

Theoretical and Practical Insights into PMPD: A Reinterpretation of Marxism

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ABSTRACT

People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) emerged as a distinctive ideological framework within Nepal's communist movement, formulated by Madan Bhandari, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN [UML]), amid profound political transformations in Nepal and the global decline of communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Reinterpreting Marxism in response to changing international, regional, and domestic contexts, PMPD has nevertheless been criticized by several communist factions as a revisionist adaptation that reduces Marxism to bourgeois democracy. Despite extensive political discourse, its philosophical foundations and theoretical essence remain underexplored. This study examines the political and philosophical concepts underpinning PMPD and evaluates its practical implications through the framework of dialectical and historical materialism. Employing a qualitative research design, the study analyzes published literature, party archives, congress documents, and official political records. The findings suggest that PMPD represents a contextual reinterpretation of Marxism by incorporating competitive multiparty democracy into the socialist transition while preserving the objective of progressive social transformation. It conceptualizes democracy, human rights, and civil liberties as universal achievements of humanity rather than exclusively bourgeois constructs, and its policy orientation has contributed to social welfare initiatives benefiting marginalized communities. Although several communist parties have not formally endorsed PMPD, many have adopted similar immediate political strategies. The study concludes that PMPD constitutes a historically grounded and theoretically adaptive Nepali interpretation of Marxism; however, its effectiveness has depended not only on its ideological framework but also on its consistent implementation in party practice and governance.

Introduction

The context of this article is that Nepal has had a communist and leftist movement spanning more than seven decades, during which numerous parties have emerged under different names. These

parties differ from one another in their ontological orientations. However, in practice, all of them have followed the path that Madan Bhandari (1951–1993) proposed in the early 1990s. The global upheavals of the 1990s posed a serious

threat to communist parties worldwide. However, in contrast to this global decline, Marxist ideology continued to flourish in Nepal, largely due to its contextual adaptation. A key figure in the Marxist–Leninist movement, Bhandari (1993) articulated the concept of People’s Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) in response to Nepal’s specific socio-political context. Not only Nepal, but also countries such as China and Vietnam, adapted Marxism in accordance with their national characteristics. Although several studies have described PMPD from different perspectives, there is limited scholarly research analyzing its philosophical foundations and essence. This article seeks to uncover the political and philosophical concepts embedded in PMPD and to explore its empirical consequences through the framework of dialectical and historical materialism.

Marxism is the theory of class emancipation through class struggle and the transformation of the material conditions of humankind (Marx & Engels, 1848). Philosophically, Marxism comprises the theories of dialectical and historical materialism, together with the political economy intertwined with them. Being dynamic in nature, Marxism has been applied in different countries according to their historical contexts and circumstances. Marx encouraged individual freedom as the necessary condition for collective freedom. Within the Marxist framework, the first manifesto of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), 1949 strongly demanded freedom and equality (1949). In the course of developing the democratic movement through the Marxist framework, particularly within the communist movement, PMPD emerged in Nepal through the initiative of Bhandari and was formally adopted at the Fifth National Convention of the CPN (UML) in 1993.

There have been debates among communist parties and Marxist thinkers regarding PMPD, particularly over whether it represents a revisionist deviation or a contextual adaptation of Marxism to Nepal. Some have viewed it as a Nepali adaptation of Marxism, while others have regarded it merely as a concept of the welfare state.

Methodology

Drawing on qualitative and auto-ethnographic research design, this article is primarily based on published literature on various political concepts, such as democracy, the party system, and related themes, with particular emphasis on PMPD. Archival materials from various communist parties, especially the CPN (UML), along with documents from other communist parties and relevant literature from anthropology, sociology, and political science, were collected as primary sources. In particular, the documents of the Fourth and Fifth National Convention, first organized by the CPN (ML) and later by the CPN (UML), at which Bhandari presented his political documents, were reviewed and used as the principal sources. Other materials, including party doctrines, political reports, constitutions, official documents, and election manifestos, were also examined.

Along with the scholarly literature, this research article incorporates ethnographic data drawn from the life experiences of people from different parts of Chitwan District in central Nepal to explore the empirical implications of PMPD. This article specifically engages with the perspectives of three senior citizens aged over seventy. Their assessments of social change—particularly in relation to the social security allowances introduced by the CPN (UML)-led government under the guidance of PMPD—form the core empirical basis of this article. These perspectives help illustrate the empirical implication of PMPD. The collected data and information were analyzed and presented thematically. The article adopts a constructive approach, through which various political and philosophical concepts, as well as the fundamental principles of PMPD, are critically analyzed.

Results and Discussion

Emergence of PMPD

The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and its various factions evolved through a series of political movements and struggles. Throughout the more than seven decades since its foundation, the

communist parties of Nepal mobilized peasants, workers, and the general populace against despotic regimes such as the Rana oligarchy, the Panchayat system, and the King's direct rule. However, their separate efforts failed to achieve the desired outcomes. For example, following the dissolution of multiparty democracy by King Mahendra in 1960, Pushpalal Shrestha (1924–1978), the founding General Secretary of the CPN, strongly advocated for a “joint people’s movement” (Bhusal et al., 2021). He repeatedly proposed collaboration with the Nepali Congress (NC) to launch a united struggle against monarchical rule. However, the NC did not agree to this proposal for several decades (Pokhrel, 2069 BS) because of major ideological differences between the communist and bourgeois parties. One of the principal differences between the NC and the communist parties concerned the monarchy. The NC primarily supported a multiparty democracy with a constitutional monarchy. However, the Communist Party of Nepal (ML), while accepting a multiparty system, remained skeptical of a constitutional monarchy.

The Fourth General Convention of the CPN (ML), held in 1989, adopted an immediate program that aimed “to establish an independent and secular state, the rule of law, and a multiparty democratic political system” (15). Immediately after the General Convention, the CPN (ML) formed the United Left Front with other leftist groups and initiated a joint people’s movement in collaboration with other democratic forces, including the NC. The NC also accepted this proposal. As a result, the left and democratic forces launched a joint people’s movement against the monarchical dictatorship, which established parliamentary democracy and brought the monarchy under the constitution in 1990.

Bhandari (1993) outlined the minimum program of the revolution and introduced the term “People’s Multiparty Democracy” in place of “New Democracy.” Over time, the CPN (UML) adopted it as the party’s guiding principle, beginning with its Eighth General Convention held in 2009.

Not only the bourgeois parties but also the left parties, particularly the CPN (ML), played an equally significant role in establishing multiparty democracy in 1990, a contribution that has been acknowledged by historians and writers both inside and outside Nepal. For example, “every person aware of Nepali politics has no skepticism on the role played by CPN (ML) and later as the CPN (UML) for founding and restoration of multiparty democracy” (Dhakal, 2021:30). In this way, the CPN (UML) emerged as one of Nepal’s leading political parties following the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990.

In the wake of the collapse of Soviet-model socialism, an intensive ideological attack was launched against Marxism, with capitalist parties and bourgeois thinkers around the world proclaiming its theoretical collapse and practical failure. Seizing upon this historical conjuncture, the U.S.-aligned neoliberal theorist Francis Fukuyama advanced the thesis of “the end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992), presenting liberal capitalism as the ultimate and unalterable form of political organization. This narrative functioned as an ideological instrument to legitimize neoliberal hegemony at a time when socialism had entered a defensive phase in the global balance of forces. In contrast, Marxist parties in Nepal were achieving significant successes in their political movement by defeating the monarchical dictatorship and establishing parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, bourgeois thinkers sought to discredit Nepali Marxists by citing the “failure of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe.”

Mao propounded the concept of “New Democracy” (Mao, 1960) as the program for the Chinese revolution, which was subsequently adopted as the immediate program in countries characterized as feudal or semi-feudal and colonial or semi-colonial. Most communist parties in Nepal, including the CPN (UML), also adopted Mao Thought as their guiding principle and “New Democracy” as their minimum program until 1989. Drawing on

the experiences of the international communist movement and the struggle against autocratic rule in Nepal, PMPD was developed as the immediate program of the Nepali revolution by incorporating fourteen specific features into the concept of “New Democracy.” Remarkably, PMPD emerged not merely as a program based on historical experience but also as a “theoretical innovation” (Karki, 2025:39).

Theoretical position of PMPD

Shortly after the Fifth General Convention of the CPN (UML), at the Conference of Communist and Workers’ Parties held in Calcutta in 1993, Bhandari presented a paper entitled *Contemporary World Situation and the Validity of Marxism*, through which he elaborated and shared his theoretical position with communist parties from various countries. In this paper, he argued that Marxism, as a living and dynamic science, must be reinterpreted and reformulated in accordance with changing social realities to ensure its effective implementation. Bhandari (2021) states:

The experiment with Marxist theory in different countries, however, suggests that the redefinition and reorientation of Marxism are necessary to guarantee its stability and reproof [prove again] that there is no alternative to Marxism which can ensure the development of productive forces, elimination of exploitation from the societies, liberation, freedom, and progress of human beings. (38)

Bhandari (2021) further raises the following critical questions:

Being a scientific theory, Marxism [Marxists] should make a thorough assessment of the underlying factors responsible for making the socialist system a failure in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We should ask ourselves why there was so much public discontent in these countries in spite of the fact that the income distribution was almost even and a massive social welfare programme

for the well-being of the people was launched vigorously by the states. (39)

Looking at the above statement by Bhandari, he advances a normative and reflective argument regarding the need for critical self-assessment within Marxism. Bhandari presents Marxism as a “scientific theory,” implying that it should remain open to empirical evaluation and revision when confronted with historical outcomes—specifically, the collapse of socialist systems in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the core of the passage is a central question: why did widespread public discontent emerge despite relatively equal income distribution and extensive welfare programs? This raises an important analytical point—that economic equality and social welfare alone are insufficient to ensure legitimacy or popular satisfaction. Bhandari’s argument implicitly suggests that non-economic factors played a decisive role in the failure of these systems.

On the question of public discontent, despite the relatively equal distribution of resources, Bhandari (2021) argues:

There are certain defects in the thinking itself regarding the adaptation of a political and economic system which guarantees the expression of views and use of democratic practices, proper utilization of productive forces, creation of an enabling environment for the productive forces toward the use of the new technology, productivity enhancement, and testing of people’s support. This simply calls for a complete reorientation in the [traditional] thinking of Marxism. In the process, a Marxist has also to examine carefully the political and economic events taking place in capitalist countries to assess the inherent defects of the capitalist countries themselves. (39)

Bhandari’s argument encouraged the party to rethink the governing system practiced in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European

countries, where equal distribution of opportunities was guaranteed but individual freedom to choose representatives and express opinions was lacking. Drawing on those experiences, Bhandari urged Marxists to reconsider their traditional thinking. However, Nepal's communist movement had developed differently from those of other countries. The communist party not only raised its voice for democracy and freedom but also took the lead in the people's movement for these ideals. It mobilized the masses around the cause of patriotism, opposing unequal treaties signed between the then governments of Nepal and India. For the establishment of democracy, it organized movements through both legal and illegal means. Within the legal framework, it participated in the Panchayat system to voice the people's concerns, thereby weakening the Panchayat system under the absolute monarchy while simultaneously expanding the party's organizational strength. As a result of the joint movement led together with the bourgeois democratic party, parliamentary democracy was established in 1990. Thus, within the context of Nepal's own historical political development, PMPD was proposed as the immediate program. In Bhandari's (2021) words:

Based on the past experiences of various socialist countries, a new orientation is needed while implementing Marxism in countries like Nepal, and therefore the Fifth Party Convention has made some important decisions which I believe will have a wide-ranging long-term impact on the left movement of Nepal. Our party Convention has adopted a programme which is based on PMPD. This decision is also based on our struggle of more than 40 years, in which the left forces of Nepal had fought continuously against the autocratic regime for establishing multiparty democracy in the country. (48)

One of the new features that Bhandari added to "New Democracy" was the concept of a "multiparty competitive system" (49), replacing the idea of a multiparty cooperative system. He argued that competitive multiparty politics was

not merely an attribute of capitalist democracy but rather an achievement of humankind. However, some Marxist intellectuals and leaders regarded the essence of the bourgeois political system as an illusion. Bhandari argued that every Marxist should be liberal enough to embrace not only Marxist ideology but also the great achievements of humanity that have resulted from the shared struggles of people across societies (Dhakal, 2021). PMPD thus emerged as a leading idea within the Nepali communist movement, "drawing from the nation's historical communist efforts, global communist experiences, and key insights from Marxist political philosophy and socialist theories" (Pokhrel, 2024:8).

Although the "reasonableness, excellence, and originality" of PMPD were affirmed (Pokhrel, 2024:4), the CPN (Maoist) also adopted a broadly similar program through its Central Committee meeting held in 2060 BS. Through this program, the CPN (Maoist) committed itself to organizing political competition within the constitutional framework of an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist democratic state (CPNM, 2060 BS:19). It further resolved that "among the various political parties, associations and institutions against feudalism and imperialism, which accept the constitutional system of democratic state power, ... on the dialectical relationship of democratic political competition in the service of the people" (19). In this way, PMPD has been adopted as an ideological framework of the Nepali socialist movement, not only by the CPN (UML) but also, in one form or another, by other left parties. Within the context of Nepal's political process, PMPD has demonstrated both its practical relevance and its capacity to guide political transformation. It also suggests that communists must rethink and reorient themselves beyond traditional interpretations of Marxism. At the same time, every society possesses its own culture and historical trajectory of struggle; therefore, Marxism must be redefined and interpreted within its own historical and social context to remain relevant.

A review of the programs of various communist parties in Nepal shows that they largely align with PMPD, although they attempt to distinguish themselves through specific ideological formulations. For instance, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) waged an armed struggle from 1996 to 2006 with the objective of establishing a conventional communist regime. Ultimately, however, it entered into negotiations and agreed to participate in a multiparty political system in 2006.

Philosophical assessment of PMPD

Democracy

According to Sankrityayan (1970), during the Buddha era (c. 600 BC), “democracy existed” in South Asia, although only the nobles, especially the Lichchhavis, had the right to vote. In Western society, the concept of “democracy” emerged in the fourth century BC in ancient Greece, where the Greek philosopher Aristotle first discussed the idea of democracy (Amadio & Kenny, 2023). These historical facts show that the idea of democracy has developed alongside the evolution of human civilization. In other words, the concept of democracy has evolved simultaneously with human society. Thus, democracy is not a new concept and was not developed by capitalism; rather, it is an achievement of humankind resulting from the long historical experience of human society. Bhandari defines democracy within the local context. Democracy is not a fixed concept; rather, it can be transformed according to the socio-cultural context of a country.

Initially, during the early stages of the capitalist system, democracy was established as a common achievement of both the capitalist and working classes, as the “capitalist class led the change, with the working class contributing as collaborative partners in the process” (Bhandari, 2024:63). Later, after seizing state power, the capitalist class “established a capitalist state and their dictatorship over the state power” (63). Bhandari further writes, “old democracy itself is not monopoly capitalism,

imperialism and fascism... The bourgeoisie monopolized the fruits of revolution, and it gradually morphed into monopolist, imperialist and fascist” (64). Thus, Bhandari argued that to establish genuine democracy for the working class and the broader populace, it is necessary to build a movement under the leadership of the working class, which characterizes “New Democracy” or PMPD in the Nepali context. For Bhandari, Western democracy was insufficient for a country like Nepal. He viewed it primarily as a majoritarian system that overlooked the concerns of the poor, peasants, and workers. In his view, PMPD could provide a framework for implementing socialist programs that address the needs of marginalized populations.

Party system

Modern political parties first emerged in the seventeenth century. Historically, the Whigs and Tories in England are regarded as two of the earliest organized political factions, appearing in 1679 during the intense conflict over the Exclusion Bill, which sought to bar James, Duke of York, from the line of succession (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). The party system developed further after the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, a period that coincided with the consolidation of capitalism in England. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, representative political institutions, including the party system, gradually became institutionalized. With the consolidation of political parties, structured party systems also became established. The United Kingdom gradually evolved into a predominantly two-party system, a model that was later adopted in the United States, where many immigrants carried political traditions from their countries of origin. These historical facts show that the party system emerged during early capitalism, but it is not a product of capitalism itself. Political parties are the product of a class-based society rather than an exclusive feature of capitalism.

Hence, the concepts of democracy and the party system are achievements of human civilization rather than the private property of capitalist society or any other social order. Human beings have invented many tools and institutions throughout history. Although these have passed through the stages of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, they are not the private property of slave owners, feudal lords, or capitalists; rather, they are inventions of humankind throughout its historical evolution. Thus, democracy and the party system are neither products of slavery, feudalism, nor capitalism. Political parties are expressions of class interests within society and are formed to represent particular classes. Therefore, democracy is the method, whereas political parties are the means.

Party system in socialist society

Marxism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when various political parties already existed. In 1847, Marx and his colleagues founded the Communist League, and in 1848 they published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in Brussels, presenting the communist party as the vanguard organization of the proletariat, in contrast to other parties that primarily represented bourgeois interests. Later, in 1864, the International Workingmen's Association, subsequently known as the First International, was established to promote and coordinate the expansion of the communist movement on a global scale (Blunden, [n.d.](#)).

There was no formally established communist party during the Paris Commune of 1871. The revolutionary organization that later led the Russian Revolution was the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks), which led the October Revolution in 1917. As a result, Russia became the first state to embark on the socialist path, and in 1922 it formally established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, uniting several former territories of the Russian Empire. After consolidating power, the Bolshevik Party led the new government, while other political parties disappeared.

In China, the Communist Party of China (CPC) waged a people's war for "New Democracy," which triumphed in 1949, leading to the establishment of the New Democratic Government under its leadership. Although there are currently nine political parties, including the CPC, all have representation in the National People's Congress according to their respective strength. China's political system differs from those of many other countries. Nevertheless, its basic political framework is known as the "system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China," a form of "consultative democracy" (Embassy of PRC, [2022](#)). Similarly, communist or workers' parties led the New Democratic or socialist revolutions in various countries and subsequently formed governments under their leadership. In those countries, reactionary forces were excluded from the legal political process.

There is, however, a common misconception that bourgeois democracy is inherently a multiparty system whereas New Democracy necessarily requires a single-party system. This is a misconception. Whether a country adopted a single-party or multiparty system was largely a technical issue specific to its own circumstances. In some cases, it also reflected dogmatism or the "blind imitation" of the Soviet model of socialism. Therefore, the single-party system in socialist and New Democratic countries should be understood as a specific historical phenomenon rather than a general principle of Marxism. Marx did not advocate a "single-party system"; rather, he argued for the leadership of the proletariat.

Marxism and democracy

It is evident that "the state is a means of a class controlling another class" (Bhandari, 2049 BS:26). It is also evident that New Democracy or socialism is not communism, where classes would no longer exist. New Democracy remains a class-based state. Moreover, communist parties serve as the vanguard of the proletariat, while members of other classes

may also be assimilated into the revolutionary movement. Regarding New Democracy, Mao (1960) stated:

Although such a revolution ... is still fundamentally bourgeois-democratic in its social character during its first stage, and although its objective mission is to clear the path for the development of capitalism, it is no longer a revolution of the old type led by the bourgeoisie to establish a capitalist society and a state under bourgeois dictatorship. It belongs to the new type of revolution led by the proletariat with the aim, in the first stage, of establishing a new-democratic society and a state under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes. (344)

This statement shows that the revolution in such countries is fundamentally bourgeois-democratic in its social character, although its orientation is socialist. It also makes clear that multiple classes may exist even within the revolutionary bloc. Similarly, different political factions may also exist among the revolutionary classes.

In some socialist countries, political organizations other than the ruling communist party were banned, preventing dissatisfaction from being openly expressed. As a result, grievances accumulated beneath the surface, and when they eventually emerged, they often did so explosively. Consequently, the socialist system collapsed in several of these countries. Although the proletariat succeeded in capturing state power in the short term, it failed to sustain that authority over the long term. Reflecting on this experience, Bhandari stated, "There is no concept that the working class cannot be served under the multiparty system. On the contrary, we have experienced that one-party monopolies have not been useful to the proletariat in the long term" (Bhandari, 2048 BS:47–48).

As discussed above, the multiparty system is an achievement of humankind rather than the private property of capitalism. Democracy, human rights,

and the multiparty system are achievements of human civilization as a whole. Although capitalist societies incorporated these institutions into their political systems, many socialist countries did not. "Marxism recognizes that all the achievements of human beings in society are the common property of the people of the world" (Bhandari, 2021:21), even though socialist countries often failed to adopt some of these achievements, such as the multiparty system. Whether a country adopts a single-party, two-party, or multiparty system may be a technical matter determined by its own historical circumstances, but the choice has significant political implications.

PMPD and the multiparty system

There were historical-materialist reasons for the development of this new ideology. On the one hand, multiparty democracy was an achievement of Nepali society through the democratic movement, in which the Communist Party had played a decisive role. On the other hand, "it has taken a profound lesson from the failure of Soviet-model socialism and the extreme mistakes committed in the name of the Cultural Revolution in the Chinese communist movement" (Pokhrel, 2079 BS:22). In this context, Bhandari introduced the program of PMPD at the Fifth General Convention. Accordingly, PMPD was adopted as the party program in 1993 (2049 BS). It subsequently became the party's leading ideology from the Sixth General Convention and was formally adopted as the guiding principle of the CPN (UML) at its Eighth General Convention. Bhandari incorporated several distinctive features into the concept of "New Democracy," transforming it into a new interpretation of Marxism in the Nepali context. These features were:

Supremacy of the Constitution; pluralistic open society; separation of powers; protection of human rights; multiparty competitive system; periodic elections; a government formed by the majority party and a constitutional opposition; the rule of law; strengthening the

people's democratic system; permission for foreign capital; compensation for landlords who support people's democracy; a balanced and dignified foreign policy with the highest priority given to national interests; the leadership of the working class and people's democratic dictatorship [governance] or people's democratic state; and anti-feudal, anti-comprador capitalist, and anti-imperialist policies. (Bhandari, 2049 BS:21–27)

However, everything is dynamic and subject to change; Marxism and PMPD are likewise dynamic, evolving through historical experience. PMPD has not remained static since its adoption at the Fifth General Convention (2049 BS); rather, it has continued to develop dynamically (Oli, 2079 BS:14). Characterized as a “comprehensive democracy” (15), PMPD extends beyond a political framework and seeks to guide various spheres of social life, including development campaigns, environmental campaigns, human rights campaigns, and other humanitarian initiatives, alongside political movements. Furthermore, “it emphasizes values such as social justice, human rights, and economic equality” (Chapagain, 2023:59), which constitute the fundamental principles of PMPD. Remarkably, the foundation for socialism is envisioned through “the development of a self-reliant agricultural system, food sovereignty, increased production, equitable distribution, and universal access to health and education” (Pokharel, 2025:15).

The Nepali revolution differs from those of other countries. It was neither like the French Revolution, which ushered in capitalism, nor the Russian Revolution, which established socialism, nor the Chinese Revolution, which introduced New Democracy. Rather, the Nepali revolution possesses its own distinctive characteristics. It was led neither solely by the capitalist class nor exclusively by the proletariat; instead, it was achieved through an agreement between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Accordingly, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) is regarded as a common agreement between these two classes. Nevertheless, this agreement

represents a negotiated settlement between them, while the working class continues to move toward a more transformative social order.

For ten years (2052–2062 BS), Nepali society experienced intense class conflict. On one side stood the NC, representing bourgeois interests and advocating constitutional monarchy as one of its principal objectives. Since 2006, however, it has embraced republicanism after jointly leading the democratic movement with the communist parties. On the other side was the CPN (Maoist), which maintained a rigid commitment to armed struggle and expressed little confidence in peaceful political transformation. Consequently, it organized the People's Liberation Army and launched an armed insurgency.

Positioned between these two forces was the CPN (UML), which, guided by PMPD, consistently advocated peaceful political mobilization from its inception (Pokharel, 2079 BS). Regarding the means of revolution, Bhandari argued that while the party would prioritize peaceful struggle, it would not renounce other means if the ruling class resorted to violence (Bhandari, 2049 BS). Thus, the CPN (UML) neither absolutized peaceful struggle nor regarded armed struggle as an immutable strategy for revolution.

Eventually, PMPD became the ideological framework that helped bring conflicting political classes into a common political understanding in 2006. Thus, “today's Nepali version of ‘Marxism’ and the Nepali version of the ‘world communist movement’ is People's Multiparty Democracy” (Oli, 2079 BS:15), which has also been described as the “Marxism of the 21st Century” (Pokharel, 2079 BS:22).

Validation of PMPD

Enactment of PMPD

Following the first general election after the success of the 1990 People's Movement, the NC emerged as the largest party with an absolute majority and began expanding its influence throughout the state

apparatus. At the same time, as the communist movement gained strength and the CPN (UML) was reforming its party program, General Secretary Bhandari was killed in a suspicious road accident in 1993. During this difficult and defensive period, the party nevertheless emerged as the largest political force in the subsequent election. Although it formed only a minority government, it introduced policies and programs that were both forward-looking and far-reaching in their significance. These included the strategic rural development campaign *Let's Build Our Village Ourselves* (*Aphno Gaun Aphai Banaun*), the social security program, and policies aimed at the modernization of agriculture. These initiatives were formulated and implemented in accordance with the principles of PMPD.

In Bhandari's interpretation, Marxism is "a universal theory developed for the well-being of mankind in general and oppressed and exploited people in particular" (Bhandari, 2021:38). Guided by this principle, the CPN (UML) introduced social security allowances for senior citizens, single women, and other disadvantaged groups, while also implementing land distribution programs for landless squatters (Oli, 2071 BS:18). These policies were implemented under the guidance of PMPD. During the first half of the 1990s, right-wing parties spread the rumor that "if communists win the election, they will kill senior citizens." The introduction of the social security allowance effectively dismantled this misconception. In this way, the social security program implemented by the CPN (UML)-led government significantly improved the welfare of disadvantaged groups in society. Some illustrations based on empirical data are presented below.

A septuagenarian male informant from southern Ratnanagar stated that his two sons had taken bank loans to purchase land and build separate houses. He explained:

My wife and I each receive four thousand rupees per month, which amounts to almost one lakh rupees per year. We buy many things

with our allowance and also give a little money to our granddaughters for their tiffin. My two sons have been working in Qatar and both send money home, but they are still repaying loans they took to buy land and build houses. If we did not receive the social security allowance, they would also have to support us financially. Now they do not have that burden. (personal conversation)

An octogenarian male informant from a southern village in Khairahani Municipality, Chitwan, stated that the social security allowance has been a great support and a blessing for his family. According to him, the allowance is sufficient to cover the family's basic food expenses. He stated:

I receive a social security allowance of four thousand rupees per month, which is enough to buy *dal-chamal* (rice and lentils) and *nun-tel* (salt and cooking oil) for our five-member family. Without this allowance, my son could not support the family in our present situation. The amount I receive is greater than the income we earn from our eight *kattha* (2,709 square metres) of land. Because the allowance covers our food expenses, my son has been able to save a small amount of money from his petty trade. (personal conversation)

Another octogenarian male informant from Kalika Municipality, whose sons and daughters live in developed capitalist countries, stated that he no longer depends on remittances because the social security allowance sufficiently covers his personal expenses. He explained:

Unless I become seriously ill, I do not ask for remittances, even though my son and daughter live abroad. We own one *bigha* (6,772.63 square metres) of land, from which we earn only fifty to sixty thousand rupees annually through very hard work. By contrast, my wife and I receive ninety-six thousand rupees per year from the government as a social security allowance. That amount is greater than our annual earnings from one *bigha* of land.

The government has greatly supported us.
(personal conversation)

This policy has gained widespread public support by providing essential financial assistance to senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Consequently, no political party has been able to oppose or abolish it, and successive governments have continued to increase the allowance. The above cases demonstrate that the annual social security allowance exceeds the income these households earn from agricultural production on their land. According to the UAPS (2075 BS), the average landholding in Chitwan is only 10.8 *kattha* (3,657.2 square metres). Thus, these empirical findings suggest that the social security allowance has become a significant source of support for many households and has contributed to improving the welfare of lower-income groups.

Justification of PMPD among political parties

As discussed in the previous section, the then CPN (Maoist), despite having launched an armed struggle, also came to adopt a program supporting competitive democracy within a New Democratic framework (CPNM, 2060 BS). Although the Maoist factions continued to uphold Maoism as their guiding principle and Prachanda Path as their specific ideological line, Prachanda himself acknowledged the influence of Bhandari and PMPD (Dahal, 2021). He repeatedly stated that had he been able to meet Bhandari, the armed struggle might never have taken place. Because of Bhandari's untimely death, that meeting never occurred, despite the fact that a date had reportedly been arranged. In his own words, Prachanda stated, "If we had met, I would have rethought the armed struggle" (Dahal, 2016). In this sense, the Maoist stream was influenced, in one way or another, by PMPD, although it never formally adopted it.

Today, the mainstream Maoist group, the CPN (MC), has reorganized itself under the name of the Nepal Communist Party following its merger with the CPN (US), a splinter group of the CPN (UML). The merged party has adopted Marxism-

Leninism as its guiding principle, setting aside Maoism. Although the former CPN (Maoist) endorsed the principle of a multiparty competitive system (CPNM, 2060 BS), it has continued to face dilemmas in translating that principle into political practice.

Democratization of the party

PMPD has not remained static since its adoption in 2049 BS; rather, it has continued to develop over the past three decades. One of its important contributions has been the democratization of the party itself. To carry out a peaceful revolution through the organized strength of the people and to exercise state power democratically after the revolution, the internal life of the Communist Party must itself be democratic (Gyawali, 2069 BS). From this perspective, PMPD has contributed significantly to the democratization of party organization. Accordingly, from its Eighth Convention onward, the CPN (UML) adopted a plural electoral system for selecting its internal leadership. Subsequently, other political parties also adopted similar procedures in organizing their leadership.

Theoretical achievement of PMPD

PMPD can be assessed through the framework of dialectical materialism, the philosophical foundation of Marxist theory. Dialectical materialism explains three universal laws: "the law of the transformation of quantity into quality, and vice versa; the law of the interpenetration of opposites; and the law of the negation of the negation" (Warde, 1940). However, PMPD envisions the socialist revolution as *peaceful in the first instance*. Accordingly, it emphasizes peaceful means such as participation in elections, political initiative and competition, winning elections, forming governments, and implementing revolutionary programs through democratic institutions. Following these principles, the CPN (UML) led the government six times between 1994 and 2025.

The first communist government in Nepal was formed under the leadership of Man Mohan Adhikari on 30 November 1994 and remained in office until 12 September 1995. It introduced Nepal's first comprehensive social welfare programs and a people-oriented development model, both of which played a decisive role in strengthening the communist movement as well as democracy. The second and third UML-led governments were formed under the leadership of Madhav Kumar Nepal (May 2009–February 2011) and Jhala Nath Khanal (February–August 2011). Following the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, K. P. Sharma Oli led the government three times. Most recently, the Oli-led government was dissolved under highly controversial circumstances amid the political turmoil surrounding the Gen-Z movement. This situation was further complicated by geopolitical tensions arising from the interests of major powers.

Setback in 2082 BS and the necessity of PMPD

The CPN (UML) suffered a major setback in the parliamentary election held in March 2026, the reasons for which require careful investigation. According to Marxist philosophy, “external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change” (Mao, 1967:38). Although there were many external factors, several internal dynamics also deserve attention.

Party leader K. P. Sharma Oli proposed, at the Seventh National Convention of the CPN (UML), and the Eighth Convention subsequently adopted, two important organizational principles: first, that a person who had already served twice as an office bearer of any committee would not be eligible for another term in the same position; and second, that seventy years would be the upper age limit for election or nomination to any executive committee (Sharma Oli, 2071). On the question of leadership transition, Oli argued:

How can new leadership emerge if one believes only they can lead the party? I want to clarify that

the party leadership must now quickly transition to a new generation. I intend to pave the way for that (9).

However, contrary to these commitments, their implementation weakened within a decade. Although the policy remained in force until the Tenth National Congress, where the party statute stated that “A person shall not be eligible for election or nomination as an office bearer or member of any executive committee over the age of 70 years” (CPN UML, 2078 BS:65), the Central Committee subsequently suspended this provision. At the same time, the party membership of former President Bidya Bhandari was not renewed. These became major structural issues during the Second Statute Convention and the Eleventh National Congress of the party, where proposals to address them were defeated.

Although PMPD was originally designed to prevent authoritarian tendencies (Karki, 2025), the party's actual practice gradually departed from its own principles. Violations of the party constitution, organizational norms, and established values contributed to the emergence of authoritarian tendencies. Likewise, the Marxist method of resolving internal contradictions through “criticism and self-criticism” (Mao, 1951) was increasingly neglected. During the past several years, the CPN (UML) leadership also moved away from the “methodology of revolutionary patience rooted in democratic pluralism, organizational rigor, and linguistic precision” (Karki, 2025:39), which had been developed through PMPD itself.

The party entered a defensive position following the Gen-Z movement and ultimately after the early parliamentary election of 2026. In the federal parliamentary election of November 2017, the CPN (UML) secured 33.25 percent of the proportional representation vote. This declined to 26.95 percent in 2022 and further fell to 13.44 percent in 2026, representing a severe electoral setback. Although many external factors contributed to this decline, the internal organizational dynamics should not be overlooked, as they constitute the fundamental

causes. Consequently, the party suffered a major setback because it failed to adhere consistently to the guiding principles of PMPD.

Conclusion

Bhandari's PMPD represents a historically grounded and theoretically adaptive reinterpretation of Marxism in the Nepali context. Emerging at a time of global crisis for socialism, PMPD responded both to the failures of Soviet-style socialism and to Nepal's own experience of democratic struggle. The analysis shows that Bhandari's central contribution lies in reconciling core Marxist objectives—class emancipation, social justice, and the transformation of material conditions—with democratic institutions such as multiparty competition, constitutionalism, and civil liberties, which he regarded not as bourgeois impositions but as achievements of human civilization.

Empirically, the study finds that PMPD has had tangible impacts on Nepal's political process and social structure. Its influence is evident not only in the policy orientation of the CPN (UML) but also, implicitly, among other communist groups that have adopted similar democratic practices despite ideological differences. Programs such as social security allowances and inclusive welfare measures illustrate how PMPD has contributed to addressing the needs of marginalized populations, thereby reinforcing its practical relevance. At the same time, the trajectory of the then CPN (Maoist)—from armed struggle to participation in competitive democracy—further validates the broader acceptance of PMPD-like principles within Nepal's left movement.

Theoretically, PMPD expands Marxist discourse by integrating democracy as both a means and a necessary condition for socialist transformation. It challenges deterministic and dogmatic interpretations of Marxism by emphasizing contextual adaptation, pluralism, and the dynamic relationship between class power and democratic governance. However, this study also demonstrates that deviations from PMPD's core principles—

particularly regarding internal party democracy and organizational governance—have contributed to political setbacks, underscoring the importance of consistently applying its guiding values. When the party functioned as a model of internal democracy, it secured the highest level of public support; however, as it gradually departed from the principles and organizational values that it had itself established, its electoral strength declined. In many respects, the party failed to adhere to the guiding principles of PMPD, resulting in a substantial political setback.

The findings suggest that PMPD is neither a revisionist departure from Marxism nor merely a welfare-oriented framework. Rather, it constitutes a coherent and evolving model of People's Democracy and a distinctive ideological framework for advancing socialist democracy rooted in Nepal's historical experience. By bridging the gap between revolutionary ideals and democratic practice, PMPD has played a significant role in shaping Nepal's contemporary political development and offers an important contribution to the global rethinking of Marxism in the twenty-first century. The experience further suggests that deviation from the principles and values of PMPD tends to push the party toward authoritarian tendencies and places the communist movement in a defensive position—a lesson underscored by the major electoral setback of 2082 BS.

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