

**PARADISE LOST OR REPUBLIC FOUND?
MAOIST INSURGENCY IN NEPALESE LITERATURE**

**A dissertation submitted to the
Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of**

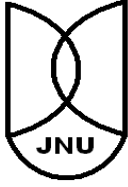
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled “**Paradise Lost or Republic Found? Maoist Insurgency in Nepalese Literature**” submitted by **Dinesh Kafle**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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This Dissertation titled “**Paradise Lost or Republic Found? Maoist Insurgency in Nepalese Literature**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Nepalese Insurgency Literature (NIL)

The ten-year Maoist insurgency in Nepal (1996-2006) resulted in the creation of a distinct category of literature, which can be called Nepalese Insurgency Literature (NIL). NIL is a body of literature constituted of writings which, keeping in view their differing representations of the insurgency, can be considered as belonging to three different camps, namely, the *Anti-insurgent Camp*, which considers the insurgency as an undesirable political unrest created by those without a solid ideological foundation and political goal; the *Pro-civilian Camp* which represents the insurgency as harmful to people as it takes the blood of the very citizens whom it claims to be serving; and the *Pro-insurgent Camp* which considers the insurgency as necessary for revolution and transformation of the state. NIL includes all genres of literature such as fiction, poetry, theatre, and memoir, among others. Of these genres, fiction is the most prominent, and is the subject of this research project. These camps are represented by the novels that include Pra-deep Nepal's *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir* (2057[2000])¹, Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Kyafe*² (2062[2005]) and Yug Pathak's *Urgenko Ghoda* (2066[2010]), represent the exemplifying the general tendency in which the insurgency has been depicted in literary expressions. This research project is a critical analysis literary effect of the insurgency, and the above-mentioned three novels serve as primary texts for the study.

¹ Henceforth, the publication dates of the Nepali texts will be mentioned according to the Vikram Sambat calendar, which is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar.

² A note on transliteration: *Palpasa Kyafe* refers to the Nepali version of the novel, whereas *Papasa Café* refers to the English translation of the novel.

While I have argued that the NIL can be divided into three different camps—the *Anti-insurgent Camp*, the *Pro-civilian Camp* and the *Pro-insurgent Camp*—it should be noted that it is not possible to create absolute categories of such writings. The three groups often overlap and several texts are marked by internal contradictions; this classification is broad and useful in understanding a general drift of the NIL based on the interpretation of the specific orientation of the texts vis-à-vis the insurgency. For the purpose of this research, a classification of the different novels becomes necessary to understand the tendencies seen in such writings. One way of interpreting such tendencies is to see how they have represented the insurgency-borne socio-political scenario in the country that has for long been considered a ‘paradise’. Did the insurgency destroy the peace and calm of the paradise that was Nepal? Or, did it in turn help transform the country into a better paradise by giving voices to the citizens who were previously marginalized and discriminated under the paraphernalia of the ‘paradise’? The answers are varied, and that is what makes the NIL a complex discourse of contradictory perspectives.

With these caveats in mind we can examine the three camps more closely. The *Anti-insurgent Camp* is to be understood as the camp of writings that regard the Maoists and their insurgency as essentially a violent activity without a solid political ideological foundation. This camp consists of writers who either subscribe to the view of the state machinery or a political party other than the Maoists, or are vehement critics of the Maoists’ use of violence. Thus their writings mostly represent the violence perpetrated by the Maoists. This camp is led by writers like Pradeep Nepal and Mahesh Bikram Shah³. The former is a leftist intel-

³ Shah is a short story writer, and has published many collections of short stories, notably *Sipahiki Swasni*, *Chhapamarko Chhoro* and *Kathmanduma Comrade*. Although he has written extensively on the insurgency, his writings will not be discussed in detail in this study, because they are mostly short stories, which do not fit within the scope of this study.

lectual and political leader associated with of CPN (UML), a moderate leftist party, and the latter is a Nepal Police officer. They basically represent the atrocities of the Maoists in the name of a “people’s war”, without necessarily talking about the atrocities in the name of counter-insurgency and maintaining peace. Chaitanya has criticized the writings of such camp as those which paint a wrong image of the ‘people’s war’ (2060:121). The writings of this camp can be interpreted as lamenting the loss of a peaceful paradise. This camp consists of fewer writers than the others. In this research, Pradeep Nepal’s novel *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir* represents the *Anti-insurgent Camp* of writing, which I will explain a bit later.

The second or *Pro-civilian Camp* consists of writings that represent the insurgency through the civilian perspective, condemning the way in which the insurgency caused the death and victimization of ordinary citizens. These writings are based on the idea that the right to life is a person’s essential human right, and that should not be severed on the basis of any ideology. Prominent among such writers are Narayan Wagle, Narayan Dhakal, Govindaraj Bhattarai and Khagendra Sangraula. In this research, Narayan Wagle’s novel *Palpasa Kyafe* represents the *Pro-civilian Camp* of writing because it values human life and individual’s security over an armed revolution. In *Palpasa Kyafe*, for instance, the Nepali village, the epitome of paradise, is represented as engulfed in a war because of certain reasons like underdevelopment. The novel advocates that, rather than a violent insurgency, the paradise could be retained by putting individual efforts on reconstructing the village through economic development.

The third or *Pro-insurgent Camp* consists of writings that subscribe to the Maoist ideology and definition of a “revolution”. This camp is led by writers such as Ghanashyam Dhakal, Rishiraj Baral, and Yug Pathak. Such writings provide essential knowledge about the inner workings of the insurgency and the Maoist

party. Yug Pathak's novel *Urgenka Ghoda* is a representative novel of this camp.⁴ The novel advocates the Maoist worldview of establishing a republican state through an armed insurgency to ensure that all ethnic communities have autonomy and self-rule over their native territory, equal distribution of economic resources without political dominance or the cultural hegemony of certain group of people. This camp has grown into prominence especially after the beginning of the peace process when the changed political condition made it possible to publish and distribute the writings that valorize the insurgency. A large number of new writers have emerged in this camp, writing about their own experiences of the insurgency. Their writings are mostly amateurish, lacking in literary merit and artistic rigor. They mostly have poor plot structure and little command over the language. Nevertheless, they have challenged the canon of Nepalese literature.

The categories that have been defined in this study are by no means unprecedented. Similar categorizations have been done by different critics. Khagendra Sangraula (2011) has argued that there are three different approaches of writing on the insurgency. The first approach, according to Sangraula, is that of writing from the no-man's land of history. In this approach, the writer deals with the insurgency by standing at a distance, either supporting it or opposing it summarily. The second approach is the touristic approach. Explaining what he means by such an approach, he says that if the insurgency were an exotic valley, the writer who is writing about the valley is a tourist watching it from atop a mountain. That the writer with touristic approach does not take pains to go into the valley itself and examine it closely, this kind of writing tends to give a superficial view of the insurgency that does not delve into its intricacies. The third approach that Sangraula mentions is that of writing about the insurgency by entering into the wave

⁴ Although the novel does not use the term "Maoist" particularly, I regard it as a novel on the Maoist insurgency, which I will explain in detail later in this chapter.

of history. Such novels are not written by observing the conflict from atop a hill, nor are they written standing on history's no-man's-land. They are written by directly entering in the wave of the history itself" (ibid). He argues that the literary works written in the latter approach relatively objective (ibid). But there are slight distinctions in the way such categories are formed. For instance, Sangraula's "no man's land" and "tourist-view-point" are metaphorical expressions. Sangraula has used such metaphors to measure the involvement of the author with the subject of writing. This is different from the political position that this study is taking. I am looking at representations of the insurgency which may be based on political ideology. However, I am not entirely interested only in that, but also in understanding how the insurgency was theorized and depicted by the writers. There are yet other critics who have categorized the insurgency literature in terms of political positions, but most of these were offered as passing comments without substantial explanation of the categories they have formed. Nabin Bibhas (2065) divided the writings into three categories: writings opposing the insurgency; opposing both the insurgency and the state machinery; and supporting the insurgency. Likewise, Laxmanprasad Gautam (2063:4) categorized the writings as those supporting the insurgency; those opposing the insurgency; and those expressing the fear and torture faced by the common citizens. At the other end of the critical spectrum is Rishiraj Baral (2066) who categorizes such writings strictly in terms of whether they contribute to the "revolution" or not. He has categorized those writings as anti-revolutionary; revisionist; and revolutionary.

As I mentioned earlier, such categories are not watertight compartments, but explanatory devices, formed for the sake of methodological convenience of studying the NIL by dividing it into thematic areas. No wonder, there are grey areas between the camps. For instance, if the novels like *Samargatha* and *Rato Akash* are categorized as absolutely Maoist novels, then *Urgenko Ghoda* can as

well fit into the grey area between the *Pro-civilian Camp* and the *Pro-insurgent Camp* because it represents the issues voiced by not only the Maoists but also the different ethnic and linguistic groups who are not associated with the Maoists or the insurgency. Moreover, the latter novel does not actually use the term “Maoist” while referring to insurgency. In a recent seminar in Kathmandu, the critic Michael Hutt pointed out to me that the novel can very well *not* be considered a text about the Maoist insurgency at all because it does not use the term “Maoist” anywhere in the narrative. This makes the whole categorization of the novel a complex issue, but given the context or writing and publication of the novel, as well as the issues that the novel deals with, I consider the novel not only as a novel written on the insurgency but *Maoist* in its ideology as well. Similarly, *Palpasa Kyafe* is a *Pro-civilian* novel but it is also very anti-insurgency in its outlook. The perspective that it gives is that of a humanist, an artist. *Akash Gangako Tiraitir* also gives a humanist and artist perspective, so can fit in the *Anti-insurgency Camp* as well as in the grey area between the *Pro-civilian* and the *Anti-insurgency* camps. Yet, each category cannot be collapsed into another because each text usually represents the predominant trait. Hence, the categorization is done by considering the degree of representation of the insurgency in the texts. *Pro-civilian Camp* is very complex and ambiguous category which may, to an extent, be pro-insurgency and to an extent be anti-insurgency. Actually, many people in Nepal are in between. They are pro-insurgency to the extent that it promises them equality and democracy, that the previous government was not representing the people, that it was not democratic and that it was very elitist. They are anti-insurgency to the extent that there was peace earlier, which has been disturbed by the insurgency and the civil rights violated. The *Pro-civilian Camp*, thus, shows the complexity of the middle position of the Nepalis who deplore the killing of the innocents and the loss of life and property. To sum up what I have argued so far, the NIL is a cate-

gory of writing that came into existence as a literary documentation of the insurgency, representing it through various perspectives which are ideological as well as purely humanist.

Historical background

To understand the genesis of NIL, we have to go in to the historical and political background of the insurgency. The roots of the insurgency are in the political crisis of democracy in Nepal. This crisis was compounded by the uneasy relationship between the monarchy and the democratic forces on the one hand, and the continuing economic, social and regional inequalities of Nepal. To trace the origins of this, let us go back to the 1960's at a time of projected peace. In the 1960's an angry generation in the West, especially the United States, that was frustrated with the political climate of the time and the American war on Vietnam, and wanted to defy established social norms of the West. It turned to the East to find an alternative perspective on life and society. It discovered the road through Turkey, Iran, Afganistan, Pakistan and India, and finally halted in Nepal. The road they paved was called 'the hippie trail—the road to paradise'⁵. Kathmandu was then an exotic place, where the locals served them local beer for free and gave them a place to stay; marijuana was sold at a government store. The people of Kathmandu, and of other parts of the country, were friendly and hospitable and the nature pristine. They called Nepal a "paradise on earth". The memories of the 1960's hippie days are still alive here and there in Kathmandu, for instance on the commercial signboards of lodges and bakeries that read "Paradise Lodge: Bed and Breakfast" and "Paradise Bakery"⁶. These are just stereotypes given by certain individuals,

⁵ <http://www.ponty.dk/hippietr.htm>. Accessed on 23 July 2012.

⁶ Pico Iyer has written of such a stereotype in his book *Video Night in Kathmandu*(1988) thus: Within minutes of landing in Kathmandu, I found myself in Eden. The Hotel Eden, that is, not to

groups or travel books, but they nevertheless suggest how the country was viewed not so long ago. But what happened to that “paradise on earth”? Is it still considered so? The question that this study intends to raise is more serious as to what has happened to the country in the recent past on the political and social level? Today, anyone having knowledge about Nepal underwent would hesitate to call Nepal as paradise in the aftermath of the insurgency. So, something fundamental has changed, though it is not entirely true that the pre-insurgency period was any better. Though the country has been projected as peaceful, it has remained under the clutches of the feudal structure, against which there have been sustained struggles at different times. There had been long political tussle between the Ranas and the kings, the Ranas and the people, and the monarchy and the political parties. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal was not a new phenomenon but a part of such a series of struggles and Left movements that had been going on in Nepal in the final years of the Rana regime through Panchayat era. When on 8 April 1990 the United Leftist Front and the Nepali Congress called off their months-long protest after King Birendra’s assurance to open doors of multi-party democracy, the United People’s Front Nepal (UPFN), led by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, continued with its protest. The Movement freed the country from the clutches of the autocratic monarchy, bringing the latter into constitutional framework. For UPFN, the people’s movement was not over yet—it had the target of making Nepal a republic (Dahal 2001:70). But the ousting of the king and establishment of a republic was not even a distant dream for the NC and the ULF who, under the prime-ministership of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, were fast to begin the process of writing a new democratic constitution (Dahal 2001:79). It had the provisions, among other things, of constitutional monarchy, bicameral legislature, independent judiciary,

be confused with the Paradise Restaurant around the corner or the Hotel Shangri-La. The Eden was on the intersection of Freak Street and the Dharmapath, which was, I thought, the perfect location: at the intersection of hippiedom and Hinduism, where Haight Ashbury meets the Himalayas.

guarantee of the fundamental rights of the people and vesting of sovereignty to the people (ibid). When on November 9, 1990, King Birendra promulgated it, the NC endorsed it as a democratic constitution while the CPN (UML) welcomed it with a critical support. Feeling betrayed by the major political parties halfway through republicanism, the two factions of the CPN Mashal [one led by Prachanda and another by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai] showed their strong dissatisfaction with it (ibid 83). The new political condition was indeed a huge leap forward. It heralded a new beginning in democratization of the state's institutions. The benefits of democracy were seen in an unprecedented freedom of press, political activities and opening of organizations and unions, as citizens were allowed to publish freely and form unions and parties. Soon after, however, voices of disenchantment started popping up, with people belonging to different identity groups complaining that their voices were not represented in the constitution. The complex hierarchy of caste, ethnicity language and religion still existed in the deep structures of the nation, which weakened the foundation of democracy. Panchayati project of "nation-building" continued to exist, as Nepal was constitutionally defined as a Hindu monarchical State with Nepali as its official language. Commenting on the situation of the state and society in Nepal during 1990, anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista wrote: "Currently, in Nepal, it is the educated Hindu high caste who have most of the opportunities, and their natural tendency, consciously or unconsciously, is to protect these privileges. The majority of people need a democracy in which their interests are constantly considered and expanded, while the stratified hierarchy of the caste system is abolished completely" (1991: 113).

Having understood the complexity of the Nepalese society, and the political path the country was taking after the establishment of democracy in 1990, the CPN(UC) led by Prachanda, renaming itself CPN(Maoist) decided to begin an armed insurgency during its Third Plenum in 1995 (Thapa and Sijapati 2003; La-

woti and Pahari 2010), and on 4 February 1996, the UPFN led by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai submitted to the then Deuba government a list of 40 demands on nationalism, people's democracy and livelihood with an ultimatum to initiate insurgency if they were not met, and finally began it on 13 February 1996 by attacking police posts in three districts of Nepal (Lawoti and Pahari 2010). The Deuba government retaliated, bringing into force counter-insurgency attacks like Operation Romeo and Kilo Sera. The insurgency kept growing unhindered, and from the remote hill districts, it soon spread to the urban areas, and within few years, engulfed the entire country in a violent conflict. It escalated after 2001 when the Deuba government, which was again in power, declared an emergency and mobilized the army. After two failed dialogues with the Deuba government and the Lokendra Bahadur Chand government in 2002 and 2003 respectively, the Maoists finally came to an understanding with a political alliance of seven parliamentary parties in late 2005.⁷ In April 2006, a 19-day movement forced the king to backtrack from his stand and reinstate the Parliament. The insurgency formally ended in late 2006 when the Maoist signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the government formed of the seven parties. During the ten years of the insurgency, almost 15000 people were killed (6000 by Maoists and 9000 by the government) and an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 people were internally displaced as a result of the insurgency.⁸

Right since the beginning of the insurgency, different speculations and theories have been floated regarding the genesis of the insurgency. Avidit Acharya has argued that there have been two approaches to understanding the genesis of

⁷ On 1st February 2005, the then king Gyanendra Shah dissolved the Parliament, taking over as executive of the state. The political parties, unable to reestablish the Parliament even after a prolonged agitation, finally came to an understanding with the Maoist at an undisclosed place in Delhi. They signed a 12-Point Understanding which basically focused on a joint movement in Kathmandu to oust the king.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_Civil_War

the insurgency. He writes, “In one line of research, studies such as Mursheed and Gates (2005) and Bohara, Michell and Nepal (2006) have used cross-sectional regression techniques to predict the effect of poverty, inequality, rough terrain, and ethno-linguistic divisions on the intensity of political violence. In the other approach, historical analyses have highlighted the incentives of rebel leaders and the failed policies of the Nepali government to suggest that politics has played the primary role. Typical studies of this kind include Thapa (2002, 2003) and Whelpton (2005). Lawoti has blamed the Nepal’s post- 1990 electoral system for pushing the Maoists to a violent insurgency. He writes:

The winner- take-all majoritarian democracy Nepal adopted in 1990 alienated ideological and cultural minorities through denial of political space in governance. It was instrumental in pushing the party which had participated in the 1991 general and 1992 local elections, to an armed insurgency (2010: 19).

Mishra (2007) has provided a more comprehensive list of five major factors that led to the insurgency: the historical conditions of the birth and rise of Maoism within the context of the international and national communist movements; the world-historical political military experience of the communist movement; the “structural” causes of absolute poverty, underemployment, inter-household and regional economic inequality, caste-gender-ethnic-region based oppression; the 1990 constitution; and the rise of CPN (Maoist) vis-à-vis the policies of the Indian government (99-100). The causes of the insurgency, thus, seem so varied and so many, as is evident in the opinions of the academics mentioned above. It is also important to mention here that, apart from the rampant change caused by the Maoist insurgency, the Nepali society itself is also undergoing a massive internal change, where we see curious paradox. On one hand a violent and visible insurrection ravaged the country and recently with the insurgent force entering the mainstream politics and peace process. And on the other, we find a very silent but no less radical revolution going on—from Hindu to multi-cultural, from upper class elitist to popular. The incredibly hierarchical Nepali society is changing ra-

pidly. A fast-paced process of democratization is taking place, where several languages, cultures and ethnicities that were on the brink of the Nepali society and politics have begun to be drawn to the mainstream. It is in the context of such historical background and the contemporary political transition as direct and indirect result of the insurgency that the study of the NIL becomes pertinent.

Overview

The three novels are chosen not only because of the different perspectives they provide on the insurgency, but also because of the temporal significance, as they were published intervals of almost five years each, and depict the way in which the understanding about the Maoist insurgency evolved and the issues related to it were depicted in the novels. Moreover, one text from each category is selected so that such a selection ensures a representation of the different dimensions of the NIL. *Akash Gangako Tiraitir* is regarded as the first novel written on the Nepalese Maoist Insurgency. *Palpasa Kyafe*, published during the final years of the Maoist insurgency, is the most successful contemporary novel which sold over 50,000 copies. *Urgenko Ghoda*, published after the end of the insurgency, is also a highly acclaimed novel and presents not only the Maoist worldview but also the voices of the ethnic communities that have been vocalized throughout the 1990's and more emphatically after April 2006. So these novels are chosen as representative texts of the different camps of the NIL as well as for this research study, because of their historical/temporal value and their ideological orientation. This study looks only into the texts originally published in the Nepali language; although a few novels have appeared in English which deal with the issue of insurgency, for instance Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*, Sheeba Shah's *Facing my Phantoms* and Tom McCaughey's *Maoist in the House*, they have either not dealt with

the issue substantially or are aesthetically unappealing. Hence, all the three texts that are used in this study were originally written in Nepali. All the dialogues and paragraphs extracted and quoted from the primary texts, and those from other critical materials available in Nepali which are referenced in the Roman script, are my own translations, except for those from *Palpasa Kyafe*, whose translated version (*Palpasa Café*, Tr. Bikash Sangraula, Random House, 2008) I have made use of.

Though the NIL is predominantly a body of literature consisting of writings produced in the context of a certain political-historical rupture, and therefore calls for a sustained reference to different ideologies associated with the rupture, a comprehensive study of the NIL should not be limited to construing only the ideological positions of the texts. The best literary text should also be the best work of art. So, what kind of artistic contribution do the texts give to not only the NIL but the entire Nepalese literature? What kind of aesthetics does each of the categories of the NIL provide? These questions become equally pertinent to ask especially because the NIL is growing as a significant category of writing in a way of beginning a new literary movement within the Nepalese literature. The aesthetic and artistic tendencies of the NIL are therefore worth considering while evaluating their contribution to the Nepalese literary history. However, questions like “what is the truth about the insurgency?” and “does the NIL really tell us something significant about the insurgency and its effects on the Nepalese society?” are equally pertinent to ask while doing this kind of research. Answers to such questions are available in the novels used as primary texts in this study—sometimes they are found overwhelming, and at other times, such answers are to be found in the subtleties of the meanings they generate. These novels contain man-woman relationships as ways of trying to explore the different ideologies and effects of the insurgency. The inevitable circumstance created by the insurgency takes a toll in the

life of the characters who are either separated from their loved ones or are even betrayed by them. In *Akash Gangako Tiraitir*, Kabita uses love as a trap to lure and abduct Sanjay who is otherwise almost a recluse. In *Palpasa Kyafe*, Drishya and Palpasa express their love for each other, which remains unexpressed throughout the entire narrative, only towards the end only to depart. *Urgenko Ghoda* depicts an unusual love affair between Mhendo, the Maoist commander and Vidroha, a government soldier who deserts the service to join the Maoists. The romantic affair between the two characters coming from the “enemy camps” does not only represent a unique affair, but it also represents the victory of love over political ideologies. These novels do not only focus on the political repercussions but also explore human relationships between individual characters as inevitable overarching consequences of the insurgency. Therefore, it entails an exploration of both the aesthetic and the ideological tendencies of the NIL.

This study is conducted by using an interdisciplinary research method, balancing between the theoretical rigor of literary criticism and the other theories of political and social sciences. As this research is produced to be submitted to the department of literature, its primary objective has been to produce an original work of literary criticism. But a research of this kind is impossible to conduct without continuous reference to the political context in which the literary texts are produced. So this research entails references to texts that belong to subjects like political science, history and sociology. The critical analysis of the primary literary texts, thus, has been done by using the qualitative method. So, while the primary texts are literary, I hope that the application of interdisciplinary analytical method in the critical analysis of the texts makes this research a compelling literary-historical account of the tumultuous insurgency years of Nepal. Given the inter-disciplinary approach at analysis of the texts, it draws references from various secondary sources related to other disciplines such as sociology and politics as

well as news reports published in various media sources. Mahendra Lawoti's *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-first Century* (Routledge, 2010); Deepak Thapa's *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal* (Martin Chautari, 2003); and Chaitanya Mishra's *Essays on the Sociology of Nepal* (Fine-Print, 2007) have proved to be indispensable secondary sources for reference on the political and sociological dimensions of the insurgency. There is a severe lack of scholarly publishing in Nepalese literary and academic fraternity; secondary sources for this research are very limited. Any researcher conducting this kind of research is faced with a scarcity of secondary literary critical materials, and I am no exception. At most, book reviews of the particular texts are available, apart from unpublished theses and dissertations. However, I have made ample use of Chaitanya's *Marksvadi Kaladrishiti ra Sameeksha* (Airavati, 2054) and Rishiraj Baral's *Satta ra Sanskriti Maovadi Janayuddha ra Sanskritik Andolan* (Oxford International, 2066) as secondary sources to analyze the Marxist-Maoist literary critical paradigm.

This study is divided into five chapters, consisting of an introduction, three stand-alone chapters and a conclusion. Chapter I of this study, titled "Nepalese Insurgency Literature" discusses the creation of a category of writing called Nepalese Insurgency Literature and defines the three distinct camps of writing that constitute the NIL. Chapter II, titled "Romancing Death: Insurgency as Death of Democracy in *Ākāsh Gangāko Tiraitir*", provides a critical analysis of Pradeep Nepal's novel *Akash Gangako Tiraitir*, discussing it as a novel which dismisses the Maoist insurgency as essentially a violent political activity without an ideological foundation. The chapter argues that while the novel laments over the loss of a paradise as a result of death of democracy, it provides a lopsided view of the insurgency by representing the *anti-insurgent* sentiments. Chapter III, titled "Revolution is not Your Cup of Coffee: Dreams and Despair in *Palpasa Kyafe*", provides

a critical analysis of the novel *Palpasa Kyafe* as a novel that stands in the middle position between the *Anti-insurgent* Camp and the *Pro-insurgent camp*, and presents the insurgency as one of the reasons for the loss of the paradise all the while advocating that the paradise can be regained through efforts of the individuals sans the insurgency. Chapter IV, titled “Between Maoism and Ethnicity: Quest for Identity in *Urgenko Ghoda*”, provides a critical analysis of the novel *Urgenko Ghoda*, stating that it represents the *pro-Maoist* camp of writing because of its advocacy of the issues that are also raised by the Maoists, such as a republican state and ethnic autonomy. It argues that the novel dismisses the established conception of the country as a paradise, and sees the possibility of a paradise only in the restructuring of the state and founding of a republic. Chapter V, titled “Conclusion: Paradise Lost or Republic Found?” concludes the study with a comprehensive critical analysis that the NIL, with its varied representations of the insurgency, stands as an important literary document of the insurgency that helps understand the insurgency better. The appendices I-III include interviews with Pradeep Nepal, Narayan Wagle and Yug Pathak respectively, conducted during the research for this study. Appendix IV, titled “Images of the Insurgency” depicts the insurgency through photographic images which are analyzed within the overarching theme of the present study.

CHAPTER II

Romancing Death: Insurgency as Democracy's Death-wish in *Akash Gangako Tiraitir*

Akash Gangako Tiraitir, dismissing the Maoist insurgency as a violent insurrection without a solid politico-ideological foundation, predicts its downfall because of the injustices and undemocratic nature within and outside the party, which is contradictory with the very goal that the insurgency claims to be aiming for. By showing the death of democracy at the hands of the Maoists, the novel summarily rejects the possibility of a new nation.

Introduction

This chapter discusses three thematic aspects of the novel *Akash Gangako Tiraitir* that make it a representative text of the *Anti-insurgent Camp* of the NIL. It begins with a brief summary of the plot of the novel. It then examines briefly the reception history and critical review of the novel. Then it examines how the novel depicts the Maoist leadership as indoctrinating young insurgents with their ideology and romanticizing death as the 'attainment of martyrdom', as the best way to serve the insurgency; the disillusionment among insurgents that suggests the potential death of the insurgency; and the lack of tolerance among the Maoist cadres to listen to voices of dissent, and how the fundamental right of the expression of individual opinion is subdued by the Maoists by killing the protagonist who does not offer to praise them through his writing. It concludes by stating that the novel

presents a very gloomy future of the insurgency, presenting it as doomed to eventual failure because of the undemocratic nature shown by the leaders and cadres and also because of the lack of vision among the leadership for a new nation.

The novel begins with a dinner meeting where the protagonist, Sanjeev, a soft spoken, introvert, leftist writer, is met by his old friend Ajit and his wife, Shalini, and a few other people including Kabita, who pretends to be a non-resident Nepali born in Canada and brought up in Delhi and currently working in a development project in Maoist-affected areas. After the first meeting, Kabita pesters Sanjeev to meet frequently, which the latter tries to avoid, but eventually ends up meeting Kabita often. Kabita is actually a Maoist insurgent, the fact that is to be revealed only later in the novel, and she is on a mission of the party, whereby she has to convince Sanjeev to visit the Maoist heartland so that he could be convinced by the party to write in favour of them. The meetings turn to be love dates, and Sanjeev plans to marry Kabita in the coming year. The novel takes a different turn when one day, Kabita questions the authenticity of truth in Sanjeev's writings and offers to show him the reality of what was going on in the Nepali hinterlands. She says to Sanjeev, "Many of the things you write are based on tell-tale stories, and they do not provide windows to your own knowledge" (26). She further says, "Have you ever bothered to ask whether the reality you see might be just superficial? Can a manifest reality not be reality in some cases?" (27). Sanjeev, reluctant at the beginning, accepts Kabita's offer and follows her to the villages, only to find that Kabita is a Maoist insurgent whom the party has ordered to lure him into visiting the Maoist heartland. Betrayed by his girlfriend, Sanjeev intends to return to the city only to realize that he is abducted and there is no way of going back without the permission of the Maoists. He is made to realize that the Maoists have abducted him to turn him into the Edgar Snow of the Maoist insurgency, following the Chinese Maoist style where they used Edgar Snow, an American journal-

ist, as a medium to disseminate the ideology and information of the Chinese Maoists. As the Nepali Edgar Snow, Sanjeev is met by many different comrades of the Maoist party, and is requested, to write praises of the Maoist insurgency upon returning to Kathmandu. But Sanjeev cannot reconcile with the ideology of the Maoists, and declines to write praises of the Maoists. Meanwhile, Sanjeev begins to understand the dissatisfaction among the comrades through his old college friend, Sabita, now a disillusioned Maoist cadre. He is shattered to know later on that Sabita is killed by her own comrades for raising her voice against the internal ill-functioning and injustices of the party. On Sanjeev's part, even when the Maoists try to justify violence and convince him about their ideology, he does not accept their request to appraise the insurgency. This, in turn, imbibes in the Maoists a fear that he would rather write negative things about them, and so they kill him. In Kathmandu, his friends Ajit and Shalini receive the diary of Sanjeev while waiting for his arrival; Kabita feels betrayed by the party and visits Ajit and Shalini for purgation. With her, Kabita brings child conceived during their tour in the hinterlands when they slept together pretending to be husband and wife.

As mentioned in the introduction, the book was published in early 2001, five years after the beginning of the insurgency, and is also the first novel which deals with the issue of the insurgency. The novelist, Pradeep Nepal, himself claims so in his preface to the second edition of the novel. He writes,

While writing *Akash Gangako Tiraitir*, I had not thought that it would be the first insurgency novel. But it turned out to be so. But just a month into the publication of the novel, I had received reactions that ranged from praises and criticisms...threats and love" (6).

While the author's view about the insurgency as presented in his fiction has proven irrelevant in the present context where the insurgency and the Nepalese politics took different turns, the worldview provided in the novel indicates to the general orientation of the of a middle-class Kathmandu intelligentsia on the insurgency. In

the book *Forget Kathmandu: an Elegy for Democracy*, Manjushree Thapa explains the state of disinterestedness among the Kathmandu intelligentsia when the Maoists began the insurgency. She writes, “From Kathmandu it all sounded so fey, the prospect of a Maoist insurgency. The Maoists launched their ‘People’s War’ just before the deadline expired. But Kathmandu was not much bothered” (2005: 134). When the Maoists accelerated their action, the government retaliated, bringing into force an action called operation Romeo, detaining and torturing the villagers, which resulted in the displacement of thousands of people (ibid). Thapa further writes that the counter-insurgency operation of such a scale

should have outraged Kathmandu’s civil society, but it did not, because we were all too busy with our lives. And were the Maoists for real? Who was this Prachanda anyway? Who had ever seen him? How far could he get, peddling discredited revolutions to villagers?

We in Kathmandu could not grasp the sheer appeal of the Maoist ideology in the poverty-stricken countryside.

It explains to a large extent the reaction, or the lack of it, shown by the Kathmandu intelligentsia, including Pradeep Nepal, in the beginning years of the insurgency. Pradeep Nepal is a leftist intellectual and politburo member of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML). Ever since the beginning of the Maoist insurgency, his attitude about the Maoists has remained negative. In an interview with me, Nepal admitted that he had received several threat calls, “but he continued to write against the atrocities of the Maoists”⁹. He further claimed that during a tête-à-tête with Prachanda, the latter “congratulated me for writing the novel with such a courage and conviction” (ibid). Nepal’s attitude about the Maoists has remained almost the same even after it came overground and participated in the mainstream politics. The author is very vocal about his prejudice against the Maoists and the insurgency, and emphasizes the need to expose the gravity of the insurgency even after it is over. He writes, “Nowadays, when the meaninglessness of the gun is

⁹ Interview with Pradeep Nepal. Kathmandu, 18 July 2012. Audio record.

proven, when it is proven that the gun does not give freedom but only death to the human beings, then I have begun to think—in order to get rid of the bullet forever, the ugliness of the war should be continuously brought into discussion” (7).

“Janayuddha” or People’s War is a beautiful term. But I did not see any connection between the beauty of this term and the Nepalese insurgency. This insurgency was born out of a will for revenge, and it ended just there. This is proven by the fact that the elements of the janayuddha are lying loose everywhere in the society.

Even in contemporary political debates, Nepal continues to appear as a vehement critic of the Maoist ideology. He wrote in a newspaper column, “the goal of the CPN-Maoist, led by Mohan Vaidya,¹⁰ is to attain the ‘new *janavaad*’ through *satta kabja* or “seizure of the ruling power” in the model of the Russian or the Chinese revolution” (*Kantipur*, July 1, 2012). This suggests his suspicion about the Maoists’ commitment to parliamentary democracy even after they have joined the mainstream politics, and his opinion that the Maoists sat for the peace talks because they foresaw the failure of their insurgency. Going by the lingo doing rounds in the contemporary political scene of Nepal, Pradeep Nepal belongs to the ‘hardliner’ faction of the CPN (UML) because of his stand against federalism, which has remained the most debated issue after the April Movement, and which the Maoist Party has forwarded as its main agenda. Ever since the discourse on federalism floated in the Nepali politics, especially advocated for by the Maoists as their major agenda for restructuring of the state, and which the CPN (UML) along with the Nepali Congress and many other parties during and after the elections to the Constituent Assembly in April 2008, Nepal continues to advocate against it. As reported in a broadsheet daily, he has said that “federalism in any

¹⁰ After the division of the UCPN (Maoist) on, Mohan Vaidya, leading the hardline faction of the Maoists, has registered a new party named CPN-Maoist.

form is unacceptable, pointing out that federalism would only further worsen the country's situation"¹¹. The daily further reports Nepal as saying,

Nepal's economy is still heavily dependent on foreign aid and we have failed to bring about infrastructural development needed for one central parliament, a single government and the institution of head of state...How can our economy bear the weight of expenses needed for several chief ministers, governors, parliaments and governments in such numbers? (ibid)

According to the same news report, Nepal termed federalism as socially unviable in the context of Nepal. "Because it has already deeply divided society along ethnic lines even before its implementation...federalism is definitely going to be a failure in our case", the report quotes him as saying (ibid). The novel is replete with autobiographical elements, beginning with the name of the protagonist, Sanjeev, is phonetically close to Sanjay, which is the pen name under which Pradeep Nepal wrote for a long time. Both the author and the protagonist follow the leftist ideology. The author also exploits what can be called his 'writer's license' to praise the work that the party he is associated with, CPN (UML), had done in the past. In one of the conversations between Sanjeev and Comrade Nirveek, the latter tells of the situation that led them to begin the insurgency:

It's not that there was no silver lining at all. In 2051 BS, when we were preparing to take up arms, one of the parties running the government had tried to give a sense of democracy¹². When it brought the budget to our villages and showed care to our old fathers and mothers, we thought of shelving the program of taking up arms. We also requested our trainees to wait and see for some time. But our dream of cards crumbled soon. The government was toppled and we came to a tough decision. We concluded that in such a democracy, we cannot even do a minimum of reformation.

...Then we did not have any other option than to take up arms (57).

¹¹ *Republica*, 28 June 2012

¹² Here, the "party" means the CPN (UML) which had led the government in 2051 BS (1995), but was toppled only nine months into the government. The CPN (UML) government had established several popular schemes including a monthly stipend to the elderly and widows.

Inevitable disillusionment

In *Akash Gangako Tiraitir*, death is at the pivot around which the narrative revolves. The novel is replete with characters who are either so ideologically blind that they cannot see any contradictions within the party and in the party's activities, or they are so disillusioned with the party's functioning that they are torn between leaving the party or sticking to it. For the Maoist insurgents like Nidar, Nirveek, Prabhakar, Himal and Garjan, death is the ultimate sacrifice to the cause of the insurgency. So the question of death is ubiquitous among the cadres. The romanticization of death is what the top level of the party does to ensure that its cadres become ready to give their lives for the revolution if need be. That is why the cadres take the possibility of their death casually. Sanjeev says, "I was already fed up with the talks of impending deaths" (105). But for Sabita, who is disillusioned by the functioning of the party, death in the name of the insurgency is nothing but a falsity. She tells Sanjeev, "I don't have any regrets about my life. But I could not invite death according to my will. This is the only lack in my life...because death represents hopelessness. Death is nothing but the end of everything. That is why it is just the end of hope" (99). One way in which the insurgents are brainwashed is discourse on death where they are given the romantic idea that the death of an insurgency, termed 'martyrdom', signifies the great sacrifice given for the cause of the revolution, and that such kind of martyrdom is of the highest form of death. When Sanjeev talks to Comrade Jaya, she says,

'There are two kinds of death. One kind of death is heavier than the mountain. And the other is lighter than the feather. Those who die while serving a people attain a death heavier than the mountain, but those who die while serving the reactionaries, they die the death that is lighter than the feather' (72).

Sanjeev narrates that he realized she was "taught very well" (ibid). Again, he asks,

then, sister, what sort of death does that person attain who does not serve both the reactionaries and the people? (ibid)

Sanjeev comments that

she had not yet received this level of teaching. So she got startled, and to hide that, she just smiled. Then comrade Nidar, who was listening to us from before, said, ‘There is no such death’ (ibid).

But Sanjeev cannot reconcile with the definition of life and death with which the Maoist party has indoctrinated its cadres. He expresses his disagreement in front of Comrade Prabhakar during their meeting:

you do not seem to have understood the meaning of life yet. It might not be difficult somebody to take birth, as it is said that the consummation of *prakriti* and *purusha*, or woman and man, results in the birth of a child. But it is very difficult to raise and sustain that life. You are yourself a father to somebody, and you have brought spring in the life of many as a teacher. You know how difficult it is to sustain a life. But see, how easy it is to end a life!..Please remember the faces of all those who have been killed. Remember the faces of those who were your own people and those who weren’t. You will then understand the meaninglessness of death. If history would change by killing people, it would have changed many times by now ((137).

Sanjeev’s hatred of the Maoists begins with their naming itself. Revolutionary names like Nidar, Nirveek, Badala appear to Sanjeev as ridiculous. When Comrade Nidar calls Kabita with her party name, Comrade Badala, meaning “revenge”, Sanjeev asks, ““Comrade Badala? I was surprised. What kind of a name is this? Whom does she want to take revenge and why? Will she take revenge with people like me?” (64). His problem with the name is understood later when, upon meeting Comrade Jaya, he is surprised to see that she has a “normal name”. Sanjeev says, referring to Jaya, “Finally, she had a name which I found easy to pronounce” (71). As the novel develops, Sanjeev’s hatred against the Maoists grows even stronger. The more he understands the extremist nature of the Maoists, he believes that the Maoist is a totalitarian party. Sanjeev’s hatred against the insurgency and the party are fuelled by Kabita’s false identity and her attempt to indoctrinate Sanjeev with Maoist ideology by strategically bringing him into their trap. This is further fuelled by Sabita’s confession that she is frustrated with the party because of its undemocratic nature within and outside the party. Moreover, most

of the insurgents appear to Sanjeev as lacking practical vision because of blind support for the party and its ideology. Sanjeev tells Sabita,

I have already talked with some of your comrades. Kabita has told me that after a few days, I will be meeting your high ranking leaders along with Comrade Garjan, Comrade Aakash and others. But before that, I want to find some answers from you. While talking with the common citizens, I found in them some kind of emotion about life. But while talking with your comrades and militia, I found them just living in sad dreams entangled with boredom and hopelessness. Is life nothing more than a formality? Can't your life be a life in the sense of the commoners? Are you all machines, or is there life inside you too? (83-4).

He further asks, "These comrades are people without hearts. Can one not remain a human being when he becomes a militant?" (75).

Sabita is the mouthpiece of the writer in presenting the contradictions within the party. Though a Maoist combatant, Sabita is disillusioned with the internal functioning of the party and the way in which it deals with those who criticize the party. For instance, when an innocent villager named Krishna Puri, who also belongs the author's party is killed for fake allegations of conspiracy, Sabita sees the injustice of the party workers against the common villagers. She tells Sanjeev,

When I unearthed the reality underlying Krishna Puri's execution, I realized how my comrades used barbaric methods of executing innocent people for expanding the party's politics and influence. Nobody is allowed to express opinion and criticism against us. Krishna Puri was not the only person to have been killed for his ideological stand, but there were many others like Krishna Puri (90).

When she speaks against such injustice with the party comrades, they consider her as the enemy of the party itself. When the party comrades kill an innocent villager or unarmed police personnel unjustly, the comrades just utter some vague and ideologically embellished language which stands to Sabita for nothing than the hypocrisy of the party. Giving justification of the killing of an innocent villager named Balaram Khadka, Comrade Garjan says,

Yes, Balaram Khadka should not have been killed. It is true that he had not committed any such mistake that deserved execution. But, can we consider Balaram's death as an independent incident? Why are our comrades sacrificing their beautiful lives? Why are the police killing us? What is it that makes our death

justifiable and Balaram's unjust? Everyone should sacrifice for the revolution in his lifetime; Balaram fulfilled his duty for the revolution (92).

Here, too, the question of the significance of individual or collective life arises, and the Maoists consider the killing of a village individual as the necessary sacrifice for the 'collective good' or for their 'great revolution'. But Sabita is disillusioned by the way the party takes the cases of innocent villagers. She says,

Not for a single day could I understand how the killing of Balaram Khadka was significant for the revolution. I always felt that it was an unimaginable crime committed by my party (93).

Another reason for the Sabita's disillusionment is her rape committed by her own comrades. During a visit of rural villages in party's activities, she is raped by two of her party comrades at a shelter while she is sleeping at night. She reports about her rape to several of her senior leaders, they take her complaint very casually. Her senior comrade Santosh tells her,

If you wish that the comrades serve wholeheartedly for the war, these insignificant issues should not be taken into consideration. You have given a sacrifice for the revolution. You should internalize this fact and establish a cordial relation with those comrades (102).

Sabita then becomes fully aware of the way hypocrisy is ingrained in the party. She tells Sanjeev, "Slowly, I came to know that women here were living not just in a primitive society but also in a barbarian society" (102). The knowledge about such a barbarian condition within the Maoist Party itself fuels Sanjeev's hatred against, and reaches the tipping point with the eventual murder of Sabita by her own comrades for voicing dissent against the injustices and contradictions within the party itself. The only thing that which consoles Sanjeev at Sabita's death is that she dies the death of a hero by speaking against the party itself notwithstanding the potential threat to her own life. Sanjeev narrates, "Sabita had told me repeatedly of her impending death, and during our departure, I had wished for her death. For me, she had achieved peace. She had achieved freedom". It is interesting here to know that Sanjeev wishes for Sabita's death, because he respects her

conviction to speak the truth against the fear of death. This gives impetus to Sanjeev to speak his mind even when he is sure about his impending murder if he does not reconcile with the demand of the Maoists. This reemphasizes the author's intention of showing the Maoists as the conduits of violence.

The janus-face of the Maoists: consent and coercion

The Maoists employ the strategy of manufacturing consent by briefing writers and asking them to write about the insurgency. The fact that the Maoists abduct Sanjeev and ask him to write about their 'revolution' exemplifies that they have understood the might of the pen. They know that only coercion would not lead to their victory in their 'revolution', but information about their goals should be written about and presented to the people through intellectuals. During a meeting between Sanjeev and Garjan, the latter tells Sanjeev,

I am meeting you with the hope that if you use your magical pen to talk about our efforts, people would begin to trust us. We have begun a very sincere effort...I am hopeful that now, your pen will start to sing the songs of praise for the people's revolution. That, it will contribute to dismantling the old, tattered, decayed and crumbling system", that, it will become the Gorky and Lu Xun for the revolutionary wave (114).

Sanjeev learns that most of the Maoists wore paraphernalia of a Maoist ideology which dictated them how to speak the ideology and not their mind. So, to satire the Maoists, Sanjeev also uses coated words when he says: "Comrade Garjan had taught me how not to speak my mind but conduct a serious debate on superficial things (114). Sanjeev does not follow what the Maoists dictate—he rather opposes them, which becomes the reason for his killing. Even when Sanjeev is aware of the consequences of not following the dictates of the Maoists, he continues to stand firm in his opinion about the Maoists and the insurgency.

Sanjeev cannot even reconcile with the definition of *janavaad* given by the Maoists. He says,

Is *janavaad* as beautiful as this? Aren't there any dark patches like there are on the moon? Why doesn't anyone think? If *janavaad* was as beautiful as the songs, then why was there any need to terrorize people? If *janavaad* was as beautiful as the performances, why would people run away from it? You might blame any for the sake of convenience—the oppressors and anti-revolutionaries run away from *janavaad*. In that case, does it mean that ninety percent of the population is oppressor and anti-revolutionary? No, the revolutionaries have not done a serious reading or thought about *janavaad* and people. They might have been lost in some definitional terms of *janavaad* but they have not understood the *janavaad* of life” (69-70).

In the novel, Comrade Prabhakar is representative of the extremist viewpoint of the Maoists. For him, you either support the Maoists or become 'enemies of the people' by opposing them. There is no middle way. For them, those who stand neutral are also enemies or matter of suspicion. He tells Sanjeev, “Whenever you present our good deeds in the paper, we take a peaceful sleep. But when you start to throw sharp nails towards us, we even stop eating. Why are you so unstable? You should either continue to praise us or criticize us” (127). But as an independent writer who decides on his own what to write, Sanjeev cannot follow the dictates of Comrade Prabhakar. He says,

I am the kind of person who plays with events. I am not the leader of an event, so I can only analyze events. But I cannot dictate them. How on earth can I write for others? I write for myself. In fact, everyone writes for himself, speaks, reads, and works... Comrade Prabhakar wanted to use me for his things good or bad. But I wanted to hone my writing for my own liberation. That is why there was no meeting point between us (128).

In his meeting with Himal, Sanjeev criticizes the way in which the Maoists try to impose their opinion upon others, and punish if their opinions are criticized. He says,

You think that you are free to do anything to anyone but nobody can say a word against you. For you, protesting against everything is the revolution, the dharma. But if anyone protests against you, you retaliate by killing that person. That is why, Comrade Himal, my ideal is my life, and your ideal is the performance of an ugly drama” (130).

Sanjeev further comments on the hypocrisy of the party that does not maintain discipline inside the party itself.

The intra-party injustice is also injustice as well as that is outside. Why don't you speak against the internal injustices? You have decided to kill me because I did not support your revolution and because I have differences with your party. But, did you take action against your comrades who raped their own comrade? No, you did not (130).

Sanjeev is of the firm opinion that killing of persons based on an ideology whatsoever cannot be justified. He asks Comrade Garjan, "Can we ever forgive the gas chamber of Hitler? May be you can. That was also his chamber of belief. But I cannot, because my belief is not on chamber but on nature" (130). But then Sanjeev is killed, and so is Sabita for raising voices against the atrocities of the Maoists. With their killing, the possibility of rationality and consensus is killed with the killing of Sanjeev and Sabita, reemphasizing the violent nature of the Maoist insurgency. This presents the Maoists as an essentially barbarian forces opposed to the idea of discourse.

The death of democracy

In the novel, the writer does not engage with the idea of a republic as was propounded by the Maoists. In essence, the novel simply does not indulge in the ideological foundations of the Maoist insurgency. So, the idea of an armed insurgency is presented in a negative light. When comrade Nirveek talks about the 'war', Sanjeev wonders how these villagers could have spoken about the war so casually. He says, "How can these villagers use the fearful word like war so casually? Haven't they imagined the ugliness of a war? How is this ugly war continuing in this village?" (54-55) In Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Kyafe*, the protagonist, Drishya, is abducted by some unknown people, the reason for which is not made clear. Given the fact that Drishya visits the village during the insurgency, there is a high proba-

bility that he might have been abducted by the security forces. This puts an end to Drishya's dream of reconstructing the nation. In Aakash Gangako Tiraitir, the possibility of establishment of democracy and free speech is dead because of the killing of Sanjeev. In the novel, Sanjeev is an epitome of a person who values individual human rights against the 'collective good' as the Maoists claim to be fighting for.

The novel presents the Maoist insurgency as product of the unfulfilled promises of the democracy that was established after the People's Movement of 1990. It also presents certain individuals as joining the insurgency because of their discontents with democracy. But the novel does not present any idea for republican model. This is so because the discourse of a republic itself came into existence in the latter half of the insurgency. The 40-point demand of the Maoist party submitted to the Deuba government in 1996 does not have any clause related to republicanism. It was only when the then king, Gyanendra Shah, began his direct rule after 2002, which also inspired the youth wings of other parliamentary parties to speak against monarchy that the demand for a republican state surfaced. So the novel does not preempt the issue of a republic as it was written prior to the period when the actual discourse began.

Sanjeev's execution in the novel represents the death of right to free speech and democracy. This completely undercuts the Maoist opinion which they put forward in their 40-point demand. Under the heading "Concerning people's democracy", article 23 of the demand states that "the right to expression and freedom of press and publication should be guaranteed..."¹³ Likewise, article 24 of the demand states, "Academic and professional freedom of scholars, writers, artists and cultural workers should be guaranteed" (ibid). The birth of Sanjeev's son

¹³ "40 Point Demand" in Thapa (2003 b)

from the womb of Kabita signifies the possibility of the birth of the legacy of Sanjeev. The continuation of resistance against extremism seems possible because of the birth of the baby boy. In the preface of *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir*, a leftist writer and critic, Agnishikha, has written that “Aakash ganga is the faith of Sanjeev. Even if an *ams*¹⁴ night darkens his life, it cannot darken his Aakash Ganga. Who, after all, can stop the light of the Aakash Ganga from dancing on the face of Sanjeev's infant child? “Aakashganga ko Tiraitir” is also a conflict between comrades of two opposite camps: On one camp is a bundle of bullets, where there is an environment of terror; on the other, there are flowers of faith, where hundreds of flowers of ideology blossom” (12). In the end of the novel, Sanjeev reiterates his disbelief in the power of the gun. While Sanjeev is convinced himself that he is going to be killed by the Maoists soon, he says, “I am confident that the devil inside them should stop one day. Their way of seeing everyone who disagrees with them as enemies should stop” (134).

Conclusion

In *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir*, the author does not present the Maoists as having a vision for a new nation. The characters are unaware which road would lead them the kind of a nation they want to build. The insurgency is presented as essentially a criminal and political activity run by activists of a group of extremist ideology by showing the capture of the protagonist, killing of innocent villagers with differing ideological beliefs, and also the killing of a Maoist combatant named Sabita by her own comrades because she dares speak against the unjust killings orchestrated by the party. It shows the death of an old nation in the death of rationality, but the possibility of a nation seems almost impossible as its major characters are

¹⁴ The night of the new moon

shown unsuccessful in their mission. Sanjeev is killed by the Maoists, Sabita is killed by her own comrades, Kabita is betrayed, Nidar and his sister are disillusioned. Gopindra Paudel has criticized Nepal for not presenting the insurgency as it was, but by falsifying the Maoists. He writes, “Pradeep Nepal is unable to understand the head and tail of the behaviour, activities and goals of the Maoists, which is why he has taken recourse to false accusations against the Maoists.”¹⁵

Claiming that writers like Nepal have “falsified the reality”, Paudel further writes,

Those writers who have not been able to internalize the scientific process or transformation, the status quo-ists and reactionaries have demonized the situation that has been formed due to the insurgency. The main reasons for this are: regarding the status quo as the only truth, being consumed by the class interests, and lack of ideological clarity... (ibid)

Another critic Rishiraj Baral has written that “*Akash Gangako Tiraitir* represents the ruined and decayed thinking of Pradeep Nepal who compares the Maoist leader Prachanda to Saddam Hussein and calls the national and international reactionary forces to destroy its leadership” (2010: 200). Baral’s criticism represents the general whimsical castigation with which the Maoist critics have dealt with other writers belonging to different camps other than the *Pro-insurgent*. In *Akash Gangako Tiraitir* at least, Nepal has not used any such derogatory comparison for Prachanda or the leadership of the Maoist. A similar kind of castigation is seen in the writings of Chaitanya, where he writes of *Akash Gangako Tiraitir*: “This is not a novel, but is a fascist manifesto of capitalist-terrorist authoritarianism in the name of literature, presented in the language anger, hatred and fury against the great people’s war and the dreams, desires and bright future of the Nepali people. Its main message (sic) is to paint a wrong image of the people’s war and present the Maoist as a terrorist force. In crux, it represents the regressive age and thinking

¹⁵Gopindra Paudel, “Samakaleen sandarbhamā naya yathārtha ra samanantar kathama tesko vidrupikaran” in *Marxvadi sahitya ra janayuddha ko saundarya*, p. 561.

against the contemporary age and revolution” (Chaitanya 2060, quoted in Baral 2010: 200).

What Paudel, Baral, and Chaitanya have said of the book is true to some extent, in that *Akash Gangako Tiraitir* is a highly partisan novel, hence belonging to the *Anti-insurgent Camp*. The novel presents only the atrocities of the Maoists, but does not talk about the atrocities of the state in the name of counter-insurgency. Rishikesh Shaha has written about the atrocities of both the sides in an essay titled “Idea and reality, Nepal and Rolpa”. He writes, “Following the insurgency by the UPF and the reciprocal counter-insurgency by the police, the common people of Rolpa and the surrounding districts have had to suffer all kinds of excesses and atrocities through no fault of their own. They are terror-stricken and traumatized. Cases of rape, brutal killings and arson by both sides have victimized innocents with gross injustice, brutal excesses and atrocities” (Thapa (2003 b)).

In terms of the artistic and aesthetic aspect, the novel is very weak. The author has clarified in the introduction that he did not want to make any changes to the novel though things had changed a lot in the decade after the first publication (the second edition was published in 2067) of the novel (7). That is fine, but the novel is replete with what can be called the chronic disease of the Nepali publishing industry—syntactic and typography errors in almost every page of the book. In addition to such avoidable shortcomings, the novel is also not appealing in terms of linguistic craft. Consisting of only 140 pages, the novel also fits to be called a novella. Moreover, the novel does not explore the reasons as to what inspired thousands of young citizens of what used to be considered a peaceful nation to join such a violent war. Was it the sheer attraction of power attached with the gun that lured the citizens into the war? Was it rather the social stratification and underdevelopment or really the ‘feeling of revenge’ as indicated by some of the characters here and there in the novel? The novel does not provide significant an-

swers to such basic questions as—why the insurgency began and what it wanted to achieve. But the novel is successful to express the most important that the author seems to want to give: that ideology dehumanizes us and provokes even common people to kill fellow citizens.

CHAPTER III

“Revolution Is Not Your Cup of Coffee”: Dreams and Despair in *Palpasa Kyafe*

In *Palpasa Kyafe*, Narayan Wagle projects images and narratives of brutalities like rape, physical and psychological torture, and killing of people by both the warring parties—the state, which is responsible for providing security to its people, and the Maoists, who are fighting the “people’s war”. Wagle argues that though the Maoist goal of a “revolution” is not bad on its own, the manner in which they have taken recourse to violence undercuts the very idea of a revolution, for the ordinary citizens become victims as they are robbed of their foremost right to live or exist as human beings in this earth. The price being paid at present by the already damned people through irrevocable loss of their family, physical property, and peace of their lives, is much more than what the revolution promises to pay back in a distant, obscure future—“rights to nationalism, democracy and livelihood”.¹⁶ Through such depiction of the insurgency, *Palpasa Kyafe* stands as a representative novel of the “pro-civilian” camp of writers who have defended an individual’s right to life against the Maoist concept of a greater communal good.

Introduction

This chapter discusses three major thematic aspects that make the novel *Palpasa Kyafe* a representative text of the *Pro-civilian Camp* of the NIL. At the outset, it

¹⁶ The gist of the 40-point demand submitted by the CPN (Maoist) to the His Majesty’s Government of Nepal in 1996.

introduces the author of the novel, Narayan Wagle, focusing on career as a journalist and author of the present novel, followed by a plot summary and an overview of the critical reception of the novel. The chapter then discusses the context of the discontents of democracy after 1990 that is often considered as one of the factors that led to the genesis of the Maoist insurgency. It then discusses the complex situation of dreams and despair in which the protagonist is caught, as he visits the rural parts of the country hit by the insurgency. It then discusses how the novel shows the transformation of the protagonist, Drishya, from a carefree middle-class artist to *drashta*, an enlightened person who reflects the country's political and social condition brought about by the insurgency in his art.

“When’s your novel going to be published, Mr. Coffee Guff?”, reads a paper bird that comes flying down the balcony and lands by Narayan Wagle’s seat at the Birendra International Convention Centre a while before singer Deep Shrestha begins his performance (Wagle 2005 [2008]: 1). “Mr. Coffee Guff” or “Coffee Guffee Wagle” is the name Wagle earned through his weekly column “Coffee Guff” that he wrote for several years when he worked in the editorial department of the Nepali broadsheet, *Kantipur*. In his column, Wagle brewed light opinion pieces on contemporary affairs for reading over a cup of coffee every morning, but the coffee that the protagonist of his novel *Palpasa Kyafe* intends to brew never gets brewed. The never-to-be-brewed coffee chokes its readers even—or exactly—in its non-existence. Born and brought up in the Western hill district of Tanahun, Wagle came to Kathmandu to attend BA at Trichandra College. During his graduation years, two of his ‘letters to the editor’ published in a newspaper called *Janamanch*, expressing the poor quality of contemporary journalism, landed him a job in the same newspaper. He could not afford to turn down the offer, for a job meant more money to buy books. The newfound press freedom had made it possible for private media to operate - thanks to the democracy that had dawned in

Nepal in the early 1990's, opening doors for the much-awaited transformation. Wagle became involved with a national daily, *Kantipur*, since its early days, rising later on to the post of editor when the Maoist insurgency had also reached at its peak. During the anti-monarchy mass movement of 2006, also called the April Movement, Wagle's was a ubiquitous face among protesters on the street—his tall figure protruded half-a-foot above fellow protesters.

The novel is written in a metafictional narrative structure which is generally attributed to postmodern fiction. The writer appears in the prologue and epilogue of the novel, telling readers about the writing process of the book itself. Named as Narayan, the writer persona of the book can be identified as its actual writer Narayan Wagle. The novel begins at a point where Narayan, the author, is waiting to interview his protagonist, Drishya, ask for more missing details which would help him give a finishing touch to his novel. At the outset, he tells the reader about how changed political circumstances had led to changes in the whole set up including his protagonist. He writes in the prologue, “a series of shocking incidents had occurred at breathtaking speed in the lives of my countrymen and in the life of my protagonist.” As Narayan keeps waiting for Drishya, he receives a message the latter is. In the meta-narrative, Drishya is a middle-class artist based in Kathmandu, who befriends Palpasa, a Kathmandu-born-American-returnee art connoisseur during a vacation in Goa. Their friendship develops into a subtle but undeclared love for each other. Drishya is busy in his own creative world in Kathmandu until the day after the Royal Massacre when his former college junior Siddhartha, now a Maoist leader, visits him in his gallery and questions his way of seeing art, history and political events. While urging Drishya to understand the Royal Massacre in a national and historical context rather than as an independent incident, he also questions quality of Drishya's paintings calling his use of colour as “nothing except an expression of fantasy” (88). Siddhartha further challenges

Drishya to see “beauty in the bitter truths of life” by visiting the country (ibid). Taking up the challenge, Drishya visits his own village and other parts of the country ravaged by the insurgency; witnesses the death of many people including Palpasa, and upon returning, indulges in painting again—using darker colours than those used earlier. Several days after finishing his painting series on Palpasa, when Drishya is envisioning an ambitious project of opening a trekking route, coffee garden and a coffee house in Palpasa’s name, he is abducted by some unidentified men pretending to be security personnel from his own gallery. In the epilogue, Narayan meets an American non-resident Nepali girl called Gemini who requests him to help her find the whereabouts of her friend, Palpasa. He tells Gemini about Palpasa’s death, and hands over a manuscript of a book titled *Palpasa Kyafe*, which recounts the story of Palpasa’s death.

Seen in the light of the three defining categories of the insurgency literature, *Palpasa Kyafe* qualifies to be considered a *Pro-civilian* novel to the extent that the novel does not try to maintain a balance in representation of the insurgency. It prioritizes an individual’s life chances over a ‘collective dream’. There is no exact measuring whether the author did it on purpose, but expecting a writer to stand on a purely no-man’s-land does not make any sense either. In other words, a writer cannot but take sides when thousands of his fellow citizens are engulfed in a violent insurgency. And the side that Narayan Wagle takes through this novel is the side of the public. This is reflected in the protagonist of the novel, Drishya, who says, “The stand I’d taken was that of people who resisted the warmongers of both sides. I belonged to this, third force. People who felt as I did could be targeted by either side because we opposed both. I’d protested against both warring sides in these paintings, my colours showing my support for the third camp. This was my strength” (221). It is thus clear where Narayan Wagle the author and his

protagonist are standing-in the camp of those who value the lives of individuals over the promise of a larger cause that serves as an excuse for killing people.

A novel by someone keeping close vigil of the country's politics and society ravaged by the insurgency, Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Kyafe* published in 2005 amidst great hype and anticipation, and immediately received wide accolades and rave reviews. It became one of the highest selling Nepali novels, with over 40,000 copies sold in a span of three years.¹⁷ In July 2012, Nepalaya, the publisher of the novel, claimed the total sale of the novel, including its translation which was published by Nepalaya in (2008) and reprinted by Random House India (2010), to be 50,000 copies, according to a news report published in *Republica*.¹⁸ In Michael Hutt (2011) put the number at 25,000 copies. Though Hutt differs on the number of sales, he nonetheless considers the sale as unprecedented in Nepali literary publishing market, and attributes this to different factors such as marketing strategy, author's profile and the novel's own literary merits:

The book's success was attributable as much to the public profile of its author and the marketing strategy adopted by the publisher, Nepalaya, as to any literary merits of the book itself. For example, a series of whole-page advertisements appeared in the news magazine *Nepal*, a sister publication of *Kantipur*, during the summer of 2005. The advertisement published on 14 July 2005 consists of a photograph of a slice of melon and a copy of *Palpasa Kyafe* with the English sentence 'It refreshes you' beneath the melon and 'It refreshes your brain' under the book (Ibid).

These, Hutt claims, were the reasons why *Palpasa Kyafe* became the first of its kind to have achieved a high commercial success in the Nepali fiction market, which was "barely imaginable before the date". The publisher of the novel testifies to Hutt's claim, saying that as a businessman dealing with books, he had pushed marketing to such an extent that he had put up a stall at places as odd as Patan Durbar Square where, feeling chased by the book, the reader would even-

¹⁷ As mentioned on the blurb of the English translated edition, 2008. Speaking at a literary program, Narayan Wagle (2011) claimed the sale of *Palpasa Café* had crossed over 40,000 copies.

¹⁸ http://myrepublica.com/portal/index.php/twb/?action=news_details&news_id=37931

tually buy it.¹⁹ On the purpose of such an aggressive marketing strategy, Wagle says in an interview with a weekly newspaper, “As of now, it is difficult to survive by writing books in Nepali. We, the young generation, should break through this. So my novel is available not only at the traditional bookshops, but at hotels, Cafés and department stores, which makes it easier for general public to buy my books” (*Drishti*, 26 July 2005).

Palpasa Kyafe eventually won the Madan Purashkar for the year 2005, Nepal’s most coveted prize in literature. It received generous reviews which praised its poignant depiction of Nepalese lives living under the double problems of Maoist insurgency and state-imposed emergency. Critic Bishnu Sapkota wrote of the book, “What Wagle has been writing in the mainstream print media is real and what he has written through this novel is more real than real. When realities look unreal, it is only a work of fiction that can talk about the situation” (2005). On the same line as Sapkota, journalist Kunda Dixit wrote, “...they are all there in these pages: the atrocities, executions, disappearances and people caught in the crossfire that we read about everyday in the newspapers. But, because they happen to characters we now know intimately, the incidents seem more real than the factual headlines. That is the power of fiction” (2005). Abhi Subedi wrote that Wagle’s fiction “is a sensitive image of life and reality in the broken times of present Nepalese history...(its) language and poetic description help one understand and contemplate on the broken and horrific times and events” (2005).

The narrative style of *Palpasa Kyafe* also created a stir in the Nepalese literary circle. The blurb on the back cover of the Nepali edition of the book includes an opinion expressed by the Darjeeling based critic and writer Indra Bahadur Rai: “This novel is not written within the framework of any ism or theory. But

¹⁹ Kiran Krishna Shrestha, publisher of Publication Nepa-laya, said this during a discussion on book publishing, organized at Martin Chautari, June, 2009. My personal record.

there are three quarters of modernism and a quarter of postmodernism in this novel” (2005). Calling it a postmodern novel, Shekhar Kharel wrote, “Because of non-linear plotline, *Palpasa Kyafe* is a postmodern novel. That the reading of this novel can be started from any of the chapters testifies to this. Readers would not have any difficulty reading this novel even after shuffling its chapters like a card-game” (2005). Bishnu Sapkota wrote, “The narrator of *Palpasa Kyafe*...tells us that he has written the novel based on whatever information he had obtained about the characters. In this way, the audience, in a typical postmodern fashion, is left between believing and disbelieving. This meta-fictional technique is the power of a postmodern fiction.” The very postmodern character of the novel, where fact is confuted with fiction, and political circumstance leads to major changes in the life of the protagonist along with the writer, gives ample space for a critical analysis of the novel, too, to draw references liberally from the political and social history which is also the context of the novel.

Democracy and its discontents

At the outset, there is a significant difference in the way Drishya and Siddhartha, two youth of the same generation, conceive of change and revolution. Siddhartha considers change as a situation where there is a complete overhaul of the social, political and economic system through “dismantling the rusted structures” of the old regime. On the contrary, Drishya sees possibility of change through individual initiatives of giving back to the nature and country from which one has learned life’s lessons. Their mutual influence on one another’s thought process and evolution as a political being; their opposite views on the state, society and idea of a revolution; and Drishya’s external and internal conflict due to unusual incidents happening on his life including the deaths of Siddhartha and Palpasa, and his

journey in a devastated country—these aspects of the novel open ways for understanding the context, nature and the extent of the Maoist insurgency. In a different context, Makarand Paranjape suggests that rather than reading the face value of a certain text or its characters, they can be read as allegories of the context in which they are located. He writes, in order to read [a novel] as an allegory,

we shall have to agree that each character is much more than the portrayal or representation of an individual. That the characters are individuals can not be disputed, but...their typical and collective features will be more important. Viewed in this light, the characters become embodiments of social conditions and ideological configurations. They are not merely individual agents, but carriers of a larger socio-cultural thematic baggage (2002: 146-7).

Seen in this light, Siddhartha is more than just any individual Maoist insurgent out there. His - characterization calls for two immediate allusions: First, the socio-cultural significance of his name in juxtaposition with his present vocation; second, the allegory of Nepal's "abortive" project of democracy as visualized on Siddhartha's painting made by Drishya during their college days.

The name "Siddhartha" has a socio-cultural significance in Nepal. Siddhartha, or Siddhartha Gautama, was a 5th century BC Shakya prince named of the ancient Kapilvastu in western Nepal who, at the age of 29 in, renounced his princely pleasure of the palace in pursuit of knowledge after seeing a sick man, a dead body and an ascetic. After a sustained meditation, Siddhartha attained *bodhi* or knowledge, and became the Buddha. He understood the four noble truths related to human suffering: life means suffering; the origin of suffering is attachment; the cessation of suffering is attainable; and the noble Eightfold path (that emphasize on wisdom, ethical conduct and mental development) leads to the cessation of suffering.²⁰ Siddhartha, as Gautama Buddha, spread the message of peace and meditation to his disciples across the *Bharata Varsha*. The Siddhartha of *Palpasa Kyafe* different—one of violence and the other of non-violence. But they do not differ much in their expected goal, that is, to establish justice and

²⁰ <http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/fourtruths.html> Accessed on 25 July 2012.

harmony. Just the path they take is different. While the former spread the message of peace, the Siddharth of *Palpasa Kyafe* advocates for violence as the path to revolution that would lead to social justice. Having understood the hardships, prevalent injustices and discrimination faced by the people of the country Siddhartha comes out of his comfort zone and joins the insurgency to bring change not only in his life, but in the life of the whole country. While Siddhartha Gautama emphasized on peace and harmony, the present day Siddhartha is in favour of justice before peace. Siddharth says, “People don’t need peace. They need justice. People are tired of living in despair under the facade of peace. If there’s justice, peace will follow...We shouldn’t ask for a peaceful country. We should ask for a just country” (86-7). This juxtaposition of the two Siddharthas reminds me of the first two lines of a ghazal I heard a few years after the beginning of the insurgency, and which has remained at the back of my memory. It goes like this: *Buddha harule yuddha gareko dekhera mero hriday dukhyo / Nepal Aama ko aansu jhareko dekhera mero hriday dukhyo*

(“My heart breaks to see the Buddhas in wars

My heart breaks to see my motherland in tears”).

Alternatively, Siddhartha’s incomplete painting made by Drishya during the college days is an allegory of Nepal’s tryst with democracy—a democracy that was flawed in its inception in the Maoist view. The dialogue between Siddhartha and Drishya gives ample suggestions that it could be understood in a larger political context of the country. Drishya, being a middle-class Brahmin male artist well-established in Kathmandu, represents the middle class intelligentsia of Kathmandu and the nation as a whole that established democracy in 1990 after a sustained movement against the autocratic Panchayat regime. Earlier, in 1950, democracy dawned in Nepal after people’s long fight ending the 104 year Rana autocracy, only to be prematurely subverted by King Mahendra’s coup d’état in 1960. In the

novel, the dialogue between Siddhartha and Drishya can be assumed to have taken in the context of the democracy established in 1990, as the Maoist insurgency had begun six years after 1990. The context in the novel is that, Drishya had once made Siddhartha a subject of his painting during the college days. Titled “What We Want”, the painting had presented Siddhartha as a “romantic hero” to show the kind of Nepal the young people aspired to (84). This had inspired Siddhartha participate in a movement with a conviction to change the face of the country. But now, Siddhartha has become opposite of how Drishya had presented him in the painting. An argument between Drishya and Siddhartha explains it better:

‘Did I make a mistake in my painting?’ Drishya asks.

‘You were in a hurry. You painted me as you saw me. But you failed to capture me as I really was’, replies Siddhartha.

‘You didn’t say anything at the time.’

‘You never asked.’

Your expression said it all.

That’s here you’re wrong. You didn’t understand. You just went for superficial appearances and painted me as a character, not as a part of a larger phenomenon.

‘What difference does it make?’

‘You presented me as a romantic hero, an individual. You lacked the vision to understand I represented more than that.’

‘You were immature then. I wouldn’t do that painting again. The painting I did was good enough for the times. It was a statement about that period.’ (85)

This argument between Drishya and Siddhartha is not just about technical misrepresentation of a subject by his painter, but in the larger context, their argument revisits the discourse concerning democracy in Nepal. Siddhartha, as the mouthpiece of the Maoists, is criticizing the artificial manner in which democracy was established in Nepal. Siddhartha views the Nepalese society and about political process during and after the establishment of democracy in Nepal, in much more complex than Drishya, the sophisticated artist who indulges more in visiting an exotic place like Goa, spends on gadgets, and lives a relatively luxurious life. Though the revolutionary persona of Siddhartha is Drishya’s own making, the latter is not able to grasp the complexity of his own subject that animated into a revolutionary. Drishya is not aware that the light of hope that he gives to his intrin-

sically revolutionary subject, turns into a torch of revolution to bring a much-needed change in the country. When Drishya expresses his guilt of having painted Siddhartha as a political figure, the latter argues that he would have gone for the revolution under any circumstances:

‘I was wrong to paint you as a political figure?’ I said.
 ‘You’re scared of your own shadow!’
 ‘I should’ve painted you as an ordinary student’
 ‘Wouldn’t I have become involved in politics in any case?’
 ‘You could’ve become a lawyer.’
 ‘That would’ve given me more skills to make my arguments.’
 ‘You could’ve become a journalist.’
 ‘Then I might have shocked you by presenting harsh truths about this country.’
 ‘You could’ve become a musician.’
 ‘I would’ve stirred the people with revolutionary songs.’ (88)

Drishya and Siddhartha do not only have ideological differences, but they also have a very complex relationship. In more ways than one, one influences the other in their evolution as an individual or a political being. Siddhartha changes the mentality of Drishya, who before meeting Siddhartha, was just “expressing fantasy through his colours” (89), by taking him to the countryside and letting him see on his own the situation of the country. Siddhartha says to Drishya, “I’d like you to see for yourself the way country is these days. Then you’ll discover that your paintings are meaningless. Then you’ll understand that you’re lost in a jumble of culture, songs, and dances, a fantasy world of colours” (89). Siddhartha considers it as his duty to enlighten Drishya: “though you fall into the reactionary camp, I feel it’s my duty to show you the right path because you’re a creative person and I believe there’s some hope for you” (90). Likewise, Drishya has a role in the making of Siddharth into a revolutionary leader by depicting the latter as the face of hope in his paintings, giving him the energy to fight for bringing change in the society. Siddharth mentions this while responding to Drishya’s anger about his resorting to violence: “You’re responsible for that. I was preparing for a teaching

career, but the day I saw your painting, I decided to become a good citizen. You gave me the courage to channel the frustration of the people into revolution” (89).

Characteristically, Siddhartha and Drishya have two differing ways of viewing an incident, for instance, the Royal Massacre. As they engage in an argument on the reasons behind the Royal Massacre, Siddhartha gives a diachronic view of the incident, but Drishya contradicts Siddhartha by giving a synchronic view of it. For Siddhartha, the Royal Massacre has a long background history to look into, but Drishya cannot think of anything other than the official version of the incident, apart from some loose conspiracy theories overheard during the city protests. In his review of *Palpasa Kyafe*, Aahuti comments, “Drishya is so illogical and devoid of critical thinking that he neglects Siddhartha’s expression of simple truth that the Royal Massacre should be understood in a totality, accepting the state agencies’ flawed assessment instead” (2062: 39). The analysis given by Siddhartha, rather suggestive than elaborate, is akin to the Maoist analysis, voiced fiercely by the Maoist ideologue and Vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai, in his article published in the Nepali language broadsheet daily a week after the Royal Massacre, where he hinted that the Massacre was not an isolated incident but was a part of a more complex “conspiracy”²¹. He argued that the massacre should be understood as a result of a historical process of power struggle between forces within the nation, and also between the nation and the outside forces. He wrote in *Kantipur*:

The Reactionary world view presents any historic incident as a mere accident and tries to put the blame on some particular person. And it also tries to hide the core reality of the incident and only focuses on what is seen at the surface level. Analyzed from this angle, the recent tragedy in Nepal might be made to appear to be about a love affair, and the government and its foreign masters’ media are busily presenting this view (24 Jestha 2058 B.S.).

²¹ Titled “Naya kot parva lai manyata dinuhudaina”, the article irked the then Koirala government, which immediately sent the publication’s editor Yubraj Ghimire, along with Kailash Sirohiya and Hemraj Gyawali, managing director and director respectively, to police custody. Ghimire was released only after ten days.

Bhattacharai further stated that the progressive materialist worldview understands an incident as part of a larger process of events taking place around the world—that any incident

is seen as a product resulting from the intertwining of historical necessity and accident. Looked at from this angle, in any given incident, the underlying structures of social life play an important role, and the players who are seen associated with it from outside or at the surface level are but accidental. This makes it imperative for us to look at the massacre which took place in the Narayanhiti royal palace vis-a-vis the class struggle and people's revolution taking places in Nepal and elsewhere in the world. (Ibid)

Siddhartha's entry into Drishya's gallery is thus a significant event in the narrative. He meets Drishya with the hope that the latter would understand the cause of the "people's war". But contrary to the larger cause of a "people's war" or a revolution that makes sense for Siddhartha, for Drishya, it is an individual's foremost right to live as an individual that makes sense. Drishya is a humanist who thinks that the very act of killing somebody in the name of a People's War is an inhuman and unjustifiable act. He is an advocate of people's foremost right to live no matter whatever are the circumstances. For him, a person's right to be treated as a living, human being comes prior to his/her right as a citizen. On the contrary, Siddhartha believes that the life or death of an individual does not hold much in the larger context of a revolution as much as the right to citizenship does. Their argument also suggests their juxtaposing opposite views regarding security when Siddhartha asks Drishya to continue his journey of the countryside alone stating that he will be safer that way:

'You'll be safer walking without me', Siddhartha says.

'I want everyone to be safe', I'd told him. 'You're talking about a temporary, artificial thing, he replied. "you need permanent peace for everyone to be safe. And for permanent peace, the state must negotiate with the people.'

'But if you want negotiation, why are you and your people trying to bring the state to its knees by killing innocent villagers?' I asked angrily.

'Who's killing them? How and where are they being killed?' he'd said, turning to go. 'You're an artist. Go and see the situation with your own eyes...' (163-4)

Siddhartha seems to be suggesting to Drishya that bourgeois certainties may suit an artist like Drishya not the insurgents. Their argument shows the improbability

of bridging between the thoughts of Drishya and Siddhartha— between an individualist and a collectivist.

Dreams and despair in the insurgency-hit hinterlands

If there is any metaphor that best illustrates the insurgency, it should be the face of the janus. The Maoists use both coercion and consensus to establish a strong foothold in the villages. On one hand, they create psychological terror by torturing and killing a few well-off people, and gain support of the poor peasants; on the other, they generate consensus among the younger people that they are the conduits of a revolution. In *Palpasa Kyafe*, Siddhartha convinces an old man to send his daughter named Sanu to leave school and join the insurgency. Lahure Kaakaa's daughter, Yam Kumari, also joins the insurgency, leaving her old father to fend for himself, as the Maoists lure her with the promise of a better future. Consider this conversation between Drishya, Yam Kumari and Lahure Kaakaa.

‘So are all you girls carrying guns these days?’

Well, we couldn't study,' she said, 'and we couldn't go abroad to work

'I was thinking of marrying her off,' the old man said from his bed upstairs, 'but no such luck!'

'I've decided to make my own destiny,' she said huffily. (120)

For the village youth, there is no any way other than joining the Maoists. No one is spared. Contrast Yam Kumari with Kishor in Kathmandu—while the former joins the insurgency to “make her own destiny”, the latter has even bigger dreams than what Kathmandu can fulfill—to better his future by settling in America, even though he has a good prospect of pursuing a singing career in Kathmandu. But for Yam Kumari, who leaves her school in pursuit making her “own destiny”, insurgency is the only hope. The old villagers like Sanu's father and Lahure Kaakaa are the representatives of a generation that considers its life-condition to be the god's program and an individual's destiny. Noted Nepali anthropologist Dor Bahadur

Bista has considers such a fatalistic tendency as a characteristic of the Nepali society. In *Fatalism and Development*, he has argued that

deep belief in fatalism has had a devastating effect on the work ethic and achievement motivation, and through these on the Nepali response to development. It has consequences on the sense of time and in particular such things as the concept of planning, orientation to the future, sense of causality, human dignity and punctuality...(it) is highly connected to various forms of dependency, which may be part of a more basic Nepali cultural system (1991:4).

But the younger generation is willing to change such an attitude, and the Maoists have provided fodder to their determination. This is evident in the speech of one of Sanu's friends, who "sounds like a revolutionary". She says, 'How long do we have to keep carrying these *dokos*? Our mothers did the same thing. Our sisters-in-law do it' (96). Her revolutionary voice goes on:

If we'd studied in boarding schools, we could've become doctors or engineers. We could've learned something. We wouldn't have to spend our lives picking oranges, cuffing grass, and looking after the mustard fields! Our lives are wasted. Those dais are right! If we take part in their struggle, at least our younger sisters and brothers might be able to get a proper education' (96).

There is hope among those who have already joined the insurgency, and those who are still joining. Those who are already in the insurgency speak the language of Siddhartha, which means that they are sheer brainwashed. The conversation between Drishya and the Maoist insurgent girl leading Drishya to Siddhartha testifies to this the fact that the youth are empowered by the gun. Examine the following dialogue between Drishya and one of the insurgents:

'Can I tell you something, Bahini?' I said, 'Don't get angry but that gun doesn't look good in your hands.'

She said combatively, 'You mean only bangles look good on a woman?'

Well, at least bangles don't kill,' I said.

'This gun's for my protection,' she said. 'I'm strong because I have this gun.'

'But how long will that last?'

'I'll live courageously as long as I can.'

'But why are you so intent on cuffing your life short?'

She said, 'A long life without purpose is a waste of time.'

'And life becomes purposeful when you carry a gun?'

'It's better than wearing bangles just to show I'm a slave to some man!' (168)

Though the girl is thankful to the gun, which has provided her an immediate protection, it is evident in her argument, just that of Yam Kumari's and Sanu's revo-

lutionary friend's arguments, that it is not the sheer power of gun that has attracted them to the insurgency—it is rather the promise of change. Drishya is suspicious of the authenticity of the youngsters' zeal for the "revolution" when he says that so many of them had "followed him mindlessly and taken up arms without understanding the circumstances" (173). He narrates, "They were exhilarated by the power guns gave them. But such power brought nothing but devastation" (ibid). Inherently, those young insurgents are a peace-loving people, which is implicit in the fact that a Maoist girl puts a white flower in the barrel of her gun. Her comrades do the same, and one of the boys who does not find a flower uses a piece of paper instead (125). For such girls, as also for boys, who have not even finished their high school, the promise of change given by the Maoists is the only hope that remains. Growing up in the rural hills, they have seen that their forefathers and fathers, mothers and sisters-in-law have spent their lives in deprivation, and taking up arms is seen as their option. Govinda Bartaman, author of a travelogue based on the insurgency, *Sohra Saanjh Haru*, says, "Conflict is an inevitability of the Nepalese society. Because, as long as issues like social discrimination, economic deprivation and neglect of identity remains, conflict does not end. In the course of my exploration, I understood that conflict is in some ways a positive thing, and is a medium that leads the society forward" (2011).

Although the enthusiasm among the young people joining the war raises the potential of a "revolutionary change" of the country, for Drishya, the expected result of such a change is negligible against the loss facing the country engulfed in the cobweb of violence. During his visit of the countryside, Drishya encounters incidents and stories of death, killing and torture caused by the insurgency. Even the nature that looked so pristine a few years back looks ugly now, as Drishya sees blood splashed all over. The entanglement of nature and human beings in the

deadly condition of the insurgency is poignantly shown in the narrative of his journey. Drishya narrates:

Walking ahead of me was a woman who'd been widowed the day after her wedding. I felt as if I were stepping on her tears. To one side of the trail was an injured bird that had fallen from a tree. One of its wings was caught on a branch. The flapping of its wings devastated me...Walking behind the widow was an elderly man. He was on his way to claim his son's body. His sighs had become the sigh of the hills...There were flowers around us, but they had no perfume. They'd been picked, thrown down, and trodden under foot. ..As we climbed, the hills grew steeper, adding to the woes of the stooped old man. The hills in which he'd invested his sweat, blood and tears had become burden to him. Now he was in a hurry to claim his dead son.

'I just buried one son,' he said. 'Now I have to identify the body of another... Behind me was an old woman. She was on her way to claim a body, the body of her daughter, which had been crammed into a basket and placed on a riverbank across the hill. (162-3)

The meaninglessness and uncertainty of lives of people of the country ruined by the insurgency is exemplified poignantly once again when Palpasa is killed when the bus she is travelling blows off after being caught in an ambush put by the Maoists. Drishya, who is co-incidentally one of Palpasa's co-passengers, is saved as he gets off the bus for urinating, but several other passengers are charred to death. The thin line of life and death, where Drishya is saved and his lover Palpasa is killed, speaks of the futility brought into the lives of the people. Drishya says,

All my dreams and desires were suddenly gone, as swiftly as a bird flying off the branch of a tree. I survived only because I'd got off the bus. And Palpasa had been killed only because she hadn't. It was absurd—the reason I'd survived and the reason she'd been killed. There was no logic behind it. It's not that I'd survived because of some act of courage and she died because of some weakness. None of it made sense. (191-2)

The death of Drishya's potential lover adds to his reasons for not accepting the logic of a violent insurgency. It is a major incident in the novel that speaks of the irony of the insurgency. A nonresident-Nepali, Palpasa is someone who returns to her country with a determination to stay back. In a country suffering from a massive brain-drain, Palpasa is running against the tide by returning to her country against the will of her parents and friends. She is faced with series of hindrances when trying to document the state of affairs in the countryside—first, a directive from the security forces to abandon her journey, followed by abduction

from the Maoist for entering their area “without permission” and eventually death as she is made a victim of an ambush attack by the Maoists. Drishya’s disagreement with the Maoist way of “people’s war” heightens with the death of Palpasa. He comments, “It was a crime. It was cowardice. All logic and all common sense were gone. Why were I alive and Palpasa dead?” (ibid) Palpasa is innocent, and with her death, innocence is dead too. The novel clearly suggests that when innocent blood is shed to bring change, it does not lead to the desired change but the death of the idea of a nation itself.

The novel also depicts the disintegration of family system after the beginning of the insurgency. As the youth join the insurgency, the elderly are left to fend for themselves. In Nepal, as in most of South Asia, family system is considered the most important and stable institution of the society. A family does not just consist of its core members, but it is intricately linked with the society as a whole, which helps make a well-interconnected web of families which contribute to making an integrated society. Unlike the West where individualism and nuclear family pattern cause neglect of the elderly by their own children, in Nepal, family system is based on a tradition where grown up children live with, and take care of, their parents. But with the coming of the insurgency, the family tradition has broken down, as the young generation has joined either the insurgency or have been displaced, leaving the elderly to fend for themselves. In many cases, the different members of the same family have joined either of the warring parties— just as in the case of Drishya’s kin friend (miit) and his siblings. While Drishya’s miit Resham join the police force, Resham’s siblings join the insurgency. Resham is killed in an encounter with the Maoists, the party which his siblings are working for. Resham’s siblings can not even return home to be with their parents in such a moment of grief, as they belong to the enemy camp of their deceased brother. Resham’s parents are not able to come to terms with such such a breakdown of the

family, which has led them to madness. The Damai tailor-turned-shopkeeper tells Drishya about the disintegration of family and plight of an old couple in Resham's neighbourhood:

there's another old couple. They're no better *off* than your Miit Ba and Miitini Aama. They have poor eyesight and can't go anywhere. They're waiting for their sons to come back. One's in the army and the other's joined the rebels. The one in the army sent them a message saying that if they wanted to see him, they should come to Kathmandu because it's too dangerous for him to come back here. But the old folks can't go to Kathmandu...Their griefs going to kill them one day (146-7).

The loneliness of Lahure Kaakaa after his daughter leaves home to join the insurgency, and the lament of a seventy-year old woman leaving the village following the order of the janasarkar or "people's government" after found "guilty" of misbehaving with her daughter-in-law speak of the effect of the insurgency in the families. James Sharrock writes that Wagle "wishes to tell the common tales of individual and family trauma from the conflict" (2008). The government data proves the extent of disintegration in the rural villages—an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 people were displaced during the ten long years of insurgency.

The irony of life after insurgency is found in the conversation between Drishya and the boatman. The boatman expresses his fear of being misinterpreted: "I don't have a clue who you are," he said. "If I say one thing, you might take out a gun and shoot me. If I say something else, you might still take out a gun" (174). This is an ironical situation where the person who is helping Drishya cross the river, is himself scared of his passenger. Drishya says, "There he was, steering the bot which was taking me across the river. But he looked so worried. He was doing me a service, but I was making him feel nervous. He was helping me to cross safely but saw me as a possible threat to his life...Still, the boatman was rowing the boat" (174). The loss of human values, the ironical sense of insecurity from a fellow being who is helping oneself, and the loss of calm and peace in the society—he cannot accept these things that are the direct result of the insurgency. Drishya tries in vain to console himself by through positive thinking. He is optimistic

about his journey because he has immense love for his country. There are hindrances, and his security is at stake. But that does not deter him to continue the journey—he continues to move ahead, to map the country on his own foot. He tries to see beauty among the uneasy cairn of the mountain. He tries to see beauty in the rhododendron, see the birds, and follow the path of the melting snow (105).

He says:

I wondered if I'd see any blood on the trail. I decided I wouldn't let it upset me. I'd dismiss it as a reflection of the rhododendron flowers or the play of the sunlight and shadow. The people of the hills had been walking up and down these trails for centuries. The footprints of my ancestors were imprinted on these trails. I wanted to touch their footprints, to feel these trails carved from their sweat. If I screamed in loneliness here, the chirping of the birds and the humming of insects would cover the sound of my scream. If I went mad here, my madness would be drowned by the crashing of waterfalls. If I were to weep, anyone who heard me would think it was the cry of a bird. I'd walk. Siddhartha and his comrades had left me, but I was determined to finish the journey I'd started. (105-6)

Drishya is an epitome of hope. He does not believe in a miraculous “revolution”. So he keeps moving. He tries to see beauty in the village that is ravaged by the insurgency the novel is a combination of hope and despair—Drishya tries to row the boat of hope and development boat against the tides, but he is challenged in every step. Seeing immense possibility of development in his own village, Drishya contemplates on establishing tourist route, opening an art gallery cum Café in his village below the Dhanchuli Himal. That is Drishya's answer to a real revolution—by giving back to his village by turn despair into realization of a dream.

My village was looking for a future. It deserved prosperity, and I could help bring it. I wanted to give new life to my village. The fields of mustard had taught me how to draw. I'd borrowed colours from these hills and wanted to pay them back with interest. I'd been given so much by the earth, the wind, the water, and the life and culture of my village. The rows of *saag* had taught me about straight lines, the hills had taught me the upward strokes of my pencil, and the streams had taught me how to bring them back down...The heights of the hills and the depths of the valleys had taught me the essence of life. The place in the hills where I was born had turned into a coffee plantation. I wanted my art to contribute to the transformation (124).

But Drishya's optimistic idea of putting individual effort loses in a futile battle with the Maoist revolutionary idea of a “total change”. His plan of development becomes a matter of suspicion to both the state and the Maoist—leading to his abduction. Who are those people who abducted Drishya from his own gallery while

planning for the *Palpasa Kyafe*? The identity of those people is ambiguous, because there is a possibility of both the state and Maoists feeling insecurity from the activities of Drishya, which is, helping his village to build a future of its own. This is perhaps what Narayuan Wagle is trying to show: in the times of the insurgency, an optimist, innocent citizen becomes the victim of the warring forces. Whichever side of the insurgency commits an extra-judicial crime; it is the citizens who bear the brunt.

Drishya to *drashta*: evolution of an artist²²

The more Drishya delves into the reality of the villages, the deeper does his sense of insecurity haunt him. A series of incidents contribute to his gradual mental deterioration. He revisits his past through the cowherd boy who cautions him to be alert while walking along the path. Drishya sees his own self in the face of the cowherd, and can not but compare and contrast his own life with the cowherd's. He says,

the cowherd reminded me of my childhood. He was still tending cattle, while I become a painter. We were separated by a span of two decades, but at this age I been no different from him I spoke like him, I even looked like him. The only difference was that this boy's mother didn't drag him to school by his ears. A bomb had ripped his school apart (108).

Drishya is relieved that at least he has risen his status from a cowherd to a reputed artist, but he is at the time feeling sympathetic to the boy who may be able to go to his school again. His sympathy grows even more when the boy shows interest in his poem, and when Drishya tells him he could be a poet later on owing to his interest in poetry, he tells Drishya of his wish—"I don't want to be a poet...I want to be an engineer"—in a reenactment of how Drishya had told his teacher of his dream to become an engineer when the teacher had told he could become a poet

²² These ideas were discussed in conversation with Professor Makarand Paranjape. I would like to thank Prof. Paranjape for the same.

someday. The other difference is also that, he may never realize his dream of becoming an engineer. Herding the cows will be his vocation, or there is always the possibility of him joining the insurgency. Drishya's insecurities grow when he meets a girl named Nanu, who heading to her kin-friends house, reminds him of Palpasa when she says "*je paayo tei*" or "nonsense". This is just after leaving his miit's house when Drishya is still devastated by the news of his miit's death. Just as Drishya took a banana as a gift for his miit during childhood, Nanu has a banana for her miitini, unaware that her miitini would be blown off by the bomb put up by the Maoists. Surrounded by stories of killing and double insecurity from both the state and the Maoists, Drishya's insecurities and mental deterioration lead to schizophrenia where he sees "a shadow who looked like me, had my name, wore my clothes, shared my experiences and even aimed a gun at me" (174). His schizophrenia continues even when he is led by Maoist combatants on the way to meet Siddhartha. This time, he loses control over his own speech, and speaks when he is ordered not to, inviting a doom. His climactic schizophrenia becomes the immediate reason for inviting attention of government soldiers, who kill Siddhartha's in cold blood. Only the guilt of being a reason for Siddhartha's death brings him his senses back. He says, "My thoughts had been all over the place. I'd had no equilibrium. It was the warmth of Siddhartha's blood which had brought me back to reality. I'd been walking through a war zone" (ibid). The schizophrenia was a result of having seen the affect of the insurgency, which he himself realizes. Self-aware of the mental state he went through, he says, "I'd been surrounded by images of widows, orphans, and old people who'd lost their children. I was falling apart. Even when I saw a real person, I saw the face of a widow, painted by my fear" (ibid).

There is a significant change in the use of colours and representation of subjects in the paintings of Drishya, after he returns from the hills. In his earlier

paintings, he usually represents nature or culture. For instance, in the beginning of the novel, he says of his painting, “I’d started a series of paintings on jacarandas. But I’d stopped halfway through the first painting, dissatisfied with one of the figures, a college girl on her way to campus, walking along a street strewn with blue flowers” (44). Another of his paintings, titled “Rain”, also depicts nature. The only instance of his representation of political situation is the painting of his bombed school—which attracts immediate attention of Siddhartha. But his sense of colour and art changes after seeing the affected by the devastating images of war and the death of his potential lover, Palpasa. His art then becomes an outlet through which he vents out his reflection of the reality that he experiences in the insurgency-hit country. His paintings are reflections of the time and the environment of insurgency in which the country is entangled. His name thus represents the metaphor of the changed reality: *drishya* stands for “image” or a “picture”. The condition of violence and turbulence gives him an eye and a philosophy—he gets a new *drishti* to examine the reality. As he returns from the countryside all shattered by seeing the blood of the fellow citizens and that of Palpasa, his *drishti* is expressed into his paintings in which he uses dark colors. Breaking away from the light, romantic art of the earlier times, the new paintings that Drishya creates upon returning depict the real picture of the suffering of the people and the country. Drishya then does not remain a *drishya*, but metamorphoses into *drashta*, venturing to create paintings called *Palpasa Series*. The level of his grief and mental disturbance is evident in what he says about his colours:

I was working on the sixth painting in my Palpasa series, but I was having trouble with it. I just couldn’t find the right colours. The brush-strokes didn’t seem to suit the shades I’d given them. I wanted to put hope into the figure of Palpasa. At first, I’d painted her in vermilion, but it looked like blood. I couldn’t even distinguish between vermilion and blood (218).

Devastated though he is, Drishya is at the same time determined with a renewed energy to contribute in his own way towards bringing change in the country. His belief that change is not going to happen through bloodshed becomes even strong-

er, so his paintings would show the negative impacts of the insurgency and inspire people to take the route of non-violence. He says, “In places, vermilion looked like blood and blood like vermilion, yet, in reality, the two represented complete opposites. Vermilion stood for hope, while blood stood for failure and despair. The message of my paintings was that I wanted vermilion. The warmongers wanted to see a blood-soaked canvas stretched across the country” (220).

In his early conversation with Siddhartha, Drishya says that he is not interested to bring change through his paintings. When Siddhartha asks if he does not intend to change the society, he replies,

Paintings aren't meant to change society,' I said. 'Art isn't politics. Painting is like music, removed from day-to-day life. It's a medium that touches the heart and the mind simultaneously. It seeks only the synergy of brushstrokes and colours. I use colours to express beauty. I'm not involved in politics (89).

But now his stand on the purpose of his paintings changes. He wants to give a clearly political and humanist, message: “The stand I'd taken was that of people who resisted the warmongers both sides. I belonged to this, third force. People who felt as I did could be targeted by either side because we opposed both. I'd protested against both waning sides in these paintings, my colours showing my support for the third camp. This was my strength” (221). As the images of the insurgency haunt his mind, he gradually becomes clear about the purpose of his paintings—to depict the reality facing the country engulfed in the insurgency, hence the metamorphosis from Drishya to *drashta*. He increasingly finds clarity in his thoughts and the purpose of his painting—to renounce violence: “Through my paintings, I was trying to convey my views on contemporary Nepal...These paintings were a reflection of my journey and my sufferings. I couldn't be objective. The language of time was brutal and could easily defeat me. I was a loner trying to overpower forces on the small stage of his gallery, with only a paintbrush in his hand” (219). Painting thus serves to Drishya as a metaphor for seeing reality clearly and strengthening his humanist ideology.

Conclusion

The significant changes in the subject of representation in Drishya's paintings show that there is a definitive change in his thought process. The inevitable circumstances lead to a sudden leap in his consciousness, making him more thoughtful about the political and social condition. But there is no significant change in his view on the violent insurgency—he grows even more hateful towards the Maoists for adding to the already damned condition of the citizens in a country languishing in underdevelopment. The novel does not elaborate on the Nepalese history, mostly the 240 year Shah dynasty that the Maoists have cited as the root of the problem. To put it in other words, Drishya is not interested to dwell on the root of the problems in monarchy or whatever happened in the bygone centuries as much as he is concerned with the right of the citizens to live their lives in their own terms. Even at the end of the novel, Drishya is still not convinced why there had to be an insurgency which was doing nothing other than killing innocent people or dragging them into the insurgency. Unable to find Siddhartha, Drishya says, “How could he bear to be responsible for these widowed hills? How could he stand to see these innocent people being turned into widows or orphans or losing their children? Or was he only thinking about another attack on a district headquarters (164)?” But when he meets Siddhartha, the time has already gone. The writer has left a space of ambiguity by not giving voice to Siddhartha at the time of his dying. It is not quite sure what his last words were. He tries to say something to Drishya, but his voice does not come out, which keeps Drishya unable to guess what he was saying. One way of interpreting Siddhartha's voicelessness can be that he is emphasizing the need of insurgency even when he is dying. This is fairly assumable considering the ideological indoctrination of Siddhartha. Drishya's ideology is clear: to engage in reconstruction from the very ruins of the country. But the novel ends at an ambivalent point projecting a gloomy picture of

the nation where Drishya's own attempt at reconstruction does not see the light of the day because of his abduction.

In the years after the publication of *Palpasa Kyafe*, Nepal has taken a great leap in the social and political areas. So in the changed political context, the novel lends a possibility of reading it as a historical documentation of the insurgency years. The Maoist goal of a republic has been achieved. The insurgency indeed paved way for establishment of a republican state, apart from the roles played by different identity groups after the 1990's, and by political parties especially after the changed role of monarchy after King Gyanendra Shah began his direct rule after 2002. There have also been certain changes in the socio-political structure of Nepal, including the status of women, Dalits and ethnic communities. For many who spent their youthful days for the "total change", the insurgency might have become a nightmare. This, though, makes for a different subject for study and analysis. To conclude, it is seems pertinent to quote what the poet Buddhisagar (2011) has to say about the condition of the country: "In Nepal, the land of the Buddha, there are peaks of tears and anger way taller than the Mount Everest". *Palpasa Kyafe* documents those tears, wounds and anger inflicted by the insurgency on lives of the citizens remains, and stands as one of the brilliant testimonies of such an infliction for a long time to come, perhaps even after a "total change".

CHAPTER IV

Between Maoism and Ethnicity: Quest for Identity in

Urgenko Ghoda

*Hūdaina bihān mirmirmā tārā jharera nagaye
bandaina mūlūk dui chār sapūt marera nagaye*

“Morning won't arrive unless the stars are fallen at dawn
A country won't be built without the blood of her children”
(Bhupi Sherchan)

Urgenko Ghoda presents the Maoist worldview of a nation whereby ethnic communities have autonomy and self-rule over their native territory, equal distribution of economic resources without political dominance and cultural hegemony of certain group of people. Presenting a Tamang woman as the ethnic face of the insurgency, who romanticizes an individual's martyrdom as a matter of collective pride and prerequisite for revolution, the novel argues that the insurgency acted gave ethnic communities a weapon to hit back at the hegemonic order, assert ethnic identity and build an autonomous state of the ethnic groups on their native lands.

Introduction

This chapter discusses three important aspects of *Urgenko Ghoda* which make it a representative novel of the *Pro-insurgent Camp* within the NIL. It begins with a brief summary of the plot of the novel, followed by an overview of its critical reception. Further, under three different subheadings, it examines how Mhendo's

quest for the history of her race and the urge to reclaim that history through an armed insurgency based on Maoist ideology; her vision of a nation to be established after the success of the insurgency; and her romantic view of martyrdom that gives impetus to her and her comrades to sacrifice individual life for the collective cause. It concludes by stating that, whereas Mhendo's quest for understanding and reclaiming the history of her race facing marginalization in a stratified society is justifiable, the claims for an ethnic state in a mixed society with multiple cultures and ethnicities may not necessarily lead to establishing an egalitarian society.

The novel begins with a metafictional narrative in the prologue where readers are introduced to Yaman, the editor of a magazine titled *Sumeru Post*, who meets two poets—Hritu Ranjan and Mausam Shrestha—for a drink one monsoon evening, and gives them another banned magazine titled *Laal Pailo*, which has serialized a novel titled *Urgenka Ghoda*. That *Laal Pailo* is a banned magazine suggests that the novel it has serialized should be somehow associated with the insurgency. When Mausam reaches home, he shows the magazine to his wife Ujjwala, who keenly joins him in reading the novel surreptitiously, despite the fear that the mere possession of the banned magazine in their house would lead to their arrest by the security forces. The novel then enters into its meta-narrative where Mhendo, a Maoist insurgent woman belonging to the Tamang ethnic group, and her friend Pallavi are on a journey originating from their camp in some unnamed hilly area to Mhendo's native village Ichong, a poor hinterland in the outskirts of Kathmandu. Mhendo is pregnant with over five months, and on strict dictation of the party seniors to discontinue her combat activities, she is heading to her home area where she hopes to engage in the Party's political activity which is mainly focused on accelerating its attack on Kathmandu, also called “Yambu” in the Tamang dialect. The journey is expected to be complete in about 25 days, but

because of the presence of the security forces along the way, they have to divert their ways and take shelter in Maoist camps and in locals' houses for several days, and as a result, are delayed. But, nevertheless, Mhendo enjoys the journey, because after a long service in the militia force, she is finally able to interact with the people and gather more knowledge about their lives—the reason for her growing interest in the lives of the people being that she is on a quest to unfold the mysterious history of the Tamangs which involves a mythical valiant warrior named Urgen and his white war horse who had been killed in cold blood on the banks of a river named Yabeng. For the last eight years, Mhendo has experienced hallucinations whereby Urgen and his horse appear and seem to inspire her to avenge the killing of her Urgen and his horse along with her other ancestors, and reclaim the glory of their ethnic heritage. Finding it impossible as a pregnant woman to walk any further on the difficult hilly terrain, Mhendo stays on in a Tamang village where she takes part in party's propaganda activities, and in the meantime gives birth to a baby girl. She spends the first six months of her post-delivery period in the hut of a Tamang woman named Silikmo, where she is visited regularly by her Maoist colleagues. Ultimately, she re-joins the militia leaving behind her infant daughter at the custody of Silikmo, as she considers that the time has come to reclaim her history and also make a new one as the Maoist launches a *coup de grace* against Yambu. But even before the execution of the Yambu attack plan, the Maoist militia, of which she has become the commander, confronts the government's security forces who raid the Tamang village. At the end of a fiery battle, in which her militia turns out to be victorious, Mhendo, though, succumbs to her injuries. As she is breathing her last, she feels content at the thought that she fought as valiantly as her ancestor Urgen, and became the true Tamang martyr while defending her race. According to the narrator, "her lips were calm, but her eyes that were gazing at the horde of the white horses said, 'Urgen! I have saved the dignity of

the native Tamsaling land. See, I have fought valiantly and accepted martyrdom fearlessly. Tamang is also a valiant race.” (238)

The novel is written in a postmodern narrative style with different layers of narrative where readers also become part of the narrative itself, as they read and respond to the novel simultaneously. At times, the author of the novel appears to directly address the reader and tells them what he intends to do. For instance, the narrator says, “Dear reader, (Mhendo and Pallavi) are waiting for a favourable condition to move ahead. Meanwhile, a series of incidents are happening around the country, but they have not come across any such significant incident. In this free time, we will try to look for interesting stories that came as turning points in Mhendo's life” (56). The novel is also self-congratulatory of its projected success as it is depicted as being read surreptitiously by influential people of different walks of life, including the poet Mausam and his wife Ujjwala; college students; police personnel and his wife also named Mhendo; army officers; and Maoist insurgents. There is an interplay of fact and fiction where characters themselves speculate on whether particular characters were might be real or fictional. Mausam and Ujjwala discuss on whether Mhendo could be a real life character. Even when they talk about “revolutionaries”, one asks the other whether s/he was referring to a fictional revolutionary or a real one:

“Tell me whether Mhendo exists somewhere or not”, Mausam says. “Mhendo's photo is not there on the book, so I can't tell.”

“Come on, answer in yes or no.”

“Eh, she does, why not! How would the insurgency be possible otherwise?”

As they keep on speculating, they are visited by a Maoist insurgent named Bisam who could be the same Bisam of the novel whom Mhendo calls Bisu Dai. To her surprise, when Ujjwala asks Bisam whether he knows Mhendo, asks in turn, “Who? Mhendo the revolutionary? How do you know her?” Apart from such me-

ta-fictional elements, there is also an interplay of historical events with fictional. For instance, Rupchan Bista of the novel is a fictional representation of the real life person named Rupchandra Bista who, during the Panchayat years of the 1970's and 1980's, spread awareness among the villagers of Makwanpur and peripheral district through his initiative called "thaha". The novel also draws reference from the real life event of the brutal killing of unarmed Maoists by the security forces in Sindhupalchok district during the ceasefire; it also depicts the infamous incident called "Madi incident" where 38 people were killed and more than 70 injured when a public bus was ambushed by the Maoists in 2005.

Although the novel *Urgenka Ghoda* or "Urgen's Horse" falls under the *Pro-insurgent Camp* in this study, its author, Yug Pathak, did not engage directly in the Maoist insurgency, unlike Rishiraj Baral (*Samargāthā*) and Ghanashyam Dhakal (*Rāto Ākāsh*) and many other writers who were directly involved in the insurgency. Previously a college lecturer, he now contributes regularly to a Kathmandu-based newspaper, *Nagarik*. By representing celebration of violence in the novel, Yug Pathak has stood on the side of the Maoists who believe that violence is the only weapon that a human being can use for heralding a revolution. Not only has Pathak represented the Maoist ideal of violence in his novel, he has presented himself as an advocate of violence, at least in one of the articles while responding to an open letter by Jugal Bhurtel. Arguing that violence cannot be a matter of celebration for common people, Bhurtel wrote, "These incidents of violence (as represented in the novel) might look normal to those who believe that an armed insurgency is necessary for transformation of the society, but wider Nepali society which has burned by terror of the so-called "people's war" is not in a condition to stand such a misfortune again" (2010). Yug Pathak responded to Bhurtel thus:

Violence have emerged as indispensable elements during certain phases of transformation of society. Non-violence is a lovable thing for everyone, but the human society has never become free of violence. Violence itself has different shades, so a mere denouncement of violence will not lead to non-violence. The voice of non-violence will remain subdued until the last of the weapons remains in the world. But what we need to do is identify the sources of violence, and turn the discriminatory state into a rational one. In this selfish society, such attempts at times become necessarily violent” (Pathak, quoted in Burtel 2010).

Such an attitude is also prevalent in his heavily partisan novel, which is also characteristic of novels of the *Pro-insurgent Camp* as well as the military camp. *Urgenka Ghoda* is set during the final years of the Maoist insurgency when the Maoist is launching the final and decisive war against Kathmandu. The novel gives only a little reference to political events and incidences, which keeps it distanced from the larger contemporary political situation of the country, but the reference to the royal massacre and the emergency period establishes that the novel is set during the post-insurgency period (2001- 2006). But the novel was actually published in 2010. Khagendra Sangraula (2010) has said that *Urgenka Ghoda* is one of those novels written during that era of history when there was no restriction of expression, and the insurgency had become a thing of the past. He says that such literatures have been written in memory of the insurgency, also keeping in view the changes that had taken place in the society. As they are written after the insurgency years, “they have presented history without fear of any kind. (Such) novels are not written by observing the conflict from atop a hill, nor are they written standing on history's no-man's-land. They are written directly entering the wave of the history itself” (ibid). He further argues that the literary works written in the aftermath of the insurgency are relatively objective (ibid). Though Sangraula's argument is true to an extent and applies even to other authors who have been vocal about the realities of the insurgency as the restriction of right to expression was lifted post-insurgency period, it is even more important to see the Pathak's deliberate attempt to end the novel with a degree of ambivalence. Pathak's novel is dated in the sense that it ends during the insurgency period itself at an ambivalent

point, whereas a lot of political changes happened in reality post-April Movement. This shows Pathak's deliberate decision to not deal with the post-insurgency situation, as the real events unfolded in a dramatic manner which neither the Maoists nor the political parties had envisioned earlier. This will be discussed in detail towards the end of this chapter.

Myth and the quest for native history

This novel is written from the perspective of the subaltern, where a member of a historically marginalized race of the Tamang is fighting the war hope to regain the dignity for her entire race. The Tamangs do not have a history—their place in history was lost when they were vanquished by the Khas rulers and pushed out of their lands. Inspiration for Mhendo comes from the most recurring image the Tamang mythical figure Urgen and his horse. The image remains with her as a shadow, an expression of her psychological condition as she is unable to unearth the mystery about lost history of the Tamangs. As her understanding of the history grows gradually, it keeps reminding her the duty she should accomplish as a descendant of the clan of the Tamang warrior Urgen—to win back the dignity that was lost in history. Though she becomes aware of Urgen through myths prevalent among the Tamangs as an oral tradition, there are other elements which add to her mature understanding of history. Mhendo derives these images from her father Phurva who is the first person to unearth the myth about how the ancient Tamang warrior, Urgen, along with his horse, had been betrayed and killed on the banks of the Yabeng River by the Khas king. When accompanying a foreigner on a research trip, Phurva sees thousands of white horses from the ruins of the ancient palace of the Tamang king of the Kabila principality. This visit to the palace of his ancestors gives Phurva impetus to begin his quest for the history of the Tamangs.

“Now we should understand. We should know why our race has been marginalized”, he says to his wife (75). The understanding of history manifests through different means, though. For the artisan Sonam, Mhendo's uncle, the injustice laid upon his ancestors by the Khas rulers manifests in the sculpture he makes of his father inadvertently. The narrator says, “When he made that sculpture, he was not driven by the lure of money, nor was he inspired by his love for art. In the deep layers of his heart, he was inspired by the consciousness about his race” (80). The connection with the ancestors does not only remain constricted within person to person relationships, but in the surrounding itself. After 21 days of fruitless search for the right kind of boulder to use for the sculpture, Sonam, upon returning home, finds a suitable one in the frontyard of his own house. The sculpture he makes is that of his long dead father whom he had seen only as an infant, and whose face he had completely forgotten, but it is the magical connection with his past that makes it possible for him to create the sculpture. The connection with the boulder is established only later by the Tanba who says that Sonam's father had breathed his last sitting on the same boulder when he came back as an ailing fugitive from the labour camp for building the Shankha Durbar for the Rana rulers. Mhendo's conviction to strike the Sankha durbar originates as a result of the myth, which is a narrative of historical oppression of her ancestors, but her conviction gets ideological framework when the Maoist insurgency accelerates its campaign to attack Yambu. As her understanding of the Tamang history gets clearer, and she is involved in the battle for reclaiming her past through a violent insurgency, the image comes to life. During her last battle against the state army, she is depicted as riding on Urogen's horse, and fighting valiantly like Urogen himself, in a magic realistic way.

Mhendo develops her critical understanding of history not just through the Tamang myth, but, significantly, through Rupchan Bista who advises her father to

send her to a village school rather than make her a cowherd. Rupchan is thus her first rebel leader, with his “Thaha” initiative, urges the villagers to seek their space in history. And it is ultimately the Maoist which gives her the weapon and confidence to choose the path of violence to get back her history. The post-1990 identity politics advanced by the ethnic groups has developed with a strong resentment against the so-called upper castes like Brahmins and Chhetris, which has also become an integral part of the novel. The narrative of the novel also dwells on the same issue, as Mhendo is fighting with conviction to stir the hierarchical structure where people belonging to the Brahmin and Chhetri Khas rulers have pushed the Tamangs from the brinks of history. Here, Pathak has tried to strike a balance by representing the real life character of Rupchandra Bista as Rupchan Bista who, going by the surname, is an upper caste Chhetri, but is instrumental in triggering the fire of awareness among people of the rural people including the Tamangs. He is the one who teaches Phurva to question the tradition that he is blindly following, and asks him to shed the cultural garb given them by the Khas rulers during their consolidation of the Nepalese state. Upon seeing the rice and blood of cockerel offered as worship on the door, Rupchan chides him for his ignorance and inspires him to see the history behind such practices:

“What is this, stupid?” Rupchan asked.

“This is the tradition of the Tamangs, Sir. This is continuing since long!”

“Tell me when exactly it began”, he questioned.

Phurva was.....he had only learned to follow the tradition, but he had not learned to find the history of that tradition. He blabbered, “I dont know, Sir. They say it's continuing since long.”

“Ok, you don't know when it started, but do you know who started it?” he asked firmly.

“May be the ancestors”, he said in a low voice.

“Not your ancestors, stupid! It was started by the law of the powerful. Is there a Dashain festival in your culture, and a deity of the Dashain?” his slender hands moved like furious snakes. “Find about it and tell me, stupid! It was started by the Rana rulers. Dashain was imposed upon your race. Once a man forgets his

identity and history, what does he become but an animal? How long will you follow the tradition imposed upon you by the criminal? (69-70)”

Historically, the Tamangs, as well as many other ethnic groups consolidated within the Hindu caste system, have been victims of both the repressive and the ideological state apparatuses. Prithvi Narayan Shah consolidated the Twenty-two and Twenty-four princely states scattered all over the country through military intervention, whereas the Rana rulers used selective violence along with the civil code. Cultural hegemony has continued in different forms—Gorkhanization in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; Rana civil code in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Panchayati Nepali nationalism in the late twentieth century; and to a lesser extent, multiparty democracy around the turn of the millennium. Lawoti (2010 a) has argued that rather than extending legal equality and welfare to the people, the modern institutions such as the legal code of 1854 “in fact solidified the caste system and dominance of the ruling caste while even the 1990 constitution privileged Hindu religion and its followers” (104). In the views of the sociologist Chaitanya Mishra,

oppressive structures of caste, gender and ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional dominance (have) been frequently marked as constituting the structural causes of the Maoists struggle. The caste system, while often regarded as a “cultural” feature of Hindu society, nonetheless bears highly pronounced political and economic significance. This significance is particularly salient in relation to the “upper-caste” groups and ethnic groups, on the one hand, and the “untouchable” dalits, on the other” (2007: 107).

The question of ethnic nationalism appears as one of many concerns of the Maoists. The most detailed explanation, and an insider's view, of the causes of Maoist insurgency is given by the Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai. Bhattarai (2003: 154), cited by Mishra (2007:102), has identified the several “structural causes” as follows: imperialist oppression, expansionist oppression, semi-feudal relations and underdevelopment in agriculture, decline of industry, expansion of comprador and bureaucratic capitalism, regional inequality and the question of the nationalities. Mishra (2007) argues,

ethnic, religious, linguistic and regionalist dominance have more recently come to be regarded as a salient cause of the Maoist struggle. The “ethnic cause”, to a significant extent, encompasses linguistic, regional and religious causes as well, although the overlap is far from perfect” (108).

Mishra further adds that there is a long history of the “dominance of upper-caste groups and their (Hindu) religion over Buddhist, animist, Islamic, Christian and other faiths, the dominance of the Nepali language over other languages” and also the dominance of hill dwellers over the Tarai dwellers (ibid). Mishra argues that the Maoist resistance, “while set in the backdrop of this historical dominance, also constitutes a resistance against specific features of the 1990 constitution” (ibid). Mahendra Lawoti has also expressed a similar view, stating that

the Nepali Maoists raised many issues of the indigenous groups such as language equality, secularity of the state, and self-determination rights. The Maoists also formed various ethnic fronts and declared autonomous ethnic regions. They launched campaigns against the caste system and ethnic prejudice and resisted imposition of compulsory Sanskrit in schools, a language alien to most indigenous groups (2010 b).

The above discussion thus situates Mhendo’s quest for native history and the Maoist insurgency in the foundations of Nepali history which is a history of marginalization of certain ethnic groups like that of Mhendo, and the discontents expressed by the ethnic groups in the context of the 1990 Constitution.

Between ethnic liberation and class struggle

Urgenko Ghoda dwells on an important debate concerning the question of whether the assertion of ethnic identity would be integration in the larger national state, or a demand for a near-separate province of the Tamangs. It argues that the ethnic assertion in the Maoist insurgency is not for an establishment of a separate state or a nation, but for the assertion of the Tamang's identity and dignity, and the search for their history as well as a place in the present socio-political map of the country. While for Siddharth of *Palpasa Kyafe* the Maoist insurgency is for restructur-

ing of the economic order through class struggle, for Mhendo on the contrary, it is the reclaiming of her ethnic heritage and establishing an autonomous state. But what about the question of class struggle that is the hallmark of the Maoists? This is where Yug Pathak falters as a novelist, as the novel shows only a lopsided view of ethnicity bypassing the question of class struggle, and eventually, as a passing thought, presents class struggle as the primary aim of the insurgency. For a large part of the novel, the issue of class struggle remains only in the hindsight, and Mhendo does not have a clear viewpoint on this regard. Pathak presents Mhendo's commander Sangharsha, as the mouthpiece of the party who clarifies Mhendo on the nexus between class and ethnic struggle. He says,

Never forget that the issue of liberation of ethnicities is related to the liberation of class. In every ethnicity, there are both the oppressor and the oppressed classes. But the party has raised the issue of ethnic liberation because some groups of people have remained victims of oppression just because they belong to a certain ethnicity (133).

So when her cousin brother, Dorje, backs out from the “people's army” feeling betrayed on the issue of ethnic struggle, Mhendo clarifies about the nexus of class and ethnic struggle within the insurgency:

Dai, you know that the “people's war” did not start only with the issue of ethnicity. Even within caste (and ethnic groups), there are classes...It is true that many indigenous communities like the Tamangs are exploited because of their ethnicity, but dealing with only the issue of ethnicity will again be nothing than Brahminism...Our main aim is class struggle—ethnic liberation is possible only after the struggle of the proletariat class (211-3).

Similarly, she explains the history of exploitation and marginalization of the Tamangs to an elderly Mhemey (grandfather): “Several hundred years ago, Tamang was a ethnic group of the warriors, who fearful of noone. But, as the Tamangs were very straightforward, they were deceived by the king whose descendants have occupied the big palace of Yambu. We are now fighting the war to demolish that palace and save the dignity of the Tamangs” (137). When the Mhemey expresses disbelief in Mhendo's talk of fighting against the King and questions whether she was talking of a separate Tamang country, Mhendo says, “We won't

have a separate country, Mhemey. But we will have a separate state inside Nepal. We will bring back our language, culture, identity and our dignity. The king is the leader of the elites. What's the use of replacing one king by another? Now, we will rule ourselves, make our own laws, make developments ourselves and stand on our own feet. We will have the rule of the poor, of the proletariat. Isn't that good?" (137). Mhendo's will to attack the Shankhadurbar is strengthened for two reasons: political and libidinal. Political, because she wants to destroy the power centre that has been the reason for hegemonic dominance of caste and ethnic groups; libidinal, because she wants to to avenge the death of her grandfather and other ancestors because it was the same building that took their lives. Mhendo writes, "In my will to attack Yambu was the conviction to demolish the monarchy that had dominated and abused the Tamangs for hundreds of years" (133). Mhendo contemplates,

Sangharsha Dai was telling me in my ears, 'Our ethnic group can not remain remain coward and escapist. Keep fighting fearlessly, become a martyr after creating a history, but never become a coward. We, too, have a history of having won wars. Go on attacking the royal palace of Yambu, and relax only after you oust the king. Join the other ethnic groups in the war, and build a dignified world for all. Never return as the vanquished—the people's army never loses' (146).

Even then she is confused whether her conception of the ethnic struggle has any substance. The narrator says, "Mhendo started to ponder whether there was problem in the conception of a Tamsaling native land itself. She had imagined the entire people's liberation army as Tamsaling army. She knew that blind racism could not fight help the working class in their struggle" (207-8) . She concludes, "No, racism is not the meaning of my Tamsaling, in today's world, there is no use of racism" (ibid).

Self versus 'collective cause' and the metaphor of death

As a woman rebel, Mhendo does not only challenge the traditional role of a docile household girl by joining the insurgency, but she also takes up the issue of rec-

laiming the history of her ancestors, which is not usual in a patriarchal society where a woman is considered to be a temporary member of the household as she is expected to shift to her husband's house, considered to be her permanent home. It is interesting that Mhendo, being a woman herself, is less concerned about women's liberation. For her, the liberation of her ethnic group is more important, for which she is even willing to sacrifice her responsibility as a mother. In the beginning of the novel, Mhendo accepts the cautions necessary for a pregnant woman with much reluctance: "Her heart was dangling from the twine. On one hand was Mhendo the insurgent, and on the other, an infant was crying and calling Mhendo the mother. She took leave from the people's army with a heavy heart" (20). But few months after delivery, Mhendo is again caught in the dilemma of whether she should assume the role of mother for her newly born daughter for a considerable amount of time, or resume the life of an insurgent. On the one hand, she has the biological responsibility of mothering her child, and on the other, she also has the zeal of fighting the war for mothering the rebirth of her history. Then she concludes that Silikmo didi can replace her as the mother, but there was no replacement of Mhendo in the war. It is that desire of mothering the dignified rebirth of her ethnic group that Mhendo decides to resume her activities in the insurgency. She writes in her diary:

Tomorrow, when I stand on the frontyard of Silikmo didi wearing combat dress, a cap with a glistening red star, a mauser on the waist, and a bag with toothbrush, paste, handkerchief, changing dress, books, diary, pen, portable radio and other necessary things, my daughter will probably still be sleeping. Before wearing the combat dress, I will suckle her and keep the rare feeling of motherhood locked inside my heart. 'Didi, I am leaving my daughter in your custody. I am not sure if I will return from the war. If I become a martyr, please tell her once she grows up—your mother became a martyr for the country and its people!' As I will say this, Silikmo didi will keep nodding mechanically (147).

In *Palpasa Kyafe*, the death of Palpasa signifies the death of a dream of reconstruction of a nation. In the novel, death stands for a metaphor of destruction. So when Palpasa dies, it is as if a little bud is plucked before it blooms. This is

reflected in the paintings of Drishya that are full of gory colours that represent blood and violence as the order of the day. But in *Urgenko Ghoda*, Mhendo is a fully blossoming flower. After the flower blossoms, it is destined fall after a certain moment of glory, so that the possibility of regeneration of a new bud remains. The Maoists envision construction of new structures on the ruins of old structures that are deconstructed by violent means. So, even violence is celebrated with an expectation that a new structure will replace the old one. In *Palpasa Kyafe*, Siddhartha says:

‘Consider the purpose...Destruction in order to create’ (86).

When Drishya confronts Siddhartha by asking why he cannot envision construction without destruction, he replies:

‘The important question is what is being destroyed. To cure this diseased country, its fundamental structures must be changed. And that’s what we’re doing.’

‘But people are being killed.’

‘Most of the people who’re being killed are representatives of the old power elite. True, some innocent people are getting caught in the crossfire,’ he conceded (ibid).

For the Maoist insurgents—be it Siddhartha of *Palpasa Kyafe*, or Mhendo of *Urgenko Ghoda*—the life of an individual is equal to an object worthy of destruction for the making of a new structure. In terms of the central argument of the novel, though, *Palpasa Kyafe* denounces all kinds of killings in the name of the people, whereas, *Urgenko Ghoda* celebrates violence as the only option that is remained of the poor people who are facing hardship and historical discrimination at the hands of the oppressive power structure. So when Jhilko, one of Mhendo's colleagues, expresses his frustration over the death of his friends, Mhendo says, “Don't call them dead, friend. They are martyrs. Attaining martyrdom for the cause of the people by rising above the self and dying for petty selfish desire are entirely different things” (189).

Conclusion

In his open letter to Yug Pathak, Jugal Bhurtel has indicated the possibility of beginning of an ethnic tension through the representation of the divide between the Khas and the Tamangs. He has written that

in a new Nepal when social order is disturbed because of the problem of extremist ethnic consciousness, you might be criticized for recreating a history of a very sensitive issue of ethnicity. At a time when the Khas people are blamed for all kinds of real and fictitious “injustices”, a problematic trend has begun where the Khas are considered as the criminals of the past, neglecting the issue of feudalism which does not have any caste or colour” (2010).

Especially, the post-April Movement political climate of Nepal has been that of tension between the different forces that are regarded as the “oppressors” and the “oppressed”. The erstwhile elite section of the Nepalese society, including the Brahmins and Chhetris are losing their social and political footing as the erstwhile “oppressed” communities like the Dalits, Janajatis and Madhesis have begun voicing demands for equality with a newfound confidence. Khagendra Sangraula says, that “Dalits have claimed for their social dignity, Madheshis have claimed for Nepaliness, ethnic groups have claimed for (their territories), the marginalized and disadvantaged who belonged nobody and nowhere, have asked for new opportunities from the society and the state” (2011). In actual terms, the issue of ethnic autonomy is much more complex in a country with more than 102 castes and ethnic groups and 92 languages. Even at the time of writing this chapter, the issue of ethnicity continues to be the most contested issue in the Constituent Assembly, also sparking tussle between different ethnic groups claiming their native land and status. The claim for ethnic autonomy, even though not separatist, is thus a complex one in the context of restructuring the nation. Moreover, in an age when information technology, free labour market and economy, where exchange between people regardless of ethnicity/caste background becomes a necessity, there cannot be water-tight compartmentalization between different communities. It should ra-

ther be based on the philosophy of a sharing a common democratic space between multiplicity of identities. There should be linkages that pull the strings together and that can be nothing other than cultural institutions. Cultural institutions can bridge the gap between ethnic, non-ethnic and indigenous communities. Theatre, cinema, art and literature transcend the borders of caste, ethnic and religious identities and bring people together. With the people becoming more conscious about their identities, we can see that the cultural landscape of Nepal will be more vibrant than ever, just that there is a need of democratic institutionalization of those different identities (Kafle forthcoming).

CHAPTER V

Conclusion: Paradise Lost or Republic Found?

It is almost always the case that the biggest crises in history have turned out to be opportunities for the production of outstanding literature. Be it the two World Wars, the Spanish War or the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, such historical events have produced some of the best literary masterpieces, and many a time, also changed the course of literary history. In the same manner, the Maoist insurgency that changed the social and political landscape of Nepal also changed the direction of Nepalese literature, hence the creation of the NIL as discussed above. This study began with a presumption that literature is a tool to understanding social and political reality; that a novelist can show you what a journalist cannot. It began with the question—does the NIL provide enough bases to infer what the Maoist insurgency was, what it aimed to achieve, and how the actors involved in it or those affected by it took the insurgency in their own different ways? The study showed that the NIL provides different perspectives of understanding the insurgency, and that the attitudes towards the insurgency that are complex, ambivalent and paradoxical. At the outset, it discussed NIL by dividing it into camps of writing—the *Anti-insurgent Camp*, the *Pro-civilian Camp* and the *Pro-insurgent camp*. Speaking in terms of depiction of the insurgency vis-à-vis the stereotype of a “paradise” as discussed in the introduction of this study, the NIL provides perspectives that range from the “loss of a paradise” to the “founding of a republic” and a middle position that laments over the loss of a paradise and improbability of a founding of a republic. The overarching thematic link between all three novels, which is also true of the NIL, is the metaphor of death. Somehow, the NIL is dominated by death, but its depiction of death is as varied as the ideological positions

the novels take. Does death represent the loss of a paradise, or serves as an essential stepping stone towards the founding of a republic? The title of *Akash Gangako Tiraitir* itself serves as a metaphor of death, as the *akash ganga* or the “sky-ocean” is where the protagonist, Sanjay, wishes to remain as a twinkling star after his death. For Sanjay, his own death, though being the loss of human body, is a testimony of his ideological honesty and dignity. *Palpasa Kyafe* has a complex relationship with death, because it advocates for celebration of life but death comes as an inevitable evil in the lives of the characters. It is a tragedy and loss of human life. Whereas, *Urgenko Ghoda* celebrates death as martyrdom, a necessary precondition for the completion of a “revolution”.

An important question that has been raised on the representation of the insurgency in such texts is the question of objectivity. Critics have blamed the ideological positions of the writers and the political circumstances as the reasons hindering the objectivity in representation (Bibhas 2067; Sangraula 2011; Baral 2066). Bibhas writes that the texts hitherto produced from all three camps are not the “real” literatures of the insurgency, claiming that the “real” writings about the insurgency have not come out as yet from any camp of writings (2067). Sangraula has said that the author’s ideology determines what kind of writing is produced, and expressed the hope that “more objective writings will appear in the post-insurgency period when there is no threat to a writer’s life” (2011). Talking about objectivity in writing, when I asked the writer Pradeep Nepal why he showed only about the atrocities of the Maoists and not the state forces, he gave me a blunt answer: “Because I was only concerned with exposing how bad the Maoists were; and it had to do with my personal experiences, including an incident where his friend Yadu Gautam of Rukum was killed by the Maoists for ideological clashes.”²³ He had personally visited Rukum and saw that he was devastated to see that

²³ Interview with the Pradeep Nepal, Kathmandu, 18 July 2012.

the Khalanga bazaar and the adjoining villages where humanity and rationality was dead” (ibid). For Nepal, there is no objectivity in writing, and is brave enough to declare so. There are some other kinds of critics who criticize the lack of objectivity in a certain writer’s book, and in so doing lose their own objectivity. Narayan Wagle, on the other hand, claims that he chose fiction over non-fiction to avoid the problems of objectivity. He says, “There are so many restrictions in journalism that you can’t always express the things you want to, which is why I chose fiction so that I could give a fictional garb to the things I wanted to say.”²⁴ The seasoned critic, C.K. Lal, argues that it is not abnormal for writers to come up with partisan writings in a post-insurgency condition. He says, “Partisanship is normal when polarisations are in process. Writings reflect the position of the author. For the position of “reality” to appear, passions have to subside”²⁵. But the important question is, how is the reality of the insurgency reflected in such writings? Lal responds that the writers “have largely done justice to the complex “reality” of a country afflicted with multiple conflicts” (ibid). But another literary critic and publisher, Ajit Baral, differs with Lal, arguing that such representations are far from reality. He says that the few texts that have been written about the insurgency are, “except one or two exceptions, removed from reality, and they have failed to bring out the complexities of the insurgency.”²⁶

Apart from the ideological position of the author and the partisanship associated with it, there have also arisen criticisms regarding the question of authenticity, mostly from the writers and critics of the *Pro-insurgent Camp*. The question is—“Who has the right to write about the insurgency?” The political dogma of the Maoist writers is clearly visible in their criticisms where they question the non-Maoist writers if they are at all entitled to represent the insurgency. In the con-

²⁴ Discussion with Narayan Wagle, New Delhi, 22 October 2011.

²⁵ Email interview with CK Lal. 27 October 2010.

²⁶ Email interview with Ajit Baral. 30 September 2010.

temporary critical scene, those critics belonging to the pro-Maoist camp have become the most vocal of all. Ninu Chapagain, Rishiraj Baral, Chaitanya and Ghanashyam Dhakal are the leaders of the camp. Rishiraj Baral, in his book *Satta ra Sanskriti*, has lambasted the writers who have “criticized the insurgency and inspired the state to destroy it” (2066: 194). He writes, “The so-called progressive writers like Pradeep Nepal and Khagendra Sangraula have begun an initiative against the insurgency through their articles, commentaries, stories and novels. *Junkiriko Sangeet* and *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir* are the texts leading the initiative. The latest novel to have presented a wrong image of the Maoist insurgency is Narayan Wagle’s *Palpasa Kyafe* (ibid). But who will write such a real and authentic narrative, and who will define what is really authentic? Or, more importantly, is fiction the best form of writing that can tell the truth about the insurgency? This is also a debatable topic, because in the past few years, there have appeared a slew of writings in the form of memoir, which deal with the issue of the insurgency, and, arguably, seem to be giving an authentic view of the insurgency through writing their personal experiences of the insurgency years. The genre of memoir is increasingly becoming the most used genre especially by ex-Maoist insurgents who were directly involved in the insurgency. A cursory examination of the Nepali book market reveals that there are no less than sixty books of memoir written by the Maoists. A researcher at Martin Chautari, Kailash Rai, has compiled a bibliography listing 38 such memoirs, and claims that her last count is forty-nine (2068). Most of these are written after the Maoist came overground. Almost all of the books listed by Rai, and those I have found in the market are published after 2006. Rai says that, although a considerable number of writings appeared during the insurgency period itself, those written by the Maoists were few in numbers. But after the Peace Agreement, the writing and publishing of such books has escalated. She further says that “if the books written by the “outsider” writers and

those written by the Maoists themselves are compared, the latter category of writings make many things clear about the insurgency. A study of such memoirs can be a subject of another dedicated study. However, a serious problem with such writings, whether fiction or non-fiction, is that they are not written with artistic rigour, and are a highly partisan and monotonous lot. So, although there is a fast-paced quantitative growth of such writings, the lasting legacy of the Nepalese Insurgency Literature written so far amounts to not more than its acronym, nil. But perhaps this won't happen because at least a few outstanding books have been written in the recent past. Baral (ibid) confirms by saying that "If much had been written about the conflict, I think a few good, powerful works of writing would have emerged." But, of the novels written so far, is there a novel which can be considered as the grand narrative of the insurgency? I believe that the grand narrative of the insurgency is perhaps still waiting to be written. But, of the novels that are available today, *Palpasa Kyafe* is outstanding, which is proven by the fact that it is a cult novel in the contemporary Nepali literary scene. The book does not only appeal its readers because of the issue it deals with, but also the style in which the narrative is carried and the simplicity of language in which it is narrated. There are other good novels in terms of artistic value and the issue they raise. For instance, Rajan Mukarung's *Hetchhakuppa* (2065) is a significant novel that falls in the grey area between the *Pro-insurgent* and the *Pro-civilian Camp*. The novel uses the Limbu mythical figure of Hetchhakuppa as an allegory of life of the protagonist, Sangen, who struggles for identity in deeply stratified Brahministic society. The ulterior motive of the writer seems to be to support the insurgency as it appears to the protagonist as the only thing that promises the uplifting of ethnic communities, but the protagonist also condemns the situation that has arisen after the Maoists resort to violence. The novel *Karnali Bluj* (2067) by Buddhisagar has a poignant representation of condition of a commoner during the insurgency,

though the issue is dealt with as a subplot in the novel. In the novel, Jarilal, a village porter is detained and killed by the security forces. His fault—he carries a pressure cooker—not to turn it into a bomb but to fulfill his desire of cooking food in a “modern” utensil during the final years of his life. His dream of adopting modernity hits back as he is tagged a Maoist for possessing a cooker, a potential explosive. For citizens like Jarilal, meeting two ends is the only aspiration, and do not know what revolution means to them or the nation. But even that aspiration is shattered with the coming of the insurgency, and escalation of torture from the state itself. These novels are artistically and aesthetically appealing, in which the authors show their mastery over the colloquial Nepali language and the craft of the novel.

The question that still remains to be addressed is—is there an authoritative text of the insurgency? Will a grand narrative of the insurgency ever be written? These are difficult question to answer, partly because it is a subjective question which might have different answers, and partly because the NIL is only a little more than ten years, and these questions may not have answers at all. Nevertheless, we can expect that in the next few years, the NIL will grow even bigger, and produce writings that seem “more”, if not “absolutely”, authoritative, texts that reveal the truth about the insurgency.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview with Pradeep Nepal

DINESH KAFLE: *While reading your novel Akash Gangako Tiraitir, one gets a sense that you are presenting the Maoists as having no solid ideological foundation, and that, because of the internal injustices and undemocratic functioning of the Party as well as the lack of tolerance against innocent common citizens like Krishna Puri, the Maoist insurgency will not be successful, and is doomed to downfall. What led you to depict the insurgency as you have done in the novel?*

PRADEEP NEPAL: The Maoists have associated themselves with Marxism, and I also come from the same school, but our ways have been different. So am interested to analyze the difference. In the context of writing of the novel, I was basically inspired by the events unfolded and the stories I heard when I had gone for a political meeting in one of the worst-hit districts—Rukum. I had stayed at Khalanga, the district headquarters. When I saw the terror and fear that present there, I thought that it should be depicted as it was. There I interviewed a few people about their condition after the insurgency, and used them as materials for my novel. For instance, there is a character named Balaram Khadka in the novel. I formed this character after a real life person who was killed by the Maoists (the name of the real person is changed in the novel, though I have given the same surname). I spoke to his widow and she told me, “my husband had never even criticized the Maoists, and he did not do anything without asking the Maoists”. When enquired about this with some locals there, then I got to know that he was killed because of the internal tussle between different factions within the Maoist. Later I also talked with the widow of Yadu Gautam (who is depicted as Dharma Gautam in the nov-

el). The things that she told me have appeared in different versions in different characters. Then I talked with a police hawaldar, who had been displaced. The Maoists had seized all his property and burnt his house down. Alongside, his cattle were burnt too, and the Maoists allegedly feasted on a charred buffalo. Then when I returned to Dang, another district, I met a person named Ganesh Bahadur Pun who recounted an incident in Harjang of Rolpa district where a family was made hostage inside the house and the entire house burnt. Whoever tried to step out of the house was gunned down. This reminded me of the concept of Hitler's gas chamber.

Moreover, after the Maoists began the insurgency, I read two books: Karl Marx's *Wealth, Family and the Origin of State*²⁷, and Mao Zedong's *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Then I came to a conclusion that the insurgency the Maoists had initiated in Nepal was really not a people's war. So, even in my political articles, I call the insurgency either a "Maoist people's war" or "Maoist armed insurgency". For me, the Maoists do not appear as having any ideological foundation. The killing and destruction happened because of idiosyncrasy of certain individuals.

DK: *In the novel, some of the characters like Prabhakar, while giving the reason for beginning of the insurgency, have said that the democracy that dawned in 1990 did not yield the expected results, which led them to the insurgency. Moreover, they have said that a 'structural change' was necessary. But the novel has not given any alternative to the insurgency.*

PN: You should understand the novel as a document of torture faced by the citizens. I wanted to give justice to them. If I had taken up the issue that you have pointed out, my book would have become a political memoir rather than a novel. So my characters are those people who have been made victims at the hands of the

²⁷ It is not clear which book of Karl Marx the interviewee is referring to.

Maoists. The message that I wanted to give was that the killing of such innocent citizens is the death of a country. And the second thing that you asked, the main character unearths the ideological inconsistency of the Maoists. There is a scene where there is a debate on the significance of Rosa Luxemburg. The protagonist tries to establish that the Maoists have neglected the ideology of Luxemburg. The society cannot be changed through a violent insurgency. The fight between Lenin and Rosa was on the same ground—the former was in favour of dictatorship and the latter in favour of democracy. The protagonist of my novel also tries to establish that the society cannot be changed through violence, and that, democracy and people’s movement are the real conduits of change.

DK: *The protagonist, Sanjeev, is betrayed and abducted in the novel, but his ideological foundation becomes even more solid after his tour of the Maoist area. His conviction to fight for humanity and condemn the Maoist model becomes even stronger. But for a person like Sanjeev, who values life so much, is it not important to come out of the Maoist net? Sanjeev himself criticizes the Maoists for killing individuals, does he not appear as a mere idealist when he continues to reconcile with the ideological difference with the Maoists? Attaining “martyrdom” is a coinage of the Maoists, not a person like Sanjeev.*

PN: I wanted to present Sanjeev as someone who does not surrender to wrong things. While building the character of Sanjeev, I had in the back of my mind images of some of my friends killed by the Maoists. They were never ready to surrender to the Maoists. I wanted such a strong character. Even now, I think that if I had presented Sanjeev as surrendering to the Maoists and accepting to work in favour of the Maoists, the novel would not have been the *Aakash Gangako Tiraitir* as it is now. The important thing is, he does not expect to be called a martyr—

rather, he wants to live but not as a coward. He says, “I am being killed even though I still want to live. But I don’t want to fall on their feet in order to live”.

DK: *No matter whatever the goal of the Maoist party, the characters that you have depicted in your novel as cadre –level insurgents and middle-level leaders do not appear as having either any ideological clarity or a defined goal, except that they are happy with the power the gun has given them.*

PN: That has already been proven now, hasn’t it? Let me tell you one thing: I did not even know this guy called Prachanda. Some people speculated that he was Comrade Kalyan, while others claimed that he did not exist at all. I met him only in the end of 2063 BS when they Maoist came to the Parliament. There he shook my hand and we introduced ourselves. And he asked, “Aren’t you the author of *Akash Gangako Tiraitir?*” He was actually the same person who had previously told our leader Madhav Kumar Nepal that they would kill me if I did not take back my writings. “I won’t do anything myself, but if anything happens from the cadre level, then don’t complain me later”, he had said. Now people ask me how I could have managed to give such deceptive characteristic to the Maoists. My ideological understanding and study of different characters in literature taught me that a person with a criminal gene indulges in such deceptive activities.

DK: *Lately, a lot of writings have appeared which deal with the insurgency, and they have represented it variously. How do you assess the growth of such writings in qualitative terms? As we can see, such writings are poor in terms of form and content in the literary sense is poor. Do they not erode the quality of Nepali literature in general?*

Let me begin with an example: *Chhapamar Yuvatiko Dayari*, a memoir by an ex-insurgent named Tara Rai became a very famous book. The book is a reflection of

an innocent, school-drop out girl who is still so young that she longs for motherly affection from woman named Dharmasheela Chapagain. Though the book might not be up to the mark in terms of literary craft, it is an honest account of a girl who worked in the cultural team of the Maoists for a short while before getting arrested. So I began reading the book with certain preconceptions. In my case, a lot of readers do not like me because I speak the bitter truth. If you don't speak the truth, it's better not to speak at all.

If I have to compare, let's say between, *Sohra Saanjh-haru*²⁸ and *Palpasa Kyafe* I consider the former as a better book in terms of artistic quality. But it is *Palpasa Kyafe* that won the Madan Purashkar and got wider popularity. So the qualitative judgment also depends on what you expect from the particular book. Nowadays, the ex-Maoist insurgents themselves have written about their experiences. Though their writings might not be artistically competent, they serve as historical documents of the insurgency.

DK: *Your novel is mainly focused on the atrocities of the Maoists. Various sources, including the media reports have shown that the state was no less atrocious, killing more number of people than the Maoists. Why didn't it occur it to you to maintain a balance?*

PN: While I wrote this novel, I had kept the Maoists at the centre of the narrative, and I did actually not think about maintaining a balance. I was basically guided by two incidents: First, the killing of Yadu Gautam: Gautam had actually told me back in 2054 that he would be killed sooner or later because he was aware of a secret meeting between Prachanda and the then King Birendra. He was killed just one month after our meeting. Another incident that touched me was that when I

²⁸ Written by Govinda Bartaman and published in 2004, *Sohra Saanjh-haru* is a travel narrative of the insurgency-hit western districts, including like Baglung.

had gone to Ropla for a political meeting, I met four of our Party members who had several cuts on their hands. I was told that the Maoists had punished them for coming to attend to my meeting. I was thus so taken by the atrocities that I did not give much thought to whatever the state had done in the name of counter-insurgency. Moreover, it was only after the declaration of Emergency in 2001 that the state killing escalated, especially during Gyanendra Shah's direct rule. But in my collection of short stories, titled "Baghmare ko Laalsalaam", I have depicted the atrocities and terror of both the sides of the insurgency.

APPENDIX 2

Interview with Narayan Wagle

Dinesh Kafle: *At one point towards the end of your novel, **Palpasa Kyafe**, Drishya, while painting the “Palpasa series”, says that “The stand I’d taken was that of people who resisted the warmongers of both sides...I belonged to this, third force. People who felt as I did could be targeted by either side because we opposed both.” But in so doing, doesn’t a writer risks losing objectivity in representation of reality? How difficult was it to maintain a balance while writing a novel that stands on the “civilian side” might as well stand on the “anti-insurgency” side?*

Narayan Wagle: It was a bit difficult to maintain a balance. Especially, since it was going to expose the human suffering caused by the insurgency, and also because it was going to be published during the climax of it. But I was very sure that my character protagonist intended to represent the ‘human side’ of the insurgency. By this, I mean that he was against the way in which the insurgency was being carried and was being dealt with by the state machinery. The state was looking at it purely in a military way and the Maoists were putting people in the fence.

DK: *During a literary discussion (Kathmandu Liteary Jatra, 2011) the critic Khagendra Sangraula commented that the **Palpasa Kyafe** is a novel written from the “tourist’s viewpoint” suggesting that it tends to give a superficial overview of the insurgency and does not delve into its intricacies. What are/were the limitations of writing a novel from such a distance?*

NW: Sangraula's comment might have been conditioned by the fact that my protagonist constantly travels to different places during the difficult time. Talking about my writing process, I visited a number of places during the height of the insurgency and interacted with people who had been victimized and terrorized. As a journalist I had the privilege of getting first-hand account of the war. I have experienced the war from very close: I lost some of my relatives and close acquaintances to the war; the disappearance of one of my close friends left me numb for a very long time. So I do not subscribe to Sangraula's categorization of my writing as "touristic writing". I would say that I have written as an insider, not as a "tourist".

DK: *Very little is known about the social and familial background of Siddhartha as well as that of other characters like Drishya. Couldn't a detailed exploration of such background have helped you establish the reasons why the insurgency actually began? Or, were you at all interested to explore the reasons behind the insurgency as much as to expose the consequences of the insurgency?*

NW: I wasn't interested to analyze and explore the political reasons behind the actions political or non-political. I was simply interested to tell the story of what was happening to my characters during the peak of the insurgency and how they were dealing with the rough currents of the time.

DK: *The Maoists profess that an individual's sacrifice is an essential process that leads to a revolution for collective good. Isn't there any substance in the argument that any history of the human race is written with blood, and that the sacrifice of one generation brings change for the other?*

NW: I have a counter-argument to that of the Maoists. It is well known that it was the multi-party democracy and a functioning parliament against which the Maoists

launched their violent insurgency. There is a strong point of view which shouldn't be ignored: it wasn't at all necessary to ask people to sacrifice their lives for a violent insurgency.

DK: *Lately, a lot of writings have appeared which deal with the insurgency through different perspectives: anti-insurgency, pro-civilian and pro-insurgency. How do you assess the growth of such writings in qualitative terms? Do such texts help in any way to understand more about the insurgency, and do they help in furthering the debate on the insurgency? Or, do they help to understand the background and history of the insurgency?*

NW: There are some propagandist writings which have a specific purpose to serve: to justify the insurgency. But it is the readers who are the real judges. As a writer I should be accountable to the people and try to bring out the truth about the insurgency as it was. And I am clearly on the side of the innocent victims rather than any of the warring sides.

APPENDIX 3

Interview with Yug Pathak

Dinesh Kafle: *In your novel Urogenko Ghoda, the protagonist Mhendo seeks to win back the history of the Tamang race that had been subdued by the discriminatory state. That is fine. But on empirical level, the claims for a native land and ethnic autonomy for the Tamangs as well for other 'indigenous' groups in a multicultural, multiethnic state can possibly end up creating a vicious circle of ethnic tension, as the question of who is native and indigenous itself is problematic. Everyone is native in one way or the other. There is resistance even from within the communities themselves.*

Yug Pathak: This is a bit of a question to be asked to a political analyst or a sociologist. Moreover I fear it would demand a long answer either. Yet I will try to briefly note something here. Every society lives its own life with its own sort struggles and own sort of love and hate relationships. We can't use the experience of any other society to understand and handle the issues and complexes of any particular society. Primarily I have an opinion that every people should try to find out their own answers for their social questions. Ethnicity doesn't subjectively or perhaps objectively mean the same to all the countries around the world. Just like modernity doesn't mean the same thing for all. Nepali modernity, however, is taking a new shape with the quest of identity of not only the ethnic communities but all the marginal communities like Dalits and Muslims etc. The change that stems out of the blend of history and present mood of society can't be effaced out. During my research for *Urogenko Ghoda* I came to the same conclusion. A small country like Nepal with wonderfully complex web of diversity has a lot to offer to a novelist mind. I was trying to reread and reinterpret the history of Nepali society while researching but my attempt was a kind of musing mind's attempt. I wanted

to portray some characters who opted for armed struggle. It seemed strange to me that many men and women, particularly young ones, were trying to alter the course of history in such a way that they could free themselves from the fear of death. A sort of madness that we believe a poet or a mathematician or a scientist practices, was being practiced by those people. Can one be so 'mad' for a social cause? This question haunted me during my research. When I finally tried to analyze the social, political, cultural, economical and historical roots of this 'madness', I was shocked. I went through people's minds and aspirations, books and folk tales. And finally discovered Mhendo, the white horse, blood and flesh people like Prometheus and of course the theme of the novel.

During the period of Maoist People's War the ethnic uprising took historically different and characteristic upward movement. I found people harking back to their tattered ancient history, of race and political entity, and trying to reshape their language, cultural artifacts and glory 'to be one with an ethnic identity'. Suddenly people decided to be proud of being someone of an ethnic identity or Dalit. I portrayed these findings in a way they took shape like living creatures in my mind. A novelist portrays what is there in the world. Of course portrays them with certain magnanimity of judgments, but the course of history automatically suggests them to fix them in a particular way. I did the same thing. The only difference I made is that I tried to be true to characters I portray and the people whose first hand experience served to form those characters.

So Mhendo came alive with her political ideology, ethnic experience and aspirations to win back her history. It was true and it is still true to many such activists who try to evolve through the history. We can ignore them but can't dismiss them from the platform of history. And, yes, it exhibits a different tendency in our society. Ethnic tension was part of the history, it's not new. But this tension is making its way to resolution. People close their eyes for some time but not al-

ways. When they close their eyes, it seems to be peace. But that fake peace is something getting devastated. If we understand Mhendo, we can understand what it really means to win back the history. It's not like making a walled ethnic state, but a state that serves good to a human being who bears a face of the marginalized community too.

DK: *One of the characteristics that define the Maoist insurgents in the novels is their willingness to 'die for the revolution' and attain 'martyrdom'. In your novel, Mhendo attains dies in a battle even before her final goal of attacking the Shankhadurbar in Yambu. In that sense, the novel ends at a point where it cannot tell whether Yambu would be 'attacked' eventually or not. Does it signify by any chance a preemptive lamentation of the hardline view that real goal of "Satta Kabja" or capture of the state power was forfeited because of the signing of the 12-point understanding and the peace process?*

YP: I presume a novel is not meant to tell the history. However a novel tells the history of those people who made the history in the broader sense and lived their life through the same history. Mhendo did what she had to do and what she could do in the mess of history. But her death is not the death of her (hi)story and the history she made. Such things do have subtle winnings. I suppose one Tamang woman or a man, or of any marginal ethnicity, who won the election or became a minister or a member of parliament or even a member of a particular school management committee member, for being one from marginal community, won 'shankhaburbar' symbolically. If we fail to see such winnings we can't really understand the revolutions and evolutions in any society.

DK: *You yourself were not associated with the Maoist insurgency (or were you?). You may have ideological similarities or differences with the Maoist and the vio-*

lent insurgency it launched. How do you balance between subjectivity and objectivity while representing the insurgency?

YP: It doesn't matter whether a creative artist participates in person in the things that happen in the artistic creation or not. If you ask- Does *Urgenko Ghoda* portray the characters from Maoist People's War in Nepal? I would say—Yes. But if you ask—Have you portrayed them objectively? I would say—Yes and No both. A movement is a great thing. You can't even collect the materials that serve you best for objective totality. A movement has multidimensional face. You recognize one and you just can't see the other. On the other hand a human being in that movement bears another multidimensional face. Take, for instance, Mhendo. She is the part of People's War. Actually she is one of them who make it happen. Simultaneously she has her own personal life-history that serves her differently and uniquely among the others in the same movement. Being a member of Tamang community makes her live other dimension of her life. How can then I would be able to portray People's War in general in a novel? It's an account of history of its own characters. So far I have researched I have almost tried to be honest with the facts. At the same time I presume this 'facts' means differently.

DK: *Lately, a lot of writings have appeared which deal with the insurgency, and it is represented variously. How do you assess the growth of such writings in qualitative terms? As we can see, the quality of such writings in terms of form and content in the literary sense is poor. Do they not erode the quality of Nepali literature in general?*

YP: A big movement lives through the lives of people in general. Therefore there may be a lot of experiences out there in the country. And a movement of bigger dimension like People's War in Nepal might ignite many literary minds in various ways. On the other hand, People's War was waged by those people who were

marginalized and deprived of their socio-economic rights. It was a class struggle exhibited in the form of war. Therefore there is nothing to be surprised that a lot of writings have appeared dealing with it and they represent it variously. Likewise many ex-combatants and activists too have written and published their memoirs and literary creations.

When the question of literary quality comes, we get caught in the limbo. Some works of already famous writers too sometimes lack the quality as such. Therefore it's safe not to comment on that. When the question of quality comes, I have the opinion that a society needs loads of literary writings, of all quality-levels, from all quarters of the country. I think we need hundreds of average writers to make one better writer. Out of them time automatically selects some to develop their career as a writer.

DK: *The Maoist insurgents themselves have come up with their subjective reflections of the insurgency in novels and memoirs. While they write out their subjectivities, how honestly do you think the Maoist writers are representing the insurgency? Are they just trying to justify and valorize the insurgency, or are they honest enough to write about the insurgency as it happened and its effect on the lives of the people directly or indirectly affected?*

YP: It's good that they have come up with their writings. They provide first-hand experiences of the insurgency, their aspirations and despair, hope and fear while living through and making the revolution. It is very healthy thing for the society. How they participated in the movement, what made them happy and what made them angry, all these things serve to the minds who want to perceive them to analyze and nurse the social change. Yes, they write in a bit of their own dialect that was developed and practiced in the Maoist camps all over the country. And naturally they valorize their efforts and the party. But whatever they write, they are

quite honest. If they were ready to sacrifice their own life, that everybody holds so tight to hurt the others, it would be quite fine that they certainly had valorized it and still valorize.

DK: *Do such texts help in any way to understand more about the insurgency, and do they help in furthering the debate on the insurgency? Or, do they help to understand the background and history of the insurgency?*

YP: Yes, they help understand how the real agents of the insurgency felt like, acted like and aspired like. Their motives were built on the foundations of history. So they help us understand our history, its hidden perspectives. An insurgency is the outcome of history and does a lot to history too. Such writings are necessary for the further investigation of social, anthropological and many other dimensions of society. Therefore I welcome them.

APPENDIX IV

Images of the Insurgency²⁹

So far, this study looked at the creative genre of fiction as written source for understanding the different aspects of the Maoist insurgency. Photographs also serve as visual documentary sources for understanding events and moments, and the insurgency has been documented in photographs. This section provides, in the form of a photo-essay, glimpses of visual representations of the insurgency which can also be understood in the framework of different categories of representation that have been discussed in the beginning of this study: the *Anti-insurgent*, the *Pro-civilian* and the *Pro-insurgent Camps*. The photographs are reproduced with permission from the book *A People War*, a collection of photographs of the insurgency, edited by Kunda Dixit.



Image 1 © Chandra Shekhar Karki

²⁹ The captions given alongside the photographs in the original book have been used liberally as basic information for compiling this essay. I would like to acknowledge and thank the editor for the same.

The photograph by Chandra Shekhar Karki (Image 1) gives the message that the insurgency is not simply about a war between two enemy parties. In the image, a woman is seen crying beside her husband's dead body among many such dead bodies of policemen who were killed during a crossfire with the Maoists. Either it is physical torture or familial loss or even the inconvenience caused by



Image 2 © Bikash Rauniyar

the destruction of public infrastructure, it is mostly the common people who bear the brunt. The image of the little girl shedding tears “when her mother tells journalists of how her husband was killed by the Maoists, speaks of the story of how thousands of innocent children were made orphans in their young age when they do not even know what is exactly going on in the country. The girl's father, a journalist named Dekendra Thapa, was one of the many journalists that were killed by the Maoists for allegedly writing against the insurgency. The state forces also did not spare disappearing and killing journalists for charges of writing in favour of the insurgency. These are poignant images that depict the loss that the

families have to bear no matter what part of the insurgency one is engaged in (or not).

The photograph by Kumar Shrestha (Image 3) shows the hand of a civilian who was killed along with 38 other passengers in an infamous accident called the “Madi bus accident” where an entire passenger bus was blown off by the Maoists to kill two army men who were allegedly travelling on the bus as civilians. The

perpetrators of violence

have usually justified the violence as a “mistake” in the course of a “great revolution”, but the bitter truth is that the lives that we have lost will never come back even after a supposedly great

revolution succeeds. The

novel *Urgenko Ghoda*,

though belonging to the

Pro-insurgent Camp,

depicts the real even of

the Madi bus blast as an

event that becomes a

reason for disillusionment

of one of the insurgents

named Jhilko.

Image 3 © Kumar Shrestha



Image 4 © Kiyoko Ogura

Whoever might be fighting the war, it is the citizens who are victimized the most.

Even in *Palpasa Kyafe*, Palpasa is killed in a case of utter inhuman act when the

ambush kept by the Maoists blast off the in which she is heading to Kathmandu. In a photograph by Kiyoko Ogura (Image 4), a man and three of his goats are killed in an aerial attack by the army targeting a meeting of Maoists. Although four of the Maoists were also killed in the same attack, four other innocents—a man and three goats—lost their lives for no mistake of their own.

In a photograph by Rabi Tuladhar (Image 5), local citizens of Dailekh are seen making a tricky journey by dangling on a Chhupra suspension bridge in



Image 5 © Rabi Tuladhar

Dailekh that is bombed and by the Maoists. This is a poignant image that depicts the true nature of the Maoist slogan of “destruction for reconstruction”. The photograph makes us rethink the Maoist ideology that professes destruction of whatever little physical infrastructure is available to the already damned villagers.

One of the most affected areas of public life during the insurgency was the educational institutions. I have vivid memories of having to stay at home for several days because of the closure of the school. The novel *Akash Gangako*

Tiraitir depicts the story of Sanjeev who does not get deterred by the Maoist threat of violence for not surrendering to their ideology, and is consequently killed. The stories of persons with such determination and perseverance are available in umpteen numbers even in the reality. One such real-life character is Muktinath Adhikari ((Image 6), a government teacher and human rights activist, who was tied to a tree and shot dead for ideological differences.

The teacher Narjit Basnet (Image 7) is an epitome of extraordinary courage and dedication for his profession that he went back to teaching in the same school where the Maoists had chopped off his hands for refusing to join the party during the beginning years of the insurgency.

When the present photo was taken in 2005, Basnet was still teaching in the same class.

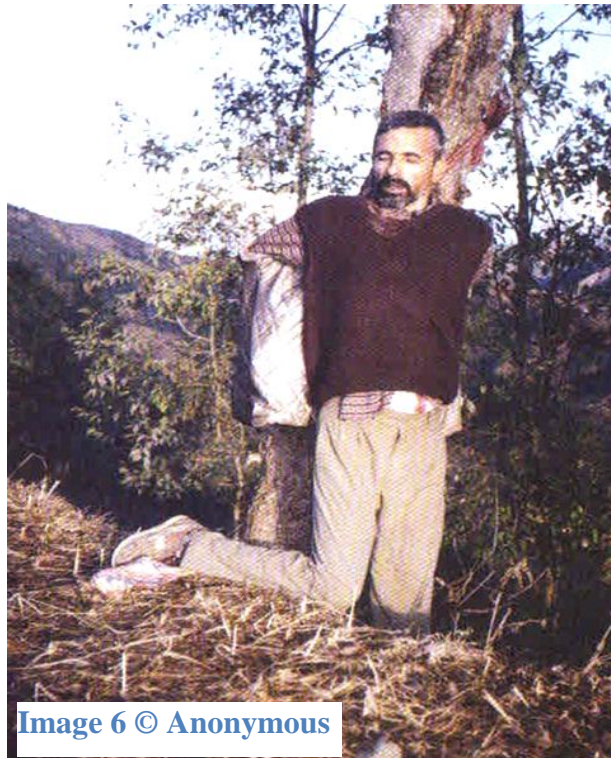


Image 6 © Anonymous



Image 7 © Naresh Shrestha

The pictures by Sagar Shrestha and Sailendra Kharel (Images 8 and 9) depict the *Pro-insurgent* side of the war one of the Maoist insurgents, Comrade Chaunti, is seen clutching a rifle while she recovering from her illness at a Maoist camp.

Image 8 © Sagar Shrestha



Chaunti reminds me of Comrade Mhendo of the novel *Urgenko Ghoda* where the Tamang protagonist is engaged in the insurgency with determination to fight against the “discriminatory” state. But the rifle that Chaunti is holding abreast in this photograph, while juxtaposed with her pale face. In another photograph, school children are seen changing the slogan of “ Long Live Prachanda Path” and giving a red salute after a morning assembly. This is a rather awkward image

of the insurgency where school children are

Image 9 © Sailendra Kharel



indoctrinated with an ideology that professes violence. As is evident of the NIL that includes a wide number of writings that depict the loss of human life and civilian freedom because of the insurgency, the images of this photo essay also show most of the victims to be civilians.