

The Nepali Communist Movement and People's Multiparty Democracy

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ABSTRACT

Madan Bhandari postulated People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) to bolster both the Nepali Communist Movement and the International Communist Movement. As the global experiment with Marxism under one-party communist rule and the Soviet model of socialism collapsed, and the partyless Panchayat regime in Nepal became unpopular, Madan Bhandari fused classical Marxism, Leninism, and New Democracy, liberal democracy with the unique situation of Nepal to establish the foundational concept of PMPD. This article retraces the developmental trajectory of PMPD in conjunction with the evolving Communist Movement in Nepal. It examines PMPD's development from its initial adoption at the Fifth National General Convention of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) through the party's subsequent General Conventions. In this light, this paper reveals that PMPD emerged not only as a central principle for the party's vision of socio-economic transformation and political strategy but also provided insights for other political parties and movements. Furthermore, this paper explores the potential of PMPD to address citizens' needs exceptions, and core national interests. The future of Nepal's communist movement depends on its adherence to democratic principles and popular consent. Nepali communists must remain competitive to retain the revolution's achievements, and strategies must align with current realities. Finally, an excessive focus on democratization at the expense of revolutionary change and socio-economic transformation goals may undermine the progress of the communist movement in Nepal.

Introduction

The Communist Movement in Nepal has unquestionably surged with new energy under People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), applying Marxism to Nepal's unique context. For Marxism to advance, proponents must fiercely oppose fundamentalism and relinquishism and adapt creatively to contemporary conditions. In this context, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) (CPN [UML]) stands

out as a leading force and advocates within Nepal's communist landscape. This concept integrates the following key components: (1) opposing the emergence of fundamentalism and abandonment within the communist movement, (2) creatively applying and advancing Marxism, and (3) Establishing socialism as the maximum program and PMPD as the minimum program.

The CPN (UML) has consistently elucidated PMPD in diverse forums as "an original principle

derived from the application of Marxism to the distinctive characteristics of Nepali society.” This theoretical postulation emerged from the scientific analysis of various aspects of Nepali society, including nationalism, social justice movements, democratic and communist movements, as well as ideological struggles within the party and efforts towards democratization. Additionally, the notion of PMPD is imbued with the experience of international communist and socialist movements across the world. PMPD adopts Marxism as its foundational principle, creatively adapted to suit the concrete circumstances of Nepali society, with an explicit commitment expressed to be further guided by Marxism.

Amidst the international communist movement being significantly impacted by the forces of fundamentalism and relinquishment, communists were confronted with the task of advancing their movement while adhering to the unique characteristics of their respective nations, and concurrently opposing these ideologies and inclinations. Recognizing this genuine responsibility, the CPN (UML) positioned itself to propel the communist movement with the unique perspective of PMPD. Despite facing strong hostility from the reactionary forces, the CPN (UML) played a historically crucial role in setting up a democratic system in the country and consequently emerged as the political party garnering the highest number of votes from the Nepali populace. This achievement has fostered the conviction that the nation's prosperity and happiness can only be achieved through the pursuit of democratic methods and processes.

Methodology

This article applies qualitative and methodology to scrutinize the sway of people's multiparty democracy on the trajectory of Nepal's communist movement and its broader historical context. It delves deep into the profound ramifications of people's multiparty democracy, charting its profound impact on Nepal's political terrain, and paving the way for the birth of a federal democratic

state. Anchored in a thorough exploration of published literature surrounding the communist movement, multiparty democracy, and assorted political and rightist uprisings within the nation, this study furnishes invaluable insights into the evolution of Nepal's communist movement.

Results and Discussion

Trajectory of the Nepali communist movement

Formative years

The foundational aim of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) was to restore the “complete civil liberties” that had been abducted by the Rana regime for 104 years. The “First Pamphlet” (Baishakh 12, 2006 BS) issued by the NCP categorically mentioned this intent (Puspala, 2073 BS, p. 27). Subsequently, the NCP issued its first “Manifesto” (September 15, 1949; Bhadra 30, 2006 BS) (pp. 33–48), emphasizing the need for a constitution based on adult suffrage, guaranteeing full freedom, democracy, and basic economic rights for the common people. The NCP declared its commitment to continue the fight for political rights. The party actively participated in the anti-Rana people's movement of 2007 BS and contested the first municipal election (2008 BS). The party faced a ban from 2008 BS to 2012 BS, during which it opposed the ban and demanded its end. The NCP participated in the first parliamentary elections of 2015 BS and won four seats (Binaya, 2067 BS).

King Mahendra's military coup refers to the event that took place in Nepal on December 15, 1960, when King Mahendra dissolved the government and suspended the constitution. This resulted in the establishment of a new autocratic regime under the direct control of the monarchy. On the same day, he dismissed the cabinet of Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala and imprisoned Koirala. On April 13, 1961, King Mahendra made a televised appearance in which he introduced Panchayat, a partyless political system.

The 1979 student protests in Nepal were a series of protests among the student community during April and May 1979. These clashes had a significant historical impact, as they forced the monarchy to concede to holding a referendum on the possibility of a multiparty system in the country.

On December 15, 1960 (2017 BS), King Mahendra abolished the parliamentary system through a military coup d'état. He dissolved the B. P. Koirala-led government, suspended the constitution, arrested leaders and politicians, including Premier Koirala, and curtailed fundamental rights. Amidst the post-military coup turmoil, the CPN waged a movement against the royal takeover and promoted the political slogan: "Restore the dissolved parliament" (CPN [UML], 2049 BS, p. 27). Despite certain differences in their political agenda and course of action, all factions of the Communists fought for democratic rights against the autocratic and partyless Panchayat regime. During the people's movement of 2036 BS–2037 BS, they resolutely opposed the partyless Panchayat regime and supported the popular notion of a multiparty system, although it was one of the variants of capitalist democracy.

Almost all of the splinter groups of the communist movement in Nepal were active in the Referendum, proclaimed by King Birendra in response to the Nepali people's protest of the Panchayat regime. As the regime favored partylessness, it declared that the partyless Panchayat regime won the Referendum. The CPN (ML) then took a strategic move to participate in the elections orchestrated by the regime, opening a new frontier for struggle within the regime. In the year 2043 BS, the party, while remaining underground, projected pro-people candidates in the general elections in some districts of the country. Eventually, some of the most influential left candidates won elections to the Rastriya Panchayat from those districts. This included Padmaratna Tuladhar from Kathmandu, Somanath Adhikari Pyasi from Kaski, Drona Prasad Acharya from Jhapa, Rupchandra Bista from Makawanpur, and Bhim Bahadur Shrestha

from Chitwan. Additionally, Narayanman Bijuksche of the Nepal Workers and Peasant Party from Bhaktapur won elections that year. This was a time when political parties were banned, and they had used the elections of the Panchayati system for their strategic purposes. Nevertheless, candidates from the underground parties secured popular support during the franchise, which would ultimately become the last general election of the Panchayat system.

During and after the people's movement

The party declared the establishment of a 'democratic system with multiparty competition' and adopted it in its political program through its Fourth National General Convention of CPN (ML) in 2046 BS. To materialize this program, the party took the lead in forming the United Left Front (ULF) to restore the multiparty system. Under the ULF, all communist factions participated in the historic People's Movement of 2046 BS to oppose the repressive partyless Panchayat regime and establish multiparty democracy in the country. Not only communists but also capitalist liberal parties like the Nepali Congress allied with the ULF. The alliance was so effective that the King's Panchayat regime bowed down to the People's Movement. King Birendra liquidated the Panchayat regime and agreed to set up a multiparty system through the promulgation of a new constitution in the country. Although the King's regime eventually crumbled under the People's Movement, he tried to temper new constitutional provisions through his representatives in the Commission for Constitution Counsel to benefit the monarchy and the reactionary elements supporting him. In this context, Surendra Manandhar states:

The movement was concluded successfully. As a result, late King Birendra was compelled to declare the end of partyless autocratic Panchayati system and proclaimed multi-party democratic political system. The success of the movement also paved the way for [the] making of a new democratic political system. There was

formed the 'Commission for Constitution Counsel' to draft a new constitution by collecting different suggestions from the people. As per the recommendation of the commission for constitution counsel, late King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah had Promulgated the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 2047, (1990A.D.) on the date of 23rd of Kartik 2047 (9th November 1990 A.D.). (Manandhar, 2076 BS: 371)

Although the constitution was progressive, it did not fully meet the aspirations of the CPN (UML) or the demands of the People's Movement of 2046 BS. In this context, the CPN (UML), under the leadership of its General Secretary Madan Bhandari, played a crucial role in the constitution-writing process to ensure the inclusion of people's rights. As the right-wing Nepali Congress allied with the royalists during this process, many of the people's concerns were not guaranteed in the 1990 Constitution. The CPN (UML) resolutely opposed these limitations, and General Secretary Bhandari articulated the party's 27-point disagreement, despite lending critical support to the constitution (Bhandari, 1990). The party engaged in parliamentary-democratic practices following the restoration of the parliamentary system through the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 1990. However, the multiparty democracy specified in the constitution was a capitalist one, which, according to Bhandari, could not fully serve the people's interests or provide them with full equality. Thus, Bhandari proposed a New Democracy with Nepali characteristics, which he called People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD). This concept was taken to the common people for discussion and suggestions to help the party adopt a mature political notion.

After extensive public debate and intense internal discussions, the Fifth National General Convention of the CPN (UML), held in January 2049 BS, embraced PMPD as the program of the

Nepali revolution. In adopting PMPD, the party emphasized the need to oppose fundamentalism and relinquishment, creatively utilize and develop Marxism, regard socialism as the maximum program, and present it in a detailed and holistic manner, while considering PMPD as the minimum program (Bhandari, 1993). The Sixth National Convention of the CPN (UML), held in 2054 BS, recognized PMPD not only as the minimum program of the Nepali revolution but also as a fundamental principle. Drawing upon the analysis of nationalism and social justice movements in Nepali society, the democratic and communist movements, ideological struggles within the party, efforts for democratization within the party, and the experiences of international communist and socialist movements, PMPD was defined as a fundamental principle developed through the creative application of Marxism to the unique context of Nepal (CPN [UML], 2054 BS).

During the Seventh National Convention held in 2059 BS, PMPD was reaffirmed as the original program and principle of the Nepali revolution, and the party committed to continue its work under this philosophy. It was acknowledged that almost all factions within the communist movement were embracing the essence of PMPD in some form, and its 'reasonableness, excellence, and originality' were affirmed. The guidelines stated that the main objectives at that time were to protect multiparty democracy by combating regression, restore peace and stability by addressing the Maoist problem, and progressively transform the country through progressive economic, social, and political reforms (CPN [UML], 2059 BS).

During and after the second People's Movement

The Eighth National General Convention of the CPN (UML), held in 2065 BS, provided a detailed explanation about jobs and highlighted three important aspects of PMPD.

The first and most important aspect is the theoretical aspect. This principle is used to analyze changing national and international situations, advance the ideological, political, and organizational tasks of the revolution, and guide the determination of the party's programs and policies. It develops and prospers through the revolutionary actions of the people (CPN [UML], 2065 BS, p. 158).

Secondly, the programmatic aspect of PMPD is addressed. It is stated that it will be developed under the theoretical guidance of PMPD. The program put forward by the Fifth National General Convention (2049 BS) was a product of the historical situation at that time. Amendments and modifications to some aspects of the program are mandatory (CPN [UML], 2065 BS, p. 158). Updating does not necessarily mean revising PMPD; it is accepted that the party's program is determined by socio-economic development and class struggle.

The third aspect emphasizes that changes in the direction of actions, tactics, and strategies will inevitably follow alterations in the balance of power. The party will always be guided by the philosophical-theoretical aspect of People's Multiparty Democracy, continue to make timely changes in the programmatic aspect, and proceed in a new way based on the developed balance of power in terms of operational direction.

The Ninth National General Convention of the CPN (UML), held in 2071 BS, presented a systematic review under the title "Principle of People's Multiparty Democracy: 22 Years of Defense, Use, and Development" (CPN [UML], 2071 BS, p. 119). Several factors, including the role of the Nepal Communist Party in the democratic movement in Nepal, the ideas of state revolution and party building, and lessons learned from the failure of the Soviet model of socialism, have been instrumental in establishing multiparty democracy in Nepal. PMPD was implemented in response to certain commentaries, such as

"the end of history" and "the death of ideas" put forward by fierce anti-communist agents and organizations.

Based on the same analysis, the Ninth National Convention promoted PMPD, noting that "theories are developed based on some theoretical-philosophical preconceptions, prior experience, and future predictions" (CPN [UML], 2071 BS, p. 125). These theories are tested as they are applied in practice, becoming more advanced and prosperous. Additionally, special attention should be paid to their implementation.

The Tenth National General Convention of the CPN (UML), held in 2078 BS, stated,

The correctness of PMPD, which was developed based on Marxist philosophy, the practice of the Nepalese revolution, and the experience of the world communist movement, has been confirmed by practices in politics and governance over the past thirty years. During this period, neoliberal thinking and the status quo has failed in Nepal; the country has also experienced the failure of violence, authoritarianism, and one-party thinking. Nepali politics today is influenced by the notion of PMPD. The principle will guide us not only in the stage of a democratic revolution but also in the socialist stage. In the meantime, based on the context of developing new circumstances and our own experiences, this principle needs to be developed and enriched over time. (CPN [UML], 2078 BS, p. 108)

Experience gained from the international communist movement

During the disintegration of the Soviet Union, anti-communist capitalists predicted that 'now the communists will be eliminated from the world'. Several political-theoretical and philosophical conclusions were published based on this proposition. There was a need for the activists of the communist movement to move forward creatively but firmly with concrete political strategies under broader planning. However, at

that time, two misconceptions emerged in the communist movement: fundamentalist thought and relinquishist thought.

Fundamentalist school of thought

The followers of the fundamentalist school of thought ignored the country's distinctive political dynamics. They believed that communists should only work based on the ideas already formulated in the books written by Karl Marx. These proponents had a tendency that prevented them from understanding or accepting the sovereign truths of Marxism-Leninism, the concrete circumstances of a country, and the effects of specific times. They thought that the communist party should not be allowed to operate openly as state power was in the hands of the reactionary class. They asserted that all new Marxist thoughts should not affect the revolutionary spirit of the Communist Party.

The CPN (UML) aimed to free the movement from both fundamentalist and relinquishment thoughts, which were considered conceptually wrong and impractical. Highlighting the concrete expressions of these thoughts and trends, the CPN (UML) proposed: "Let's oppose relinquishism and fundamentalism: Let's use and develop Marxism creatively!" (Bhandari, 1993). At that point, the CPN (UML) adopted this time-honored slogan to expedite the communist movement. The CPN (UML) opposed the anti-communist pernicious trends that spread worldwide, saving the communist movement from its harmful influence and taking it to new heights (Bhandari, 1993).

Important precepts of the party

The party embraces the principle of the necessity and universality of conflict, endeavoring to apply it in practice. It deeply absorbs the dialectical materialist philosophical concept of the "negation of negation" (Engels, 1877) while promoting the belief in balancing the sovereign aspect and disregarding the decadent aspect of dynamic assumption. The party also assimilates and seeks to establish the principles of checks

and balances in society and state governance. It acknowledges that people are the source of power, emphasizing that the essence of the state system is the interest and well-being of the people and the nation. The aim is to organize and operate state power democratically based on this belief.

The party ultimately aims to abolish all forms of privileges and classes, striving to subject everyone to the provisions of the constitution and operate under the rule of law. It seeks to establish a system of competition and initiative while opposing excessive centralization of power and adopting the principle of separation and decentralization of power.

Adapting to changes in the global landscape, the party aims to advance the communist movement alongside national independence and social liberation movements. It endeavors to promote nationalism and humanism developed in Nepali society, aligning with the society's characteristics and uniqueness. The party adopts the historical materialist approach to analyze Nepali society. Additionally, the party has assimilated the accomplishments of humanity, thereby defending and upgrading Marxism by building on its foundation.

Basic principles of PMPD

The foundational postulation of PMPD is that the Communist Party should be established as a political party. While the form and method of organization may vary due to working conditions, the Communist Party should not function as a military organization or a ruling entity—it should operate as a dynamic political party. The Communist Party should be able to engage in fair competition and selection of leadership based on meritocracy. However, fundamentalist thinking also heavily prevails in the Marxist party, suggesting that "The party should not be open, the party should not directly engage in public activities; the party should operate within the non-parliamentary sector; and the party should create a separate

platform for parliamentary struggles and other parliamentary activities. The party should only consist of cadres” (CPN [UML], 2049 BS: 60).

In contrast, PMPD advances in terms of credibility and capacity demonstration to the public and the entire society. Based on multiparty competition, it aims to maintain excellence by the party in terms of policies, programs, plans, and conduct. This approach enables the creation of a working strategy based not on possibilities, but on reality. “The Communist Party, which has reached the doorstep of the people, has been exposed to various modes of organizational activities and struggles for the benefit of the people. Its policies and leadership can only demonstrate capability by dealing with adversities!” (CPN [UML], 2049 BS a, pp. 60-64). The party should be built with this perspective in mind. The Communist Party should be free from the confusion between parliamentary and non-parliamentary activities. The party itself is neither parliamentary nor non-parliamentary. Struggle can take on parliamentary or non-parliamentary forms, and the path of revolution can be parliamentary or non-parliamentary. It cannot be labeled as a parliamentary party during a parliamentary struggle, a military party during armed conflict, or a political party while governing. The belief lies in the system of periodic general elections, majority government, and minority opposition, rejecting unelected, monopolistic, and totalitarian practices. Whether parliamentary or non-parliamentary is a matter of strategy, path, and struggle.

So, the party can employ any methods and forms of struggle and work according to the situation. It should adopt any means necessary to achieve the declared and determined objectives. “If there are other political organizations within the working class or political organizations of the non-working class, they can compete politically with them” (CPN [UML], 2049 BS b, p. 24). The merits and demerits of the party and its leaders should be critically evaluated in the best interest of the country and all of humanity. Whether it is the entire Communist Party or its leaders, the

people should be able to evaluate their merits and demerits. The party leaders and cadres should objectively be evaluated not based on feelings, mystery, and adventure, but on merits and demerits and their performances. The people should be allowed to evaluate them based on their ideas, conduct, actions, and accomplishments. “The party should be developed as a party with leaders who are not nominated or appointed from above but are democratically elected within the party and accepted by the people themselves as trustworthy leaders” (CPN [UML], 2049 BS c, pp. 60-61). For this, the qualities and standards set within the Communist Party must be seriously assimilated.

Strict adherence to the organizational principle is crucial. The organizational principle, known as the principle of democratic centralism, can transform the Communist Party into a formidable fortress rather than just a club. This principle alone can elevate the Communist Party to the status of a revolutionary force. Party members formulate principles, policies, and rules through collective discussion, and decisions are made accordingly. Once decisions are reached, whether unanimously or by majority, they must be strictly implemented.

People’s centralism entails allowing different viewpoints to be discussed within committee meetings or conventions of the relevant level, but these discussions cannot extend beyond the specified scope. The right to examine, express opinions, and make decisions should be recognized as a democratic process, while the necessity for unified implementation of decisions underscores the essence of centrality. Relationships between the party committee and its members, lower committees and higher committees, committees and conferences or conventions, and between minority and majority factions, are all integral aspects of this organizational framework. In the history of revolution in human civilization, one of the maxims, “Individuals cannot become strong when the party is weak, but its members automatically become strong if the party becomes

strong,” underscores the organizational theory of PMPD.

Some considerations for implementing PMPD

Firstly, the practice and experience of the last thirty years validate its efficacy. However, to address the challenges encountered in its implementation, discussions and debates should be conducted at a new level regarding the form, characteristics, or nature of the Nepalese revolution. This dialogue should not only involve leaders and workers but also engage ordinary people interested in political change and participation.

Given that Nepal's revolution was achieved under the joint leadership of representatives from the working class and the capitalist class, the direction of the revolution will be determined by which class gains dominance in the competition. Our revolution is not one where the working class imposes a 'dictatorship' over other classes and powers; rather, it progresses within the framework of democratic principles such as constitutional supremacy, the rule of law, and the separation of powers, with the consent of the people. PMPD's theoretical base anticipates that the Constitution of Nepal upholds the democratic values and leads to socialism.

Recognizing the risk of losing many of the revolution's gains if the working class falls behind in the competition, policies, programs, plans, and conduct should be organized accordingly. This reality underscores the importance of aligning strategies with the prevailing circumstances.

Secondly, competition is pertinent not only to state management but also to party management, necessitating its correct utilization in party affairs. However, this endeavor is fraught with challenges and risks. It is imperative to acknowledge the need for practical application not only in policies, methods, and structures but also in conduct and culture. Transparency

within the organizational structure concerning this practice is essential for the continuity of party life.

Thirdly, the concept of competition should be understood not solely in the context of state or party administration, nor merely as a political issue, but also as a matter of cultivating an advanced culture and tradition. Developing a culture that embraces not only the victors of competition but also acknowledges the outcomes of defeat is crucial. Without it, the party not only struggles to enforce laws but also faces numerous problems and unfortunate consequences.

Fourthly, the legal framework for accepting competition results within the party must be fortified. The weakness of such a system will certainly pose threats to the implementation of PMPD.

Fifthly, there is a tendency to emphasize democratization over revolutionary transformation, in the strong conviction that power can be attained through peaceful competition without considering the clear opinion of the people, and to view intra-party competition as a divergence from the goal of revolutionary change. This perspective does not remain compatible with the power associated with an objective of socio-economic transformation. Weaknesses such as mechanistic thinking and conventional approaches that resist development and the tendency to overlook its relevance pose challenges to PMPD.

Conclusion

People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) has emerged as a leading concept within Nepal's communist movement, drawing from the nation's historical communist efforts, global communist experiences, and key insights from Marxist political philosophy and socialist theories. There is an urgent need to further enrich the ideas derived from this foundation. Recognizing PMPD as a concept shaped by the application of Marxism within Nepal's unique

context, one must not overlook the inherent dynamics it should embody. Addressing the specific challenges the country faces requires a proactive evolution of Marxist theory relevant to the character of society, rather than an acceptance of the status quo. It is now imperative to comprehend and effectively implement the principles, programs, and policy frameworks of PMPD.

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