

Evolution of People's Multiparty Democracy: Political Language, Ideological Adaptation, and Democratic Transformation in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This article reconceptualizes the historical evolution of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), a political theory developed by Madan Bhandari. Drawing on a concentric qualitative framework of historical materialism, the sociology of knowledge, and Cambridge School contextualism, the study explores PMPD as an evolving ideological formation rather than a static doctrine. The analysis demonstrates how each layer of this evolution naturally succeeded the previous one through a sequential process of ideological development. Materially, it emerged from Nepal's semi-feudal conditions, acknowledging democratic transformation as a necessary historical prerequisite for a socialist transition. These structural parameters were amplified by the post-Soviet crisis, during which PMPD operated as a sociology-of-knowledge mechanism for ideological maintenance, preserving a distinct Left identity within a pluralist framework. At the tactical level, this reorientation was accelerated through deliberate Cambridge School rhetorical innovations that embedded constitutionalism, competition, and popular sovereignty within a socialist vocabulary. This experimentation eventually created a democratic-socialist precedent that shaped the environment for the Maoist movement's entry into peaceful politics following the 2006 peace process. PMPD is best analyzed as a historically situated process of ideological adaptation rather than as a capitulation to liberal hegemony. The article concludes by examining its contemporary challenges, warning of a twin crisis currently facing PMPD, navigating an increasingly hostile global order reminiscent of the 1990s while simultaneously confronting internal decay driven by corruption, expensive elections, and entrenched patronage networks.

Introduction

Political theories bridge normative ideals with empirical inquiry, analyze prevailing power dynamics, and shape the boundaries of governance (Dryzek et al., 2006; Heywood, 2015). They are not static repositories of abstract axioms but living frameworks that evolve through organic, non-

linear processes (Choi, 2010; Vogelmann, 2024). Theories germinate in response to crises, expand through considerable organizational hard work, and consolidate through an adversarial dualism that forces proponents to sharpen, clarify, and revise their claims (Skinner, 1969; Ball, 1988).

This adaptive journey punctuates the growth of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD). Formulated by Madan Bhandari in the late twentieth century, PMPD was an inventive synthesis designed to address Nepal's internal material conditions and a shifting international landscape (Dhakal, 2023). Bhandari refused to let the Nepali revolutionary movement capitulate to liberal capitalism or withdraw into dogmatic isolation. He embedded pluralistic, competitive governance within a revolutionary socialist framework. PMPD maintained that multiparty elections, constitutional supremacy, and the rule of law were not bourgeois luxuries but indispensable instruments of working-class emancipation under Nepal's specific material conditions. This synthesis gave the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN [UML]) the ideological framework to survive the post-Soviet crisis and the electoral credibility to emerge as a major democratic force in the early 1990s (Oli, 2025; Pokhrel, 2024).

The long-term significance of this move extends well beyond the CPN (UML)'s organizational endurance. By institutionalizing a democratic-socialist framework within the Nepali state, PMPD established the structural precedent that made Nepal's post-conflict transformation following the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) possible. For the insurgent Maoist party to enter the democratic polity, a viable democratic-socialist paradigm already existed, demonstrating how a Marxist party could pursue revolutionary goals through competitive institutions without abandoning its socialist identity (von Einsiedel et al., 2012; Sharma, 2019).

Despite its importance, the historical process through which PMPD developed remains undertheorized. Existing scholarship dealing with PMPD is divided into two camps that share a common limitation. Orthodox Marxist critiques treat the doctrine as a static act of ideological betrayal (Singh, 1992/2019; Prachanda, 1995), while institutionalist analyses reduce it to a pragmatic instrument of democratic

transition (Hachhethu, 2002). Neither approach captures the essence of PMPD as a living, adaptive construct shaped by specific historical realities, organizational struggles, and deliberate rhetorical choices. This article attempts to bridge this gap by examining the macro-level structural matrices and micro-level rhetorical moves through which an ideology continuously alters its strategy and transforms its shape alongside the changing material realities that affect it.

Methodology

This article deploys a three-layered methodological framework, presenting its analysis and findings through a qualitative narrative. It treats historical materialism, the sociology of knowledge, and Cambridge School contextualism as concentric, mutually reinforcing analytical elements. Each layer of this triad addresses a distinct yet complementary dimension of PMPD's evolution.

The baseline is grounded in the historical materialism of Karl Marx (1859/1977), who made the principal theoretical claim that legal and ideological superstructures are conditioned by the economic base of a society. At one point, Cohen (1978) produced an analytical systematization of this model, through which the analysis section of this article maps the semi-feudal, agrarian landscape of late twentieth-century Nepal. This layer facilitates discussions that help trace how PMPD identified the main contradiction of Nepali society within the existing mode of production. It also briefly engages PMPD with the dialectics articulated in the law of the negation of the negation.

The second layer draws on the sociology of knowledge as developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) and grounded in insight that all political thought is intrinsically situated (*seinsgebunden*)—the existential determination of knowledge, whereby worldviews are bound to historical reality. Their concept of “universe-maintenance” describes the institutional and discursive labor required to preserve a coherent social world against external

disruption. This concept provides the analytical vocabulary to understand how PMPD engaged with the post-Soviet international order. Here, the doctrine is treated as a cognitive and institutional survival mechanism designed to re-legitimize a fracturing leftist reality and translate its core axioms into a new historical context.

The third layer applies Cambridge School contextualism as pioneered by Quentin Skinner (1969). Skinner's focus on recovering an author's or leader's illocutionary force prioritizes what they were actively doing through their writing or speech over what they were saying. This prism transforms Bhandari's texts from a static doctrinal inventory into a dynamic political intervention. Applied in this article through the refinements of Alexander (2024) and Edling and Mörkenstam (1995), this approach reveals how Bhandari's defense of constitutional supremacy and political pluralism functioned simultaneously on multiple fronts. It operated as an intra-party maneuver against orthodox critics, a reassurance to a skeptical domestic elite, and a claim to revolutionary legitimacy in the post-Cold War world celebrating the death of communism. For this analysis, the English translations of Nepali texts are the writer's own.

Results and Discussion

The chronological trails

The historical roots of PMPD trace back to the second major ideological divergence of the Nepali communist movement in the early 1970s. It built on an earlier rupture when prominent communist figures such as Keshar Jung Rayamajhi and Kamal Raj Regmi were co-opted by the Panchayat system in exchange for state positions. The deliberations of the 1970s soon grew into a protracted internal argument among leftist parties, which oscillated between parliamentary institutionalism and revolutionary militancy (KC, 2008; Mishra, 2001).

One major strand of this debate pitted Pushpalal Shrestha's group against the more radical Jhapa youth movement on one side and Bhandari's

emerging generation on the other. Pushpalal, who founded the Nepal Communist Party in 1949 and served as its first-ever Secretary General, advocated during the 1970s for tactical alignment with the Nepali Congress to dismantle monarchical autocracy, but his long-term vision remained tied to a Soviet- or Chinese-style vanguard state (Bhandari, 2012). The Jhapa movement rejected parliamentary politics altogether in favor of armed insurrection. There were other groups, most notably those led by Manmohan Adhikari on the conciliatory side and Mohan Bikram Singh on the radical side, but both remained largely in the middle of this debate (KC, 2008). Bhandari's distinctive position rejected both options. He linked democratic transformation directly to popular sovereignty and Nepali patriotism (Bhandari, 1993). These were categories that orthodox Marxism-Leninism had difficulty accommodating. Bhandari's argument centered on expanding the party's reach among the people, for which any armed adventurism would isolate the movement from the mass base it required (Pokhrel, 2023).

These debates were institutionalized through student mobilizations and underground publications, most famously *Mukti Morcha*, which facilitated a gradual transition of revolutionary zeal from dogmatic Maoism toward peaceful mass mobilization. The formation of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) in 1978 and its choice of neutrality during the 1980 Panchayat Referendum marked a period in which the party confronted the legitimacy of bourgeois democratic instruments directly for the first time (Puri, 2025).

By the late 1980s, Bhandari's critique of leftist extremism had successfully reoriented the party toward a mass-based political infrastructure. Soon, it participated in the Panchayat elections by fielding People's Candidates, aiming to fight the Panchayat system from within. The party's mobilization capacity was built through sister wings such as labor unions, peasant associations, and civil society networks, which gave PMPD its early democratic credibility before it was formally codified. PMPD

thus evolved from its earlier dissident position into the indispensable ideological engine behind the 1990 *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement), enabling the CPN (UML) to transition into a

mainstream electoral force (Hachhethu, 2002; Adhikari, 2024). Table 1 maps the chronological evolution of PMPD from its ideational phase to its eventual culmination.

Table 1: PMPD's evolutionary timeline

Year/ Phase	Historical evolution and ideological milestones
1971–1972: The Seedling Moment	Initial ideological fractures emerge. Bhandari and his supporters break away from Pushpalal's vision of a classic Soviet/Chinese-style communist regime, while simultaneously rejecting the armed, ultra-left strategy of the Jhapa group. Bhandari advocates for a unified, joint struggle alongside the Nepali Congress to establish a multiparty competitive democracy
1975: The Mobilization Shift	The establishment of the party's student wing marks an organizational pivot. The capacity to mobilize university students shifts internal party logic away from armed struggle toward peaceful mass mobilization. This era seeds the Maoism vs. Political Pragmatism debate, disseminated through the theoretical magazine <i>Mukti Morcha</i> published from Varanasi, India. It is from this magazine Bhandari's group derived their name.
1977: Organizational Realignment	<i>Mukti Morcha</i> faction merges with the Coordination Center (which had also taken the remnants of the Jhapa group in), centralizing the internal ideological debate.
1978: The First Break from Maoism	The Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) (CPN[ML]) is formally established. By deliberately omitting "Maoism" from the party name and emphasizing Marx and Lenin, the party synthesizes its six-year internal debate and begins its formal ideological departure from Maoist dogma.
1980: The Referendum Dilemma	"The Great Debate" occurs over whether to utilize the Panchayat Referendum. Bhandari pushes for active participation to build public opinion for a multiparty system. Fearing allegations of a "sell-out," the CPN(ML) takes a compromised middle path remaining organizationally neutral while allowing leaders to vote individually.
1981: Self-critique	The subsequent narrow defeat of the multiparty option convinces leadership that non-participation was a strategic error.
1981–1982: Mass Front Expansion	To rectify the referendum mistake and expand societal reach, the party established specialized labor, women, and civil society wings—most notably the Democratic National Unity Forum. This shifts the party from an isolated vanguard into a broad-based social movement.
1986: Institutional Penetration	Driven by Bhandari's rising influence as the chief ideologue, the party decides to enter the institutional arena. They bypass the political party ban by fielding independent "People's Candidates" in Panchayat-held national and local elections, successfully normalizing the mechanics of competitive electoral politics within the party cadre.
1988: The Democratic Mandate and Abandonment of Maoism	The Fourth General Convention of the CPN (ML) elects Bhandari as Secretary General. The party officially codifies its orientation toward a "joint peaceful struggle" with the centrist Nepali Congress. It also mandates the creation of the Joint Left Front (JLF), a critical coalition of seven leftist factions.

Year/ Phase	Historical evolution and ideological milestones
1990: The Democratic Transition	The joint street power of the JLF and the Nepali Congress culminates in the Jana Andolan (People's Movement), successfully overthrowing the partyless Panchayat system and inaugurating competitive multiparty democracy.
1991: Left Consolidation	The CPN (ML) unites with the CPN (Marxist) to establish the modern Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN[UML]), creating a singular, dominant vehicle for mainstream parliamentary leftism.
1993: Theoretical Synthesis	At the Fifth General Convention of the CPN (UML), Bhandari formally introduces and codifies the structural, historical, and ideological evolution of the past two decades into a cohesive political doctrine of People's Multiparty Democracy.

Recent readings on PMPD

Contemporary scholarship on PMPD exhibits a two-way split. Orthodox Marxist critiques deprecate PMPD as ideological capitulation and deliberate revisionism (e.g., Bhattarai, 2005; Singh, 1992/2019), while institutionalist analyses reduce it to a pragmatic instrument for democratic transition (Baral et al., 2001). Within the leftist political spectrum, it is common for mainstream parties entering parliamentary politics to be routinely condemned by radical groups for “revisionism,” “reformism,” and “class-capitulationist” behavior that supposedly abandons the proletariat in exchange for state power. Pragmatic leftists like the CPN (UML) dismiss their radical critics as trapped in “dogmatism” or “ultra-left adventurism.”

This rhetorical warfare, which factions like CPN (Mashal) and CPN (Maoist) waged both against one another and against the conceptual framework of PMPD, frequently extended to geopolitics, using labels such as “social imperialist” or “foreign puppets” to delegitimize rivals as ideologically deviant (Prachanda, 1995/2013). In the early days, framing smaller tactical disagreements as existential betrayals of the revolution was a recurring phenomenon that PMPD not only survived but also smartly outfoxed.

More nuanced and recent Marxist readings, however, offer necessary correctives. Dhakal (2023) argues that Bhandari accurately diagnosed Nepal's principal contradiction as existing between absolute autocracy and a bourgeois-democratic

impulse, making an immediate leap to proletarian governance theoretically impossible. Sharma Oli (2025) demonstrates how PMPD's embrace of multiparty competition represented not an abandonment of class struggle but its strategic relocation into institutionalized governance. Roka (2024) situates it within a transitional developmental logic as a basis for eventual socialist consolidation. Adhikari (2024) characterizes it as an original conceptual synthesis from the Global South, and Rijal (<https://doi.org/10.3126/ssd.v3i01.81306>) extends this to international relations, noting the doctrine's anticipation of contemporary subaltern critiques of liberal internationalism. Carrying this expansion further into ecology, Chapagain (2023) observes that PMPD's sensibilities toward environmental protection and sustainable resource mobilization appear far ahead of their time.

Most of these studies treat Bhandari's writings as fixed doctrinal positions to be assessed for theoretical consistency rather than as situated speech acts designed to accomplish specific political work within a contested narrative landscape. Sparse semantic network analyses have mapped PMPD's lexical architecture (Karki, 2025a), and biographical studies have established Bhandari's personal authority (Karki, 2025b), but current scholarship stops short of recovering the “universe-maintaining” functionality as well as the illocutionary force of these texts. Without these dimensions, it cannot fully explain why this particular socialist adaptation succeeded where comparable Global South movements failed, nor

can it analyze how its rhetorical architecture helped establish the institutional conditions that enabled the post-2006 political settlement following a decade-long Maoist conflict in Nepal.

Semi-feudal contradictions and the case for democratic instruments

A historical materialist reading of PMPD requires situating it within the economic conditions of late twentieth-century Nepal. The doctrine was an objective structural response to an unsustainable contradiction: an evolving bourgeois-democratic popular impulse repressed by a semi-feudal, monarchical superstructure.

Anatomy of principal contradiction

Throughout the Panchayat era (1960–1990), Nepal's economy remained overwhelmingly agrarian, dominated by exploitative land tenure, royalist rent-seeking, and a lack of industrial infrastructure. Beneath this stagnant surface, demographic and class shifts were accelerating. Expanded basic education, urbanization around the Kathmandu Valley and the Tarai plains, and a growing merchant and professional middle class created a new socioeconomic reality. The Panchayat state actively obstructed these new material interests (Sharma, 2004). Political organizations were outlawed, and patrimonial monopolies blocked economic expansion. In the strictest Marxist sense, the state's superstructure had become a fetter on the productive forces it governed.

Orthodox Marxist-Leninist groups at the time, particularly the factions that later formed the Maoist insurgency, argued that the immediate task was to launch an armed struggle for a dictatorship of the proletariat. However, this position ignored a fundamental materialist constraint. As Dhakal (2023) observes, a proletarian vanguard state requires a developed industrial base and a consolidated working class. In a society where modern capitalism had not yet matured, launching such a strategy would mean imposing a superstructure with no economic base to sustain it.

Resolving the orthodoxy-revisionism dilemma

Bhandari's insight was to ground the party in this material reality rather than in a doctrinaire projection. In his texts, Bhandari explicitly identified the principal contradiction of contemporary Nepal as a conflict between absolute feudal autocracy and the democratic aspirations of the wider population, rather than a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (Bhandari, 1993). This diagnosis carried immediate strategic implications. If Nepal was undergoing a delayed bourgeois-democratic revolution, then democratic instruments, such as a multiparty system, periodic elections, and constitutional supremacy, were not bourgeois traps. Instead, they were the most effective terrain for organizing subaltern classes, building counter-hegemony, and exposing the contradictions of the ruling bloc. This shift represented a strategic relocation of class struggle, not its abandonment, as claimed by PMPD's detractors, such as Mohan Bikram Singh (1992/2019) and Prachanda (1995/2013), who accused the UML and Bhandari of ideological betrayal.

Roka (2024) argues that PMPD was a transitional developmental stage toward a larger goal. The democratic processes PMPD champions generate the material conditions and structural base required for eventual socialist consolidation. This materialist reading establishes that charges of "revisionism" misread the direction of causality. Bhandari did not import liberal democratic values into Marxism from the outside. He derived the necessity of democratic instruments from a careful analysis of Nepal's existing economic base and the CPN (UML)'s history of fighting for democracy and human rights during the Panchayat autocracy. The doctrine's embrace of pluralism was, in the strictest sense, a logically Marxist position based on a correct reading of the material conditions.

The negation of the negation in PMPD's genesis

The negation of the negation is one of the most interesting laws in Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. It holds that a thesis, when negated, does not

vanish but transforms itself and the conditions around it. When that negation is itself negated, the result is not a return to the original but a new synthesis that carries forward elements of both the thesis and its opposite. As Hegel argued in *Science of Logic*, contradiction is not a defect of thought but the very engine of development. According to him, every determinate thing carries within itself the seeds of its own negation, driving forward through successive moments of dissolution and reconstitution (Hegel, 1812/1969). Engels later grounded this in the natural and historical world, treating the negation of the negation as a universal law by which contradictions are not simply abolished but sublated into a richer, more complex unity, “a development that seems to repeat the stages already passed, but repeats them differently, on a higher basis” (Engels, 1878/1987, p. 131). It is this dialectical logic that best explains how the Nepali Left moved from the Panchayat system to Bhandari’s PMPD.

The Panchayat system was the first negation. By outlawing party mobilization, it suppressed the organized political will of the Nepali people and, in doing so, produced the very contradiction that would eventually destroy it. Bhandari himself was politically shaped within this repression. As a communist party worker from the 1960s, his political ideas were certain to be influenced by the system he would spend his life opposing. The material conditions of class contradiction and the democratic pressure building among revolutionary youth made the Panchayat’s negation a historical necessity. When the Jana Andolan of 1990 finally broke it open, what followed was not restoration but transformation. Bhandari seized that moment to push the CPN (ML) away from orthodox militancy and toward a theory rooted in Nepali realities. This was the negation of the negation in concrete political form. The Panchayat system was sublated into multiparty democracy through struggle. The CPN (UML) was also reinvented in the process, with PMPD as its ultimate logical synthesis.

The post-Soviet universe maintenance

While historical materialism explains why PMPD became structurally necessary, the sociology of knowledge illuminates how it functioned as a cognitive and institutional survival mechanism during a period of existential threat to communist ideology worldwide. Between 1989 and 1991, the Nepali Left confronted a double crisis. Locally, the domestic transition triggered by the 1990 Jana Andolan required a careful response because the CPN (UML) had a direct stake in the success of the nascent democracy. Externally, the catastrophic dissolution of the Soviet bloc stripped communist parties worldwide of their most powerful source of ideological legitimacy.

The dynamics of cognitive disruption

In Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) terms, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the USSR constituted a catastrophic disruption of the “symbolic universe,” the overarching theoretical framework through which the communist movement had organized and legitimized its understanding of history, society, and political action. Leftist parties around the world risked either dogmatic isolationism, which meant treating the external world as entirely corrupt and irrelevant, or ideological dissolution, which meant liquidating their socialist identities into Western-style liberal democracy. Neither option was organizationally viable for the CPN (UML).

The party’s position was further complicated by the domestic conjuncture. The 1990 Jana Andolan had forced the monarchy to restore the multiparty system. It offered a historic democratic opening in which the CPN (UML) had played a central organizing role. However, participating in the new parliamentary system required justifying to a party cadre trained in orthodox Marxism-Leninism why electoral competition was not a betrayal of revolutionary goals. At the same time, convincing the newly educated and aspirational classes required political communication in a new democratic lexicon.

PMPD emerged as precisely what Berger and Luckmann (1966:104) term an institutional mechanism of universe maintenance. Rather than abandoning the Marxist symbolic universe or sealing it off from external reality, Bhandari

undertook a systematic translation by rearticulating the doctrine's core axioms in a form that could be reconciled with democratic pluralism without dissolving into it (Table 2).

Table 2: PMPD's universe-maintenance functionality

Classical Marxist-Leninist axiom	PMPD's structural integration	Universe-maintenance function
Dictatorship of the proletariat	Constitutional supremacy & multiparty competition	Replaces authoritarian vanguardism with institutionalized class struggle, disarming liberal critiques while preserving revolutionary goals.
Violent overthrow of the state	Peaceful mass mobilization & electoral mandate	Uses democratic legitimacy to build counter-hegemony within the state apparatus, converting the arena of struggle without abandoning it.
Monolithic party rule	Pluralistic social and political space	Absorbs democratic impulses of the urban middle class while protecting the party's organized base from fragmentation.

Source: Author 2026

This translation performed a crucial political function. It explicitly integrated pluralism, human rights, multiparty competition, and the rule of law within a coherent socialist matrix, which insulated the CPN (UML) from the global narrative of communist obsolescence articulated most influentially by Fukuyama (1992). Rather than appearing as an anachronistic Cold War relic, the party presented itself as the true custodian of democratic transition in Nepal.

Shaping the Maoist transition

The long-term sociological value of PMPD's universe-maintenance machinery became apparent in 2006. By that point, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) had fought a decade-long armed insurgency that claimed over fifteen thousand lives and reached a bitter military and political stalemate. The insurgency faced an acute crisis of legitimacy. Continuing the armed struggle looked increasingly unsustainable, yet transitioning into mainstream politics risked alienating a radicalized base accustomed to the binary logic of revolution versus parliamentary democracy. This transition

succeeded largely because the CPN (UML) had spent the preceding fifteen years proving that a Marxist party could advance revolutionary ideals through competitive democratic institutions without shedding its socialist identity. The Maoists' endorsement of the 12-Point Agreement and their subsequent participation in the Constituent Assembly elections were not a sudden leap into unfamiliar liberal territory. They were entering an institutional environment that PMPD had already legitimized and normalized (von Einsiedel et al., 2012). The democratic-socialist paradigm was not built overnight under the pressure of 2006. It was available as an objectively institutionalized political reality, built over a decade and a half of political hard work.

This is PMPD's most consequential and least appreciated historical contribution. It certainly helped the CPN (UML) endure a geopolitical crisis. It also restructured the conditions of possibility for Nepali politics as a whole, making a peaceful settlement of a decade-long armed conflict institutionally conceivable. Dangal and Karki (2025) extend this argument into contemporary

institutional reproduction, showing that PMPD's normative frameworks continue to shape Nepali governance structures, including the restructuring of higher education under the federal republican constitution.

Recovering illocutionary force through micro-rhetorical moves

The macro-structural and sociological layers of the methodological framework explain the material conditions under which PMPD became necessary. They cannot, however, explain the precise linguistic mechanisms of its execution or how Bhandari analytically persuaded a skeptical party, outmaneuvered radical critics, and reconfigured the boundaries of the state using language as his primary political instrument. To answer this, we must apply Cambridge School contextualism to the micro-rhetorical level, analyzing Bhandari's texts not as static ideological products but as situated speech acts designed to perform specific political acts within a highly contested terrain of political narratives.

Following J. L. Austin's tripartite distinction, the analysis below isolates the locutionary (what was said), illocutionary (what was done in the saying), and perlocutionary (the effect achieved in the hearer) dimensions of five foundational speech acts spanning the crucial 1990–1993 transition. Together, these acts demonstrate how Bhandari manipulated existing linguistic conventions to engineer a new political common sense.

Speech Act 1: Justification of ideological departure

Bhandari (1993b), at an international conference in Calcutta of India, said:

Our party congress has adopted the program of PMPD. This decision is based on our experience of struggle of more than forty years, in which the Left forces of Nepal have fought enduringly against the autocratic regime for the cause of establishing multiparty democracy. The essence of PMPD

remains in that, unlike the experiment made with a one-party system (although some socialist countries in Eastern Europe claimed to have followed a multiparty system, which in practice they did not) in socialist countries, it consents to the existence and operation of various political parties and considers that a communist party should also compete in elections to have a legitimate mandate from time to time to run the government and rule the country. (360)

Locutionary act: A declarative statement reporting the CPN (UML)'s official adoption of PMPD as its programmatic orientation.

Illocutionary act: The governing function of this expression is one of justification and legitimation, directed squarely at an international fraternity of communist peers. Bhandari is not only informing but also actively defending a departure from Leninist orthodoxy. He does not argue his position philosophically from first principles. He grounds the shift in forty years of empirical struggle. This is an appeal to historical experience rather than doctrinal authority. By pointing to regimes that “claimed to have followed a multiparty system, which in practice they did not,” Bhandari performs a rhetorical inversion. For him, it is the orthodox one-party communist states that deviated from genuine socialist principles, while his party has drawn the correct lessons from historical evidence.

Perlocutionary intent: To persuade international communist interlocutors that PMPD represents a theoretically defensible evolution of Marxist praxis, thereby insulating his domestic ideological commitments from being delegitimized as “revisionism” by orthodox critics at home and abroad.

Cambridge School significance: Skinner (1978) emphasizes the linguistic conventions within which political innovators must operate and the rhetorical strategies by which they modify those conventions from within. Bhandari's deployment of the phrase “a legitimate mandate from time

to time” is a deliberate appropriation of liberal-democratic vocabulary within a communist argumentative frame. This is a classic example of normative redescription (Skinner, 1969), in which the innovator does not reject the prevailing vocabulary but re-semanticizes it, bending existing terms toward new normative ends while preserving the appearance of continuity with established tradition.

Speech Act 2: Conditional accommodation and constitutional warning

Bhandari (1990), in the context of the promulgation of the 1990 Constitution of Nepal, asserted:

राजतन्त्र संवैधानिक भएर बस्न चाहेसम्म, बहुदलीय प्रजातन्त्रको संविधानमूनि राजा बस्न तयार रहेसम्म राजतन्त्रको निरन्तरतासँग नेपाली जनतालाई धेरै ठूलो समस्या हुँदैन । महाराजधिराजले यो सहमतिलाई तोड्न खोजिबक्सै, समस्या त्यहाँ सुरु हुनेछ, र त्यसबेला जनता आफैँ राजतन्त्र नामक संस्थाकै विकल्प खोज्न बाध्य हुनेछन् । Translation: The continuation of the monarchy, as long as the monarchy remains constitutional and as long as the King is prepared to function under the constitution of a multiparty democracy, will not be a problem for the people. A problem arises if His Majesty attempts to breach this consensus, and then the people themselves will be compelled to seek an alternative to the institution of the monarchy. (personal recording of Bhandari's speech on Kartik 27, 2047 BS)

Locutionary act: A conditional statement articulating the terms under which the institution of the monarchy is acceptable to the people within the new constitutional order.

Illocutionary act: This assertion from a public rally performs a double function simultaneously. It is at once an act of accommodation as well as a carefully calibrated warning. Speaking at the birth of the 1990 Constitution, Bhandari signals the party's constructive participation in the new political settlement while placing the palace on formal notice that its continuation is contingent

on constitutional obedience, not on historical privilege or divine right. The conditional syntax “as long as it functions under the constitution” is the precise rhetorical mechanism of the speech act. The phrase “the people will be forced to seek the alternative” is a measured threat, cloaked in the passive voice of popular necessity, which simultaneously distances Bhandari personally from the threat while amplifying its force by attributing it to the sovereign people. This statement came to be a self-fulfilling prophecy in 2008, eighteen years after it was made, when the popularly elected Constituent Assembly announced the abolition of the monarchy.

Perlocutionary intent: To stabilize the highly volatile transitional moment of 1990 by signaling the UML's constructive intent while preserving ideological leverage over the monarchy, making the republican possibility a latent, conditional threat rather than an immediate, destabilizing demand.

Cambridge School significance: Pocock's (1973) concept of distinct political languages is directly relevant here. Bhandari is operating within the rapidly emerging language of constitutional sovereignty, a discourse in which “the people” become the supreme referent of legitimate authority. By invoking “the people” as the agent who will “seek the alternative,” he naturalizes popular sovereignty as the overarching framework within which even the monarchy must justify its existence. This is a profound act of political-linguistic reconfiguration. The monarchy, which had historically claimed to confer legitimacy on political arrangements, is now placed in the position of receiving it, conditionally, from the people.

Speech Act 3: Cultural-theological redefinition of sovereignty

Bhandari (1991), delivering a speech after securing landslide victory in the constituencies of 1 and 5 of Kathmandu, asserted: “हाम्रा देवता भनेका नबोल्ने ढुङ्गाका

मूर्ति होइनन्, ती जीवित बोल्ने जनता हुन् । Translation: “Our deities are not silent stone idols; they are the living and speaking people.”

Locutionary act: A metaphorical redefinition of the concept of *devata* (deity) within Nepali cultural-religious discourse.

Illocutionary act: This performative act executes a radical substitution of political theology. In a deeply religious society where traditional deities commanded popular reverence and where the monarchy derived much of its legitimacy from its identification with the Hindu divine order, Bhandari displaces the sacred from the transcendent to the immanent. He does not attack religion. Instead, he captures its emotional and moral authority and redirects it toward the people as the sovereign collective. The speech act is simultaneously philosophical (a claim about where true divinity resides) and political (a reorientation of mass loyalty from religious hierarchy to popular sovereignty), delivered at the politically charged moment of electoral victory over the sitting Prime Minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Perlocutionary intent: To mobilize a predominantly rural, deeply religious Nepali audience by translating the abstract language of popular sovereignty into culturally resonant and theologically familiar terms. The aphorism works precisely because it honors the cognitive and spiritual framework of *devata* while radically redefining its referent, making the act of honoring the people feel not like a departure from tradition but like its fulfillment.

Cambridge School significance: Skinner’s insistence that innovators must work within existing ideological vocabularies, rather than simply inventing new ones, finds its clearest illustration here. Bhandari’s rhetorical genius lies not in rejecting the theocratic idiom of Nepali public life but in recreating it, a move Skinner identifies as central to the most consequential forms of political-conceptual innovation. It is a performed transformation of political meaning, delivered to a live audience at a historically charged moment.

Speech Act 4: Parliamentary indictment

Aryal (2078 BS), citing Bhandari’s speech in parliament in 1993 on Tanakpur treaty controversy, asserted:

प्राकृतिक स्रोतको उपयोगको बाँटफाँट भएको छैन, त्यसबाट मुलुकको कुनै अहित भएको छैन बरु भारतले शुभेच्छा स्वरुप पानी र बिजुली नेपाललाई प्रदान गरेको छ भन्ने कुरा सत्तापक्षबाट उल्लेख गरिएको थियो । श्री ५ को सरकारले गरेका ती कुराहरु गलत छन् । जनतालाई गुमराहमा पार्ने खालका छन्, राष्ट्रको हितलाई हानि पुर्याउने खालका छन्, आघात पुर्याउने खालका छन्, संविधानलाई मिच्ने खालका छन् । Translation: It was mentioned by the ruling side that there has been no sharing of natural resources, that no harm has been done to the country, and that India has provided water and electricity to Nepal as a gesture of goodwill. Those statements made by His Majesty’s Government are wrong. They are of the kind that mislead the people, they are of the kind that harm the national interest, they are of the kind that cause injury, and they are of the kind that violate the Constitution. (12)

Locutionary act: This was a formal parliamentary rebuttal of the governing Nepali Congress’s defense of the Tanakpur Accord with India.

Illocutionary act: This is Bhandari’s most explicitly adversarial speech act, a formal act of parliamentary indictment directed squarely at political opponents on the floor of the House, the highest constitutional forum in the nation. The governing illocutionary function is accusation. Bhandari is charging His Majesty’s Government with a fourfold offense: misleading the people, harming the national interest, causing injury to the state, and violating the Constitution.

Perlocutionary intent: To comprehensively delegitimize the government’s position on Tanakpur constitutionally, nationally, and morally before both the House and the wider national audience. Through this statement, he also intends to consolidate the UML’s identity as the authentic guardian of both constitutional order and national sovereignty.

Cambridge School significance: This speech act demonstrates Bhandari operating in the agonistic dimension of political language, which Skinner regards as essential to understanding how political concepts are contested and transformed. The rhetorical architecture of the accusation deserves close attention. The fourfold anaphoric repetition of “खालका छन्” (they are of the kind that...) is the performative engine of the indictment. Each repetition adds a charge, building cumulative prosecutorial weight. The rhythm enacts the argument, showing that the government is not guilty of one error but of a systematically compounding series of wrongs. The final pivot from legal-constitutional argument to the invocation of lives lost and sacrifices made during the campaign against Tanakpur shifts the speech act from forensic accusation to moral witnessing, rendering the ruling party morally culpable for the human cost of its decisions.

Speech Act 5: Canonical inscription of liberal-democratic norms

In the political paper presented at the Fifth General Convention of the party, Bhandari (1993) categorically included human rights, rule of law, independent judiciary, governance by the majority and the opposition by the minority, constitutional democracy, and superiority through periodic competition and governance by the superior, among others (360).

Locutionary act: A formal, categorical enumeration of the normative-conceptual pillars of PMPD, presented at the CPN (UML)’s highest deliberative forum.

Illocutionary act: The governing function here is institutionalization and canonical inscription. By presenting these concepts in a General Convention paper, which is the most authoritative genre of communist party discourse, Bhandari is not merely advocating ideas but installing them as the official doctrinal vocabulary of the CPN (UML). Each term on the list represents authentic diction from liberal-democratic political philosophy that he is formally

inducting into a Marxist-Leninist institutional framework. The inclusion of this lexicon commits the party to the supremacy of a written Constitution as the limiting framework of all political power, including, implicitly, the power of the party itself. This is a profound doctrinal reversal of the Leninist position, performing what Skinner calls the normative redescription of political vocabulary.

Perlocutionary intent: To bind the party machinery, comprised of cadres, district and local committees, and ideological leaders, to a new theoretical vocabulary, making these liberal-democratic norms the internal measure of socialist legitimacy rather than external bourgeois impositions to be resisted. The institutional context of the General Convention gives these terms binding force because, from that very forum and moment, they become party policy, not personal opinion.

Cambridge School significance: This represents a decisive ideological re-description and doctrinal authorization. Bhandari was not merely describing democratic norms; he was performing the political act of incorporating the vocabulary of liberal constitutionalism into the authoritative language of a Marxist-Leninist party. By inscribing concepts such as human rights, the rule of law, constitutional democracy, and an independent judiciary into a General Convention paper, he altered the accepted linguistic convention of how socialist democracy would henceforth be understood.

Cross-cutting synthesis: Audience triangulation and conceptual translation

When these five speech acts are evaluated as a synchronized whole, they reveal that Bhandari’s rhetorical strategy was not situational speculation but a highly cohesive campaign of audience triangulation. Bhandari managed a complex, multi-front communication strategy that allowed the theory of PMPD to stabilize across entirely divergent political interest groups simultaneously. By operating across multiple registers, Bhandari achieved a profound conceptual translation.

He mediated among Marxist doctrine, liberal-democratic law, and cultural idioms without fracturing the CPN (UML)'s core identity.

Most importantly, across every genre, Bhandari performed a consistent sovereign redefinition. He systematically centered “the people” as the ultimate source of political authority, displacing both monarchical divine right and communist vanguardism. Whether addressing the palace, the communist international, Parliament, or a victory-rally crowd, the referent of legitimate sovereignty remained the living, speaking, voting people. He deployed language as a political instrument to shift what was thinkable, sayable, and doable within Nepali political life, establishing the robust democratic lexicon that would ultimately govern the post-1990 state.

Contemporary challenges to PMPD

In the contemporary era, PMPD must immediately confront a twofold threat that directly mirrors the structural crises Bhandari faced in the 1990s. Tackling these challenges head-on provides a necessary critical lens through which to view the long-term sustainability of its ideological evolution.

Renewed geopolitical threat

Bhandari's theory was designed precisely because he realized that a small, developing nation like Nepal would have a difficult time navigating militarized isolation or relying on external socialist superpowers. PMPD helped the Nepali Left successfully survive post-Soviet liberal hegemony. However, the international circumstances today present an entirely different threat perception.

Renewed geopolitical attacks against communist and socialist parties worldwide have effectively eliminated the global incentive to democratize left-wing movements. The new Left and contemporary communist parties must rapidly adapt to increasingly hostile, jingoistic globalization and techno-feudalism. They face this pressure

regardless of how deeply they commit to pluralistic and constitutional norms. This global order is demanding yet another total capitulation from the remaining socialists and communists of the world, as seen in Latin America in early 2026.

Therefore, the enduring legacy of PMPD as a flexible template will be tested by its ability to resist this external geopolitical pressure without retreating into dogmatic isolationism. A serious reimagining is needed, just as Bhandari undertook in the 1990s, to evaluate and confront this challenge.

The threat from within

PMPD certainly has significant academic merit and pragmatic statecraft value, while empirical observations prompt vital reflections on the current situation of the Nepali Left.

Its emphasis on electoral competition has created a critical internal contradiction within parties following PMPD or those walking similar paths. Winning a democratic election requires matching the expensive strategies of political opponents. As a result, campaign costs have skyrocketed to millions of rupees in every constituency. To fund these elections, communist parties must now court the “wealthy capitalists” they once promised to eliminate. There is no need to villainize the rich, but when leaders of an impoverished society embrace luxury, they lose credibility with the people, who are left struggling to survive. Furthermore, repeated stints in government through unprincipled alliances build a culture of patronage and corruption rather than a socialist transition.

This cycle, as seen in the CPN (UML), has diluted the party organization. Its cadres, who once held revolutionary ideals, have transformed into electoral managers and power brokers. At the same time, communist parties that governed certain Indian states through elections, though they do not adhere to the principles of PMPD, have also declined over the last decade. This demands serious soul-searching. The followers of PMPD

must guard themselves against these pitfalls of competitive electoral politics and demonstrate their resolve to reform and return to the original PMPD values.

Conclusion

This article has reconstructed the evolutionary journey of PMPD from its origins in the early 1970s to its formal codification in 1993. It has also traced its potential long-term institutional consequences.

The findings converge on four claims. First, PMPD was not an ideological capitulation but a materialist necessity. Bhandari derived the case for democratic instruments from a careful diagnosis of Nepal's actual economic base, repositioning class struggle into the institutional arena that historical realities made available. Second, the doctrine functioned as an institutional mechanism of universe-maintenance that preserved the identity and organizational presence of the Nepali Left against the risks of the post-Soviet collapse. Third, it laid the normative and structural groundwork for the 2006 peace process by establishing a viable democratic-socialist precedent for the Maoists' transition into peaceful politics. Fourth, this evolution was achieved through deliberate rhetorical labor. Bhandari's linguistic appropriation of classical Marxist categories convincingly outmaneuvered orthodox critics, reassured a skeptical establishment, and created a new common sense about what a Marxist party could legitimately do.

Beyond Nepal, PMPD's evolutionary path has survived a fundamental philosophical challenge. Louis Althusser's (1970) analysis of ideological state apparatuses and Slavoj Žižek's (1989) account of how dominant ideologies naturalize themselves reveal the structural pressures that demand intellectual submission from radical movements, identifying any alternative to global capitalism as inherently totalitarian or regressive. PMPD's survival and institutional success constitute counter-evidence to this pressure. It demonstrates, in practice, as Chantal Mouffe

(2000, 2005) argues in her framework of agonistic pluralism, that democracy requires an adversarial arena where divergent worldviews compete for hegemony without attempting to annihilate one another. To demand the total ideological capitulation of socialist paradigms is to negate the dialectical character of political development itself because the continuous collision of contradictions, in classical materialist philosophy, drives history forward.

PMPD's enduring legacy is etched into the federal, secular, and republican constitutional architecture of modern Nepal. But its significance is not exhausted by Nepal's national context. It offers a transferable template, a proof that revolutionary socialist objectives and democratic pluralism are not inherently contradictory paradigms destined for mutual destruction but can be synthesized into an open-ended, living framework capable of facing profound historical shocks. PMPD did not merely endure and transform local political crises. It engineered an enduring democratic legacy in Nepal and, in doing so, permanently expanded the range of what a pluralistic, emancipatory politics can achieve.

In order to continue its evolutionary trajectory, PMPD must respond to the material conditions of today's political terrain. The contemporary global order is no longer as accommodating to communist and socialist nomenclatures as it was during the early days of liberal hegemony. Internally, an obsession with electoral politics has bred corruption and cultural decay among PMPD followers, who were once guided by sacrosanct democratic ideals. To overcome these adaptive pressures and win back public trust, PMPD must innovate and continue to evolve, precisely as Bhandari did during the early 1990s.

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