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Greed and Grievance of Maoists in Maoist Insurgency of Nepal

Abstract: The paper analyses the Nepali Civil War (1996-2006), focusing on the economic, political, and social grievances that spurred the Maoist insurgency. It examines how the Maoists mobilised support by addressing systemic issues affecting marginalised groups, including Dalits, women, ethnic minorities, and the economically disadvantaged. While promising an alternative governance model and systemic reforms, the Maoists also sought power and resources, raising questions about their motives. The paper argues that their pursuit might have been driven more by greed than genuine grievances, offering a critical perspective on the conflict and the importance of understanding its complexities. Does this paper answer how much people's was "Peoples War in Nepal"?

Keywords: Insurgency, Maoists, Greed, Grievance, Inequality, Nepal, India.

1- Introduction:

At the 1973 Non-Alignment Movement summit in Algiers, King Birendra of Nepal underscored the importance of declaring Nepal a "Zone of Peace" (Duquesne, 2022). Despite his intentions, Nepal plunged into a severe conflict under his reign, resulting in over 17000 deaths and displacing over a hundred thousand people from February 13, 1996, to the peace agreement on November 21, 2006 (Poudel, 2020). Historically dominated by a monarchical system, Nepal saw limited political freedom even after the 1959 constitution introduced a bicameral parliament. The 1962 Constitutional Amendments further entrenched the monarchy by establishing a party-less panchayat system despite a growing demand for democracy. It wasn't until 1990, amid widespread pro-democracy protests, that King Birendra transitioned Nepal to a constitutional monarchy, ushering in a multi-party system (MoFA Nepal). However, the subsequent decade was marked by political instability, leading to calls for constitutional reform from various factions, with Maoists seeking a complete system overhaul. (Ashraf, 2002)

The Insurgency saw the monarchy, the government, and the Maoists as key players, with the latter pushing for the establishment of a republic. The Communist movement, initiated in 1949 and supported by Indian Communists, was divided between factions aligned with Russian or Chinese Communist ideologies, with the CPN (Maoist) leading the civil war following their split in 1995 (Lawoti, 2010, pp5 & SATP). British economist Paul Collier argued that civil wars are driven by greed and grievances, such as economic disparity and political exclusion, which fuel conflict and aid in recruiting rebel groups (Collier, 2004). The Nepali Communist movement's resilience, despite the global decline of communism and amidst economic growth, underscores the need for a thorough examination of the interplay

between economic and political factors in the context of the Maoist insurgency, especially to understand the Maoist insurgency's appeal and impact.

In this paper, my analysis will delve into the motivations behind Maoist actions, specifically their incorporation of the grievances of the common people. By examining current events, particularly the 2006 peace agreement, I aim to explore the question of how much Peoples was "People War in Nepal"?

2- Grievance of Maoists:

The question of why insurgency erupted in Nepal in 1996, despite transitioning towards democracy, has been a source of debate among scholars and policymakers. While the Maoists cited "inequality" as a significant factor, including poverty, landlessness, and unemployment, these issues have long been present in Nepal. Instead, the emergence of the CPN-Maoist party in 1990, with its explicit use of violence, politicisation of grievances, and collective mobilisation, requires further examination (Basnett, 2009, pp. 5). The immediate causes of the insurgency may have varied, but the grievances adopted by the Maoists during the insurgency were fundamentally emancipatory, leading to its designation as a "People's War." Among the grievances articulated by the Maoists were:

A- Prevailing Inequalities: From 1996 to 2006, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) grew from an obscure group to a force of 30,000 combatants, driven by societal disparities and promises of alternative governance for marginalised populations (Davis et al., 2012, p.3). In the early 1990s, Nepal's economic and social challenges included a GDP per capita of \$896, a life expectancy of 52.5 years, and an adult literacy rate of 25.6% (Davis et al., 2012, p.3). By 2010/11, income inequality worsened, as shown by a Gini coefficient of 49.42, and about 7% of households owned 31% of agricultural land, highlighting landlessness issues, especially among Dalits in the Tarai region (OXFAM, 2019, pp.7-8; UN-Habitat, 2018, p.8). Gender inequality and the high participation of women in the insurgency challenged patriarchal norms (Khan, 2009; Prasai, 2018). The CPN-M attracted support from the Dalit community, representing 20% of Nepal's population but 80% of the "ultra-poor" despite the party's upper-caste leadership (CHRGJ, 2005, pp12). Tensions between hill and Madhesi communities and the lack of representation for Nepal's diverse population in governance further fueled the insurgency's growth, with the Maoists advocating for an ethnic-based federal system and aligning with the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) to address janajati grievances (Khalid, 2016; Sunam & Goutam, 2013; Boquérat, 2006; Macours, 2011). The CPN-M's appeal across marginalised segments significantly contributed to its expansion, challenging the state's structure by leveraging societal inequalities.

B: Secular State: During the First Peoples War in the 1990s, there was a surge in demand for secularism. This demand was raised by Theravada Buddhist Monks and supported by Janjati activists who sought to acknowledge the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of Nepali society. It is important to note that this demand was not an attempt to banish Hinduism but

rather a call for non-Hindus to be treated equally. At the core of this demand was the de-Hinduisation of the state and a push for a Multi-Cultural Nepal. The Maoists were wise to include the demand for a secular state in their 40-point demand presented before the Civil War in 1996. (Letizia, 2017)

Janjatis's support for a secular state is not only from the religious angle but also from the linguistic angle. Though a significant population of Janjatis are Hindus, their mother tongue is not Nepali. Janjatis believed that the supremacy of the Nepali language is manifested in the dominant Hindu religion controlled by “Upper-Caste” Nepali-speaking Hindus, e.g. Magar is the third most prominent ethnic group consisting of 6.9% of the population of Nepal; 79.0% of the Magar people follow Hindu religion, but most of them speak Magar-Dhut a Sino-Tibetan language. Despite their 6.9% population, only 2.78 % say their mother tongue “Magar-Dhut”. The same is the case with the Tharu and the Newar ethnic groups, the 7th and 11th most prominent ethnic groups in Nepal. (NSO, 2021) Non-Hindus and marginalised Hindu groups such as Dalits, Women, non-Nepali speaking Hindus, etc., most of them backed the Maoists for their demand for a Secular State. In return, Maoists had an extensive support base; actually, Maoists were not in the capacity to ignore this popular demand.

C: Federal Republic: Nepal's governance until 1990 was marked by autocratic regimes, including the Shah dynasty, Ranas, and the Panchayat system. The advocacy for federalism primarily emerged from the Madhesi population, marginalised due to Kathmandu's exploitative view of the Terai as merely a resource reservoir (HimalSouthAsian, 2023). The Maoist insurgency, commencing in 1996 to establish a Marxist Leninist-Maoist 'people's republic,' did not initially envisage a federal structure (Lecours, 2014, pp11). The Terai region, especially its Hindu caste groups, along with Muslims and indigenous communities, identified strongly as Madheshi, facing systemic exclusion and difficulty in obtaining citizenship, primarily viewed as outsiders by hill Hindus. The escalation of Maoist activities in the Terai post-2000 propelled the Madheshi to assertively demand federalism tied to self-determination ideals, leading to the formation of the Madhesh National Liberation Front (MNLF) with connections to CPN-M. The interim constitution's omission of federalism shocked Madheshi leaders, given CPN-M's influence over the transition, prompting the Madheshi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJF) to initiate a general strike, involving constitutional burnings, abductions, and violent clashes, resulting in over thirty deaths (ibid. pp11-12). By the 2013 and 2015 elections, although all major parties had incorporated federalism in their platforms, their approaches varied. Maoists advocated for ethnic-based federal divisions—a stance the NC and UML parties criticised for threatening national unity and stability. The Maoists sought to exploit ethnic divisions for political gains, leveraging their connections with leaders of indigenous nationalities (ibid. pp15).

D: Independent Foreign Policy: Nepal, a landlocked nation bordered by India on three sides and the Himalayas to the north, is in a geopolitically precarious position. The country's dependency on India for external engagement and economic progress underscores Delhi's dominant stance in bilateral relations. On February 4, 1996, Maoist factions presented a 40-point ultimatum to the Nepalese Government, with the foremost demands directly

challenging existing Nepal-India treaties and policies, including the abrogation of the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty and the 1966 Integrated Mahakali Treaty, regulation of the border to prevent Indian vehicle entry, and ending the recruitment of Nepali Gorkhas into the Indian Army (SATP, n.d.). The Maoist ultimatum, followed by the Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's contradictory actions in India, precipitated the "People's War" (Pun, 2012).

India's perception of Nepal serving as a conduit for anti-Indian activities, underscored by the 1999 hijacking incident, has further strained bilateral relations. Despite historic assistance from India, a pervasive anti-Indian sentiment flourishes in Nepal, often seen as a hallmark of nationalism. This sentiment is exacerbated by Nepali leaders who navigate a delicate balance between public anti-Indian sentiment and covert engagements with India, a strategy that muddles the bilateral discourse. (Mishra, 2004, pp18-19) Given its regional dominance, the onus of altering this complex dynamic lies significantly with India. Former Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral's "Gujral Doctrine" aimed to transcend reciprocal expectations in favour of unilateral generosity towards India's neighbours, including Nepal. However, post-Gujral, this policy perspective has retreated mainly to academic debate rather than guiding India's foreign policy. India's covert involvement in Nepal's internal affairs, marked by a Machiavellian strategy and overwhelming geopolitical leverage, necessitates a nuanced understanding of India's foreign policy motivations. The bilateral relationship's future hinges on Nepal's ability to strategically navigate Delhi's attitudes to safeguard its national interests and sovereignty.

3- Greed Of Maoists in Insurgency:

According to Paul Collier (2001), 'opportunities for rebellion' were more significant in explaining the outbreak of insurgency than political factors. However, the greed hypothesis on 'resource-based wars' does not facilitate a conceptual framework to analyse Nepal's insurgency because Nepal's case is not based on a resource war. (Collier, 2004) However, Ted Gurr (1971) contends that the process through which political violence manifests can be traced from the development of discontent politicisation of discontent to its actualisation in the form of political violence. Both theories argue that the 'breeding ground for conflict' or 'grievance' does not automatically translate into conflict. (Gurr, 1993) At the same time, the Maoist organisation was able to create a collective grievance amongst the diverse population in Nepal and translate unified grievances into a collective force. A collective force was, in turn, the result of CPN-M's construction of parallel structures of government in Maoist-operated areas & its mandate for violence to uphold these structures. (Basnett, 2009, pp10) The grievances mentioned above have existed in Nepal for a very long time, but why was it in 1996 that violence happened, not earlier; there is some facilitation condition which has translated existing grievances into a conflict that I classified as the greed of Maoists, the prominent actor of the Peoples War in 1996 such as:

A- Greed of Political power: In the People's Movement of 1990 in Nepal, Maoists, distinct from Communists within the United Left Front, sought more radical reforms than those introduced by the 1990 constitution. Initially, they abstained from the 1991 elections,

advocating for significant changes. The United National Peoples Movement (UNPM), with a revolutionary arm, CPN (Unity Centre), and a political front, UPFN (United Peoples Front of Nepal), eventually decided to participate in the electoral process. They fielded 69 candidates, securing 4.83% of the vote and emerging as the third-largest party. However, ideological and personal differences led to a split in 1992, resulting in the formation of CPN (Maoist) led by Dr Baburam Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda. Prachanda's faction, lacking Election Commission recognition, was ineligible for the 1994 elections and chose to boycott and disrupt them, questioning the feasibility of integrating Maoists into mainstream politics without exacerbating conflicts. This scenario underscores the challenges of political marginalisation in a multi-party democracy, highlighting the Maoists' perception of state persecution and their consequent extrajudicial opposition. (Muni, 2003)

B- Greed of International Leadership of Left-Wing Groups: During the rise of Maoist movements in Nepal, left-wing groups experienced a decline on the international stage, mainly due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This resulted in a leadership void the Nepali Maoists sought to fill. While they drew inspiration from China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), they emphasised the importance of moving beyond it and Maoism. (Ayadi, 2018, pp6) Seizing the opportunity presented by the waning Comintern, Nepali Maoists and their comrades from the US, Latin America, and other parts of the world established the Revolutionary International as an alternative. Prachanda explained that the RIM committee would play a crucial role in synthesising the global experiences of the Maoists. The RIM institutionalised connections among Maoist movements worldwide. In June 2001, the CPN(M) and nine other Maoist parties in South Asia formed the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA). (Das, 2010, pp4) Their objective was to unify and coordinate the activities of Maoist parties across the region and establish a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ) spanning parts of Nepal, Bihar, and Jharkhand up to Andhra in India. This initiative aimed to create a base for launching the People's War throughout India and South Asia. These realistic measures were gaining support from Indian Maoists, raising the global stature of the Nepali Maoists. (ibid.)

C- Resource Grabbing: Despite Nepal's lack of significant exportable natural resources, as identified by Paul Collier, the country's minimal assets, notably land and forest products, have been effectively utilised by Maoists to support their agenda. The Maoists have forcefully expropriated land from landlords and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), a situation exacerbated when land claims conflicted with the post-2006 peace agreement due to inadequate documentation (land-links, 2018). Although some lands were returned following the insurgency, numerous cases of unresolved land repatriation persist. The 2015 earthquake further highlighted the issue of land documentation, as many individuals were denied state reconstruction support due to a lack of ownership proofs. (Amnesty, 2017) The Maoist Party's 40-point demand emphasised Land Reform, advocating for land redistribution from Feudal Lords to the landless and tenants, a commitment the government failed to meet, sparking the insurgency.¹ The CPN-Maoists subsequently appropriated land from large

¹ <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/nepal/document/papers/40points.htm>

owners, political adversaries, and the state, redistributing it to impoverished, landless farmers to consolidate support and further their objectives (land-links, 2018).

Moreover, Maoists have occupied lands from absentee landlords or those seized from political rivals, imposing a new system where tillers are compelled to contribute a portion of their harvest to the Maoists rather than the landlords. This shift has led to reduced investment in agriculture by the original landowners, and with Maoists engaged in conflict, support for agricultural activities has dwindled, diminishing productivity and exacerbating the challenges faced by middle and lower-income farmers. In western Nepal, a significant departure of landowners is noted, with many farmers relocating to India or other urban centres. For instance, in Kailali, Maoists have commandeered over 200 hectares primarily from local political figures, adopting a communal farming approach, a trend that is expanding (KC, 2003).

Contrary to their revolutionary agricultural policy, which ostensibly protects farmers from land seizure and endorses a land-to-tiller principle, Maoists have targeted not only affluent landowners but also less prosperous farmers under suspicion of informing or cooperating. This practice predominantly affects farmers owning less than ten bighas, undermining the middle-income agriculturalists who have independently sustained their livelihoods without governmental aid.

D- Exploitation from Forest Resources: Forests have long been a favoured hideaway for Maoists, turning state forests into a contested battleground for Maoists and forest dwellers or collectors. In accordance with the Forest Products Rules of Nepal of 1970, collectors were required to obtain permission from the District Forest Officials (DFOs) and pay royalties. However, this forest tenure shifted with the Maoist uprising in 1976. Maoists forced forest officials to flee, leaving the forest unprotected. Ironically, people expected that Maoist control of the forest would spare collectors from royalty charges. However, the Maoists replaced the state as another exploiter. They patrolled the forest like rangers and issued permits for forest product collection and taxes on collectors. Through extortion, Maoists utilised the collected funds for their own needs. In reality, Maoists controlled the complicated lives of poor forest dwellers. Maoists issued permissions for forest product harvesting, but the need for more officials left forest resources vulnerable to illegal and unsustainable deforestation. As a result, collectors faced double taxation - first to the Maoists for permits and then to state officials when selling the products in nearby markets. (Chaudhury, 2013; pp 8-13)

E- Donations from Diasporas and Other Financial Resources: The Maoists have used two primary sources to fund their insurgency. Their first source of funds was bank robberies, donations, and extortion from people they labelled as “feudal” enemies. Their second source was taxes and seasonal donations collected from their base areas. Besides these two sources, the Maoists were known also to tax natural resources, such as medicinal herbs and timber (International Crisis Group, 2005). Through these various means, the Nepalese Maoists reportedly succeeded in accumulating between US \$64 million and \$124 million by 2003. (Davis et al., 2012)

4- Conclusion:

Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006, the Maoists directly or indirectly held power in Nepal. This period offers a lens through which to assess the fulfilment of the aspirations that were leveraged for mobilisation during the insurgency, thus evaluating the extent of success of what could be termed as Nepal's "Second People's War". Significant structural reforms such as adopting Republicanism, Federalism, and improved political representation of diverse groups emerged post-2006. The constitution, which enshrined these changes during the second constituent assembly, was notably led by the Nepali Congress, highlighting a stark contrast to the failure of the first assembly, dominated by Maoists, to deliver a constitution. (Jha, 2015) The Maoists' propagation of anti-India sentiment, aimed at stirring nationalist fervour for mobilisation, has seen a gradual dilution in their stance towards India post-insurgency, with no significant treaties abrogated that were once criticised. Additionally, their commitment to equitable land redistribution has become ambiguous. Investigations during the truth and reconciliation process revealed instances where local Maoist leaders, who had seized land, resisted its redistribution. High-profile leaders like Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai faced inquiries by the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) regarding land appropriation. (Anonymous, 2023)

Despite advocating for a secular state during the insurgency, a move towards de jure secularism has been observed, albeit with contradictions. Some leaders, including Prachanda, have been seen leveraging religion for political gain, diluting the initial stance on secularism. (Ghimire, 2023) Moreover, upon returning to power post-CPA, Maoist leaders have been criticised for indulging in a luxurious lifestyle and nepotism, deviating from their earlier stance against dynastic politics. This contradiction is exemplified by reports of significant financial offerings to Prachanda's son, Prakash Dahal. (NDTV, 2013) The success of any political group can be determined based on the people's satisfaction on the ground, the continuous declining vote share of Maoists after 1st constituent assembly election and the frustration in people has surged the demand of reinstating the Monarchy back into power. The dwindling electoral support for the Maoists post the first constituent assembly election, coupled with a growing public sentiment favouring the restoration of the monarchy, underscores a perceived gap between the Maoists' promises and their delivery. (BAGCHI, 2023)

Despite their shortcomings, the Maoists played a significant role in bringing societal issues to the political forefront. Their engagement drew attention to pressing problems, even if their commitment to these concerns has been questioned since they assumed power. This dynamic of greed and grievance as motivators in the context of insurgency finds a nuanced expression in Nepal, with political greed playing a pivotal role. This analysis highlights the complexity of assessing the Maoist impact, where both achievements and shortcomings must be considered to understand their legacy within Nepal's political and social fabric.

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