

## PEDAGOGY OF LIBERATION: A CASE OF NEPAL

Roshan Raj Baral\*

### ABSTRACT

This paper looks into the experiment of New Democratic Education (NDE) as an alternative to the mainstream education in Nepal. It was carried out in Nepal by CPN (Maoist) during the period of People's War from 1996 to 2006. Along with the emergence of new people's government in western hilly districts of Nepal by 2003, the concrete foundation was laid to establish 'new democratic schools' with their own curriculum. Such a radical pedagogical intervention was in fact an attempt to oppose the present education system which is elitist in its model. The paper endeavours to examine the development and implementation of the NDE project in western Nepal. With the exploration of its curriculum including objectives, textbooks, instruction methods and evaluation system, this paper tries to depict the alternative discourse of school education backed by this experiment in Nepal as well as the counter-arguments. The method of the study constitutes review of the relevant documents and interviews.

**Key words:** New Democratic Education (NDE); People's War; curriculum; military science; alternative pedagogy; reproduction; polytechnical education; Nepal

"The pedagogy of the oppressed.....is a task for radicals; it cannot be carried out by the sectarian." (Freire, 1970, p.21)

### INTRODUCTION

The New Democratic Education (NDE)<sup>1</sup> movement was an alternative experiment in the field of education and pedagogy in Nepal under the larger political-educational programme of CPN (Maoist)<sup>2</sup> during the

People's War (1996-2006). There were two major necessities of this experiment: first, to fulfil the claim of NDE within the Leftist Parties, repeatedly expressed in the "boycott bourgeoisie education" movement<sup>3</sup>; second, to counter the criticism of the opposition parties from

\* Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University. email : roshanrajbaral@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding to the immediate political programme i.e. to establish a "new democracy", the new model of education was termed as Naya Janabadi Shiksha (new democratic education) by CPN (Maoist). See Mishra (2004) for a discussion on "new democracy" programme of CPN (Maoist).

<sup>2</sup> After the merger of CPN (Unity Center – Masal) in February 2009, CPN (Maoist) was named as United Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN) (Maoist).

<sup>3</sup> "Boycott bourgeoisie education" was a movement influenced by Charu Mazumdar's Naxalites Movement- 1967 in West Bengal, India. The movement had a tremendous impact within the left

democratic bloc for not having an actual alternative NDE model despite the long-run rhetoric. Some of the alternative experiments of this genre throughout the world include peasants' education in China during 1927 (Qingjun 1994), Paulo Freire's innovative literacy campaign in Brazil during 1960s (McLaren 2000) and Gandhi's new education scheme (*Nayee talim*) in Sevagram against the colonial education system in India (Gandhi, 1951). Within the framework of alternative discourse, the case study of NDE was conducted to interrogate whether the establishment of "new democratic schools" by people's governments posits an alternative to the mainstream educational and pedagogical practices or merely appears as an instrumental project for political gain.

In order to investigate this experiment, both secondary as well as primary data was collected. As the full-grown experiment took place during the period from 2003-2006 and was followed by politico-legal restriction in 2006 as per the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the study of related documents, particularly school curriculum, textbooks and the documents of teachers' and students' associations was carried out. Besides this, primary data was generated from interviews with members of teachers' associations, officials from people's

education departments, teachers, students and party politicians during the year 2009.

Before entering into the debate on the model of NDE, let us once visit the background of People's War in the diverse territory of Nepal. The following excerpt shows the public appeal of CPN (Maoist) when it formally declared the initiation of the People's War in 1996:

Conscious of the duty towards this historical necessity, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) - the proletarian party of the sons and daughters of the masses of the people has resolved to initiate the process of forcibly smashing this reactionary state and establishing a New Democratic State. This resolve is based on the feeling of service and devotion towards the people, on the commitment to the almighty ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to free humanity forever from the yoke of class exploitation, and on the study of history of the Nepalese society in that light.<sup>4</sup>

According to Thapa (2003) following the declaration of armed struggle, Maoists made their first attack on police posts in Rolpa, Rukum and Sindhuli districts and seized the substantial amount of high explosives and other utilities before escaping to safety.<sup>5</sup> During the initial years of protracted People's War, Maoists adopted a strategy to

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parties i.e. a number of the young communist leaders from Coordination Committee (later known as CPN (ML)) and CPN (Central Nucleus) boycotted the higher education during the period of Jhapa Uprising in 1971.

<sup>4</sup> See Karki and Seddon (ed), (2003, p.186) to view this excerpt which had been taken from the leaflet which was distributed in hundreds of thousands all over the country along with the initiation of the People's War on February 13, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> See Thapa (2003, p.193), for the Maoists' 40 points demand. As far as education is concerned, point number 35 mentions that "free and scientific health services and education should be available to all and commercialization of the education should be stopped."

establish "base area" in rural hill districts. Their main tactics were, as Hutt (2004, p.6) argues, "the concerted political indoctrination of villages in the areas they controlled, armed attacks on government officials and police posts in those areas, the replacement of state institutions by 'pro-people' bodies, and the eventual establishment of a people's government". Hutt (2004, p.6) further notices that "by mid-2000, the Maoists had gained almost total control of five mid-western hill districts where they were busy establishing local people's governments, and their cadres were active almost everywhere else".

Eliminating the presence of what the Maoist termed 'reactionary state mechanisms', the party began to set up various people's committees at the ward, village, area and district level under the (ideological and technical) leadership of United Revolutionary People's Council, coordinated by senior leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. According to Thapa (2003) these committees took up most of the functions of local government covering administrative, economic, social and cultural and educational matters. Thus the establishment and operation of people's governments – in the 10 years long history of war – was said to have been set up, as the Maoists claim, as a unique example in the revolutionary movement of the world in the twenty-first century.

The "Directive for Local New People's Government", promulgated by CPN (Maoist), divided the operation of people's government into three areas, i.e. political, economic and socio-cultural. Meanwhile,

due to the threat from state mechanisms, students who belonged to the families of the Maoist armed wing, the People's Liberation Army, full-time Maoists cadres, martyrs' families, local politicians, and the general public were forced to stop their studies. Students were gradually pushed out from the market areas, local towns and headquarter of the districts. It was in this context that the people's government realised the necessity of schools and thereby set up new schools named as "new democratic schools" to provide an alternative education. These were initially established in several hilly districts in western Nepal including Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Jajarkot, Kalikot, Jumla, Surket, and Mugu during the year 2003. However, the necessity for massive reforms in community schools was realized simultaneously. It was followed by the agenda of free and equal education and quality enhancement in the schools.

### THE EXPERIMENT OF NEW DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

The philosophical base of NDE was officially defined by the basic policies and programmes formulated by the first national conference of "United Revolutionary People's Council" in 2002. According to Lohani (2007), despite several difficulties, curriculum developers' team succeeded to draft a curriculum for class I to V (all subjects) and class VI to X (Social Sciences). The foundation was formally laid by the curriculum entitled "*Naya Janabadi Shiksha: From Class I to Class-V Curriculum (Draft)-2006*".<sup>6</sup> The publication of the new

<sup>6</sup> Naya Janabadi Shiksha: From Class-I to Class-V Curriculum (Draft)-2006 was developed by *kshetriya janashiksha vibhag vishesh kshetra*, situated in *kendriya adhar ilaka* to launch new democratic education in centralized and planned manner under the rule of people's government.

curriculum opened an avenue for the expansion of "new democratic schools" particularly in the western part of the country.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime such schools, as argued by teachers, also provided textbooks which were reconstructed by eliminating the chapters that dealt with Shah Monarchy, feudalism and the 'idealistic' world view.

The guiding principles of the CPN (Maoist) i.e. Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and Prachanda Path<sup>8</sup> had been reflected in the process of curriculum formation. The philosophical base of NDE included the principle of dialectical materialism by replacing the idealistic foundation of state driven education. The primary focus of the new curriculum was on the development of the students' materialist understanding of nature, human society and culture, and history. Within the materialist conception it further emphasised the principle of superiority of matter over consciousness.

On the other hand, Gunraj Lohani (2007) - chairman of All Nepal Teachers Organization (ANTO) - argues that in the course of replacing the old school culture, it introduced a small curriculum, limited textbooks, short schooling periods, student friendly examinations and a grading system of evaluation to discourage unhealthy competition among the students in order to encourage cooperative feeling. Similarly the emphasis on integrating the mental labour with physical labour and engagement of the students in local production systems was taken into consideration.<sup>9</sup> "Naya Janabadi Shiksha: From Class-I to Class-V Curriculum (Draft) -2006" mentions that "primary level students shall be encouraged to adopt a materialistic way of thinking, develop self-confidence, free themselves from blind tradition and superstitions, become laborious, honest and self-reliant (As per the spirit of "Directive for Local New People's Government -2003")".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> According to Ratna Bdr. Oli aka Tufan Singh, one of the curriculum developers, the publications of *kshetriya janashiksha vibhag*, kendriya adhar ilaka include textbook from class - I to III, curriculum for class I to V, supervision manual for class- IV to V, curriculum of social science for class VI to X and *Naya Chetana* textbook for informal education.

<sup>8</sup> Prachanda Path was one of the directive thoughts of CPN(Maoist) and, according to the party, it reflected an ideological synthesis of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism in Nepali context.

<sup>9</sup> Lohani (2007) views that in an effort to bring out such reforms, NDE broke down the customary practices such as extended curriculum, heavy textbooks, long period of schooling, rote learning, and anti-student examination pattern.

<sup>10</sup> It further mentions that the following aspects should be emphasized:

- a. To develop the habit of discovery
- b. To develop discipline consciously to respect the labour
- c. To grow interest in new democratic art, aesthetics and culture
- d. To develop ability to exchange thought in written and oral form
- e. To develop necessary skills to solve the mathematical problems in daily personal and social life
- f. To help live a healthy life by developing positive behaviour related to health and physical education
- g. To develop scientific understanding to appreciate the relationship between life and natural environment
- h. To develop helpful feeling and leadership through arousing faith in new democratic norms and values

In the primary level, students were offered subjects like Nepali and the local language, art, social studies, military science, simple arithmetic, politics, economics, history, culture and English language. Bir Roka Magar, one of the ex-students of *Shaheed Smriti Namuna Janabadi* School, Thawang, Rolpa, boldly admits that except social sciences all other subjects of model school were analogous to that of government schools.<sup>11</sup> The learning achievements in social sciences had been decided on the basis of its broader philosophical framework. It has been found that the inclusion of philosophy aimed to enhance the students' understanding towards Marxian concepts of class, consciousness and knowledge. Secondly, it sought to inculcate the idea of practical politics such as state, revolutionary leadership, martyrdom, organization, People's War, people's government, civil rights and duties, etc. through the section called "politics".

The history writing primarily dealt with two major subjects- Nepalese Communist Movement and the People's War. As far as political economy is considered, the basic concept of mode of production and relations of production including production, exchange and consumption had been stressed. Likewise students were supposed to develop the ideals of new democratic culture, arts and literature. In new

democratic culture, the subject Social Sciences aimed to introduce students with new democratic songs, music, stories and festivals.

The most debated and controversial aspect of the curriculum was the inclusion of military science in schools. According to Lohani (2007), the necessity of military science was realized because of the rapid expansion of People's War all over the country. He specified that given the vulnerable condition of social security, the inclusion of military science assisted in students' understanding of guerrilla warfare and equipped them with the necessary knowledge for self-defence. The lessons on military science thus helped students to build up skills such as identifying explosive materials, adopting required safety measures, reporting to elders, taking shelter during search operations and safely escaping during gun-fights.

Ex-student Magar articulates that he was taught about the use of rifle and its various parts and functions in class-IV. He further mentions that the physical training included exercise of hands, legs and waist under the guidance of a captain. "The elementary military science was taught by teachers on the basis of their past experiences during the service in the People's Liberation Army", says Ratna Oli aka Tufan Singh, head of the people's education department.<sup>12</sup> Oli strongly

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- i. To develop behaviour according to new democratic norms
  - j. To help develop dignified and disciplined citizens by developing socialist scientific world vision to nation, nationality and new democratic unity.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Bir Roka Magar (a pseudonym)-one of the ex-students of *Shaheed Smriti Namuna Janabadi* School, Thawang, Rolpa who studied up to class -VI, on 30 December, 2009. Magar was a student in class -VII at Janakalyan Secondary School, Dudras, Dang in 2009 under the government programme of rehabilitation of the conflict affected children.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ratna Bdr. Oli on 29 December, 2009. He was also the head of the People's Education Department established by CPN (Maoist) in December, 2003. Besides this, he was the vice-chairman of the All National Teachers Organization (ANTO), Nepal as well.

emphasizes the need to provide military education to the masses including school students so that military knowledge and technology does not only become accessible to the elites and ruling class. This is a strong argument against the existing bureaucratic monopoly of the so-called privileged knowledge in the country.

The social sciences textbook thus reflects the process of indoctrination of socialist ideology and nationalist thought as well as building of revolutionary character. Furthermore, the dissemination of the People's War and its liberating project has been centrally located in the curriculum. Yet a number of intellectuals both from leftist and rightist background have questioned such political content of the textbook. Koirala (2008) puts forward a sharp critique of NDE textbook by analyzing its contents. He was very much critical of the ways the textbooks glorified individual revolutionary leaders. Koirala (2008, p.36) with reference to education in so called communist Korea further wrote, "North Korea praised Kim Il Sung and his followers. In this sense, what is the difference between *Panchayat* era education which revered [Shah] monarchy and NDE during People's War period which paid tribute to Marx, Lenin, Mao and Prachanda?"

### **PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION**

One of the central focuses of the curriculum was moving ahead from simple to complex phenomena in the process of teaching-

learning activity. It was ensured that students would start learning from simple to advanced alphabets in the elementary level. Beside this, teachers used to relate the lesson and its exercises with the surrounding environment. In addition, students were made as respectable as teachers in the process of teacher- students' dialogue. "Despite the dearth of textbooks, teachers were trained to construct the lessons by themselves as per the necessity and taught the students effectively on the basis of the prescribed curriculum", recalls Ramita Giri, a female teacher of *Shaheed Smriti Namuna Janabadi* School, Thawang, Rolpa.<sup>13</sup> Oli mentions that the People's Education Department conducted a number of trainings (varying from 1 to 25 days) to encourage teachers to use child-centred teaching methods and to treat the students according to their psychology.

The basic focus of instruction was on the scientific integration of mental and physical labour in the learning process. Agricultural farms, fields, riverbanks and cottage industries in the surrounding areas of the school were selective places for students' educational tours. Similarly, importance was given to introduction of new technology among students so that they would learn to use it. School management was strengthened in such a way that school would focus on the development of students' skills and aptitude towards the polytechnical education.<sup>14</sup> According to Oli, the basic skills learnt by the students included kitchen

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ramita Giri (a pseudonym), a female teacher of Shaheed Smriti Namuna Janabadi School, Thawang, Rolpa on 28 December, 2009. She worked there from the time of establishment of the school in February 2005 to April 2006.

<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to impart a socialist model of education, new democratic education borrowed the concept of polytechnical education from Nadezhda Krupskaya. Krupskaya, wife and companion of Lenin, was one of the leading figures of education in Soviet Russia. Skatkin and Georgij (1994,

garden work, sewing cloth, hair cutting, etc. This went as far as to oblige students to contribute to the daily chores to keep the school running. For example, Samjhana Basnet, one of the ex-students of *Juni Bal Samrakshan Kendra* from Jajarkot district reveals her experience that grown-up students had to carry rice, *dal* and other edible food stuffs from remote bazaars of about one days walking distance.<sup>15</sup> Similarly collecting firewood and assisting in kitchen chores were common tasks for the senior students whereas juniors would clean the toilets.

According to the curriculum developer Oli, the focus was on the integration of written and practical elements in students' evaluation, i.e. giving 50% weight to the practical side of examinations. Ex-student Magar states that there was no fixed time limit as such in the major written tests. Students could write for as long as he/ she wished to.

As a part of the process of distancing themselves from the mainstream education, a number of changes were made to the academic schedule. "According to the academic calendar of the school, the school would remain closed on every Tuesday as opposed to Saturday, the weekly holiday provided in the government schools. This was because Tuesday was the day of initiation of the historic People's War", Magar explains. Likewise the grand

observation of the martyrs' day was another tradition prevailing in the school. Unlike government schools, no holidays were provided on the occasion of Dashain and Tihar, the major Nepali national festivals.

The cultural orientations of the schools were quite different from the mainstream schools. Giri reports that "new democratic schools" had strict rules of common sharing; for example sweets, fruits and other items brought by parents/guardians of individuals were to be shared equally amongst all students. Both the ex-students, Magar and Basnet, confess that students of "new democratic schools" were more disciplined, modest and laborious in nature than those of government schools. Basnet opines, "New democratic schools are really necessary for students like me who are orphans and have nobody to look after them."

### IMPACT OF POLITICAL TRANSITION

Following the success of People's Movement-2006, CPN (Maoist) and the Government of Nepal signed the CPA by declaring an end to the decade long armed conflict. Furthermore they embraced the commitment for the beginning of a new era of peace and co-operation. This entailed a democratic restructuring of the state with the view of facilitating a social, economic

p.54) explain that for Krupskaya, the centre of gravity of polytechnical schools is in the comprehension of the processes of labour; in development of an ability to combine theory with practice, to understand the interdependency of certain phenomena, whereas in vocational school the centre of gravity is the acquisition by pupils of working skills.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Samjhana Basnet (a pseudonym), an ex-student of Juni Bal Samrakshan Kendra, Nayakwada VDC, Jajarkot on 30 December 2009. She was a student in class-VIII at Janakalyan Secondary School, Dudras, Dang in 2009. She had completed class-VII in the previous school which had only 65 students in 2008 when she left.

and cultural transformation of Nepalese society. According to the provisions of the agreement, the operation of such parallel schools was brought to end formally.<sup>16</sup> However, despite this, "new democratic schools" do still function in some parts of the country in one form or the other; some of them have been merged with other government schools, while some have been legally registered as new schools. The study shows that schools were forced to make such new managerial arrangements to compensate the dearth of funds from party mechanisms after the CPA.<sup>17</sup> After the participation of CPN (Maoist) in the interim government in 2007, the Ministry of Education (MoE) instigated a rehabilitation programme in which all together five rehabilitation centers were established throughout the country – one in each development region- to address the problem of "conflict-affected children".<sup>18</sup>

The experiment of this new model of education had sought to challenge the discriminatory characters of the existing education system which the NDE movement blamed for isolating the masses from the right to basic education. It further argued that the national education system has only served the interests of the privileged section of the society such as

ruling class elites, feudal lords and bureaucratic capitalists. In so far as the spirit of the People's War is concerned, the voice against the continued privatization and commercialization of education was also very strong. It neither supported the state's economic liberalization policy nor accepted the supremacy of market. With sharp criticism, NDE movement, therefore, wished to undertake the burden of transforming the unjust characters of the existing educational system. It is in this context Maoist chairman Prachanda condemns the mainstream education as follows:

The main aim of this education [mainstream education system] is to prepare extreme individualist, absurdist, position oriented and slave mentalist blind followers. In this age of revolution, it is the necessity of the hour to revolt against this policy...<sup>19</sup>

Despite the political transition, it is evident that the NDE may still have left some legacy on the education system. Given the lengths to which the revolutionary education experiment was implemented during the People's War, the Maoists were morally obliged to place some emphasis on instigating massive reforms in the existing

<sup>16</sup> See the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) - 2006, signed between government and CPN (Maoist) ending the decade long armed conflict in Nepal.

<sup>17</sup> However some of these schools are still being run by the local communities under their own financial management.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Nandu Ram Khadka (a pseudonym), a hostel teacher at Janakalyan Secondary School, Dudras, Dang on 30 December, 2009. According to Khadka, the students of "new democratic schools" were also considered as conflict-affected children for the programme. Conflict affected children of mid-western development region were kept in this school temporarily under the government's rehabilitation programme.

<sup>19</sup> See Vidan and Prativedan (2006, p.55), 17th National Conference of All Nepal National Independent Students' Union (ANNISU) (Revolutionary) for the quotations on education by renowned Marxist figures.

education system in the post war context. Following this spirit, Maoists took a stance on a progressive intervention in education. As we know, the promulgation of the Interim Constitution of Nepal-2007 was a forward move in the direction of socio-economic reconstruction of the state. Even though it was a highly politically negotiated document, it mentioned that every citizen shall have the right to receive free education from the state up to secondary level as provided for in the law.<sup>20</sup> Sometime later, the CPN (Maoist)'s *Commitment Paper for Constituent Assembly Election* (2008) came up with a more clear note on a transitional education scheme relating to their policy, preference and programme.

The election for the Nepal's Constituent Assembly was held on 10 April 2008. CPN (Maoist) went for the election with its respective manifesto which included the policies of state restructuring along with a commitment to educational reforms and restructuring of the education system. It says: "The current trend of commercialization of education shall be ended and everyone shall be provided free education up to class XII. Everyone's fundamental right to education shall be established. Education relevant to life and production shall be provided. Technical and polytechnic education shall be emphasized. Open schools and universities shall be established for the population which has been deprived of formal education, and particularly the youth involved in the decade-long revolutionary movement. Special provisions shall be made to provide recognition to the education [which was] obtained from practical knowledge [fighting

for the People's War] in the form of life-long education" (p.31).

From the budget speech of fiscal year 2008-09, the then finance minister Dr. Baburam Bhattarai imposed 5% education service tax on private schools for the benefit of the poor students of backward and remote areas. In addition to this, he proposed the concept of open schools and universities in order to provide an opportunity to youths who were deprived of education during the conflict period. Similarly the ambitious programme of a national literacy campaign was launched with the goal of eradicating illiteracy in the next two years by employing 35000 local literacy volunteers. However, the collapse of the Maoists led government in May 2009 diverted their attention towards political agitations undermining the education agenda.

Despite the volatile political situation, popular voices have constantly been raised for the renewal of the public education system. Yet, it is very difficult to predict the future. It is largely dependent on the extent that measures of progressive socio-economic transformation will be taken to end the transition.

### INTERROGATING THE LIMITS

To some extent, the NDE movement seems to tell us the story of over emphasis on the ideological and socio-economic reproduction in education. As far as the design of the pedagogy is concerned, it indeed reveals the primacy of the deterministic/structural approach in education. This is an approach followed by the classical Marxists based on the

<sup>20</sup> See Interim Constitution of Nepal - 2007, part-3 fundamental rights, article -17 education and cultural rights.

proposition that "base determines the superstructure". Because of this, as Giroux (1983, p.259) argues, "The idea that people do make history, including its constraints, has been neglected." It could be argued that the goal of NDE was ultimately to reproduce students who would develop agreeable behaviours to the new democratic system. Hence teaching military science in schools is not necessarily just a case of enhancing safety skills alone. It is also a manifestation of the long-term strategy of imparting military knowledge, teaching the art of warfare and providing information on war technology to enable students to fight for the defence of new democratic revolution.<sup>21</sup>

The Maoists' policy of excessive politicization of educational institutions has been criticized severely. The overt agenda of turning educational institutions into the cradle of political activism is one of the most controversial issues, although this is considered a common bourgeoisie critique. A similar argument was put forward by the political opponents of the Maoists to resist the experiment of the NDE in Nepal. In an attempt to counter such arguments in the past, Lenin (1978) had said that schools outside of politics represented the lies and hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the glorification of the People's War and ideological intervention were the primary aims behind such overt politics.

It is also evident that the NDE movement did not provide adequate room for the recognition and mobilization of human will and agency. Therefore a de-emphasis on the possibility of resistance from various agencies of students and teachers was a

major flaw of NDE movement. As far as textbooks are considered, the excessive glorification of the revolutionary leadership appears fatalistic and anti-dialectical in its approach. It then tends to kill elements of criticality, dialogue and reflexivity among growing children. Paradoxically, this is itself a deviation from the overall aim behind the NDE and thereby impedes students' critical ability to understand the very complexity of their material situation and the power structures and class relations of their society.

Inclusion of military science in the NDE curriculum attracted a lot of attention from different sections of the society. The parliamentary parties blamed the Maoists for having a vested interest of establishing a communist dictatorship and totalitarianism in the country. These sentiments were aggravated by reports in the media of a number of atrocities in various parts of the country during the period of the People's War. These included, for instance, the use of schools for shelter, forcible recruitment of students in people's militias, and the physical torture and murder of teachers. Such activities were condemned as violations of human rights by the various Human Rights Organizations in the country. Viewing the nature of such violent atrocities, Maoists were also blamed by its political rivals such as Nepali Congress Party and CPN-UML (United Marxist-Leninist) for practicing "social fascism" instead of fighting a political/ ideological war against the state.

The gap between theory and practice is another flaw of the CPN (Maoist). It is evident from this study that not a single child

<sup>21</sup> One can infer this from the various party documents (more specifically from the documents of students' organization affiliated to CPN(Maoist)).

of top level leaders had been admitted into "new democratic schools". Most of the students belonged to the families of lower-status party cadres working in the interior parts of the country. Surprisingly, it was found that almost all high ranking leaders have been sending their children to well-off private schools in towns. Therefore discrimination and hierarchy are prevalent even among the Maoists party members in their every day practices. Such experiences do not necessarily match with the theory of egalitarianism, justice, and class-affinity.

Another irrefutable criticism is about the relationship between the party and the people. The huge bureaucratic structure and power hierarchy of the party often tends to dominate people. As far as the bureaucratic structure of NDE is considered, it unravels the mechanistic picture in which the party is the giver and the students are merely passive receivers. This is unfortunate that such unequal relation only adds, as argued by radical educator Paulo Freire, to what he refers to as "banking education".<sup>22</sup> Freire (1970) even talks about the concept of generative themes which are constructed by oppressed themselves in their own setting. In the context of NDE, the party's role is central and the role of the community is subordinate. There is therefore, no room for a true dialogue and in the absence of true dialogue no authentic liberation is possible.

Young children in their tender age often find the biographies of Marx, Lenin and Mao alien to them. It reflects the dearth of relevance of

the textbooks' contents to the students as far as their personal experiences are concerned. It is in this context, the curriculum of NDE loses the sense of indigenouness, nearness and self-representation. In the context of diverse socio-cultural scenario of Nepal, emphasis on class alone is not sufficient to change the structural inequality. Therefore rather than engaging only with the class category of the society, it is equally important to dig out the class nature embedded in other social categories such as gender, caste, ethnicity, and regionalism. The NDE curriculum has undervalued other categories except that of class and thereby tends to lose its originality.

### CONCLUSION

The case study of the NDE movement - an alternative educational experiment in Nepal by CPN (Maoist) during People's War period (1996 to 2006) - reveals the image of correspondence between revolutionary struggles and revolutionary pedagogy. The study shows that NDE was the first "radical experiment" in school education in Nepal and possessed a revolutionary spirit in terms of higher objectives, a distinct curriculum and an alternative pedagogical approach. The customary practices of mainstream education such as extended curriculum, heavy textbooks, long periods of schooling, rote learning, unfriendly examination patterns, isolation from larger domains of social-political life, regimented schooling and forceful treatment of students, highlighted the need for radical reforms in

<sup>22</sup> Banking education is implemented when the instructor talks most of the time and the learners listen. Likewise teachers not only choose and enforce his or her choices but he/she also selects the content and the students adapt to it. In his famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire suggests that the banking concept transforms the minds of students so that they will better adapt to actual situation (subordinate condition of the learners) and be dominated (superiority of the teachers) with greater ease.

the sector. It is in this context, NDE emerged with some genuine progressive tenets in education which could be framed as free, compulsory and secular education combined with mental as well as physical labour (material production). A special focus was on polytechnical schools which create opportunities for students to learn livelihood skills, develop the various faculties of human personality and develop a patriotic and revolutionary spirit. In addition, the pedagogical characteristics as identified by students and teachers are equally interesting. Characteristics such as the removal of time limitations in written exams, student engagement in productive works, a familial cordial school environment, autonomy and flexible curriculum, the use of school as a democratic space and common way of living are more distinctive than mainstream pedagogy.

The challenging task undertaken by the NDE movement was to oppose the mainstream schooling system of Nepal and to help in the direction of developing a new model of democratic education. It is, in a way, a progressive intervention in the field of "conventional pedagogical practice". Learning from the NDE, this paper stresses

the need for dialogue in the restructuring of the present education system to address the issues of free and equal education, quality assurance of public educational institutions and expansion of polytechnical and vocational education. At a time when education for successful employment is considered indispensable, and inclusive nation-wide literacy campaigns remain popular academic and political concerns, this short-lived alternative pedagogical experiment reminds us of one of the necessities to eliminate hierarchies based on class, caste, gender and region in Nepalese education.

Whatever one's view on the NDE, it is evident that the larger section of civil society is critical of the state policy of privatization in school education and insists that the market should withdraw its hand from this area. Even accepting some of the critiques of the NDE movement, it is clear that the failure of mainstream education calls for radical innovation in the road to democratic education. In this context, the experiment of NDE does not negate the possibility of further experiments in education and pedagogy for a more substantial and authentic outcome.

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