

# Nepal Crisis is the Fiasco of Social Democracy

T J Jacob

The Maoist movement in Nepal is nearly forty years old. In fact it is as old as the Maoist movement in India, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. The first major eruption of the Maoist movement on the ground level in South Asia was in Naxalbari in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal where the revolutionaries rejected the social democracy of the conventional leftists whose politics of collaboration was exposed by the peasantry and youth. Naxalbari ignited the pent up potential of affirmative revolutionary action not only in different parts of India but in Nepal too. The Maoist movement in South Asia, starting with the Naxalbari uprising in 1967 rejected parliamentary democracy and upheld the thesis of semi colonialism and semi-feudalism which, according to them, invalidates the thesis of bourgeois democracy upheld by the mainstream leftist parties. Armed peasant struggle under the leadership of the working class was considered the only option in front of the people for establishing a genuinely democratic socio-political system. In the context of Nepal where a feudal monarchical ruling system was in place the analysis became more complex. The Maoist movement in Nepal, right from its beginning, declared the monarchy with its social base of feudalism as the principal enemy and added Indian expansionism and global imperialism as the other main enemies. It was on this theoretical basis that they started organizing the people there with the declared goal of New Democratic Revolution following the central thesis of Mao, which was successfully tested in China.

Like in India, the Maoist movement in Nepal and the rest of South Asia too underwent several splits and splits within splits over the next ten years after its beginnings in the late 60s. These splits were interpreted by themselves and outside observers as the result of varied reasons ranging from severe state repression and inability to withstand it to incorrect understanding of the character of the state and society which in other words means wrong understanding of the class structure and class struggle. Putting aside the exact reason of these continuing splits, one thing is sure. It is that it is an amalgam of reasons that contributed to the dispersal of this originally monolithic movement. And, certainly, ideological factors did play a major role in precipitating this state of affairs. Assertions like the stage of Indian industrialization in the late 1960s were only as much as what existed in China of the early 1930s (when Mao wrote his famous *Analysis of Classes in the Chinese Countryside*, which subsequently became the programmatic cornerstone of the successful revolution) showed this infantilism at its worst. In general, the same situation[s] applies to the case of Nepal. To understand this phenomenon in a better light it may be necessary to go a little further in history.

Social democracy, as a distinct political stream, originated in West Europe where it still continues to hold sway in many countries with periodical parliamentary ups and downs. The immense loot from the vast colonial world helped to mitigate the contradiction between capital and labor in the imperial

countries and this became the fertile ground for social democracy which is essentially reformist and not revolutionary in nature. Under the ideological regime of social democracy reforms and bargaining for concessions replaced the classical Marxist idea of revolutionary overthrow of capitalist hegemony in a Eurocentric context. Its basic dynamics rested on the possibility of bargaining for crumbs from the dining table of the European bourgeoisie by holding forth the threat of class struggle and this threat succeeded to a large extent only due to the thick flow of colonial loot. Not only that this political stream originated in Europe but it was also exported from there to all over the world, especially to the Third World which was the victim of colonialism and as such was subjected to colossal economic drain and impoverization which facilitated the origin of social democracy which in turn subverted the goal of socialism through class collaboration. This is how social democracy became the effective conduit for protecting the interests of capital in the developed capitalist world, and, thanks to its export, in the newly independent world. Its historic task was defined in the capitalist West and this task was nothing but the continuation of the capitalist socio-political and economic system without bursting asunder due to capital-labor contradiction.

The Communist Party of India right from its beginnings had a guru-disciple relationship with the Communist Party of Britain which during the crucial period of the 1940s was led by R P Dutt and Harry Polit who were great advocates of Joseph Stalin and his brand of phony internationalism. Accordingly, many of the crucial policy decisions of the CPI were decisively influenced by the consuls of the leaders of British Communist Party which were in turn determined by the internationalist conveniences of the leadership of Communist Party of Soviet Union. What this means is that the CPI leadership never cared, or were unable to study the reality of this vast and complex country with very long history and unique social institutions that survived millenniums. Dependency on Eurocentric mechanical formulations was crippling as far as revolution was concerned. One outrageous illustration of this gross inability was the shifting from the slogan of “convert the imperialist war into people’s war” to “defend the fatherland” when USSR entered the fray after Hitler attacked the USSR. The degeneration was so much that those who had the day before shouted that not a single paisa or a single soldier will be given for the war overnight started propagating recruitment and fund collection for the imperialist war. This shameless somersault was being practiced on the people at a time when the patriots were being brutally assaulted and killed by the British police and army. To date no self criticism has been offered by any of the official communist parties in the country on this phase of its history. All that they could do was to hide the concerned party documents from the eyes of the people by denying accessibility to them. So it became a double crime by adding destruction of evidence to the original crime.

It is in this global historical background that the conversion of the communist movement to a social democratic one has to be viewed. Arbitrary withdrawal of the Telengana struggle and preparing the ground for full scale participation in the mainstream political process was the next logical step and to keep up the facade of issue based economic struggles were being organized. The first major “success” of this transformation was registered in Kerala during the 1957

elections when the CPI could win enough seats in the State assembly to form their own government. This government became a test case of the success or failure of social democracy in fulfilling their promises to the common people which included land to the tiller and universal education with equity. These slogans were very much part of the Nehruvian rhetoric of those days but when the state government in Kerala timidly started to frame laws to implement these essentially Nehruvian slogans what happened was the dismissal of the government itself and witch hunting of the CPI cadres and supporters. The failure/utter incapability of social democracy to deliver the goods was brought forth in stark light. The CPI was thrown into chaos the churning up of which resulted in the split between the pro-Congress CPI and CPI (M) posturing as a radical party which enabled it to hold on to the vast majority of the cadres at least for some time.

It was this radical posturing of the CPI (M) that was pricked badly with the outbreak of Naxalbari. Nepal repeated what happened in the Indian communist movement. While in India the revolutionaries went out of the CPI (M) and formed the CPI (ML) the militants in Nepal went out of the social democratic fold and formed the equivalent of CPI (ML) there. As said earlier, in both the countries the ranks of militants underwent splits after splits until, in the case of Nepal, the militants finally consolidated their ranks and formed the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) more than a decade back. By this time many of the erstwhile militants who had rejected social democracy had themselves reverted to social democracy. The new party that emerged consisted of the relatively younger elements and many of them were in India for a long time due to the specific conditions that existed in their home country. In any case, the open border that exists between the two countries and the abysmal conditions of living within Nepal was continuously driving hordes of working age Nepalese men and women to India and a good percentage of Nepalese people came to be living and working in India at very low wages and in the most menial of occupations even according to Indian standards. The Maoists of Nepal always found a ready and easy asylum and support of their own compatriots in India and this writer remembers a time when their entire central committee was living in and around Delhi for years. Naturally they developed fraternal links with their Indian counterparts. These links steadily strengthened over the last more than a decade and came to the level of periodic joint statements, participation in each others key conferences and common memberships in international platforms like Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and South Asian forums of Maoist groups and parties.

More than ten years back, when the NCP (Maoist) declared the beginning of protracted armed struggle against the monarchic feudalism and global imperialism which included Indian expansionism (this was also inspired by the Peruvian *Sendero Luminoso*), they started from scratch. The growth of their guerilla army, to say the least, was spectacular. From being a fledgling group of guerillas they grew up to be a 20,000 strong trained fighting force with weapons mainly wrested from the opposing forces. Moreover, almost two third of the total area of the country of 17 million population went under their effective control. They could establish their own parallel administration, law courts, schools and hospitals. Various new forms of social organizations came into being in the areas

which they “liberated”. They expropriated feudal land holdings and distributed the land among the landless. The slogans of death to monarchy and its social base, promise of effective tribal autonomy and equality of all irrespective of caste, community and class galvanized the poor (Nepal is one of the poorest countries of the whole world where less than 30% of the total population virtually control the whole set up) and the Maoists gained large scale mass support. Nepal is also characterized by acute social inequalities where a minority of caste Hindus totally dominates every organ of social, political and economic power. The rest, the overwhelming majority, mainly composed of Dalits and dozens of tribes, who have nothing to do with Hinduism, are excluded from every sphere. The assertion that Nepal is a Hindu country is nothing but a canard propagated by the royalists in Nepal and the Hindu right wing in India. The Maoists recognized these important characteristics of Nepali society and vowed to rectify them.

More than 17,000 people were killed during this ten year period of war against monarchical forces who were being ably supported by New Delhi and the peace process was started a year back when it became clear that the Maoists are clearly gaining the upper hand and the Royal Nepalese Army stands the chance to be wiped out unless direct foreign armed intervention is invited. This was the situation which necessitated the broad alliance for democracy inclusive of the Maoists, social democrats and the pro-Indian parties like the Nepali Congress. It was an opportunist alliance because the track record of many of the members of the alliance is opportunist to the core. The king usurper who unlike the earlier assassinated king is extremely unpopular, had no other way but to agree to the Maoist demand for elections to a Constituent Assembly whose task will be to formulate a new Constitution for the country. It was at this point that the far more experienced social democrats stepped on to the arena to convince the rebels that peaceful transition is very much possible. The Maoists of Nepal were gullible enough and agreed to surrender of weapons and confining of their guerilla army to barracks and elections were held under UN supervision without understanding that the UN is nothing but a US handmaiden.

The popular support to the Maoists was such that they emerged as the biggest party in the elections. The rest is very recent history and the leader of the Maoist party became the prime minister and key portfolios like Finance also went to them. But the government obviously could not survive unless the coalition is kept in place. It is this highly unstable, flimsy equilibrium that is now in doldrums.

The Maoist charge that things are being decided in New Delhi rather than Katmandu sounds extremely credible. In the first place, the involvement of the leadership of Indian social democrats like the CPI (M) is unmistakable. It was their envoys who brought the Maoists to the negotiating table and made them agree to the surrender of weapons and the quarantining of the guerilla army. Alliance with the Nepali social democrats was the agenda and it was this agenda that was implemented. Under the peace agreement the Constituent Assembly will decide what form of republican government will be set up in the country and a moratorium on the size of the Royal Nepalese Army was agreed upon. After the elections the new government immediately initiated the process of writing the Constitution and monarchy was stripped of all formal powers though the royal family was allowed to retain its immense ill gotten wealth. But very soon

roadblocks emerged on the question of the structure and role of the Army. The name was changed to Nepalese Army omitting the word Royal. But, historically the Army which is about 75,000 in strength is die-hard royalist in nature and remained very much loyal to the monarchy. Who controls whom, i.e., whether the royalty controls the army or the army controls the royalty, is doubtful. Possibly it is both ways and operates in a mutually advantageous manner. It is important to note that the army top brass brazenly defied the elected government before the writing of the Constitution could be completed. In an orchestrated manner the Nepali social democrats also ditched the democratically elected government thereby declaring themselves in favor of the royalist army. All these had the full support of the governments in Delhi and the US. The US had made it repeatedly clear on more than one occasion that they will never endorse a Maoist dominated government in Nepal, which is an extremely strategic piece of land for them because it is a wedge between the two most important countries of Asia. The Indian ruling class is naturally concerned because its economic interests which got well entrenched during the long period of monarchy may not continue on the same track under the Maoist dispensation. Remember that some of the main promises of the Maoists to the people of Nepal relate to the unequal relations between India and Nepal and the exploitation of the vast hydel wealth of Nepal in Indian interests and Indian expansionism had always remained one of the main planks of their political programme.

There is little doubt that it was in a conspiratorial manner that the Maoists were eased out of power in Nepal. And in this conspiracy the social democrats in India and Nepal played a key role with the blessings of the government of India. That is why the social democrats who surrendered to the high-handedness of the royalist army are in power now, at least nominally. How far the Constitution writing and acceptance will successfully proceed is anybody's guess. For all practical purposes Nepal is objectively back to the civil war situation, at least potentially. The Maoists are saying as much. Whatever the future is holding forth for the Nepalese people and the country one thing is very clear. The Maoist attempts to forge a peaceful transition from monarchy to republic has failed though they never tried to force any seriously radical measures after coming to power. In fact, they were very cautious not to do it. They had limited their objective to total abolition of monarchy. They were even ready to hand back the confiscated feudal properties. There is an uncanny similarity to the situation of Kerala fifty years back. There also the EMS government was only cautiously trying to implement the double dealing promises of the Nehru government. But still it was not allowed to survive. Now it is possible for the social democratic governments in Kerala or Bengal to survive only because the social democrats, over a period of time, have graduated to becoming efficient protectors and intrinsic parts of the ruling classes. In the case of Nepal the popular compulsions and deeply rooted anti-monarchical and anti-Indian feelings would certainly have put serious obstacles on the path of integration of the Maoists into the ranks of the social democratic political stream. In this context it is worthwhile to note that there were at least five splits in the Maoist party after the peace process started. Now, if further erosion of the cadres is to be prevented it may become necessary for the Maoist party to take up arms again. They are in a trap because if they do

not continue the struggle they will be politically decimated. And if they do, militarily, it may turn out to be a highly unequal fight because they quite possibly have blunted their fighting edge due to the veering towards social democratic illusions. On all counts, it is an unenviable situation for the Maoists of Nepal.

Contrary to all agreements the Nepalese army has been engaged all these months on a hectic expansion drive and the diehard royalist senior officers have all been given extensions. What it means is that the army has been hectically preparing for a showdown and the ouster of the Prachanda government has to be seen as the first step of this anticipated showdown. It is a tragedy, but a tragedy brought about by a negligent understanding of the ground reality and refusal to read blatant political manipulations for what they actually are. India was always and remains the main arms supplier to the Nepalese army and with the current ongoing expansion of the Nepalese army these supplies can only follow suit. Moreover, it is very much possible that now the supplies can assume more specialized nature taking into account the possible future contingencies of desperate guerilla war. □□□