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The Frontier Hero in the Trajectory of Contemporary Nepali Politics: PMPD with Bhandari's Dynamic Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Joseph Campbell defines the hero as an extraordinary figure who sacrifices his life for the greater cause of humanity. This paper presents Madan Bhandari as the frontier hero in the trajectory in the post-1990s Nepali politics. It explores Bhandari's efforts to adapt Marxist principles to Nepal's unique socio-political context through the formulation of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), an ideology that continues to shape the country's political trajectory to this day. PMPD not only became the mainstream political ideology but also succeeded in bringing together liberal democratic parties and hardline leftist fronts around the period of restoration of democracy in 1990. These efforts ultimately contributed to the downfall of the autocratic Panchayat regime and the beginning of a new era of democracy and development in Nepal. The paper highlights Bhandari's legendary role, portraying him not only as a unifying and principled leader but also as a visionary leader who helped lay the foundation for a transformed Nepal. The study concludes that Bhandari's heroic figure, leadership, and vision—embodied in PMPD—contributed to the emergence of various peaceful political movements, culminating in the establishment of the Republic of Nepal and the formation of Constitution of Nepal through the Constituent Assembly in 2015.

Introduction

In the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series *The Power of Myth* (1988–92), Joseph Campbell (2001) highlights the hero's extraordinary deeds performed for the greater cause of humanity. Originally a Greek term, the "hero" refers both to a courageous person and a demigod (Boon, 2009, p. 302). The Sanskrit equivalent, *vira*, refers to a brave warrior loyal to a higher authority, such as a king or prophet (Hodous & Soothill, 2004, p. 41). The Latin term *virtus*, meaning "true" or "pure," shares an etymological root with *vira*, connoting an ideal person with nobility. While Homer's hero like Achilles is a man of valor and dignity, Plato's hero is the philosopher-king. In *Plato and the Hero*, Angela Hobbs (2000) considers Achilles a hero for his relentless efforts on behalf of the Greek army during the Trojan War (1194–1184 BC) (214). Similarly, Stephen Halliwell describes the Aristotelian hero as a preeminent figure—an agent of tragedy (Hobbs, 2000, p.148). Hobbs also references Leeming (2022) to a miraculous birth and spectacular childhood, and undergoes childhood initiation—indications of extraordinary labor and a quest beyond the normal range of human experience (Hobbs, 2000, p. 83). The Greek term *arête* conveys the hero's attributes of virtue,

nobility, courage, and excellence (Miller, 2004, p. 240).

In the world stage, South Asia is invariably associated with historical figures such as Siddhartha Gautam Buddha, Emperor Ashoka, and Mahatma Gandhi. In the Eastern epic tradition, heroes in *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* emerge within the dynamics of state mechanisms rooted in familial conflict. Karna, Arjuna, and Abhimanyu display remarkable feats of heroism in defense of their respective causes. Likewise, Rama and Laxman exemplify loyalty and valor in service of family and state. In the Hindu Kush Himalayan cultural landscape, some of the political leaders have also taken on heroic stature, calling on peace and harmony, advocating for freedom from imperial regimes, championing democracy, and defending national sovereignty. In the early 1990s, People's Leader Madan Bhandari captivated the public with his powerful oratory and the innovative political vision of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD). Like the hero in the Campbellian model, a young promising political leader with a clear vision for the greater cause of the Nepali nation-state and sovereignty of Nepali people emerges to unite the left forces and promote political working relations with the Nepali Congress.

These discussions on popular representations of myths and heroes often blur the line between art and life, as actors reflect on relationships in both "reel" and real life. In this context, cinematic portrayals of historical heroes take on particular significance. For example, Richard Attenborough's (1982) epic biographical film *Gandhi* not only dramatizes Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent resistance to British rule but also earned Ben Kingsley the Academy Award for the best actor in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1983. One might portray Balbhadra Kunwar safeguards the Nalapani fort during the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–16). The 2022 Nepali film *Nalapani*, directed by Rimesh Adhikari, portrays the heroic deeds of Balbhadra Kunwar, a Nepali military leader who, with a small, untrained force including women and children, defended the Nalapani fort against the vastly superior British East India Company army in 1814.

In 2010, the Nepal film industry released *Dashdhunga*, directed by Manoj Pandit and Haridev Oli, dramatizing the mysterious car crash that killed CPN-UML leaders Madan Bhandari and Jibaraj Ashrit in Dashdhunga, Chitwan. Based on this true event, *Dashdhunga*, starring Anup Baral and Dayahang Rai, continues to resonate with audiences—especially those who had seen or met Bhandari, or who have heard stories about him. Such films bring to life not only real events but also the heroes of history who sacrifice themselves for a greater human purpose. These heroes, larger than life, continue to reappear before audiences in iconic forms in popular media, such as film and television. Nepali people's great sense of unity in diversity and collective aspiration have been reflected in different occasions, such as restoration of democracy in 1990 and formation of Constitution through the Constituent Assembly in 2015.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye (1957) outlines five fictional modes of the hero based on their representation. In the first, the *mythic* mode, the hero is superior in kind to both other people and the environment—a divine figure such as a god, angel, or prophet. In the second, the *romantic* mode, the hero is superior to others and their surroundings in degree—situated between the divine and human realms, like a medieval saint or chivalric knight (33). Thirdly, in the high mimetic mode, the hero is superior to other people but not to their environment—typical of epic and tragic figures like Portia in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* or Ulysses in Homer's epics (34). Fourth is the *low mimetic* mode, in which the protagonist is on the same level as ordinary people, performing everyday actions in realistic contexts—such as Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's (1949) *Death of a Salesman*. Finally, the *ironic* mode features a protagonist whose power of mind and body is inferior to that of the audience, creating a sense of detachment or pity. Frye writes

that this type of character belongs to a world of "bondage, frustration, [and] absurdity" (34). The anti-hero, emblematic of the ironic mode, occupies a liminal space between heroism and villainy, often descending into the everyday struggles of ordinary life. Examples include Alex in Anthony Burgess's (1962) *A Clockwork Orange* and Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In *Murphy*, Samuel Beckett's (1938) titular character diverges from traditional heroism; his suffering stems from inaction and the disillusionments of interwar Europe. Unlike villains, such anti-heroes alienate themselves from public life and ultimately become entangled in the very societal structures they fail to confront while becoming products of the same social dynamics.

Birth of the hero

The hero must be, in a sense, technically dead. When the physical body ceases to exist, the hero rises with revitalized energy. Martyrs are those who accept even death for a noble cause—serving humanity and the whole of human civilization. Civilizations rise with their heroes and leaders, regardless of social class or cultural origin. There are individuals—heroes and builders of culture and civilization—who, often at the expense of their personal interests, are driven by a commitment to building society or the nation and the entire world.

When someone devoted to their family and children die, it is primarily their family and relatives who grieve the demise. But when someone who champions the cause of humanity passes away, the nation—or even the world—pays tribute and they promise to transform the tragedy into creative energy. People express deep respect for such figures, honoring their legacy and offering condolences to their families. Creative artists, including novelists, playwrights and movie makers bring those heroes and legends in art forms. This was especially true in the case of Madan Bhandari, whose death in a mysterious car crash on 16 May 1993 left the entire nation in mourning. Nevertheless, the politics of Nepal has been revolving around his thoughts and principles ever since.

Nearly three decades after his passing, contemporary national politics still revolves around Bhandari's doctrine of PMPD in terms of fair franchise and competition for leadership within the party. People often feel a personal connection to heroes and iconic figures. Heroes and legends influence individuals across cultures and create emotional affinities that transcend borders. Bhandari continues to live in the hearts and minds of people—whether or not they share his ideology or worldviews.

People come and go in the world stage, but heroes leave lasting contributions to the world. Their heroic actions are often more fully recognized after death. In *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, Otto Rank (1965) offers a definition of the hero:

> The newborn hero is the young sun rising from the waters, first confronted by lowering clouds, but finally triumphing over all obstacles. The taking into consideration of all natural (chiefly atmospheric) phenomena--as was done by the first representatives of this method of myth interpretation —and the regarding of the legends, in a more restricted sense, as astral myths (Stucken, Winckler, and others) are approaches not so essentially distinct as the followers of each individual direction believe to be the case. Nor does it seem a basic improvement when the purely solar interpretation, as advocated especially by Frobenius, was no longer accepted and the view was advanced that all myths were originally lunar. Hüsing holds this theory in his discussion of the myth of Cyrus the Great; Siecke also claims this view as the only legitimate, obvious interpretation of the birth myths of the heroes; and it is a concept that is beginning to gain popularity. (p. 32)

Rank connects the hero to nature. He parallels the newborn hero with the rising sun. Just as the rising sun faces the obstacle of surrounding clouds, the

hero confronts multiple hurdles in the process of his birth. Connecting the hero with the sun evokes the resonance of the heroic journey at the threshold of adventure.

People in diverse cultures worship their heroes in various forms. Some revere them as creators and protectors, while others worship them as gods. The multiple forms of deities in shrines and temples reflect individuals' values and belief systems. The Christian figure Jesus Christ parallels Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad. Muhammad is the Prophet in Islam, Christ the Son of God in Christianity, and Siddhartha Gautama the spiritual leader and founder of Buddhism. Along this line of heroic representation, Rank (1965) reveals the inherent connections between myth and psychic energy, and between divinity and humanity:

> The spiritual development found its cultural expression in Christianity, although the idea of the sacrifice or self-sacrifice of a man or divine hero had been prepared in classical religion and mythology, as witnessed by the partition of Osiris, the mangling of Bacchus, and the mutilations of Attis. The Oriental mystery religions, which lived on in the Eleusinian and Orphic cults of Greece, all have the death and resurrection of a god as their subject. But in the mysteries, the god becomes man and suffers the fate of mortality, while in Christianity, man again becomes god, that is, achieves psychical immortality. (pp. 289–290)

Rank considers the hero a demigod. He examines the Oriental deity in an analogy with the Christian suffering hero, Jesus Christ. Most theoretical conjectures revolve around the hero as a divine figure, a link between the profane and sacred, whereas others identify the hero with a redeemer.

Campbell reworks Lord Raglan's and Carl Jung's ideas of the hero. Raglan's (1965) hero makes his trip from his comfort zone of home to an unknown territory. Likewise, Jung's (1969) hero is transformed through the ritual journey, a process of conversion shared by gods. Similarly, Campbell (1973), in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, drawing insights from myths and history, traces the universality of the hero's journey:

> The mythological hero, setting forth from his common day, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). [. . .] At the return, the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world. (p. 246)

Numerous narratives, such as myth and folklore, originate from dreams and the unconscious. Arts, visual or non-visual, originate from myths: myths rework archetypes. Further, myths themselves are arts, or they are represented in media, such as film and fiction.

The Campbellian monomyth hero shares common patterns of the heroic journey with those found across various media and archetypes. Joseph Campbell clearly outlines three major stages of the hero's journey: departure, achievement, and return. On the journey into the unknown, the hero is usually supported by helpers—such as parents, teachers, mentors, friends, and assistants. In contrast, the hero continually faces opposition from antagonists, including villains and rivals. Like Campbell's hero, the folklore hero endures trials and tribulations until returning to society with a boon or gift for the people. Mythological heroes share recurring patterns and motifs with archetypal figures, as well as with the heroes represented in historical accounts and fictional narratives across media.

The hero in changing paradigms

Individuals often seek to identify with heroes—whether real or fictional. Responding to collective needs, the hero voluntarily undertakes demanding physical or moral challenges to achieve specific goals. A person of unwavering actions and remarkable accomplishments, the hero sacrifices personal interests for a noble cause: rescuing others from danger, transforming society, protecting ideals, or advancing the greater purpose of humanity. A figure of sincere dedication and exceptional courage, the hero often acts decisively to reshape the world.

At times, the hero of one society transcends boundaries and acquires symbolic status in other cultures over centuries, uniting disparate peoples through shared admiration. In this context, Marshall Fishwick (1987) traces the evolving aesthetic representations of the hero: "In classic times, heroes were god-men; in the Middle Ages, God's men; in the Renaissance, universal men; in the eighteenth century, gentlemen; in the nineteenth, self-made men. Our century has seen the common man and the outsider become heroic" (61). Each era has its own needs and expectations from leaders and public figures. In this sense, those officially designated as leaders or chieftains must meet the aspirations of their people—or else, new figures who can fulfill those needs rise to become their heroes.

In Jungian archetypal theory, the hero serves as a bridge between individual consciousness in the manifest level and a deeper collective human experience in the deeper level. In Jung's model, the mythic hero—symbolizing the human psyche—often appears as a supernatural being who embodies ego-consciousness. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung (1969) introduces an archetypal hero whose weaknesses are counterbalanced by the strength of a guiding figure—such as a wise master or mother-goddess. In Greek mythology, for instance, Theseus was aided by Poseidon, Perseus by Athena, and Achilles by Cheiron, the wise centaur (101). Jung also views archetypal hero actions as symbolic of inner psychological development: triumphs over giants (105), battles with monsters, journeys into darkness (111), and the rescue of the "damsel in distress" (anima) (114). By integrating physical strength with spiritual insight, the hero employs both body and symbolic "magic" to rescue humanity and protect the world. These superhuman acts, recurring across mythologies and cultures, reflect the universal dimension of heroic legend. Among such figures are Hercules, Sisyphus, and Prometheus—each challenging divine authority in defense of human potential.

Prometheus steals fire from heaven to empower mankind, while Sisyphus accepts the absurd fate of endlessly rolling a boulder uphill—knowing that if he stops, he dies. Though the task appears futile to the ordinary mind, it symbolizes direct defiance of theological determinism. This act affirms the hero's assertion of human supremacy over divine will, humanity over divinity, and life over death. Similarly, Hercules reveals his heroic essence early on, famously killing a serpent as a toddler. These mythological heroes undertake tasks beyond ordinary human limits, placing themselves within a divine sphere for the sake of noble ideals.

The hero often dies young, valuing honor and glory above life itself (Finkelberg, 2009, p. 1). Frequently celebrated as superhuman, the hero builds an iconic legacy through feats of daring and sacrifice. Orrin E. Klapp (1922) further characterizes the hero as a figure of success, defiance, and prowess:

> Because the hero exceeds in a striking way the standards required of ordinary group members, as has been said, he is a supernatural deviant, his courage, self-abnegation, devotion, and prowess, being regarded as amazing and—beyond the call of duty. Because of the requirement of transcending the mediocre, he must prove himself by exceptional acts, and the most perfect examples of heroes are to be found in legendary or mythical personages who represent in a superhumanly exaggerated way the things the group admires most. Because of

> their superior qualities, heroes dominate the scene of human action, symbolizing success, perfection and conquests of evil, providing a model for identification by the group—one might say its better self. (p.57)

Orrin appraises the hero's role in bridging the mortal and the immortal, transforming the real world into an ideal realm where mythic characters perform superhuman deeds. The hero emerges at the frontier between the divine and the human, between the material world and celestial space. Through their extraordinary service to humanity, heroic figures are elevated into the divine sphere, as people venerate them as gods and legends. Following these mythological interpretations of the hero, the next section outlines the psychological dimension of heroism.

The hero has a unifying function: to create order and maintain balance. Robert Segal (2015) reinterprets Freudian theories of the hero, identifying heroes as creative individuals attempting to alleviate their feelings of guilt for initially separating themselves from the self—symbolically represented by the mother's body (xvii). According to Segal, creative individuals emerge through acts of imagination, while ordinary individuals, seeking conformity, submit to societal norms. He further asserts that social conformists accept themselves as idealized by others, neurotics assert themselves by rejecting established norms, and average individuals relinquish their identity by fully accepting the world (xviii). The hero, rising above the average person as a model of human potential, demonstrates creative ingenuity through transformative action. Rank's mythic hero, blending the mortal and the divine, connects the human realm to the sacred.

A complete journey in a circular structure symbolizes perfection, wholeness, and harmony. In the process of the journey, the hero is transformed through multiple revelations, each offering a noble lesson. In myth, the hero often faces the death of someone he intends to benefit with the boon obtained through his trials. Learning begins with the loss of the most cherished figure. Transformation of consciousness takes place through the act of letting go—ultimately through the self's sacrifice—for a noble cause such as restoring order, securing peace, defending the nation, or upholding an ideology.

In *Seven Pillars of Popular Culture*, Fishwick connects the concept of an icon to an extraordinary individual and symbolic image, emphasizing that every culture or historical era marked by significant achievements produces its own icons. He further outlines the transformation of *history into mythos, mythos* into *logos*, and *logos* into *eikons*, citing references such as Plato's Ideas, Christ's Parables, Kant's Categories, Jung's Archetypes, and McLuhan's Media. According to Fishwick (1987), the heroic figure, imbued with iconic power, enters both individual and collective consciousness—where the idea gives rise to the image (132). He establishes a relationship between *mytho* and *logo* to uncover the deep connections between heroic narratives and their symbolic representations. Similarly, he explores the link between *icon* and *logo* to show how a literal sign can carry iconic significance. In this context, Fishwick demonstrates how specific events or ideas become associated with particular figures in specific cultural settings.

The study of the hero is not limited to male figures or leaders who perform actions greater than themselves. Since the dawn of civilization, women have played essential roles in shaping humanity. Female actors and leaders have carried out exceptional deeds for the benefit of the world and its people. Fiction and history intersect to reveal truths about heroism. Representations of female heroes in fiction affirm and expand heroic ideals.

Twentieth-century accomplishments in diverse fields—such as science and technology, democracy and human rights, and sports and healthcare—were deeply rooted in the intellectual and political achievements of the nineteenth century. During this period, Karl Marx, in his monumental works *Das Kapital* (1867–1894) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), examined class-based society and human relations through the lens of dialectical materialism, emphasizing class conflict as the

driver of historical progression. Marx's theory of historical materialism parallels Sigmund Freud's (1977, p. 22) concept of the unconscious that stores unfulfilled wishes and desires which are sublimated in the form of dream, art, and myth. Whereas Freud posits that the human mind is driven by libido, Marx argues that it is driven by material conditions.

Similarly, the Bible-based belief in the divine genesis of man—centered on the figures of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—was challenged by Charles Darwin's (1858) theory of evolution. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* shifted humanity's faith from religious doctrine to scientific reasoning, fostering a research-based empirical worldview. This paradigm shift, along with Enlightenment influence and the Industrial Revolution, also catalyzed social change. It encouraged women to step beyond the confines of the domestic sphere into public domains such as sports, politics, and education.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative analysis with historical research. It draws from both primary and secondary sources, including print and audio-visual materials. The heroic actions and ideological contributions of Bhandari are analyzed within the theoretical framework of myth and archetype.

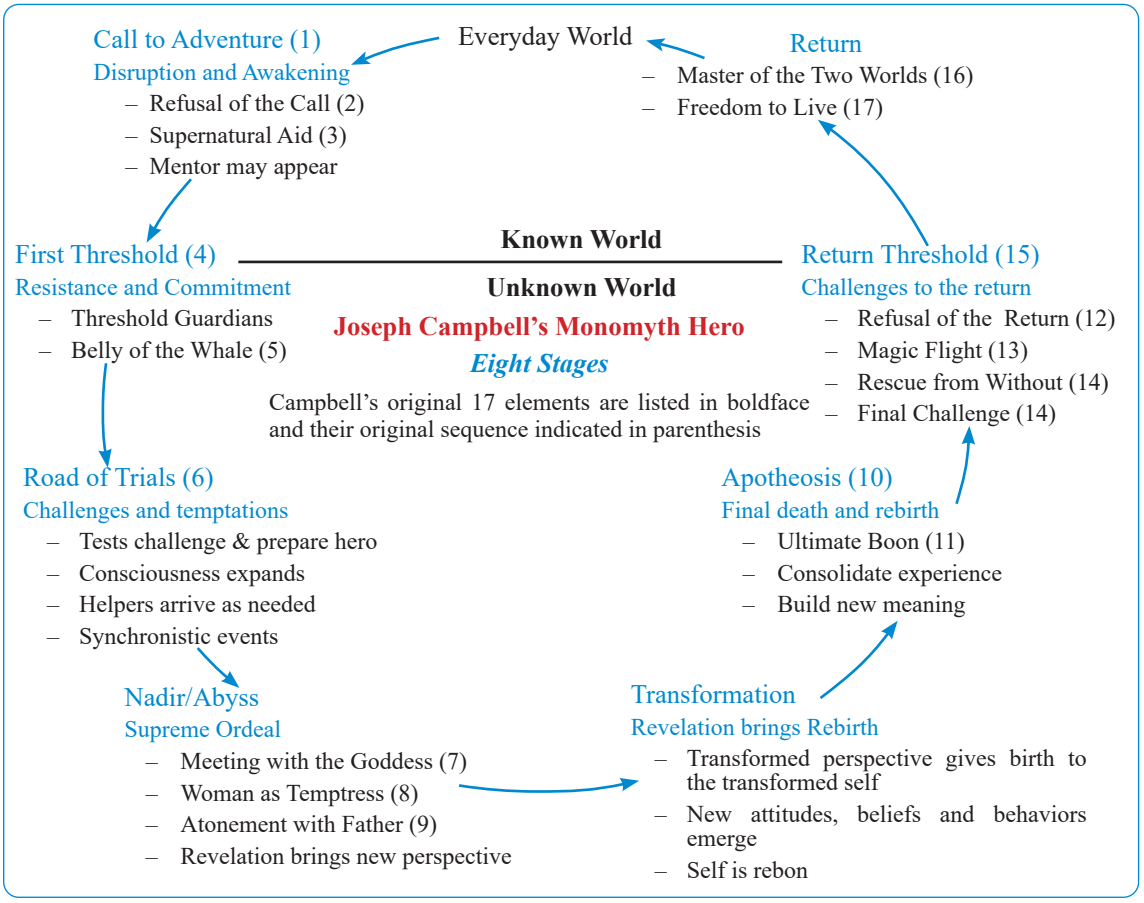

Figure 1: Campbell's three significant stages of the hero journey
(*Note*: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*)

Myths, dreams, and arts originate from the same psychic center of the unconscious, so there are underlying universal patterns birth and death of the hero. The Campbellian monomyth hero shares common patterns of the heroic journey with those found across various media and archetypes. Joseph Campbell clearly outlines three major stages of the hero's journey: departure, achievement, and return. On the journey into the unknown, the hero is usually supported by helpers—such as parents, teachers, mentors, friends, and assistants. In contrast, the hero continually faces opposition from antagonists, including villains and rivals. Like Campbell's hero, the folklore hero endures trials and tribulations until returning to society with a boon or gift for the people. Mythological heroes share recurring patterns and motifs with archetypal figures, as well as with the heroes represented in historical accounts and fictional narratives across media.

The study demonstrates that Bhandari's heroic personality, visionary leadership, and the formulation of PMPD played a pivotal role in shaping Nepal's peaceful political transformations, ultimately leading to the establishment of a republican state under the 2015 Constitution.

The paper begins with foundational concepts and definitions of the hero and frontier hero, myths and archetypes, and democratic movement and multiparty democracy. It then explores Bhandari's ideological vision of PMPD—a political doctrine that blends democratic and socialist values—within Nepal's evolving political landscape. The paper uses theoretical tools to interpret Bhandari's contributions as both a political leader and the architect of a distinctly Nepali model of democracy rooted in local needs and aspirations.

Based on an analysis of available published literature and Bhandari's speeches, this paper examines his influential leadership, which was instrumental not only in unifying various fragmented leftist factions but also in bridging the gap between opposing leftist and rightist forces.

Results and Discussion

The hero in the geopolitics of South Asia

With the emergence of democracy in South Asia, postcolonial states began to establish political institutions—often under military rule or led by Western-educated political elites from former imperial centers. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, both educated in Britain, played instrumental roles in shaping India's post-independence democratic structure. Nehru studied at Harrow School and Trinity College, Cambridge, and trained at the Inner Temple in London. Gandhi, too, earned his law degree from University College London and trained at the Inner Temple. On the western front, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a graduate of the Christian Mission High School and Lincoln's Inn in London, became Pakistan's first Prime Minister after the partition of India on 15 August 1947.

In the context of Nepal, Bhandari's ideological contribution—PMPD—emerged as a powerful force after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Following the fall of the Rana regime in 1950, Nepali citizens had long aspired to create a constitution through a Constituent Assembly. However, this goal remained unfulfilled until 2015—nearly seven decades later.

Nepal held its first democratic elections from 18 February to 3 April 1959, electing 109 members to the House of Representatives. However, the parliamentary system was short-lived. The Communist Party of Nepal secured only 4 seats (3.67%), while the Nepali Congress won 74 seats, forming the government under Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala. In December 1959, King Mahendra dismissed the elected government and parliament, and introduced the partyless Panchayat system, consolidating absolute executive power.

During the 1979 Referendum, Nepal's communist parties failed to capitalize on the opportunity to push for parliamentary democracy, which led to low voter turnout. However, they later revised

their strategy. The underground Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) actively participated in the 1986 Rastriya Panchayat elections to use the system strategically for advocating multiparty democracy. Eventually, a mass democratic movement, supported by a united front of underground leftist parties and the Nepali Congress, brought an end to the 30-year Panchayat regime and restored democracy.

Nepal had already experienced cycles of democratic experimentation and political upheaval, often benefiting only the elite. After Nepal's unification under King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the mid-eighteenth century, the country emerged as a strong sovereign nation, stretching from the Tista River in the east to the Satluj and Kumaon-Garhwal regions in the west. It stood resilient between the Tibetan-Chinese forces in the north and the British imperial power in the south.

A key element in understanding Nepal's democratic left movement is the PMPD model, a distinctive political ideology that harmonizes Marxist thought with multiparty democratic principles. In the Nepali context, PMPD is a homegrown theory developed through the local experiences of leftist politics and shaped by international trends.

In a multiparty democracy, leadership is not confined to a single charismatic figure; rather, it involves a commitment to democratic values—such as constitutionalism, pluralism, human rights, accountability, and fair competition. A leader in such a system becomes a "hero" when they prioritize the collective good, empower citizens, and work toward a just and equitable society.

Initially considered a Program of Nepali revolution: PMPD has integrated the capitalist and socialist modes of production. While adopting the liberal ideology of the capitalists and democrats, PMPD incorporates principles of capitalism and socialism:

> Marxism-Leninism is the guiding principle of the Nepalese revolution. The CPN (UML) adopts the scientific and ideological system of Marxism-Leninism as its guiding principle. The advanced Marxism of contemporary times is not only a liberating ideology for the proletariats of the industrial economy and working-class peasants of feudal society but also stands as a guiding principle of national independence. Except for Marxism-Leninism, there is no scientific ideological system to liberate peasants from feudal exploitation and make the country independent from imperialist repression. Under the ideological guidance of Marxism-Leninism, the CPN (UML) is determined to drive the revolution and construction campaign ahead. No political party except the one leading the proletariats and working under the political and ideological guidance of Marxism-Leninism can shoulder the responsibility of leading people's democratic revolution to eradicate feudalism, comprader capitalism, and imperialism. In Europe and North America, the capitalist class led the capitalist revolution against feudalism. However, now the international capitalist class has become an enemy of people, not a friend. It has become protective of feudalism, not of the peasants. Imperialism is the developed form of capitalism that primarily subordinates and exploits the smaller, weaker, and backward countries, not the capitalists. However, the proletarian people's party cannot command such leadership without serious competition and struggle with capitalist and petty capitalist forces. Therefore, the CPN (UML) takes vows to move ahead resolutely for the leadership. (Bhandari, 1993, p. 290)

During the autocratic Panchayat regime, when the monarchy held absolute power, Bhandari played a decisive role in reconciling ideological differences between the leftist parties and the democratic socialist party, the Nepali Congress. By steering his party toward an alliance with the liberal democratic forces, Bhandari made pragmatic moves to restore

democracy. His proposal to form an alliance with the Nepali Congress was endorsed at the Fourth National Convention of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), held in the Indian city of Varanasi in 1974. Eventually, the Fifth Convention of the party, held in Kathmandu in January 1993, formally adopted PMPD as the party's guiding political ideology. At this convention, Man Mohan Adhikary was elected as party chairperson and Bhandari as general secretary.

Aligned with the principles of PMPD, the party's leaders and cadres committed themselves to democratic values, pluralism and inclusion, transparency, and accountable socio-economic transformation—ultimately envisioning a Nepali model of socialism. The concept of the frontier hero aligns with the Marxist vision of socio-economic progress and political struggle. Because of the internal political dynamics as well as external imperial interventions, Nepal had to concede almost one-third of the territories in the west from the Mahakali river and the east from the Mechi river as well as the plains of the southern belt.

The frontier hero in the politics in South Asia

Etymologically, the English term *frontier* derives from the French *frontière*. In military discourse, *frontier* denotes the "front line of an army, vanguard, border fortress, fortified place facing an enemy, frontier post, border region," and more generally, "a region bordering another country or contested territory" (*Frontier*). Fundamentally, the term connotes a battlefield, borderland, conflict zone, disputed territory, or remote region inhabited by indigenous peoples, rival settlers, or foreign powers. When land is a defining element of the frontier, infantry units—with close-range military engagement—employ arms and tactics to secure strategic ground. In this context, territorial occupation transforms the land into a tangible, material asset claimed by force.

In Nepal's political history, the idea of the frontier is closely tied to the formation of the Nepali Army and the campaign for national unification. Initially, the frontier referred to the geographic extent of the Gorkha state under King Dravya Shah. It was further expanded under King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who named the newly unified territories "Nepal" following the annexation of numerous principalities, including the Kathmandu Valley (Patan, Bhaktapur, and Kantipur) during 1768–69. The unification campaign continued under Regents Bahadur Shah and Rajendra Laxmi Devi Shah.

Kirkpatrick (1811), in *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul*, provides a detailed depiction of Nepal's frontiers. In discussing frontier heroes, he refers to figures such as Prithvi Narayan Shah and places like the Gorkha kingdom, Shreenagar, and the Teesta River (280–282). Kirkpatrick uses the term *frontier* to describe the territorial expanse of pre-Anglo-Nepal War Nepal (1814–16). At that time, the British East India Company had already unified 565 princely states under its rule in India, while Nepal extended westward to Kangra and eastward to the Teesta River. However, geographic boundaries alone do not constitute a nation-state. For a territory to become a nation-state, it must also have a functioning government, a population, and sovereignty. In Nepal's case, Prithvi Narayan Shah is universally credited with leading the unification campaign, later sustained by Regents Bahadur Shah and Rajendra Laxmi Shah. Thus, unification under Prithvi Narayan Shah marked the initial political frontier; later, national expansion and consolidation became the new frontiers of Nepali statehood during the regency of Bahadur Shah and Rajendra Laxmi Shah.

Amidst the fall of the Rana Regime, political upheavals between 1951 through 1960, the Panchayati rule for three decades, Bhandari expanded the political frontier not through military conquest but through ideological innovation. By forging unity between leftist and liberal democratic forces during the anti-Panchayat movement, he not only created a broader political space that transcended ideological binaries but also inspired young generations and lower and middle

class circles. Moreover, he appealed the elite to participate in main stream democratic political process through elections.

Precisely, Bhandari's vision and leadership culminated in the 1990 People's Movement, which restored multiparty democracy and laid the groundwork for socio-economic and political transformation. Thus, Bhandari can be seen as a frontier hero in the political sphere—breaking through autocratic barriers and constructing a new democratic terrain for the nation.

In *The Culture of Time and Space*: *1880–1918*, Stephen Kern (1983) discusses paradigm shifts in public perceptions of culture across spatial and temporal dimensions. Kern explores how science and technology transformed cultural representations from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. Drawing from Frederick Jackson Turner's influential essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Kern emphasizes how the frontier became a defining aspect of American character and institutions. Turner (1993) links the American spirit of individualism to the experience of an open frontier, where challenges and opportunities shaped national identity:

> Settlers, compelled to adapt to the challenges of crossing a wilderness and rebuilding their lives again and again, sacrificed traditions and leveled religious, social, and political hierarchies. The constant expansion fragmented religious authority and led to the proliferation of rival churches scattered in the frontier towns. Continuous social dislocation made it impossible to maintain the fixed social order of the older Eastern cities, where families remained in the same place and intensified class distinctions with each passing generation. But the most important effect of the frontier was "the promotion of democracy here and in Europe." Life in the wilderness broke down complex society into a primitive organization based on the family. The need for improvising brought out new social organizations in which everybody played a role and was vital to the survival of the community. These circumstances produced "an antipathy to control, and particularly to direct control. No single person could monopolize power in frontier settlements where cooperation and democracy flourished. (p. 164)

In Kern's analysis, the concept of the frontier resonates with the Puritans' journey to the Northern English colonies in the New World during the 1620s and 1630s. The Puritan work ethic, grounded in biblical principles, became the foundation of the American way of life. The Puritans established several key colonies: the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629, the Saybrook Colony in 1635, the Connecticut Colony in 1636, and the New Haven Colony in 1638. This spirit of disciplined labor and moral purpose not only contributed to the development of the modern nation-state but also laid the groundwork for modern capitalism, especially in the American context.

Similarly, in the context of Nepal's democratic movements, Bhandari's ideology of PMPD emerges as a pivotal force. PMPD reconciles differences among individuals and political parties and has helped steer Nepal's political landscape toward the national aspiration of a prosperous Nepal and a happy Nepali people.

Conclusion

The frontier hero can be described as an individual who ventures into uncharted domains in defense of their country and people. In the political history of Nepal, Bhandari holds a special place as a frontier hero. More broadly, frontier heroes include pioneers, explorers, settlers, investigators, and military leaders—figures who elevate society and work to maintain order in the world. In Nepali politics, the frontier hero serves to unite parties and individuals around a common agenda of progress and prosperity.

Historically, frontier political heroes in Nepal have demonstrated loyalty to the state while upholding the sovereignty of the people. These heroes are widely admired for their accomplishments, which extend beyond personal interest. Over time, their extraordinary contributions make them cultural icons and legendary figures. Their stories, retold through books, comics, films, and television programs, transcend generations and borders. Some frontier heroes become legends within their lifetimes, celebrated in popular media; others find their legacies debated as the political climate changes.

Nevertheless, they are consistently honored for their unwavering dedication to the people and deep love for the nation. Nepal has formally recognized Bhandari's immense contributions by awarding him the highest civilian honor, Nepal Ratna. He is respectfully remembered as the People's Leader, an enduring source of inspiration and a role model for post-1990s Nepali society. I call upon the new generation to draw inspiration from Nepal Ratna and People's Leader Madan Bhandari—and to take an active role in shaping the future of the nation.

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