

***Le maoïsme au Népal. Lectures d'une révolution*, edited by Brigitte STEINMANN, Paris: CNRS Editions. 2006. 250 p. ISBN 2-271-06400-7.**

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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.