

PMPD Perspective on Environment and Development

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ABSTRACT

People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) is a creative thought of redefining Marxism in the twenty-first century. It advocates for multiparty competition, the rule of law, and supremacy through competition for leadership. It is also characterized by social justice, human rights, and economic equality. PMPD respects the embedded relationships between women and nature and internalizes the harmony between people and the environment for sustainable development. It acknowledges diversity and differences in society and environment, claiming that colonialism and neoliberalism have commodity nature and destroyed biodiversity, and displaced communities depending on natural resources. Further, it amplifies the access and control of resources to the local people and is utilized with the values as argued in Vedic philosophy, and utilizes the environmental resources with due recognition to the needs of future generations.

Introduction

PMPD argues for the 'new democracy' that consists of a multiparty system and periodic elections. Contrarily, the old democracy (*purano janabad*), according to Bhandari, is the capitalist democracy that was established by defeating feudalism. It established capitalism. It served capitalism and imperialism while establishing their leadership. Besides, it naturally promoted the capitalist dictatorship at large. However, PMPD strongly opposes such monopoly capitalism and imperialism by rejecting the idea of establishing such a democracy in which a few people exploit the state resources and accumulate benefits at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the people. Feudalism has been manifested in different forms which gradually emerged as a comprador capitalism, so it should eventually be

abolished in the best interest of the majority of people. However, this comprador capitalism and imperialism are also manifestations of feudalism, and thus, the revolution against it cannot be completed under the leadership of the capitalist class. Thus, it must be led by the proletariat working class. Such a struggle will establish the leadership of the people who are against imperialism and feudalism that will eventually adopt the program of transformation towards socialism and finally establish people's democratic state. These are fundamentally different from the old capitalist democracy. PMPD inherits these characteristics and stands as a new democracy in the context of Nepal (Bhandari, 1993: 168-169).

It was deeply realized that one of the reasons for the downfall of communism was the restrictions in opening political parties and the lack of political rights in choosing the people's representatives

in the parliament and government. There can be multiple parties, and the communist party should also be competing with other parties for it to rule the country. Thus, PMPD has presented the principle of supremacy through electoral competition both within the party and among the parties for ruling the country. For ruling the country, a communist party must be superior in terms of its policy, performance, and development vision. The party should be able to demonstrate its distinctive vision and constructive involvement in effectively transforming policy into action. Eventually, the party with its service delivery has to be tested, and their constructive actions in the best interest of the people and country should be approved through periodical general elections. Such a provision is fundamentally a new vision for the communist party, similar to the parliamentary democratic system, but different from that of the traditional orthodox left party. In that sense, PMPD transformed the traditional concept of communism when single-party communist regimes were experiencing setbacks in communist and socialist countries. In this light, addressing an international seminar in Calcutta, India, in 1993, Bhandari said:

The essence of people's multi-party democracy ... unlike the experiments made with the one-party system (although some socialist countries in Eastern Europe claimed that they were following a multi-party system, in practice they were not) in socialist countries, PMPD essentially permits the existence and operation of various parties considers that a communist party should also compete in the periodic election and it should get the mandate from people from time to time to rule the country and run the government. We believe that only a people's multi-party democracy based on rule of law can alert us to check the mistakes and sustain the popularity of the party among the people. (MBF, 2021: 48-49).

The PDMP has presented the political and socio-economic program holistically. It has stressed the socialist economy with social security and equitable distribution of the benefit to the people. Its 14 additional major features include the supremacy of the constitution, the rule of law, periodic elections, pluralistic open society, and human rights (MBF, 2021, see annex 1). Western liberal democracy also advocates for political rights and individual freedom but does not pay attention to social justice, economic equality, and the right to live. Similarly, the traditional communist movement focused on social justice, and economic equality, but it lacked political rights or freedom of political competition. But PMPD argues for real social justice, and economic equality with political rights (Sharma Oli, 2067 B.S.: 11-12). It rejects the principle of supremacy by birth and argues for achieving supremacy through competition, respects human values and dignity, and provides opportunities for exploring and developing the unlimited possibilities of human life. It also remains compatible with the UN Charter (Sharma Oli, 2071 B.S.). In this way, PMPD has presented the ways of peaceful transformation of the left movement and established as 21st century Marxism with Nepali characteristics (Pokhrel, 2068 B.S.). Furthermore, PMPD stressed prosperity with equality, and equality with prosperity. Consisting of political, economic, and social programs, it postulates a dignified life with freedom and respect, with rights and access to opportunities. It is the state of affairs that guarantees the biological and basic needs of people. It is the advanced form of democracy that can be referred to as the 'comprehensive democracy' (Sharma Oli, 2077 B.S.: 68). Importantly, PMPD stressed environmental conservation, and believes in the close relationship between environment and development which is shaped by the power relations. In this context, this paper aims to highlight the discourses on the environment and development of Nepal in general and PMPD's perspective on the environment in particular.

Methodology

This article is mainly based on the published literature on PMPD and the debate on the environment and development in Nepal. Some of the print materials, including books, articles, and journals come from libraries, research centers, and individual collections. The majority of them have been published by Madan Bhandari Foundation and a few other organizations. In addition, literature and data on environment and development discourse are collected from various journals and books in the related field. It has also consulted the Vedic literature/philosophy and assessed the thought on the environment, the relationship between environment, and development, and women, environment, and development. Furthermore, official documents of the CPN (UML), especially of the Fifth National General Convention presented by People's Leader Madan Bhandari have been reviewed. The views on the environment, relationships between environment and development, and the importance of environmental conservation expressed in these literatures have been critically examined. The article has followed a constructive approach to the interpretation of the environment and development discourse from the PMPD perspective.

Results and Discussion

Revisiting the discourse on degradation and deforestation in Nepal

From 1950 to the present, numerous researchers have put forward their views on the environmental situation of the Nepal Himalayas. These views can be grouped into four broad categories (Chapagain and Aase, 2020). Ranging from Robe (1954) to Eckholm (1976), the research findings indicate that the cause of degradation and deforestation of the Himalayas was mainly higher population growth and their dependency on agriculture for food. It was argued that the increasing population cleared forests for agricultural land to meet their food and energy demand. They even cleared the marginal land that was unsuitable for

cultivation. Forest clearance resulted in a high soil erosion, landslides in the upstream areas, and sedimentation and flooding in the downstream. The top fertile soil was lost and decreased soil fertility and even required more land to sustain the population. The topsoil of Nepal reached the Bay of Bengal. It was claimed that the hill forests would have been completely cleared by 2000 and only the denuded hills would remain. Further, it was also claimed that farmers were unaware of the environment and carelessly cut down green trees for firewood. In this way, population growth and people's ignorance were established as the major causes of forest depletion, and it was suggested to nationalize the forest. The forests were nationalized in 1957. But the deforestation did not stop. Also, the government implemented various programs for afforestation, soil conservation, environmental conservation, and population growth control as advised by the experts and donor agencies. In this way, the environment was considered a fragile object. These all were top-down thinking that did not pay attention to the environmental management practices and knowledge of the farmers in the Himalayas.

The second view emerged after 1980, and flourished during 1985, and dominated the debate until 1990-1995. Considering the mountain environment a dynamic entity, this view claimed that there was environmental degradation and soil erosion caused by different factors, other than the mountain people. Being the geologically youngest mountain, the Himalayas, with its steep slope and complex topography, is geologically active with many fault lines. In addition, it has a monsoon-dominated climate. About 80 percent of the total rainfall occurs within three months from June to August. Nepal's Tarai forests were cleared for infrastructure development including railway lines in north and northeast India in the early twentieth century. The forest resources were availed as per the interest of the Rana regime, who liked to appease the British Empire to safeguard their regime in Nepal. In this way,

bio-physical climate and historical processes became the dominant discourse in this period (Chapagain and Aase, 2020).

The third view emerged after 1990. It was said that the bio-physical and climate in the Himalayas is the same since the origin of the Himalayas. Thus, the impact of these processes could not be confined to a particular period. By contrast, it was claimed that poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities were the major causes of deforestation and degradation. People have been using the forest for several forest products to maintain their livelihood. In this regard, the Eighth Five-Year Plan also set poverty reduction as one of its objectives. The 9th and 10th Five-Year Plans also continued the objective of poverty reduction. Many programs were designed and implemented to increase income and enhance employment opportunities in the country. With the donor's support, the government established the Poverty Alleviation Fund. The major donation during this period was on poverty reduction, so that the environment could be conserved.

The outcomes of the Community Forest program and the poverty reduction program turned positive. However, the situation of the forest could not substantially improve. Why was it so? In 2000, a new discourse began in Nepal. The Maoist insurgency had already started. Due to the armed conflict, the local-level election could not be held. The local government institutions in the district and the lower level were severely paralyzed and could not function. Importantly, it was concluded that the underdevelopment and environmental degradation resulted from the exclusion of people, especially poor, underdeveloped, and disadvantaged groups. The development support then focused to reduce social exclusion and increase the participation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Importantly, environmental degradation was also linked to social inclusion, conflict, and failure of

institutions in this period, and the development support was guided and somehow confined to address these issues. In other words, the environmental deterioration in Nepal was interpreted as a result of the exclusion of the indigenous, forest-dependent, and disadvantaged people's participation in the decision-making processes of the environmental resources. This was strongly articulated and also supported by the donor community and established that the underdevelopment and marginalization were due to social exclusion.

In this way, environment and development discourses are interlinked. The people who control and utilize these resources at different levels are fundamentally guided by power politics. In other words, there are changing views of environmental issues, and these views are always related to the issues with politics and power especially in defining and getting access and control over the natural resources. These debates are still at the surface and reflected in the broader socio-economic and political context as the World has targeted to achieve the UN sustainable development goals by 2030. These goals, as claimed by the SDG Report 2022, are directly related and intervened with the issues of COVID-19, climate change, and conflicts. These issues have affected several sectors such as health, education, environment, peace and security, which challenged to meet the SDGs goals (https://reliefweb.int/report/world/sustainable-development-goals-report-2022?gclid=EA1aIQobChMI9KTR9aLx_gIV1TYrChIFjQc7EAAAYASAAEgIJg_D_BwE, accessed on May 5, 2023).

PMPD and environment

PMPD does not clearly elaborate environmental issues. The CPN (UML) General Secretary's report presented in the 5th National General Convention presented the environmental agenda in a nascent form "to stop the degradation of forest and other natural resources and focused forest conservation." The report mentioned that the "environment will be conserved," but it did not elaborate on

particulars. (देशको वनजङ्गल र अन्य प्राकृतिक स्रोतको विनासलाई रोकी वनजङ्गलको विकास र सम्बर्द्धन गरी वातावरणको संरक्षण गरिनेछ (UML, 2055 BS:7).

Indeed, Bhandari was aware of an increasing level of deforestation and degradation across Nepal. Issues of the environment had already gained momentum at the international, regional, and national levels. Internationally, many events took place during 1980-1990 setting new light on the political, socioeconomic, environmental, and development issues. Among others, the gender movements, the report on sustainable development, the emergence of a bottom-up approach in development, and the 1992 summit of the world leader in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil are of greater importance. Among them, the gender movement and Brundtland Commission's report are important. They critically reflect on the environment, development, and decision-making processes. It can be said that development is not apolitical, and thus, environmental agendas are also not apolitical. Thus, environmental issues are closely related to the power relationships that define access and control over natural resources.

PMPD's view on the environment is closer to political ecology. Political ecology analyses the factors and processes of environmental changes due to capitalist economic processes and power relations (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987; Robbins, 2019). It was emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in the context of global neo-liberalization and focuses on how the environment in the global South restructured by economic modernization and international development processes. Political ecology combines ecology and political economy that comprehend the "shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself" (Blaikie & Brookfield 1987:17). They further argued that societal interaction with the physical environment resulted in land degradation that reflects social, political and economic processes. It examines the power relations between nature and society that affect access to natural resources (Robbins 2012).

Political ecology, which is heavily influenced by Marxist theory and critical development studies, focuses on the role of political economy as a driver of socio-ecological change in the neoliberal world. It has provided an in-depth insight into understanding the global capitalist processes of local human culture and environment (Greenberg & Park, 1994). The land degradation and disruption of livelihood of the people in the developing countries primarily resulted from the large-scale mining, and logging industries that disrupt the historically embedded relationship of these communities with nature. In short, political ecology attempts to understand the relationships between environmental deterioration and the changing pattern of access and control over the resources and their linkages to politics (Robbins, 2019). It focuses on environmental and livelihood changes of the natural resource-based communities through large-scale mining, logging, and agricultural conversion in developing countries. Thus, it strongly argues that capitalism and the associated market forces challenge the sustainable use of natural resources and disrupt the environment. Importantly, it provides a counter-argument to the Malthusian theory that blamed the growing human population as the major cause of food insecurity and environmental degradation (Roberts, 2020). At present, the global environmental agenda has become more important with deteriorating environmental health along with issues of climate change, degradation of natural resources, and industrial pollution which are primarily related to the capitalist mode of production and its market-centric approach to nature that eventually makes the environment unsustainable.

Planting trees—planting thought

In early 1980, it was realized that massive deforestation was occurring in the Nepal Himalayas, so the afforestation program was implemented with support from donor agencies. These programs supported nursery development, transplantation, and conservation of forest and soil.

A single species, i.e., the pine tree was massively planted in many districts by guiding the Euro-centric development thought. The pine tree

helped increase forest coverage but massively destroyed local biodiversity as small trees, and grass could not grow under its canopy (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Plantation forest, Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu, 2023

The homogenization of the forest resources greatly affected the livelihood of small landholders and peasants who relied on different forest resources for livestock and other income-generating activities that were based on local forest resources. Moreover, it disturbs rainwater infiltration and water recharge.

The local people of the Panchkhal area (personal communication, also see Everard et al., 2018) also claim that pine trees extract more groundwater and make the soil drier. It has affected the regional ecology and environment. It is true as Bryant (1992 cited in Benjaminsen, and Svarstad, 2019) claimed, “State policies are not developed in a political and economic vacuum, but result from the struggle between competing actors seeking

to influence policy state formulation ... often facilitating the interests of powerful economic elites” (p. 18). It eventually transformed into a forest landscape with pine-like hegemonic species that resulted in a massive displacement of forest resources on which small farmers and poor people depended.

On the other hand, the author has observed that many local farmers in the Charnamati watershed area in the Dolakha district have started clearing the pine trees and conserving the natural forest. They claimed that the natural forest (Figure 2) is far better for local livelihood and it supplies many things: fodder, firewood, wood for agricultural tools, litter for animal bedding, and also looks beautiful.



Figure 2: Natural forest, near Nuwakot Durbar, 2023

In light of these two examples, PMPD also recognizes diversity and differentiation and accepts it as the richness of nature and society. Thus, the natural forest is rich in terms of forest species fulfills the demand for different forest products in the local community, and helps sustain the livelihood of poor and disadvantaged people. This naturalness is not imposed from outside rather it has emerged naturally as per the characteristics of local climate and landforms. It does not affect the local biodiversity and ecosystem. As PMPD accepts differentiation in politics and competition for growth and development, it has similar views to the environment with diversity, natural competition, and growth and finally makes the natural environment healthy and sustainable.

The PDMP perspectives on the environment are also closer to the views of the World Commission on Environment and Development (<http://www.ask-force.org/web/Sustainability/Brundtland-Our-Common-Future-1987-2008.pdf>) (Imperatives, 1987). It has been argued that environmental resources are to be extracted to meet the demands of the present without compromising to meet the needs of the future generation. It has claimed that environment and development are closely linked and development cannot be sustained in the situation of deteriorating environmental resources. For instance, deforestation can increase soil erosion and siltation of rivers/reservoirs. It also reduces soil fertility and affects agriculture productivity and food security. The report has outlined that poverty and the environment are interrelated. Increasing poverty increased stress on environmental resources and environmental deterioration in many countries in the global south have become the source of political unrest and international tension. Stress on environmental resources is also reflected in economic development. Fuel-wood and deforestation are directly related to energy policy. Similarly, land use change, agricultural development, road, and infrastructure development are directly related to land use policy. Thus, the environment and economy are also directly related to

decision-making for stimulating development. Environmental pressure and unequal development can cause social tension. Precisely, the approach of sustainable development can integrate environmental challenges with development issues.

PMPD also strongly advocates for safeguarding and developing the various natural resources in the best interest of the people. Nepal has a vast water resource. The rivers originating from the Nepal Himalayas are perennial. They are the major source of clean energy, drinking, and irrigation water. Both fresh water and (clean) energy are keys to human life and development. Importantly, there is a high demand for hydropower and fresh water for drinking and irrigation purposes within and outside of the country. It is important to develop these resources sustainably with due emphasis on the long-term social, economic, environmental, and political, etc., issues and their implications. Moreover, PMPD has focused on rural electrification and the use of hydropower as a major source of energy for industry and household uses. It focuses on the participation of local people in water resource development. Most importantly, it has emphasized ensuring the sovereign rights of the Nepali people to the water resources of the country.

Furthermore, the PMPD perspectives on the environment are also closely related to the relationship between gender and the environment. The relationship between women and the environment has been articulated for a long time through the gender movements especially the UN Conference on Women. Later, the feminist movement further stressed the relationship between women and nature and their role in environmental conservation (Shiva, 1989; Agarwal, 1992).

The Vedas were passed down orally from generation to generation until it was written between c. 1500 - c. 500 BC (https://www.worldhistory.org/The_Vedas/). The Vedas have presented the importance and embedded relationships between human beings and the environment. It is said that

every element is composed of soil (*prithvi*), water (*jala*), fire (*tejas*), wind (*vayu*) and space (*akasha*). The earth, and human body also consist of these five elements. Harmony of these elements is essential in the earth and the human body as well. Long before the claiming of modern science, the Righvedas claimed that 'आप ओषधीतरू नोऽ वन्तु धीर्वना गिरयो वृक्षकेशाः' (ऋग्वेद ८.८.५). जल, अन्न, जडिबुटी, वन, रुख, पर्वत, तथा आकाशले मनुष्यको रक्षा गर्दछन्, water, food, trees, herbs, forest and sky all protect human beings. It is further written in the *Aathrwavedas* and the *Righvedas* that 'वीरुधो वैश्वदेवी : उग्राः पुरुषजीवनीः' (अथर्ववेद ८.७.४) । वनस्पतिहरूमा सबै देवताको शक्ति रहेकाले मनुष्यलाई जीवनशक्ति दिएर रक्षा गर्दछन् । 'उग्रा या विषदूषणी : ... ओषधीः' (अथर्ववेद ८.७.१०) वनस्पतिहरूले प्रदुषण नष्ट गरिदिने भएकाले विषदूषणी हुन् । 'वीरुधः पारयिष्णवः' (ऋग्वेद १०.१७.३) वनस्पतिहरू हामी सबैका रक्षक हुन्, plants have the unique super power (of all the gods), they protect humans by giving them vitality. Plants are detoxifiers as they destroy pollution. Plants are our protectors. Thus, the *Yejurvedas*, one of the four Vedas, written that 'माऽपो हिंसिः मौषधीहिंः' (यजुर्वेद ६.२२) जललाई दूषित बनाउनु हुँदैन तथा वनस्पतिहरूलाई हानी पुऱ्याउनु हुँदैन, water should not be contaminated and plants should not be harmed. The *Righvedas* claims 'न्यू चित्रु वायोरमृतं वि दस्यते' (ऋग्वेद ६.३७.३) । वायुमा अमृत रहेको छ तसर्थ त्यसलाई नष्ट हुन दिनु हुँदैन, that *amrit* (the life giving substance) is present in the air, so it should not be allowed to perish. In the *Yajurvedas*, it is further written that पृथिवी माता (यजुर्वेद, २.१०) द्यौष्पिता (यजुर्वेद, २.११) पृथ्वी माता हुन् आकाश पिता हुन्, तसर्थ पिता र माताको सम्मान र संरक्षण गर्नु हरेक मानिसको कर्तव्य हो, earth is our mother and sky (space) is our father. Thus, respecting and protecting the earth, and the atmosphere is the responsibility of each individual as we do to our mother and father. The various social groups in Nepal have such rich knowledge and embedded relationships with nature that have been expressed in their tradition and are yet to discover and disseminate.

The Vedas have not only explained the importance of the co-existence of these

elements but also explain the relationship between women and nature. The word 'मही' is from the Sanskrit language in which 'मही' (महि+ई) means 'earth/dharti'. So the word 'women' refers equivalent to *dharti*. *Dharti*/earth has the power of reproduction, nurturing, and growth, and women have the same power. In this way, the importance of the environment in totality has been conceptualized and practiced for a long time in the Himalayas. Importantly, Eastern philosophy also envisioned the unity of the earth, atmosphere, biosphere, and hydrosphere and their embedded relationships. Different social groups living in the different ecological regions in Nepal have the knowledge and different methods of environmental conservation that they have been practicing for a long time. People plant different species of plants like bunyan, bamboo, *simali*, etc., in different types of lands, especially in landslide-prone areas. The worshiping of trees and the changes of the season from the festivals like *Udhauli* and *Ubhauri* indicate people's efforts to understand and respect the harmonious and intimate relationships between the environment and society.

Late Bhandari well internalized the social diversity of Nepal and considered it as the richness of life. After the Calcutta conference, Bhandari addressed a mass meeting in Pokhara. Pointing out the reasons for the failure of the left movement in different countries, he mentioned seeking unity not only in uniformity but also in diversity as well. Unity is very important in the situation of diversity also (MBF, 2069 BS: 18). He claimed that any political thought should be for life but life not for thought. This principle suggests being pragmatic in defining and applying Marxism as per the particular context of the society, so life is dynamic and the thought governing life and society should also be dynamic (MBF, 2069 BS: 10). As human life is dynamic, the environment is also dynamic. In another context, he said, "*jiwan ko rang hariyo hunchha*" (the color of life is

green). With this claim, he stressed diversity and recognized differences and harmony in social life. Similarly, he emphasized the diversity in nature. This diversity is the beauty and richness of nature. While translating the environmental perspective of PMPD into practice, Sharma Oli (2068 BS: 25) mentioned that globalization, industrialization, and mega projects have affected the environment and the communities dependent on environmental resources. Such communities are to be protected and rehabilitated by the country and must safeguard their right to resources. In this way, PMPD strongly advocates for the rights of the disadvantaged and affected communities and their access to resources, and stress having special provisions in the situation of disasters and displacement. It has recognized the traditional knowledge of environmental conservation of the Himalayan people.

Conclusion

PMPD is a creative thought of defining Marxism in the context of twenty-first-century characteristics of Nepali society. It has introduced a perspective that has revolutionized the entire left movement amid changing times. PMPD critically examines the deficiencies of individual freedom and political rights within the traditional communist governance system. It strongly advocates for multiparty competition, the rule of law, and the provision of proving supremacy through competition for leadership. Additionally, it emphasizes values such as social justice, human rights, and economic equality.

PMPD asserts that access and control over natural resources fundamentally depend on political decisions and power relations. Colonialism, globalization, and especially new liberalism have massively destroyed diversity and differences, distancing people from their access to natural resources and further commodifying nature. The local biodiversity was replaced by planting pine-like trees that not only homogenize the forest but also replace diversity, and destroy the local forest-based livelihood of the poor people. It has

emphasized to develop and use water and other natural resources in the participation of local people.

PMPD's environmental stance aligns closely with the concept of sustainable development, advocating for the utilization of natural resources to meet present-day demands while ensuring the ability to fulfill future generations' needs. It highly respects the unity and harmony between nature and society that has been expressed in the Vedic literature that regards the Earth as a mother. PMPD acknowledges the intricate connections between women and nature, respecting the traditional knowledge and conservation practices upheld by diverse Himalayan communities. It approaches nature from a subjective standpoint, internalizing the integration and harmony between people and nature as cornerstones of sustainable development.

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Annex 1

The additional features of People's Multiparty Democracy

1. Supremacy of law [Constitution]
2. Pluralistic open society
3. Separation of power
4. Protection of human rights
5. Multiparty competitive system
6. Periodic election
7. Government of majority holding party and the constitutional opposition
8. Rule of law
9. Strengthening people's democratic system
10. Permission to foreign capital
11. Compensation to those landlords who support people's democracy
12. Balanced and dignified foreign policy with the highest priority on national interest
13. The leadership of the working class and people's democratic dictatorship [governance] or people's democratic state
14. Anti-feudal, anti-comprador capitalist, and antiimperialist People's Multiparty Democracy.

