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Address for correspondence and submissions:

EBHR, CNRS UPR 299
7 rue Guy Môquet
94801 Villejuif Cedex, France
ebhr_cnrs@yahoo.fr
fax: (33) 01 49 58 37 38

For subscription details and back issues (>3 years)
<http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/ebhr>

Contributing editors:

Martin Gaenszle,
Institut für Südasiens-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde
Uni-Campus AAKh, Hof 2.1, Spitalgasse 2-4, A-1090 Wien, Austria
martin.gaenszle@univie.ac.at

András Höfer, Elvira Graner
South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330, D-69120 Heidelberg, Germany

Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Ben Campbell
School of Oriental and African Studies
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, U.K.
mh8@soas.ac.uk

Mark Turin
Himalayan Languages Project, Silodam 355
1013 AW Amsterdam, Netherlands
mt272@cornell.edu

English editing: Bernadette Sellers, CNRS UPR 299

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Revolutionary Nepal

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EDITORIAL

The *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* has recently devoted a lot of space to contributions focusing on various areas of the Indian Himalayan Range. This special issue on “Revolutionary Nepal” proposes to return to Nepal and to trace back over a revolutionary period now complete. Yet, given the role it continues, and will no doubt continue, to play for long time in the country’s social and political life, this fundamental moment in the history of Nepal has not been the focus of enough of our studies.

This special issue marks the growing importance of studies on Nepal by Nepalese scholars, and in particular by students who have chosen to study abroad. This is only one aspect of a massive phenomenon of migration which occurs in this region of the world. Tristan Bruslé is coordinating a special volume on this topic to appear in the next issue of the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*; those wishing to participate are asked to consult the Call for Contributions at the end of this journal.

M. Lecomte-Tilouine

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

BENOÎT CAILMAIL is a PhD candidate in History at the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. His research focuses on the history of the Maoist movement in Nepal, especially the Masal party of Mohan Bikram Singh. He has carried out fieldwork in Pyuthan and Rolpa districts. He is a member of the ANR programme “La Guerre du Peuple au Népal”.

PRAGYA DHITAL completed an MA at SOAS, London, in 2007.

PUSTAK GHIMIRE is a PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at EHESS, Paris. His research focuses on the religious and political changes in Khotang district, Eastern Nepal, where he grew up and passed his SLC. He is a member of the ANR programme “La Guerre du Peuple au Népal”.

KRISHNA HACHHETHU is Reader in Political Science, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal. Author of numerous publications on politics in Nepal, he has recently published *Local Democracy in South Asia: Microprocesses of Democratization in Nepal and its Neighbours*, Sage, Delhi, 2008 (with D. Gellner). He also contributes to the ANR programme “La Guerre du Peuple au Népal”.

CARINE JAQUET holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne and a BA in Nepali from INALCO. She has made regular field trips to Nepal since 2001. She has been carrying out fieldwork on the peace process in Western Nepal and has recently been working for international organizations on reintegration programmes designed to target child soldiers in Nepal.

MARIE LECOMTE-TILOUINE is a researcher in Social Anthropology, CNRS (UPR 299). Her recent publications include: *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival and Maoist Rebellion in Nepal*, OUP, Delhi, 2009 and *Bards and Mediums. History, Culture and Politics in the Central Himalayan Kingdoms*, Almora: Almora Book Depot, forthcoming. She is currently coordinating a programme on the People’s War financed by the ANR (the French national agency for research).

SATYA SHRESTHA-SCHIPPER is a PhD scholar in Social Anthropology and she works jointly with UPR 299, CNRS, Paris. Her research focuses on the Matwali population of Jumla district, where she has conducted extensive fieldwork. She is a member of the ANR programme “La Guerre du Peuple au Népal”.

Revolutionary Nepal: Introduction

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

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.¹

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

¹ 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 13th 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.

Introduction

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.

A History of Nepalese Maoism since its Foundation by Mohan Bikram Singh

Benoît Cailmail

The CPN (Maoist) stems from various splits within the Nepal Communist Party. Yet one cannot attempt to trace the history of Maoism in Nepal without looking at the life of one of its most renowned and most enigmatic figures: Mohan Bikram Singh.

A myth in the making

Mohan Bikram Singh was born in Kathmandu, Marutole, on Baisakh 3, 1992 BS (15th April 1935). It is difficult to accurately paint his family background since the various accounts of his past that we were able to gather differ. For instance, Balaram Pokharel, Mohan Bikram Singh's only biographer (as far as we know), writes that his family origins remain unclear (Pokharel, 2059 BS). And while a memo written by the NGO "Mercy Corps" (Mercy Corps, 2003) claims that Mohan Bikram Singh's father was the one who first settled the family in Okharkot, Mohan Bikram Singh himself told us in August 2007, that his family has been living in Okharkot for seventeen generations and that his ancestor, named Poras Gharti, came from the district of Jumla. If it was thought that Mohan Bikram Singh's version of his family background, which he confirmed in May 2008¹, was necessarily the correct one, one cannot help wondering why Balaram Pokharel (who is from Okharkot and had the chance of interviewing MB Singh a number of times) did not mention it in his biography and merely said that "there is no trace of their immigration in Pyuthan" (Pokharel, 2059 BS: 1). Hence, if caution is recommended regarding this matter, the very fact that M.B. Singh's family history remains vague helps one to begin to grasp the great mystical aura attached to this senior leftist leader who profoundly affected Nepalese politics.

Mohan Bikram Singh's father, Khim Bikram Gharti Chhetri, was described both by his son² and by historians (Pokharel, 2059 BS) as a hot-

¹ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, May 2008.

² Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, April 2006.

headed person who recklessly refused to obey the rules of the Rana family³. Because of regular quarrels he had with the then rulers, he had to leave Okharkot, to go first to Bangemarot (another village nearby), then to Arghakhanchi district and eventually to Kathmandu. There, he met Tara Kumari whose father worked there as a judge (*ditha*). She became Khim Bikram GC's wife and mother of Mohan Bikram Singh. Soon after Mohan Bikram's birth, the family moved back to Pyuthan where M.B. Singh spent most of his childhood.

After this short account of M.B. Singh's background and early years, we will now look at his political commitment as well as how and under what influence he came to be one of the major actors in leftism in Nepal.



M. B. Singh, 2007. Photo: A. Carpentier

Like most Communist leaders we met in Nepal, M.B. Singh drew a great deal of his inspiration for communism in literature. During his first years at school, he had little opportunity to read books for they were scarce in Pyuthan. Hence, it was not until he arrived in Kathmandu in 1950 that he could start building and consolidating his Marxist-Leninist knowledge. Apart from the classics by Marx, Engels and Lenin, M.B. Singh found stimulation in political leaders (mostly Communists) who had started to emerge in neighboring India, including Rahul Sankrityayan, who had a particularly great influence on him.⁴

³ Mohan Bikram Singh always insisted on the fact that his father opposed the Rana, not for political reasons, but because he could not stand being given orders.

⁴ M.B. Singh, interview, June 2008.

But M.B. Singh's commitment to communism was not only fired by literature, but was also inspired by his father's militancy. As we have briefly seen, Khim Bikram GC often fought against the Rana rule and ultimately became the leader of the anti-Rana movement in Pyuthan during the early fifties. One must not be led to think, however, that Khim Bikram fought for political reasons, for M.B. Singh, as well as most inhabitants of Pyuthan, admits that Khim Bikram GC's main goal was to free himself of the Rana dictatorship and to lead the life he wanted. Yet whatever the motives behind Khim Bikram's militancy (whether selfish or altruist), they had a great impact on his son, who took up politics, following in his father's footsteps.

Just like his father, Mohan Bikram became a member of the Nepali Congress Party in 1950. But his sympathy for the Nepali Congress did not last when he realized that the Party had imprisoned his father on false accusations that the Ranas had made a few years earlier. From 1951 onwards, M.B. Singh viewed the members of the Nepali Congress "as corrupt, bureaucratic and power-thirsty as the Ranas used to be"⁵, and he decided to join the Nepal Communist Party in 1953.

*The creation of the Communist Party of Pyuthan*⁶

From the beginning, one could sense the importance that M.B. Singh was to assume in the future of Communism in Nepal, by the actual founding act of the Communist Party of Pyuthan in December 1953. Whereas, as our surveys showed, Communist Parties in other districts were founded by a few local activists who gathered in a room in a remote area, Mohan Bikram Singh set up an actual training center that was run for three months. No less than a hundred and fifty persons gathered in Ratamata (near Dankhakwadi) and attended the various ideological courses given by M.B. Singh or Khagu Lal Gurung (a friend of M.B. Singh), thus generating a great deal of publicity for the newly created Party among the local population.

When the training course came to an end (in February 1954), farmers from Narikot (a nearby village), who had learned about this gathering and its purpose, came to complain to M.B. Singh about the exactions they had suffered from the village *mukhiya* and his friends (Pokharel and Vasyal, 2055 BS: 10-12).

⁵ M.B. Singh, interview, April 2006.

⁶ We discovered most information on the birth of the Communist Party in Pyuthan through interviewing veterans during our fieldwork in Pyuthan, Kapilbastu, Kathmandu and Rolpa in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

They had forced peasants to sign false contracts allowing them to take over the peasants' land. M.B. Singh, followed by a hundred newly trained Communists, went to Narikot to restore the lost land to the farmers. Hoping to achieve this by negotiations, he forbade his troops to turn any weapons on the landlords, but to merely brandish them as a threat. But after a week of useless negotiations – despite the fact that by then the protesters amounted to five-six hundred people –, M.B. Singh and Khagu Lal Gurung decided to deploy tougher methods, so they kidnapped the landowners and brought them to Machchhi (Okharkot) where they were to stand trial.



Khagu Lal Gurung, Narikot (Pyuthan), 2007, photo: A. Carpentier.

Acknowledging the growing threat, the neighbouring landowners (mostly from Khung) decided to go in and deliver their friends, armed with clubs, *kukhuris* and even small guns. But the Communists were waiting for them and had prepared an ambush, forcing the assailants to retreat and finally surrender. In order to benefit from this “first victory of the Communist Party in Pyuthan” as M.B. Singh puts it⁷, the Communists carried on their fight in the neighbouring villages of Bangemarot, Badikot or Tusara, forcing the landowners to return the property they had illegally appropriated over past decades.

In 1954, the Communist Party of Pyuthan, led by Mohan Bikram Singh and Khagu Lal Gurung, continued to organize mass movements for

⁷ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, April 2006.

peasants' rights, as well as against corruption in the administration, and for the transfer of the district capital Khalanga to the nearby town of Bijuwar. Most of the time, their actions consisted in demonstrations and the slogans such as "land to the tiller" that the demonstrators brandished, foreshadowed the future trend the Party was to follow.

The government finally managed to strike a strong blow against the Communist Party in Pyuthan by arresting its two main leaders. In February 1955, Mohan Bikram Singh and Khagu Lal Gurung had been leading demonstrations in Bagdula when police forces encircled them and arrested the two leaders, who were immediately sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

The fight goes on

Even from his prison cell, M.B. Singh continued to fight for the people's rights. Thus, he was transferred to different jails: first to Khalanga, then to the Palpa jail, to finally end up in a prison in Salyan. The last transfer came after a riot that M.B. Singh and Khagu Lal Gurung had started in the prison in Palpa. Its prison cells were, at that time, in total disrepair and prisoners lived in dire conditions with no lavatories, and almost no food or water. When Mohan Bikram Singh and Khagu Lal Gurung discovered the prisoners' lot, they started a mass movement inside the prison, rallying all their cellmates. In order to try and quash the rebellion, the wardens started beating up Mohan Bikram Singh who answered back by striking the guard with his shoes.

When the other prisoners saw that Mohan Bikram Singh had had the courage to raise his hand against the authorities, they all acclaimed him and chanted slogans such as "Meet our demands!", "Stop the beating!" or "Stop the oppression!". Fearing a general uprising, the government decided to transfer Khagu Lal Gurung and Mohan Bikram Singh to Salyan.

The reason for his transfer from Palpa to Salyan⁸ proves to be particularly significant of the kind of struggle Mohan Bikram Singh used to lead and which contributed to creating a particular aura around him. The very fact that the story of his struggle inside Palpa's jail made it all the way to Pyuthan and brought the population of the district to lead demonstrations demanding his release (demonstrations which eventually proved to be successful), is noteworthy, and is sufficient to depict M.B. Singh's charisma.

One must bear in mind that the success and popularity of the Communist Party of Pyuthan cannot be explained merely by the

⁸ Khagu Lal Gurung, interview, May 2007.

organization of a training centre, but had a great deal to do with M.B. Singh's personality.

Mohan Bikram Singh's personality

"Communists don't believe in mysteries, myth or religious stories. However, Mohan Bikram Singh was, at that time, almost like a religious leader. [...] His authority was divine-like".⁹ This description of M.B. Singh by Mohan Baidya reveals the impact M.B. Singh had on the local population.



Mohan Baidya, June 2008, photo: B. Cailmail.

The reasons for such charisma¹⁰ lie in various factors, including his struggle against his own father. We have shown how Khim Bikram GC contributed to his son's political commitment and how his unjust imprisonment led M.B. Singh to forsake the Nepali Congress and join the Nepal Communist Party. Yet, his father's influence over his son was also revealed when the latter set about despising and criticizing his father's behaviour towards peasants.

⁹ Mohan Baidya, interview, June 2008.

¹⁰ On the issue of charisma, one could argue that a charismatic person can only be qualified as such if his peers define him this way. However, we believe that an aura can also be certified when a large part of a population sees him as such. This question, however, needs to be examined further which we will do so in a forthcoming essay.

Khim Bikram GC was a renowned “feudal” in Pyuthan and in the neighbouring districts, and Barman Budha (a Maoist leader in Rolpa) recalled that satirical songs about his avarice were common all the way to Thabang.¹¹ In fact, in the manner of the landowners in Narikot, he had acquired land from peasants by making them sign false contracts they were not able to read, thus managing to increase his land tenure up to 700 *ropani* (36 hectares) (given that the average surface nowadays according to our research is approximately 11 *ropani* (0.56 hectare) in Pyuthan).



M. B. Singh's house in Bangemarot, Pyuthan, 2007, inhabited today by M.B.'s brother, photo: B. Cailmail.

Hence, when M.B. Singh led the struggle against the landowners of Narikot in 1954, he likewise came after his father and asked him to redeem himself. His struggle against his own father made a deep and lasting impression on the people, and by doing so, Mohan Bikram Singh helped the communist Party gain many more new sympathizers than a hundred meetings would have done. Indeed, most Communists we met, whether Maoist or Masal, whole-timers or part-timers, young or old, leaders or

¹¹ Barman Budha, interview, May 2008. Mohan Bikram Singh however, describes his father as a “feudal reformist”, because on the one hand, he was against corruption, he supported democracy and was ready to fight for these standards, but on the other hand, he was not ready to share his wealth and was against all kinds of socialist and communist ideology.

simple sympathizers, told us that the first story they had heard about M.B. Singh recounted his struggle against his father and that it had all impressed them deeply. Sant Bahadur Nepali for instance (a member of *Rastriya Jana Morcha* and elected member of the Constituent Assembly), recalls that every family in his village in Arghakhanchi used to laud M.B. Singh for his abnegation and for his “struggle against his own blood”.¹²

To sum up and as Mohan Baidya puts it, M.B. Singh’s aura “came from the fact that he was from a feudal family, his father being the greatest feudal in the entire district. But because he broke away from his father and his family and embraced communism, the message it sent to the masses was tremendous. It allowed him to gain enormous prestige. The masses saw a miracle behind M.B. Singh’s actions”.¹³

Another factor that helped M.B. Singh to cultivate an aura was his (almost) complete dedication to the Communist ideology. In order to be in keeping with it, Mohan Bikram refused any kind of religious heritage and dropped his father’s name (Gharti Chhetri) for “Singh”. In the same manner, when his father died, he chose to return to the peasants his share of the land that had been taken illegally and that his father had not returned.¹⁴

Moreover, from the very beginning, Mohan Bikram Singh showed the people that he would not accept to willingly moderate his stance in order to follow a personal career, in his turning down an invitation by King Tribhuvan in early 1954 to participate in a newly constituted Council.¹⁵ He also preferred to be incarcerated rather than to take part in the first democracy set up by Tribhuvan and which he considered to be contrary to his revolutionary beliefs. Mohan Bikram Singh’s stance did not go unnoticed by the people in Pyuthan who felt for the first time that someone was standing up for them. Megulal Poudel, a 72-years-old farmer from Bijuli VDC and member of the Communist Party of Nepal (United-Marxist-Leninist) emphasizes that, although he then left Mohan Bikram’s Party on ideological grounds, it was M.B. Singh’s actual personality that had convinced him and many others to join the Communist Party in the first place.¹⁶

Lastly, M.B. Singh’s fame grew as his first writings started to be published. Although he wrote most of his books from 1961 onwards, he

¹² Sant Bahadur Nepali, interview, June 2008.

¹³ Mohan Baidya, interview, June 2008

¹⁴ Although we met peasants (or their descendants) who claimed to be beneficiaries of these donations, we were unable to verify any legal or official documents that would confirm these statements.

¹⁵ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, May 2007. See also Mercy Corps, 2003: 24.

¹⁶ Megulal Poudel, interview, March 2006.

had already started to compose a few poems during his first prison sentence that once again left a deep impression on the few ones who had had been lucky to read them. Indeed, Mohan Bikram's prose disclosed his revolutionary feelings and echoed the political speeches he had given at the various meetings he had attended in Pyuthan. This short extract from his poem *Lepht Rāit Kadam Badhāu* (*Left, Right, March*) reveals the strong images that the author used to galvanize his followers into action:

Let the mothers shed their tears
 Let their glass bracelets shatter and let them
 tear off their *dori*¹⁷
 Let the children die of hunger
 Let black clouds hide the fathers' eyes
 But the revolutionaries should be prepared to
 sacrifice themselves with smiles
 And hope for the Revolution
 Left, right¹⁸ (Singh, 2057 BS: 21).

The implantation of the communist ideology in Pyuthan is thus a combination of several factors. First of all, the training centre that overlooked the founding of the Communist Party in Pyuthan allowed its leaders to disseminate its ideology on a larger scale. Secondly, the numerous struggles that immediately succeeded the Party's birth helped the Communists to reveal their commitment towards the people's welfare. Finally, we have tried to show how the personality of M.B. Singh had a major impact on the population and led to greater cohesion among the masses. Yet, one must not think that M.B. Singh's aura led in any way to a real personality cult. And though many people were awestruck by his charisma, nobody ever worshipped him by hanging his picture on the wall, etc. Though Mohan Bikram's hold on the Party is manifest, the different party expulsions he underwent throughout his career, and which led to several splits, prove that he was still subject to criticism from his peers.

The expansion and splits in the Communist Party of Nepal

We will not linger on all the scissions the Communist Party of Nepal has undergone since its foundation in 1949, but on the splits in the different communist parties that chose to support the Chinese vision of

¹⁷ A necklace that symbolizes marriage.

¹⁸ We translate: « *āmāhorukā āṅkhabāt balindra dhārā āṅsu bharun / churā phuṭun ḍori chuḍyun, bachchāhoru bhokale sukun / bābuhorukā āṅkhāmā, kālā bādalakā lahara uṭhun / tara krāntikā lāgi krāntikāri hāṅsdai marn tayār banun / lepht rāit... »*

communism since this was the trend M.B. Singh chose and which finally led to the foundation of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

When M.B. Singh joined the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Nepal in 1957, there was already a certain amount of dissension regarding what stance to adopt towards the King. Whereas Rayamajhi was in favour of a pro-king line, Mohan Bikram along with Pushpa Lal Shrestha and Tulsi Lal Amatya opted for a republican ideological line (Thapa, 2004: 24-37). Furthermore, as in almost every other country in the world, the Communists of Nepal were divided between the partisans of a China-like ideology and those that pursued the Moscow trend. The combination of these two divergences finally led to the first major scission during the third Party Congress in 1962, and gave birth to the Communist Party of Nepal (Tulsi Lal Group).

The underground organization

At that time, M.B. Singh had been in prison since 1961 for having once again taken a stance against the King and his government. Since Mahendra's royal coup in 1960, all political parties were banned and their members threatened with imprisonment. Nevertheless, communist activists did not suspend their struggle, despite retaliations from the government, but continued spreading their ideology, thus gaining more and more sympathizers.

To this end, the Nepalese Communist Parties moved to India where they could express their opinion freely: first, in Darbhanga (Bihar), then in Varanasi from 1961 to 1974, and finally to Gorakhpur, for it was nearer the border. However, most activists stayed on in Nepal and pursued their struggle from there. They held meetings, distributed pamphlets and even led a few demonstrations against the King's autocracy. A party worker from Badikot in Pyuthan (whose name we cannot reveal as he is still a member of the underground Masal Party), recalls that the monthly meetings he used to organize in neighbouring villages took place at night in small houses.

To start with, there were only five or six members who attended the meetings, yet from 1979 onwards, their number rose to twenty members or more (they could even be as many as 150 if the meetings were held at district level). No women were present and most of the audience was made up of literate men. Another activist from Tusara VDC remembers that some of the meetings targeted the population at large and could last a whole week during which they would explain the basic principles of Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. In order to organize such mass meetings attended by as many as 500 or more people, they had to meet in the depths of the jungle where it was not easy for the police to

venture. Those organising the meetings, as well as those only listening to the speeches, were likely to be arrested for this reprehensible act. Thus, every member of the party was forced to go underground to avoid police reprisals. However, being a clandestine did not necessarily mean that one had to leave the country or spend one's time hiding in a cellar. Most of the time, the underground party members led a normal life during the day, thanks to the villagers' sympathy for their cause, and they worked for the party at night.

Yet, many of them, especially among the leaders, did not manage to escape the authorities and served a prison sentence. But even then, M.B. Singh, who spent nine years in prison, Mohan Baidya and many more of the leaders that had been arrested, managed to continue working for the Party from their prison cells. They were kept informed about what was going on outside with the connivance of the wardens who closed their eyes to their activities. Mohan Bikram Singh recounts that he managed to send and receive letters by hiding them in the food he was allowed in his cell¹⁹, while Mohan Baidya emphasizes the fact that as all party members were underground, they were able to receive their visit without alerting the authorities who took them for relatives.²⁰

The scissions

Despite their ability to go on working while in prison, it was not before the main leaders' release that the CPN (Tulsi Lal Group) could solve the new issues that had emerged over the past years, and thus continue to build their Party. However, the different resolutions that were taken divided the Party and led to new scissions. A first split appeared in 1968 when Pushpa Lal decided to create his own Party. A few years later, Mohan Bikram Singh (who had just been released from jail)²¹ along with Nirmal Lama, took part in the formation of the Central Nucleus, a new political organization which aimed at founding a new central party "*by tying together the various strands of the communist movement*" (Thapa, 2004: 30). Hence, in order to federate the different trends within the Communist movement, they asked Pushpa Lal to join forces with their future Party.

¹⁹ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, May 2007.

²⁰ Mohan Baidya, interview, June 2008.

²¹ Mohan Bikram Singh was the last of the great communist leaders to be released from prison in 1971, for unlike Man Mohan Adhikari or Sambhu Ram Shrestha for instance, he had refused to sign a paper agreeing to give his support to King Mahendra.

However, they failed to reach an understanding with the latter on the party's policy regarding the Nepali Congress²² and China. Thus in 1974, Mohan Bikram Singh and Nirmal Lama founded a new Party called CPN (Fourth Congress) which became the strongest communist Party over the following years. As its new General Secretary, Mohan Bikram Singh adopted a hard-line policy, advocating Mao Zedong Thought and the protracted armed revolution which could only take place aided by a mass uprising.



Rastriya Mukti Morcha, Butwal, 2007, photo: A. Carpentier.

Nevertheless, this new Party did not remain united for long and a new scission occurred between Mohan Bikram Singh and Nirmal Lama in 1983 on the question of the legitimacy and the orthodoxy of the Jhapa Uprising that had started in 1971. Mohan Bikram Singh left the Fourth Congress to create the Nepal Communist Party (Masal) which lasted two years before another schism occurred.

We have willfully given a brief overview of these different splits for they have already been studied more or less thoroughly by fellow researchers. Our focus will be the scission of 1985 which marks a turning point in the history of leftism in Nepal.

²² Contrary to MB Singh and Nirmal Lama, Pushpa Lal was in favor of a unity of all democratic forces against the *panchayat* regime, including Nepali Congress.

Divergences

From the moment the Masal party was created, it already bore the seed of dissension. Though Mohan Baidya, a growing Party figure at the time, still followed Mohan Bikram Singh's line, he gradually came to think that the Jhapa Uprising was not responsible for divergences within the communist movement of Nepal and that M.B. Singh's stand on this issue was heading towards what he called a "reformist line"²³. As the CPN (Maoist) later puts it, he, along with other members of the Masal Party (including Pushpa Kamal Dahal who had joined the Fourth Congress in 1977), felt that "the Jhapa revolt had, in essence, played the same role in the Nepalese communist movement as what the Naxalite revolt had done to expose revisionism in the Indian communist movement and establish the universal contributions of Mao. Therefore, the Jhapa revolt [...] had provided a ground for unity of the revolutionaries" (CPN (Maoist), 2004: 77).

Furthermore, Mohan Baidya and his followers also came to believe that, unlike what Mohan Bikram Singh thought, Pushpa Lal Shrestha could not be accused of being a renegade²⁴, a refutation that was, for that matter, restated by the CPN (Maoist) a few years later: "the ideas and political line of Pushpa Lal have helped, in totality, the revolutionaries [...]. His works and contributions [...] prove the fact that Pushpa Lal Shrestha was a sincere communist leader of the Nepalese communist movement" (CPN (Maoist), 2004: 78).

Lastly, Mohan Baidya, accused Mohan Bikram Singh of "anarchist individualism and rightist opportunism"²⁵ for his constant postponing of the armed-struggle that should normally be the main goal of the Party.

All in all, the dissidents decided to create a new Party in 1985 under the leadership of Mohan Baidya, which they called the *moto mashal* Party, later to become the CPN (Maoist).

Comrade Jaljala

"In spite of those different disagreements, we could not make a serious debate about [Mohan Bikram Singh's] line. We could not refute thoroughly that line. But still, the split was inevitable. But then, we did not raise political questions, only technical questions. It was only after the split that

²³ Mohan Baidya, interview, June 2008.

²⁴ See Singh, Mohan Bikram. 2052 BS. *Krānti vā bhrānti*. Kathmandu: Jana Sahitya Prakashan.

²⁵ Mohan Baidya, interview, June 2008.

political questions were raised very seriously”.²⁶ With Mohan Baidya’s statement, we reached the crux of the Masal scission: behind this split, there was mostly a “technical problem” due directly to Mohan Bikram Singh’s personal life.²⁷

We have shown, at the beginning of this paper, how Mohan Bikram Singh’s personality had served the communist Party and helped attract many sympathizers. Yet, this was also the reason for one of the major scissions the party has had to deal with since its creation. In 1974 in Varanasi, M.B. Singh fell in love with Bidhya Dhakal, another party member. He then named her “Comrade Jaljala” for he explained that “when I went to Thabang VDC in Rolpa for the first time, I saw Jaljala hill covered with ice and shining in the rays of sun. Since then I loved the hill very much, so [...] I gave her the name Jaljala”.²⁸ And although he had already been married to Shanta Singh since 1972, he did not break off his relationship with Jaljala until her death in a bus accident in Delhi in November 1981.

When his adulterous relationship came to the Party members’ knowledge, many of them were offended. Indeed, explains Chitra Bahadur KC (a Central Committee member of Masal Party at the time and president of Rastriya Jana Morcha today) “during this whole period, society was still very traditional and it was frowned upon to divorce, especially if you had children (Mohan Bikram had two at the time)”.²⁹

Thus, many Party members, such as Mohan Baidya or Barman Budha, criticized him vehemently and asked him to put an end to it.³⁰ In the face of his stringency, they finally expelled both lovers from the Party in 1978 for a period of three years.

After one year spent in Kerala and in Chennai, Mohan Bikram Singh was allowed back into the Party. Despite being banished from the Party, Mohan Bikram Singh had still not ended his relationship with comrade Jaljala, and although he had “regularized” the situation by sending a letter

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Amik Sherchan had spoken about this “technical problem” to Deepak Thapa and the latter admitted that Sherchan had refused to elaborate on the matter (Thapa, 2004: 35).

²⁸ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, July 2008.

²⁹ Chitra Bahadur KC, interview, June 2008.

³⁰ Mohan Baidya and Barman Budha, interviews, June 2008.

of divorce to his wife in 1980³¹ (divorce which Shanta Singh had refused), many party members had not forgiven him for his behaviour.³²

According to Mohan Baidya and his followers, as Mohan Bikram Singh had had his love affair while married to Shanta Singh, he had become a “bourgeois” and was no longer capable of leading the revolutionary party. “*Had he divorced before meeting Jaljala assured Keshav Nepal (office secretary to the CPN (Maoist)) in his interview, there would have been no problem at all and we would not have expelled him from the Party in 1978*”.³³ Furthermore, they emphasized that it was Mohan Bikram’s refusal to acknowledge his mistake that finally urged them to create a new Party.³⁴

Logically, M.B. Singh’s partisans have another explanation for this new split. Although he blamed Mohan Bikram Singh for his love affair, Chitra Bahadur KC for instance, affirms that “if the Maoists [i.e. the then moto masal] made such a fuss of this whole affair, it was because they were becoming extremists. Mohan Bikram Singh was struggling against their extremism and they knew that they could not match him on ideological grounds. Hence, the only way they could get to him was by attacking him on personal matters”.³⁵ Though this analysis seems too simplistic, the very

³¹ According to Shanta Singh (interview, June 2008), Mohan Bikram Singh asked her for a divorce in 2037 BS whereas he states that he sent his letter of divorce in 2042 BS.

³² One must not think that this adulterous relationship only causes problems for Communists in countries with a traditional type of society. A former communist leader of France recounted that at the end of the seventies (therefore after May 1968 and the women’s liberation movement), he attended a meeting of the local branch in Aubervilliers, during which one of the central committee member was accused of having an affair with another member. He was summoned to either leave the Party or marry her. This example shows that the Party’s involvement in its members’ personal life was not specific to the Masal Party and can find an explanation in the very principles of communism. Engels, in his *Origins of the Family*, made it very clear that mostly members of the upper class have a mistress: “The right to conjugal infidelity remains secured to [the man], [...] and as social life develops, he exercises his right more and more” (Engels, 1931: 60). Hence, to have an adulterous relationship stems from a “bourgeois” way of life and is therefore reprehensible.

³³ Keshav Nepal, interview, June 2008.

³⁴ A puritanical reason is not the only explanation for the sexual issue within Communist Parties. Hence, one should note the excellent work of Goodwin on the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, according to whom, “this [sexual] prohibition is motivated not by a puritanical fear of sexuality per se, but by fear of libidinal withdrawal from the group” (Goodwin, 1997: 56), or that of Lanzona (Lanzona, 2008). This question will be further discussed in our future essay.

³⁵ Chitra Bahadur KC, interview, June 2008.

fact, as Mohan Baidya himself acknowledges,³⁶ that it was only *after* the split that the *moto* masal started to address political questions, tends to prove that Chitra Bahadur KC's allegation, if not totally correct, is based on reliable sources.

As for M.B. Singh, one can obtain some insight of his state of mind at that time by reading his poem written in March 1979 and entitled "Ganga-Kaveri Express" (Singh, 2057 BS), in which he depicts his doubts and mixed feelings towards his friends and his Party. In a long metaphor on a train trip between Varanasi and Chennai, Mohan Bikram wonders why there is a growing distance between him and his friends. His incomprehension remains total and yet, he concludes that whatever happens, he will always be dedicated to the Party and will keep on spreading the revolution's principles wherever he goes. We noticed in our interviews that twenty eight years later, Mohan Bikram Singh's feelings have not changed.

1985 was thus a turning point in the history of Maoism in Nepal: from then on, Mohan Bikram Singh's *patalo* Masal Party gave way to Mohan Baidya's *moto* Masal which eventually, became one of the main actors in Nepalese politics.



The Rastriya Jana Morcha office in Butwal, 2007,
photo: A. Carpentier.

³⁶ Mohan Baidya, interview, June 2008.

CPN (Maoist) and CPN (Masal): the “fraternal enemies”

The takeover of the village of Thabang in Rolpa by the CPN (Maoist) is a good example of the growing supremacy of the latter over the Masal party on Nepal’s political scene.

The introduction of the communist doctrine in Thabang

The leading and most charismatic figure of communism in the village of Thabang in Rolpa, is Barman Budha, born in 1930 and the first of the villagers to fight against the local headmen’s authority and forms of abuse.³⁷ Because of his commitment to the struggle against what he called “*the oppressors of the village*”, he was accused of being a Communist in 1955 and ordered not to leave the headquarters of Khalanga, where he had been to plead his case against one of the local leaders. This type of accusation was very commonplace in the 1950s. In fact, everybody who dared to attack the authorities was labelled a “Communist”, no matter whether the accused knew who Marx and Lenin were. Indeed, according to Barman Budha’s own confession, he had never heard of communism before and did not know what it stood for.³⁸

However, while under arrest, he met Nanda Lal Gurung (Khagul Lal Gurung’s elder brother) and Rum Bahadur Pandey, who were both close to Mohan Bikram Singh and fought alongside him. When he learned that his “cellmates” were Communists, he asked them to teach him the rudiments of Marxism-Leninism. A year later, after he had been released from Khalanga and had returned to Thabang, he met Mohan Bikram Singh who was on his way back from the Salyan prison, along with Khagu Lal Gurung and Rum Bahadur Pandey. There, M.B. Singh taught Barman Budha the basic principles of communism and in 1956 he helped him to create a Peasant Front (which would be less subjected to retaliations by the government than a Communist Party).

The communist movement in Rolpa was thus inspired and created by Mohan Bikram Singh who, for the decade to come, became the main political figure in the area. Though he did not return to Thabang himself until May 2008³⁹, he was represented by Party comrades whom he had sent to continue to spread the good word (Comrade Jaljala for instance, spent a whole year in Thabang in 1977).

³⁷ For an excellent account of Barman Budha’s life, see de Sales, Anne. Forthcoming.

³⁸ Barman Budha, interview, May 2008.

³⁹ He went to Thabang just this once in 1956 (2013 BS), where he spent several days.

Yet, if the communist ideology had penetrated Rolpa through Thabang, the rest of the district was still, according to M.B. Singh, virgin territory that was only conquered after 1985 by the *moto Masal*.⁴⁰ Indeed, during the scission of 1985, Barman Budha decided to follow Mohan Baidya's line for he accused Mohan Bikram of being the one who had caused the split: "when the Party asked him to redeem himself, he chose to create the *patalo masal* instead. This, I could not admit, which is the reason why I chose to stay with *moto masal*"⁴¹. This decision had major consequences for the *moto masal*, because the village of Thabang became their base area from which they launched their People's War ten years later. Due to the fact that Mohan Baidya⁴² had been the Party leader for Rolpa district before the split and thanks to the help of Barman Budha (who, as a native was well known and trusted by the local population), the *moto masal* managed to extend its influence beyond the immediate area around Thabang, at the expense of the *patalo masal* which had to retreat to its Pyuthan lands.

If *Moto Masal*'s takeover of Thabang VDC foreshadows its supremacy over the leftist political scene, the decline of *patalo Masal* was also the consequence of a continuous desertion of its cadres who mainly walked out on the Party for ideological reasons.

International communist movement

In order to fully grasp the reasons behind these ideological divergences, one must bear in mind that, like most communist Parties in the world, the CPN (Masal) did not develop on its own, completely cut off from the outside world, but always kept an eye on the international situation. Moreover, the Masal Party was not just a simple observer of the international communist movement but it became one of its main actors.

In March 1984, somewhere in France⁴³, different Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary parties from four continents (Africa was not represented) formed the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM). "Armed with the scientific teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tsetung" (RIM, 1984), their aim was to provide a genuine revolutionary leadership to unite "the revolutionary struggle of the masses in all countries" (RIM, 1984). Although Mohan Bikram Singh was a founding member of this

⁴⁰ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, August 2007.

⁴¹ Barman Budha, interview, May 2008.

⁴² Mohan Baidya was also a local leader, since he was born in Khaira VDC in Pyuthan.

⁴³ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, August 2007. MB Singh did not remember precisely where the meeting took place and the other members present at the meeting did not wish to answer our questions on this matter.

organization, he rapidly expressed his reluctance regarding certain aspects of RIM's ideology, and particularly about Bob Avakian's⁴⁴ theories. In a "Note of Dissent presented to the 2nd International Conference of Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations held in 1984", Mohan Bikram Singh, on behalf of the CPN (Masal), accused Bob Avakian of "trying to weaken the very ideological foundations of nationalism and national revolutionary movement. For this purpose Marx, Engels and Lenin are interpreted in a confusing way, Stalin is opposed in an antagonistic way, Mao is criticized in a friendly way and the history of the International Communist Movement during the WWII period is evaluated wrongly" (CPN (Masal), 1996: 16).

The ideological cleavages between Mohan Bikram Singh and RIM intensified at the beginning of the 1990s, regarding the question of Maoism⁴⁵. While Mohan Bikram Singh followed the line based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, from 1993 onwards the RIM believed that the experience gained from the People's War in Peru enabled the International Communist Movement "to further deepen [their] grasp of the proletarian ideology and on that basis take a far-reaching step, the recognition of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the new, third and higher stage of Marxism" (RIM, 1993). One must not be led to think that this "ism" dispute was just a quibble between M.B. Singh and RIM, for it had an impact on the whole international Maoist movement. As M.B. Singh put it, "in the context of RIM, "Maoism" represents an opportunist trend to drag Revolutionary Internationalist Movement as a whole on to the path of opportunism and Trotskyism" (Singh, 1996). Hence, today a major distinction exists between the Communist parties that continue to follow "Mao Zedong Thought" (some of which belong to the "International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations") and those that follow "Maoism" (and related to the RIM). By choosing the latter, the CPN (Maoist)⁴⁶ thus definitely diverged from Masal.

Apart from this issue, the RIM and the Masal also disagreed on the question of an armed-struggle. Whereas M.B. Singh believed that the "objective and subjective conditions to raise an armed struggle were not

⁴⁴ Leader of RCP (USA) and main figure in RIM.

⁴⁵ On the question of the disagreements between RIM and Masal, read Singh, Mohan Bikram. 2058 BS. *RIM ra māobādihoruko kathit janaddha*, Kathmandu, Jana Siksā griha.

⁴⁶ From now on, since we have chosen in this paper not to list or recount in detail the different splits that occurred from 1990 to today, we will use the CPN (Maoist) terminology to designate the *moto masal*, even though it may sometimes be anachronic, for it only adopted that name in 1995.

fulfilled”,⁴⁷ the RIM was convinced that it was time for Nepal to launch the People’s War and urged the Masal Party to do so during the 6th Convention of the RIM in 1994. Contrary to M.B. Singh, who refused to accept RIM’s point of view, Prachanda, having replaced Mohan Baidya at the head of the former *moto* Masal Party in 1988, accepted the Organization’s advice and, as of 1991, started to prepare the Party for an armed uprising that would bring Mao’s New Democracy to Nepal. Faced with these strong disagreements, the Masal party was expelled from the RIM and the CPN (Maoist) became the only party to represent Nepal in this organization.

This dispute within RIM thus affected political relations inside Nepal: the Masal and the CPN (Maoist) steadily grew further apart. As Mohan Bikram Singh summarizes it, “we flatly rejected RIM’s suggestions [...]. That distanced us from the RIM but brought Prachanda, Kiran and Babu Ram closer to the RIM leaders. [And] the day the trio embraced Maoism, the differences between my party and the CPN (Maoist) started simmering” (Singh, 2007). And though issues only related to politics in Nepal were also debated within the country’s leftist movement (we will not linger on this in this paper), we have seen that the international communist movement played an important role in the Nepal’s political orientations. Not only did the RIM contribute to separating the two Nepalese parties, but it also incited the CPN (Maoist) to launch its People’s War. Mohan Bikram Singh goes even further and claims that “the Maoists did not raise an armed struggle themselves. [...] RIM was the main instigator behind the armed movement in Nepal” (Singh, 2007).

Yet even though the international context contributed to the decline of the Masal to the benefit of CPN (Maoist), the personality of Mohan Bikram Singh was once again a sizeable factor.

Mohan Bikram Singh’s personality called into question

The ideological divergences between the different Communist parties led members of the Masal party to abandon their party and join forces with the CPN (Maoist). Perhaps the most significant defection is that of Baburam Bhattarai, who joined the CPN (Maoist) in 1990. Though this particular defection is full of highly symbolic meaning, it remains one among many others.

Among the various activists who left Masal and whom we were able to meet and interview, all admitted that Mohan Bikram Singh was very much responsible for their defection. The case of Dinanath Sharma, now member of the *politburo* of the CPN (Maoist), is a perfect example of the

⁴⁷ Mohan Bikram Singh, interview, December 2007.

growing feeling of misunderstanding that gradually filled the minds of Masal activists. Dinanath had remained faithful to Masal until 1999, when he finally decided to split and form his own Masal Party (which he merged with the CPN (Maoist) two years later): “I was very close to Mohan Bikram Singh [...]. But gradually, I began to realize that he had made two mistakes: he had lapsed into sectarianism and dogmatism”.⁴⁸ Those accusations of sectarianism and dogmatism, very common between Maoists, were not the only reasons for Dinanath’s split:

In his writings, he keeps on talking about revolution but in practical terms, he has never been able to organize and unite people around him. He did not succeed in building a strong Party. And this is because when there were inner struggles inside the Party, there was never any change. Inner-struggles are not made to create splits but to bring changes. But M.B. Singh never accepted change. This is one of his mistakes.⁴⁹

This reproach is of utmost importance in understanding why many members of Mohan Bikram’s party finally abandoned him. As we have shown in previous sections of this paper, the split in 1985 was partly due to M.B. Singh’s stubbornness regarding his relationship with Comrade Jaljala. If, unlike in 1985, one admits that it is his unwillingness to accept changes in his ideology that led people to leave his party starting in the 1990s, both episodes show that it was M.B. Singh’s obstinacy that was to blame.⁵⁰ Ajay Sharma (Central Committee member of CPN (Maoist) and now ambassador of Nepal to Australia) for instance, confessed: “At the beginning, I did not want to leave Masal. I just hoped Mohan Bikram Singh would understand his mistake and merge with the CPN (Maoist). But when I saw M.B. Singh’s obstinacy and realized that he would not change his mind, I decided to join Prachanda’s Party”.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Dinanath Sharma, interview, May 2008.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Although we will not give a detailed account in this paper, we should mention the fact that MB Singh’s personal life once again caused fresh quarrels within the Party when he decided to remarry Durga Paudel in 2000. M.B. Singh was then forced to resign from his post as General Secretary. He was called reinstated a year later.

⁵¹ Ajay Sharma, interview, June 2007.



Ajay Sharma, 2007, photo: A. Carpentier.

Hence, just like Barman Budha in 1985, many leaders accused M.B. Singh of being responsible for the many splits in Nepal's Maoist movement. Dinanath Sharma, for example, does not have a single doubt about it: "Mohan Bikram Singh was responsible for the scissions and he still is."⁵²

If the intransigence of Mohan Bikram Singh led many members of his Party to leave, it was also one of the reasons that incited some of his supporters to remain with him. Indeed, most Masal activists we met admire M.B. Singh for his "correct and never deviationist vision of Marxism-Leninism."⁵³

A member of Masal, whose name we cannot reveal for obvious reasons, cites as an example of M.B. Singh's noble stance the fact that in 1961 he was the only one on the Communist Party's Central Committee to demand and vote for a Constituent Assembly.⁵⁴ And while everyone at the time criticized his line of action, my interlocutor went on, "today, they all claim to be the first one to fight for it. This proves that Mohan Bikram Singh had the correct vision from the very beginning and that he was right not to give up his stance, despite criticism within the Central Committee".

Perhaps the most symbolic testimony is that of M.B. Singh's former wife, Shanta Singh. Although she was repudiated by her husband, she never ceased to support the Masal Party: "It is not because the husband is bad that the leader is. Even if, as a man, I dislike him, I have to admit that his line is and always has been the correct one. Unlike the other leaders,

⁵² Dinanath Sharma, interview, May 2008.

⁵³ Member of Masal, interview, May 2007.

⁵⁴ This fact was also recounted by Bhima Rawal in: Rawal, Bhima. 2047 BS. *Nepalma samyavadi Andolan: udbhav ra vikas*. Kathmandu: Pairavi Prakahana, p. 53.

he has never altered his stance in order to further his career. He is not an opportunistic.”⁵⁵

The accusation of being an opportunistic was the obvious counter-attack Mohan Bikram Singh used against his opponents. According to him, what they consider to be stubbornness is complete dedication to the Communist ideology, even if it means abandoning power for a time. He thus reminds us that he could have been a member of the government as early as in the 1950s or could have avoided many years' imprisonment if he had agreed to renounce some of his principles, a stance which, according to him, Prachanda and his followers refused to adopt:

A few months after we started working together, I felt that both Prachanda and Babu Ram Bhattarai were careerists and not honest comrades, who could fight for the people's rights. They kept on changing their minds rather than discussing on the issues of national importance. [...] The statements issued thus far by the Maoists, if you read them, tell us how inconsistent they are. [...] They have given up their communism and their main goal is to come into power (Singh, 2007).

M.B. Singh is not the only one to blame the CPN (Maoist) for its opportunism, since some of its allies have expressed great disappointment regarding its latest change of heart (since April 2006). For instance, the CPI (Maoist), which has close ties with its Nepalese counterpart, has strongly criticized Prachanda's new line since it jeopardised the revolution: “the decision of the CPN (Maoist) to dissolve the revolutionary people's governments in the countryside and to merge the PLA with the reactionary army will unfold an irreversible process of losing all the revolutionary gains achieved till now” (CPI (Maoist), 2006).

If, as we have shown, the gap between Masal and the CPN (Maoist) widened from 1990 onwards to the latter's benefit (in terms of size as well as in terms of the impact on Nepalese politics), the former's influence did not cease completely, particularly in Pyuthan. Indeed, even though the CPN (Maoist) considered Pyuthan to be part of its base area, one will see that in reality, the situation was rather nuanced.

The People's War in Pyuthan

The many accounts we could gather during our fieldwork in February-April 2006 and in May-June 2007 in Pyuthan, highlighted the fact that the

⁵⁵ Shanta Singh, interview, June 2008.

grip the People's War's had on the local population was not as strong as suggested by the declarations made by the CPN (Maoist). The figures collected by different NGOs already showed that the casualties in M.B. Singh's birthplace were lower than those in the surrounding area and Yam Lal Upadhya, the local representative of the Red Cross, corroborated this.

Table 1 : Number of victims in 2005 in Pyuthan and in the surrounding areas

Districts	By Maoists	By State	By Others	Total
	No. of Victims	No. of Victims	No. of Victims	
Pyuthan	37	9	1	47
Rolpa	77	70	13	160
Arghakhanchi	60	54	7	121
Dang	65	127	22	214
Gulmi	1 032	46	20	1098
Baglung	51	133	14	198
Rukum	1 640	160	18	1818
Palpa	558	73	3	634
Kapilvastu	100	98	571	769
Banke	144	290	14	448
Salyan	85	28	142	255

Source: Poudel, 2006: 244-277

The Maoists' incapacity to establish a strong hold in Pyuthan (apart from the northern part of the district) is due to a combination of several factors, among which the presence of the Masal is by far the most important. The fact that the district is the birthplace of one of the founding leaders of Maoism in Nepal is obviously one way of explaining why the Masal retained a strong influence in this area. We have shown that the Party's work in the district and the numerous meetings, speeches and gatherings they had organized since 1953 had rendered the local population particularly well politicized. Hence, when the CPN (Maoist) arrived to "educate the masses" (to use their terminology), the latter had already been trained in Marxism-Leninism by the Masal and were thus reluctant to adopt a new ideology from strangers.

But the main reason why the local population remained faithful to the Masal was that its members proved to be the only ones to dare to oppose the Maoist violence in the district and which will be perfectly illustrated by the following example recounted to us in 2006. In 2004, Maoists accused members of the Masal Party of having killed one of their activists, Dal Bahadur Pariyar, in the village of Bijuli. In retaliation for this so-called murder (Masal members as well as local villagers claimed it was a suicide),

the Maoists kidnapped 22 Masal members, five of whom were held captive for 74 days. Far from being intimidated by the Maoists' actions, the Masal activists (including Mohan Bikram Singh) gathered their forces and led demonstrations throughout Pyuthan, demanding the release of their comrades. These demonstrations lasted for several weeks and the CPN (Maoist) was finally forced to capitulate.

Although this event was the most revealing, it was not the only one that proved the Masal's resistance to the Maoists. Many villagers admitted that they felt strong enough to defy the Maoists because they knew that they were backed by Masal activists. Lastly, the many slogans written on walls by the Masal against their opponents illustrate once again their opposition.

Yet, one must not believe that the CPN (Maoist) was totally absent from Pyuthan. The north of the district came to be one of their strongholds during the war, an area which they used as a corridor to mobilize their army for their attack on Sandhikharka (in Arghakhanchi) in September 2002 or on Tansen (Palpa district) in January 2006.



Maoists in Bijuli, Pyuthan district, Feb. 2006. Photo: B. Cailmail.

Conclusion

Mohan Bikram Singh, through his commitment to Communism and his constant struggle against the Monarchy, is one of the pillars of the Nepal communist movement and the founding leader of Maoism in Nepal. Yet, we have shown that his political and ideological divergences with members of his Party led to several splits that finally gave birth to the CPN (Maoist) in 1995. Above all, the strong personality of Mohan Bikram Singh led to many quarrels within the Party and contributed to one of its most important scissions. This is perhaps one of the most interesting features of this charismatic leader who dedicated all his life to the party, disregarding his personal career, and who almost lost everything for the love of a woman.

Despite the present decline of the Masal Party, Mohan Bikram Singh remains a respected figure in Nepal politics. While Mohan Baidya, for instance, considers that M.B. Singh made a huge contribution to the communist movement in Nepal, Dinanath Sharma states that he still greatly respects Mohan Bikram Singh, even though they no longer share the same ideology. Finally, the rumours that spread in Kathmandu during the month of May 2008 about the nomination of M.B. Singh as first President of the Republic of Nepal (rumours that were reported to be false by the man himself) prove that the influence of the Masal Party on Nepalese politics remains significant.

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The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist): Transformation from an Insurgency Group to a Competitive Political Party

Krishna Hachhethu

Our party has adopted a resolution on the 'development of democracy in the 21st century' and put forward some new theses. Among others, the most important thesis has been to accept and organize a multiparty competition within a stipulated constitutional framework even in the future socialist state. This idea of multiparty competition within a socialist state is a big step forward in the revitalization and the development of a socialist democracy.

Prachanda,
Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)¹

Introduction

The April 2006 movement was remarkable not only because it ended monarchical rule in Nepal but also because it marked the beginning of the transformation of the Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist or CPN (Maoist) from an insurgent group to a competitive political party.

The transformation started when the CPN (Maoist) made a categorical commitment to the multiparty system and peaceful politics, a commitment that was documented in the 12-point understanding reached between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the CPN (Maoist) in November 2005.

This understanding provided the basis for an unprecedented 19-day-long mass movement, *Jana Andolan II*, in which four to five million people participated, and which led to a series of important political developments: the reinstatement of the dissolved House of Representatives (HOR) on 24 April; the declaration on 18 May, which called for the election of a Constituent Assembly (CA); the temporary suspension of the monarchy; the formation of the SPA government on 27 April, with G.P. Koirala as Prime Minister; the beginning of formal negotiations on 26 May between the CPN (Maoist) and government; and a series of summit meetings between the SPA and the CPN (M) that resulted in several important decisions being taken, including the signing of the Comprehensive Peace

¹ Speech by Prachanda to "Hindustan Times Leadership Summit 2006", 18 November 2006. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 33-34: 39-71 (2008-2009)

Agreement (CPA) on 21 November and the promulgation of the Interim Constitution on 15 January 2007.

All these developments were instrumental in the election of the Constituent Assembly and in setting new goals for the transitional phase—the restructuring of the Nepalese state through the abolition of monarchical rule and the formation of a republic, arms management and the creation of an inclusive democracy. One of the most important parts of all the bilateral decisions and agreements that have taken place in this period relates to conflict transformation against the backdrop of a decade-long war between the Maoist combatants and the State's security forces. The CPN (Maoist) itself took several decisions to ensure its transformation from an armed rebel group to a competitive party:

- In accordance with one of the new components of its ideology and principles, it pledged allegiance to the multiparty competitive system.
- On 21 November 2006, it announced the end of the decade-long insurgency.
- It agreed to place its soldiers from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in cantonments and to lock up their weapons under UN supervision.
- Its parallel governments—from village to central levels, along with its *Jana Adalat* (People's Court)—were dissolved.
- It changed from a rebel group to a mainstream political party by scrapping its military-related organizations, abandoning its wartime strategies and re-creating its organizational setup to reflect the changes.
- It joined the Interim Legislature, with 83 representatives (the total number of members in the Interim Legislature is 330). It will soon become part of the interim government.

In one respect or another, the transformation of the CPN (Maoist) is similar to transformations that liberal political parties in the third world and communist parties around the world have undergone. Just like the CPN (Maoist), most liberal parties in third-world countries originated in one form and changed into another; just like the CPN (Maoist), they also resorted to taking up arms at one time or another to gain independence from colonial rule or liberation from a despotic regime; and just like the CPN (Maoist), communist parties throughout the world started out with the ideology of class struggle and armed revolution, but later accepted

bourgeois democracy, which they had at one time unsuccessfully tried to overthrow. Liberal democracy, which is known as bourgeois democracy in Marxist vocabulary, has now become the ultimate destination of many communist parties in the world.

But in other respects, the changes in the CPN (Maoist) and the party's role on the Nepalese political scene are unique. Unlike many other communist insurgent groups around the world and unlike the previous communist rulers of Eastern Europe, the influence the CPN (Maoist) has had on political processes and on the populace in Nepal has never diminished.

In many developing countries, such as Indonesia and Peru, communist parties, which were once the most powerful forces, have turned into insignificant political entities; but the CPN (Maoist), despite completely abandoning its policy of capturing state power solely through an insurgency, has emerged as one of the most potent forces likely to shape the future of Nepal.

The salient features of the CPN (Maoist)'s transformation are given in the table below. Two important documents referred to in the table are the 'Common Minimum Policy and Programme' of the CPN (Maoist)'s United Revolutionary People's Council, September 2001, and the 'Broad Political Agreements made between the SPA and the CPN (Maoist)' in November 2006, which the CPN (Maoist) consider to be a "victory document".

On the basis of literature reviews, documentary analyses, media reports and personal interviews with some of the CPN (Maoist) leaders, this paper will attempt to trace the trends and events that led to the fundamental transformation of the CPN (Maoist) from an insurgent group to a party competing for state power through peaceful means². The theoretical proposition of party transformation stipulates that the development of a party from birth to maturity is characterized by changes in the party's goals and activities, and that eventually, the party acquires new characteristics, i.e. de-ideologization, downgrading of the role of party members, increased access to a variety of interest groups, and a deemphasizing of the class grade.³ A transformation from the genetic phase to organizational maturity follows, with some transitional characteristics—from a system of solidarity to a system of interest, from adherence to the party's manifest ideology to concentration on organizational survival, from domination of the environment to adaptation to the environment, and from leaders having a maximum

² Interviews with Baburam Bhattarai (19 April 2006 and 13 May 2006), Krishna Bahadur Mahara (4 June 2006), Suresh Ale Magar (11 December 2006) and Khim Lal Devkota (12 December 2006).

³ O.Kirchheimer, 1966: 177-200.

freedom of choice to restrictions being placed on the leaders' freedom of manoeuvrability⁴. A previous study of party transformation in Nepal found that the Nepali Congress party (NC) and the CPN (UML), in the course of their transformations from grass-root movements to contenders for state power, acquired new characteristics: the parties grew in size and organizational complexity; they watered down their more strident ideological strains; they became involved in divisive politics; they appropriated state resources for the benefit of party-clients, etc.⁵

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section briefly examines the details of the CPN (Maoist)'s transformation, drawing on comparative experiences and party-transformation theory. The second section provides a narrative picture of the origin and evolution of the CPN (Maoist) vis-à-vis other communist parties of Nepal. The third section provides a glimpse of the Maoist insurgency. The fourth section analyzes the national and international situations that forced the CPN (Maoist) to review its ideological goals and strategies. The last section examines whether the transformation of the CPN (Maoist) into a competitive party is reflected in the party's current configuration, organizational structure, ideology and support base.

The Origin and Evolution of the CPN (Maoist)

The Maoist insurgency (February 1996 – May 2006) could be viewed as one of three paths that broader communist movements have taken in Nepal. The other two paths that communist parties have taken are:

- i) participation in the parliamentary process without fully accepting liberal democracy (this was the path taken by some small communist parties such as the United People's Front (UPF) and the Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party (NWPP) in the post-1990 period);
- ii) the transformation of a hard-line communist party into a parliamentary party that also accepted all the mechanisms of liberal democracy as achieved by the CPN (UML) during the post-1990 political setup.

According to Path One, a non-conformist but participatory approach, the communist party was to adhere to the wider communist philosophy and goal, but at the same time, participate in the bourgeois democratic process. The communist movement in Nepal began with this approach, which was similar to the Bolsheviks' aims before the October Revolution.

⁴ A. Panebianco, 1988.

⁵ K. Hachhethu, 2002.

Table 1: The Transformation of the CPN (Maoist)

Contents of ideology	Common Minimum Policy and Programmes	Broad Political Agreements
Core ideology	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism	Democracy, peace, prosperity; state restructuring; progressive social and economic transformation; independence, integrity and sovereignty of the state
Key strategy: Prachanda Path	A fusion of the Chinese model of protracted people's war in the countryside and the Soviet model of urban armed insurrection	Arms management: placing the Maoist combatants in cantonments and locking up their weapons (reciprocated by the Nepalese army)
People's government	At village, area, district, regional and national levels	Dissolved. Interim local bodies will be formed at district, city and village levels on the basis of agreements between the SPA and the CPN (Maoist)
Political system	New People's Democracy based on the Chinese model created by Mao, under the leadership of peasants and workers and a dictatorship of the proletariat	Commitment to a multiparty competitive system, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, freedom of the press, rules of law and other standards and democratic values
The Monarchy issue	Communist Republic	Determine the fate of the monarchy as an institution during the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly through a simple majority vote
Model of inclusion	Federalism on the basis of ethnicity and region, and right to self determination; end of all forms of patriarchal exploitation; abolition of untouchability; special rights for women and Dalits	Establish an inclusive, democratic and forward-looking state by abolishing the centralized and unitary structure of the state
Economy	End of feudalism and exploitation of backward groups; nationalization of state resources; revolutionary land reform to end feudal land ownership	End of feudalism and exploitation of backward groups; land reform to end feudal land ownership; protection and promotion of national capital, industries and resources
Religion	Secular	Secular

When it was founded in 1949, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) —the parent organization of all communist parties in Nepal— proclaimed that its main goal was to establish a ‘New People’s Democracy’ (NPD), a derivative of Mao’s Chinese model. NPD was, as written in Mao’s *Red Book*, ‘a political system established by a broader united front of labour, farmers, national capitalists, the middle class, intellectuals, youth, women and students, on the basis of unity between workers and peasants and the leadership of proletariat’.⁶ The CPN also adopted core components of Marx and Lenin’s communist ideologies, i.e. class struggle, armed revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat; but it added its own native contents, i.e. land reform, instituting a republic, nationalism based on anti-India and anti-West sentiments, and non-conformism with the Westminster system. The CPN upheld both the theoretical and native contents of communism in Nepal.⁷ Yet at the same time, it participated in the first experiment with democracy (1951-1960) and obtained four seats in parliament at the time. The main strategy in Path One involved the communist parties’ abiding by bourgeois democratic processes until favourable conditions emerged for an armed revolution.

In the early 1970s, with the formation of the CPN (Fourth Convention), the CPN ceased pursuing Path One. The CPN (Fourth Convention) was the immediate parent organization of all radical communist groups professing Maoism or Maoist thought in Nepal—among others, CPN (Masal, Mohan Bikram group), CPN (Mashal, Mohan Vaidya group), and CPN (Unity Centre). The CPN (Unity Centre) —consisting of several Maoist splinter groups, including the present CPN (Maoist), before its split in 1995— initially continued to pursue Path One methods during the post-1990 period. Through its political wing, the UPF (later renamed the People’s Front [PF] because of the party’s split and realignment) the CPN (Unity Centre) contested all three parliamentary elections and two local elections held in the 1990s. It won a minimum of six seats (in 1999) and a maximum of nine (in 1991) out of the 205 seats in the HOR. Its proclaimed aim for becoming involved in the electoral and political process was to ‘expose the sham of parliamentary democracy’.⁸ And in a move that was antithetical to the armed revolution, all those championing Path One, i.e. the CPN in the 1950s, the CPN (Fourth Convention) in the 1970s and 1980s, the CPN (Unity Centre) in the 1990s and even the CPN (Maoist) advocated an alternative course, demanding the election of the CA. But the CPN (Maoist)

⁶ *Excerpts of Mao Tse Tung’s Speeches* (in Nepali) (Peiking: Bideshi Bhasa Press, 1972)

⁷ *Text of the First Manifesto of the CPN, September 1949*

⁸ K. Hachhethu, 1992.

finally emerged as a separate party when it refused to abide by the methods outlined in Path One and opted for the course of armed revolution. The Maoist insurgency was, therefore, a rejection of both Path One and Path Two, paths that were taken up by other communist parties in Nepal.

Path Two, the transformation of a communist party into a parliamentary party, called for the party to depart from some core principles of communism such as armed revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, nationalization of national resources, and commitment to one-party communist rule. The CPN (UML) chose this path. The CPN (UML) originated as a Naxalite group in the early 1970s, committed to Mao's NPD ideology. After initially working to annihilate class enemies, the CPN (UML) turned into a mainstream party committed to the 1990 constitutional arrangement, which championed constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. Besides abandoning its previous goal of instituting a one-party communist system in favour of the multiparty system, it also changed its strategy for achieving its political aims—from its initial aim of using an armed revolution to one of engaging in peaceful political competition. At its fifth national convention, in 1993, the CPN (UML) adopted a new ideological programme called *Janatako Bahudaliya Janbad* (People's Multiparty Democracy, or PMD). The PMD has adopted all major components of liberal democracy, i.e. fundamental and human rights of citizens, peaceful competition among political parties, periodic elections, majority party rule, supremacy of the constitution, separation of powers and rule of law.⁹ Path Two was a post-1990 phenomenon. The path has been condemned by many radical leftists, including the CPN (Maoist), as a revisionist and deviationist approach. As stated above, on the eve of their armed insurgency, the CPN (Maoist) also rejected Path One.

Path Three, armed revolution, meant that the communist party would resort to *Janabadi Kranti* (people's revolution), in accordance with Mao's prescription of using the three magic weapons for mounting an NPD revolution: i) creating a disciplined party infused with the Marxism-Leninism doctrine; ii) creating a disciplined army to work under the party's leadership; and iii) creating a united front of all parties and groups willing to unite and work under the control of the communist party.¹⁰ In 1995 a faction of leaders and workers among the communists decided that it was time to put these ideas into action and carry out a fully fledged movement based on these ideas. That group, which subsequently became

⁹ *Text of Organizational Report Passed by National Congress of CPN (UML) 1993*, Kathmandu: CPN (UML) Office, 1993

¹⁰ *Op. Cit* 6.

the CPN (Maoist), split from the CPN (Unity Centre) and formally established itself as a separate party. The party members who wanted to continue working through parliamentary processes inherited the party name CPN (Unity Centre), and the splinter-faction, which advocated implementing an armed revolution, named itself the CPN (Maoist).

The CPN (Maoist)'s implementation of Path Three was, however, not the first instance of a communist party in Nepal taking this path. Long before the CPN (Maoist) insurgency started, Path Three had first been experimented with for a short period in the 1970s by another communist party known as the Jhapali group. Against the backdrop of the Cultural Revolution in China and the Naxalite uprising in India, the Jhapali group followed the Naxalite dictum of class annihilation, which resulted in the killing of eight landlords. But the Jhapali group was suppressed by the then *Panchayat* establishment; and eventually, with the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, the group turned into a parliamentary party with a new name —the CPN (UML). But unlike the unsuccessful revolution by the Jhapali group, the CPN (Maoist) was able to stir up a sizable movement because the party was able to exploit people's discontent with the post-1990 political system, which was based on constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy; the CPN (Maoist) launched a full-scale armed revolution in February 1996.

The CPN (Maoist) insurgency could, therefore, be viewed as a revival of Path Three. The CPN (Maoist) vowed to dismantle the prevailing political structure through an armed revolution and replace it with a new political system known as the NPD. This goal was clearly stated in a resolution passed by the CPN (Maoist) on the eve of their insurgency. 'This plan of initiation of the people's war will be based on the principle that everything is an illusion except state power. While remaining firm on the principal aim of the armed struggle to capture political power for the people, the party expresses its firm commitment to wage a relentless struggle against all forms of deviationist thoughts and trends, including economism, reformism and anarchism'.¹¹

When tracing the genesis of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, we have to take into account the role that the current leader of the CPN (Maoist), Prachanda, has played in keeping alive the more vehement forms of communist ideology. In the years leading up to the insurgency, the Maoist groups led by Prachanda never wavered from their non-conformist stance regarding the post-1990 political setup, and they have continuously

¹¹ *Text of Plan for the Historic Initiation of the People's War adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in September 1995.*

adhered to the ideology of class war, as evidenced by the stands Prachanda's parties have taken since 1990.

- The United National People's Movement, a coalition of hard-left parties, of which the Prachanda-led faction (then known as Mashal) was a part, wanted to continue the 1990 mass movement until a New People's Democracy had been created in Nepal; this aim was different from the United Left Front (ULF)'s aim, which was to restore the multiparty system.
- Mashal (Prachanda), like other Maoist parties, showed its antipathy to the monarchy and democracy by refusing to make suggestions to the Constitution Reformation Commission (1990).
- The CPN (Unity Centre), along with Prachanda's faction as a partner, condemned as reactionary the new 1990 constitution, which implemented a system based on parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.
- The political report adopted by the Unity Congress of the CPN (Unity Centre) in December 1991 stated, 'Our political strategy is to establish a new democratic republic of Nepal with a people's democratic dictatorship against feudalism and imperialism and on the basis of an alliance of peasants and workers under the leadership of the proletariat. ...For this, it is a must to adopt the line of a protracted people's war with a strategy of encirclement of the city from the countryside.' This Unity Congress elected Prachanda as General Secretary of the CPN (Unity Centre).
- The Prachanda faction of the CPN (Unity Centre) boycotted the 1994 parliamentary elections, and it adopted a new name, CPN (Maoist), in February 1995. The third expanded meeting of the party's central committee, held in March 1995, decided to launch the protracted people's war, which started in February 1996 and rapidly gained momentum.

A Glimpse of the Maoist Insurgency

The CPN (Maoist)'s armed insurgency was the most powerful anti-establishment movement that Nepal has ever seen.

The first armed movement launched by the Nepali people in 1950-51 against the 104-year oligarchic Rana regime ended after the NC's *Mukti Sena* (liberation army) captured more than 50 per cent of Nepali

territory.¹² The 1990 *Jana Andolan* (mass movement), which ended the three-decade-long authoritarian partyless *Panchayat* system (1960-1990) and restored the multiparty system, was largely an urban and middle-class based movement.¹³ But the CPN (Maoist)'s People's War was nothing like the previous insurgencies and movements that had occurred in Nepal. The People's War started in February 1996 with a ragtag army of a couple of hundred insurgents, but within a short time span, it spread to all of Nepal; and except for the two districts of Manang and Mustang, which remained unaffected, the armed conflict between state security forces and the Maoist guerrillas affected everyone. At least 13,000 persons lost their lives during the insurgency.

According to the Maoists, the insurgency, passed through the strategic defence and strategic balance stages, and in 2005, reached the strategic offensive stage. With the advancement of the insurgency, the military capacity of the Maoists also increased. In 1996, the Maoists had only 200 very active cadres. But the number of soldiers in their people's army alone was reportedly 35,000 in 2005. Its PLA had seven divisions. The PLA was 'one of the largest non-state military formations in the world'.¹⁴

The Maoists not only increased their military strength but also expanded their own administrative areas. They claim that they had seized most rural parts of the country, limiting the presence of the 'old regime' to the capital and district headquarters. The CPN (Maoist) had four tiers of government: central (United Revolutionary People's Council), regional (nine autonomous regional governments), district and village/city.

As outlined in the blueprint of insurgency prepared by the CPN (Maoist) a year before the insurgency started, it predicted a successful outcome to the insurgency on the following accounts.¹⁵

- The geographical situation (of Nepal) is favourable for waging guerrilla war.
- A good mass base for guerrilla war can be created from the members of ethnic groups who have been oppressed.
- There is no possibility of a direct military clash with the enemies who hold political power. The people's armed forces could take advantage of this to seize a definite area.
- By using peasant revolution as the backbone of the insurgency, by centralizing activities in rural areas and by relying on and uniting

¹² P. R. Uprety, 1992: 183.

¹³ K. Hachhethu, 1990: 190-92

¹⁴ D. Kumar, 2004: 12 (unpublished)

¹⁵ *Text of Strategy and Tactics of Armed Struggle in Nepal, Adopted by the Third Expanded meeting of the Central Committee of the CPN (Maoist) in March 1995.*

with poor peasants, guerrilla warfare can be initiated and used in different parts of the country.

- The people's support for the insurgency will carry on increasing if the revisionists of the right are thoroughly exposed and if the tactics of armed struggle are painstakingly pursued.
- The pace of development of the armed struggle to establish the people's alternative revolutionary power would be faster and inspires us to undertake bold tactics to achieve the same.
- Nepalese people working in foreign countries —mainly those working in India— would be mobilized if we were to conduct political work among them and if we were to use the Indian territory for providing logistical support for the armed struggle in Nepal.

This well-thought-out blueprint for insurgency indicated that the Maoists could advance their armed struggle if they utilized Nepal's topography and its geographical proximity with India and if they mobilized the peasants and the excluded ethnic groups and employed guerrilla tactics carefully. Yet there were others factors, such as social injustice, unemployment, underdevelopment, problems of exclusion, lack of good governance etc. to fuel the insurgency.¹⁶

All these indicators encouraged the Maoists to launch their people's war, which started on 13 February 1996 with attacks on police stations in the remote areas of Rolpa, Rukum and Sindhuli districts. Initially, the Maoists limited their attacks to remote areas where the state's presence was minimal, and they targeted schools, health posts, agricultural banks, NGOs, police stations, Village Development Committees (VDC), and village level organizations of parliamentary parties. Thabang village in Rolpa district, which was designated as the Maoist headquarters, could be viewed as the sort of locale that the Maoists wanted to establish their bases in: Thabang village was far away from the headquarters of its district; it did not have motorable roads; it had forests; it was inhabited by members of deprived communities who had long suffered from poverty and unemployment; and it was a stronghold of communist ideology. In fact, the conditions in most villages in remote areas in Nepal are not very different from those of Thabang village.

Cleansing opponents was the main strategy the Maoists used for creating their own territory, base areas. They killed civilians considered to be 'enemies of the people', such as party workers, elected representatives,

¹⁶ For details see, A. Karki and D. Seddon (eds.), 2003; M. Hutt (ed), 2004; D. Thapa and B. Sijapati, 2003; D. Thapa (ed), 2003; S.D. Muni, 2003; A. Karki and B. Bhattarai (eds.), n.d..

landlords, businessmen, moneylenders, 'exploiters', and police informants. The Maoists launched the people's war in a most organized way and adopted a uniform plan of action everywhere: they would first disarm local people by seizing their weapons and then in broad daylight kill people they accused of being 'anti-people'. The brutality of their methods was explained by a witness: 'People have been killed while they were eating, after being dragged out of their house into the courtyard and killed in the presence of family members; victims have been tied to trees, hacked and their bodies shot in various places so that they die in excruciating pain'.¹⁷ The Maoist strategy was to create a reign of terror. Their next targets were banks, NGOs and INGOs. Consequently, the people's representatives for local elected bodies and parties' local cadres fled to district headquarters for their own safety. The offices and activities of NGOs and INGOs shut down. The number of police stations was reduced substantially in Maoist-affected areas.

Along with cleansing opponents, the Maoists also sought to broaden their support base. This two-pronged strategy of broadening their support base and cleansing opponents produced swift results. By late 1998, the CPN (Maoist) had started to form its own government at village and area levels. The CPN (Maoist) started instituting district-level governments from December 2000. The party also formed a United Revolutionary People's Council (central level government) in September 2001. The formation of the Maoist government at local and central levels had been synchronized with the amplification of the state-Maoist armed conflict from low to middle intensity. The Maoists' attacks escalated from isolated assassinations of rural-based party workers to regular assaults on police stations. The Maoist offensive war against the police reached a climax when the guerrillas seized Dunai, the headquarters of Dolpa district on 24 September 2000, where the Maoists killed 14 policemen. In November 2001, the Maoists attacked an army barracks in Dang, and this attack marked the start of their high-intensity war against the state.

The government retaliated by declaring a state of emergency and mobilizing the army to counter the insurgency. The army launched Operation Romeo in November 1995 in Rolpa district and Operation Kilo Sierra 2 in 1997-98 in 18 districts around the country; the army launched counter-insurgency operations throughout the country from November 2001 to May 2006, in which they conducted mass arrests and resorted to indiscriminate killings that took the lives of many innocent people. The state's ruthless suppressive actions proved counterproductive and instead contributed to 'spark[ing off] (...) an expanding insurgency'.¹⁸ The Maoist

¹⁷ M. Kattel, 2003: 60.

¹⁸ Thapa, 2003: 90.

strength increased with each infamous operation conducted by the state: out of the 23 major attacks carried out by the Maoists during the period November 2001 to January 2003, they were defeated in only five instances. The Maoist guerrillas were successful in attacking and capturing the district headquarters of Dolpa, Syangja, Solukhumbu, Dang, Achham and Jumla districts. In every big raid, the Maoists managed to capture huge caches of modern arms and ammunitions from state security forces.

The Maoists gained strength by exploiting the weaknesses of the state. During the initial phase of the insurgency, the state's capacity for dealing with the insurgency was severely constrained by a division among the mainstream parties in their perceptions of and strategies suggested for dealing with the Maoists. Worst of all, the mainstream parties sought to exploit the Maoist insurgency to fuel their own petty agendas against other parliamentary parties. The NC welcomed the ascendant Maoists as a countervailing force against the other dominant communist party, CPN (UML); during the initial phases of the insurgency the Maoists had mainly targeted NC workers, and thus the CPN (UML) too tried to cultivate a rapport with the Maoists because they figured that the Maoists' actions would weaken the NC, the CPN (UML)'s main electoral rival. Furthermore, the state's capacity to deploy armed forces against the Maoists was also limited by the fact that the army was not under the control of the civilian government, and the hostility between the party and the military was compounded by factors of historical legacy¹⁹, constitutional ambiguity²⁰, and non-cooperation between the political parties and the army.²¹ The relationship between the government and the military was further complicated by the palace's separate dealings with the Maoists. Maoist leaders, Prachanda and Babu Ram Bhattarai, claimed that they had an *aghsit karyaat ekta* (undeclared alliance) with late King Birendra, and they said that King Birendra was not in favour of the government's plan to

¹⁹ The army was used by the late king Mahendra to stage a coup in 1960 against the NC government and multiparty system. The army had also been used time and time again to suppress movements against the partyless *Panchayat* system (1960-90).

²⁰ The 1990 Constitution has a separate provision for military mobilization; the Security Council (consisting of the Prime Minister, Defence minister and Chief of Army Staff) can only recommend it while the king takes the final decision.

²¹ Non-cooperation by the army was felt widely, particularly during the Maoist's capture of Dunai, the headquarters of Dolpa district in September 2000. The then Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala resigned obviously because of the army's betrayal over the Holeri incident. The army disobeyed the government's decision to counter the Maoist guerrillas after they held 76 policemen in hostage on July 12, 2001 at Holeri in Rolpa district.

mobilize the army during the People's War.²² The army had deliberately and consciously distanced itself from the elected government, as if its primary duty was only to protect the palace.

The monarchy took centre stage after the royal takeovers in October 2002 and February 2005, and in the second round of negotiations held between the royal regime and the CPN (Maoist) in April-October 2003. The NC and UML took a non-cooperative stance that resembled the same stance the palace and the military had taken during the first round of negotiations between the elected government and the CPN (Maoist) in August-November 2001. The CPN (Maoist) acquired power by taking advantage of the weakness and internal contradictions of the state rather than through any concerted effort to gain political capital. The CPN (Maoist) encouraged and abetted the squabbling among the state actors, particularly the conflicts between the treasury and the opposition, and between the palace/army and political parties (the divide between the palace and the parties was most acute during the immediate periods after the royal takeovers in October 2002 and February 2005).

Situations that led to the transformation of the Maoists

Many observers within and outside the country found it surprising that the CPN (Maoist) halted their insurgency even though it was going strong: the insurgency had indeed advanced to the 'strategic offensive' stage from the 'strategic defence' and then 'strategic balance' stages; the number of Maoist combatants had risen to 35,000; and the Maoists were implementing the Prachanda Path, which was a mix of the Chinese model of protracted war in the countryside and the Soviet model of armed insurrection in urban areas.²³

But the Maoists knew what they were doing when they abandoned their insurgency. The Maoists could not have overlooked the military supremacy of the state security forces (95,000 army personnel, 25,000 Armed Police Force personnel and 40,000 civilian police personnel) that were backed by international anti-communist and anti-terrorist support. The Maoists, as Prachanda once said, 'did not foresee the possibility of capturing state power at the centre through armed revolution alone'.²⁴ Some experts had long before predicted that the war between the state and Maoists was un-winnable militarily.²⁵

The LTTE's experience with armed revolution in Sri Lanka, for example, shows that full military victory is impossible for an insurgent

²² *Kathmandu Post*, June 4, 2001.

²³ For details, see A. N. Chamlagai, 2006 :13-30.

²⁴ *Text of Speech by Prachanda in a Press Conference on 8 November 2006*.

²⁵ L. Philipson, 2002: 19.

group. Civil war can be sustained only if it is confined to a certain territory, but as soon as it spreads throughout the country it becomes vulnerable from within: when the CPN (Maoist) grew from a small group to a large party, it had to face a variety of internal problems; during the expanding insurgency, the CPN (Maoist) had to deal with confrontations within the party on five occasions.²⁶

The latest confrontation between the Prachanda faction and the Baburam Bhattarai faction became so intense that it could have, according to the party's own assessment, vertically split the party if the confrontation had not been successfully managed in time.²⁷ The crux of this confrontation was shaped by the different views the warring camps had over who the 'main enemy' was —India or the monarchy— and over what strategy to take against the enemy.

To resolve the conflict, the party decided to adopt a strategy that called for waging an all-out struggle against the monarchy and possibly seeking India's assistance to start collaborative political efforts with mainstream Nepalese parties. This new strategy ultimately drove the CPN (Maoist) to the idea of fusing the insurgency with a peaceful mass movement. Besides, the history of the CPN (UML) had already shown that a gradual modification of earlier party aims and a toning down of the party ideology could prove a pragmatic decision that would bolster the party's organizational strength.

The CPN (UML) had given up its Naxalite aims in 1982, dropped its Maoist ideal in 1989, and participated in the movement for the restoration of democracy in 1990; and it had officially declared its support for the multiparty system of democracy in 1993. The same logic applied by the CPN (UML) to transform itself is probably being used to determine the transformation of the CPN (Maoist) from an insurgent group to a competitive party.

Although the CPN (Maoist)'s transformation is being witnessed now, the party had actually pushed for political settlement as an alternative to insurgency time and time again: it did in fact sit down to negotiate with the civilian government in 2001 and again with the royal regime in 2003, but the CPN (Maoist) reverted to its insurgent ways after both meetings, as its demand for the election of the CA —its bottom-line demand— was not entertained by the Establishment at the time.

The Establishment, for its part, was obsessed with the notion that the negotiations were mere tactical moves by the CPN (Maoist), rather than proof of true Maoist commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The CPN (Maoist) had, after all, taken advantage of the truces and

²⁶ R. Baral, 2006: 9.

²⁷ *Historical Documents of CPN (Maoist)*, 2005, pp. 318-320.

negotiations in the past to expand its organizational base and enhance its military capacity. The CPN (Maoist) was also not as optimistic as its opponents about the negotiations leading to a solution.

The first negotiations were held before the conflict had escalated into a high-intensity war, and so the Establishment had been less willing to meet the CPN (Maoist)'s demand regarding CA elections. According to one of its central leaders, the CPN (Maoist) withdrew from the first round of negotiations because the party sensed that the government was preparing to intensify its military attacks on the Maoists.

The situation at the time of the second round of negotiations in 2003 was favourable to the Maoists because the division between the palace and the parties after the royal takeover in October 2002 was at its starkest. Yet it was also the time when the international community's support for the political parties, and the international backlash against the CPN (Maoist), was gaining momentum.

In fact, so strong was the antipathy that the international community had for the CPN (Maoist) and so strong was their support for the post-October 2002 regime then, that the state was able to procure many sophisticated weapons and military gadgets from the USA, the UK, India and other countries.²⁸ The CPN (Maoist) thus needed to take part in the second round of negotiations because they needed to offset international pressure.

The CPN (Maoist) was also in a position to gain more political leverage against the royal regime, which was waging a political battle against the political parties, and whose legitimacy was being questioned by the Nepali people. But by agreeing to negotiate with the royal regime, the CPN (Maoist) tarnished its anti-monarchical credentials and had to resort to using the state's refusal to grant the creation of a CA as an excuse to withdraw from negotiations.

The upshot of it all was that the CPN (Maoist) ended up intensifying its armed insurgency, acquired an even more republican tenor and toned down its criticism of the political parties. Presumably, the CPN might have retained its ideological image if they had instead settled their differences through the agency of the political parties.

The royal coup of February 2005 paved the way for the CPN (Maoist) to finally strike up a partnership with the political parties, which eventually launched a process of negotiated settlement to the armed conflict. King Gyanendra's ambitious attempts to become an active monarch had changed the role of political equation in the country —from an ally championing the cause of constitutional monarchy in the past, the political parties had become proponents of republicanism.

²⁸ For details, see D. Kumar and H. Sharma, nd.

In the days that followed, the CPN (UML) passed a resolution to declare Nepal a *Loktrantik Ganatnatra* (democratic republic), and the NC deleted the phrase 'constitutional monarchy' from its party constitution. Both parties also further changed their earlier demands for constitutional amendment to demands that called for an election of the CA. In the post-February 2005 coup period, the mainstream parties had been moving closer to the CPN (Maoist)'s long-standing demands for the country to be transformed into a republic and for the election of the CA.

Earlier in November 2001, the CPN (UML) and other left-wing parties had rejected the Maoist proposal to form a loose left-wing coalition that was to champion the republic agenda and the demand for a constituent assembly. Yet after February 2005, all the communist parties and the NC exhorted the CPN (Maoist) to join their struggle against the royal regime.

The CPN (Maoist) had earlier tried to cultivate mainstream parties, albeit inconsistently, in its quest for a political resolution of the armed conflict. It had maintained contact with the top leaders of the mainstream parties since the beginning of 2002, in reaction to the state of emergency declared by the Sher Bahdur Deuba government. In the aftermath of the February 2005 royal coup, frequent clandestine meetings among the leaders of both sides resulted in the development of a common strategy and goal—the ending of absolute monarchy.

Although the CPN (Maoist) was aware of the dismay it would cause its most radical supporters by forging an alliance with the mainstream parties, it knew that sticking to its NPD ideology and PW strategy was not politically germane. And the bottom-line demand put to the CPN (Maoist) by the mainstream parties, should the CPN (Maoist) want to forge a coalition, was that the CPN (Maoist) would have to mainstream itself, give up its violent revolution and accept the multiparty system.

The CPN (Maoist) actually used the party's transformative moment to strike a bargain with the political parties—Baburam Bhattarai reportedly told the parties, 'You accept republicanism and we will accept multipartyism.'²⁹ In striking up an alliance with the mainstream parties, the CPN (M) revised its immediate goals from that of a quest to set up an NPD to a Completion of Bourgeois Democratic Transition (CBDT). In its proposed transitional arrangement, called 'Democracy in the 21st Century', which was chalked up in June 2003, the CPN (Maoist) cited the acceptance of the multiparty system as one of its key features.

Putting an end to the monarchy is the central goal behind the CPN (Maoist)'s new proposal regarding the CBDT. Earlier, the CPN (Maoist) had harboured an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the monarchy—initially it championed the formation of a republic, yet it was later willing to adopt a

²⁹ B. Bhattarai, 2002.

tacit approval for conserving the monarch as a ceremonial head. However, after the royal massacre, it had called for an end to the monarchy³⁰.

After the failure of the second round of negotiations with the royal regime in 2003, the CPN (Maoist) became more anti-monarchical, and it seriously began working on developing an alliance with the political parties. Its new commitment to remain faithful to the multiparty system widened the scope for the launching of a joint struggle by the mainstream parties and the CPN (Maoist) against the monarchy. As a consequence of the concerted efforts made on both sides, the seven-party alliance (SPA) and the CPN (Maoist) drew up a 12-point understanding in November 2005; this was a landmark event because it not only united all the popular forces in their struggle against absolute monarchy, but also because it allowed mainstream parties to endorse the demand for an election of the CA. The CPN (Maoist) reciprocated by embracing multiparty politics. This understanding provided the basis for the April 2006 movement.

The changes in Nepal's relationship with the international community following the royal coup of February 2005 was regarded as an encouraging development by the CPN (Maoist), a situation that it regarded as appropriate in its quest to transform the state of armed conflict through a political resolution. In the past, as stated earlier, the international communities had backed the post-October 2002 royal regime because they had preferred a military solution to the insurgency.

In fact, India and the USA had slapped a 'terrorist' label on the Maoists. But the international communities reviewed their position on two grounds. Firstly, the king had failed to take the parties into his confidence, and the Royal Nepal Army had been unsuccessful in putting an end to the Maoist insurgency. Secondly, they realized that King Gyanendra, in all his ambitiousness, had overplayed the position of advantage that he had with the international community and had overreached himself with his political manoeuvres.

When the king dismantled the democratic setup after the royal takeover of February 2005, the members of the international community completely reconfigured their relationship with the monarchy—from active supporters of the monarchy, they instead became opponents of the monarchy. Consequently, the members of the international community supported the anti-regression struggle launched by the political parties, and they also used their influence over the mainstream parties to start a dialogue with the CPN (Maoist).

The members of the international community became proximately involved in the process of building confidence between the SPA and the CPN (Maoist). This reverse situation regarding the international

³⁰ B. Bhattarai, 2001.

community's relations with the palace thus prompted the CPN (Maoist) to abandon their strategy of armed revolution.

India's changing role and perception vis-à-vis the CPN (Maoist) has been one of the main factors that have shaped the CPN (Maoist)'s transformative arc. India has always worried about the implications that the escalation of the conflict in Nepal would have on Indian Maoists. Earlier, India used to hold the view that any development that weakened the Nepali Maoists would prove demoralizing for their Indian counterparts, and in the former political setup, India backed the royal regime. But after the royal coup of February 2005, India could not pursue its earlier stance and had to come up with a new strategy for dealing with the Nepali Nepalese Maoists: India now sought to establish a rapport with the CPN (Maoist) in the hope that such a relationship between the Indian state and the Nepali Maoists would help dissociate Nepalese Maoists from Indian Maoists.

A noted expert on the matter summed up the new strategy thus: "Maintaining its two pillar approach —constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy— India tried to impress on the king to reverse his course by accommodating political parties. Its unequivocal support for the regime to quell the "terrorists" (Maoists) by force changed following the February coup, resulting in opening dialogues with the Maoists on the one hand, and supporting the political parties against the King on the other."³¹

India now played a crucial role in bringing the mainstream parties and the CPN (Maoist) together, a partnership that was crucial for fortifying the latest resurgent movement to instil democracy in Nepal. And by responding to India's new-found attitude towards the Maoists and to the help India provided in creating the 12-point understanding between the SPA and the CPN (Maoist), Prachanda changed his party's line regarding India (previously India was portrayed by the CPN (Maoist) as being expansionist).³² Yet the goodwill of the international community that the CPN (Maoist) now enjoys and the international community's proximate involvement in creating a new political environment in Nepal hinges on the agreement that the CPN (Maoist) will ultimately give up its ideology of armed revolution and that it will also abide by the universal principles of democracy.

Reflections on the CPN (Maoist)'s Transformation

The April 2006 popular uprising was a landmark event in the transformative journey of the CPN (Maoist) —the success of the uprising

³¹ L. R. Baral, 2006: 185-209.

³² M. Dahal, 2006: 23.

spurred on the party to change from an insurgent group to a party competing for state power. The party changed its earlier strategy of using armed insurgency to embracing peaceful negotiation in order to reach its goals.

The CPN's goals have also changed: before it sought to capture state power, but now it advocates restructuring the state. The process of restructuring the Nepalese state is driven by three core contents —end of monarchical rule, transformation of armed conflict into peace building and inclusive democracy. In the wake of the April 2006 mass movement, the restructuring process has become the central political development in Nepal, and the CPN (Maoist) is one of the key actors involved in the process. This change in the CPN (Maoist)'s goals —from that of capturing state power by force to advocating restructuring the state, in partnership with the other political parties— means that the CPN (Maoist)'s political roadmap henceforth has also changed.

Ideology

With the country's new political reality after the April 2006 mass movement, the CPN was primed to make overhauls in its ideology. The CPN (Maoist)'s proclaimed ideology has been Marxism, Leninism, Maoism and the Prachanda Path. But the party has been willing to modify its ideology to suit the changing times; in June 2003, the party passed a resolution called 'Democracy in the 21st Century', which featured an insert that supported multiparty democratic competition. This new insert reflected the transmutation of the party's goal from NPD to CBDT, which was later renamed 'Democratic Republic'.

The CPN (Maoist)'s proposal regarding CBDT or a 'Democratic Republic' is clearly a revision of its earlier Maoist belief; but the party regards the CBDT as a temporary transitional goal to be attained, one which when accomplished will prepare the stage for instituting a true NPD. The nucleus of Maoism is the establishment of NPD only through a People's War, and there is no space for multiparty competition in that model. The NPD and the People's War therefore constituted mutually coherent components.³³ The CPN (Maoist)'s 'Democracy in the 21st Century' proposal, on the other hand, champions political resolution. It should also be mentioned here that the 'Democracy in the 21st Century' proposal was first made public around the time that the second round of negotiations took place in 2003 (the first round of negotiations was held in 2001). The ideas of CBDT and political resolution therefore constitute mutually coherent ideas, just as NPD and PW were mutually coherent

³³ C. Mishra, 2004: 47.

ideas. The CPN (Maoist) defended this revision in their ideology by citing Lenin: 'Marxism is not a lifeless dogma, not a completed readymade immutable doctrine, but a living guide to action.' The spirit of such rhetoric has been used to defend the proposal for 'Democracy in the 21st Century'.

There is no doubt that the idea for 'Democracy in the 21st Century' resulted from the CPN's quest to find a political resolution, but the CPN (Maoist) claims that such ideological refinement was introduced because the party had studied the behavioural trends of communist states in which the communist parties deteriorated after they had captured state power. The CPN (Maoist) says that it made the changes in its ideology because it realized that a party in power and a party in the midst of a revolution were two different entities; it says that changes were made to prevent the professionalization of the Red Army, to prevent the Red Army from shoring up undue privileges in a post-revolution milieu, and to introduce a system of popular control over a communist party that endorsed the competitive multiparty system.³⁴ Prachanda confirmed this new mode of thinking when he said: 'Only through this way the inherent monopolistic and bureaucratic tendencies of communist parties in power can be checked and socialist democracy institutionalized. Moreover, a suitable mechanism must be found and put into practice to ensure constant control, supervision and intervention of the masses in state affairs. Only then can it be a true democracy in the sense of rule of the people.'³⁵

Two months before the CPN (M) officially adopted the 'Democracy in the 21st Century' proposal, the party's endorsement of the multiparty system was incorporated in its document put forward for negotiation in 2003. 'Universal democratic and civic rights including multiparty competition, periodic elections, universal suffrage, rule of law, freedom of speech and press, fundamental and human rights, etc. should be guaranteed. Such unconditional support for the multiparty system was, however, not well received when the party officially adopted a resolution on democracy in the 21st century. Instead the party stood only for a limited multiparty system by a provision prohibiting the rights to those labelled as 'reactionary, feudal and pro-imperialist'. In one respect, this is a continuation of the CPN (Maoist)'s previous proposal that in NPD -to be achieved through people's war- 'full freedom will be granted for various patriotic, democratic, and leftist parties on the basis of mutual cooperation and supervision with the communist party for a long time. However, the people of reactionary classes who would play a reactionary

³⁴ *Op. Cit.*27, pp. 242-257.

³⁵ *Op.Cit.*1

role during the people's revolution and act against the cause of the country and people shall be deprived of all political rights for a definite period.³⁶ The CPN (Maoist)'s endorsement of the multiparty system has different meanings for different people. For the rank and file, it is true to the ideology of a dictatorship of the proletariat. For others, the CPN (Maoist) has reaffirmed its unconditional support for the universal notion of liberal democracy as is documented in the 12-point understanding and in all other important subsequent agreements made between the (Maoist) CPN and the SPA.

The ambiguous attitude shown by the CPN (Maoist) towards the multiparty system makes it hard to discern whether the party's show of support for liberal democracy is merely a tactical ploy or a sign of a new found faith. Those who closely observe left-wing movements in Nepal know that communist parties' show of support for a multiparty system is initially just part of their tactics, but that eventually, they become fully committed to the democratic cause.

In the early phase of the post-1990 movement, for example, the CPN (UML) espoused the idea of limited multiparty democracy in which they said that 'reactionary, feudal and pro-imperialist' forces would not be given a chance to compete in the political processes. But ever since the party passed the PMD resolution in 1993, the party has become fully committed to the universal principles of the multiparty system. Similarly, the CPN (Maoist) supported only a limited form of the multiparty system as long as it was primarily an armed group. But once it had prepared to change its means of politics from an armed revolution to peaceful politics, it became more committed to the multiparty system. The CPN has not deviated from its commitment to a multiparty system since its signing of the 12-point understanding with the SPA in November 2005. It has also reaffirmed its faith in the universal principles of liberal democracy by signing all subsequent important agreements. In the preamble to that broad political agreement—which was made public the day the CPN (Maoist) celebrated as victory day—the party clearly supports the 'commitments to competitive multiparty democratic system, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, press freedom, rule of law and all other norms and values of democratic system'.³⁷ In the post-April 2006 period, the CPN (Maoist) behaves exactly as the CPN (UML) did before. In fact, a daily paper reported that 'Prachanda admitted that Prachanda Path has similarities with Mandan Bhandari's ideology of *Bahudaliya Janbad*.'

Table 2 compares the CPN (Maoist)'s model of Democracy in the 21st Century with the CPN's model of People's Multiparty Democracy. The

³⁶ *Some Important Documents of CPN (Maoist)*, 2004, p. 160.

³⁷ *Full Text of the Decisions of the SPA-Maoist Summit Meeting*, 8 November 2006.

table shows that the contents of both proposals are the same in substance as far as their assessment of the characteristics of the Nepalese state and their proposal for radical reformation on socio-economic issues are concerned. The differences in the nature of the proposed revolution—the CPN (Maoist) for an armed revolution and the CPN (UML) for a peaceful and parliamentary one—no longer hold because in the transitional period after the April 2006 movement, the CPN (Maoist) through a formal declaration in November 2006 revised its strategy in favour of a peaceful struggle.

The CPN (Maoist)'s proposed inclusive democracy with due representation of the excluded groups in the state apparatus complies with the main demands at the time, but an analogous proposal is missing in the CPN (UML)'s PMD programme. When the CPN (UML) adopted the PMD programme, ethnic and regional movements were not as powerful as they are today, and this explains why the issue was not formally documented in the PMD. Yet today the CPN (UML) has also taken up the cause of excluded groups; for example, in their recommendations to the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, where the CPN (UML) suggests that a federal system should be adopted.

The CPN (Maoist)'s proposal of 'Democracy in the 21st Century' has been deemed one of the chief components of *Prachanda Path*. The two other features that define this path are a fusing of the plans for a protracted people's war with a plan for an urban armed insurrection, and ethnic autonomy with the right to self-determination.

The fusing of the plans for a protracted People's War with a plan for an urban insurrection is no longer valid because the CPN (Maoist) has already declared an end to its their insurgency. Thus *Prachanda Path* has recently been redefined as 'a blending of armed revolution, mass movement, peace negotiation and diplomacy'.³⁸ The party has consciously inserted the phrase relating to an armed revolution in its revised version of *Prachanda Path* not because it intends to revive the armed insurgency, but because it seeks to commemorate the past insurgency as a glorious event that contributed to bringing a sea of change in Nepali politics. The CPN (Maoist)'s support for the third component of *Prachanda Path*—ethnic autonomy with the right to self-determination—can be discerned from Prachanda's own words; he has said that the CPN (Maoist) '... would lose its identity if it did not remain firm on its agenda of ethnic autonomy. We will no longer remain Maoists if we forget the agenda of ethnic autonomy, through which we gathered strength and support from the masses'.³⁹ This quote shows how the party would like to project its image in the changed

³⁸ *Op.Cit* 27. p. 332.

³⁹ *The Himalayan Times*, 30 November 2006.

Table 2. CPN (Maoist)'s Democracy in the 21st Century and CPN (UML)'s People's Multiparty Democracy

Contents	Democracy in the 21st century	People's Democracy	Multiparty
Characteristics of the Nepali state	Semi-feudal and Semi-colonial	Semi-feudal and Semi-colonial	
Post-1990 political set-up	Exploitative and reactionary	Multiparty system with limited democracy	
Strategic goal	Democratic republic	Multiparty people's republic	
Nature of Revolution	A fusion of protracted people's war in countryside and urban armed insurrection	Peaceful and parliamentary	
Characteristics of proposed political system	Multiparty system, periodic elections, rule of law, freedom of speech and press, guarantee of human rights, education, health and employment as part of fundamental rights (revised)	Supremacy of constitution, rule of law, separation of power, guarantee of human rights, pluralistic society, competitive party system, periodic elections, government of majority, and minority in opposition	
Legislature	Elected Assembly with proper representation of all classes, nationalities, Dalits, women, linguistic and religious groups, regions and distinguished personalities	Parliament as provided by the 1990 constitution	
Characteristics of proposed economic system	Land to the tiller, redistribution of land, protection/promotion of national capital and resources, self reliant national industrialization, proper balance of private, joint and collective ownership	Mixed economy, protection of national capital and industry, ownership of industry by state as well as private sector, encourage foreign capital and technology, land ceiling and compensation for acquisition of excess land, landownership by individual, encourage cooperative farming	
Religion	Secular state	Secular state	
State	Caste/ethnic and regional based autonomy with right to self-determination	Equal status and treatment for all linguistic and cultural groups	
Foreign policy	Repeal unequal treaties with India	Repeal unequal treaties with India	

context of competitive politics in the aftermath of the April 2006 movement.

Image and Support Base

The identity of a political party is the image it portrays in citizens' minds. A party's image is a composite idea, shaped by its history, ideology and objective, along with the images projected by its leaders and workers. The CPN (Maoist) has multiple identities; the dominant one is associated with the past insurgency. Unlike the CPN (UML), which concealed its past record of involvement in violent activities, the CPN (Maoist), after April 2006, has been willing to have its insurgency presented as a glorious event that contributed to bringing radical changes to Nepali politics. In order to satisfy its many activists who were recruited during the insurgency and also to prevent the possibility of internal splits in the party on ideological grounds, the Maoist leadership will probably continue hawking its communist ethos and credentials. In the changed context, its rank and file have been socialized in such a way that the class struggle is being carried out through more peaceful methods. And the party's proposal of 'Democracy in the 21st Century' is still being touted as only a transitional phase that will ultimately lead to instituting the NPD.

Besides, the CPN (Maoist) has been lumped together with all the other Nepali communist parties who are supposed to be 'radical, nationalist and pro-poor' forces; while in the new political realm, it has to compete with the other left-wing parties, the CPN (UML) in particular, to wrest that mantle solely for itself. Left-leaning and progressive ideologies, which have been monopolized by the communist parties of Nepal, are popular among the people of Nepal. To be a leftist or a communist in Nepal means to advocate for the people's right to have access to basic necessities, to support radical and revolutionary change, and above all, to stand for absolute economic equality, even at the cost of political liberty. That leftist and progressive ideologies have gained strength in Nepal is clearly evident by the fact that while the CPN won only 4 of the 109 seats in parliament in 1959, the combined total of seats won by the different communist parties in the post-1990 period was 82-95 out of a total of 205 seats in the HOR. The percentage of popular votes for communist parties stood at around 40 per cent in all three parliamentary elections held after the restoration of democracy. Today, the CPN (Maoist) is seen as one of the most dominant communist parties, and it has a relative advantage among the electorate because of its long-standing demands for the election of the CA and the formation of the republic—the central demands that defined the new wave of national agendas in the period following the April 2006 mass uprising. And while it is true that almost all political parties now support the call for a CA election and a restructuring of the Nepali state—with the attendant demands for secularism, republic,

federalism and inclusion— the CPN (Maoist) is considered to be the catalyst for bringing about and translating these issues into a reality.

Like other major political parties, the NC and the UML, the CPN (Maoist) is a broad-based pluralistic party, in terms of the caste/ethnic composition of its leadership; and this feature of its leadership could go a long way to widening its support base among the different segments of Nepali society. Besides, it has always enjoyed solid grass-root support from the people of the excluded groups ever since the insurgency began. By contextualizing the ideology of class war with poverty, injustice and exploitation, and through ethnicizing the insurgency, the CPN (Maoist) has been able to appropriate a large number of people belonging to the poor and excluded groups. In fact, most of the people who participate in the rallies and mass meetings organized by the CPN (Maoist) are youngsters from poor families living in rural areas. As for its image as a pro-poor party, one foreign anthropologist working in Dhorpatan, Baglung district, observed, “People hear that communism is about the redistribution of wealth, and as most people in the area are extremely poor, this notion is very appealing, especially to disillusioned youth who turn to Maoism because it promises to better their living conditions.”⁴⁰

The CPN (Maoist)’s ethnicization of class ideology has also helped the party cash in on the post-1990 ethnic upsurge. The restoration of democracy in 1990 saw the emergence of ethnic activism. Discontent towards domination by the hill high castes is the central issue of the emerging minority movements in Nepal. The CPN (Maoist) concerted efforts to blend ethnic activism and class war is evident from the party’s forming ethnic and regional based frontier organizations.⁴¹ Furthermore, based on ethnicity and regionalism, the CPN (Maoist) proposed a federal structure with its nine autonomous regional governments.⁴² The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 synchronized with ethnic revival, and among the forces competing to cash in on the post-1990 ethnic uprising, the Maoists seem to have been the most successful, both

⁴⁰ C. Millard, 2002: 293.

⁴¹ Several ethnic and regional based front organizations of the Maoist party are: 1) Magar National Liberation Front, 2) Tamang National Liberation Front, 3) Tamuwani National Liberation Front, 4) Limbuwan National Liberation Front, 5) Nepal Dalit Liberation Front, 6) Tharuwan National Liberation Front, 7) Madheshi National Liberation Front, 8) Karnali Regional Liberation Front 9) Thami Liberation Front, 10) Majhi National Liberation Front, and 11) Newa Khala.

⁴² These are: 1) Seti-Mahakali Autonomous Region, 2) Bheri-Karnali Autonomous Region, 3) Tharuwan Autonomous Region, 4) Magarat Autonomous Region, 5) Tamuwani Autonomous Region, 6) Tamang Saling Autonomous Region, 7) Newar Autonomous Region, 8) Kirant Autonomous Region, and 9) Madhesh Autonomous Region.

in accumulating political capital and in creating a political framework for the main ethnic demands—autonomy and federalism.

In the new context of competitive politics since the April 2006 mass movement, the CPN (Maoist) has retained its image as a pro-poor party and a force that champions the ethnic cause. However, in order to expand its support base and its legitimacy in other areas/constituencies—the urban and Tarai populace, the middle and upper classes, and international communities, among whom the CPN (Maoist) does not enjoy the same support as other parties, the party will probably try to acquire a new identity. The party's promise to abide by the universal principles of multiparty democracy and its assurance that it will not revert again to insurgency are examples that show that the CPN (Maoist) leadership is trying to forge a new image for the party. To respond to the new situation, the party has gradually put the party's ideological NPD goal on hold, and has brought to the fore its agenda for state restructuring. Strains of communist rhetoric that contravene the notion of multiparty system and peaceful competition have been limited to internal debates, and in the public forums, from now on, the party will probably push the agenda for state restructuring and muffle its communist rhetoric. Radicalism would be blended with state restructuring agendas rather than with the Marxist philosophy. The recent central committee meeting of the party has pointed out the key issues for public campaigning: democratic republic, federal autonomy, revolutionary land reforms, and an end to feudal land ownership.⁴³ The CPN (Maoist)'s quest for a new identity, along with a revision in its ideology, calls for the new party organization to match the new context.

Organization

To make the transformation from an underground organization to a mainstream competitive political party, the CPN (Maoist) will have to make substantial changes to its party structure. During the insurgency period, the CPN (Maoist) had four sets of organizational structures.

1. Party organization top down: Party Headquarters, Standing Committee, Politburo, Central Committee, 3 Regional Commands (east, middle and west), 11 Regional Bureaus, District Committee, Area Committee and Village Committee.
2. *Jana Sarkar* (parallel government/administration) top down: Central Government, 9 ethnic and regional based Autonomous

⁴³ *The Himalayan Times*, 21 December 2006.

- Governments, District Governments, Area Government and Village Government
3. Military organization, chain of command from Supreme Commander, 4 Deputy Commanders, 7 Divisions, Brigade, Battalion, Company, Platoon and Section
 4. *Jan Adalat* (People's Court)

Today, the last three organizational structures have become redundant because the members of the PLA have been placed in cantonments and because the CPN (Maoist) has agreed to dismantle its parallel governments and people's courts of justice. Since the organizational structure framed in the past to serve the war strategy is no longer valid in the new context, the CPN (Maoist) has come up with a new organizational setup. Its Central Committee meeting, held recently in Bhaktapur, sought to reorganize the party structure from a military model to a civilian one. Taking into consideration the election of CA, the party has, by and large, adopted the official territory division while restructuring its party organizations at different levels. In addition to a structural chain from Politburo/Central Committee at the top to District and Village Committee at bottom, the CPN (Maoist) has introduced some central and regional units.

One-third of the most strategically important positions —the high commands, the central secretariat, the regional commands and the bureau— is occupied by leaders from different ethnic groups. Such ethnic make-up is also reflected in the party's composition at central level. Although the CPN (Maoist) has accommodated more members of minority groups in the party's central structure than the NC and the UML have, the levels of representation still fall short of the model of inclusive democracy that has been touted for the plan to restructure the Nepali state. The absence of or only the token presence of Dalits, women, Madhesis, Tharus and members of other excluded groups is evident from the composition of the party's newly introduced central and regional party apparatuses. Thus all the major political parties in Nepal, including the CPN (Maoist), are still dominated by the hill high caste Brahmins and Chetris.

Nevertheless, the CPN (Maoist) has continued to activate its ethnic platforms for the expansion of party support bases. The success of the April 2006 mass movement has been followed by conventions of its caste (Dalit), ethnic and regional (Madhes) based organizations at different levels, from district to central levels. It is worthwhile mentioning here that out of the CPN (Maoist)'s 73 representatives in the Interim Parliament (excluding its ten other nominees) 74 per cent of its representatives are members of excluded groups (*Janajatis*, *Dalits* and *Madhesis*), and of these 40 per cent are women. Since it decided to pursue a strict policy regarding

Table 3: The CPN (Maoist)'s New Organizational Apparatus

High Command	Regional Command	
1. Prachanda 2. Mohan Vaidya 3. Baburam Bhattarai 4. Ram Bahadur Thapa 6. Krishna Bahadur Mahara 7. Dina Nath Sharma 8. Dev Gurung 9. Nanda Kishwor Pun	Ram Bahadur Thapa	Eastern Command (Mechi, Koshi and Sagarmath zones)
	Ananta	Central Command (Narayani and Bagmati)
	Top Bahadur Rayamajhi	Western Command (Gandiki, Dhaulagiri and Lumbini)
	Posta Bahadur Bogati	Mid-west command (Bheri, Karnali and Rapti)
	Netra Bikram Chand	Far-west command (Seti and Mahakali)
	C.P Gajurel	International
	Bureau Incharges	
	Gopal Kirati	Mechi
	Ram Karki	Koshi
1. Prachanda 2. Mohan Vidya 3. Baburam Bhattarai 4. Krishna Bahadur Mahara 5. Dev Gurung 6. Ram Bahadur Thapa 7. Ananta 8. Top Bahadur Rayamajhi 9. Posta Bahadur Bogati 10. Netra Chand 11. C.P Gajurel	Hari Bol Gajurel	Sagarmatha and Janakpur
	Matrika Yadav	Mithila belt
	Sonam	Narayani
	Agni Sapkota	Bagmati
	Hit Man Shakya	Kathmandu valley
	Devendra Poudel	Dhaulagiri
	Pampha Bhusal	Lumbini
	Hit Raj Pandey	Gandaki
	Hemanta Prakash Oli	Rapti
	Shakti Bahadur Basnet	Bheri and Karnali
	Lekh Raj Bhatta	Seti
Kamal	Mahakali	
Hari Bhakta Kandel	India	

the distribution of party membership, the CPN (Maoist) has called upon its sister organizations to recruit new members. In line with a decision taken at a meeting held in Punjab (immediately after the April 2006 mass movement) and in the spirit of a decision taken at a Kamidanda meeting to 'mobilize as many people as possible', the CPN (Maoist) has mobilized other frontier organizations, made up of students, women, trade unions, etc., in aggressive campaigns to enlarge the party's support base. The CPN (Maoist) has also created populist organizations such as the Janasewa Samiti (committee to provide service to the people) in urban areas, and these committees are occasionally called upon to perform civic duties such as cleaning cities. Such activities have served to highlight the success of the party's drive to expand and diversify the organization; for example,

in Kathmandu, 'the Maoists claim to have some 1,500 full-time political activists, compared to the 70 they had before April 2006'.⁴⁴

Conclusion

With its endorsement of the multiparty system, revision of its ideological goal from NPD to 'Democracy in the 21st Century' and change in its central means for harnessing political power —through the ballot instead of the bullet— the CPN (Maoist) has shifted to Path Two (transformation into a parliamentary party) from Path Three (armed revolution). Such transformations must inevitably undergo certain awkward initial phases, and, to some extent, weather the ambivalent attitudes towards the change of party members indoctrinated according to the tenets of the original party ideology; to avoid an ideologically based split, the party leadership has to assuage the grievances of the militant cadres who may not take kindly to the new political reality. But except for the show of dissent by a small faction led by Rabindra Shrestha, who was expelled from the party before the April 2006 mass movement, there have been no signs of internal discontent from party leaders toward the revised party ideology. This lack of overt infraction, however, does not mean that there will be no dissenting voices within the party. Within most communist parties, internal voices of opposition against incumbent leaders and against revised ideologies usually come to the surface whenever the parties call a national convention. And the CPN (Maoist) will be no exception. At the moment, there is no one in the party to challenge Prachanda's leadership and the party's decisions to revise its ideology or political strategies. For now, the CPN (Maoist) must first find a way to resolve the problem of reining in the behaviour of its party cadres who do not behave in a manner consistent with the party's new ideology. At the recent central committee meeting that the party held in Kamindanda, members of the committee confessed that the lower-level cadres of the party were still using force in their political campaigns.

In the course of its transformation, the CPN (Maoist) will have to take up a more politically pragmatic position that may not reflect the spirit of the high-sounding promises the party has made in the past to the excluded groups, i.e. the ethnic groups and the *Madhesi* community in particular. Two factions of the Tarai Jantantrik Morcha, one led by Goit and another by Jwala Singh, have already splintered off from the CPN (Maoist) party; these parties justify their existence and their armed activities on the grounds that their parent organization, the CPN (Maoist), has given less weight to the cause of the *Madhesi* people. There are

⁴⁴ ICG, *Nepal's Peace Agreement: Making It Work*. 15 December 2006, p. 19.

altogether 11 caste/ethnic and regional-based frontier organizations within the folds of the CPN (Maoist) collective, and if the CPN (Maoist) cannot properly address the issues of the excluded groups in its campaign to restructure the Nepali state, the possibility that these groups may begin to openly air dissenting opinions cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, the CPN (Maoist) has been subjected to tremendous pressure from non-Maoist ethnic organizations as none of the agreements made between the SPA and the CPN (Maoist) clearly spelled out the particulars of a caste/ethnic based federalism.

The success of the CPN (Maoist)'s graduated transformative process will depend on the party's ability to coax the SPA government to make a smooth transition to the election of the CA. Since the State is by nature a conservative institution, the SPA will continually seek to withdraw from its earlier commitment to share power with the CPN (Maoist) and refrain from adopting radical contents to expedite the transitional process. Through its role in the transitional government, the CPN (Maoist) has been urging the mainstream parties to speed up the transitional process, but if the partnership between the SPA and the CPN (Maoist) were to break down, and if the process for the election of the CA were to be derailed, the CPN (Maoist) would have to face unsettling internal problems. The party may not revert to its insurgent form, but it would find it difficult to continue its current trajectory of party transformation, and it would prove much more difficult for the party to achieve its aims of restructuring the Nepali state according to the mandates of the new constitution of the CA. Thus, an ongoing partnership between the SPA and CPN (Maoist) is necessary to ensure that the former insurgent group genuinely morphs into a responsible mainstream party whose legitimacy is unquestioned both within and outside the country. To gain that legitimacy, the CPN (Maoist) is expected to launch a campaign of socialization of its rank and file to bring them into line with the party's new roles and responsibilities.

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Myths of the State Fraying at the Edges and Unravelling at the Centre: A Comparison of Two “Communal” Riots in Nepalgunj¹

Pragya Dhital

Introduction

At the centre of the bazaar in Nepalgunj, a town in south-western Nepal on the border with India, stands a statue of King Tribhuvan, under whom Nepal experienced its first short-lived period of democratic rule. Tribhuvan, with the underground political parties and Indian government assistance, saw off the Rana autocracy and introduced democracy to Nepal in the 1950s.² His son Mahendra reversed this act in 1962, when he introduced the Panchayat system of guided democracy under which political parties were once again declared illegal. The statue has been vandalised. The king’s right arm, formerly raised in a salute, was lopped off during the *jan andolan* (people’s movement) of spring 2006, which brought down the autocratic regime of king Gyanendra. Audio tape has also been wound round his mouth and a placard reading “Shahid Kamal Madhesi Chowk” (martyr Kamal Madhesi crossroads) attached to his chest. These defacements date back to a later period, to riots which occurred in the town in December 2006, during which a local man named Kamal Giri was shot dead by a police officer. Giri posthumously acquired symbolic status as a martyr for the Madhesi (plains-dweller) movement and the epithet “Kamal Madhesi” –possibly in ironic allusion to the practice of concealing subordinate caste identity under the generic surname “Nepali”.³ If the first act of vandalism can be seen as a symbolic attack on the political power of the monarchy, the second would seem to be attacking the legitimacy of the nation-state and Nepalese national identity itself by making a martyr of a man who was shot by a policeman (a state representative) and asserting his Madhesi (as opposed to

¹ Friso Hecker, Michael Hutt, Matthew Nelson, Ramesh Parajuli and James Sharrock looked through drafts of this paper and offered useful suggestions. Krishna Pradhan provided linguistic advice on the Nepali language texts that I used.

² The extent of the king’s involvement in effecting the transition to democracy is disputed (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 40).

³ This passage describes what I saw in January 2007. The statue was completely destroyed by the Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League in May 2007.

Nepalese) identity. This is how Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala interpreted the riots during which it took place, as indicating that attempts were being made to unsettle the government and “erase the national identity”.⁴

This paper looks at how state and societal identities are made (and sometimes unmade) through a comparison of two “communal” riots that occurred in Nepalgunj in 1997 and December 2006. It takes issue with the idea, expressed by Koirala, that this violence is aberrant and has a purely destructive effect, and argues that riots, a particular form of collective violence, are now part of the way identities are constructed and politics is done in Nepal.

The article adopts a “relational” view of collective violence which privileges the role of “interchanges...involving a degree of negotiation and creativity” over interpretations that would foreground “destructive ideas” or personal/genetic proclivities (Tilly 2003: 4). Ideational and behavioural interpretations of such violence dominate popular understandings of it. They were expressed, for instance, by Onta (2001: 14), following the December 2000 “anti-Indian” riots:

Anyone who cared to notice that the rioters in Kathmandu were overwhelmingly young and male would no doubt wonder whether being young and male are significant for an understanding of the violence in Nepal today. They are. High levels of unemployment among semi-educated young people, the unrestrained circulation of pessimism in college campuses, and the macho ways in which personal and societal problems are solved in the universe of Nepali and Hindi films, have given birth to a highly violent masculine imagination in this segment of the population.

These comments of the same nature as those made by the headmaster of a Nepalgunj madrasa in January 2007, who told me that riots that occurred there in December 2006 were all the work of “some brainless boys”.

Whilst I agree that “mob violence” can be both “highly organized” and responsive to “repositories of unconscious images” (Das 1992: 28), and do not dismiss “psycho-cultural” analyses (Gellner 2002: 20) out of hand, I will be looking at riots as political events, signifying more than the psychological compulsions of rioters. Partly because all riots have a political dimension, in that they test state authority and legitimacy; and partly because the catalysts for these particular riots were overtly political: in 1997 a municipal election and in 2006 an interim constitution. I will argue that state and society, rather than being monolithic and

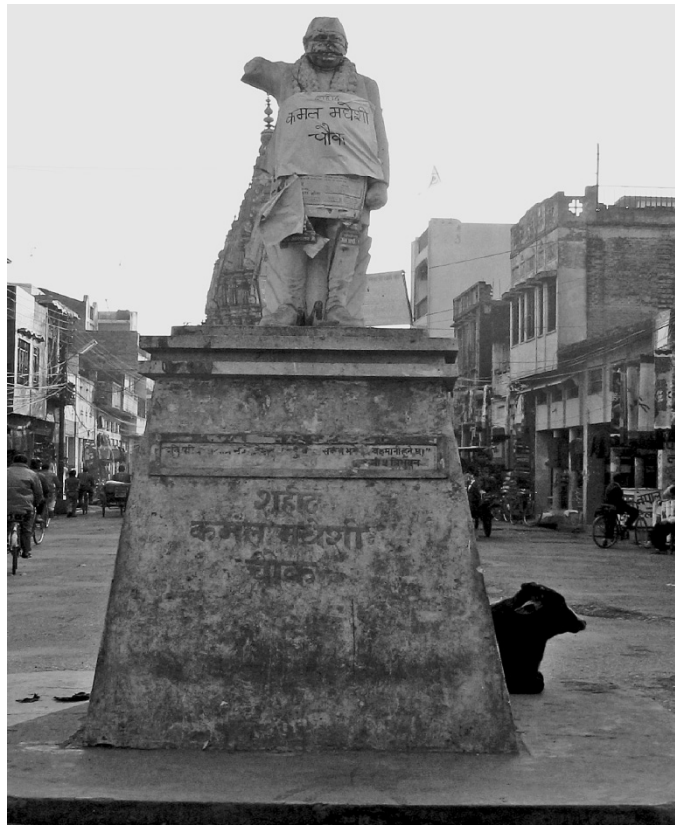
⁴ <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=95823> accessed 30/05/2007

binary concepts, mutually constitute one another, and one of the ways they do so is through “communal” riots.

This paper takes its cue from Brass’s description of riots as “a grisly form of dramatic production” (Brass 2003: 15) to show how the Nepalgunj riots emerged during moments of heightened self-consciousness, when all sorts of identities were being redefined as a result of democratisation. Hence both riots will be contextualised by the constitutions (1990 and 2006) that reconfigured these identities by redefining them and ushering in more robust forms of democracy than had previously existed. However, I will be approaching constitutions as one of Hansen’s politico-social “representations” (Hansen 1999: 19), rather than as cast-iron frameworks for or determinants of state and societal behaviour. Therefore I will be looking at riots both in the context of attempts to order state and societal identities top-down (riots as the shadow side to modern state processes, constitutions and citizenship laws); and as responses to these processes and ways of reconfiguring these identities bottom-up (riots as a form of collective action and electoral canvassing).

This paper emerged from data collected whilst doing fieldwork over the periods June–September 2006 and December–January 2006–07. Much of this time was spent conducting interviews and collecting literature in the Nepalese Tarai. Only a selection of this data is presented in the paper, but all of it contributed to its argument. Being in Nepal during this interim period, when memories of Maoist insurgency and autocratic royal rule were fresh, and all sorts of identities were in flux, underlined the porous nature of the state-society nexus, and links between political transformation and collective violence. Being in an area that defines the limit of the Nepalese nation-state also influenced my thinking about the role played by ethnic and territorial boundaries in these processes. Gaunle’s 1997 article on the riots that occurred in Nepalgunj that year is my main source for the first set of riots. News reports also form a significant part of my account of the December 2006 riots, and I have supplemented this information with interviews I conducted with Nepalgunj residents in January 2007 and an NGO report.

The paper begins with background information on the area in which Nepalgunj is located, and then divides into two parts. The first part deals with the 1997 riots, the second with those that occurred in 2006. I have chosen to focus on the Shiv Sena and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party because they were all assigned or accrued responsibility for the riots, and also because they exist at various points along the state-society continuum. The Indian associations of Shiv Sena and Sadbhavana (Indian origins of the former, and the constituency and pro-Hindi policy of the latter) add an extra layer of ambiguity to how they are situated, risks putting them beyond the pale of the Nepalese nation state altogether.



Tribhuvan Chowk, Nepalgunj, 8th Jan 2007. Photo: P. Dhital

Setting the scene

Nepalgunj is located in the Nepal Tarai, an area that has always existed in peripheral and ambiguous relation to the Nepalese central state –viewed as not quite part of it, but essential to its survival as a buffer zone, breadbasket and safety valve for hill migration.⁵ This is partly because of its location along the open India-Nepal border, an area in which modern state practices that are normally used to police territorial boundaries, such as “continuous

⁵ Stiller, for instance, observed about Nepal in the early nineteenth century: “Nepal could not survive as a unitary state without the Tarai...Without it, Nepal would once more fragment into the mini-states that had been brought together with so much labour to form the modern state of Nepal” (Stiller 1976: 11).

barbed-wire fencing, passports, immigration laws, inspections, currency control and so on” (Mitchell 1991: 94) are absent or barely present.

More specifically, Nepalgunj lies within “naya muluk” (new land), an area which was incorporated relatively late into the Gorkhali empire. Stiller’s observation that these “western provinces” have not been “truly assimilated” into “Nepal proper”, that for cultural and geographical reasons they have preferred “to face to the south and west” still holds true to some extent today (Stiller 1976: 27). This is particularly the case for the large (according to 2001 census statistics, in Nepalgunj municipality over 27%) population of Muslims, who often have strong cross-border connections through family ties.⁶

According to Gaunle’s article on the 1997 Nepalgunj riots, these geographical, historical and demographic facts make the town a tinderbox for communal conflagrations, and democracy has made the situation worse (Gaunle 1997: 8 and 14). Riots are said to have been rare in the Rana and Panchayat era; disputes between Hindus and Muslims would occur from time to time, but they were resolved and sometimes pre-empted by local panchayats (*ibid*: 10). This view ignores violence committed by both state and oppositional groups during the Rana and Panchayat period. Because of easy ingress and egress across the open border between India and Nepal, the Tarai has often been a centre for this activity, some of which has had a communal element.⁷ Democracy may have provided new opportunities and incentives for this violence, but it is not a new phenomenon.

I. Fraying at the Edges

On 17th May 1997 a young Muslim man named Kamaluddin Ansari went to a polling station located in ward number 9, a predominately Muslim area, to vote in the municipal elections. He was prevented from doing so by

⁶ According to the 2001 census, Nepalgunj municipality has a total population of 57,535 (His Majesty’s Government 2002: 28). In “Table 11: Population by Caste/Ethnic Group”, 15,977 (27.8%) of this population are recorded as Muslim (*ibid*). Whereas in “Table 12: Population by Religion”, 15,714 (27.3%) of the population are listed as Muslim (*ibid*: 106). No aggregate of the two figures is listed, and the criteria for differentiating between Muslims as a caste/ethnic group and Muslims as a religious group are not explained. Many of the Muslims I spoke to in Nepal suggested that the census figures were an underestimate.

⁷ Gaige (1975: 48) describes an “unusually gross example of administrative weakness and gang-style looting and terror that occurred in 1971, when four to five hundred bandits rampaged through Rautahat and Bara districts, leaving scores of villagers ravaged and 51 persons killed before retreating across the border”; according to newspaper reports, Hindu-Muslim communalism “was a secondary cause of death and destruction.”

representatives of the Shiv Sena-supported candidates, who claimed that he was under-age, provoking a dispute which escalated into violence as Shiv Sena representatives spread rumours that Muslims had taken over a voting booth. During the course of this violence, a bullet fired by Chand Ali injured Kiran Budhathoki. Ali, a Muslim who lived in Lucknow, India, but often came to Nepal to work, was the cousin of Samsuddin Siddiqui (the United Marxist Leninist (UML) party candidate, subsequently appointed for the post of deputy mayor in the Nepalgunj municipal elections) and the older brother of Nizamuddin Siddiqui (the Nepalese Congress candidate for ward number 11). Kiran Budhathoki was mid-western region district commander for Shiv Sena in Nepal.

The shooting is said to have inflamed the situation. The municipal council postponed polling in the wards concerned, and the local administration imposed a curfew on these areas. The curfew was extended until 19th May 1997, but it failed to calm the situation. During the curfew, Phaisal Kabadia, a Muslim man resident in a village close to the border with India, was killed in a knife attack.

According to INSEC (a human rights NGO) no effort was made to identify and take action against the perpetrators, who were suspected of being Hindu youths; Kabadia's death was met with indifference by local media and the political parties, and dealt with tardily and perfunctorily by the administration. Twenty-seven people were also injured in the violence and dozens of businesses and properties looted and set ablaze; 90% of them are said to have belonged to Muslims. On 20th May 1997, 12 people were arrested and sent to jail for one month for violating the curfew, only to be released by the appeal court within two days. (Gaunle 1997: 8-10)

Political context: a municipal election

The riot occurred in connection with the 1997 municipal elections. As previously discussed, although communal violence did occur in periods of non-democratic rule, democracy arguably changed the nature of it by providing new means for political entrepreneurs to gain power and legitimise authority; encouraging greater assertion by hitherto quiescent groups, and a fear of this assertion amongst dominant groups, thereby fostering a sharper sense of difference. I will outline these processes by looking more closely at the provisions of the 1990 constitution, which reintroduced democracy to Nepal, focusing on its attitude towards state religion and identity politics. I will argue that the 1990 constitution and the changes it inscribed were conservative in design and radicalising in effect: conservative with regard to implementation of radical measures, and radicalising in going far enough to release pent-up forces, to encourage reactionary counter-forces, and to shape the direction of both through its

conservatism, through the limited constitutional space which it allowed them, thereby driving them into the margins of mainstream political activity and even to extra-constitutional measures. Instances of violence in the post-1990 period, whether occurring in connection with the Maoist insurgency or taking the form of “communal” riots, far from being aberrant, result from competing drives for reification of a Hindu, monarchical, unitary state and creation of a state that is more representative; drives that were both reflected in and encouraged by the 1990 constitution.

The 1990 Constitutional Framework

Article 4(1) of the 1990 constitution of Nepal defined it as a “multiethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom.” In a welter of adjectives the constitution drafting committee attempted to reconcile traditionalists (bearing in mind the recent provenance of some of these traditions) and those who sought limited monarchy and greater representation for marginalised groups. The demand for a secular state lost out in the balancing act, which surprised many. Hindu religion had long been used to legitimise political (and in particular monarchical) authority in Nepal, but it had only quite recently become an official state designation, in the Panchayat constitution of 1962, flying in the face of Nepal’s multi-faith reality and the fuzzy boundaries between the various faiths –in particular between Hinduism and Buddhism (Hodgson 1827). Congress and the Communist parties had allowed a free vote on the issue, and many politicians are said to have been receptive to the idea. However, the politicians who made the decision were predominately upper-caste Hindus (often Brahman), who, classifying Buddhists as a type of Hindu (which was how the Panchayat state designated them), assumed Hinduism to be the national norm. The reportedly 150,000 strong pro-secularism demonstration staged by Buddhists came as a shock to these men. Agitation by non-Hindus is said to have made them more aware of their own Hindu identity as one among and in competition with others, and therefore seek to preserve Nepal’s Hindu status, which would privilege the group to which most of them belonged. (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 312-320 and 333-335). This is how the Hindu victory was interpreted by pro-secular Buddhists –as signalling that proclaimed political allegiances were secondary to ascriptive identity, that the communist leaders who helped make it possible were “Brahmans first and Communists second” (Gellner 1997b: 178).

As a sop to the pro-secular movement, concessions were made to religious minorities (although it should be noted that many Buddhist

activists insisted that they were a religious majority). Christian missionaries imprisoned in Nepalese jails were freed and strictures against proselytising were de facto albeit not de jure lifted (*ibid*: 335). However, the very fact that concessions were made and secularism was even being discussed alarmed some Hindus. These discussions are said to have provoked Arun Subedi into forming the Nepal chapter of Shiv Sena.⁸

Conflicting impulses to reform, limit the impact of reform, and then loosen that limit, can also be discerned in the 1990 constitution's handling of identity politics, with a similar radicalising effect. Political parties were reinstated but those appealing to particular religious, caste or regional constituencies were banned,⁹ and this ban in turn was not strictly enforced. Sadbhavana, a group that promoted the interests of those living in the Tarai, was allowed to register as a political party (the Nepal Sadbhavana Party or NSP) in 1990, and Shiv Sena did the same in the late 1990s.¹⁰ Hoftun *et al.* (1999: 178) argue that some parties managed to avoid the "communalist" label by not making their "regional or ethnic nature too obvious". However, as many writers on nationalism have observed, the boundary between the categories "national" and "ethnic" is not clear cut; Wimmer, for instance, writing that in many new states "the nation" is simply the ethnos of an elite group generalised onto the whole population (Wimmer 2002: 91). In the Nepalese context, this would be the ethnicity of the Parbatiya or Caste Hill Hindu Elite, as Lawoti (2005) designates them, generalised onto the whole nation through emphasis on the Nepali language (formerly known as Parbatiya or Gorkhali language) and state Hinduism (Whelpton 1997: 49).

Legitimation of Sadbhavana and Shiv Sena in Nepal also seems to confirm Wimmer's insight, indicating that the point at which a group can be described as national is largely a matter of context and emphasis. Shiv Sena's Hindu communalism could pass itself off as nationalism in officially

⁸ www.nepalitimes.com/issue/214/FromtheNepaliPress/2265 accessed 23/08/2007

⁹ Article 112 prohibits imposition of restrictions on political organisations or parties. However, article 113(3) declares that the election collection "shall not register any political organisation or party if any Nepali citizen is discriminated against in becoming a member on the basis of religion, caste, tribe, language or sex or if the name, objectives, insignia or flag is of such a nature that it is religious or communal or tends to fragment the country." Article 112 is further hedged by proviso 3 in article 12(2), which licences restrictions on any act that threatens Nepal's sovereignty, integrity and communal harmony, "which may instigate violence, or which may be contrary to public morality".

¹⁰ www.nepalitimes.com/issue/214/FromtheNepaliPress/2265 accessed 23/08/2007. According to the International Crisis Group, "Shiv Sena Nepal participated in elections in the 1990s but had a negligible vote and failed to win a single seat" (ICG 2007: 11).

Hindu Nepal (I will analyse this manoeuvre in the section dealing with Shiv Sena in Nepal), whilst Sadbhavana was careful to emphasise its nationalist credentials. The Nepal Sadbhavana Party is usually translated into English as the Nepal Goodwill Party, although *sadbhavana* can also mean harmony; thus by including Nepal and the idea of goodwill/harmony in its name, it would seem to promote a nationalist and quietist stance.

On the other hand, groups such as the Mongol National Organisation, which fit less easily within national orthodoxy (for instance, as self-proclaimed non-Hindus) were not allowed to make the transition to political party status (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 178), and thereby stigmatised by the state as “communal” and politically marginalised. Some political space was afforded them within mainstream political discourse by the constitution’s acknowledgement of their existence (of Nepal as “multiethnic” and “multilingual”), and political parties, notably the UML party’s, multicultural rhetoric (Hachhethu 2002: 149). But words did not inevitably translate into deeds, and continued high-caste dominance of party politics made it easy to dismiss these gestures.

It has often been argued that ethnic groups who felt excluded by constitutional arrangements and parliamentary politics made ripe targets for Maoist mobilisation (for instance, in Lawoti 2005). The Maoists were quick to target them with the concept of ethnic federalism, which, if implemented, would end the national “indivisibility” proclaimed in the 1990 constitution that the ban on “communal” parties was designed to preserve. The Maoists were not the only or even the first Nepalese party to propose federalism. The Nepal Sadbhavana Party had done the same in 1990 (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 332). However, the Maoists did so in a more forceful and comprehensive manner. Both demands for ethnic federalism and secularism were included amongst the 40-point ultimatum they issued to the government in 1996, prior to launching the People’s War.¹¹

State and Society Actors

The police and local administration

The police and local administration’s handling of the situation corroborates all too well observations about how inadequate responses to communal violence that disproportionately affects certain ethnic groups amounts to state endorsement of this violence, and conveys a message

¹¹ The demand for secularism was point number 18, whilst number 20 declared, “Where ethnic communities are in the majority, they should be allowed to form their own autonomous governments” (Bhattarai 1996: 191-192).

about the ethnic bias of the state (Das 1992: 23). In this way, communal riots can be seen as unofficial counterparts to citizenship laws: as a way to define who belongs to the nation-state and is therefore worthy of protection.

The authorities were seen as responding inadequately on several counts. Firstly, for allowing Shiv Sena to flout the election code. A police officer is quoted saying: “we repeatedly reminded the canvassers of the code of conduct, but they did not obey”, evidently not thinking the police were obliged to enforce it (Gaunle 1997: 12). Secondly, for failing to effectively coordinate between the office of the CDO (Chief District Officer) and the police to take timely action against rioters (*ibid*: 13). Analysts of communal rioting, with divergent understandings of its causes, agree that early intervention is crucial in preventing its escalation (Horowitz 2001: 489; Brass 1996: 28) Thirdly, for failing to maintain the curfew. Gaunle notes that one of the most striking features of the riots was that violence occurred during the curfew. Far from protecting Nepalgunj residents, it seems to have provided an opportunity to commit looting, arson and vandalism with impunity; the police merely looked on as these crimes were committed (Gaunle 1997: 9-10). All of this was compounded by failure to take action against those who broke the curfew and participated in the violence.

The repercussions of these failings were not confined to the victimised group. As Das (1992: 23) observes, police negligence during communal violence, amounting to complicity with those who perpetrate it, not only highlights the precarious position of the neglected group, but also “leads one to seriously question the notion of *legitimate* force”, which forms the basis of Weberian conceptions of the state. In the Nepalese context, it also undermines idealisations of the Nepalese (Hindu, monarchical) state as a more effective guarantor of communal harmony (and the security of religious minorities) than the (secular) Indian state: an opinion held across the political spectrum, with varying emphasis on the terms “Hindu”, “monarchical” and “secular”.¹²

Shiv Sena in Nepal: from political party to NGO, from India to Nepal

Shiv Sena started life in India as a Maharashtrian “sons of the soil” party, evolved into a nation-wide (although still largely Maharashtra-based) Hindu nationalist party, and in Nepal became an NGO, which was then

¹² This view was expressed by Mohammad Mohsin (interview with Mohsin, 08/09/2006). C.K. Lal (2002: 108-109) has also described how Nepal has been a “safe haven” for Muslims fleeing “the atrocities of the occasional ruthless rulers of north India”, from the time of the zamindars of Sursand through to the destruction of the Babri masjid.

transformed into a political party (it is once again an NGO). These acts of shape shifting and translation inevitably changed the character of the organisation, as it adapted to different environments and acquired new significance in changed contexts. One transformation brought about by transplantation to foreign soil was that from a political party to an NGO. Shiv Sena was registered as an NGO in Kathmandu in 1990, but, as its involvement in the 1997 Nepalgunj municipal election confirms, this did not preclude participation in party politics. The ease with which it was able to shift from NGO to party status (and back again), and its interference in electoral politics whilst still an NGO, substantiates claims that the boundaries around civil society, which in liberal theory is meant to stand discrete from and equidistant to political society and the state, are in practice highly porous (Tamang 2003).¹³ Shiv Sena's behaviour might have been inconsistent with certain theorisations of civil society and the letter of the Nepalese constitution, but hardly marked it out from its peers in Nepal, where the political affiliations of many civil society organisations are an open secret, and certain ethnic groups are perceived to favour certain parties. Muslims, for instance, are seen as favouring the United Marxist Leninist Party (UML), and Nepal Muslim Etehad, one of the major Muslim civil society organisations, is viewed as affiliated with the UML.¹⁴

This atmosphere of scarcely concealed political affiliation on ethnic and organisational lines was conducive for Shiv Sena politicking, of which the riot can be seen as one form. Many writers on Indian communalism have noted the connection between *Votes and Violence* (Wilkinson 2004), the way in which communal riots are encouraged to consolidate electoral support, and Shiv Sena's behaviour during the 1997 municipal election was consistent with this pattern. After the election date had been announced, the Nepalgunj chapter of Shiv Sena published a list of demands that it distributed to the main political parties: Congress, UML, RPP and Sadbhavana. On receiving no response, it decided to back two independent candidates for the seat of mayor and deputy mayor, flouting prohibitions against aggressive campaigning as it did so, by publishing

¹³ A more thorough exposition of the history and various interpretations of the term "civil society" lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, I will note Mitchell's observation that this "defect" of unboundedness is not only a characteristic of new democracies, but can also be discerned in established systems such as in the US (Mitchell 1991: 90). For Mitchell, this is a source of strength rather than weakness, as "producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power." (*ibid.*)

¹⁴ This is denied in the organisation's statute (article 5(2) 1998) and by its current chancellor Taj Mohammad Miya, who is also a UML activist (interview with Taj Mohammad Miya, 14/09/2006.)

colour posters, holding motorcycle rallies, and posting saffron-clad workers at polling booths (Gaunle 1997: 11-12).¹⁵

In Muslim-dominated areas, where such tactics were unlikely to work, a policy of obstruction seems to have been adopted. According to a government worker posted at the Muslim majority electoral ward where the riot broke out, the dispute regarding the age of Ansari was merely a pretext to block the progress of a ballot that would most likely result in a UML victory (*ibid.*: 9). Therefore Shiv Sena's activities during the election not only highlight the blurred boundaries between civil society and political society, but also links between democratic political transition and violence. Nepalese elections have been relatively peaceful, compared to many that have taken place in other parts of the subcontinent.¹⁶ Nevertheless, as the Nepalgunj riots show, violence does occur, and less blatant instances (i.e. threat of the use of force, such as was deployed by Shiv Sena to intimidate voters and election officials) are commonplace (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 251).

Shiv Sena in Nepal's turbulent history points to the problematic nature of its position as an Indian-origin Hindu nationalist organisation in a Hindu nation where anti-Indian sentiment is prevalent. Indeed, in a nation where Hinduism has historically been used *against* the influence of (Moghul/British/secular) India, and to demarcate national boundaries. In Nepal, Shiv Sena is situated between pro-Hindu state policy and Nepalese suspicion of India, at the risk of being rendered irrelevant by the former and falling within the purview of the latter, at the same time as gaining legitimacy from both.

Shiv Sena's official objectives, submitted at the time of its registration as an NGO, committed it to maintenance and promotion of the national status quo, i.e. Nepal's status as the only Hindu kingdom in the world. This conservative and nationalistic approach was attuned to the requirements of a particular moment: the need to present Shiv Sena as consistent with Nepal's history and laws whilst it sought state recognition as a legitimate NGO. Changed contexts brought about changes in strategy and emphasis, as Shiv Sena's activities in Nepalgunj around the time of the riots demonstrate. Statements from Shiv Sena's leader, Kiran Budhathoki, quoted in Gaunle's article, create the impression that Shiv Sena in the mid-western Tarai was acting in accordance with an Indian template

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that one of the candidates it supported was a former member of Congress, and several people I spoke to claimed that Shiv Sena and Nepali Congress enjoyed a close mutual relationship in Nepalgunj. The "independent" candidates would not have been the only ones to benefit from UML losses.

¹⁶ Hoftun *et al.* (1999: 181) note that only 12 people were killed during the 1991 election, which is said to be "a low total by South Asian standards".

rather than a national one. Budhathoki is quoted saying that Nepalese Hindus will no longer tolerate the state policy of making special provisions for Muslims in the name of appeasing minorities (Gaunle 1997: 15). Such statements, when made in India, oppose state concessions to religious minorities, such as separate personal laws and endowment of money and land to support religious institutions. They also obliquely reference a history of centuries of Muslim rule, and, more recently, Partition, in their sense of Hindu victimisation. They consequently seem irrelevant in Nepal, where such concessions have largely not been made, and which has a quite different history.¹⁷

However, as Horowitz observes, this paranoia is often explained if not justified by the geopolitical context. He refers to India's fear of Pakistan as a factor in anti-Muslim sentiment; citing as an example the 1992 anti-Muslim riots in Bombay, during which search-lights were trained on the Indian Ocean to detect (non-existent) Pakistani battleships (Horowitz 2001: 172). Hence fears of minoritisation, which underlie anti-Muslim paranoia, have even more force in Nepal, as Nepal is considerably less powerful and populous than India. Whilst animus between India and Pakistan is open, relations between Nepal and India are avowedly more friendly and peaceable, and the open border between the two countries declared in the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty apparently embodies this. However, the two countries' mutual suspicion of one another underlies calls for closer monitoring and even closure of the border, which is seen as facilitating terrorism and cross-border crime. Fears of "Sikkimisation" are also expressed across the Nepalese political spectrum from royalists through to Maoists.¹⁸ These fears are likely to be

¹⁷ The Kathmandu Valley was invaded by the sultan of Bengal in the middle of the 14th century and under the suzerainty of Delhi in the 15th century (Gaborieau 1977: 31); and large parts of the Tarai did come under Mughal influence, leading Slusser to describe residents of the area, both Muslim and non-Muslim, as "acculturated to Islam", yet their influence at central state level was limited (Slusser 1982: 69). For instance, purificatory rituals were enjoined on travellers returning to the Kathmandu Valley from Mughal territory to form a symbolic boundary around the polity (Burghart 1984: 232).

¹⁸ Royalists view monarchy as a more effective bulwark against Indian encroachment than the political parties. Maoist leader Bhattarai adapted this view in an article he wrote following the 2001 royal massacre. In it, he praises the Shah kings "from Prithvi Narayan Shah to King Birendra" for preserving Nepalese independence from the hands of Indian expansionism (Bhattarai 2001: 21), and describes the new king and the political parties as Indian stooges. India, he claims, chose Gyanendra as "a Jigme Singay [king of Bhutan]" to effect the "Bhutanization of Nepal" and Nepali Congress leader Girija Koirala as their "Lendup Dorje (the Sikkimese leader who collaborated with India during the annexation of Sikkim)" (*ibid*: 20).

particularly acute in border areas such as Nepalgunj where neighbouring India looms larger than the traditionally distant Nepalese state.

Hence an awkward combination of anti-Indian sentiment and sensitivity to Indian communalist rhetoric characterises the Nepalese Hindu nationalists' attitude towards Muslims. In the imaginings of both Indian and Nepalese Hindu nationalists Muslims are anti-national in two contradictory senses. Firstly, their religion is seen as antithetical to nationalism. A Muslim "whichever country he belongs to, is first a Muslim", Indian Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray has said, "Nation is of secondary importance to him" (quoted in Mehta 2004: 48). Secondly, they are at the same time viewed as allied to a foreign power: in India, Pakistan; and in Nepal, Pakistan *and* India. "Kashmiri Muslims flee from the country", reads graffiti written on a wall after the 1997 riots (photo in *ibid*: 15). Whilst there is a long-established Kashmiri presence in Kathmandu, Nepalese Muslims are more often associated with "Hindustani ethnicity" (Gaborieau 1998: 375) and are mostly either of Indian origin or indigenous to the area. The xenophobic reference to Kashmiris is an import; it refers to Indian fears about the Nepal Tarai as a haven for Pakistani terrorists, fears not quite so strongly felt within Nepal, and thereby highlights Shiv Sena in Nepal's Indian origins.

These origins lay it open to the very charges of anti-nationalism, which Hindu nationalists have traditionally levelled against Muslims; charges that have indeed been made, notably by Nepalese Muslims, in an interesting reversal of the usual positions. UML MP and minister, Salim Miyah Ansari is said to have angered Shiv Sena activists by accusing the organisation of being anti-national in a speech given at the Banke District, Nepal Muslim Etehad Conference, held in Nepalgunj in December 1996 (Gaunle 1997: 11). However, Nepalese Shiv Sena members themselves were receptive to this possibility. Gaunle describes how these feelings surfaced during a visit to Nepalgunj by Bal Thackeray. Thackeray had come to donate an ambulance to Shiv Sena in Nepal in memory of his late wife. During the presentation ceremony, one of his representatives described him as "king/emperor of the Hindus", which was perceived by some of those present as a slight to the king of Nepal (as king of Hindu Nepal, the *real* king of the Hindus in their eyes). Many Nepalese members of Shiv Sena are said to have left the organisation following his remarks (*ibid*).

The organisation was to eventually splinter, and one faction of it to implode, under the weight of these contradictions. Tensions came to a head when Arun Subedi, leader of Shiv Sena in Nepal, registered the organisation as a political party in 1998. Following a rift between Subedi and Budhathoki, the organisation split into Nepal Shiv Sena and Shiv Sena Nepal. Thackeray appointed Budhathoki head of the former, and Budhathoki claimed legitimacy for his faction from this fact. Thackeray

“sahib has recognised us as his true representative in Nepal”, he reportedly said, “this is why we are the real Shiva Sena”.¹⁹ It is unlikely that this toadying to the Indian “sahib” would have endeared him to many Nepalese. The stock of the organisation fell particularly low after Budhathoki claimed Nepal Shiv Sena was responsible for riots that occurred across the country in September 2004, following the murder of 12 Nepalese migrant workers in Iraq.²⁰ Budhathoki subsequently went underground, and was shot dead in Nepalgunj on 29th December 2004. The Maoists, widely believed to be responsible for his murder, by ending Shiv Sena militancy, in Nepalgunj at least, apparently succeeded where Chand Ali and the Nepalese state had failed.²¹ The Shiv Sena office in Nepalgunj now lies derelict, host to a paan stall and snoozing vagrants.

II. Unravelling at the Centre

On Monday 25th December 2006 the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi) called a Madhes bandh (a strike²² across the Tarai) to protest against the interim constitution, and demand proportionate allocation of electoral constituencies and a federal state.²³ NSP workers are said to have vandalised some 25 vehicles during the strike, including a microbus in Nepalgunj. A scuffle ensued between Madhesis and Pahadis (those of hill

¹⁹ www.nepalitimes.com/issue/214/FromtheNepaliPress/2265 accessed 23/08/2007

²⁰ This might not be true; other groups were also implicated (personal communication with Ramesh Parajuli, August 2007). A member of the Nepalese Jama Masjid management committee described these riots as a “wound in the consciousness of Nepalese Muslims”, fundamentally undermining their faith in the Nepalese state; during the riots, the Nepalese Jama Masjid was badly vandalised despite being opposite a police station and close to the royal palace (personal communication).

²¹ Regarding Maoist involvement in the shooting: this was the belief of Nepalgunj Muslims I spoke to (personal communication, August 2007). The US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor in its International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 also states: “On December 29, 2004, Maoists shot dead Arun Budhathoki [sic], Chief of Shiv Sena Nepal [sic], a Hindu religious organization, in Nepalgunj” www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71442.htm accessed 01/09/2007, which for all its inaccuracies indicates how widely these rumors had spread.

²² “Bandh” more properly conveys the sense of a shutdown. Shutdown also more effectively conveys the sense of (forced) cessation of all public activity that occurs during a bandh than “strike” (which in British English means a withdrawal of labour to seek amelioration of working conditions). However I have chosen to describe it as a strike because this is the usual translation in the Nepalese English language press, and the more familiar term.

²³ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=95559 accessed 20/05/2007

origin) in that town. The violence escalated, and looting and arson also took place. The following day, transport workers in Nepalgunj demonstrated against the strike. This resulted in more violent clashes. The Chief District Officer, Tilak Raj Sharma, imposed a daytime curfew on the town. However the curfew was widely ignored and the police failed to enforce it. Violence, looting and arson continued, and one person was killed in police firing.²⁴ Members of the seven main political parties and the Maoists met and decided to stage a peace rally the next day. Maoists guarded Muslim and Madhesi homes and property during the night.²⁵ On Wednesday, the peace rally initially took place as planned, in defiance of the curfew, but was cancelled after “unruly gangs” infiltrated it. A goodwill rally led by the Madhesi Mukti Morcha (a Maoist organisation), with the participation of leaders of the other main political parties, and all ethnic and religious communities, went around the town.²⁶ Another Maoist-led rally took place on Thursday 28th December 2006, during which Banke district Maoist leader, Athak, criticised the police for their handling of the situation and claimed that Maoists were working alongside the police to control it.²⁷ On the same day Prime Minister Girija Koirala gave a speech about the riots. He described them as one of the most unfortunate incidents in the history of the country, and claimed that the violence was a sign that regressive forces had not been completely eradicated and attempts were being made to “erase the national identity”.²⁸

The government report on the riot has yet to be published (as of August 2007). A report published on 29th January 2007, by a human rights NGO, the People’s Level Civil Investigation Committee (hereafter People’s Level), claims that one person was killed, 26 injured and 211 houses and shops damaged during the incident. It recommends Kamal Giri be declared a martyr and one million rupees paid to his family in compensation for his death. It also apportions moral responsibility for the riot to the NSP, charges which the party refuted.²⁹ A Maoist-produced VCD of the riot, showing the police failing to take action against rioters and curfew-breakers, and even apparently participating in the violence, was distributed across the Tarai. It is said to have fuelled violent protests which occurred across the eastern Tarai in January–February 2007; protests that forced the interim government to concede to demands for

²⁴ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?nid=95639 accessed 20/05/2007

²⁵ Personal communication with Nepalgunj residents, January 2007

²⁶ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?nid=95741 accessed 20/05/2007

²⁷ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?nid=95824 accessed 20/05/2007

²⁸ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?nid=95823 accessed 20/05/2007

²⁹ www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullstory.asp?filename=aFanata0vfqzpa4a9Ta3pa.axamal&folder=aHaoamW&Name=Home&dtSiteDate=20070130, access : 20/05/2007

federalism, increased electoral representation and “inclusion of marginalised groups in state bodies on a proportional basis” (International Crisis Group 2007: 12–13).

Political context: an interim constitution and a citizenship law

The immediate context of the riots was publication of an initial draft of the interim constitution on 25th August 2006,³⁰ an amended version of which was signed by the eight main political parties including the Maoists on 16th December 2006.³¹ This act confirmed reintegration of the Maoists into the political mainstream as a political party, the end of autocratic royal rule, and reinstatement of democracy. The guarded optimism with which these developments were met almost served to obscure the violence which had brought the country to this pass: the decade-long Maoist insurgency and the royal massacre of 2001, both of which had undermined notions of Nepal as a peaceful land of communal harmony, with the king guarantor of this harmonious order. It also seemed to encourage de-emphasis of dissensions about and lacunae within this draft. The most publicised objections, initially, were those expressed by the Maoists over its failure to resolve the question of the monarchy.³²

The riots in Nepalgunj were a reminder of Nepal’s disharmonious recent history, and an indication that aspects of it were not yet confined to the past: the collective violence perpetrated by all sides during the Maoist insurgency, with its accompanying erosion of state legitimacy and repertoire of political coercion –strikes and curfews as well as physical violence. Its apparently communal nature also brought to the surface the ethnic politics that the grievance-model interpretation of the insurgency views as a motive force behind it.

The riots are also contextualised by the Nepal Citizenship Bill, which was passed by the House of Representatives on 26th November 2006, under whose provisions individuals could, for the first time in Nepal’s history, acquire citizenship by virtue of their mother’s nationality. The decision was made with Constituent Assembly elections in mind, and was both popular (especially amongst women and people living in the Tarai) and controversial. The proposed extension of citizenship to an estimated four million people living in the Tarai region alarmed many Nepalese (particularly those of hill origin), upsetting their sense of the boundaries of Nepalese national identity by incorporating people whom they viewed

³⁰<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2006/08/nepal-interim-constitution-panel.php> accessed 16/07/2007

³¹www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=94695 accessed 16/07/2007.

³²<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2006/08/nepal-interim-constitution-panel.php> accessed 16/07/2007

as Indian.³³ Therefore fears of Indian encroachment encouraged by a redefinition of Nepalese identity brought about by democratic forms and constitutional change (the impending Constituent Assembly elections) were a feature of these riots, just as they were of those that occurred in 1997.

The 2006 Constitutional framework

Article 4(1) of the 2006 interim constitution declared Nepal to be an “independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive and completely democratic state”. Here again a kind of balancing act can be discerned, although in abbreviated form from that of the 1990 constitution, and with different constituent elements, reflecting the different constituencies being addressed. The same tension can be perceived between a desire to maintain Nepal’s “traditional” identity (as an independent, indivisible and sovereign state, the three elements retained from the 1990 constitution) and pressure for greater representation. However, these two impulses are now reconciled by an emphasis on “inclusion” rather than Hinduism or monarchy. Nepal was declared a secular state soon after the 2006 *jan andolan*, and the constitution confirms this decision. Although partly a response to calls for greater representation by Nepal’s non-Hindu population, this was not the only motive behind it. As already discussed, monarchy and state Hinduism have traditionally reinforced each other in Nepal, with Sharma, for instance, suggesting kingship was the only remaining “core Hindu institution” in post-1990 Nepal (Sharma 2002: 22). Conversely, Hinduism can be seen as the main ideological support for monarchy, and the decision to declare Nepal secular as reflecting a desire to curb monarchical power by depriving it of legitimacy, whilst stopping short of the controversial step of declaring Nepal a republic.³⁴

The suddenness of the change took many Nepalese by surprise, and was greeted with disapproval by some. Veteran Nepalese politician Mohammad Mohsin, for example, suggested that by sidelining royalists and Hindu nationalists, the new constitution risked unleashing “right-wing extremists” in the same way that the 1990 constitution had inadvertently encouraged “left-wing extremists”.³⁵ As previously discussed, Hindu nationalists had already been provoked by the 1990 constitution’s limited concessions to Nepal’s multi-faith reality. They received the arrival of secularism with even less good humour, cloaking

³³ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=92618 accessed 16/07/2007

³⁴ This could also be a pre-emptive strike against the Maoists: with the swift introduction of a measure they had long advocated robbing them of the chance of claiming credit for it (personal communication with Friso Hecker, August 2007).

³⁵ Interview with Mohammad Mohsin, 08/09/2006

their threats about its repercussions in concerns for communal harmony and religiosity. In an interview, Shiv Sena Nepal's chairman Arun Subedi claimed secularism would worsen Hindu relations with religious minorities, ominously adding, "If Nepal is not a Hindu kingdom then there is no Nepal. We are entering into a holy war".³⁶ Both royalists and Hindu nationalists were implicated in the Nepalgunj riots,³⁷ their nostalgic "longings for authoritarian order and stability" (Hansen 1999: 24) apparently finding expression in destabilising violence.

The 2006 constitution's handling of identity politics also both adhered to and departed from that of its predecessor to radicalising effect. The 2006 constitution enshrines the right to form political parties in a more robust manner than the 1990 constitution, including it in the section on fundamental rights (article 12(3)), as well as in the section on political organisations, where article 141 prohibits imposition of restrictions on political parties. However, the right to form parties is constrained by the third proviso to article 12(3) of the interim constitution, which licences restrictions on any act that threatens Nepal's sovereignty, integrity and communal harmony in terms almost identical to those of the third proviso to article 12(2) of the 1990 constitution. Article 142(4) of the 2006 constitution also states that the election commission will not register a party if it bars membership on the basis of religion, caste, tribe (jati), language or sex, or if its name, objectives, insignia or flag would disturb the country's religious or communal harmony or promote a party-less or single-party system. The exclusion of opponents of multiparty democracy is new, and communal and religious parties are not barred per se, but otherwise the terms of this restriction closely resemble article 113(3) of the 1990 constitution, which also threatens non-registration of parties with discriminatory membership criteria or if their "name, objectives, insignia or flag is of such a nature that it is religious or communal or tends to fragment the country."

"Fragment" is the keyword here; fears of national fragmentation underlie both constitutions' restrictions on party formation. However, fissiparous forces are defined differently in the two documents, reflecting changed political contexts. The mention of proponents of party-less or one-party systems responds to experiences of royal takeover and insurgency (targets royalists and Maoists). This article's implicit view of monarchy as a potentially divisive force is obviously a departure from the 1990 constitution, and from monarchical myths of the Nepalese nation-

³⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5355816.stm, accessed 15/07/2007.

³⁷ From personal communication with Nepalgunj residents in January 2007, and also stated in the report of the People's Level Civil Investigation Committee (People's Level 2007: 7).

state, which present the king as a figure for Nepal's heterogeneous population to coalesce around. Fears of fragmentation can also be discerned in the 2006 interim constitution's retention of pre-existing electoral constituencies for the purpose of the Constituent Assembly elections.³⁸ These constituency boundaries were widely perceived to under-represent Tarai-dwellers, and were one of the catalysts for the Sadbhavana strike. Therefore the 2006 constitution, like its predecessor, can be seen as mixing progressive and conservative elements to radicalising effect: going far enough to antagonise some and not far enough to satisfy others. In addition, memories of the 1990 constitution, its perceived disappointments and failures, added urgency to protests against it and discouraged acceptance of constitutional compromises.

State and society actors

I will now discuss how identities were delimited bottom-up, through the role played by specific actors during the riots, focusing again on interactions with state representatives, parastatal and extrastatal organisations.

The police, the local administration and their counterparts

The catalogue of police errors committed during the 2006 riots recall those committed in 1997. Familiar tropes include discriminatory policing, failure to maintain a curfew and to protect people and property from damage. These failings were captured on a Maoist-produced VCD that shows bored-looking police officers idly watching rioters.³⁹ Other notable incidents included the CDO standing on the roof of the municipality office looking down at the violence below, and apparently doing nothing to control it, or to take officers to task for failing to do so (People's Level 2007: 7). The systematic nature of police inaction encouraged the impression that orders had been given from above not to restrain Pahadi

³⁸ Article 63(3)a states that 205 (out of a total of 425) members of the Constituent Assembly will be elected via the first-past-the-post system from pre-existing constituencies. Article 63(3)b states that 204 will be elected from a countrywide vote using the proportional representation system, in which the whole country will count as one constituency; and article 63(3)c that 16 will be nominated by the Interim Council of Ministers.

³⁹ The people I spoke to in Nepalgunj (January 2007) told me that this VCD was Maoist produced, and this is also stated in ICG 2007: 12. Parts of this VCD were uploaded onto a pro-Madhesi blog (accessed 01/10/2007) and can be viewed at: <http://demrepubnepal.blogspot.com/2007/01/madhesi-alert-nepalgunj-pahadi-attack.html>

rioters, i.e. that it was not a simple matter of local-level incompetence.⁴⁰ Moreover, the police and local administration not only failed to protect citizens, but also perpetuated violence against them. In the Maoist VCD, a policeman is shown participating in the violence.⁴¹ Whether or not this scene is taken at face value, it remains the case that the single fatality was caused by a police bullet. Kamal Giri's death was said to be an accident (he was caught up in police firing rather than directly shot at), but the fact that police were firing upon predominately Muslim and Madhesi crowds, whilst allowing Pahadi youths to rampage around them, speaks for itself.

The riots therefore undermined the idea of state disinterestedness in the eyes of all its protagonists. Most of the Muslims I spoke to following the riots had seen the Maoist VCD, and all of those who had drew my attention to the scene with the rioting police officer. As already mentioned, Madhesi activists responded to the shooting by declaring Giri a martyr and defacing the statue of king Triubhuvan. Pahadi rioters for their part are captured on the VCD greeting police convoys with the slogan "long live the Nepalese police!" indicating that they too were aware of, indeed confident of, police bias in their favour.

If the riots diminished the stature of the Nepalese state, it helped boost various extrastatal and parastatal bodies, which were able to legitimise their own outfits by stepping into the space created by state failings, illuminating Mitchell's observations about how these organisations exist on the "uncertain boundary between society and the state" in the process. (Less cynically, they could be seen as remedying state derelictions.) The People's Level write in their report that they are acting in anticipation of state negligence: conducting their own investigation into the riots, and producing their own report, because they know any official findings will be put in a drawer and left to be eaten by insects (People's Level 2007: 4).⁴² Although the name of this NGO distinguishes it as an "extrastatal" actor, a civil society organisation, working at the "people's level", its pronouncements exceed this role. Its assignment of "moral responsibility" for the riots to Sadbhavana, its demand that the political parties and ethnicities conduct themselves

⁴⁰ Hints as to why that might be so can be found in the People's Level report which mentions that false rumours had been circulated around the time of the riots about the molestation of Pahadi school children and suchlike (People's Level 2007: 5).

⁴¹ The bias of a Maoist-produced VCD is obviously to be borne in mind, as well as the fact that the two scenes in which he appears, back-shots of a man wearing no jacket, but what look like police-issue trousers and boots, only last a few seconds.

⁴² This has indeed been the fate of a number of government reports on civil disturbances and official misconduct, from the ill-publicised and patchily implemented Malik commission report on the first jan andolan on (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 167-169).

better, and that Kamal Giri be declared a martyr, specifying exactly how much compensation his family should receive, indicates that it is seeking to position itself as some sort of arbiter, above the political and communal fray. This is of course how the state is often conceptualised, as standing apart from society and issuing “authoritative *intentions*” (Mitchell 1991: 82).⁴³

Whilst extrastatal bodies occupy the moral high-ground vacated by a partisan police force and “irresponsible” political parties, the parastatal Maoists assume another set of state-like characteristics: that of monopolists of legitimate force, a long-term objective of their “people’s war”. The police having proved to be unwilling/unable to protect Muslims and Madhesi, and other political parties to be ineffectual, the Maoists step into the breach: stand guard over Madhesi and Muslim-owned houses and organise rallies which lead to an eventual “normalization” of the situation. This double manoeuvre can be clearly seen when Maoist leader Athak criticises police handling of the situation at the same time as declaring that the Maoists are working alongside the police to control it. The Maoist intervention was reported in the press “as a stepping stone to their entry into mainstream politics”, boosting their standing on a national scale.⁴⁴ Capture of state legitimacy by Maoists and civil society point to the obverse of Mitchell’s observations about how it is the porosity of the state that gives it its strength –enables it to renew its legitimacy at the level of the everyday. These same blurred boundaries also help legitimise extrastatal and parastatal organisations.

The “ruling” Nepal Sadbhavana Party: from regional NGO to national party

Sadbhavana, like Shiv Sena, is situated between NGO and political party status and in ambiguous relation to defining features of Nepali identity, highlighting both the persistence and fluidity of these boundaries. Moreover, as a “ruling” political party it also blurs boundaries between political parties and the state.

Sadbhavana, like Shiv Sena in Nepal, has experienced transitions from political party to NGO status and back, whilst acting in ways that underline how porous these categories are. Sadbhavana’s origins are said to lie in the Tarai Congress party, which was established in 1958, in the

⁴³ It also, although I think to a lesser degree, recalls the role played by panchayats in resolving communal disputes, as described in Gaunle’s article. To a lesser degree: because the People’s Level, in their report on the riots at least, lay little stress on being local and ethnically representative; they address the interests of all Nepalese people (not just the people of Nepalgunj). Confusion about the source of NGO’s authority is of course not confined to Nepal (Hopgood 2006).

⁴⁴ www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&mid=95728 accessed 20/05/2007

first democratic interlude, and revived in the Panchayat era as the Sadbhavana Parishad (Hachhethu 2006: 14). According to Gajendra Narayan Singh, the Parishad's founder, it was provoked into existence by preparations for the 1980 referendum on whether to reintroduce democracy. When the government began to distribute citizenship certificates in the Terai in 1976, two thirds of its population was deemed ineligible. The resulting dispute is said to have compelled "Gajendra Narayan Singh to leave the [Nepali] Congress Party, which he had been active in for many years and led him to devote all his energy to fighting for the Terai people." (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 332). He is said to have been successful in his efforts, eventually being voted onto the national Panchayat on this issue (*ibid*). As already discussed, in 1990 the Parishad became the Sadbhavana Party, despite the ban on regional parties. Therefore, as a civil society organisation with an elected presence in government, and a regional political party in a state where regional political parties were banned, it had committed multiple transgressions against normative standards hedging civil society and political party behaviour.

Sadbhavana's status as a "ruling political party" in a multi-party coalition government blurs yet another set of distinctions, those between political parties and the state. According to Varshney, political parties can play a double, political and civil society role in multiparty democracies, but not in one-party systems. In the latter, "political parties become an appendage of the state" and therefore lose "their civic functions" (Varshney 2002: 4). This is based on a view of state and society as binary entities, which underlies Varshney's downplaying of state responsibility for causing and controlling inter-ethnic violence.⁴⁵ However, as Hachhethu (2002: 165) has observed, in countries such as Nepal where patronage politics is rife, and political parties are viewed as dispensers of state resources and therefore part of the state, this distinction does not really hold.⁴⁶

The current (as of August 2007) political situation in Nepal further refutes these distinctions. Nepal does not currently qualify as a one-party

⁴⁵ According to Varshney (2002: 289), inter-ethnic civil society associations are better suited to the task of effecting the "integration" which he views as necessary to maintain ethnic peace.

⁴⁶ This attitude can be seen in Shiv Sena in Nepalgunj's decision to approach political parties, rather than state officials, with its wish list prior to the 1997 election. Interestingly, Hachhethu (2002: 173) does not see blurred boundaries between parties and the state as necessarily being a bad thing. He suggests that Nepalese parties could play a valuable role in the absence of "other effective intermediary organizations between the state and society." Also, as mentioned earlier, it is questionable whether this distinction really obtains anywhere.

state: its interim government is a temporary and multiparty body, within which there is open dissension. Sadbhavana's ruling party status has also clearly not eliminated its "civic functions". On the contrary, around the time of signing the initial draft of the interim constitution, Sadbhavana can be seen to play a triple role. In its capacity as a member of the interim government, it was a signatory to the constitution. As a political party looking to its own electoral interests (or the interests of its main constituency) it issued a note of objection to provisions that would limit its electoral clout (or under-represent its constituency).⁴⁷ In its civic capacity, it organised a strike and street protests against the constitution that it had signed.

Moreover, the principle of separation of powers was violated by this draft of the interim constitution, which allows the prime minister to select the head of the judiciary and thereby makes him head of both state and government.⁴⁸ Sadbhavana's behaviour is of a piece with how close to becoming meaningless distinctions between state, government, political parties and civil society were in the interim period. Or, given how fluid they have often been in practice, how difficult it was, in this period when everything was in flux, to make internal distinctions between categories appear like external boundaries, which Mitchell (1991: 78), writing about the elusive state-society boundary, claims is the "distinctive technique of the modern political order".

Whilst indigenous to Nepal, Sadbhavana's pro-Hindi policy and Tarai-centred support base place it in ambiguous relation to defining features of Nepalese national identity: the Nepali language and Pahadi identity,⁴⁹ and help to explain its political marginality. Although it has participated in a number of coalition governments and is currently in the Seven-Party

⁴⁷ The NSP issued a note of dissent complaining about the vague wording of provisions for land reforms and retention of a constituency system, which they claimed discriminated against plain-dwellers. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a1f3bfdc-8def-11db-ae0e-0000779e2340.html accessed 20/05/2007

⁴⁸ According to Bhimarjun Acharya, a constitutional lawyer, the constitution is flawed because, "It has the same head of state and head of government which is not what you have in a parliamentary democracy. The prime minister is to appoint the head of the judiciary, which contradicts the notion of separation of power." www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a1f3bfdc-8def-11db-ae0e-0000779e2340.html access: 20/05/2007.

⁴⁹ As Gellner (1997a: 8-9) notes, there is a distinction between the terms Parbatiya and Pahadi, although both mean "hill people". The former refers to upper-caste groups and "their associated low-status artisan castes", whilst Pahadi refers to all hill groups. However, as he notes, Tarai dwellers typically decry Pahadi (rather than Parbatiya) domination (*ibid*). From conversations with Nepalgunj Muslims I did not get the impression that they conflated the two terms, that when they spoke of Pahadis they meant Parbatiyas only.

Alliance,⁵⁰ Sadbhavana has always occupied a marginal position in Nepalese politics; its marginality linked not only to its limited electoral support, which is localised to what Hachhethu (2006: 39) describes as the “Tarai hinterlands”, but also to how this constituency is viewed, as not only peripheral to, but also not quite part of the national mainstream, despite the fact that the majority of Nepal’s population now lives there. Therefore Sadbhavana also resembles Shiv Sena in that its constituency is a majority with a minority complex.

One of Sadbhavana’s main demands is that Hindi be declared a national language of Nepal, because it acts as a *lingua franca* amongst the people of the Tarai (Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 332). Official use of Hindi was discontinued in the 1950s, as part of the Panchayat-era promotion of what had become known as the Nepali language (*ibid.*: 331), and this policy is effectively still in place today. The 1990 constitution liberalised the policy; although Nepali retained its official status (article 6(1)), all languages spoken as a mother tongue in Nepal were acknowledged as national languages (article 6(2)). The 2006 interim constitution modifies this, but keeps the mother tongue proviso that effectively discriminates against Hindi.⁵¹ Although many Nepalese speak or at least understand Hindi, which probably has greater currency now than it did in the 1950s due to dissemination of Indian media (Liechty 2003: 184), for very few is it a mother tongue. Burghart (1984: 259) has explained the geopolitics of exclusion of Hindi: ‘The absence of Hindi, the national language of India, from within the kingdom of Nepal has been used by the Nepalese government as a means of affirming its cultural difference from India...the absence of native Hindi speakers in Nepal serves to legitimise Nepal’s continuing political autonomy on the South Asian subcontinent.’

Therefore, exclusion of Hindi, like the promotion of state Hinduism, is a means to shut out Indian influence; and just as Shiv Sena’s Indian origins risked nullifying its pro-Hindu stance, Sadbhavana’s pro-Hindi policy threatens it with the taint of foreignness, despite being indigenous to Nepal.⁵²

This taint, of course, more generally threatens its Tarai-dwelling constituency. In an interview, Gajendra Narayan Singh described the

⁵⁰ It participated in five coalition governments between 1994-1999 and one king-nominated government in 2005 (Hachhethu 2006: 67).

⁵¹ Article 5(2) retains Nepali as the official language; article 5(1) declares all languages spoken in Nepal as a mother tongue “national languages” (5(1)), and some provision is made for use of these languages at local level in article 5(3).

⁵² This is not the only feature, which associates it with India; its flag is also almost identical to that of the Indian National Congress: a version of the Indian tricolour with an outstretched palm in the centre.

situation in sweeping terms: 'The Terai people...have neither been treated as Hindus nor as Nepalese. We have always been called Madhesis...and treated as second-rate citizens. All the Terai people, whether they are Muslims or Hindus, are treated as Madhesis' (quoted in Hoftun *et al.* 1999: 331).

However, his comments point to internal tensions within Tarai regionalism, which help account for why it has struggled to achieve national prominence. It is obviously not the case that all Tarai-dwellers are identified as Madhesi: large numbers of Pahadis moved to the region following the malaria eradication programmes of the 1950s and 1960s, and Muslims are ambiguously situated in relation to the term (Gellner 2007: 1824-1825): some accept it, others do not.⁵³ It is not even the case that all of the Tarai is considered to be part of the Madhes. According to the International Crisis Group, the term only really covers the central and eastern Tarai (ICG 2007: 2). The ICG was writing in the wake of civil disturbances that had been concentrated in those areas, and its definition illustrates the way in which identities are demarcated by conflict and violence. Just as the Hindu-Muslim conflict during the 1997 municipal elections helped make those particular identities salient, and for the purposes of the NSP strike the western Tarai did count as part of the Madhes, disturbances in the central and eastern Tarai have apparently encouraged demarcations of the territorial limits of the Madhes which exclude the western regions.

Sadbhavana has traditionally sought to elide internal divisions, as Singh does in his comments, or emphasising that it speaks for all residents of the Tarai, as Sadbhavana politician Sarita Giri did in a recent interview.⁵⁴ Whilst this has helped to ensure its continued presence in the political mainstream, it has perhaps hampered its efforts to campaign for its constituency. It has recently been superseded by groups less constrained by the need to be all things to all people, and to publicly abjure violence; by the Maoists and by various Madhesi organisations

⁵³ According to Sharma, prior to the 1990s Tarai Muslims were associated with madhesi identity, as the main communal fault-line in the region at that time lay between Madhesis and Pahadis. The Hindu nationalist resurgence in India, and its spill over into Nepal, is said to have changed this (Sharma 1996: 46). The riots that occurred in December 2006, which were presented as a Pahadi-Madhesis conflict, appear to reflect a reversion to the previous state of affairs, although during these riots too Muslims suffered disproportionately (personal communication with Nepalgunj residents, January 2007).

⁵⁴ In an interview posted on the web on 08/01/2007, Giri said: Sadbhavana "has never indulged in racial politics. It is our political religion to take care of the betterment of the entire Terai region." www.kantipuronline.com/interview.php?&nid=97006 accessed 16/07/2007

(some of whom were previously affiliated with the Maoists)⁵⁵, who have been more effective than Sadbhavana in promoting federalism and bringing Tarai regionalism to the political main stage.

Conclusion

The national implications of “communal” violence, which underlay the 1997 riots, but were obscured by presentations of it as Indian communal backwash, were clearer in those that occurred in 2006, because the stakes were higher: not just the election of local representatives for a period of time, but the drafting of a document which would have a lasting effect on state and societal identities. However, everything was in flux during the transition period in which the December 2006 riots occurred, making it harder than usual to distinguish between state and society, or even to define Nepalese state and society. Relaxation of citizenship laws had loosened the boundaries of Nepalese identity, but, as police inaction during the 2006 riots suggests, citizenship was still a paper right for many, even for those who counted as citizens under the narrower terms of previous legislation. Monarchical myths of the state appeared to be dying out (although not without a struggle), but “modern” ones had yet to convincingly take their place, with violence in the Tarai, from the December 2006 Nepalgunj riots onwards, undermining notions of the state as an arbiter and protector of the people. After a decade of Maoist insurgency, collective violence was by now a standard way to achieve political change and demarcate ethnic and territorial boundaries –as militant Madhesi groups had learned.

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⁵⁵ For instance, the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha, which was set up in 2004 by former Maoist leader Jai Krishna Goit (ICG 2007: 9).

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Women's Participation in the People's War in Jumla

Satya Shrestha-Schipper

In the early years of the Maoist Insurgency that began on 13th February 1996, local and foreign journalists brought back striking images of a large number of young women in combat fatigues casually carrying rifles from their first guided tour of Maoist held areas in Western Nepal. These images surprised scholars and the public alike, so much so because until recently women had been forbidden from joining the Nepalese Army.¹ While great attention has been paid to the presence of large numbers of women in Maoist organisations, the conditions of their recruitment, their predicament, and the overall situation of women in Maoist held areas have been either ignored or barely mentioned.² This article attempts to analyse these Maoist women's motivation to join the Maoist Party and to remain within the organisation, the changes brought about by Maoists regarding the situation of women in Maoist held areas, particularly in the Sinja Valley in Jumla district, and the situation of Maoist women.

In 2006/2007, thousands of Maoist men cadres, according to my informants, left the Party and went to work in India. Some workers returning from Kargil (Northern India) whom I met in Jumla and Mugu during my fieldwork in 2007 told me that thousands of ex-Maoist men had found paid labour in the same areas where they themselves were working. However, the desertion of women cadre has never made any headlines. Is it because there were no women deserters? If so, what motivated women to remain in the Maoist Party while their male comrades deserted in thousands?

Maoist Recruitment

The presence of a large number of women combatants in the Maoist insurgency was first confirmed by photographs brought back by local and foreign journalists and pictures published on the Maoist website. But, the exact figure for women's involvement was not available; it was said that

¹ The Nepalese Army started recruiting women for combat as of 2003; however, women were allowed to join the Army for administrative and medical work, www.nepalarmy.mil.np

² Mukta S. Lama *et al.* (2006) reported some positive changes in women's lives brought about by the Maoists in Maoist held areas.

30 to 50 percent of the PLA is made up of women³ but due to a lack of independent sources of verification, it was difficult to confirm the claim made by the Maoists. Finally, 3,846 women and 15,756 men Maoist combatants are officially registered in the seven UN supervised cantonments and satellite cantonments in Nepal.⁴ Regardless of official and unofficial data, the presence of large numbers of women in the Maoist ranks is undeniable and makes us reflect on the motivation of those women to join the Maoist insurgency.

According to the Maoists, they denounced all forms of discrimination against women and are all for gender equality;⁵ as a result, a large number of women joined the revolution in order to change their situation. Some foreign journalists⁶ who have travelled extensively to Maoist training camps and Maoist held areas during the insurgency seemed to confirm this Maoist statement.

However, at grass-roots level, it appears that women have joined the Maoist insurgency for various reasons. Some of them indeed joined the revolution in sympathy with the Maoist ideology and programme, as stated by the Maoists; others joined the Maoist party after having experienced misbehaviour and harassment from the security forces⁷. The social reform campaign launched by Maoists against gambling, brewing and drinking alcohol, domestic violence, polygamy, child marriage, etc., and prompt action against people who defy the prohibition have also generated some support among women⁸.

3 Adhikari (2007) "Nepal: Women combatants in cantonments: where next?", www.telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=1360

⁴ UNMIN Press Statement, www.unmin.org.np/downloads/pressreleases/2007-12-27-unmin.srsg.press.statement.eng.pdf

⁵ One of the forty-point demands submitted to the government just before launching the people's war specifically refers to women: "Patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women should be stopped. Daughters should be allowed access to paternal property". Nepalese law prevented women from inheriting paternal property unless unmarried and older than 35. This law has been modified and came into effect in 2002 granting certain property rights to women; however, if a woman marries after inheriting, the paternal property is reverted to the successor in her maternal home. The woman will instead inherit her husband's property, Binda Pandey, *Women's Property Right Movement and Achievement of the 11th Amendment of Civil Code*, www.nepaldemocracy.org/gender/property_rights_movement.htm.

⁶ Jonas Bendiksen, The slide show on "Inside Nepal's Revolution", <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0511/feature3/multimedia.html>. Onesto, Li 2005.

⁷ M. Sharma and D. Prasain, 2004.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Yet in addition, and above all, the Maoists have mobilised their entire resources, such as coercion techniques and propaganda (through cultural programmes) to recruit young men and women.

In a remote area like Jumla where the literacy rate is very low,⁹ the ideological campaign alone would not have produced the expected result on the recruitment of youths in the Maoist ranks. Massive recruitment took place between 2003 and 2004. During this period the Maoists launched a programme called “One House One Maoist”, which was known in Jumla as “shoes¹⁰ abhiyan” (Shoes Campaign) and also known as “tuna kasa Jungal pasa” (Tie Shoelace Enter Jungle). According to this, every house had to provide the Maoists with one child. If a family refused to send their children to the Maoist Party, the latter would ask for a donation, usually far more than the family concerned could afford. Rich families usually paid the donation to avoid recruitment; those who could not pay let one child join the insurgency. In this part of the region, a son is more valuable; therefore, parents with few sons sent a daughter to join the insurgency and this partially explains the large number of women in the Party.

Among other recruitment methods, the Maoist have very effectively used door to door recruitment techniques, particularly in the Sinja valley (Jumla district). They first went from house to house to convince parents to let their children join the Maoist Party to create a “New Nepal”. When they were unable to convince the parents, they would simply order the young men and young unmarried women to gather in one of the houses in the evening without their parents. If the parents followed the children to the meeting, they would be told to leave the premises immediately. If they refused, they would be penalised for not obeying the Maoists; either by forced labour or they would be forced to feed and shelter more than their share of visiting Maoists.¹¹

⁹ The female literacy rate is 16 percent while male literacy stands at 45 percent according to Educational Mirror Jumla. However, Human Rights Year puts the literacy rate as low as 8.2 percent for women and 23 percent for men as quoted in Women’s Educational Status and Maternal and Child Health Care Practices in Jumla District West Nepal. Rawal, L.B. *et al.* 2004.

¹⁰ One of the schoolteachers from Sinja Valley explained to me that it was not “shoes abhiyan” but “sujha abhiyan”; people from the Valley misunderstood the word and called “shoes” instead of “sujha”. Ratna’s Nepali English dictionary translates “sujha” by vision, perception, thinking and understanding.

¹¹ The Maoists had established a rule in the Sinja Valley that every household in a village, in their turn, had to provide food and shelter for visiting Maoists. The number of Maoists a house should provide food and shelter for depended on the number of visiting Maoists in the neighbourhood.

During the gathering, the Maoists would try to convince the young people to join the Party. Girls were told that if they got married, they would be subject to their husband and parents-in-laws' authority and would have to work like slaves. They would not achieve anything in life by cutting grass for their husband and their parent-in-laws. On the other hand, if they joined the Maoist Party, they would be allowed to choose their own husband. They would be free and be able to dance and sing whenever they wished, they would be able to travel around the country and they would be given soap¹² to wash themselves. Women were also promised pocket money.¹³ But above all, they would be given a gun and would be able to eat anywhere free of charge.¹⁴ If potential recruits were students, they would be told that their bourgeois studies were useless and would come to nothing; they were just wasting their time. Conversely, the Maoist Party would bring change, therefore they should join the Maoist Organisation to bring change to the country.

The Maoist recruitment method, at least in the Sinja valley, was very similar to that of a technique used by Matwali Chetris of the Sinja Valley to provide a suitable bride for their sons. In this part of the region, a young man with a physical disability or from a family with limited financial means usually has difficulty in finding a bride. In such a case, the family and friends set out to search for a suitable bride. Once they have found one, yet think that her family would not accept a marriage proposal from the young man, the family and friends of the boy first let the girl know the interest he shows in her through a co-conspirator (this could be a friend, a family member or a neighbour). Then, the young man's family members or friends turn up one evening at the village where the potential

¹² Due to an electricity shortage and a lack of any other means of cooking, pinewood is largely used for cooking and for lighting in Jumla. Houses in the region have either no windows or very few to evacuate the smoke generated by burning pinewood. The people living inside therefore become very black due to the smoke. Due to poverty, many people cannot afford to buy soap; they use ashes to wash their clothes; therefore, a bar of soap is a luxury item in this region.

¹³ In Jumla, women do not have access to the economy although they work more than men; it is man's sphere. It was said that each Maoist gets a monthly allowance of 200 rupees to buy basic necessities, such as a tooth brush, tooth paste, soap etc., while clothes and shoes are provided by the Party.

¹⁴ Some young people attracted by power and of being a Maoist came with guns. Even a child Maoist could threaten old people and make them work under his/her command, as explained by the ex-in-charge of the student militia from the Sinja Valley. He lamented that people stopped listening to them since the Maoists had signed the peace process. Prior to that they could ask anything of villagers and the latter would execute orders without asking any questions. He loved the power that came with being a Maoist. He said he missed that period.

bride lives, without her parents' knowledge. As soon as they arrive, the young woman is invited to a secret place (it often takes place in a cowshed belonging to a co-conspirator). There, the family members or friends of the young man start trying to persuade the young woman to marry the young man. In the process, they promise to give her everything she desires if she marries the young man. Once the persuasion tactics start, the momentum is maintained until the young woman either says yes and comes with them the very same evening or she says no and the family and friends of the young man finally slip away under the cover of darkness. Her parents would never know what happened that night. If the young woman goes along with the scheme, yet her parents find her before the marriage can take place, they are allowed to take her back and marry her to another man. That is why the young man's family and friends try to organise the marriage as soon as possible. The young woman's family calls it "abduction" whereas the young man's family calls it "voluntary", since the young woman is not dragged away against her will.

In a similar way, the Maoists try to persuade the young men and women they have rallied together to leave over night. If the young men and women leave with them, the ceremony of giving *tika* (red vermillion) on the forehead of a new recruit called *sindur lagaune* (put on the red vermillion) takes place the same night. This ceremony makes the new recruit a full member ("whole timer" in Maoist jargon) of the Party. It is organised in haste for two reasons; the first reason is that the parents of new recruits will not have time to find and take them back before they become full members of the Maoists Party, and the second reason is that the young recruits will not have enough time to change their minds. Thus, it is very important that the *tika* ceremony be organised as soon as possible. Once the young men and women have taken *tika* from the Maoists, they become accountable to the Maoist Party, no longer to their own parents. The young recruits' parents call the recruitment technique "abduction" while the Maoists call it "voluntary recruitment". From that day on, newly-recruited children can come and go as they wish to their parents' house, without the latter being able to say anything against their children; if they do, the Maoists take immediate action against them. The following example explains the Maoist recruitment technique:

This young man I will call Ram is in his 20s and is from the Sinja valley; he was first recruited into the Maoist Party and later sent back home. He has a speech problem; he cannot articulate properly. In Jumla, a man with any physical shortcomings faces many hurdles in finding a bride; therefore, he was still unmarried after coming of the

marriageable age. One night a few young Maoist women came to visit him with the intention of recruiting him into the Party. They discussed his grievances of not finding a wife in the village. Then he was told that if he became a Maoist, he could find a wife very easily in the Party. If he could not find one, one of the young women who came to recruit him would marry him, though he did not know which one. The young man believed them and went underground the very same night. A few months later, he reappeared in the village, still single. Apparently he was told that he was not good enough for the Party and sent back home. He did not find a wife in the Maoist organisation as promised by the young women recruiters.

The parents of recruits told me that if the Maoists signed up a certain number of new recruits, they got promoted; that was why they forced children to join the Party; yet this was never confirmed by the Maoists.

Most of the women who were good at dancing and singing were recruited as members of cultural groups; others were enlisted in the People's Liberation Army, and the children whose parents were very adamant about sending their daughters away to work for Maoist were recruited as militias to work in the village and surrounding areas.

Disparity between Rhetoric and Reality

Since the beginning of the insurgency, the Maoists have championed the women's cause. From the very beginning they asserted that they were determined to put an end to all forms of discrimination against women and empower them in providing gender equality as explained by one of the forty-point demands¹⁵ presented to the Government before launching the People's War. The following pages first discuss the social changes brought about by the Maoists to the women's situation in the Sinja Valley (Jumla district), then discuss the women's situation within the Maoist organisation.

¹⁵ See note no. 4



A PLA woman with her village comrades during a period of leave, Jumla, 2007.
Photo: S. Shrestha-Schipper.

Social Change in Women's Situation at Village Level

The Maoists arrived in the village in the year 2000 and governed the region until they signed the peace process with the Government in 2006. Upon their arrival in the region, the Maoists took a series of measures to uproot so-called “bad practice” (*kharab/naramro chalana*). They banned child marriage, arranged marriages and *Jari*. During the 10-11 years of regular visits to Botan and the surrounding villages, I had encountered only one child marriage during the early years of my fieldwork; and underage marriages were in decline. However, arranged marriages and *jari* have been an integral part of their tradition. Ironically, since the arrival of Maoists in the region, underage marriages have drastically increased. Parents have a tendency to marry their daughters by the age of 13-14 years of age to prevent them from being recruited in the Maoist ranks, as the latter targeted young unmarried girls.

The Maoists have banned “arranged marriages” and promoted “love marriages”. However, they have proscribed traditional courtship called *chotti basne* -traditionally young men and women meet in a cowshed and spend the night singing; during this time they get to know each other. The Maoists consider traditional courtship as a “bad tradition”

(*naramro/kharab calan*), therefore, it must be abolished. If young people defy prohibition and are caught in a cowshed, immediate action would be taken against them by the Maoists. A Maoist DCM (District Committee Member) from the Sinja Valley explained to me that love could not be expressed by singing in a cowshed at night; it could only be expressed through letters. If a young man and woman liked each other, they should exchange letters to express their feelings. According to this person, reading “love letters” was more beautiful than “singing” in a cowshed. The irony is that more than half of the population of Jumla cannot read and write.¹⁶ When the “love marriage” has been arranged, the couple has to submit separate written applications to the Maoist administration to ask for permission to marry. The person concerned must mention that s/he is in love with her/him (name) and wishes to marry her/him. The age of the bride and groom must be mentioned in the letter; the Maoists have fixed the marriageable age at 18 for a woman and at 20 for a man in a village.¹⁷ However, the age of the bride and groom, particularly the age of the bride, is often raised to meet the marriageable age fixed by the Maoists. Local Maoists would not question the age of the couple because they know how things work at village level, while Maoists from outside would not know the exact age of the couple. Written applications had to be submitted six months in advance, but this was reduced to a few days after parents protested.

The Maoists have banned the traditional custom called *jari*, calling it a “degraded wife selling tradition”. *Jari* designates “adultery marriage” as well as the “payment” made by the woman’s second husband to her first husband, which is calculated on the basis of the expenses that the first husband incurred at his wedding and the number of *jari* for the woman. The first *jari* is more expensive, from second *jari* the price decreases. *Jari* is a *de facto* divorce involving no court hearing and commonly practised in the region without any stigmatisation towards women. At the time of divorce, the woman has to return all the ornaments she received from her first husband. Since the arrival of the Maoists in the region, *jari* is tolerated only if the husband is much older than the wife. The couple is not allowed to remarry without divorcing from the first marriage and the divorce would not be granted without a “valid reason”. The Maoist philosophy at village level is that men and women marry only once in their life and love is eternal. Their philosophy makes it more difficult for a woman to ask for a divorce. If she does so, she would be considered a “bad

¹⁶ See note no. 3.

¹⁷ The legal marriageable age in Nepal is 18 for women and 21 for men without their parents’ consent and 16 for women and 18 for men with their parents’ consent.

woman”/”woman with no moral value”. If a woman elopes with another man (go away in *jari*) before divorcing her first husband, she is considered a “bad woman”, and the Maoists take action against the woman and her second husband. They are first separated and are sentenced to forced labour. If the couple wants to avoid the Maoists’ punishment, they must leave the village overnight. The following case will highlight the problem that the women in the Sinja Valley have been facing since the *jari* has been banned. This incident took place during my stay in the Sinja valley in 2007.

A young man studied up to class 10 and brought a wife from a neighbouring village. He belonged to a Maoist supporter lineage. Within six months of their marriage, the wife eloped, i.e. she went away in *jari*, with a man from a neighbouring village. When I heard the commotion in the village, I went to inquire why his wife had left him for another man. The people gathered, who were Maoists and their supporters, told me she was a “bad woman” (*bigreko aimai*), and they wanted to find the eloped couple. I asked them again why they were so determined to find a “bad woman” and her second husband; they should be happy that she had gone off with someone else. Then I added very quickly, “such a fine young man should not have any problem in finding another woman.” They explained me that they wanted the couple to be brought back to the village to be punished¹⁸ before the villagers as a lesson to other potential runaway women. Apparently, the young woman’s first husband was night-blind and the woman did not know until she had married him. That was why she eloped with another man. The case was first reported to the Maoists; since they were not able to locate the whereabouts of the eloped couple, the case was later reported to the newly opened police station in Hat Sinja (a neighbouring village). The family and friends of the young man wanted the couple to be brought back whenever they would be found. Rumour was that the couple had left for India overnight due to fear of the Maoists. Prior to the arrival of Maoists in the region, this case would have been a simple *jari* and would have been settled by the elders of both parties concerned with *jari* payment.

¹⁸ They did not know what punishment they should inflict on the couple if they were to be found; some suggested shaving the couple’s head and parading them around the village. The Maoists used to give this sort of punishment while they were in power. They are no longer in power, but their hegemony is still felt in the village.

The couple would not have had to leave the village in a hurry. The villagers were very sympathetic towards the woman; for them, the sickness of her first husband was a valid reason for the woman to go in *jari*, but they were not able to defend the woman openly for fear of the Maoists. Even the Maoists admitted in private that the young woman had made the right decision by leaving her first husband and going in *jari* with a nice young man, otherwise life would have been very hard for her if she had stayed with her night-blind husband. Nevertheless, in public she continued to be seen as the culprit.

Gender equality had been one of the Maoists' main agendas since their arrival in the region. In the name of gender equality, the Maoists first suggested that villagers divide parental property equally between sons and daughters. However, their suggestion was never taken into consideration by villagers; therefore, the Maoists put the emphasis on dowry. Prior to the arrival of the Maoists in Botan, the dowry played an insignificant role in marriage; the bride would be the centre of attention; thus, she would receive a dowry of little value from her parents and her kin. Now prestige has shifted to the dowry. Regardless of their economic situation, villagers try to give more dowries like their high-caste neighbours. Now villagers look at the dowry that a bride brings with her rather than the bride herself.

In Jumla, there is a well-defined division of labour between men and women; the latter usually carry out most of the agricultural work and household work, while the former deal with the economic and politics. Men spend their leisure time playing cards and talking politics. Since the arrival of Maoists in the region, playing cards is banned, and the men, including local Maoists, now spend their leisure time discussing politics and gossiping, leaving most of the agricultural and household work to women. Since my arrival in the region, I had not observed any gender equality as pointed out to me by the Maoists. I thus asked a Maoist DCM (District Committee Member) from the Sinja Valley, belonging to Thakuri lineage, why he would not set an example by helping his wife to carry manure (while I was visiting him, his wife with the help of other women was busy carrying manure from their home to their field. Carrying manure is a woman's work in Jumla region), so that other men would follow suit. As justification for his behaviour, he said that his wife did not want him to help her and added very quickly that people's mentality had not changed; people were ignorant, and they needed to be taught. Besides, he had a lot of political activities to take care of, so he had no time. If needed, he would help her. Throughout my stay in the village, I only saw

him engaged in political activities leaving all the household and agriculture work, including carrying manure, to his wife.



Women carrying *porso*, animal manure mixed with pine needles. Jumla, 2007.
Photo: S. Shrestha-Schipper.

Social Conditions among Maoist Women

Despite the Maoist slogan on gender equality, if one looks at the central committee of political structure and the military wing of the Maoist Party, there is a drastic fall in the participation of women. However, the following pages do not set out to analyse the participation of women at central level; they examine the social conditions of these Maoist women at grassroots level.

The following observation is based on interviews carried out with men and women who are or have been PLA members, who have worked as full-time party cadres and militias, and with family members of these Maoist cadres who were either forced to join the Maoist party or who joined of their own free will.

The Maoists have always maintained that people have freely joined the party and they would be allowed to leave if they wished to do so. In reality, deserting the Party is a crime and not only the deserter but also his/her whole family is liable to punishment. If a Maoist Party member leaves the organisation, the person's family members would be asked to

replace the deserter. In the case of a refusal, the family has to pay a hefty fine. Despite the threat of punishment, some men left not only the Party but also the village (if the person stays in the village after leaving the Party, he will be taken back to the Party either to reintegrate it or to be punished). Some deserters came back to the village after the Maoists had signed the peace agreement with the Government; nevertheless, these returnees are being courted by the Maoist cadres to bring them back to the Party.



Young Maoist women at a Maoist meeting in Jumla Bazar, 2007. Photo: S. Shrestha-Schipper.

The situation with Maoist women is different. In the area studied, most Maoist women were recruited at the tender age of 12-13 or even younger. Many of them did not even know what Maoism was when they were recruited as Maoist cadres. By the time they become adults, they are already married and even have one or two children. Although the Maoists denounce underage marriages and impose a marriageable age at village level, they apparently do not scrutinise underage marriages within the Party. The couple often lies about their age on the marriage application form, and the commanders who are supposed to check the reliability of the information provided do not verify it. It is said that commanders are

rather pleased that Maoist cadres choose partners within the Party. The cadres, particularly women, are not only encouraged to find a partner but also pressurised into taking a husband within the Party even at a young age. High-caste PLA women are encouraged to take a low-caste husband to break caste/social barriers. The PLA sometimes abduct young women belonging to high castes with the intention of marrying them with low-caste PLA men.

Love marriage is the norm in the PLA and the Maoist Party as at village level; but courtship is strictly forbidden. If an unmarried couple is discovered together, it is considered to be a form of misconduct and both of them are reprimanded. The couple is only allowed to exchange letters through the commander. However, some couples manage to exchange letters without the latter's knowledge. Therefore, the couple usually gets married very quickly to avoid such problems. Most Maoist women are married within the Party. If a woman marries outside the party, she will be chastised for taking a husband outside the organisation. I met two such women who defied the Maoist ban on leaving the Party and marrying outside the organisation, but not without consequences:

Two women from the Sinja Valley worked as Maoists for a few years: one worked as a member of a cultural group, and the other was a party worker at village level. Both women left the Party and married non-Maoist men from a neighbouring village. When they returned to their natal home, both women were abducted by local Maoists and taken to the base area of Jumla to be presented before the Maoist court. The Maoist tribunal gave them a choice of either reintegrating the Maoist Party or of being sentenced to forced labour. Both women accepted the sentence rather than becoming Maoist again. After purging their sentence, they were still confined by local Maoists to their natal home despite repeated requests made to the Maoist authorities by themselves, their parents, parents-in-laws and their husbands. They were allowed to join their respective husbands only after the Maoists signed the peace agreement with the Government.

Despite the many hurdles, if women decide to quit the Maoist Party and stay away from them to start a new life, the stigma and exclusion of being Maoist persist. They do not usually find non-Maoist husbands. I was told that non-Maoist men would not marry ex-Maoist women, because these women were considered to have no moral values. The following incident

occurred to a young woman from the Sinja Valley whom I had known as a child.

Beauty (her real name) –she was a beautiful child– was, according to her parents, abducted by the local Maoist cadres and forced to become a Maoist against her will. After some time, she surrendered to the State and lived in the Tarai; she never came back to her village to avoid arrest by the Maoists¹⁹. There she met a young man with whom she got married, but she did not tell her husband that she was an ex-Maoist. When the young man found out that his wife was an ex-Maoist, he left her. In desperation, she took her own life.

This is not an isolated case, there are indeed many such stories. Many ex-Maoists who had been forced to become Maoists lost their husbands-to-be. After they left the Maoist Party, their fiancés refused to marry them because of the Maoist label these women carry on their heads.

Exclusion is an integral part of being Maoist women. However, Maoist men do not meet the same fate as their female comrades. During my fieldwork, I met Maoist men and women who were on home-leave. Maoist men did not have any problem in reintegrating their village social circle. They were welcomed back as if they had just come back from a trip to India, and saw no obstacle to carrying out their social duties. Women, on the other hand, faced exclusion. PLA women are not able to resume their previous life, such as tending fields, fetching water, looking after animals etc. and are not able to find a new role within the community. As a result, they tend to stay at home with immediate family members or with their own comrades rather than with young women of their own age. A female PLA member who was on home-leave in the Sinja Valley had never interacted with other young women of the village. It looked as if she was not able to find her place within the social environment where she had grown up. When I asked the other young women from the village why they did not talk to their friend (they had been friends before the young lady joined the PLA), they told me that their Maoist friend had become very different and that she did not like to mix with them. I did not know whether this was true but young village women usually avoided contact with the Maoist woman even though they lived in the same village and

¹⁹ For the Maoists, whoever surrenders to the State, automatically becomes a traitor. If they capture the person, the latter faces severe punishment; this could be capital punishment. The Maoists killed some of these “traitors” who surrendered to the State, and after purging their prison term, resided in Jumla Bazar (district headquarter) during the attack on Jumla in 2002.

belonged to the same lineage. I was not able to establish contact with her despite having known her as a child. I saw her only with her comrades. Two days after her departure from the village, news came that she had eloped with another PLA member and left for India. The young man has a wife who is also a PLA member and a child in one of the UN-monitored cantonments. When I enquired about the couple while visiting the camp (where the couple was based) in 2007, I was told that the young woman was known for not having a good moral character. If they had found the couple before they left for India, they would have been punished for their deed.

The Maoists claim to fight for gender equality and are determined to end all forms of exploitation of women and sex discrimination. They also argue that women join the Maoist organisation in large numbers because of their programme. To justify their claim, the Maoists display pictures of women in combat fatigues with guns; this, indeed, justifies gender equality in work between men and women. Indeed, women PLA cadres seem to enjoy some forms of gender equality while running day-to-day camps, such as, cleaning, cooking etc. The dress code is the same for PLA men and women -both wear shirts and trousers; however, female Maoist political activists wear *kurta suruvalal*²⁰ despite encouragement from their superiors to wear a shirt and trousers to become a “Modern person”. However, research shows that not all women join the Maoist ranks and continue to stay with the organisation just because of gender equality and the fight against sex discrimination that the Maoists promote.

Most young women are recruited at a young age through coercion and persuasion, and many of them are married and have children with Party cadres before they reach adulthood. They only have experience of home and the Maoists. For lack of knowledge of the outside world, it is very difficult for these women to step beyond the safe perimeter into the unknown. Even though Maoist women leave the Party, they will still be brought back to Party since they cannot cross the border like their male comrades. In response to Rita Manchanda’s question, “why are girls who are a high-risk group not leaving their villages”, a brigadier-general of the then Royal Nepal Army said, “The boys can go across the border to find jobs in India or Malaysia. Where can the girls go? If they come to Kathmandu or go to India, they run the risk of being trafficked or getting entrapped in the sexually exploitative jobs here.”²¹ Some Maoist women acknowledge that even if they did want to run away from the Party, they could not do so, because they do not have sufficient knowledge of the outside world and this restricts their mobility: “Men can go across the

²⁰ A long knee-length top and a sort of pyjama trousers, favoured by young women.

²¹ R. Manchanda, 2004.

border, but where can we go?" Then, they explained, "Once a Maoist, always a Maoist", they did not enjoy the liberty of running away. On the one hand, women cannot leave the Maoist organisation because their life is built around Maoists, and on the other hand, they face the stigma and exclusion for being members of the Maoist Party. In most cases, Maoist women have seen and experienced nothing other than their village life, so when they return home, they are not able to use their new found skills or to find a new role in the community. In some cases, for lack of an ability to readjust, Maoist women exclude themselves from the community, while sometimes the latter rejects them for being members of the Maoist Party.²²

Conclusion

One of the Maoist agendas was to put an end to child marriage. However, since their arrival in the Sinja Valley, underage marriage, which was in decline, has drastically increased in the region. Since the Maoists have only recruited unmarried young girls, parents have a tendency to marry their daughters as young as possible to avoid Maoist recruitment.

The Maoists perceived *jari* custom as a discriminatory tradition against women; therefore, they have prohibited the *jari* system calling it "wife selling, degraded custom" to end discrimination against women. In fact, the *jari* tradition provides women with some form of independence and full status vis-a-vis their husband and their parents-in-laws, not as subordinates as defined in Hindu culture. Regardless of the number of *jaris* for a woman, her status vis-a-vis her husband does not change. She maintains her position in society and does not suffer from stigmatisation, as there is no stigma attached to *jari*. This tradition provides a woman with a way of escaping her abusive husband and her parents-in-law. Since the Maoists have prohibited *jari*, a woman is systematically stigmatised as a "bad woman" if she left in *jari*. By opposing the *jari* tradition that is granted to women by the tradition in the Sinja Valley, the Maoists are merely reinforcing exploitation of women and sex discrimination, the very agenda they said they were fighting to eliminate from society.

Despite the Maoist rhetoric on gender equality, nothing has changed in villages, at least in the Sinja Valley; women are still the major agricultural work force. While the women juggle between work in the fields and at home, the men, including the Maoists, spend their time gossiping instead of helping these women. For the sake of gender equality, the Maoists have put pressure on Matwali Chetris to give dowries like their high-caste

²² For a more personal story of the exclusion of child soldiers see www.nepalnews.com/archive/2008/others/feature/sep/news_feature03.php

neighbours. Before the arrival of Maoists in the Sinja Valley, dowries played an insignificant role among Matwali Chetris. Forcing them to give dowries only increases pressure on impoverished communities.

The Maoist rhetoric on the emancipation of women by ending all forms of exploitation of women and sex discrimination and guaranteeing them gender equality remains rhetoric, at least in the Sinja Valley.



PLA women knitting in a PLA cantonment, 6th division, Dasarathpur, Surkhet, 2007.
Photo: S. Shrestha-Schipper.

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Maoism, Violence and Religious Upheaval in a Village in Eastern Nepal¹⁷⁸

Pustak Ghimire

Anyone returning after a long absence to Temma, a village like so many others in eastern Nepal, will immediately notice that the fighting in Khotang district from 2001 to 2005 and the Maoist takeover of local life have rocked an order that once seemed immutable. For centuries, the communities who inhabited this mountainous but fertile area had found their way by coexisting side by side, with group distinctions being preserved by a strong religious conservatism. The low-intensity unrest which appeared in the wake of the “democratic revolution” in the 1990s was followed after 2001 by a sudden outburst of violence when the Maoist guerrilla and the royal army clashed in the vicinity of Temma. Until the 2005 cease-fire, permanent insecurity and distrust fuelled by the infiltration of Maoists and government informants provoked intense anxiety in village society, with severe repercussions on the religious life of communities, moreover disturbed by the “People’s government’s” constant interference. The spreading of new forms of religiosity, especially among the Rais and the Magars, including the astonishing popularity of the cult of Goddess Baghawati, reflects a protest against violence on both sides and a long-term transformation of religious conceptions.

Background

A multi-community society:

Temma, in the heart of the Rai country, is a village of 4,000 inhabitants far off the beaten track where hamlets rise in tiers at an altitude of 1,000 to 2,000 metres. Premature overpopulation and intense land fragmentation have prompted a massive rural exodus since the end of the 1970s. Demographic pressure was eased somewhat by the enrolment of the Rais

¹⁷⁸ The fieldwork research was financed by the ANR programme coordinated by M. Lecomte-Tilouine and the article is an expanded version of an exposé given at a workshop on the “Nepalese People’s War” held in Villejuif, July 15-17, 2008.

and the Magars in the British and Indian armies, by Brahman-Chetris moving to urban areas and their more recent emigration to the Middle East, opening Temma up to the world and providing expatriate families with decent living conditions.

As is often the case in Khotang, Temma is a multi-community society: the indigenous Chamling Rais represent approximately 40 per cent of the population, the Magars 25 per cent, the Chetris 20 per cent, the Brahmins 5 per cent and Dalits 10 per cent. Although the Indo-Nepalese, and no doubt the Magars, settled there at the latest in the early 19th century, only the Chamling Rais, for largely religious reasons, claim to be native to the region. They see the “latecomers” as guests, strangers to the land, the deities and the world of the ancestors.

Relations between communities are governed by rules laid down to prevent conflict: avoidance is the first one; the second one is a tacit compromise, which gives the Chamling Rais, allied with the Magars, exclusive local power from which the Indo Nepalese are excluded despite their demographic weight and land wealth.

All things considered, the communities live peacefully side by side. The Chamling Rais are the “masters of the country”. The land issue, a sensitive one in the middle of the 20th century, lost its edge in the 1980s when the Brahman-Chetris, torn by family quarrels, started to sell their land. The ethnic flames stoked by Kiranti nationalists barely made a ripple. However, manifestations of jealousy between neighbours as well as family squabbles, among members of a particular community rather than among different communities, are incessant, including in the Rai and Magar families, which have been destabilised by emigration and alcoholism. On the whole, the patriarchal family order, the patrons-clients order and the religious order in the communities were already showing cracks by the time the Maoists burst onto the scene in Khotang.

The establishment of the Maoist order

Maoism has no roots in Khotang, even though a handful of professional revolutionaries, essentially Brahmin-Chetris and Newars, prepared the ground for it in the late 1990s. In addition, the *Maobadi* had to reckon with competition from the *Khumbuwan Mukti Morcha* (Khumbuwan Liberation Movement) militia, who preached ethnic arguments against the Indo-Nepalese and whose bloody deeds contrasted with the Maoists’ “restrained violence”.

The army’s sudden engagement in Solukhumbu and Udayapur following the declaration of a state of emergency on 26th November 2001 prompted Maoist and Khumbuwan groups to take refuge in Khotang. The

Kiranti nationalists yielded to the Communist leadership, which proceeded with the forced merger of the Khumbuwan and Limbuwan movements into “*Kirant Rastriya Mukti Morcha*”, which it controlled.

The “People’s War in Khotang” was a low-intensity conflict, neither really civil nor really military. It claimed few victims (possibly 150 in all) since the protagonists targeted their attacks. However, the “battle of Dandagaun”, a violent clash between the royal army and the guerrilla a few kilometres from Temma, when 7 seven young Maoist female combatants were killed (after having been raped by soldiers, so local rumour reports) proved to be a durable trauma for the neighbourhood. The soldiers took advantage of the often-petty disputes that divided village society in attempts to identify and eliminate the Maoist cadres. The *Maobadi*, aware of their weakness, tried not to recklessly alienate the populations, but were ruthless when it came to informers, real or suspected. All in all, although the *Maobadi* managed to keep control of the region, many of their commanding officers, whose idealism and discipline were well respected, fell as “martyrs”. They were replaced by new recruits, Khumbuwan activists, villagers with scores to settle and Dalits hoping to have a say in the decisions, and about whom there were mixed feelings.

The villagers ultimately became the main victims of the Maoist order and the army’s repeated “blunders”, as each of the protagonists sought to terrorise their few overt opponents and intimidate the many undecided. The villagers’ exaggerated and oft-repeated tales of each side’s brutality spread far and wide, fuelling the people’s sense of moral anguish and constant insecurity, sometimes out of all proportion to the facts. In this regard, the violence was primarily psychological.

Although they controlled the territory, the Maoists were never strong enough to make Khotang a showcase for the new order. Hiding out in the forests with their minds mainly on survival and military action, the *Maobadi* relied on notables they had appointed to handle the everyday running of the district. Although the Maoists were only seen occasionally in villages, and their “forays” were sudden and random, they instilled enough fear to establish certain ground rules hinting at the shape of future society, yet they did not endeavour to set in motion a revolutionary dynamic or to launch a “cultural revolution” in this region. However, they attached a great deal of importance to the establishment of a social and “moral order”, which was not without its repercussions on religious practices.

Religions on the Move

Before addressing the upheavals that have affected the inhabitants of Temma, it is worth giving a broad outline of religious life in the region through to the mid-1990s.

The Hinduism practised by the Brahman-Chetris was scrupulously orthodox with a ritualism devoid of spirituality, characteristics fairly typical of a community cut off from the Indian world. Right from childhood were imposed demands of “purity”, which restricted contact with the other groups and prohibited sexual relations outside of the person’s own caste. Panchayati State education, with its ideals regarding equality and principles of coeducation, shook this dour Hinduism. Although the older generation continued to view the world in traditional terms, young people had more doubts about the soundness of the castes’ biases; however, few of them turned their backs on the education that had been instilled in them. The Brahmin *Purohits*, the guardians of tradition, prompted more annoyance than respect, yet the Brahmin-Chetris and certain Magars continued to call on their services for family ceremonies.

The Chamling Rais harboured mute hostility towards this Hinduism that had relegated them to an inferior position in the caste system. The Rai religion consists essentially in their worship of the ancestor spirits dwelling in the home, a sacred place and sanctuary of lineage, their reciting of the *Muddhum*, a mythological tale of the origins of the Rai people, and huge festivals in honour of the local Temma deity, Sakela; otherwise, the deities’ pantheon and other religious beliefs are somewhat vague and seem to vary depending on the places and individuals. Despite an apparent new lease of life due to the resurgence of the Kiranti identity, the Rais’ religion also bore signs of fragility: centred around the land and ancestors, it found it hard to withstand the uprooting caused by massive rural exodus. The “vocation crisis” impacting on the number of new Shamans, whose healing talents were losing currency, was a sign of the detachment of the younger generations.

Although some Magars observed certain Hindu rites, partly for reasons of social prestige, the others cultivated a sort of religious indifference that contrasted with Hindu and Kiranti ritualism.

The Dalits’ religion is based on Hinduism and they worship the same deities but they have their own incumbents. Among various petty humiliations, their low position results in a ban on their entering the home of a Chamling Rai, Brahman, Chetri or Magar, regarded (but only for them) as a sacred space in its entirety, or on sharing their meals with

them¹⁷⁹. The Dalits nurture a certain resentment of religions that endorse these snubs, but the other groups show a total lack of interest in the feelings of the “untouchables”.

Up until 1995, Temma’s religious landscape was set in stone. Huddled in their traditionalism, the communities developed an instinctive distrust of non-conformist religious movements and spiritualities, especially when they bore a resemblance to Hindu mysticism and Tantrism, promptly equated with “witchcraft”. However, things then gradually started to change.

Firstly, both Hindu and Kiranti followers, both for spiritual and material reasons, started to become allergic to blood sacrifices, which were a key component of Temma’s religions. At the same time, in 1995, individuals started building small temples, or chapels, which replaced the traditional “sacred places”. Initially, these were ex-votos by expatriates, but in 2002, when fighting between the army and the *Maobadi* brought bloodshed to Temma, these propitiatory acts combined with plant offerings acted as “substitution sacrifices” bearing a message of peace and of condemnation of the blood shed from both parties.¹⁸⁰

Secondly, up until the 1990s, the two Hindu and Kiranti religions had remained largely impervious to one another: the Rai faith, because of its lineage-based and actual ethnic nature, was essentially exclusive; and the Hindu faith due to its purity requirements was incompatible with drinking alcohol and sacrificing pigs and cattle. However, the way had long been paved for reconciliation by the religious assimilation of the Rais recruited as Gurkhas in the British and especially Indian armies. Yet the

¹⁷⁹ In this respect, their situation is very specific: a Rai or a Magar can enter the house of a Brahman or Chetri during any ritual (except for funerals) and be invited for a meal provided he keeps his distance with the sacred areas; similarly, a Brahman, a Chetri or a Magar will readily be invited to a Rai house and to attend a religious ritual from a corner of the room, but he shall abstain from coming close to the sacred hearth and jars. Conversely, a Dalit is “living pollution” who is not supposed to know what happens inside a Rai, a Magar, or a Brahman-Chetri’s house and who is practically never in his life offered the opportunity of entering any home other than a fellow Dalit’s house.

¹⁸⁰ This substitution sacrifice takes the form of the offering of a cucumber, pumpkin, yam or lemon decorated with horns, legs, and tails (made of small pieces of wood or vegetal), reminiscent of what was originally an animal sacrifice. The offering is adorned, “beheaded”, and thrown in the “sacred place”, now a garden full of flowers. This substitution sacrifice appeared here and there in the 1990s in circumstances which call for clarification. It gained popularity ten years later and found explanations linked to a refusal of violence, with the spread of the Bhagawatis and Sai Baba cults, and the trauma resulting from the “People’s War” in Khotang .

religiousness of these atypical characters was too discreet for them to incur their community's wrath. Although the attraction felt by some Rais and Magars to an ascetic and spiritualistic form of Hinduism, which we will come back to later, was not unprecedented in eastern Nepal, it was new in Temma. The individuals in question, keeping their distance from the Brahmin *Purohits*, passed themselves off as "non-conformists" taking on the originality of practices deemed edifying, but unorthodox, by both the members of their community and the Brahman-Chetris.

With the arrival of Maoists in the village, they became groundbreakers.

Maoists and Religion

Do the Maoists have a religious policy? Marie Lecomte-Tilouine's studies of Deurali, a Maoist showcase village in one of their strongholds in western Nepal, would seem to suggest so. The temples have been closed, religious festivals banned and family-based religions driven underground. These manifestations of an antireligious and anticlerical policy are symptomatic of the order of things. Firstly, the principle of the forced unification and modernisation of the country underlying the *Maobadi* ideology, and the totalitarian and atheistic aspect of their vision of the world rule out any sympathy for traditional religious practices, whether Hindu or indigenous. Secondly, the abolition of the caste system, not only in terms of legislation but also of reality, that the Maoists advocate is corollary to the secularisation of the State and society¹⁸¹ and in the end, if not to dominant Hinduism, at least to the discriminatory behaviour it imposes.

Yet Deurali is a harbinger of the extreme situation in which the Maoists, in a position of strength, could fully implement their programme. In Khotang, where their safety depended on the more or less coerced consent of villagers, their religious policy has been harder to make out. Religion as such was not targeted. The Maoist religion, the "messianism of the new man" with its chants, rituals and cult of martyrs practised in their secret hideouts, managed to put up with the ongoing existence of domestic religions. Moreover, the first local Maoist leaders, often young, university-educated Brahmin-Chetris, largely indifferent to religion, but marked by their Brahminic education, had no instinctive hatred of Hindu or Kiranti religions. They probably nurtured the half-fatalistic, half-amused indifference with which young people view the old ideas to which their parents cling and which the new era will end up sweeping away, except on one, admittedly crucial point: the equality of treatment that the

¹⁸¹ Albeit an ambition largely shared in Nepal.

Dalits were supposed to be granted. The Khumbuwan militia were quite a different story. After pressing the Party to ban the teaching of Sanskrit in state schools, they inveighed against Hinduism, as they say, supposedly “embodied by the Brahmin traitors, the inveterate henchmen of a fratricidal king.”

The hard core of this “moral order” took the form of the prohibition of alcohol, massive buffalo slaughtering and, in general, a ban on extravagant spending on major community festivals and family celebrations, along with a ban on sexual relations out of wedlock. This satisfied a number of aims: “revolutionary austerity”, mobilisation of supplies for the People’s Army, egalitarianism imposed on a village society where differences in wealth were displayed mainly by ostentatious spending on weddings, hostility to community festivals that divided a society that the *Maobadi* intended to unify, and the pursuit of a symbolic break with the old order. Yet the Maoists could not ignore the religious implications of these measures, whose logical upshot was to relegate to the private sphere a religion now confined to family worship. So they marked their irritation at the sounding of the conches in certain Hindu rituals, a little like the French anticlericals tried to have bell ringing banned following the separation of the church and the State in 1905. In Khotang, however, the Maoists did not go so far as to proscribe the major festivals, *Dashain* for the Indo-Nepalese and *Sakela* for the Chamling Rais (which attracted tens of thousands of Rais to Temma every year for impressive drinking binges), although no one actually felt like celebrating from 2002 to 2005. So the celebrations took place in a joyless, restrained atmosphere (especially in terms of drink). However, following the signing of the peace agreement in 2006, the Maoists and the government accepted to lift all measures that might bridle jubilation. These festive ceremonies resumed as before in Temma, although tinged with a new cost-consciousness and, as regards *Sakela*, a relative sobriety in terms of the amount of alcohol imbibed.

Yet austerity did not directly undermine the domestic rituals, the Indo-Nepalese insistence on purity or the lineage cult of the Chamling Rais, and villagers generally supported it since, although no one dared admit it, these compulsory and ostentatious expenses were hard to bear.

Brahmanic Hinduism in the Line of Fire

As regards the astrologer-*Pundits* and Brahmin *Purohits*, the restrictions were enforced more strictly if not harassingly.

Although the Maoists put up with readings of the Vedas and Mantra recitations, they quickly became irritated with the interminable wedding rituals, the lighting of the sacred fire and the “*homadi*” sacrifices that

accompanied it for seven days. They curtly announced, as villagers could hear it on the local radio during the war years, “that they had had enough of these huge, expensive “*saptaha purana*” rituals that were an insult to human understanding, but whose hidden diabolical meaning did not escape them (sic).” “It was absurd to burn tons of food (sic) when it was in short supply and people were hungry. As of now, the *Purohits* would be banned from throwing mixed grains of rice and wheat and clarified butter in the fire, and those who disobeyed this order would be treated as social criminals (*samajik aparadhi*).”

In Okhre, a Maoist stronghold, an old Brahmin *Pundit* persisted in conducting the Vedic rituals in the traditional manner. The Maoists, the Khumbuwan militia in this particular case, summoned all the eminent Brahmins from the neighbouring region along with the people of the village. The *Pundit* was ordered to circle his house carrying a piglet, an impure animal if ever there was one, on his shoulders. He only complied after the other Brahmin convinced him to obey, otherwise the *Maobadi* would have put him to death. He had to go round the house seven times in public (*sapta griha pradakshina*, a sardonic parody of one of the sacred rituals of Brahmanic Hinduism) in front of the open-mouthed spectators, following which the pig was let loose in his home, slaughtered, eviscerated and cooked in his hearth whereupon the Maoists feasted on it in the company of the village untouchables.

The maliciousness shown by certain Maoists when it came to some, but not all, traditional aspects of Brahmanic Hinduism was also manifest at the Temple of Baraha Pokhari in southern Khotang. This is a “holy place” more than a monumental shrine frequented by the Kiranti people and by the Indo-Nepalese where, after a long period of coexistence, the two types of religion have ended up intermingling without totally merging.

The family of incumbents who has watched over the shrine from generation to generation found itself, for the first time ever, in trouble with the *Maobadi* when they turned up without warning at first prayer in the early morning and were indignant at the obscurantist and counterrevolutionary attitude of those who insisted on barring the Dalits from entering the temple. The Maoists (Khumbuwan it would appear) told the son “to finish his prayer since the moment of sacrifice was nigh”. Then they seized the 14-year-old boy, tied him up and aped sham preparations for a sacrifice saying to him, “You’re going to become a God too, we’re going to cut your head off and spray the shrine altars and sacred stones with your blood.” His parents pleaded with the sacrificers that the child had done no harm, that he had not been warned and that he had not been given the three chances that Maoist justice gives anyone who wishes to make amends. Suddenly, out of the Maoist ranks, a female Chetri “commander” who seemed to be in charge adopted a harsh tone and

berated the family of incumbents, informing them that, “As of today, the temple was open to everyone, including the *Dalits*.” The group then disappeared as suddenly as they had come.

The incumbents remain traumatised by the intrusion of the *Maobadi*. Although the theatricality combined with a certain black sense of humour and the blasphemous parody of the Brahmanic rituals bear the mark of the Khumbuwan militia, the hypothesis whereby roles were shared between them and the Chetri Maoist commander, who stepped in “in the nick of time” to save the child, appears to have totally escaped the person reporting the incident to me. Yet one cannot rule out the possibility of a didactic will driving the *Maobadi* to sometimes tolerate cruel jokes that we have reason to believe are premeditated: the small number of people executed by the Maoists compared with those who have been publicly and horribly humiliated clearly points in this direction.

After this, the *Maobadi* gave the temple more slack in the running of its affairs. They blocked the reconstruction of a shrine using government funds (“Waste!”), but they let the incumbent make the necessary repairs, collect rent on the land surrounding the shrine and sell the sacrificed pigeons: “Neither will we prevent you from worshipping your gods and goddesses. All we ask is that you respect Party orders about the Dalits, that you don’t waste money and that you don’t blow your conch.”¹⁸² The rest is your business.”

The Maoists, so concerned about saving money when it came to major community festivals and Brahmanic rituals, do not seem to have sought to take to task the Kiranti Shamans whose spiritual practices include slaughtering animals. Maybe the Maoists felt that paying the therapist was part of the treatment, or maybe they were less concerned about sparing the livestock than saving the grain, their staple diet, which they tapped without any qualms. Maybe the Khumbuwan activists and then the young Rais, who joined the Maoist ranks en masse in 2003-2004, felt less antagonistic towards the *Bijuwa* Shamans, whose healing talents gave them a social utility, than towards the Brahmin *Pundits* and *Purohits* whose airs and graces and hardnosed, money-grabbing attitude fuel an anticlericalism that extends beyond the bounds of the Kiranti community.

¹⁸² Maoist officials have forbidden conch blowing in any Brahmanic rite, including when they were performed in temples. They have also banned the music traditionally performed by the Damais (caste of tailors-musicians) during marriage ceremonies. It is rather difficult to ascertain what hurts the Maoists more; the conch and music instruments, the noise, the religious rituals which go together, or the large festive gatherings (religious or family ones) they do not control, allowing the army’s informants to travel unnoticed in the area. The villagers I talked with are systematically inclined to underline the suspicious tendencies of the Maoists while underrating their religious and ideological aims and biases.

The All-Important “Dalit” Question

Abuse of religious sensibilities took on another form when on the part of the untouchables. It was deceitful and quite frankly seen as “underhand” by their victims, not only Brahman-Chetris, but also and above all, Chamling Rais.

The Maoists dictated to an unprepared village society that the Dalits be granted equal treatment. This measure raised no particular problem when it was limited to public life, especially to the participation of untouchables in the “People’s governments”. It did not call for any change in everyday behaviour, with the thresholds of the Brahman-Chetri, Chamling Rai and Magar homes, the shrines of domestic worship, and the sharing of meals remaining barred to the Dalits. They felt extremely resentful about this even though the replacement of the first Maoists, who fell in combat between 2001 and 2005, saw them entering the Party en masse.

Despite the outward appearance of advancement, it was still socially and psychologically impossible for many Dalits to make themselves heard in their own villages with their caste identity. So they took to the road with the Maoist groups to start a new life in villages far away where no one knew them. With a deceptive anonymity afforded them by a choice of pseudonym, but betrayed by their mix of audacity and timidity, these untouchables ended up imposing their company on those who did not want it. As a Kami (blacksmith) from my village, whom I met by chance in Diktel explained, “I want to eat with Brahmins because, by sharing their meal, I become a Brahman myself, or they become Dalits like me: it’s by sitting at the same table and being under the same roof that we are really equal, that we all become the same ...”

Abruptly imposed on village society, the Maoist policy has driven the Dalits to hide their identity more intently, or to assume the identity of high-caste individuals, than change it or to win recognition as such. Their penchant for seeking the company of high-caste members has exposed the Dalits to the risk of making a faux pas. In the village of Mattim, a young female Maoist who was a stranger to the area pretended she was a Brahmin from the Paudel clan, yet drew attention to herself by behaving rather strangely. She would walk uninvited into a Brahman’s home without so much as a by your leave, sit herself down without respecting the protocol for guests of a Brahman family (assuming they are Brahman themselves), fiddle with the home worship altar (*diya ghar*), a holy place if ever there was one, go up to the sacred hearth (*chulo*), off-handedly finger everything and, to crown it all, tuck into the family’s food. It did not take long for her unfortunate hosts to find out she was a Damai (tailor) from Solukhumbu. As one of my Chetri neighbours explained (perhaps with a

touch of malice...): “You cannot become a Brahman overnight. You become a Brahman after a long, hard education”, which the young *Maobadi* clearly lacked ... Her victims, while frantically scrubbing the crockery after each of her visits, divulged that several months earlier, a bunch of Maoists, mostly untouchables, had moved into their house: “They touched everything, they cooked the rice, everything is polluted, everything is impure. Now we don’t ask as many questions as we used to. The Maoists wanted it that way. The problem is that all this defilement has driven the gods out of the house (*Kul*). This could be the end of our line (*bansa nash*).” As one of the Chetris I spoke to also disclosed, “There is not one single house in Khatrigaun that the untouchables have not entered. So now everyone is pure and everyone is impure.”

These Chetris, who managed to keep some distance from the obsession with purity among caste members, skilfully observed that whereas the Dalits’ intrusions into the homes of the Brahman-Chetris had rankled with them, the Chamling Rais had felt downright violated, for two reasons: “First of all, the Rais deem that this is their home, that they are the masters of the land and their houses are not hostels for any person to enter as they please. Secondly, a Rai house does not belong so much to its occupants as to their ancestors, who are perpetually present, living and invisible at the same time; it is their temple, their sanctuary, and it is out of the question for an untouchable (*achhut*) to put a foot inside ...” Rai neighbours confirmed this view: “We, the Rais, do not believe that all men are equal. On the one hand, there are the divinities of the house, our ancestors and ourselves, and on the other hand, there are all the others. The others, even the Brahmins, are all “untouchables” in the eyes of the divinities of the house. Our house belongs to our divinities, who do not accept strangers entering our homes, as long as it remains ours.”

These are words of suffering, rather than exasperation, from Rais whose home has been violated.

A Chamling notable from Jyamire, for example, was taken aback to find his house invaded by strangers who had already emptied the jar of sacred liquor placed near the fireplace (where the ancestors dwell) and were grilling maize in the sacred hearth. They were all untouchables (*achhut*) merrily riding roughshod over forbidden places. After managing to get them to leave in return for a considerable revolutionary donation, the unfortunate owner started to experience trouble sleeping and to have nightmares. His health deteriorated at an alarming rate. He called on all the Shamans for them to invoke the divinities of the house (*gharko deu*). They sacrificed some thirty chickens, ten pigs and three buffalo in vain. All the Shamans explained to him that the divinities of the house were agitated and in turmoil because the untouchables had polluted the sacred places. They wanted sacrifices, ever more sacrifices. The Rai notable, who

did not want to leave the house struck by his ancestors' wrath, was desperate: "If the gods of the house (*gharko deu*) turn away from me (*bigriyobhane*), it's the end of my lineage (*maichinung*) since I am the last surviving brother of my family."

The recent popularity of devotion to the goddess Bhagawati and guru Sai Baba could be equated with attacks on the religious traditionalism of the Chamling Rais.

Visionaries and Mystics: The Boom in New Religions

The Bhagawatis

Saktisali Bhagawati ("the All Powerful") is one of the names of Shakti whose other manifestations include Lakshmi, Durga and Kali. Legend in Temma has it that Bhagawati was incarnated in the form of a poor Brahmin's daughter, the eldest of Seven Sisters, who became divine after enduring terrible trials and tribulations: she and her sisters are the personification of suffering humanity (and, more precisely, femininity).

The new religion was born in eastern Nepal a few decades ago, growing up around a Brahmin prophetess operating in a temple in Biratnagar. Although of Shaivite persuasion, this prophetess was possessed by the Spirit of the Forest (*Jangali deu*) worshipped by the Rais and Magars of Khotang and also had a special link with Saktisali Bhagawati who spoke through her mouth. One of her Rai disciples, living not far from Temma, practised in the chapel adjoining the house where she conducted her healing activities. This visionary preached an essentially moral message, which asserted that to find good health you had to repent of your faults and have a healthy diet where vegetables replaced meat and water replaced alcohol. Her sermons fell largely on deaf ears for 25 years: the Brahman-Chetris are mainly concerned with purity and do not concern themselves with being good; and as for the Rais and the Magars, it took a political cataclysm for them to consider drinking their liquor in moderation.

In 1993, a young Rai girl from a hamlet in the Temma highlands started suffering from nightmares, terrible migraines and stomach pains. The Shamans' sacrifices were powerless to help her. The healer put the young girl on a strict diet in the Bhagawati chapel, but the treatment focused mainly on her father, a dealer in rich clothes, of dubious morals, who had accompanied her. The prophetess (apparently well informed ...) told him what the problem was: this violent and alcoholic man swindled his customers and cooked his books and then swore on his daughter's life that he was honest. The gods had taken him at his word and struck down his child, who was now possessed by the Goddess who suffered physically and spoke through her mouth. The young girl stayed one year in the house of

the healer, who instilled in her the rules of ritual purity, based on those that apply to the Brahmans but are unknown to the Rais, and a series of extremely complicated prayers. She returned home cured to a house from which alcohol, pork and blood sacrifices were now banished. Her father had had a chapel built in a garden filled with flowers. She set herself up there and started prophesising as she had been taught to do, muttering and shaking in a trance, attracting curious onlookers.

This new cult gained followers, but also stirred violent opposition. Experts on the subject, the village's two most prominent Shamans and the two most distinguished Brahman *Purohits* condemned these impostors who preyed on human gullibility and the poor villagers' abysmal ignorance. They were especially incensed about the unfair competition from the new Goddess and her preaching about the abolition of blood sacrifices, which was ruining their lucrative business, and they conspired to expel the witch. The matter was solved when the "goddess" fell in love with a young Rai who believed he was the reincarnation of Vishnu and was preparing the population for "an age of truth" (*satya yuga*) because "the end of the dark age (*Kali yuga*) was nigh". The villagers took it badly. The visionary's family sent the Goddess to the Terai, out of harm's way, and the avatar of Vishnu beat a hasty retreat.

That might have been the end of the story, but new Bhagawatis sprang up in Temma from 1993 to 2003. I have noted just six whose stories would be worth telling because they teach us so much about aspects which could be perceived as village's social pathologies. With the arrival of the Maoists, the number of goddesses spun out of control from one to three new Bhagawatis per year. In 2004, three Rai girls from mountain-top hamlets were possessed by the Goddess. One of these prophetesses, divinely inspired by a local Khotang deity, Jalapa Devi, all-powerful but usually more discreet, explained to me that the Goddess had taken control of her spirit after the battle of Dandagaun: she had witnessed the capture, rape and summary execution of young female Maoist fighters. "They haunt me, they come to me crying, I see them every day." Another of these prophetesses who lives in the district's administrative capital is often consulted by the governor, police commissioner, army officers and civil servants posted in Diktel. The most highly respected prophetess remains an old woman from a tiny fringe Chetri community in a remote mountain hamlet "Phalate" who was very popular with the *Maobadi* who would seek her blessing before going into battle. She is also the only one who is disinterested in material matters.

Since 2005, I have recorded at least 13 new Magar Bhagawatis whose ranks have been swelled by a "blacksmith" Bhagawati and four "tailors". One of them, a 40-year-old Damai believes herself to be cleaner and purer than all the other female high-caste members, from whom she now

refuses food. For her, the touchables have become untouchables. In fact, the only Chetri Bhagawati of the rich rice-growing village of Khatrigaun is not taken seriously by her neighbours, who see her as a fraud or hysteric.

Devotion to Bhagawati is female in nature with an eschatological quality marked by the onset of Kali Yuga. As one of these possessed women explained to me, "Today, man has become bad, everyone is killing each other, violence is extreme, many young girls are killed, many are raped by villains. All these girls who have suffered a violent death have risen to the heavens, which are filled with the souls of these new goddesses. A time of rebirth is coming when this violence committed by selfish men will end." The proliferation of Goddesses therefore marks the end of a world and the beginning of a new cycle. However, if the messianism of the movement cannot be hidden, this dimension, which is not personified in any religious leader, remains essentially peaceful and non-political. It acts as an oblique protest against violent behaviour whoever committed it, the Maoist, the army, more generally the males. In this respect, this messianism cannot be interpreted as counter-revolutionary since, for a majority of villagers, the soldiers were the first to bring armed violence to Khotang. It also has another side to it, which is divinatory and therapeutic. These prophetesses have taken a place left vacant by the astrologer-*pundits* at a time when fear has never run so high: tense fear in the 1990s, when Nepalese society was disrupted on so many different fronts, followed by acute fear when the fighting hit Khotang. Yet the Bhagawatis have also taken the place of the Rai and Magar Shamans, known to be as money-grabbing as the Brahman *Purohit* and whose healing talents were highly disputed. The new Goddesses have, in any case, calmed the psychosomatic disorders that appear to have affected more particularly the Rai and Magar women of Khotang.

The Sai Baba devotees

Alongside the cult of Bhagawati and the Seven Sisters, a following has grown up around the person of the guru Sai Baba, a miracle worker from Southern India whose sect has millions of followers on the sub-continent.

The Sai Baba cult was started by a Rai, a former Indian army non-commissioned officer turned devotee of Shiva and an aficionado of the mystic trance. In March 1999, he fell into a cataleptic state that lasted 36 hours. Vishnu and Shiva spoke to him and sent him back to earth with their instructions: "Sewak (servant)! you shall spread our message of peace: respect the souls, end the violence, we want no more sacrifices. You must help the men who are killing each other. Free them from their wickedness!" The holy man turned the grounds of his two beautiful houses into a heavenly garden from which alcohol, sacrifices and meat

were banished. In Sai Baba's sanctuary, where the guru's picture stands on prominent display surrounded by icons of the Indian pantheon, the former NCO relieves the ill by "absorbing their pain" with his gentleness and serene certitude.

I was told that missionaries sent by Sai Baba visited Temma in 2000, but the villagers, who are very fond of wondrous tales, did not remember much about these converts who did not work any miracles.

In 2002, as fighting was escalating in Khotang, Sai Baba took hold of the spirit of a 17-year-old schoolgirl, who started to preach peace and non-violence. In 2005, this young Rai who communicated with her guru by telepathy set up a centre in Diktel where devotees (Newars and civil servants in the main) pray, chant and dance. It is said that she has already healed 42 different illnesses afflicting 250 followers. The fact that she does it for free is decidedly not the least of these miracles ... Word also has it that, every night, after she has placed a meal at the feet of her icon, Sai Baba materialises and lies with the young prophetess. An awesome experience since the visionary has been tormented by the phallus of Shiva writhing in her belly for six months in an attempt, so they say, to come out through her mouth ... In between convulsions, the young mystic prays and meditates.

These gripping spiritual experiences were bound to attract followers. In 2004, a 15-year-old schoolgirl from the town of central Temma, daughter of a former British army Gurkha, a notorious alcoholic who believed in neither Baba nor Bhagawati, fell into a trance. She announced that Sai Baba wanted an end to the violence, the drunkenness and the gambling (*Juwa*) that was sullyng Temma. The new prophetess' father gave up his vices and in turn built a small sanctuary in a floral garden where the people of the village come every morning to make offerings, pray and sing hymns through the night, in "unforgettable bliss," I was told.

All the residents of the central hamlet of Temma, astounded at this sudden boom in Baba, Bhagawati and all manner of mystics, were convinced that Temma had become a place inhabited by the gods, a "*Devasthal*". Devotees do not know whether they are coming or going. One of them told me, "We pray to Baba in the morning and pay homage to Bhagawati who lives a hundred yards from us in the afternoon. The next day, we do it the other way round." Since the two new forms of cult are by no means incompatible, far from it. A delicately balanced harmony has grown between the Bhagawati and the Baba, who live on good terms without competing with each other. Pictures of Sai Baba (and even Jesus Christ, lost among the Hindu deities ...) often adorn a Bhagawati's chapel and icons of the Goddess decorate the Baba sanctuaries. Only the mystic's path, and the identity of the spirit that has possessed them, can identify

the divinity they are attached to. To the faithful, they are totally interchangeable and, in fact, their cults have many points in common. This is actually a sort of syncretism between a remodelled Hinduism turning its back on caste distinction and the purely formal rules of purity that have paralysed Brahmanism, and the traditional Rai religion after being purged yet retaining its key elements. The sacred hearth, the main pillar and the large holy jar remain the home of the ancestors who are just as revered as ever. However, the holy “*Mochhama*” jar is no longer filled with alcohol, but with pure water and flowers, the hearth is plastered with terracotta and cow dung, and blood sacrifices are a thing of the past.

The Maoists appear to have treated these new cults with benign indifference. Their cadres, often detached from any faith, merely observed that the Bhagawati and Baba followers were, like themselves, fighting alcoholism, rejecting expensive sacrifices and advocating simple and austere living. What is more, unlike the Brahman-Chetris and the traditionalist Rais, by welcoming the Dalits into their chapels, they were doing away with the caste hierarchies and their inherent ritual purity and replacing them with personal devotion and internal purity. Lastly, local prominent figures who had rallied to the Maoists were often followers of the Bhagawati and Baba. The Temma secondary school headmaster, a former member of the Communist Party of Nepal-UML and educated as a Marxist, became a follower of the new cults and no doubt served as a “bridge” between the new masters and followers who turned out to be willing assistants to the new *Maobadi* order. Certain Maoists’ initial amused curiosity about these strange cults sometimes even turned into affinity among the young recruits who went to see the prophetesses before embarking on battles from which they were not sure they would return.

Conversions to Christianity

Another new phenomenon is converts to Christianity, here again solely among the Chamling Rais. In 2001, a family severely shaken by the deaths of their young children and exasperated by the impotence of the Shamans who had ruined them with useless sacrifices turned their backs on the ancestral religion on the advice of a relation living in a far-off village who had converted to Christianity. To the shocked amazement of their neighbours, they threw the stones of the sacred hearth in the stream, shattered the holy “*Mochhama*” jar and repainted the house’s main pillar where the ancestors dwelled, “those demons who wanted to wipe out our line.”

The family’s repudiation caused a scandal, ultimately leading to physical and mental abuse. First of all, the family were ostracised by all

the Rais of the “*daju bhai*” clan and then by the other Chamling Rais. They were banished from “*waitung*”, the community of clans, and reduced to the rank of untouchables: no one would accept water or cooked food from them and no Rai from the same clan would even consider visiting them.

These poor folk might not have survived had it not been for the solicitude of their Magar neighbours, who were not really bothered about the fate of the dumped ancestors. In 2003, the Maoists took an interest in this family who they felt had something of a “revolutionary” attitude. Their attempt at reconciliation with the other Rais was a failure. The clan brethren could not tolerate the disgraceful way in which the ancestors had been treated and were irate about the Christian family’s lack of regard for Kiranti traditions and their obvious delight in their constant provocation.

Then five other Rai families converted to Christianity for similar reasons: children who had fallen ill and were cured by reading the Bible, and exasperation at the impotence of the Shamans who were more interested in their wallets. Although these Rai converts were not subject to the same hostility, they nonetheless form an isolated community at odds with their surrounding environment.

Conclusion

Temma’s religious landscape is now one of singular complexity. It comprises the Brahman-Chetris who, like the reed of the French fabulist La Fontaine, bend in the storm but do not break; the traditionalist Chamling Rais disrupted by the attacks on their religious sensibilities; the “non-conformist” Rais (often followed by their Magar neighbours) who have rallied to a syncretism that combines all the possible facets of spiritualistic Hinduism (ascetic, mystical and visionary) with a purged Rai religion; marginalized and somewhat zealot Christians; and Dalits who err between recognition of their dignity in classic Brahmanism and membership of remodelled Hindu cults. The Maoists, bystanders to these changes that are quite beyond them, alternate between the fundamental irreligion of their cadres, violent hostility towards the Brahmans from their Khumbuwan faction, amused benevolence towards the new cults, and their young recruits’ curiosity about their prophetic and visionary aspects.

Interpretation is tricky and calls for a great deal of caution, yet several points are worth highlighting.

Firstly, the religious upheavals, which concern mainly the Rai and Magar communities, predate the arrival of the Maoists who merely precipitated the movement. They started to appear around 1995 during the unrest prompted by the introduction of the multiparty system, but

they really gathered full momentum from 2003 to 2005 when Khotang was buffeted by the fighting.

These upheavals are part of a protracted movement, which concerns all the communities to varying extents. It includes opposition to blood sacrifices, aspirations to purged and personal forms of religious practice, and especially the questioning of the Shamans' competence. As they face competition from medicine, the Shamans are losing credibility and are now criticised for their repeated failures. The accounts of conversion often start with the "miraculous recovery" of a patient who the Shamans had been powerless to treat. Bhagawati, Sai Baba and even the Christ of the Biswashi are primarily healing powers and miracle workers.

Then there is the peculiar element in that all the new religious practices preach abstinence from alcohol and non-violence. Granted, these doctrines are in keeping with the teachings of these sects. Yet the fact that they have been taken up mainly by Rai and Magar women, seemingly more exposed to domestic violence, is significant of the social pathologies that affected these two communities. The principle of non-violence gained currency when the fighting between the army and the Maoists started to claim victims in Khotang. Here again, the women, exposed to rape, played a key role in the indirect castigation of the men's violence. The new religious practices, which confer a central role on female "mystics", sibyls and prophetesses, go hand in hand with the advancement of women in a patriarchal and sometimes misogynistic society. This should be viewed in relation to the advancement of the young Maoist women who took part in the fighting and some of whom died "martyrs".

The new religious practices reveal that Hinduism has made a mark on the Rais, as has been observed in other regions of eastern Nepal. However, nothing hinted at the extent of it in Temma before 1995 and, consequently, the fragility of the indigenous religion. Rooted exclusively in the land, the everyday tête-à-tête between the "household divinities" that inhabit each home and their descendents does not allow for uprooting and expatriation. Neither is its limited spiritual and moral content likely to satisfy all the aspirations of a population that is now fairly educated and in which the individual is tending to assert himself. Yet this Hinduism is not that of the arrogant, hard-hearted Brahmans to whom the Rais remain allergic. It is a heterodox Hinduism that rejects caste distinctions and places the emphasis more on sentimental humanism than ritual purity, a syncretism of Hindu imagery and the ancestors' creed, which continues to occupy a central place once it has been purged of its most incommensurable "primitive" elements. The formidable lineage divinities, deprived of alcohol and their victims' blood, appear to have been brought to heel. People continue to venerate them,

although, now under the protection of Bhagawati and Sai Baba, they have put these intrusive and testy ancestors gently but firmly back in their place.

However, the Christians' rough treatment of their ancestors, thrown on the rubbish heap, alienated them from the other Chamling Rais. The new Christians have no less fear than others of the malevolent power of the household divinities, but in a revolutionary gesture appreciated precisely as such by the Maoists, they launched into a spectacular act of "disobedience". They broke all family and lineage ties and threw out the potentially dangerous ancestral spirits that they had taken so much trouble to keep in their "special places": the house's central pillar, the sacred jar and the three hearth stones. Such irresponsible behaviour could not be excused. It was punished by ostracism from the community.

Yet not all the Rais have been won over by the new cults, which have found followers mainly in the mountain hamlets where Maoism also has many sympathisers. There is no obvious explanation for this. Yet whatever the case may be, whereas the Rais of the highlands have stolen a march on the Maoists' expectations by reforming their domestic religions and seem more capable of adjusting to the new times, the conservative Rais of the rice-growing villages in the valley risk clashing with the new masters should there be a crackdown on the issues concerning the treatment of Dalits, drinking alcohol and sacrifices.

Strangely enough, the traditional Brahmanic Hinduism practised in Temma appears to have been less affected, despite the humiliation of certain *Purohits* by the Maoists and the Khumbuwan militia. Like the Brahman-Chetri religion, especially their obsession with purity based more on social conformism than spirituality, the affronts were ultimately borne with resignation, as long as they were also shared by the neighbours. The high-caste members, deeply materialistic, not really given to intellectual speculation, primarily worried about what the neighbours thought, apparently with no other religious needs than those their traditional practices could already satisfy, and possibly hardened by their long and sometimes rough coexistence with the Chamling Rais weathered the storm well. Himalayan Brahmanism, this dour, but ultimately robust branch of Hinduism that, in India at least, has shown its ability to evolve, has proved to be less vulnerable than indigenous religions to the shock of modernity and violence.

What 'Really' Happened in Dullu

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

Shyam lives in Dullu, which attracted media attention for the anti-Maoist mass protest as witnessed in 2004.¹⁸³ In 2006, two years after the events, he was asked to recount what had happened at that time. Ram, a villager from a neighbouring locality, who has relatives in Dullu, and knows the place well, interviewed him. Without naming anyone in particular, I had asked Ram to record a series of interviews with some people in Dullu. It was Ram's choice to interview Shyam, whom I happen to know.¹⁸⁴ Shyam is a Kshatriya by caste, in his mid-40s, though no further details about him will be disclosed as yet, in order to protect his privacy.

This indirect method has advantages, avoiding biases introduced by the presence of a foreign anthropologist, and disadvantages, such as producing a narrative which is not always very clear. Yet, Shyam's interview presents a rare example of a villager's narrative of what happened in his locality during the People's War. Indeed, most accounts published up to now have been thoroughly rewritten and summarized, and do not portray the way in which people express their experience. I have chosen to translate it almost entirely, in order to maintain the thread of his description and the way he links the events.

In the second part, I will confront Shyam's description with the Maoist depiction of events, which were published in the weekly *Janadesh*, and with extracts of another interview with Narendra, an old pro-Maoist Brahman inhabitant of a neighbouring hamlet.

¹⁸³ A very good analysis of the various reports on Dullu can be found in Saubhagya Shah, 2008. According to the journal *Kantipur* (25 November 2004; Translated as "Mothers' Army", *Nepali Times* 223, 26 Nov-02 Dec 2004): "What had actually happened was that the security forces had killed the 'people's committee' chief Raju Bajracharya when he tried to run away from them. The rebels had forced Bajracharya to join the committee. When the rebels came to cover Raju's body with a Maoist flag, the villagers beat them up. (...) In the last two weeks, the number of anti-Maoist demonstrators has snowballed and spread across 14 VDCs. (...) On 22 November, more than 20,000 people joined the protests in Dullu. "

¹⁸⁴ People's names are fictive.

Dullu in 2000 and 2003

A collective reaction, such as the one witnessed in Dullu, was not reported elsewhere in the Nepalese hills during the revolutionary decade.¹⁸⁵ Despite its uniqueness, I became personally interested in the subject for having resided in Dullu for four weeks in 2000 and for two weeks in 2003 for my ethno-historical research. This fieldwork had already proved to me that Dullu was indeed a special place. It had formed a major political centre for almost a millennium, successively housing the capital of the Malla Empire (1100-1400) and the capital of the Kingdom of Dullu (1400-1960). It is also the centre of a religious ensemble known as the Panchakoshi, where several eternal gas flames burn in temples. These two features are essential, and the Dulals, as the inhabitants of Dullu are called, clearly express their feeling of belonging to a distinct territory, which they depict as rich and holy: they qualify Dullu as a priceless land (*amulya jagga*), and as a meritorious ground (*punya bhumi*). This qualification is shared by their neighbours, who, in addition, view the Dulals as special people, in particular for being fairer and more beautiful than others, but also for being endowed with *satya*, truth, virtue.



A Dulal boy, Dullu, April 2000, photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine

¹⁸⁵ For an overview of people's reaction towards the Maoists, including Dullu, see K. Bhattachan: 2005. The Nepalese villagers' passivity strongly contrasts with the situation in Peru, see O. Starn: 1998.

The Dulals' reaction was locally interpreted as one manifestation of this *satya*, and of the fact that "one should not tell lies in the Panchakoshi".

In 2000, when I first went to Dullu, most of the small police stations in the hilly region, which were the target of Maoist attacks, had been closed, and the policemen had been grouped together in various strategic or important places. Dullu was one of the few localities in Dailekh district to still have a police station at that time: about 50 policemen had been brought into the ancient royal palace of Dullu in the centre of the bazaar, for their own security. Prior to that, there had only been a small police station near Mathura Mai, outside the main settlement of Dullu. While the Dulals were clearly not sympathetic to the revolution in 2000, and for the most part supported the Nepali Congress, they were also angry at having the police in Dullu, and did not respect their imposed curfew.

They even demonstrated collectively against the police presence during my stay, asking for their immediate departure. At the time, they reacted to the behaviour of one particular policeman, who had seduced a local girl, promising to marry her. He had taken her to the district headquarters and had then disappeared, leaving her on her own. The day the story broke, the empty police station was set alight during the night. The next day, a protest march made up of one or two hundred people, mostly women, and led by the flag of the Nepali Congress Women's Wing, weaved its way through the bazaar and reached the royal esplanade where they shouted slogans such as "We don't need the police". That same evening, under cover of darkness, policemen suddenly fired from the palace, and claimed the next day that they had held off a Maoist attack. The villagers, for their part, were not sure whether Maoists had really come to support the local population, and had different stories to tell. Nevertheless, an old Thakuri neighbour, his face all lit up, came to chat about "the attack". He exclaimed:

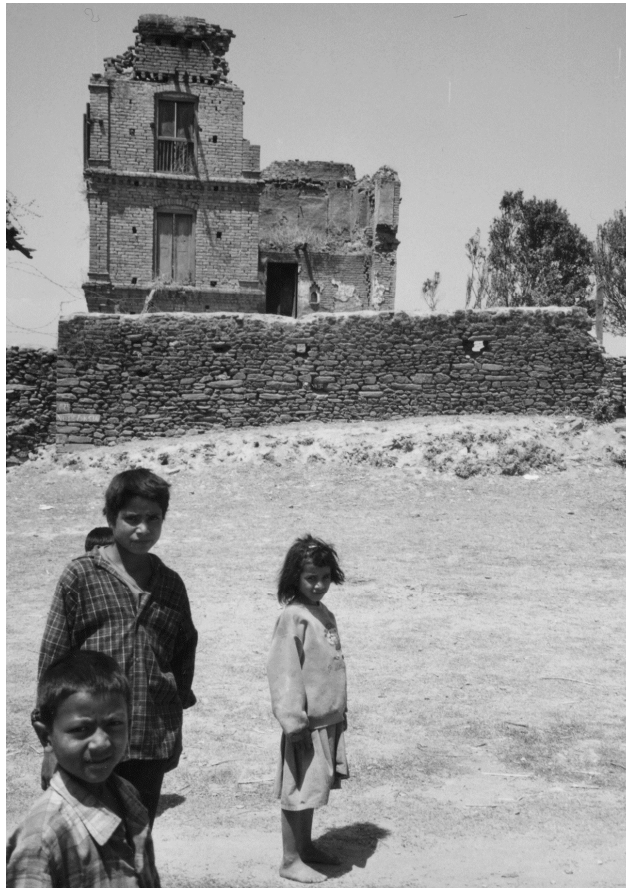
- "Did you see what it was like? Even my buffalo jumped!"

- "From fear (*darle*)?" I inquired.

- "No for joy (*khushile*)! For once, something is happening here!" he explained.

Like this Thakuri, many Dulals were excited at the idea of the Maoists at that time, as they saw in them a means of getting rid of the police presence, since the events had happened in the neighbourhood: "In Kalikot, they chased away all the policemen, the people are no problem there". The "Maoists" were seen as local youngsters who had failed their School Leaving Certificate, and were referred to in a light-hearted manner. Once on my way back from a remote shrine located at the bottom of the valley, one youth asked me for instance: "Did you come across the Maoists in the forest?" I said: "No. Well, I might have. How would I

recognise them?" His answer was simply: "They make good [i.e. shake hand instead of saluting with joined hands]".



The palace of Dullu, after its destruction by the Maoists, April 2003. Photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine.

During my next stay three years later in spring 2003, the situation had changed considerably in Dullu: the same youth greeted me with the news that his uncle had had his throat cut by the Maoists some months before. He told me how the Dulals had continued to protest about the police presence after my departure and had ended up refusing to sell them any food, thereby forcing them to regain the district headquarters and leave

the place in summer 2000. The palace¹⁸⁶ was then destroyed by the Maoists in April 2002, after its last inhabitant –a very old lady called the king's younger sister- had been told to leave. This was unanimously criticized for the building was one of the prize buildings in the locality. People's opinion was: 'Why destroy it? They could have captured it, turned it into a school or a hospital.' I thus put this question to a Dailekh District Committee member who came to inquire about my presence. No villager ventured into the room with us, yet there were many watching and listening at the windows. The cadre's answer was that it was necessary to destroy symbols of feudalism and kingship. The villagers' unusual distance was a clear sign of their fear, and the way they congratulated me for having aired their opinion was a token of their helplessness. Many shops had closed, walls were covered with huge revolutionary tags and no one dared set out along the forest paths anymore.



A Maoist meeting in Dullu in homage to martyr Sanjeev Thapa, April 2003, photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine.

¹⁸⁶ The palace had been built during the period 1980-1985 VS (1923-28) by artisans from Kathmandu.

Dullu was now engaged in another resistance struggle, this time against the Maoists, where avoidance tactics were used. During the “elections”, which the Maoists organised throughout the district of Dailekh, Dullu and the neighbouring locality of Bada Lamji were the only two places where they could not take place, since no one accepted to stand as a Maoist candidate. Yet, Maoist activists were now lording it over everyone, and came to check my passport and visa. They announced a venue, a sort of commemorative meeting to be held in Dullu.¹⁸⁷ They marched from morning to evening through the bazaar and the neighbouring hamlets shouting this through a megaphone, yet no one went to attend the meeting the next day. The Maoists had also blown up the VDC office in which the Christian “United Mission to Nepal” was housed (!), as part of their programme to get rid of the “old government” and of “foreign imperialism”. However, in 2003, some people still took the risk of carrying out secret work for UMN and continued to be paid by it for the ongoing literacy programmes. The situation worsened after a People’s government was ‘elected’ in June 2004, and led to the mass meeting in November 2004. I will now let Shyam tell us what happened in his own words.

Fire blazed within the entire population

Ram: You are from here, and we are very curious: when there was a rebellion here against the Maoists, we heard some wayward things. What is the real situation?

Shyam: The reality is that the population rebelled, after they¹⁸⁸ banned playing music. When they heard music somewhere, they would immediately turn up, encircle [the musicians] and ask them: ‘Why are you playing music?’ They acted like that.

Ram: They didn’t allow you to play music?

Shyam: No, we weren’t allowed to play any sort of music and then, within the entire population, a fire started, and that is how it came about in our village.

Ram: Which village?

¹⁸⁷ This meeting, held on April 19 2003, was a homage to Sanjeev Thapa, who was the incharge of the area where Dullu is located and member of the Dailekh District committee.

¹⁸⁸ As most people, Shyam generally uses an indefinite pronoun to refer to the Maoists.

Shyam: Sera.¹⁸⁹ First, it started when they beat up 17 people.

Ram: Who beat them?

Shyam: The Maoists. They lay down two logs, then they lay the person on it and placed another log on top of them, and then they struck this log. That's so cruel.

Ram: Why?

Shyam: It just is! At night, you sleep upstairs, you're told that someone is calling you nearby, and you're led away. Then you're asked: 'Do you know this place or not?' You say yes. So they say: 'We need to go to this place', then they beat you like I said. So, in the end, the villagers rebelled. They told each other that they should ask them why they were beating people. 'We'll die this way, but better to die in the afternoon than at night'. With this in mind, four or five hundred people gathered around the rebellious person. They [the Maoists], there were 25 or 30 of them. They are clever and there are many of them.

Ram: Were they armed?

Shyam: Only two, not many.

Ram: And where were they from?

Shyam: From neighbouring villages.

Ram: Nearby villages?

Shyam: Yes, nearby, and they gathered around. There was the area incharge, who became DCM.¹⁹⁰ People of that sort.

Ram: Some came from outside?

Shyam: No, they were not from outside. The incharges were from here, they had obtained important positions. So we asked them: 'Why did you take away 17 people in the middle of the night and beat them? What had they done wrong? Tell us'. We asked the Maoists that. What did they say? They brought out their weapons and everyone fled. Then we held secret meetings.

Ram: Just the people from your village or with others as well?

Shyam: Just the inhabitants of Sera. Only us, the others didn't know. It was secret. Only men gathered. Then, we asked one of the men who had been beaten: 'Who are those who beat you? We are going to punish them'. [He

¹⁸⁹ A fictive name.

¹⁹⁰ District Committee Member.

answered]: 'If I tell you and if they're punished, then afterwards, they'll say: 'Tell us who punished those who had carried out the beatings'. I'll only tell you when they're in front of us and when we have the opportunity to punish them'. This could not be made public.

Another day, they led another operation. What did they do? They said that high-caste people should eat food cooked by low-caste people. They went to seek a Badeni and they made her cook rice and they made the Kami-Damai eat this rice.¹⁹¹ Then the Kami-Damai cooked and 35 *dhami* appeared.¹⁹² The Bista arrived, one by one from only our village.¹⁹³ They made the Bista eat the Kami-Damais' food and the Kami-Damai eat the Badis' food. They started this operation in the Panchayat house, where there is a room: this is where the food was prepared. They said, those who are *dhami* said: 'Give us water or even tea to drink (lit. to eat, *khana*) because we do not even eat the rice cooked by our wives, and we don't feel like eating anything since we've just eaten at home before coming here'. They made this request. Then, when they [the Maoists] were about to make them [the *dhami*] eat, these 35 people started to be possessed. They put stones in their mouths, chewed on them, then spat them out, while they were possessed. Even the Maoists were surprised. Then, while in a trance, they went back to their houses.

Ram: They didn't eat?

Shyam: No, they didn't eat, they entered into a trance before eating, then they swallowed earth and stones: they showed their power (*dham viddhi*). They were frightened by the *dhami* in trance so they gave up.

Then, it started at Nepa. What did they do in Nepa? They started to make people dig the road. Everyone from each house had to dig for five

¹⁹¹ A Badeni is a woman from the Badi caste, the lowest caste in the social hierarchy. In Dullu, they make and sell clay pipes, they play music and their women dance. The latter are said to also live on prostitution, and to judge from their make-up when the police were stationed there and their normal appearance after they left, they had probably lost their main customers. The Damais are situated above the Badis: in Dullu they are tailors and musicians, like elsewhere. The Kamis, whose name is often translated by blacksmith, are locally subdivided into eight sub-castes, according to their special crafts. These include blacksmiths, but also potters, carpenters, etc. They form the highest-ranked impure caste.

¹⁹² A *dhami* is a medium who is possessed by a god or spirit. He follows more purity rules than ordinary people, so as not to offend the deity for whom he is a receptacle. In this case however, only high-caste *dhamis* reacted to the pollution.

¹⁹³ Contrary to the low castes, the Kshatriyas are not usually referred to by their caste name, but by their clan, such as Bista. This explains why this group is locally called *thari*, or clan.

days. Then they cut the long lock of hair of the *dhami* of the Masta of Pali.¹⁹⁴



The *Dhami* of the Dullu royal lineage, April 2000.
Photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine

When they cut this lock of hair, the people from five *gabisa* were there, digging the road. (...) The *dhami* was from the Mahat *jati*.¹⁹⁵ They cut his lock of hair in a cruel manner: grabbing hold of a sickle, they told him that they would also cut him, [saying]: 'If it's a man, it will hurt him; to him [the god], it won't do anything', and they struck him forcefully. Afterwards, they (came) to the place where we were digging the road, and said: 'Here it is, we've cut the *dhami*'s lock of hair'. [People said]: 'Why did they cut the *dhami*'s lock of hair? Why did they take away the *dhami*'s

¹⁹⁴ In this region, a *dhami* never cuts his lock of hair, which he keeps tied up on his head, except at the time of possession, when he unties it. The Masta are the main gods worshipped in Western Nepal. They form a group of Twelve brothers, and are distinguished by an epithet, such as Dudhe (Milky), or Dahre (Fangy). They are also identified by the name of their place of residence: here the hamlet of Pali.

¹⁹⁵ Mahat is another Kshatriya clan. As is often the case in this region, Shyam uses the term *jati* for clan, whereas in standard Nepali *jati* designates a larger social unit, such as the caste or the ethnic group.

statues? It's because there's gold and silver inside his lock of hair, that's why they cut it.' That's why we wondered why they needed this lock of hair, why they took it. 'It's for their benefit that they took it. They also took away the statues, out of cupidity (*lobhle*)'. After this event, the people who were digging the road started talking [to the Maoists]: 'Why did you cut Masta *dhami*'s lock of hair? What benefit did you get from it? What did the *dhami* do to harm the Party?' so people asked. And then we learned that those who had cut the hair were in such and such a place. So some people went there, kicked them, tied their hands behind their back and took away these Maoists, these cutters of locks of hair. There were three of them. They took them away and asked them where they had put the lock of hair and the statues. 'We've hidden them', they said -they were from this *dhami*'s village. Then they beat them up, and as their hands were tied, they fell. The area incharge was Darshan: as he was a Bahun, he was also educated. What did he say? 'Those who came to dig the road should not speak. If they speak, I'll cut them into three pieces, he said, seizing a sickle, and I'll make them drink their blood'. Saying that he hit someone, and he was hit too.

Ram: He was hit?

Shyam: Yes, M. B. Kami hit him, M. B. cut him, he cut him in return. Then others started: 'We don't know who was fighting: it became so bad' and then they all fled. Afterwards [the incharge] tried to take action against the instigators and he forbade playing music and worshipping the gods. But it was the time to worship the gods, and there was a Kami *dhami*. He came with a crowd to the top of the hill accompanied by all the instruments they were playing loudly. The Maoists tried to stop them, but they had come with all the other villagers. There was such a crowd! And they [the Maoists], there were only 25 or 30 of them. Then it was a question of demonstrating one's power (*shakti dhekhaune*¹⁹⁶). This *dhami* pointed to a one-year-old buffalo and told the Maoists: 'I'll pick it up with my teeth, come and see my power', and he lifted up the buffalo with his teeth, for at least five minutes, and on seeing this, they were surprised. He also drank the buffalo's blood. This *dhami* is our Bhairav, of Nepa.

The army then came from Dailekh. On hearing this, a *vajasa*¹⁹⁷, Raju Shrestha from Dullu, entered a few houses, and then ran away, very fast.

¹⁹⁶ Lit. To show power. The verb *dekhaunu* is pronounced and written with an aspirated d in Western Nepal.

¹⁹⁷ *Vajasa* is an abbreviation of *vard jana sarkar* (Ward People's Government): the person was the principal (*pramukh*) of a ward, i.e. a subdivision of the Village People's Government.

The situation then became very nasty. The soldiers were shouting: 'Don't run away, don't run, we'll kill you'.

Ram: Why did he run away?

Shyam: From fear of the army. This Shrestha was *vajasa* for the Maoists, he ran away and they shot him in the back, and killed him. The army said: 'We've put a bomb there, so no one must go there.' And they went away. There was a corpse: they had lied. They had buried this corpse and gone away, so there was no bomb. But no one could go and take the corpse. The Maoists didn't go either. Then all the population went, [saying], 'if one must die, we'll die'; they unearthed the corpse and took it away, saying, 'we shall dispose of it in Nabhisthan'.¹⁹⁸ They took the corpse to his home, saying, 'we must also play music', and they played music.

Ram: It hadn't started decomposing?

Shyam: No, all this happened within the same day. They had just covered him, with a handful of earth. Then we took the body [to Nabhisthan cremation place], we lifted him up, and as soon as a Maoist declared: 'He must be covered with the flag of his party and music shall not be played', he was beaten up. And the one who beat him said, 'Why would he need one? He died running away'. Then, we took the corpse away and burnt it on a pile at Nabhisthan, and we came back. The next day, the demonstration started.

'These Maoists who fabricate Maoists do not know how to protect them, they only kill sons', we started [to say] and the protest started. Everyone from all the villages was angry, and we said: 'We should also be allowed to play Bhoosi in the village'. Starting on the day of Tikadasi,¹⁹⁹ all the villages from the top to the bottom (of the valley) played Bhoosi.²⁰⁰ Each village in turn played Bhoosi and then a demonstration started in thirteen *gabisa*, starting on the new moon. What happened? In these thirteen *gabisa*, music was played here, there and everywhere. There were slogans, there were processions: 'We don't need Maoists, don't let them kill people. We want peace in the country'. Then all the journalists came, and then it went to the very top: Pyar Jang Thapa, the first general, came; ministers came: it drew a big crowd. And the government gave 30 million

¹⁹⁸ This holy place, 'The place of the navel' is located at the bottom of the Dullu hill. It contains two eternal gas flames venerated as *Jvala Mai*, Flame Mother. The corpses of all the inhabitants of Dullu bazaar are cremated there, and their pyres are lit with the holy flame. On the ritual organization of the panchakoshi and the Dullu kingdom, see Lecomte-Tilouine, forthcoming a.

¹⁹⁹ The 10th day of the festival of Dasain.

²⁰⁰ The Bhoosi or Bhoosi songs are licentious songs especially sung during Tihar.

rupees for the development of Dullu. The police came, the army came and all the offices were occupied. Now it works like that.

Ram: What about the temples?

Shyam: They had closed the five holy places.²⁰¹ The abbot of Dungeshwar²⁰² went and took the lock off the door so they beat him. So the population came and opened the temple and everyone, together with the abbot, started to perform their worship, *puja*. We said: 'there are 250 of them, we should not go'.

Ram: 250 what?

Shyam: Maoists. At that time it was the red army that came, saying that there was a revolt; so the procession stopped. 'Shall we go back or what?' we ask ourselves, but some one said: 'We're not going back, we're not going to fight anybody. We have no weapons, no knives, no sticks even. Does anyone have one? No. We shall all go. If the Maoists ask questions, we'll answer them. If they don't do anything, we'll do the rituals and open the temple door, then we'll go.' We said, 'If it's to be so, we shall go' and then they came to us and the one [who convinced us to go] told them: 'You should not kill anyone; if you need to kill some one, kill me. I am the one who started this procession. I bring these people only to make rituals because rituals at this temple have been forbidden. If it's a mistake, if we must die, only I must die, no one else, because I brought them. If we haven't made a mistake, you should let us go safely. We came with empty hands to fight you. Look in our pockets, we don't even have any knives. You, you have weapons, those who fight you have weapons, we are the people', he said, and they answered, 'All right then, go'.

Shyam: We were more than 250, and there were also people from Chadung. Altogether there were four or five hundred of us. We circumambulated the temple, we offered flower necklaces and we broke the lock and opened the door, and they did not close it again. Only 30 or 32 Maoists came. But when they heard drums played from the top, they fled: at the time, when they heard drumming, they became mad. Here we made peace on our own.

²⁰¹ *Panch asthan*, the five holy places, refers to the five main temples of the Panchakoshi religious area located in Dullu. Its epicentre was the palace of Dullu and the Throne of Dharmaraj located next to it. When the palace was destroyed, people considerably enlarged the throne, and placed the gods of the palace in a small house which they constructed at the side of the throne.

²⁰² Dungeshwar is the southernmost temple of the Panchakoshi. Its abbot, *mahant*, is a Sannyasi, while the fire temples are kept by Nath Yogis.



**The temple of Dungeshwar in 2003, opened by 'the people'.
photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine.**

Ram: What about the woman who was beaten and the people who went to Dailekh then on to Kathmandu?

Shyam: She was Khadka's daughter and Bhandari's spouse. She was caught, they abducted her.

Ram: Why?

Shyam: They accused her: 'You made the protest' and they took her away, for four or five days. They took her to Parajul. As to beating her, yes they beat her, then released her.

Ram: Some say their behaviour is immoral.

Shyam: Maybe that is so. As they took her away, we have our doubts. But the woman didn't say anything. She also said nothing because of her honour. She recounted other acts of violence. Maybe this woman will speak later.

Ram: What did she say?

Shyam: [She said]: 'They caught me and they beat me and they led me to the place named Parajul'. There, there was another woman. It seems that this Maoist woman said: 'We shall cut her legs and arms.' Then, she told

her: 'You too are a woman, me too I am a woman, do you understand? In saying 'let's cut her legs and arms', you have no honour. I'm a woman, don't make such a fuss, don't speak. If you have to kill me, kill me. What can I do? You are not using woman's words. I prefer men to speak to me. What you said are not woman's words, but demoness' ones (*rakshesheni*). You're not going to eat my flesh, are you? Do woman's things, it's up to men to kill me, to cut me up. The government is not going to come here, the King is not coming, no one is coming. I'm at your mercy, you can eat my flesh. You can cut me into pieces and throw them away.' She said all of this to them and they kept her for a day or two, then released her. She says: 'They hit me on the head and it hurts me. At times, my brain does not work'. They beat her hard.

The one called Deviram, they killed him. How did they kill him? When Kritiniddhi Bista and Tulsi Giri's government fell, they made an alliance with the seven parties and they stopped staying in the villages: it is then that they killed him.

Ram: Why?

Shyam: The one named Deviram Khadka was one of them, a Maoist, and then he surrendered. Then, he set up his own business. He was straight and completely honest. He had been forced to enrol and then he quit. He was having a house built: the workmen had finished the walls and had left. He was covering the walls when they killed him with three pistol shots. They killed him like that, so cruelly, and they broke a Thapa's leg.

Ram: And where is he now?

Shyam: A doctor treated him, he is in Dailekh.

Ram: He hasn't come back?

Shyam: No.

Ram: Isn't he allowed to?

Shyam: No, there is no problem, peace now reigns. Now, if we want to give money, they take it. But if we don't give when they ask, they don't do anything.

Ram: What about the rituals?

Shyam: Weddings (*barat*) are just like before. As for funerary rituals, we had resumed those earlier, with the protest movement. [Before that], if they met people performing funerary rituals, they used to take away all the money that had been collected.

Ram: Why? What did they say?

Shyam: 'Why forbid it?' One day I asked the principal of the district. This man let me speak freely (*bolna free diyo*). They have this rule of letting people who can make suggestions speak freely, as if they wanted to know what we have to say. (...) He said: 'Speak frankly'. 'All right, what should I say? I'm not such a competent person, I'm not learned, I'm an ordinary person', I replied. 'Still, you can speak. Come on, you should start: are you a believer (*nastik*) or an atheist (*astik*)?' I answered, 'I'm a believer, what about you? What are you?' He said: 'I'm an atheist. You worship the sun as a god, the moon, the water that flows, the earth; it is strange to worship stones as gods.' I answered: 'We must worship them a lot'. He asked me: 'How can you worship Krishna, that pig that sleeps with all women? How can you worship Shiva, that addicted yogi?' I answered: 'I will explain one thing after another. The earth, to feed us, makes grain, trees and all the vegetation grow: it's a power (*shakti*).' He asked: 'What kind of power?' I said: 'Put seeds somewhere, cucumber seeds, pumpkin seeds, they will germinate: this is a form of power without which we would not survive. We worship this power. (...) Why worship Shiva? Shiva is the most powerful. When everything was submerged, he drank the poison and kept it in his throat. How could we not worship him for such a service (*seva*)?' (...)

Then he asked: 'Do you worship Prachanda or not?' I said: 'No, we don't worship Prachanda.' He asked again: 'Why not?' and I answered: 'Prachanda has not acquired power (*shakti prapta gareko chaina*). As for us, we worship power. If you obtain power and if you rule, we will worship you.' He asked: 'What is devotion (*bhakti*)?', I answered: 'Devotion is what you do'. He said: 'What devotion did I do?', I answered: 'You left your mother, you left your spouse, your children, the land acquired by your father and grandfather. Didn't you practise austerities in this way? For whom did you practise these austerities? For Prachanda. If Prachanda is pleased with it, he makes you a member of the regional politburo. He satisfies your desire'. Then he left.

Ram: You spoke well.

The army, informants and leaders of other political parties raised women

It is not my aim to evaluate what is true or not true in *Shyam*'s narrative, but rather to investigate the episodes he selected and the various weapons of the weak which he describes. *Shyam* is not a leader or activist in any political party, he is not particularly wealthy, and he belongs to the Ksetri group, which, he says, has always been dominated by the local Thakuris. For these reasons, *Shyam* cannot be considered as one of the local feudals who organised the protest movement in Dullu, according to the Maoists.

Their depiction, as published by Chintanraj Atreya in the weekly *Janadesh*, reads: “First, the army, informants and leaders of other political parties raised women, children and disinterested peasants of Dullu and the neighbouring *gajasa*, and forced them to make protests with slogans against the Maoist activists and the People’s War. Then, they did not allow the Maoists to stay in the villages and forced all the people to go to the district headquarters, to become refugees. The royal army even forcibly led Babibta V. K. who had given birth to a child eight days before.” Atreya thus ascertains that the people’s reaction in Dullu was fully manipulated. Other elements related to the Maoists’ behaviour probably comes to his mind. Indeed he then considers the possibility that the Maoist party might have been locally infiltrated or that local activists may have not “fully understand the central policy”. He recalls this for the readers’ benefit: “The rule of the party is not to oppose the people, and its work is not to finish (*sidhyaune*) those who are opposed to it”. Yet, it is to ‘weed’ out some of them, as Atreya formulates it: “All individuals making up society are not people (*janta*); there are also animals (*jantu*). (...) These are the poisonous weeds of society, and when we are weeding, it happens sometimes that we also dig up a plant hidden among them. It is possible that it happened in Dailekh.”

Atreya firmly condemns the fact that the army forced people to participate in the protest and to the march to the headquarters. On the other hand, he ends his text by noting that the (Maoist) ‘Command in charge’ announced to the people who had left for the headquarters that they could freely come back to their homes, and comments: ‘What can be done that is more flexible, just and pro-people?’

This was apparently not sufficient for the Party, since two weeks later, the same journal *Janadesh* published a long repentance text signed by the “CPN (M), Dailekh district Committee”. Its members had composed it at a three-day meeting during which they examined “the mistakes of the party members, of the people’s governments, and of the People’s Army in the district”. They confessed: “Among our mistakes and weaknesses in our action to develop the work of the Party, there are: diffusing the slogan ‘Give one whole timer from each house’, pressurising the class of teachers and intellectuals to become whole timers, insisting that religion, culture, traditions, festivals and food, etc. be not contrary to the Marxist rules, (...), the death of the journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa during examination, the conflict with the NCP (Masal) in Dullu (...)”.

Among the quoted ‘mistakes’, Shyam was only sensitive to the religious and cultural question, which he depicted at length, whereas he did not make any allusion to the others. On this subject, the repentance text states the Party’s commitment to individual freedom, but reaffirms

that Communists are atheists and believe that “religion is the opium of the people”. The Party presents its excuses in a quite pragmatic way, specifying that one should avoid action in the religious and cultural field because “it weakens the People’s War”. The text finally lists all the acts of violence which Maoist activists were victim of in Dailekh, transforming the repentance into an accusation.

Narendra, an old Brahman from a hamlet near Dullu who was also interviewed by Ram, offers a picture in line with the two texts published in *Janadesh*:

Narendra: The Maoists were running a programme at Gairi Pipal, Dhami gaun, and the army arrived to carry out a search. When they reached Dullu, two men were walking along the path. One was a schoolteacher, the other was Raju Vajracharya, and both of them said: ‘We are just walking’. But they suspected them. If one had a bag, he was suspected at that time. The army said: ‘stop!’ The teacher stopped, but Raju Vajracarya took fright maybe, because he was a *vajasa* principal, so he jumped and fled. They fired and hit him.

Ram: Who fired?

Narendra: The Royal Army. Then they put him in a hole and covered him. They said: ‘We’ve placed a bomb, in case someone wants to take this fucking Maoist out. If so, let these Maoists sons of a bitch (*randiko chora*) go, but none of you shall go’.

On that day, no one went there. He stayed there. But the next day, his mother-in-law said: ‘My son-in-law died at 22-25 years old. If I die, what would happen? I’ll take out my son-in-law and perform a ceremony for him according to our culture’. So the mother-in-law went: with her feet tied, she dug a little of the earth covering him from above. Then she tied him with a rope, she pulled and she took him out. The villagers covered the body with a cloth, and said: ‘We’re going to organise a traditional funeral for him’, and those who were carrying bags for the Maoists (*maobadika jhola bokneharu*) arrived. They covered the body with a flag and said: ‘we should perform his funerary rituals in our own manner’. This is how the revolt started in Dullu. [The mother-in-law said:] ‘First you forcibly made a Maoist of my son (*chora*), then you should have opposed the army. We pulled him out so we’ll carry out the ceremony the way we want’. And there was a quarrel (*jhada*), which became a fight (*jhagada*), and some Maoists were beaten. To start with, it involved only 10 to 20 people. Then our Dhruva Shah, who is colonel, came by helicopter. After his arrival, it became a revolt against the Maoists. It’s the army that killed him, but it had control over his wife, mother, brother and father. And

once the family had been raised, neighbours had been taken care of, then those dominated by the Maoists, it formed a big group. Then they attracted the those from surrounding villages. It was a huge group, and they started to say: 'Those who don't come to support the demonstration are Maoists'. And so doing, the 13 *gabisa* made a committee to protest against the Maoists. Dullu rebelled, but they did not do a good job: they received 30 million rupees and fritted them away. They did nothing for the people.

Ram: Some say that the Maoists hit those who came back to their houses with sickles?

Narendra: No, all this is lies. I was also at the demonstration, and we were told to answer that if someone questioned us. And what could we do? The army came to take us to Dullu and told us that all those who didn't demonstrate were Maoists. People went, abandoning even their cows, buffaloes, and goats. In each *gabisa*, they set up a committee with a headman, and there was also a women's committee and those who were running them were bad ones (*badmasi*), who had feudal ideas (*samanta bicar*). They haven't done a good job: they squandered 30 million in only 15 months.

Ram: What did they do with it?

Narendra: It was for Dullu's development, but they kept it. There was no road between Sristhan and Nabhisthan: they made one, that's what they did with the 30 million. They've done nothing else.

Ram: People say that they beat up the priest from Nabhisthan. Why?

Narendra: It is not the leadership who did it. What I'm trying to say is that there are also bad people. Those bad people beat up not only him but also three other people. They placed a stone beneath them and struck them with an axe from above, breaking their leg bone. Now, they are disabled, but they are OK. The priest walks with a stick, in fact it is not that bad (*khas tyasto ta chaina*). We haven't seen them do that to ordinary people, only to those who were clever (*batho tatho*). Dullu benefited greatly from it, you see, it benefited enormously from it.

It is clear that Narendra feels resentment about the donation which went to Dullu and not to the surrounding localities. In many respects his depiction corroborates the *Janadesh* ones, as he presents the whole affair as mere governmental manipulation, upholding important facts to sustain

this interpretation. Unlike Shyam, who never makes distinction between the people, Narendra isolates the feudals, whom he presents as acting hand in hand with the government and the army. He is severe regarding their behaviour, while he finds excuses for the Maoists, whose ideology, he claims, does not advocate violence. Among the Maoists, he distinguishes the important and responsible actors, who are logically not involved in violence: in the quarrel about the flag on the corpse, or in the amputation of the old priest. In the first incident, Narendra refers to the Maoists' bag carriers²⁰³ (*Maobadika jhola bokneharu*), in the second one, to bad people (*badmasi*) who became Maoists. Even though he had singled them out from 'the real Maoists', Narendra also feels the need to minimize their violence –it was not that bad- and to justify it, by emphasising that the victims were not 'ordinary people', without specifying what they were exactly punished for. This accumulation of justifications reveals Narendra's political affiliation, which he expresses clearly at the end of his interview:

Ram: Were there any cases of rape?

Narendra: No, not by the Maoists. They don't do that. They don't behave badly; that's more likely to be the army during their searches. Maybe bad people became Maoists, but the Maoist thought is different: from an outside point of view, we call them all Maoists. (...) Today, Prachanda is alone in the world. With Mao Tse Tung's thought, he has made a kind of new model, called the Prachanda Path. In today's world, it's a new model.

Ram: What do you mean by new? Is it distinct (*alag*) from Mao Tse Tung's thought?

Narendra: What is it? It's an ideology (*sidhanta*) which fits in with the climate, geography and religion of Nepal. It's not that of Russia or China, or of anywhere else.

Ram: But Mao Tse Tung is the *guru*. How can one not respect the *guru's* thought but another one?

Narendra: It's not like that. The *guru* may also be wrong. Prachanda understood the Russian revolution, the Chinese one, Marx and Lenin, and who made mistakes. What were Mao's errors? Where did Marx go wrong? Where did Lenin go wrong? How did the fall of communism come about?

²⁰³ In the Dullu area, it means inferior people. Attention is drawn to one's superior status by making someone else carry one's belongings. In particular, Ksetris traditionally carry Thakuris' belongings at weddings.

He also studied the communists in Peru, and where the enemies attacked, and what their mistakes were, as well as his own weaknesses. He understood all that.'

In many aspects, Narendra's narrative uses ideas that can be found in any Maoist publication, and it is interesting to see that ordinary villagers share them. On the other hand, Shyam's perception of the events is not influenced by any ready-made political ideas circulating in printed media. We shall therefore focus on them now.

The weapons of the weak

Shyam opens his narrative by referring to music, and this element forms a leitmotiv throughout his description. He views its ban by the local Maoists as the root of the people's revolt, and later presents different forms of resistance expressed through music in Dullu. He then evokes gratuitous but selected violence, which gives rise to the first collective attempt at retaliation -though it involved only males: this failed with the victims refusing to collaborate. Shyam then shifts to another episode, during which the Maoists organise a gigantic ceremony to reverse the social order, by forcing people to eat other castes' food, starting with the bottom of the hierarchy then climbing it progressively. Here the Maoist method of introducing social equality consists in polluting everybody equally, but step by step. Indeed, a Kami who eats Badi food theoretically takes on the latter's status, and we may thus wonder why they did not simply force everyone to eat the Badeni's food altogether. Making it a gradual ceremony kept the structure of society intact, and probably rendered it altogether more forceful and more frightful for the highest-ranked people, the last to eat. As a matter of fact, it stopped suddenly when crossing the "water limit", which separates the impure and pure castes, thanks to divine intervention. The superior godly powers defied the new power holders on this occasion, and intervened to preserve the caste hierarchy, and the purity of their own occasional human bodies, the *dhamis*. The next event, which marks an escalation in people's resistance through retaliation, is again related to them. A *dhami* was attacked by three Maoists who organised his mock-sacrifice. They profaned him by cutting his sacred lock of hair, which should never be cut, and by confiscating his statues. The Maoists' aim was obviously to show that there is no godly power -or superior power-, as they announced triumphally to the crowd that they had cut the *dhami*'s lock of hair, as a sign of victory. However, the rift separating them from the villagers was apparent in the latter's interpretation, which took a completely different direction. They did not imagine any other motivation for this act than

cupidity, given that devotees offer silver and gold rings to the *dhami* to thank the god he embodies. He then ties these around his lock of hair. This signified physical violence towards the perpetrators and even against the area incharge who tried to restore the situation. In the next episode, a *dhami* then displays his supernatural powers and the villagers' solidarity with him, which announces his victory. Shyam now comes to the main event which was reportedly the source of the Dullu mass protest. His description is brief but emphasizes the villagers' refusal to have Maoist elements at funerals, and their will to have a fully traditional one, including music, as is customary in this region of Nepal. The nature of the mass movement of protest, which forms afterwards, appears as a continuation of this initial incident, as Shyam describes it as being fully musical, with thousands of villagers taking turns to maintain permanent licentious dancing and singing. In Shyam's depiction, this leads directly to bringing in journalists, generals and ministers, and finally a huge donation to Dullu. He does not mention the march to the headquarters, or the presence of the army.

Afterwards, the narrative is guided by Ram, who inquires about religion and about one last case of physical violence he had heard about. In this last part, the weapon of the weak is not divine powers or musical bravado, but speech. In three different contexts, Shyam shows that one can win with words.

The main elements emerging from Shyam's depiction are thus possession, music, and sparring matches, which have been neglected in the vast literature on the People's War, yet which deserve attention.

The power-holders' competition with the *dhamis* is not a new phenomenon in Nepal. We might even say that it is fully in keeping with a long history, which starts with the history of Western Nepal. Thus oral tradition reports that Nagi Malla, the first king of Doti (14th century), fought with the *dhami* of god Bhageshwar; that the King of Barakot lost his kingdom in the same circumstances, when he tried to hurt the *dhami* of Dahre Masta; and that the whole royal family of Achham met a deadly fate when the king refused to share his power with the *dhami*, telling him: 'there is only one throne, it's either mine or yours'²⁰⁴, and then planted tridents in the ground to wound him. During the 19th century, two other cases are documented in Bhajang and Jajarkot²⁰⁵, i.e. two areas which had kept their status as kingdom within the Kingdom of Nepal, and where

²⁰⁴ Like kings, *dhamis* sit on thrones, and are addressed in royal terms. They are recognised sovereignty over a territory and render justice. All these elements explain why they compete with the successive power holders.

²⁰⁵ On Jajarkot, see Maskarinec 1998.

there was considerable local power. The episode of Bhajang is the only one presenting the king as victorious against the *dhamis*.²⁰⁶

The events depicted by Shyam were already prefigured in stories that I had heard in Dullu in April 2003. A *dhami* of Dahre Masta of Rawatkot (a place located on the hill facing Dullu) told me at the time that some Maoists forced him to cut the neck of a goat with his teeth in front of them, in order to check if he was not fooling people. Indeed, a *dhami* possessed by this god cuts the animals with his teeth, which are supposed to grow when Dahre Masta (the Masta with fangs), takes possession of him. But he does this inside a closed temple, and then throws the bodies of the decapitated animals through a small opening in the wall, so that no one can see how the victims are put to death. The *dhami* complied, and told me: “it’s easy for me, when I’m possessed, I see a goat no bigger than a chicken!” In Dungeshwar, one of the five main Panchakoshi temples in Dullu, people told me that a total of three Maoists had profaned the temple, and that they all met their death soon after, as divine punishment. During the Tij festival in 2002, two boys entered the temple with their shoes, trampled on the flower necklaces, and ate the food offerings the women had brought. They were killed by the army soon after. Some time later, people say that a Maoist girl entered the temple while she had her menses. She then fell seriously ill, and ‘a *dhami*²⁰⁷ made her tremble. She then told it all, while she was pulling her own ears as a punishment’. She was killed by the army in Dadimari shortly afterwards.

Already in these narratives, the gods openly demonstrate their superior powers through their human embodiments. They represent the limit that the Maoists could not transcend with impunity.

A Maoist militia whom I met in Surkhet said on the subject: “First, we need to have a social revolution (*samajik kranti*). In our country, even in the 21st century, if some one is ill, they call the *dhami* to cure them. It’s so surprising: can *dhamis* cure sick people? We are truly astonished that people still believe that. We told people in many villages that they shouldn’t believe the *dhami jhankris*. However, in some places they are still influent, so the government should pass a law against this. In our villages there are many people in whose minds old traditions still go strong. They have not changed their ideas (*soc bicar*). It’s difficult to do away with astonishing conservative matters in our villages.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ See Lecomte-Tilouine, forthcoming b, for a more in-depth discussion on the subject.

²⁰⁷ The *dhamis* are also consulted to cure people. Their method sometimes consists in inducing a transe in the sick person.

²⁰⁸ The militia then described how they tried to end the practice of *chaupadi pratha*, i.e. banning women during menses, saying that they failed “100 per cent”. The



Ritual dance between the Dharni of Bhairam and the temple's Damai, during which the former tries to expell the Damai from the temple courtyard. Dullu, Cait Astami, April 2000.
Photo: J. Smadja.

As a matter of fact, Shyam attaches great importance to sacrilegious violence while he overlooks more universally reprovved forms of violence, such as against children, even though a child was killed by Maoists in Dailekh, and was recognised as something 'which should not be done' in *Janadesh*. Interestingly, in his depiction, high-caste and low-caste *dhamis* are involved in different types of resistance. The former manifest disobedience when their social (and ritual) status is endangered, while the latter react to the ban on music, which indeed, is one of their group's prerogatives. This episode leads to a burlesque situation in which the local Maoist ruler, an educated Bahun, is publicly beaten by a Dalit (a low-caste man). This was traditionally a very severely punished crime; however, the people's War had been launched, among other things, to end all sorts of

practice is stronger in Western Nepal than elsewhere, since women are even forbidden to touch plants, which would dry up, or milking cows and buffaloes, which would stop giving milk.

discrimination against the Dalits, and therefore the cadre just got a dose of his own medicine.

Music is another striking aspect in Shyam's narrative. Prior to the People's War, a ban on music had never been reported in the history of Nepal; on the contrary, it was compulsory at times, with musicians forced to play on certain ritual occasions. In fact, if bourgeois or decadent music was forbidden by many totalitarian regimes, to my knowledge, a ban on local traditional music only applied in some Fundamental Islamic contexts, such as Iran and Afghanistan. In Nepalese Maoist publications, the need to destroy "the declining and indecent culture" is often mentioned, but when referring to music, it usually means Western or Westernised 'pop music'. However, it is clear that the Maoists also perceived traditional songs negatively in Western Nepal. Thus the Maoist video "Eight Glorious years" shows a revolutionary cultural team singing a local song, *deuda*, with a new, revolutionary text. The subtitles read: "In the hilly region of Jumla and Humla of western Nepal, lyrics and ballads referring to pang [sic], passivity, hopelessness, frustration and superstitions were much popular among the shepherds. The revolutionary artists have transformed them to new art forms and developed them to express hope, courage and confidence".

The Cultural Revolution endangered the precious oral repertoire of Western Nepal, leading for instance to the cessation of epics recitation in neighbouring Achham district. Only one among the seven bards (*hudke*) whom I interviewed in 2007 had composed a "pro-people's epic" (*janavadi bharat*), while most of them did not perform at all for long periods. Late Damai told me that he could not perform during the 10 years of the People's War because the Maoists forbade him to use the apostrophe 'O King!' with which he punctuates his recitation. He explained: "how could I perform without saying 'O King!'" Instead the bards were told to use 'He comrade!'.²⁰⁹

Shyam is not clear on when exactly playing music was forbidden in Dullu: he first states that it was the initial reason why people revolted, then dates its ban to the attack of the *dhami*. He probably refers to different types of music, since already in 2003, I heard people in Dullu complaining that they could no longer sing alternative songs, which were associated with seduction and the practice of *jari*²¹⁰, and which were condemned by the Maoists.

²⁰⁹ This recalls the 'Maoist missionary zeal' in Peru: Commander Percy ordered Peruvian peasants to replace 'Ay, Jesus' by 'Ay, Gonzalo', which angered them (Starn 1998: 230).

²¹⁰ *Jari*: to elope with a married woman.



**A Hudke Damai bard performing in Dullu, April 2000,
photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine.**

At any rate, the villagers' act of bravado against the new legislators in Dullu consisted in playing big drums from a hilltop, an image that recalls scenes from local epics when the enemy arrives, magnificent, dressed in golden clothes with a band of musicians upon an open crest. These episodic acts of bravado culminated in an uninterrupted musical relay organised by the whole population of thirteen localities. Shyam presents it as a mere expression of freedom in the face of oppression, but Narendra depicts it in a very different light: "What did people do? During the day, they worked. In the evening, they ate a snack at 5 p.m., because if they each stayed in their houses, Maoists could come at night. For fear of this, at the end of each day they gathered in one place and played *madal* drum,

damaha drum, and plate (*thal*) all night long. Villages gathered in one place, this is what people did.”

The repertoire villagers chose for what Narendra presents as being a musical wake, rather than as a protest movement, is nevertheless revealing. The Bhoosi songs are carnivalesque songs, sometimes very lewd when sung by men. This choice had much to offend the Maoists’ sensitive ears, and corresponds particularly well to an act of bravado, even if it was also used to maintain a watch for protective purposes. Carnivalesque songs and dances inverse usual codes and conventions, especially in a context of puritan hegemony, such as the ideology behind the People’s War. It is thus probably not by chance that I saw women reacting in the same way in 2005, in another district of Western Nepal. These women had not been allowed to dance and sing for Tij, because the local area incharge considered that the whole ritual celebrating polygamous holy men had to be forbidden. They were particularly frustrated since Tij is the only occasion for them to dance in the year, and while we were talking about that, they suddenly started to dance a licentious dance, called *ratauli*²¹¹, in their courtyard, in the middle of the day. They thus not only expressed their freedom, but showed contempt for the puritan rules imposed on them, claiming: ‘We were not allowed to dance for Tij, now we are going to dance Rautali in the middle of the day’.

Among the weapons of the weak depicted by Shyam, words also play a fundamental role.

His description of the abduction of a woman by the Maoists focuses essentially on what she said during her custody, and aims to show that one can indeed win with words. Alone, about to be amputated, the woman refuses to be the victim of another woman and asks the men present to be her torturers instead, inciting them to the worst forms of violence. She obviously brought the séance to a close by verbal self-defence, when refusing the Maoist methods of having women brutalise women²¹², all the while accepting her fate, and describing it in the most horrific manner. She asks to be treated according to a traditional order, in which such violence has no place other than among the cannibal *rakshash* demons.

Shyam then segues into another sparring match, between an individual who plays the role of mouthpiece for a crowd of devotees he

²¹¹ Ratauli songs and dances are performed by women only, at night, during a son’s wedding. It refers to sexuality, with the groom depicted as a bear, and mimicked by a woman dressed in pants with a fake penis, who dances in a suggestive manner and assaults other women, pretending to copulate with them. I was not able to translate these songs which are full of double-meanings, because my friends laughed too much when asked for explanations.

²¹² A rule reported to me in many other instances.

had convinced to go and open a temple, and a Maoist, who represents 'the Red Army'. Once again, it is by taking the initiative in moving ahead, offering himself in sacrifice, that the villager neutralises his adversary and obtains what he forest out to achieve.

Finally Shyam reports his own sparring match, with the principal of the district himself, who enjoined him to speak. Accused of being superstitious by this high-ranking cadre, Shyam turns the situation around by showing his interlocutor that he is religious too, and that he behaves towards Prachanda, as he would do with gods, in quite a humoristic way. Whether boasting or not, Shyam makes no bones about his satisfaction in making the new legislators 'swallow their defeat' (*har khane*) in this duel.

Shyam's narrative is a parallel, "funny People's War" versus revolutionary methods and authoritative rules. In the way he describes how the retaliation was led in Dullu, we are presented with recalcitrant and uneducated villagers using witticism, provocative music and spirit possession as weapons, along with "snubbing" tactics, in order to put up resistance against inflexible rulers determined to forcibly implement a social and cultural revolution.



The priest from Sirasthan showing the sacred flame, Dullu, April 2003, photo: M. Lecomte-Tilouine.

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“One should not Cut the Blossom in the Bud”: Voices of Nepalese Child Soldiers

Carine Jaquet

To understand some of the social implications of the “People’s War”, launched by the Maoists in Nepal in February 1996, on current social changes in Nepalese society, it is worth having a look at the new generation, since they are the Nepalese citizens of tomorrow. If children and the young in general have all been affected to some extent by the conflict as victims or as fighters, some of them will have to carry social and psychological stigmas all their life. Among those are the children who took up arms to defend the Maoist ideology though they had hardly been to school and were sometimes no older than 10 years old.

This article points out the war stories of these child fighters in the People’s Liberation Army. Such witness accounts are only too rare after a conflict that included one third of under-age fighters. Only a few war stories have been written down by some combatants. These poignant narrations consist in a noticeable source of information even if their accuracy is often questionable. As a consequence, it is practically impossible to draw a true picture of these children’s experience in the PLA.

Child Soldiers in Nepal

The United Nations assume that at the time of the ceasefire, in December 2006, almost 3,000²¹³ Maoists in the Army personnel staff in the cantonment were under 18 years old. Though it had been agreed in the CPA (Comprehensive Peace agreement) that ended the 10-year-long conflict, none of those children have been formally and officially released by the Maoists who later laid down their conditions (payment of allowances, assistance for the needy, progress on security sector reforms, etc.).²¹⁴ Today, it is less and less likely that this formal release will ever

²¹³ This figure is the result of the verification process that was completed in December 2007.

²¹⁴ Report of the Task Force on Children and Armed conflict, Horizontal note on Children and Armed Conflict, reporting period: 1st January to 31st May 2008.

happen. The CPA also clearly banned the recruitment of any individual under 18 years old for any military posting.²¹⁵

According to informants from Human Rights focused non-government organizations (NGOs), many of those under 18 years old left the cantonment sites after verification of their age²¹⁶ and especially during the Constituent Assembly election²¹⁷ campaign in order to join the YCL²¹⁸ which was in a position to provide them with an incentive (food, 500 NRP and sometimes even a mobile phone for full-timers), activities (training courses, Party's campaign, development work, etc.) and social status. In some cases, after retreatingn these young people forcebly or willingly joined some Terai armed groups. Recuperating these military-trained young people has somehow been encouraged by a government that demonstrated its failure to provide any kind of support to this category of war victims²¹⁹. Others just went back to their villages where they tried to generate an income or in some cases to go back to school (District Education Officers have been officially requested to facilitate their registering even late for examinations at national level). Lastly, some left for jobs overseas, seeking higher salaries and for fear of being recruited again.

It is often pointed out that children previously involved with the Maoists troops during the People's War are from groups referred to as socially and economically discriminated against (*i.e* ethnic minorities, low castes, *janajati*, etc.). Some individual factors also have to be taken into account as they were part of the children's motivation to leave their families and enroll. Indeed most of them had previously encountered family conflicts or dislocation.²²⁰ These factors explain to a certain extent a kind of vulnerability facilitating their recruitment. Once they had been recruited, their poor relations with their respective families would hinder potential attempts at release by their relatives. In most cases, schools – especially in the hills of the western and far-western regions- have been

²¹⁵ Art.7.6.1. (...) They (both sides) also fully agree not to include or use children who are 18 years old in the armed forces.

²¹⁶ Exercise conducted under UN monitoring in the winter of 2007 - 2008.

²¹⁷ On 10th April 2008.

²¹⁸ Youth Comunist League, youth wing of the CPN-M (Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist), that reportedly used violence to threaten Nepalese people to cast their vote in favour of their party.

²¹⁹ The government did not foster any national plan to support the reintegration of child soldiers in their society of origin.

²²⁰ Cf. Rachel Brett (2003)

ground for promoting the Maoist movement and the arena for student recruitments.²²¹

Recruitment has been based on local dynamics, sometimes according to an intensive pattern: in many remote VDCs (for example in the western region in the districts of Baglung, Rolpa, Kapilvastu, Gorkha, etc.), Maoists launched the operation “one family, one child” and even “one family, two children” (reported in Gorkha when Maoist troops needed to renew their human resources).

It is worth noting that the generalized use of the categorization of “child soldiers”, a concept overly used by international and non government organizations, should not hide the heterogeneity of the cases of the under 18 year olds who have been affiliated to the armed forces. Indeed, the experiences of the under 18s affiliated to the Maoist army and militias can be differentiated according to many criteria: age of recruitment, length of involvement, tasks assigned, exposure to violence, etc. The selected examples aim at showing this diversity and prompt us to think of the long-term impact of the excessive use of these children in this war. Furthermore, the use of the term “child soldiers” is delicate in the Nepalese context as, according to the Nepalese law, adulthood starts at the age of 16, whereas international law regards all under 18 year olds as children.

Methodology

This article is based on research carried out in the Western region of Nepal²²² as it is the Maoist rebellion movement’s birthplace, and it has been acutely affected by the practice of child enrolment. The main sources used here are interviews with seven under-age children affiliated to the PLA during the time of conflict and documents taken from various sources (newspapers, UN and NGO reports, interviews of local stakeholders: NGO social workers, parents, teachers, etc.) that I came across, while I was working as a social worker assigned to a reintegration programme targeting children affiliated to armed groups.

The first challenge to collect detailed personal stories of child soldiers was to identify them. Then, it was necessary to create a favorable context to interview them, without increasing the social stigma they suffer from, and while ensuring them proper confidentiality. During the interviews, they had to be willing and able to offer their testimony and answer

²²¹ This practice is not new as other political parties, such as the Congress, had previously understood the political ground provided by schools.

²²² With the solid support of my research and language assistants: Mrs. Sarika Jaiswal and Mr. Nishit Shrivastawa.

questions as to whether they were either still somehow affiliated to the Maoist party, its youth groups, armed groups or afraid of being recruited again. They often suffered from psychological problems which prevented them from narrating their experience.

Another challenge is directly linked to the interview exercise itself. Interviewing children is somehow necessarily biased by different factors. The children have often been indoctrinated, including with regard to the answers they should provide in the case of questions from outsiders. Moreover, when depicting their reality, these children still suffer from emotional and sometimes physical scars, thereby influencing what they say and how they say it. Finally, any unconscious coping strategies affecting their perception of events should not be underestimated.

The background for this fieldwork may also have an influence on the results as it started to be conducted about one month after the CA elections, once many of those children had willingly or forcibly been campaigning for the CPN-M, generally under the YCL flag.

Among the interviews given by children (all personal names are pseudonyms), who fought for the PLA, here are some fragments gleaned from the experience of the only girl I had been granted the chance to interview. Contrary to her peers who hardly gave details about their rebel life and showed signs of emotional affliction, she seemed to appreciate being asked and listened to about this experience. Her willingness to speak about this traumatic past, usually kept secret, may cause us to question the accuracy of the narration. She readily provided detailed images of the most stricken episodes of her military involvement that started very young and went on quite late into the conflict, until the last battles. It is worth noticing that unlike the others, she still today actively supports the Maoist party and is affiliated to some Terai-based armed groups.

TRISHA: *“I was very excited to think that in the future, I would be able to beat up a lot of people”*

When I met Trisha, a smiling and gracious 16 year-old girl walking proudly down the street, with her tight pink flower *kurta* and her elaborate make-up, I could hardly believe that she could be the fearsome fighter I had previously heard about. But, after a while, when she started to evoke her past mentioning so many details and with such a lively expression - alternating between excitement and revulsion- illuminating her face, all my doubts were dispersed. She was Trisha, one of the youngest PLA recruits (in the early stages of the conflict), the student fighter who had navigated between military and civilian life from her childhood, and the one who could threaten local political leaders without shaking.

Trisha is proud of her story. In contrast with most other young fighters, who find great difficulty talking about their experience, she had even kept a record of her war exploits in memoirs she wrote when she left the movement. *“My mother wept after reading my story. In my diary, I wrote that we used to eat uncooked rice in case of an emergency as well as many experiences that I had endured during my fighting life”*. In fact, she wrote much more and used her memoirs to express her personal troubles as any teenager would do. On the very first page of the notebook illustrated by a hand drawing of roses, she wrote: *“I can’t say where I should start because I can’t find any words to express myself. But in my unfortunate life, there is no one to walk with me and my life is surrounded by thorns and whirlpools.”*

Trisha was only six years old when she discovered Maoism. After her parents had had to leave for India to provide medical care for her younger brother, she stayed with the youngest of her six paternal uncles, in Gulmi district. At home, Trisha witnessed the clandestine comings and goings of some people she had never met before, who were put up for one or two nights. These secret guests used to carry and hide weapons in the house. She heard some of their discussions. *“They talked about big things, saying that they would steal from the rich and distribute the money to the poor and I was also excited on hearing this”*. In spite of her very young age, Trisha felt the fighters’ enthusiasm and experienced a strong feeling of motivation growing inside her. She wanted to be part of the pending revolution. *“I felt I could contribute to this great deed”*. For three months, she attended some of those nocturnal discussions. Her uncle and aunt soon became convinced that in the long term she could prove to be a good element for the guerilla and introduced her to a commander who refused at first to consider involving such a young girl in his military activities. Later, he changed his mind, judging that she was physically strong enough. Now, a few years later, when looking back on those early days, she says that she was then *“convinced and ready to join the Janamukti Sena (People’s Liberation Army, PLA)”*.

She was about seven years old when she was recruited for the first time by the Maoist troops. She was then in class three. Following a cultural programme to promote Maoism at school, she had been abducted by the group. At that time, she did not really like school work, but enjoyed entertainment programmes. She was a pro-active girl and as such, she used to stand out among her friends during extracurricular activities. She thinks that this is the reason she attracted their attention. The Commander invited her in the following terms: *“Let’s go for a ride somewhere”*. After school time, she was forcibly taken to an unfamiliar place that turned out to be a remote forest-covered VDC, accessed by very few roads.

During a total of nine months, she lived in a huge cave in the rocks, hidden in an area she describes as a dense wooden one. She remembers how afraid she was staying there: *“The cave was very dark, even in the day time, we had to use torchlight when we were inside”*. The place was overpopulated with more than 250 people crowded into a very basic settlement. Living conditions were very precarious with only occasional food and drinking water shortages.

Trisha was assigned the position of sentry. She had to guard prisoners. She also had to keep watch over the weapons and food stores, buried in the ground. At that time, Trisha did not know how to use weapons but she used to attend the training courses given by the commanders. She also had to cope with the very strict discipline: *“When I was unable to carry out orders, they slapped me sometimes, 2 or 3 times. I tried to escape but the situation was not favourable²²³.”* When asked what prevented her from fleeing, Trisha vividly and ingeniously answered: *“It was so frightening, in the middle of such a dense forest and there were leeches all over the trees!”*

“I can still remember what happened in the cave. The commandants used to bring in the criminals and punished them Muslim style: by cutting their throats and using other great torture methods (...) by cutting the bodies with kukhuris and spreading salt and chilies on the wounds (...) These things happened in front of my eyes, actually the commander forced me to watch it all in order to make me stronger”. Since then, she has flashbacks. Sometimes, these troubled visions become an obsession, preventing her from focusing her mind on anything else.

She wept often. So exasperated by her whimpering, older fighters tried to get her to remain silent. They used either threats or speeches to reason with her. But most of the time, they just could not stop her from crying. She had been tortured many times for her tears.

When Trisha’s mother got to know that her daughter had been enrolled in the Maoist movement, she came back from India to Nepal. She learnt that other children from the school had been abducted for the same purpose and assumed they would never see their daughter again. She kept on looking for her and finally found her and brought her home. After that, Trisha’s parents decided to move to a district of Terai, to keep their daughter away from the Maoists troops. *“Then the real problems started. My father used to drink a lot and we (she and her mother) struggled a lot with him at that time. Then, he suddenly disappeared for some time”*.

Trisha went back to a “normal life”, living with her parents and attending school. Maoist fighters still occasionally visited their house, taking food and asking for shelter. At that point Trisha’s feelings about her experience were confused. She had not liked her life in the cave and had

²²³ Quotation taken from Trisha’s Memories’ notebook.

hated her commander for the pain he had caused her. But a few months later, she was willing to go back with the rebels, to take part in their battles. The Maoists refused to enroll her due to her tender age. According to Trisha, she insisted heavily and became obsessed with the idea of reintegrating the troops.

At that time, her relationship with her parents and especially her mother was deteriorating. She used the crude language she had been taught by her friends in the cave to address her parents. They had many clashes and her parents were so upset that they sometimes called her a “monster”. She was subject to violent fits of anger. Her mother was afraid of these changes and tried to address the behavioral issues of her daughter. At one stage, she even called upon an exorcist, thinking that an evil spirit could be at the origin of such uncontrollable behaviour.²²⁴ For Trisha, the call of the jungle was very strong. She recalls: “*At that time, these ideologies affected me very strangely*”.

During her year in class 5, Maoists again came to perform cultural programmes in her school. Trisha and some of her friends decided to follow them. She escaped from home at 4 o'clock in the morning and went to meet her Maoist friends in Arghakanchi. To get some pocket money, she had sold a gold chain previously stolen at home. To travel, she simply jumped on a truck. When she arrived, she had to walk from one place to another at night and to hide constantly from the Nepalese Army troops. “*At that time, we had rules and regulations and we were not allowed to stay in one place due for security reasons. And we used to sleep in the day time where the State security forces couldn't reach us. We used to have our dinner at 4 in the afternoon and then we had to walk through the night. We crossed many hills and many rivers. Lots of friends died when they slipped off the cliff in the night.*” She has also been trained in some martial arts. “*Though it was very difficult, I worked hard to improve my physical condition and then I walked with them (...) in the jungle, sometimes without eating anything, sometimes carrying 4 kg of rice*”. That year, she returned to her village for 3 months. She was able to study there and to sit the class 5 examination. She proudly recalls that she passed it.

Then, her Maoist “friends” telephoned Trisha from D., where they were stationed. She joined them again and took part in training courses “*... even more difficult than the previous ones*”. (...) *My troops were planning to attack the police station in D. but in the end, we decided to cancel the attack. Then, we left D.*” Though she had grown up in this environment, she still experienced some childish fears: “*even sometimes in places where there were a*

²²⁴ This practice is often reported in Central and Western Africa where child soldiers are accused of being witches and their problems are treated with exorcism.

lot of leeches” she says screwing up her face in a mixture of aversion and fear.

Trisha was then given military training in T. She learnt how to load, use and look after weapons, such as self-loading rifles, three-nought-three (303), SMGs (Sub-Machine Guns) and LMGs (Long Machine Guns). At that time, Trisha dreamt about becoming a hero through her war exploits. She was also assigned more physical tasks such as carrying weapons on rugged pathways. Any mistake was severely punished with the commanders by beating her with sticks.

“ At that time²²⁵, I was very excited to think that in the future, I would be able to beat up a lot of people and later I realized that it was not good because sometimes, when I beat the people in the camps inflicting great pain and suffering, I thought that I could be the one suffering at the hands of someone else.”

Besides, Trisha showed a strong will to learn and she could not help being attracted to school. This is the reason why she was often called “Shiksha” (Education) among the troops. Indeed, from class 5 to 8, she used to come back to her village just before the school examination and to stay about 2 months with her family. Her parents used to scold her and beg her to leave the movement but she was determined to remain involved. She remembers that she used to answer them back and to threaten them with death sentences. At one stage, she even took some weapons and beat them up. Nevertheless she was keen to carry on her studies. Trisha was very aware of her mother’s dream of making a doctor of her. She did want not to disappoint her even when relations were strained. So, for years, she did her best to convince the rebel leaders to let her go for a few weeks at a time each year to sit her exams. As she did not have enough time to study and could not stand the idea of failing her school examinations, she used to threaten the headteacher to make sure she would get a good mark.

This is how, after 3 months spent with her family in order to sit her class seven examination, she took to the road, direction Parbat district, to join commandant Akash’s troops. *“It was a very rainy day. I was in the forest; there was a lot of thunder. The group included 45 members but we didn’t find any shelter from the rain or hail. We spent that night out in the hail, water, rain and the thunder. That night, I realized that I should have been in a cozy home.”²²⁶*

Then Trisha went back to Gulmi District where she asked Akash to provide her with technical training to be able to make grenades by herself. He agreed and she was trained for 3 months in the art of bomb design. She explained: *“I was fascinated by weapons because ordinary people do not know how to handle them and we have to spend time in the midst of people and society*

²²⁵ She was then about 12 to 13 years old. It was just after her class 6 examination.

²²⁶ Extracts from Trisha’s memoirs.

and if anything goes wrong there we can retaliate by using weapons. Actually I like to experience a bit of everything". Today she often recalls this period and says: "I can still smell the gelatine on my fingers".

In spite of her doubts and the difficult living conditions, she stayed and walked to Arghakanchi district. An event took place there that left a strong impression on Trisha. She was then assigned menial tasks such as cooking or cleaning. It was one night on the border between Palpa and Arghakhanchi districts. "We were about to have noodles when our enemies (the Nepalese Army) launched an air raid and we ran away. Though we ran away, the army was waiting for us the next day, at around 4 o' clock in the afternoon. The battle started and in that battle we really wanted to come out victorious. In that battle, some friends were seriously injured and some even reached martyr status."²²⁷

As the Maoist troops had settled in a forest, located in a sunken valley, the Nepalese Army sections gathered at the top of the cliff and launched a surprise attack against the Maoist troops. The latter ran and hid in the woods for hours as they were not in a particularly strategic position to fight. "If we had attacked from below, it was certain that there would have been a maximum number of casualties on our side. It's a fact that if you attack from below upwards you loose."²²⁸ Then, Trisha and her friends climbed the hills to reach higher land with a good view of the government troops down below. Once the army alert was over, Maoist troops made a counterattack. She recalls: "They waited for us for hours" and adds proudly that she had been injured by shrapnel from an 81 mm bomb that hurt her behind her knee-joint. "As I was very brave, I fought for four hours". As many of Trisha's friends died during this battle, other fighters had to carry away their bodies afterwards. They provided basic care to Trisha who was left for hours with her bleeding leg. She wrapped her red scarf "made by the blood of the martyrs" tightly around the wound to stop the bleeding.

"Afterwards, we had to leave that place as it was no longer safe. After this battle, I visited my home. My mother scolded me when she got to know that I took part in the battle. In answer, I threatened her. Now, when I recall the past and my attitude at the time, I feel very strange."

At that time, the Basanta Memory Brigade needed reinforcements in readiness for the attack on Kapilvastu. As a consequence, Trisha was sent there. As she was not far from her village, she was able to go home for a while to sit her class 7 examination. Unfortunately she got poor results in mathematics. It seems that this failure upset her and was associated with sadness and doubts about her involvement in the PLA. In her memoirs, Trisha says of this period "Life is full of pain and we can't recover it at once but

²²⁷ *Idem.*

²²⁸ *Idem.*

if you do not give up and wait for the right time, this favorable time will come. It was the same with me.” She then started to study in class 8 when she was forcibly recruited again. She writes in her diary: *“At the time, I started feeling that I should not work with my friends (Maoists), but they forced me to work with them and I had to work under pressure.”*

After D., Trisha went to J., in Rolpa, *“the red land of Maoists”*. She once more attended technical training courses there: how to repair weapons on the battlefield. From then, she started to work in technical groups. With some excitement, she remembers: *“We used code language for example to designate a grenade; we used the term apple”*.

There were 250 fighters in the battalion, including about 60 under 18 year olds. *“There were different technical groups. One of them was assigned to repair the weapons. They also had to perform their duties during the battle. There was also a medical group to provide medical assistance to the injured during the battle.”* During their speeches aimed at motivating the troops, commandants used to say to Trisha and her friends that the Army and police were enemies to be killed without any thought or hesitation. *“The commanders tried to provide us with the position most suitable for us. I was promoted to VC (Vice Commander). They knew that if they promoted dedicated fighters to higher posts the latter would be encouraged and work hard”*.

She temporarily left the troops once more and showed up at her class 7 examination. *“But at that time, everyone in my village was aware that I was affiliated with the Maoists. Actually they (the villagers) had started suspecting me of these activities due to my continuous absence from home. The police had also been informed about me. My family was then tortured by the police: they used to come to my house and ask my parents for my whereabouts. Once my mother said me: “Because of you, we are going to be killed by the security forces!”*. Affected by this situation in with she directly put her parents at risk, Trisha considered returning home. She said that she wanted to study in class 8, and her commander requested that she join the troops after spending 2 months with her family. She did so and states: *“Anyhow I passed class eight in spite of my rebel life (...). I studied very hard for this exam and the results were very good”*.

At that time, Trisha hesitated giving up the movement to be able to focus on her studies. *“My teachers told me: “You should continue your studies. Class nine is very crucial because it prepares you for class 10 and SLC²²⁹”. I was convinced by their arguments and told my superiors that I would resign. But they didn’t allow me to, saying: “You are now one of our experts in fighting. You can’t resign. While we are planning to hit P. and S., you can’t stay at home and study. You have to support us and the party (...). The commander scolded me: “You continued your studies after telling us such lies. Now, you can’t cheat any more.*

²²⁹ School Leaving Certificate, official recognition of completing educational cycle.

The education system is useless here. You should not study in this corrupt system. Look at us, we only studied up to class 4 and we got this far” Trisha was obviously not an easy fighter to cope with. Having acquired a certain strength of mind from her early childhood, she reports with a smile (and no doubt fantasising somewhat) that she said to the commander: *“Everyone is different and they have different ideas. So, I have a different opinion than you and I feel like studying and you can’t stop me. I never refuse to obey any of your orders. I accomplished each and everything task you assigned me and you should now help me by granting me some time for my studies”*.

However, Trisha was not to get back to the school bench, but was sent to another location. According to her, it was not due to her arguments with the commander but rather to the strategic situation: the police and army were closely monitoring movements in the area.

Putting her knowledge to practice, she was assigned the duty of supplying weapons during the P. battle.²³⁰ She felt more sure of herself as she received prior information about the plan, whereas most of the time, fighters were given no clue whatsoever to prevent information from leaking out and soldiers from taking leave. *“During this battle, I didn’t encounter any difficulty because I knew 3 days in advance that we were going to hit the city”*.

“I was in R., in Gulmi district at that time and we headed towards P. from there. We had thoroughly prepared ourselves and we had drawn maps to define from which point to attack so that we would emerge victorious.(...) We did indeed win that battle. I was responsible for supplying weapons to the fighters during the battle. Luckily, I had not been injured. After the battle though, I wanted to return home because I was due to sit my 9 class exam, but they (the commanders) didn’t allow me to do so”.

Then, in view of the next attack on B., Trisha was sent as a spy to this city. With some other young girls, she wore fancy clothes and was made-up to look attractive. She was assigned to obtain information from the sentries and guards near the police and army camp thanks to informal conversations. She recalls how she played with these young boys and could easily find out: how many soldiers there were in the compound, what their daily routine was, etc. She was even able to pick up snippets of information about their action plans in retaliation to Maoist attacks.

“We also planned to hit B. We booked one lodge near the state army camp and we attacked from the roof top of that lodge. After we succeeded, the battle of Rambhapur²³¹ started”.

“On the day of the attack, I only survived thanks to sheer luck. Many of my friends lost their lives. We had bunkers in which to hide, so we buried 8 or 9 of

²³⁰ On 31st January 2006.

²³¹ On 9th February 2006.

them there in a single bunker (...)²³² We proclaimed them martyrs and a few days later we planned to attack S. The S. battle was a very difficult one for me. At that time, lots of my friends had been beaten to death by the Nepal Army. Some of them had been buried in a pit.”

“It was at this time that the people in my village started saying that I roamed around at night. And with the S. fight taking place at night, the police, especially a CID called Mohit, who was a local and has known me since I was a young girl in grade 5, started gathering information about me. He had joined the army and I had joined the Maoists, so he told everyone that I was a Maoist. He had also informed his barracks of this. So during the S. attack, they carried out an intensive search for me”.

“So, we somehow came out victorious and I returned home. I knew that this was very risky because my parents were being threatened (by the police), saying that they would be imprisoned if they didn’t hand me over to the police”.

That was only the beginning of her troubles with the police. “After our victory following the B. attack, I had kept three grenades at home. My family members complained that the grenades could explode at any moment. I passed this on to my seniors and they told me to bring the grenades to a place called M. in the West. It was then, on my way to M., that I was arrested at a police checkpoint, near the National Army’s based camp”.

“After being arrested, I told the police that someone had maybe mistakenly put those grenades in my bag. I had to tell that lie to save my life. They accused me of being a Maoist but I replied that I was a student and that they could phone and make inquiries among the children and teachers of my school. My teachers knew the truth about my status but it was risky for them to tell government forces that I was a Maoist. A Deputy Police Superintendent phoned the school and asked whether a student of my name studied there. My teachers agreed to say that I was their student but didn’t confirm the accusation of me being a Maoist (...). Then I was kept under investigation during which interrogations alternated with harsh beatings”.

“They would have definitely killed me if they had been certain that I was a Maoist but I kept denying it. We had received special training so that once we had stated something (in the event of arrest), we could not alter it because that would subject us to twice as much beating and torture by the police. So whatever we said, we had to stick to it, even if they killed us in the end. Hence, I kept on saying that I was a student and also insisted that someone had maybe put those grenades in my bag without my consent and knowledge. But they didn’t trust me at all and kept me there for three months (...). They tortured me so much that I began to think that I wouldn’t leave the Maoists movement at any cost from then onwards. In fact, torture was something that was to encourage me not to abandon the movement at any cost. I mean, they tied me up, poured water on me and beat the soles of my feet

²³² This detail is doubtful as it seems unlikely that the Maoist did bury dead bodies inside their bunkers.

with a stout bamboo stick. That beating had repercussions on my whole body and it affected my brain.”

During her detention, Trisha’s “friends” regularly called her parents to find out if she had been released. “Of course, they could not tell my family that I was in jail. Sometimes when my mother scolded them and asked about my present location, my friends would say that I was with them but a little further away (that’s why she couldn’t speak to me directly).”

At that time, Trisha’s cousin, who had been recruited three years before was assigned as officer to this police station. He was angry with Trisha for being involved in Maoist activities and he scolded her: “I told you several times not to get involved with the Maoists. You didn’t listen to me and now you see what happens. But I will rescue you.” After a first attempt at escaping, “He couldn’t stand witnessing me being tortured, he used to cry. In jail, we were provided with only one meal a day but I was used to staying like that even for six or seven days. So my only worry was about when I was to get out of there”.

“I was spending my days in jail, suffering from extreme torture and finally one day, after about 2 and 1/2 months, it was my cousin who was posted as a night sentry there. At that time, I had been transferred from the camp to a separate place nearby. It was a dark room. It had a small torch in it. When I was there, my brother²³³ told me that he would set me free (...), yet he had difficulty doing so as he had been promoted as sentry and there were other guards as well at the gate. And you know, the camp was well defended with an electrified barbed wire fence around part of it. So it was difficult either way: The front gate was guarded and the back was protected with an electrified wire. My brother told me that I had to run from there or else I would be killed anyhow if I stayed. He had some shears for cutting the barbed wire. So he cut the wire in one place and let me out through the hole he’d made. So I was free but where could I go in the dark in B.? Besides, there would be police around the place. I had nowhere to go. So I spent the whole night in a small lane. Early the next morning, I met my friends and told them how I had managed to escape. My body was covered in red and blue blotches from the severe beatings. (Showing part of her body) It was here that they beat me until it bled. It was so painful. They used some cutter made of glass and then burnt me with a torch on the wound. Then there was that angry Deputy Police Superintendent may be his name was ‘Amrit’.... He hit me here”.

After this episode, Trisha spent about 2 months in the hospital: “It was a big hospital. I stayed there with my friends. I was prescribed medicine and needed a lot of rest. There were cuts on various parts of my body including my head. So I took the medicine to heal my brain as well. After that, while I was still under medication, my cousin called my parents’ home. That’s how my family got to know that I had been in jail. At this my mother and family started to cry. He shouldn’t have done that. On the other hand, he had been dismissed, after being

²³³ She is referring to her cousin here as in the following lines.

accused of releasing me from jail. He is now in a foreign land. He still scolds me at times when he calls, saying, 'Have you still not yet left the Maoists?' He even called just a few days ago".

Even after this painful experience, Trisha made the firm decision to remain actively involved in the rebellion. *"While I was recovering, I told my seniors that there was no way I would abandon the Maoists' cause, although I had previously planned to do so. Then, I experienced a strong feeling of revenge; I wanted to kill all those who had beaten me in jail"*.

It seems that it had become more and more difficult for the commanders to control Trisha. She speaks about her later arguments with her commanders, including one with whom she did not see eye-to-eye. She explained: *"He considered himself superior and tried to dominate me."* They had a violent argument about a mobile phone he confiscated from her. *"Later, when there was a meeting with higher and senior commanders, I put forth my grievances. I told them that I was experienced in war matters and that I had been to battle many times. I also told them that truth always prevailed and their falsehood and evil like theirs always lost. In addition, I told them that we had also killed and taken action against so many people while fully aware of what we were doing, but that they were killing and torturing people out of ignorance. I even told them that their involvement in the party was useless and asked them whether they were fighting in the party for the people or for money?"*

Trisha was with the troops when news of the final ceasefire agreement reached them. In her memoirs, she writes: *"I was very happy when I heard that we could go to the Terai and stay in a camp. We started to walk from Arghakhanchi and reached Butwal, and then we decided to set up camp in Jerga. After that, we started to build our camp"*. However, Trisha's parents found out where she was and came to fetch her. Again she escaped and again they found her. Yet, on that occasion she started back at school for good and decided *"to do something for society"*. She also wanted to improve her image as *"Previously, when I came back to the village, people used to look upon me with a very negative attitude."*

After more than 3 years of *"rebel life"*, Trisha was not yet 15 years old but she was already an experienced fighter with the title of VC, a weapon maintenance officer and an explosive expert. It was not easy for her to give up her military activities. Furthermore, her "friends" were determined not to lose this accomplished fighter. They telephoned her frequently to recruit her again. She agreed to turn up at the newly established cantonment MCS-4 for the verification process²³⁴ since it seemed that the Maoists wanted to put on display as many fighters as possible to

²³⁴ Exercise launched in November 2007, aimed at counting the exact number of soldiers in Maoist cantonments and verifying that no under 18-year-olds were involved.

legitimate their power and show their military force. She was cleared just like many others thanks to her additional years in the register. She then left the camp again.

Today, looking back at her past, she has bitter memories. She writes: *“There is a lot of pain in the book of life and there is a lot of pain in soft hearts and there are lots of stories of pain and grief in my unfortunate life”*.

Trisha is aware of the fact that she had been indoctrinated and used due to her tender age. She thinks that the individuals she fought with were *“not all (...) good (...) [and were] from very different types”*. Since the transformation of the Maoist movement from a rebellion into an official political party now in power, her judgment about her “friends” is a rather well balanced one. Trisha thinks that there is a discipline crisis, partly due to the involvement of new members. She thinks that male leaders are no longer treating females decently. She has even requested that they be severely punished. But she has been disappointed to see that it turned out to be soft options (cooking and basic cleaning tasks).

Today, she still attends regular meetings with the CPN-M and YCL. She was actively campaigning for her VDC’s CPN-M candidate for the Constituent Assembly in April 2008. She also often goes to MCS-4 on Saturdays. According to her, she tries to convince her friends to walk out on the troops and to return to civilian life and their studies. Due to her arrogant and partly anti-Maoist actions, she receives death threats from the Maoists. For security reasons, she cannot spend the night at her parents’ house and has to move on every night, just like during the conflict. She also keeps up her daily physical training and is not ashamed to admit her passion for guns. She even seems to show off her past and proudly wears a bullet around her neck as a pendant.

Trisha’s parents seem puzzled by the uncontrollable behaviour of their daughter. They appear to be overwhelmed by the situation. Her father confided in me that he tried many times to stop his daughter’s violent activities and to isolate, thus protect, her from the bad influence of the surrounding armed group, but to avail. The social worker who accompanies Trisha in her reinsertion and who is sponsored by a local NGO says that she is a very challenging case. He thinks that she unconsciously exposes herself to great risks, running a local small-scale armed group. He also describes how unstable she is, changing her mind from one day to the next. Trisha is aware of her strange behaviour. She speaks about her personality and the anger stored inside her. She is still learning to cope with all of this nowadays, so she says, but her behavior is still characterized by violent moods.

When asked about her aspirations for the future, she says: “I will leave the party and the movement. I will help to defend children’s rights”. She still dreams of becoming a doctor like so many Nepalese students.

..And Thousands of Others: “One shall not cut the blossom in the bud”²³⁵

Trisha’s story like that of all the children affiliated to armed groups is an original one. Though her experience is obviously extreme, it is not unique. Among the 3,000 children counted in the cantonments, many of them were used as support staff (for tasks such as: cooking, cleaning utensils, portering, sentry duty, carrying messages, spying, etc.). Yet hundreds of them have also been actually exposed to conflict-related violence, sometimes in the direct line of fire, often on the front line and sometimes assigned to the most awful duties that adults themselves may not have fulfilled quite so well.

This is what happened to Ashok and Darmandra, two childhood friends from Palpa district who lived a nightmare during their two years of services for the PLA, from their eleventh to thirteenth year.

They left their home and joined the movement “willingly” sometime in 2003, after taking part in extra-curriculum activities organized to promote Maoism in their school, where affiliation to the movement was compulsory at that time. Darmandra left first because his parents were stricken by poverty and social discrimination due to their low caste origin. He thought he would fight not only to become a soldier earning a remittance, but also in the hope of lessening inequalities in society. A few days later, his best friend Ashok decided to accompany him and enrolled too. At the time they had great expectations. The senior members promised to provide them access to a better education.

In reality, the role they were granted was very different from their expectations. They had been given a choice: either they did or did not want to be on the front line. They did not want to fight as they were afraid, so they were assigned to these tasks. They started among the support staff, cooking and carrying weapons and items of basic necessity from one temporary camp to another. They remember how difficult it was to walk with such heavy loads.

Things got worse later, while they were barely 12 years old. They had been assigned to “cleaning” (saphaya) the battle field: after fighting, they

²³⁵ Quotation from one of the children interviewed about his traumatic experience in the PLA, meaning that because of his enrolment at such a young age, all his development process has been badly affected. This phrase is commonly used in the Rolpa area in reference to girls’ early marriages. It means that spouses who are too young will never be able to enjoy married life because their wedding took place at a too early stage in their development.

were to carry their injured friends and kill them if necessary. They had to do this if their friends were too badly injured to be saved by basic medical care, or if the hospital was too far away, the treatment too expensive, *etc.* The badly injured often begged them to put them out of their unbearable misery. Then, they had to cut up the bodies and to hide them so that the police and army could not find them and would thus suppose that there were no losses among the Maoist troops. It would crush the morale of the government security forces. Darmandra and Ashok had to behead the bodies to make them unrecognizable in case they were found. They remember the two main battles they took part in: C. and S. They had to carry many dead bodies. At least 30 children carried out the same task and that was only in Darmandra's group.

They had also been assigned to supply arms for the P. battle. Walking to the battle field, they remember, they had to carry many heavy weapons. At some point, they could no longer walk. It was the day Darmandra decided to desert. He left the night before the battle. He remembers that he was afraid, he was tired, he was disappointed and tired of all the commander's unfulfilled promises. A few days later, Ashok, who was in another battalion, also ran away and returned to his home town.

Today, both of them are still very good friends. They have been back to school and are staying with their families. Nonetheless, for some months after they came back, they encountered problems in socializing with other students. When part of a group, they used to remain silent and showed no interest in taking part in the entertainment.

Darmandra and Ashok say that they often have flashbacks. They also used to have nightmares. They are still plagued by an intense feeling of fear in their everyday existence. They feel threatened any time they see an outsider walking round the village. They were afraid of being recruited again by force, even weeks after the CPA.

Today, they also harbour a feeling of guilt about their actions as well as a sense of helplessness. Ashok still has a lot of difficulty in dealing with and speaking about this past. Both of them have recently started to share games again with their school friends.

There is a host of war stories, like the one about three other kids aged 15 to 18 in the same village as Ashok and Darmandra. After being forcibly taken from their schools in Rolpa district by the Maoists, they only stayed there a couple of days, mainly to clean utensils. In spite of their very brief experience, their lives have been transformed. For months, they were afraid of going back to their village too terrified of any potential retaliation or re-recruitment. Now they have started another existence in Palpa district, in a VDC from where at least 60 children were enrolled in the PLA.

All these children have one thing in common: they will have to carry painful scars all their life long and have to deal with traumatic images from the violence they have witnessed or inflicted. Beyond these individual stories, it is undeniable that the People's War has changed something about the mere perception of childhood and youth.

It has been very difficult to obtain these very few narratives recounted by children about the war since most of the children seek refuge in silence. According to all the cases known today, children who wrote about their experiences did so after the event. Indeed, these memoirs were written with some hindsight, rather than in the heat of the moment. Such are the stories reported through published interviews. Though data collection in the field is far from being made easy due to the psychological trauma and social stigma, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of these stories. Most of the time, some fantasy may crop up where facts cannot be verified. The few children willing to speak, often do so exaggerating some aspects, though to what extent, no-one knows. In these narrations, the timeline tends to be blurred, such as the exact name of locations, especially during troops movements, as well as the number of combatants, how long the event lasted, etc.

These stories are engraved in the children's memories. As such, they can help us to get an idea of their mental representation of the war through their eyes. Yet for a more detailed picture, we would need to find more of these narrations and to double-check by comparing several personal stories.

Changes in the perception of childhood in the New Nepal

These children's war experiences may be extremely diverse but all are multifaceted and complex. They have all generated behavioural problems, such as quarrelsome and aggressive behaviour that are hardly addressed due to the lack of any effective reintegration programme. For girls like Trisha, the PLA has been a source of excessive empowerment that led her to an impressive thirst for power, which is now jeopardising her integration in Nepalese society. All these under 18 year olds, who are mainly from vulnerable backgrounds, now have to find their own way with a minimal amount of outside support.

The use of children as fighters during the conflict will undeniably have repercussions on the next generation. Of course, at an individual level, all these child warriors will carry stigmas. Not only will they have to regain their place in civil society, but they also have to deal with their problematic and barely controllable behaviour.

For all their peers, the perception of their surroundings has been changing. The perception of space (with the move away from their native

VDC for the first time for many children), of parenthood (with a child's premature separation from their parents with whom they usually stay until their wedding day for a girl, and all their life long for a boy) and of the notion of safety (home can no longer be considered a safe haven). Over the years schools have become key political ground and a main place, in some areas, for recruitment for the Maoist party. Indeed, schools have stopped being safe areas. Moreover, in hilly districts of the western region –as in Gorkha– many teachers were affiliated to the party and openly supported the insurrection (and as a consequence more or less directly the recruitment of under 18s for military purposes).

At village level, children's involvement in the conflict also brought about deep changes. A feeling of insecurity and suspicion of each other spread among neighbours. Children became the cause of this fear, whereas they were not traditionally perceived as potential dangers by the elders. This is depicted as the “culture of terror” by J. Pettigrew who underlines that the war brings about “*new challenges to understandings of childhood*”.²³⁶ The whole social cohesion of the village has been upset. Parents also have to deal with a new set of dynamics with a general slow undermining of their parental control, challenged by competing ideologies.

As in many traditional societies, Nepalese children and young people are “voiceless”. They are not recognized fully and consulted by the group until they eventually marry and start their own family. Young people are a non negligible part of the population, prone to be actively involved in politics and contestation movements. As such, they sometimes feel the need to provoke tragic events and to use violence to attract attention to their demands and pressurise their elders, who are more powerful.

Changes can be witnessed today in the Nepalese post-war youth through the emergence of political or armed youth movements, such as YCL, that often perceive violence as the only means of being heard. Though the future of these children is apparently not at the top of the political agenda, it seems that the new government cannot afford to leave them on the margins of the overall decision-making process.

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BOOK REVIEWS

***Le maoïsme au Népal. Lectures d'une révolution*, edited by Brigitte STEINMANN, Paris: CNRS Editions. 2006. 250 p. ISBN 2-271-06400-7.**

Reviewed by Satya Shrestha-Schipper

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), whose ideology is heavily influenced by the Naxalite movement, launched the People's War on 13th February 1996 since the Government had not fulfilled the forty-point demand put forward by the party. In 2001, the Government imposed a state of emergency in order to bring the worsening situation under control. Since then, the Nation has witnessed an unprecedented scale of violence. By the time the CPN(M) signed the peace agreement and joined the government in 2006, the death toll amounted to over 15,000. It is in such a context that the reader has to appreciate the book edited by Brigitte Steinmann. This volume is the result of empirical research and a conference on anthropological perspective held in France in 2002. This volume attempts to understand this unique phenomenon, the Maoist revolution, from both a historical and anthropological perspective.

Brigitte Steinmann's introduction on Nepalese Maoism that defines the key themes of the book is followed by a section providing an ethnography of revolutionary violence. It consists of three articles. Pramod Khakurel presents a vivid account of the violence. The author describes the violence in day-to-day life in Bhakunde Besi in Dhulikhel situated 17 km east of Kathmandu. The author shows how villagers lived in constant fear of the Maoists and the security forces. Mukta S. Lama Tamang *et al.* focus on the socio-economic changes brought about by the conflict in the conflict-affected areas. The authors, such as Pramod Khakurel, first describe in detail the violence perpetrated by the State and the Maoists, then discuss the positive changes brought about by the conflict, such as a drop in cases of polygamy, domestic violence, and caste and gender discrimination in Maoist-held areas. They also point out that the economy has suffered a setback as landlords and young men left due to the Maoist threat; consequently, most of the land remained fallow during the conflict. While explaining the socio-economic changes in conflict-affected areas, the authors ignore government-held areas and buffer zones despite including these regions in the fieldwork. It would have been of some interest had the authors paid as much attention to the above-mentioned areas in order to see whether the social reforms implemented with Maoist intervention have become a trend in all conflict-affected regions.

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Philippe Ramirez opt for a visual presentation of the dynamics of the revolutionary movement. The authors publish twenty images taken from various sources dated 1996-2003. The Nepalese Army mainly used such pictures either to discredit Maoist leaders and their activities or to promote their own work alongside the population, whereas the Maoists used illustrations to demarcate the conquered territory and to convey their messages and ideology to villagers. The Maoists pay particular attention to icons, such as women, martyrs, and Marxist leaders, while illustrating popular support for the revolutionary movement. Among the pictures, photographs no. 5 (p. 94) is of particular importance as it changed public opinion towards the Maoists. The photo shows the dead bodies of policemen scattered in a field and a woman crying over her dead police husband. This image shows the brutality of the Maoist attacks in Naumule, Dailekh district in 2001. It shocked the nation and put an end to the Maoist's image as a sort of Robin Hood.

The second part of the book consists of two articles. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine examines the Maoist movement, especially the possible relationship between the emergence of the Maoist movement and the weakening of Royal Power. The author argues that the royal massacre in June 2001 marked the defining moment in the development of the Maoist movement even though the People's War had started back in 1996. Since the royal massacre, the Maoist had developed a new strategy of relegating the [then] king to the rank of "butcher" and representing Maoist leader, Prachanda, as His Majesty's *alter ego*, a legitimate successor of a long warrior tradition initiated by the Gorkhali King, Prithvi Narayan Shah. The author also demonstrates in a convincing manner how the Maoists are inspired by Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification campaign in the 18th century that led to the birth of Nepal and how they have used the same Gorkhali tactics to abolish kingship. She argues that despite the communist ideology, the Gorkhali example has been a model of unity among Maoist leaders who wanted to replace the royal power.

Gisèle Krauskopff discusses the historical context of the current Tharu movement and argues that although the movement has assumed a national dimension, the squatter movement and earlier Tharu rebellious actions remain a precursor of the current Tharu movement in the Tarai region. The author explains that the itinerant lifestyle of the Tharus, who lived for centuries as nomads in the forest on the border between India and Nepal, is a form of collective resistance against tax collectors and outside authorities aimed at retaining all the returns on their work. However, this tradition came to an abrupt end in the 1960s as the Nepalese Government introduced a land reform; since then some Tharus have become tenants (*mohi*), some *kamaiya* (labourers or bonded

labourers) and some have retained an itinerant lifestyle and are known today as “squatters (*sukumbasis*)”. During the same period, so the author explains, the Tharus along with the help of communist politicians took the first legal action in Dang to have tenants’ rights registered as legitimate. Subsequently, *kamaiya* and squatters took radical action by occupying government and private property to take over land; as a result, the government assigned them a small plot of land. However, the first Tharu organisation called “Movement for the Liberation of Tharu Labourers” (*Tharu sramik mukti sangathan*) was established in 1980; it became BASE (Backward Society Education) in 1990. The members of this organisation, with the help of NGOs, journalists and legal activists launched the “Kamaiya Liberation Movement” (*kamaiya mukti andolan*) in 2000; In 2001, three thousand *kamaiyas* from Kailali and Kanchanpur districts occupied and cleared the thousands of hectares of government forest and divided the land amongst themselves.

The author demonstrates in a very compelling way the historical antecedent of the current Tharu movement. However, the author remains rather vague about the “Tharu Liberation Front” (*Tharu (Tharuwan) Mukti Morcha*), a Maoist branch with an ethnic dimension. The author simply explains that the organisation declared the western part of the Tarai (Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur) the Tharuwan Autonomous Region in 2004 and that the Front is headed by a Tharu Maoist (p. 174). According to Gisèle Krauskopff, most disappearances recorded in Bardiya district in 2003 were of Tharus; this was also the district where the “squatter movement” was very active (*ibid*). However, the author fails to explain whether the “squatter movement” evolved into the “Tharu Liberation Front”. Perhaps it is an independent movement, as implied by one of the liberated *kamaiya*, “we have liberated ourselves, Maoist and politicians have done nothing for us” (p. 175). Some historical facts about the “Tharu Liberation Front” would have been very welcome. This movement was in fact founded in Bardiya in 1998.

The last part of the book contains two articles. Brigitte Steinmann discusses socio-political and economic conditions, and the State violence that led to the Maoist insurgency. The author particularly emphasises that the concept of communist party in the Maoist insurgency, with the Marxist theory as a backdrop, has to be placed in the relevant socio-historical context (p. 207). The author argues that inequality and politicisation among ethnic groups have only worsened since the 1990 revolution, which introduced the multi-party system and liberal democracy in the country. As the traditional socio-economic system prevailed, the majority of ethnic and marginalised groups, who played an important role in restoring democracy, were unable to take advantage of this new system. Consequently, they lost any hope they had in traditional

parties (Congress and Communist) to improve their livelihood and were increasingly drawn to the Maoist ideology, as the latter proposed radical solutions, such as, banning caste discrimination and traditional exchanges, and seizing the privileges of the dominant class by violence. The author particularly blames the State for resorting to violence towards ethnic minorities, from the Gorkhali unification of the country to the recent acts of violence to curb the rebellion. Therefore, State brutality against ethnic and marginalised groups, combined with the public's general pessimism caused by the royal massacre in 2001 have only contributed to increasing their support for the Maoist revolution.

The author discusses in length tourism, migration and the introduction of new technologies in rural areas as being the main causes of inequality that has led people to support the Maoist ideology as a way-out. However, the above-mentioned factors are considered to be of varying degrees of importance throughout Nepal. Whereas there is a considerable influx of tourism in Eastern Nepal, where the author conducted most of her fieldwork, the number of tourists visiting Mid-Western and Far-Western Nepal is so negligible that it is pointless to discuss its influence on villagers. Likewise, the people from Eastern Nepal migrate outside India in search of work, whereas villagers from Mid-Western and Far-Western Nepal hardly venture beyond India. The modern technology that the author mentions with regard to Eastern Nepal has just begun to make inroads in these regions. Thus, inequality has indeed played an important role in the rise of Maoism in rural Nepal, though the reasons behind this inequality are diverse. Therefore, regional variability should have been taken into consideration when defining inequality in the country.

Philippe Ramirez examines the nationalist aspect of violence in the Nepalese Maoist ideology. The author demonstrates how skilfully the Nepalese Maoists internalised the use of violence despite borrowing it directly from the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The author argues that the Maoists' main objective is to present violence as a solution to decadence and as a way of regenerating the Nepalese nation-state. To incite violence, the Maoists exalt the sacrifice made by the Gorkhalis during the unification of the country and describe the Nepalese people as "brave warriors" and "violent" by virtue and ready to sacrifice itself for the nation. They then accuse successive leaders of relinquishing violence and of rendering the country economically and politically weak and inferior. Thus, for the Maoists, violence has unified the nation and demarcated its boundary, thus only violence can re-establish its glorious past. They, therefore, present themselves as the legitimate successors to the Gorkhali martyrs, on the verge of fulfilling the dream these martyrs treasured and the aspiration of the Nepalese people to establish a socialist society by

establishing a strong nation and “new democracy” (*naulo janavad*). The author then looks at the similarities and differences in the use of violence in other Asian nationalistic insurrections: the Naxalite and Naga movements in India and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

I spotted a few errors in the dates of events. The Jhapa revolt took place in 1971, not in 1975 (p. 9) and in 1991 (p. 187). The clash between the police and Maoists in Bhakunde Besi took place in 2002 not in 2004 (p. 39). Likewise, the authors mention the incident that took place in Wot village in 1988 (p. 60), relating it to the behaviour of the security personnel during the People’s War; however, the insurgency only broke out in 1996; therefore, the incident must have taken place in 1998. However, these mistakes do not overshadow this book’s overall contribution. Despite some minor criticisms and the lack of Nepalese academic work on the revolution, it is an excellent book and may be recommended to all those who would like to understand this unique phenomenon, the Maoist movement in Nepal. I hope the authors will give serious thought to translating the book into English (in Nepali as well, if possible!) to make it available to a wider audience well worthy of the effort.

Michelle KERGOAT. *Histoire politique du Népal. Aux origines de l'insurrection maoïste*. Paris: Karthala. 2007. 315 p. ISBN : 978-2-84586-945-5.

Reviewed by Benoît Cailmail

Books on the Maoist insurrection in Nepal and its origins have flourished over the past years, many of which have described the People's war on a rather broad scale. However, most books on the subject are written in English. Michelle Kergoat's book entitled *Histoire politique du Népal. Aux origines de l'insurrection maoïste* (*Political History of Nepal. The Origins of the Maoist insurrection*) renders the Nepal Maoist issue accessible to the non-English speakers in France and in French-speaking countries.

In a long introduction, Michelle Kergoat brushes a quick outline of Nepal's topographical, demographic and climatic situation, and sets the scene where non-specialists gain a better understanding of the historical events she later depicts. Her book is then divided into three main parts: the first deals with the period leading to the first democracy in 1951; the second part describes the contemporary history of the country from 1951 to 2006; while the third part of the essay is an analysis of the different elements that finally led to the Maoist insurrection.

The first chapter –in which Michelle Kergoat admits to the rather confused sources of information on this subject (p. 29)– retraces very concisely the historic period prior to unification by Prithvi Narayan Shah. Yet, despite the author's warning, the reader cannot help but regret that she did not take this opportunity to provide a few hints about the different interpretations given by successive historians who worked on this topic, and all the more so as she does not systematically give her sources to backup her choices.

The next two chapters relate how Greater Nepal was built by King Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors, which is followed by an account of the Rana era. The author shows how the king of Gorkha based his conquest both on violent and diplomatic means, first by organizing his army along new lines (with the use of firearms and an innovative means of paying his soldiers), then by making promises to local chiefs who agreed to bend to his rule. Prithvi Narayan Shah and his followers gradually managed to lay the foundations of the future nation of Nepal. However, the author notes that quarrels related to successive reigns weakened the new kingdom and eventually led to its being supplanted by the Rana family.

Though this take-over did indeed last a whole century, it suddenly collapsed because of a “double impact” (p. 71): the birth of opposing forces and the support it gained from neighbouring India. Although this regime has been highly criticized by many of the current Nepalese political leaders, Michelle Kergoat argues that the Rana era was not entirely negative and that it even led to undeniable progress, especially under Jang Bahadur’s reign. Hence, the author cites Jang Bahadur’s *Muluki Ain* or the Rana general foreign policy which, as she sees it, allowed Nepal to avoid annexation by British India.

She examines more thoroughly the impact that the Shahs and the Ranas had on social and religious issues in the fourth chapter of her book. Among the different questions the author raises, an attempt is made to show how the two dynasties contributed to forging the concept of a nation in Nepal and to creating a genuine “State” of Nepal by establishing a set of rules and laws designed to unify the population. In addition, Michelle Kergoat devotes a large part of this chapter to the propagation of Hinduism and its consequences on the local population. After dissecting the mechanisms whereby Hinduism flourished in the Kingdom with the help of the Brahmins, she examines its impact on Nepalese religious matters in all relativity, for she notes that in 1951, village communities in remote areas practised an unorthodox Hinduism, mixed with rites borrowed from their former animist beliefs. Hence, she argues that Hinduism mainly influenced Nepal’s social sphere by reserving the highest ranking positions for members of the high castes. Domination by the higher Hindu castes thus created a rift between the centre and the periphery, described in the last part of this fourth chapter through a study of the main ethnic groups of Nepal. Here, one regrets that the author merely chose to provide descriptions of eastern ethnic tribes. Indeed, although the Magars are the main indigenous ethnic group (according to the Nepal 2001 census), Michelle Kergoat does not see fit to devote a detailed analysis to it. This choice is all the more surprising since the title of the book suggests that the author aimed, among other things, at giving an account of the Maoist insurrection, a rebellion which was initiated in a Magar-dominated area.

The second part of the book deals with the emergence of the Nepalese democracy and its vicissitudes, between 1951 and 2006. After briefly summarizing in her fifth and sixth chapters the major events that occurred during this period in time, the author sets out in the seventh and last long chapter of the second part to paint a more detailed picture of main actors involved in the various episodes that has shaken the Nepalese political scene over the past four decades.

To begin with, Michelle Kergoat focuses on the role of the king (not so much as a person but rather as an institution) in the country’s

contemporary history for, as the author puts it, one cannot tackle Nepal's political developments over the last forty years without doing so. The links between the King and the Hindu religion are of course one of the key factors which explain the omnipresence of the monarch in every decision taken by the government, and the fact that, for instance, Gyanendra "gave back the power to the People" (according to his words) in April 2006 underlines the King's belief that he legitimately "owned" the power and that it was only through his magnanimity that the Nepalese People finally recovered it (p. 158). Moreover, the "trauma" of the Rana period made the king reluctant about the idea of sharing his power with any other political figure. Hence, he forever tried to counter-balance any institution, party or person that would pose a threat to his authority, either by seizing total power, or by decentralizing it and thus, diluting it at a grassroots level.

The second category of actors is the political parties, and the author briefly retraces their history (the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) excepted). Among other issues, the quarrels within the different parties and their leaders' respective personal ambitions are thoroughly analysed, with Michelle Kergoat reminding the reader that this greatly contributed to weakening their position and to reinforcing the king's position.

The author then describes the CPN (M): its birth and growth, its ideology as well as its strategy. Though this section provides a good synopsis of the CPN (M)'s main trends, one regrets that the author does not systematically state her sources. For instance, she mentions the fact that the Maoists announced the creation of 21 district governments in 2001 (p. 183) or the birth and policy of the CCOMPOSA (Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisation of South Asia) (p. 188), but does not refer to any precise written sources (or even to any oral interviews she might have recorded), making any further investigation on these issues impossible.

India is another major actor on Nepal's political scene, and since the rise of the Ranas –as the events of 1990 have shown– its influence over the Himalayan Kingdom has been undeniable. Nepal is an ideal buffer state between China and India, with the latter casting a jealous eye over Kathmandu to prevent any attempts by Beijing to enhance its role in the area. Although the Kingdom tries to play the Chinese card to the full, it has often no other choice than to abide by New Delhi's rule, since its geographical situation makes its economic development highly dependant on India's goodwill.

According to Michelle Kergoat, the role the People have to play is probably what has improved most since 1950 (p. 200). The rise in democracy and the (still slow) progress made in education in rural areas are probably partly responsible for these steps forward. The part played by the People in revolutionary movements started in 1951, with the fall of

the Ranas, and has steadily increased since then, reaching new heights during the movement in 1990. The population's expectations are taking on a more specific nature and though their political commitment has gained momentum, thus proving their trust in democracy, the author points out that many Nepalese people are still incapable of differentiating between the different political parties (p. 205).

Lastly, before launching into the third part of her book, Michelle Kergoat briefly mentions the role intellectuals and students have to play.

In this final part, Michelle Kergoat focuses on the social, economic and cultural context in which the Nepalese democracy emerged, and she sets out to study its future viability.

The eighth chapter thus provides an overview of the country's economic and social situation. The author analyzes the state of demographic growth, the economic activities as well as public infrastructures from 1951 to the present day, backing up her arguments with a great many figures and tables.

The socio-cultural context is dealt with in the following chapter, in which the author reverts to the religious background of Nepal and explains how Hinduism, from a religious perspective, is gradually losing its hold over the local population (p. 243), despite the fact that its hegemony was ratified by the 1990 Constitution. However, when studying recent Nepalese political elites, she notes that the culture they promote prevails, creating frustrations among the minorities.

Given the social, economic and cultural context, the author thus wonders if the Maoist insurrection might have been foreseen. She observes in the tenth chapter that because of their elitism, successive governments have not grasped the population's basic needs, while inequalities within Nepalese society have never ceased to exist despite the emergence of a democracy in 1990. Moreover, through its increasing political commitment (especially after 1990), the population was able to broadly express its demands, their growing ethnic claims being a perfect illustration of this political development. The author ends the chapter with a description of the impact of the People's war on the country, recalling however that the sources of information concerning this issue are scarce and not always reliable (p. 276).

The eleventh and last chapter is a sketchy outline of Nepal's future, following the People's movement in April 2006 and the peace agreement signed between the Seven Parties Alliance and the CPN (M).

Overall, Michelle Kergoat's book mainly targets a non-specialist public. Indeed, in dealing with the subject, the author has preferred to use already existing literature rather than calling upon primary sources and her own personal experience. Despite some incomprehensible editorial errors, such as the misspelling of Prachanda's name (written

“Prachandra” throughout the book), her book is indeed an excellent synopsis of Nepal’s history and of the brand new Republic’s latest political development.

CORRESPONDENCE, ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS

Call for Papers:

“Migration and Changes in the Himalayas”

Tristan Bruslé

Fifty years ago, Toni Hagen stated that a quarter of the Nepalese population was on the move in the winter months. Today, mobility in the Himalayas, in its different forms, seems to have taken on unprecedented proportions. The estimated number of Nepalese people living outside Nepal has reached six million, whereas, of the nine million Uttarakhandis, 30 per cent live outside their native state. Politicians and development workers often consider remittances, which represent between 17 and 25 per cent of the Nepalese GDP, to be the ultimate solution for the country's development and modernization. This is a subject for discussion.

Whether temporary or permanent, foreigners also head for the Indian and Nepalese mountains and piedmonts, whereas internal migrations to towns or to rural areas have induced a major shift in the distribution of populations. New places are colonised and created. The integration of highlanders in the national and international labour market has led to a change in the nature of these movements. Different kinds of mobility coexist in the same locality and even within the same family. The boundaries between internal and international migrations have become somewhat blurred: families use the geographical scattering of their members to minimize risks, thus enhancing new livelihood strategies. Everywhere migration is becoming a norm, and more and more youngsters wish to adhere to this. As a result, transnational communities and diasporas are now making their voice heard to influence politics at home, raising issues of development, citizenship and belonging.

In the Himalayas, mobility can thus be considered a key feature of rural and urban economies and societies, even though this is not a new phenomenon. Its characteristics have changed, migrants choose destinations that are more distant, and impacts in their places of origin are more visible. The link between migration and development should be the subject of an in-depth study, bearing in mind that development creates conditions for greater outward movement. Migration may also be regarded as an expression of social change, while at the same time upsetting local lifestyles.

Here are a few themes that might be discussed: the processes of internal and international migration in relation to family or individual

livelihood strategies; actors of international migration (migrants themselves, *dalal*, manpower companies and state policies); gender issues, in particular concerning certain gendered types of migration; migration and changes: changes in individual aspirations and changes at family and local levels; changes in dwelling places; migration and modernity; spatial mobility and social mobility; migration and development; economic and social remittances; hometown associations and development; the making of a diaspora and the role of the institutions; material and immaterial aspects of a “culture of migration”; associations and building of communities abroad: political, caste and ethnic issues; transnational ethnic movements; issues regarding forced migration, human trafficking and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The cases studied by authors should be linked to current sociological, spatial and political developments in Nepal and India.

Proposals should focus on the Indian and Nepalese Himalayas and their immediate lowlands. They should be based on extended fieldwork, and may be linked to migration and diaspora theories. Very general approaches are not recommended. Diachronic village studies would be of particular interest.

Proposal abstract (no more than 500 words) should be sent to tristan.brusle@vjf.cnrs.fr, before 30th April 2009. The deadline for articles is end of July 2009. Publication is scheduled for autumn 2009.

INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the managing editor (pramirez@vjf.cnrs.fr). All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

We would prefer that you send both a “hard” and electronic copy of your contribution. Please use author-year citations in parenthesis within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the “Harvard format”.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988:132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak bhandar.

Miller, M.L. 1989. “A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya”. *Kailash* 6 (2): 121-83.

Smith, B.C. 1992. “Looking for ostriches”. In *Research Methodologies for the Himalayas*, edited by J. Pande, pp. 110-145. Shimla: Mountain Publishers.

Use of quotation marks:

Use double quotation marks (“ ”) for quotations of any kind, and for so-called “epistemological distancing”.

Use single quotation marks (‘ ’) for quotations within quotations and semantic gloss, including renderings of indigenous terms.

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EBHR CNRS-Himalaya
7 rue Guy Môquet
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Tel. +33 (0) 1 49 58 37 31
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