

Book Review

Proverbial Blind Men's Portrayal of an Elephant

-Laldhoj

1. **The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives** edited by Arjun Karki and David Seddon; Adroit Publishers, Delhi, 2003; pages XXIV +494, IRs. 600 (hardbound).
2. **Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal** edited by Deepak Thapa; Martin Chautari, Kathmandu, 2003; pages XX+395, NRs. 475.
3. **A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003** by Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati; The Printhouse, Kathmandu, 2003; pagesXV+234, price not stated.
4. **Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: The Challenge and the Response** by S.D. Muni; Rupa & Co. in association with Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, 2003; pages VIII+134, IRs.195.
5. **Insurgency in Nepal** by Thomas A. Marks; Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, December 2003; pages 46 (web. monograph).

The year 2003 marked a watershed in the publication of numerous books and research papers on the revolutionary movement in Nepal, both within the country and outside. This is definitely a sign of universal acknowledgement of the revolutionary movement as a serious political force by both friends and foes alike. The books and publications under review, however, can be taken as important samples representing the viewpoints of major power centers in Nepal and abroad, particularly India and the USA.

Despite their varying strategic and political interests, all the publications seem to have one thing in common: their empiricist method of enquiry and presentation. As a result, they miss the 'forest' and harp about individual 'trees' in their own narrow perspectives. This is not surprising given their bourgeois, or at the most revisionist or neo-Marxist, outlooks. Consequently most of the time their assessment of the epoch-making revolutionary movement in Nepal is a crude reminder of the proverbial blind men's description of an elephant. There are factual errors galore on crucial historical events, personalities and policy decisions; some of which may be condoned, however, for lack of access to authentic sources in an underground revolutionary movement. This has naturally led to lack of objectivity in the total assessment of the movement. How such off the mark assessment would help the concerned policy makers, only the sponsoring agencies should know.

Nevertheless, some authors seem to have made rigorous efforts to refer to official documents and authentic statements and works of responsible leaders of the movement, which have distinguished their works from the ordinary. Also, inclusion of important documents of the Party and statements/interviews of the senior leaders in some of the collections has added to the merit of the books. Perhaps the two recently published books, viz. **Some Important Documents of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (2004)**, and, **Problems and Prospects of Revolution**

on Nepal [A Collection of Articles by Com. Prachanda and Other Leaders of the CPN (Maoist)] (2004), if they had been made available in English a bit earlier, could have further aided these publications to be more objective.

The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives, edited by Karki and Seddon, is a collection of documents, articles and interviews from the revolutionary camp, as well as from other 'left' and revisionist groups. Relatively the book provides a fairly objective account of the movement, except for some nakedly motivated vituperation from such known opportunists like Mohan Bikram Singh and Pradip Nepal. The introductory piece by the editors is quite objective, except for some factual errors and limitations of their own social democratic outlooks. One of the factual errors, or willful distortion (?), repeated in this book as well is the claim that the then United People's Front, Nepal (UPFN) led by Com. Baburam Bhattarai was forced to boycott the parliamentary elections in 1994 because of the withdrawal of recognition to the Front by the Election Commission. But the well-known truth is that the UPFN had already decided to boycott the elections much before the conspiratorial decision of the Election Commission.

Among the other 'left' contributors to the volume, whereas Govind Neupane makes serious efforts to make a class analysis of the rebellion, Mohan Bikram Singh, Pradip Nepal and Sujata Sakya thoroughly expose their own Right revisionist bias against the revolutionary movement through lowly slanders and wild canards. Mohan Bikram Singh, father of dogmato-revisionism in Nepal, surpasses them all in pouring venom against the revolutionary movement with his ridiculous accusation that the movement is pro-king. When the events of last two and a half years have totally vindicated the then assessment of the CPN (Maoist) on the palace massacre that it was a part of grand national and international conspiracy against the revolutionary movement, Mohan Bikram shamelessly parrots the motivated vituperation against the Party and its leaders. It is, therefore, no surprise that even after he is totally marginalized from the revolutionary politics the reactionary media very conveniently utilizes Mohan Bikram to attack and slander the revolutionary movement.

Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal, edited by Deepak Thapa, also provides a collection of articles sub-grouped into 'Premonitions', 'Perspective of the People's War', 'The Maoists View'; 'The Emergency and After', 'Profiles' and 'Appendix'. The articles, mostly from a non-left perspective, lack rigor and analytical coherence, except perhaps those by A. Andrew Nickson & Kanak Mani Dixit, and of course within their own ideological limitations. The inclusion of a fictitious piece by some imaginary "Maoist Activist" in 'The Maoist View' section has definitely reduced the credibility of the book. Moreover, malicious propaganda such as—"The one factor that is uncontested is that India is the staging ground for the Maoists of Nepal" (p.252)-that too from the pen of editor Deepak Thapa himself, do seriously challenge the objectivity of the entire exercise.

A Kingdom Under Siege seems to be a mere extension of **Understandings...**, though this one is a single composite project by Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati. The presentation is too descriptive and lacks analytical depth. However, some poignant scenes like that of 11-year old Dilli Biswakarma feeding his two siblings, whose both parents were killed by the police, deeply touch the sensibilities of any reader. This volume, too, contains a lot of distortions of historical facts. For instance, it is claimed that the then rebel 'Masal' group had broken away

with Mohan Bikram in 1991 on the issue of participation in or boycott of the parliamentary elections. But any number of documentary evidences and bare historical truths prove that the main dispute was on the question of whether or not to shift the focus to rural peasant struggle and have unity or not with other revolutionary forces. The evidences of past one decade are there for all to see that Mohan Bikram has further sunk into parliamentary cretinism and has been marginalized as an inconsequential head of a small splinter group, whereas the leaders of rebel ‘Masal’ have blossomed into responsible leaders of the historic PW. The utilization of parliamentary elections in 1991 by the then UPFN was a correct tactical move governed by the objective conditions prevailing at that time, which has been vindicated by the later events.

Maoist Insurgency in Nepal by S. D. Muni, who is a known hand on Nepal and is believed to enjoy some access with the South Bock, provides a fairly accurate account of the events, except for some factual errors, and is surprisingly not very biased against the revolutionary movement. Originally prepared as a research paper for Observer Research Foundation (Delhi) the book should provide useful fodder for policy makers in India who seem to be pulling in different directions at the same time, and awaken the Hindutwa forces who have recently crowned fratricidal and regicidal Gyanendra as ‘the emperor of one billion Hindus of the world’. More notable is Muni’s this plainspeak:

“India’s image in Nepal today is that it is an ally and supporter of monarchy. India needs to bring the Maoists and the political parties, together, which, in the process will also moderate the Maoists’ extremist stance and use of violent methods. It is this combination of the main-stream political parties and the Maoists which can contain monarchy’s powers, help India emerge as a people-friendly neighbour and reduce the excessive influence and strategic presence of the Western powers”. (pp. 66-67)

Only time will tell whether it will have any impact in the corridors of power in Delhi.

It is, however, quite unbelievable that a research scholar of Muni’s caliber should repeat such unsubstantiated claims about the so-called ‘Compact Revolutionary Zone ‘(CRZ) supposedly planned by the CCOMPOSA to link Nepal with Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. This is just a figment of imagination by some journalists (or intelligence agencies?), who seem to have floated the idea to instigate the Indian state for a military intervention in Nepal. A similar insinuation was made by Deepak Thapa in his **Himal South Asia** (April, 2002) article (reproduced in **Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal**), which has since then spread like wild fire in the pro-establishment publications of Nepal and India. The real truth is that CCOMPOSA is a mere ideological-political platform of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia and has never formulated any plan or resolution on the so-called ‘CRZ’.

And lastly, **Insurgency in Nepal** by Thomas A. Marks, a former US government officer, well-known strategic expert and author of **Maoist Insurgency since Vietnam** (London, 1996), provides a glimpse of the current thinking of US ruling class on Nepal. Marks is unabashedly unapologetic about his militarist thinking and his public support to the hated monarchy and its mercenary Royal Army. On his latest visit to Nepal in January 2004 he is reported to have openly advocated a military solution to the so-called ‘Maoist problem’ as against the near unanimous view of other foreign powers for a ‘political solution’. It is, therefore, not at all

surprising that he advocates for more military aid to the royal regime at the end of his monograph thus:

“Lest Nepal prove similar [i.e. Colombia and southern Philippines], it is imperative that Washington proceed with an adroit mixture of reasoned advice and adequate material aid and training. Given the nature of the foe, the existing U.S. military role seems destined to increase in prominence.” (pp. 31-32).

One is just tempted to remind the learned author that further military involvement of the US in Nepal may be ‘destined’ to repeat the ignominy of Vietnam in the 21st century.

While going to press a new book, **MAOISTS IN THE LAND OF BUDDHA: An Analytical Study of the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal** by Prakash A. Raj; Published by Nirala Publications, New Delhi, 2004; pages-212; Price: Indian Rs. 395, has been received, which does not seem to be much different from the books just reviewed. •

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