

Why Mao? Maoist insurgencies in India and Nepal

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Introduction

Although 30 years have passed since his death, Mao Tse-tung continues to inspire violent action in South Asia. Maoist rebels are active in at least nine Indian states, and were labelled in March 2006 as the greatest internal security challenge ever faced by the country.² After a decade of war in Nepal, Maoist rebels control up to 80% of the country,³ and are now working with a coalition of political parties to rewrite the country's constitution that will in all likelihood do away with the country's powerful monarchy.

In this essay, I examine the original Naxalite movements, the current Maoist insurgencies in India, and the ten-year Maoist insurrection that has led to fundamental changes in Nepal. The central question that I hope to answer is why Maoism has continued to inspire violent revolution so long after the Chairman's death. From these cases, there emerge three compelling reasons for Maoism's existence and persistence in South Asia: it employs tactically effective methods; it springs from political organisations that are prone to extremist schisms; and it targets populations that have not tasted the fruits of political and economic development.

Effectively dealing with Maoist insurrections in these countries will necessitate the implementation of policies that bring real change to the peasants and rural poor. Policy makers must also be open to new and peaceful ways to entice Maoists to contribute to positive change. Until such policies are implemented, and implemented with speed, the prospect of Maoist violence will continue.

² Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-2006*, 2006, p24; Manmohan Singh, "PM's Speech at the Chief Ministers' Meet on Naxalism," April 13, 2006.

³ "Q&A: Nepal crisis," *BBC News*, February 1, 2005.

The original Naxalites

The Naxalite movement takes its name from a 1967 peasant uprising that occurred in the village of Naxalbari, located in the Darjiling District of the Indian State of West Bengal. Although small-scale Mao-inspired agitations were not new to India, the movement's rapid expansion to other states and its strategic location on the borders of China and East Pakistan grabbed the attention of the public and government,⁴ and its repercussions are being felt to this day. The original Naxalite insurrections of 1967-1972 are today recognised as the "Awakening" of a much larger movement that has persisted for nearly 40 years,⁵ and the term "Naxalite" refers to "all forms of armed struggle...that have taken up the cause of socio-economic development of the downtrodden rural masses."⁶

The story of the Naxalites begins with India's Fourth General Elections, which were held in 1967. The elections resulted in a stunning end to the hegemony of the Indian National Congress Party over state governments and the surprising rise of a new party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)]. The CPI (M) had been created three years before the election, when the Sino-Soviet conflict and internal disagreements led it to its split from the long-established Communist Party of India (CPI). The CPI (M) took with it a large number of moderates and extreme leftists who were critical of the apparent revisionist activities and pro-Soviet stance of the CPI. These extreme leftists of the CPI (M), and their belief in a Mao-inspired revolution for India, directed and fuelled the Naxalite movements of 1967-1972.

⁴ Marcus F. Franda. *Radical Politics in West Bengal*, (Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1971), 152.

⁵ Prakash Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002), 4.

⁶ Suba Chandran and Mallika Joseph, "The Naxalite Movement," in *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia: An Overview of Conflict and Peacebuilding Activities*, ed. Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren, and Hans van de Veen (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 384.

Although the Congress Party remained in control of the central government, it lost its

hold on six state legislatures, including West Bengal and Kerala. In these two states, the CPI (M) found itself cast in the lead role of two new governing coalitions. This victory came as a surprise to CPI (M) leadership,⁷ and intensified the debates within the CPI (M) rank and file that had been brewing since its creation.

From its onset, internal critics of the CPI (M)'s decision to participate in electoral politics found a voice in Charu Mazumdar, originally a middle-ranking member of the CPI (M) and a firm believer in the role of violent revolution in achieving social justice. To him, by *not* preparing for an armed assault on the government and by compromising more ambitious cadres' efforts to do so, the CPI (M) was engaging in the unforgivable sin of revisionism; the very actions that had brought the CPI (M) into existence in the first place.⁸ In May of 1967, the dreams of Mazumdar were realised when three sharecroppers and 150 members of a breakaway faction of the CPI (M) led by Kanu Sanyal looted the granary of a landlord near the village of Naxalbari. Over the following months, the "Naxalites" were responsible for over 200 violent incidents that included assault, robbery and the stealing of armaments, earning the praise of Chinese authorities and the condemnation of the CPI (M). Ironically, this original agitation appears to have been originally planned by the CPI (M) to harass the expected victors in the election; upon joining the ranks of the ruling coalition the CPI (M) was unable to control the Naxalite uprising and was forced to confront it.⁹ In July, the CPI (M) distanced itself from the Chinese Communist Party and officially expelled Mazumdar and the other Naxalites, which only seemed to validate Mazumdar's theories of revisionist leadership and swell the ranks of the movement.¹⁰

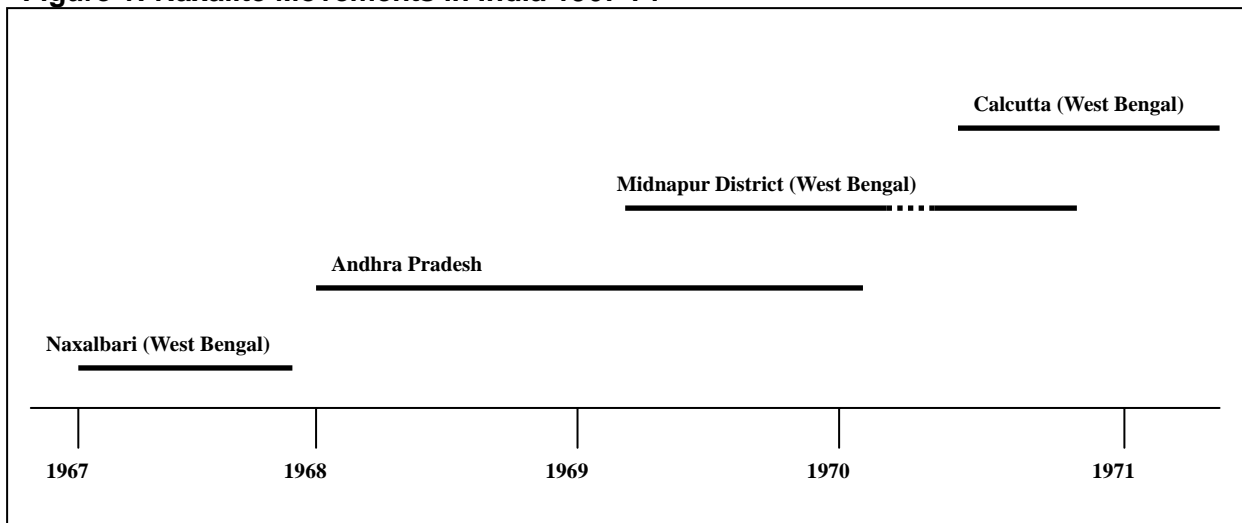
⁷ Mohan Ram, *Indian Communism: Split Within a Split*, (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1969), 219.

⁸ Ray Rabindra, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 84-85.

⁹ Marcus F. Franda, *Radical Politics in West Bengal*, (Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1971), 159.

¹⁰ Rabindra, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, 140-142.

Figure 1: Naxalite Movements in India 1967-71



These first incidences of Naxalite activity in Naxalbari were met with a stern reaction by the West Bengal authorities and were squashed by late 1967. The movement reemerged in a larger form in the northern parts of Andhra Pradesh in 1968, where guerrillas seized property, killed landlords, and engaged in acts of terror. It was met with a swift and heavy response, and was quieted there by early 1970. A year earlier, in 1969, the movement exploded again in West Bengal with the murder of landlords, redistribution of property, and cancellation of peasant debts, was stopped in early 1970, only to flare-up and be violently extinguished once again that same year.¹¹

Splits within the ranks of the CPI (M) were exasperated by the events surrounding the Naxalite movement, and led to the formation of a rival party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI (ML)]. On May 1, 1969, the original Naxalite leader Kanu

¹¹ Sanjay Seth, "Indian Maoism: The Significance of Naxalbari," in *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought*, ed. Arlif Dirlik, Paul Healy, and Nick Knight (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 293-294.

Sanyal announced the formation of the CPI (ML) with himself as Party Chairman and Charu Mazumdar as Secretary of the Central Organising Committee. The CPI (ML) initially attracted some 20,000-30,000 members across India, and yet despite its message of social justice for the downtrodden its most ardent supporters were college graduates who received their education in the United States and Europe.¹² The contradictions in CPI (ML)'s membership and theory did not go unnoticed, with a contemporary noting that “the CPI (ML)'s thinking reveals a distortion of Mao's thoughts to fit into middle class revolutionism [sic].”¹³

The CPI (ML) utilised Mao's ideas on revolution to employ peasant actors and rural-based violent action, and initially was reluctant to operate in cities.¹⁴ However, by 1970 the revolution had left the countryside and moved into urban areas. In Calcutta and other urban centres of West Bengal, the Naxalite's battled with the CPI (M) and other political parties for control of unions, assassinating political opponents and engaging in an “annihilation campaign” that was to be a bloody kick-start for a wider revolution. Instead of overturning the government or creating a more widespread revolt, however, the annihilation campaign triggered two responses which ultimately led to its demise: the creation of vigilante groups, and the deployment of the Indian Army.

Violence peaked in 1970, and in 1971 the Naxalite revolution began to lose momentum. China's stance on the Bangladesh War and internal disputes split the movement's already fragmented leadership. That year, the Indian Congress Party organised anti-Naxalite volunteer groups, whose application of violence was described as “even more ferocious

¹² Marcus F. Franda. *Radical Politics in West Bengal*, (Cambridge, The M.I.T. Press, 1971), 170.

¹³ Ram, *Indian Communism: Split Within a Split*, 263.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

and indiscriminating” than the Naxalites themselves.¹⁵ The dents that the Congress vigilantes were inflicting on Naxalite membership and morale were complimented by arrests made by the Indian Army and police. In 1971, some 50,000 CPI (ML) members were in jail, and in one incident some 150 members were massacred near Calcutta. In June of 1972, security forces succeeded in capturing two of the movement’s pre-eminent leaders, and in July arrested Mazumdar himself. His death in custody that month signalled the end of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, and by the end of 1972 it was described as “one of the most peaceful states in India.”¹⁶

For the original Naxalites, Maoism provided an inspirational blueprint for revolt, yet in the late 1960s it failed to achieve the successes it had engendered in China. As an ideology, Maoism was both progressive and inspirational, championing national economic liberation, opposing capitalist imperialism, and criticising revisionism. In West Bengal at that time, the young and educated population took these ideas to heart and gave the Naxalite movement strength and momentum. Peasants were inspired to turn the social and political order upside down, and for a time were emboldened to overthrow their masters. Perhaps one of the movement’s flaws, however, was its failure to follow the strategic prescriptions of Maoism regarding rural-based warfare: it failed to create sustainable rural bases and was fighting with state security forces before it had time to consolidate its control of the countryside. Further, in moving to the cities it found the tactics pioneered by Mao ineffective. The movement from rural to urban was the consequence of it being driven by students and ex-students from metropolitan centres (rather than peasants) and the fact that it took place in one of the most industrialised and urbanised states in India of the time.

¹⁵ Ray Rabindra, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, 172.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

Unlike other parts of India today, Maoist revolution is not a major concern of West Bengal.

One oft-cited reason is that its governments have been successful in

implementing land reforms,¹⁷ an issue that is seen to be central to the persistence of Maoist revolutionary movements in states such as Central Bihar.¹⁸ Another may be that the economic and political issues that drove students and peasants to Maoism are no longer of concern, or have been co-opted by other political parties. A third reason may have been the swift and thorough security response, which was active in confronting the movement before it had time to take root and hold. In the village of Naxlabari today, the CPI (M) is in firm control, and with the exceptional pilgrim on the anniversary of Charu Mazumdar's death remains free of Naxalite or CPI (ML) influence.¹⁹

Naxalites today

Although the authorities in West Bengal were successful in stopping the Naxalite insurgency in 1972, the movement proved to be the inspiration for other actors interested in achieving social justice through political, peasant-led violence. Today, there are said to be some between 10,000 and 20,000 battle-tested Maoists in India who are in possession of modern equipment and the means to produce and develop firearms.²⁰ The Naxalites of the 21st Century have once again captured the attention of the central government, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh labelling them in March 2006 as the “single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country.”²¹

The successors of Muzumdar's Maoist revolution have been most extreme in the states of

¹⁷ Chandran and Joseph, “The Naxalite Movement,” 384.

¹⁸ Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, 3.

¹⁹ Indrajit Hazra, “Naxalbari 2006,” *Hindustan Times*, May 5, 2006.

²⁰ Satyabrat Sinha, “India-Nepal Relations—Where Do We Go from Here?” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article no. 1691, April 4, 2005; Jo Johnson, “Insurgency in India—How the Maoist Threat Reaches Beyond Nepal,” *Financial Times*, April 26, 2006.

²¹ Manmohan Singh, “PM's Speech at the Chief Ministers' Meet on Naxalism,” April 13, 2006.

Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhatishgarh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. They have been credited with increasing the wages and

land holdings of agricultural workers, as well as attracting development projects.²² However, they have, among other things, been responsible for slitting the throats of 44 farmers in 1992, a massacre of 54 upper caste community members in 1997, and various other crimes against the people they proclaim to be fighting for.²³ In recent months these have included the kidnapping of children, blowing up vehicles, the hijacking and looting of a passenger train, and the murder of at least 39 civilians.²⁴

Scholars suggest that violent Maoist insurrections in India are “an inevitable consequence of the existing agrarian structure,”²⁵ and that these movements “thrive in an environment where economic development is lagging, where the old exploitative classes...have not been dislodged by modernisation...and where the government machinery has not been made transparent by the pressure of a functioning democracy.”²⁶ Manoranjan Mohanty points out that Naxalites are most active in hilly tribal areas, the home of the most exploited people in the country.²⁷ While there is nearly universal recognition that there is a link between India’s socio-economic problems and militancy, why have the insurgents continued to ascribe to *Maoism*?

One answer to this question is that Maoism is tactically effective. The fact that some of the Maoist groups operating in India have been doing so for nearly 40 years shows that the military and organisational prescriptions of Mao make it possible for an under-armed, small group of ideologically-inspired people to go about taking political control of isolated

²² Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, “Introduction.”

²³ Human Rights Watch, “Broken People: Caste Violence Against India’s ‘Untouchables,’” March 1999.

²⁴ *The Statesman*, “Briefs”, April 30, 2006; *The Statesman*, “Cops Rescue Six-Yr-Old From Maoist Stronghold,” May 15, 2006; Aramant K. Menon, “Guns and Postures,” *India Today*, April 17, 2006.

²⁵ Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, 64.

²⁶ Chandran and Joseph, “The Naxalite Movement,” 392.

²⁷ Manoranjan Mohanty, “The Course of Naxalism,” *Himal Magazine*, September 22, 2005.

rural areas. Despite a dip in violence in the 1990s, there is no indication that groups like the Maoist Communist Center and People's War Group are weakening.

Rather, recent events such as the murder of rival politicians, the killing of informers, and the destruction of police offices suggest that they are growing.²⁸ Further, the merging of these two groups into a new Communist Party of India (Maoist) in the autumn of 2004 means they have become the largest left-wing resistance movement in the country, with influence in at least nine states, and alleged international collaboration with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Agency as well as Sri Lanka's Tamil separatist movement.²⁹

Another reason for the persistence of Maoism in India is that other forms of social change take a great deal of time and end with compromise. Passive resistance and democracy require commitments measured in years, and can conclude without successfully resolving important issues. Maoism, on the other hand, is a proactive approach that will also take time, but will only end with the complete elimination of the enemy and the issues settled in the way that is "just." In the depressing socio-economic situations experienced by impoverished people, Maoism may seem to be the only choice.

Maoism's persistence in India may also be a function of its tendency to fracture into smaller and more radical groupings, which are not only difficult to uproot but also more prone to violence. The leadership of the Maoist movement in India was never consolidated, and despite the recent merger of its two largest bodies, the original Maoist parties have now split into at least a dozen different factions. This may be related to the ideological underpinnings of the organisations, which encourage extremism and condemn any hint of moderation in thought or action. In order to keep their posts, senior members of India's

²⁸ "BJP leader among 3 shot dead by Maoists," *The Hindu*, April 23, 2005; "Maoists give bandh call, kill 'informer,'" *The Hindu*, April 8, 2005; "Maoists blast old police station building," *The Hindu*, April 20, 2005.

²⁹ Kumar, "Merger of Naxal Groups: Threat or Opportunity." NK Pant, "Naxalite Violence and Internal Security," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article no. 523, July 13, 2001. M.R. Josse, "Disturbing Proliferation of Extremism," *Kathmandu Post*, October 15, 2003.

Maoist movements must do their utmost to continue the revolution—maintaining their revolutionary credentials or risk being labelled a reactionary by their more ideologically driven comrades.

Another question that arises is the degree to which India's Maoists are true to their namesake. In the tactical sense, the Naxalites have followed the Mao's prescriptions for the effective use of time, space and material against a much larger and stronger enemy. However, Mao was quite clear in warning against the movement becoming the home of bandits and anarchists, and insisted that guerrilla warfare be properly organised.³⁰ Kidnappings, the murder of civilians, the hijacking of a train, and other incidents of terror ascribed to India's Maoists in 2006 indicate that various Naxalite groups are deviating from the course of Mao Tse-tung Thought. Elsewhere, it is even suggested that Maoists are dabbling in lucrative corners of capitalism, becoming involved in the illicit trade of narcotics and counterfeit currency.³¹ On the other hand, there may be confusion as to who is responsible for actions that stray from the Maoist path. Are the terrible incidents the work of organised Naxalite parties, or are they violent outlaws operating in the anarchic zones of Naxalite control?

The number of Maoist factions complicates any effort by the Government of India to lure the parties into peaceful politics. However, one of the greatest challenges to solving the present Naxalite problem is not the nature of the Maoists but a lack of coordinated effort on the side of the Indian government. The fact that the state governments are run by different political parties means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to reach cross-state consensus

³⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith II, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 45

³¹ Anil Kamgoj, "Naxalism: India's Biggest Security Challenge," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article 1995, April 20, 2006.

on how to deal with the problems.³² Further, there have even been cases of opposition springing from within the central government. For example, in 2005 the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest intervened against proposed counter-Naxalite legislation that would have conferred rights to forest dwellers.³³ Acting with greater concern for the control of its portfolio than the betterment of Indian citizens, the Ministry demonstrated that many of the hurdles to eradicating Maoism are built into the democratic political system.

The Naxalite issue has continued in India because it has political utility. In the past, there have been instances where the national government refrained from offering meaningful development and military support to fight them. Instead, they watched as the Maoists took control of rural areas, and then used reports and commissions to highlight the “failings” of their state-level rivals.³⁴ At the local levels, private armies, such as the infamous Ranvir Sena in Bihar, are wielded by the upper castes as a blunt counterweight to the Naxalites, rival political parties, and the aspirations of the lower castes.³⁵ The use of violence is legitimised by the activities of Maoists, and the Ranvir Sena has received considerable political support from parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party.³⁶ Ironically, if the Maoists were to disappear then the upper caste landlords would be obliged to divulge power to lower-caste communities. Allowing the problem to fester, on the other hand, facilitates their continued economic and political hegemony.

³² V. Jayanth, “Bringing rebels into the mainstream,” *The Hindu*, April 20, 2005.

³³ Richard Mahapatra, “The PMO Backs Out from Counter-Naxalite Strategy,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article 1701, April 16, 2005.

³⁴ Suba Chandran and Alok Kumar Gupta, “Caste Violence and Class in Bihar: The Ranvir Sena,” in *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia: An Overview of Conflict and Peacebuilding Activities*, ed. Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren, and Hans van de Veen (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 402.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 398.

Experts write that an effective response to the Naxalite problem must be a comprehensive one that combines law-and-order with economic and political development. They suggest that extending roads and basic services to the most remote regions will drain support for violent revolution. At the state level, they point to coordinating cross-state police actions,

and generally reforming and modernising the police forces.³⁷ In the complexities of Indian politics, this is no easy task and will necessitate strong leadership to see that the changes made are lasting and sustainable. The degree to which the national government can restrain its powerful ministries, as well as the state governments' ability act in chorus remain to be seen, and it may take events of significant proportion to stir them to action. Such a situation is taking place in Nepal.

The Maoists of Nepal

In Nepal, Maoism inspired a revolution that has lasted a decade and cost the lives of 13,000 people. After ten years, it has resulted in sweeping changes to the political landscape, and an apparent end to the Nepalese Monarchy. Like India, the movement has roots in the socio-economic conditions of the country, and was born from a fissiparous and idealistic Communist Party. Unlike India, the Maoists have been largely successful in toppling the national government, and have effective control over 80% of the country. Its recent success, however, did not come through military action alone, and required coordination and compromise with Nepal's other political parties. Though things are presently calm in Katmandu, it remains to be seen how by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) will make the transition to peace and democracy.

The Maoist insurgency in Nepal was a consequence of the country's particular economic, political, and social circumstances that developed in the 1990s.³⁸ In the realm of economics, expectations among Nepal's young, educated and rural populations far outpaced the

³⁷ Chandran and Joseph, "The Naxalite Movement," 392-393.

³⁸ Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati, *A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996-2003*, (Katmandu: The Printhouse, 2003), 55-80.

realities of their country's development. Despite hopes of change after the return of democracy in the 1990s, Nepal in 2004 ranked 140th on the Human

Development Index, with 82.5% of its population living beneath the poverty line and nearly 20% classified as “undernourished.”³⁹ Furthermore, whatever growth was achieved in the 1990s appeared only in the few urban centres, and the number of educated and unemployed throughout the country has only increased.

In politics, Nepal was able to catch the Third Wave of democracy but its largest parties failed to consolidate their gains or expand their organisational base into Nepal’s vast hinterland. Instead of building up new leadership in rural areas (where 83.4% of the population lives), the first ruling party of the new, democratic Nepal appointed the same elites that had ruled the under the previous regime to continue to govern the provinces. When a united front of communist parties took control in 1994, hopes were high that the parties would address the issues of poverty and injustice, but the disunity and opportunism that they brought with them only contributed to a feeling of malaise.⁴⁰ Since then, there were opportunities for change as leadership of Nepal has shifted between political parties and coalitions, but with King Gyanendra’s royal coup of February 2005, Nepal returned to the type of authoritarian political system that preceded democracy, giving a strong indication that the political and economic marginalisation of the rural masses would continue.

In terms of social groups, the period following democracy to the present day has seen a consolidation of elites in the management of the country, most clearly demonstrated by the composition of Nepal’s civil service. Since the mid 1980’s, the number of civil service

³⁹ United Nations Development Programme, “Human Development Report: Cultural Liberty in Today’s Diverse World,” 2004, 141, 148, 162.

⁴⁰ Kristoffel Lieten, “Nepal: Maoist Insurgency Against Lopsided Development” in *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia: An Overview of Conflict and Peacebuilding Activities*, ed. Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren, and Hans van de Veen (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 435.

employees from the most economically and politically powerful ethnicities in

Nepal have risen from 69% to 98%.⁴¹ Another telling example comes from the other end of the social spectrum. The UNDP's 2004 Human Development Report gives stark details concerning Nepal's Dalit (untouchable) population, with life expectancy, literacy and income that are far below the country's average. These data indicate that life at the bottom is short and miserable.

This type of inequality undoubtedly contributed to a willingness to accept calls for radical, violent action that would turn the social, political and economic order upside down. Deepak Thapa describes this as "hope in a radical solution," and a function of poverty rather than a consequence of Maoist ideology.⁴² Indeed, it would be hard to imagine anyone to be drawn to the Maoist cause if not for unnaturally desperate conditions and no hope for improvement through peaceful means. In Nepal, the peaceful shift that occurred in 1991 to democracy was supposed to bring development, and it did not. In fact, for some sectors of the population things actually became worse. When the King dissolved parliament in 2002 and consolidated his control over the government in 2005, it only fuelled pessimism.

Yet the question still stands, why Maoism and not some other form of radical change? In Nepal the reason appears to lie in the hard work of an individual, Mohan Bikram Singh. As a young man, Singh had been a member of the Nepali Congress Party but joined the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and by 1957 had risen to a position of prominence. He worked hard in his home district of Pyuthan in western Nepal, building a strong communist organisation that followed him through the convulsions that fractured the party from the 1960s through the 1990s. Like other communist parties in South Asia, the CPN went

⁴¹ Thapa and Sijapati, *Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996-2003*, 77.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 64, 79.

through a series of splits following the Sino-Soviet break in the 1960s, and

further splintered with the establishment of the Panchayat (“no party”) rule under King Mahendra.

Singh stood out as a radical that opposed any compromise with the King and demanded elections for a constitutional assembly. He established a radical Maoist party in the mid 1960s that broke into a number of factions, and established his own party in 1983, the Communist Party of Nepal (Masal). He opposed the democracy created in 1991, again calling for a constitutional assembly, but then mellowed, deciding to participate in the elections of 1994. In doing so, he abandoned his district to a more extreme Maoist organisation that capitalised on an impoverished population that had for three decades been indoctrinated against participating in parliamentary politics.⁴³ The party that inherited the work of Singh was the CPN (M), which launched its “Peoples War” in 1996. Led by Prachandra and Baburan Bhattarai, the movement expanded from its core areas in western Nepal to cover 80% of the country. The CPN (M) is similar to its contemporaries in India in its birth from a fissiparous communist party, and its mobilisation of impoverished rural people frustrated by the workings of democracy and inspired by radical methods to change their social, political and economic fortunes. Unlike the Naxalites, the CPN (M) is united by charismatic leadership. It has seized upon popular discontent with national policies, and during its early stage of war targeted “class enemies” (including members of other communist parties) rather than state security forces. After nine years of struggle, the tactics pioneered by Mao began to pay dividends, though its battles with the Royal Nepalese Army were never enough to wrest control of Katmandu.

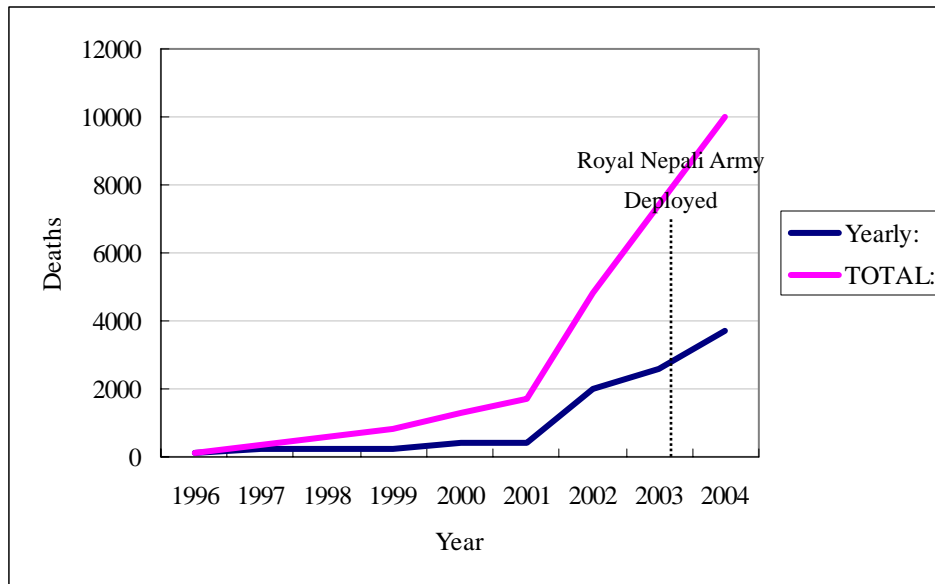
Government of Nepal under King Gyanendra decided to take a draconian law-and-order

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 67.

approach to the Maoist insurgency. In 2001, the deployment of the Royal Nepalese Army

to battle the Maoists resulted in brutality increasing at an increasing rate, illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 2: Yearly and Total Deaths from the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*



*Author's calculations based on reports by Amnesty International.

By the time King Gyandera declared a state of emergency on 1 February 2005, over 3,000 people were detained by the government, and estimates of the number of internally displaced people ranged from 8,000 to 200,000.⁴⁴ There have been abuses committed all sides, such that Amnesty International has described the war as having ““destroyed human rights in the countryside.””⁴⁵ No doubt, the situation in Nepal is still a serious one.

The authorities in West Bengal were able to battle the original Naxalites through tough

⁴⁴ “Amnesty says over 3,000 detained under Nepal emergency,” *BBC News*, April 22, 2005; “U.N. expert expresses concern over displaced people in Nepal,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, April 22, 2005.

law-and-order methods and were able to do so without concerted international scrutiny.

⁴⁵ Reuters Limited, “Nepal on brink of rights catastrophe’ – Amnesty,” February 17, 2005.

Although this approach was successful in the short-term, an influential branch of the international community was unwilling to turn a blind eye to such a process in Nepal. Following a visit by Amnesty International's Secretary General in February 2005, intense pressure from the EU, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Switzerland resulted in the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) passing a resolution to monitor the human rights situation in Nepal for two years.⁴⁶ In a sign that they no longer support a law-and-order solution to the problem, India and the United States cut military aid to the country, and foreign donors, who have bankrolled 70% of the government's development budget, slashed aid by nearly 40%.⁴⁷ The foreign governments and institutions were attempting to pressure the King to reconsider his approach to the insurgency, but at the same time cutting aid and limiting his policy alternatives. The King made conciliatory gestures to the UNHRC, but was unwavering in his pursuit of a military victory over the Maoists.

While developed countries criticised and condemned him, the King received overt support from Pakistan, Bangladesh and China in his war against the Maoist insurgency.⁴⁸ Although in the past these governments have not had the same leverage as the developed countries in altering Nepal's policies, they appeared willing to provide weapons, training and matériel in order to gain influence there.

The King hoped to play these powers off of his detractors, but in the end his gamble ended in failure. In November 2005, the Maoists entered into an agreement with the

⁴⁶ "India, Nepal try to mend fences," *The Statesman*, April 22, 2005.

⁴⁷ Xinhua News Agency, "Foreign aid to Nepal decreases," BBC Monitoring International Reports, April 22, 2005.

⁴⁸ "Pakistan can offer military aid to Nepal," *The Daily News*, March 28, 2005;

"China's FM concludes Nepal visit," *BBC News*, April 1, 2005; "King, Foreign Minister meet various leaders in Jakarta," *The Himalayan Times*, BBC Monitoring International Reports, April 22, 2005.

disenfranchised political parties of Nepal and called for a constitutional assembly to determine the future structure of a new government. In February 2006, this unlikely coalition successfully boycotted local elections called by the King, and his calls for dialogue with the political parties were promptly dismissed. In mid-March, a CPN (M) blockade of major roads began to take effect, and by early April crowds were gathering in Katmandu to demand the return of democracy and an end to the monarchy. By mid April, a general strike and mass protests began to shake King Gyandera's hold on power, and on 24 April he reinstated the parliament he had dismissed four years earlier.

As of mid-May, the new parliament was still debating measures to curb the Royal Family's power in Nepal and had not yet established the details for holding a constitutional assembly. In the meantime, visitors to the official homepage of the Nepalese government are still greeted with a picture of King Gyandera, and the English-language CPN (M) website gives no indication as to what actions the rebels will take next. In his most recent press release, Prachanda described the King's proclamation and restoration of parliament as "feudal arrogance and underrating the great Nepalese sea of the masses,"⁴⁹ but has not yet commented on the current developments in parliament.

Nepal watchers are correct in pointing to the importance of disarming and demobilising the CPN (M), but without a constitutional assembly it is unlikely that the Maoists will lay down their arms in the near future. The date for elections to such an assembly has yet to be established, and given the diverse opinions that flourish in Nepal's democratic politics, it seems unlikely that such an election will take place before the end of the year. For the sake of peace, the CPN (M) will hopefully remain patient throughout this process.

⁴⁹Prachanda, "Press Statement released by Chairman Prachanda of CPN-Maoist on April 22," *KrishnaSen Online*, April 22, 2006.

A worrying prospect is that before the CPN (M) fully disarms, it may split apart and resume violence. Fissures have been developing within the CPN (M), most recently in the public criticisms and dismissal of two senior Maoist leaders. True to the tendencies of

Maoist movements in South Asia, subordinates accused the CPN (M) leadership of being too soft on the King and for having revisionist tendencies, and were subsequently dismissed from the Party.⁵⁰ In 2005, a public rift even developed between Prachanda and Bhattarai, but it was apparently patched over. However, as the prospect for peace grows, so too does the possibility of an armed, radical faction of the CPN (M) breaking away and continuing an armed struggle. Certainly, if they are serious about pursuing a peaceful path and compromising with the other political parties in Nepal, Prachanda and Bhattarai will have to work hard to maintain their own relationship as well as peace and party discipline.

Conclusion

Although Chairman Mao is dead and his policies have been discredited even in China, the revolutionary path he pioneered is still being followed in South Asia. This is a curious development. However, each of the cases presented in this paper show that to a large extent, Maoism is effective in mobilising and exciting people to commit acts of violence in the expectation that it will bring about positive social, economic, and political change. The reason for revolution persisting in South Asia is largely due to the fact that the issues of inequality and poverty have not been adequately dealt with by the democratic governments, leaving the destitute and impassioned little hope in finding solutions through a peaceful and time consuming process.

Perhaps Maoism became the facilitator for these energies through historical chance, a function of the fragmentary culture common to each of the communist parties in South Asia. While communist parties have a long history in India and Nepal, they do not appear

⁵⁰Bhagirath Yogi, "Nepal Rebels Expel Senior Leaders," *BBC News*, March 14, 2006.

to have mechanisms for tempering their extremist elements. Instead of incorporating

divergent opinions through compromise within the larger party, factions were allowed (and maybe encouraged) to keep their ideas and break away. It may have been expected that away from the larger group, they would have faded away. However, the various Naxalite factions and CPN (M) all grew by feeding off of the failures of political groups and national governments, and the shattered aspirations of their constituents.

Another explanation for Maoism's persistence is the malleability of its ideology. Without a firm dogma and direction from Beijing, the Maoists of South Asia were able to incorporate the strongest issues that struck a cord with their beneficiaries, such as caste in Central Bihar, or anti-monarchy in Nepal. The fact that the ideology of Maoism is malleable means that it can adjust to the times, explaining why it has persisted beyond the death of Mao and the end of the Cold War. It also suggests that without proactive policies or significant compromise, Maoist insurgencies will continue to be a problem for governments in India and Nepal for years to come.

Writing about peasants in the 1960s, Everett M. Rogers identified types of change that have the potential to alter the practices of their societies. He found the most effective to be *directed contact change*, one that is “caused by outsiders who, on their own or as representatives of programs of planned change, seek to introduce new ideas in order to achieve definite goals.”⁵¹ From the examples in this paper, it is clear that the Maoists have largely been outsiders, bringing both new ideas (rejecting democratic politics for violence) and definite goals (social justice) that have captured the imaginations of the peasants and youth of their respective societies.

⁵¹ Everett M. Rogers, *Modernization Among Peasants: The Impact of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 5-6.

The reason that Maoism was able to take root in India and Nepal stems largely from the failings of politicians and their political systems. It is clear that the lowest castes and

classes in these two countries have been largely ignored by their representatives, and development has passed them by. The Maoists on the other hand are the only party that seems willing to venture into remote areas and to work with the poor. Chairman Mao was unique in recognising the latent potential of such rural peasants, and left behind powerful tactics and a vague ideology that continue to be of use to this day. Effectively dealing with Maoist insurrections in South Asia will necessitate the implementation of policies that, like Maoism, bring new ideas, goals and projects to the peasants and rural poor. It will also require a great deal of creativity to discover ways to entice Maoists to collaborate and renounce violence. Until such policies are implemented, and implemented with speed, the prospect of Maoist violence will continue. ■

Acronyms

CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
CPN (M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
UF	United Front
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Commission
UNP	United National Party

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