

Magarat, Heartland of NCP–Maoists

- The Connectivity -

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Preamble:

A University professor friend of mine was woken up by the Security forces at the dead of night, during the Royal rule, asking if there were any “*tenants*” residing in his house. When he replied in the negative, he was then asked which district he hailed from. He had hardly uttered Palpa, when the security man in an intimidating tone questioned, “*Are you a Magar?*” On another occasion, in the aftermath of the repressive 1995 Police operation “*Romeo*” in Rolpa and Rukum, representatives of the Nepal Magar Association went to question the then Home Minister, Khum Bahadur Khadga, as to why there were so many Magar deaths. “*Magar badi bhaye ko jilla ma Magar namare ko marne?*” He, instead, questioned them “*Chetri ra Bahun?*” This was the callous answer of an elected, democratic, responsible, government-in-power Minister. Yes, Rolpa is a 44% Magar majority district but in the case of Rukum, the Home Minister is wrong as this district has 58% Chetri majority with the Magars second at 23%¹ only. But a far more callous one is related to that of the elected government’s sitting Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, guardian of democracy. While chairing a Police Officers’ meet on improving the bad Police image in the public, Deuba was seized with a most novel idea. He asked the Police officers nonchalantly what harm would there be if “*Magar lai pani **Tapai** bhandiye, han?*” That there were senior Magar Police officers at the meet, he had no qualms at all. These are just three incidents of the “*Rajya’s*” perception of the Magars, nay of the entire Janajatis as a whole, in this so-called 21st century!

Background:

The kingdoms of Barah and Athara Magarats were probably the first ones in Nepal to be, if I may use the words, colonized and sanskritized by the more adept and adaptive Aryan race. The skilful King Ram Shah (*reign 1606-1633 AD*) believed in “*inclusiveness*” even in the 17th century. One of his well known 26 edicts mentioned that Magars were one of his faithful “*chha thars*” (*Pande, Panth, Aryal, Khanal, Rana and Bohara*) to be included in his royal advisory council. Prithwi Narayan Shah, the Nepal unifier, went further calling himself “*a Magar king*”² and

* Despite the availability of a large number of excellent literatures on Maoists insurgency, the writer has, for the sake of general readers, attempted to analyze the connectivity between the Magarat areas and the NCP-Maoists in this short article. The analysis, naturally, is through the Magar lens. He, thus, apologizes for any biases and short comings therein.

¹ Central Bureau of Statistics. 2003. *Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume 1*.

² Stillier, LF. 1968. *Prithwi Narayan Shah in the Light of Ditya Upadesh*. Ranchi, Bihar: Catholic Press.

instructed “*In giving the Kazi’s post to the Pandes, Basnyets, Panthas and Magars, give it to them each in turn.*”³ The Magars made valuable contributions in the expansion and unification process of Nepal. But the “*...turbulent period following Ran Bahadur’s assassination marked the virtual end of Magar-Gurung representation at the kaji level ..*”⁴ and any remnants of “*matwale*” revival were ruthlessly decimated⁵ by Janga Bahadur Kunwar.

This forced the Magars and Gurungs, as well as Rais and Limbus later on, to seek employment as “*Lahures*” in the British Indian army. “*Recruiting for the 9th Regiment is carried out among the Khas, and for the 7th and 10th among the Limbus and Rais. For the others almost the only men enlisted are Magars and Gurungs.*”⁶ Thus six of the ten regiments were manned by Magars and Gurungs with the majority being Magars as their population⁷ is three times larger than the Gurungs’. While Nepal’s ruling elites still look upon the “*Lahures*” in a derogatory manner, incidentally the first “*Lahures*” to the Lahore capital of the Sikh king, Ranjit Singh, were Bal Bhadra Kunwar and Ranjore Singh⁸, Amar Singh Thapa’s own son. During the First World War over 200,000 Gurkhas served the British Indian army and similarly during the Second World War over 250,000 Gurkhas served⁹. For the blood spilt by the Gurkhas, the imperial British Crown provided the Rana rulers of Nepal “*an annual gift of 10 lakh rupees in perpetuity*”¹⁰ since 1919. Many now perceive this recruitment as a form of Janajati population control¹¹ having adverse long term impacts on the whole social fabric of the Magars, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus. During these two world wars, the Gurkhas bagged 12 Victoria Crosses (13 including Ram Bahadur Limbu’s in Borneo Confrontation) for valour with the Magars bagging the highest numbers. Despite bringing such honours to Nepal, it is ironic that the Rana government should have prevented its own citizens to rise above the rank of Subedars in the British Indian army.¹² It was only after 1947 that Padma SJB Rana, the second last Rana Prime Minister, announced the abolition of that policy. Despite the overthrow of the Rana autocracy in 1951, the high caste “*mullahs*” have to this day successfully warded off the rightful political power that the Janajatis and others are entitled to in a democratic setup.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Regmi, Mahesh Chandra. 1995. *Kings and Political Leaders of the Gorkhali Empire 1768-1814*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited.

⁵ Gurung, Harkha. 2003. *Trident and Thunderbolt, Cultural Dynamics in Nepalese Politics*. Social Science Baha. Lalitpur. Sukhdev Gurung revolt 1858, Dasain boycott Rais 1867, Limbu language suppression 1870, Laxhan Thapa revolt 1875.

⁶ Landon, P. *Nepal volume II*. 1993 reprint. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

⁷ 2001 Population Census of Nepal. CBS Monograph 2003: Magar 7.1%, Gurung: 2.4%, Rai: 2.8% and Limbu: 1.6%

⁸ Khanduri, CB. 1997, *A Re-Discovered History of Gorkhas*. Gyan Sagar Publications: Delhi. They were opponents of the Sugauli Treaty dissatisfied with Bhimsen Thapa for handing over territories that Nepal had not lost to the British.

⁹ KC, Surendra. BS 2062. *Gorkha Bharti, Katha, Byatha ra Andolan*. Sabita Prakashan: Taplejung

¹⁰ Stiller, LF. Op. cit. Footnote 2. Juddha SJB Rana had this “*gift in perpetuity*” upped to Rs 20 lakhs after World War II.

¹¹ Gurung, KB. 2062. *Nepal ko Sandarbha ma Rajya ko Punasanrachana*. Tamang, S editor. Kathmandu: Samana Prakashan

¹² Gorkhapatra, BS 2004 Poush 14, National Archives, Kathmandu.

Rolpa and Rukum: Maoists' Epicenter

With that short background on the Magars and the “*Lahures*”, now permit me to revert back to the repressive Police operation “*Romeo*” in the districts of Rolpa and Rukum. The Magars of Rolpa, at 44% of the Rolpa 2001 census population of 210,000, are the largest ethnic group in the district. In Rukum, with a population of 188,000, the Magars are the second largest ethnic group at 23% after the Chetris' overwhelming majority at 58%. The atrocities perpetuated in Rukum, Rolpa and the adjoining districts, yes by the very so-called democrats born out of the 1990 *Jana Andolan I*, have been well reported and documented by many studies.

None of the political parties, however, paid any heed to the pains and agonies of orphans, widows, old and affected villagers. Why would they? The entire so-called democratic parties were too busy consolidating their own power-base by having the 1995 CPN-UML dissolved Parliament reinstated, forming unprincipled fragile coalition governments, engineering inter/intra-party defections, sending MPs to Bangkok for fake medical treatment, importing duty-free expensive Pajeros for themselves (*while Dr. RS Mahat himself was the Finance Minister*), getting involved in various scams¹³ (*Dhamija, LC, Lauda Air, Nepal Bank etc.*) to replenish their Parties' Funds etc. etc. The MPs and their parties abused the absolute power bestowed upon them by the Nepalese people. In the 14 years of multiparty democratic dispensation from 1990 to 2004, Nepal had an unprecedented thirteen numbers of Prime Ministers¹⁴, most of them illegitimates, born out of unholy wed-locks. So like the Roman emperor Nero, while rural Nepal agonized and burned, our Honourable Prime Ministers and MPs in the Parliament continued to sing and dance according to their own convenient tunes and not that of the agonized villagers and citizenry of the country.

The insurgency saw Nepalese deaths and wounded continue to mount exponentially. According to the data of INSEC (*Informal Sector Service Centre*) the number of deaths either by the State or the Maoists during the period 13 February 1996 to 28 October 2003 totaled 8,057. Of the 75 districts, Rukum registered the highest deaths at 808 and Rolpa was second with 750 deaths¹⁵. This can not be attributed to Khum Bahadur Khadga's cynical logic alone. What attributes did Rukum and Rolpa have to qualify as the CPN-Maoists' heartland? What were the factors conducive to the Maoists to make Thawang/Rolpa their epicentre? With the benefit of hindsight and the availability of a large number of studies on the Maoists, an attempt is being made below to merely enumerate the factors why the Magarat heartland also became the NCP- Maoists' heartland.

¹³ Thapa, Hari Bahadur. BS 2059. *Bhrastachar ko Salyakriya*. Sangita Thapa. Kathmandu

¹⁴ Shrestha, Chuda Bahadur. *Nepal, Coping with Maoist Insurgency*. 2004. Loksum Chetana. Kathmandu (The PMs were: KP Bhattarai, GP Koirala, MM Adhikari, SB Deuba, LB Chand, SB Thapa, GP Koirala, KP Bhattarai, GP Koirala, SB Deuba, King nominated PMs from October 2002 to June 2004: LB Chand, SB Thapa, SB Deuba then King Gyanendra under his own Chairmanship nominated Vice-Chairmen: T Giri & KN Bista)

¹⁵ Ogura, Kiyoko. *Maoists, People and the State as seen from Rolpa and Rukum* (based on the visits of Rolpa in June 2002 and Rukum/Rolpa in February and March 2003).

Communist factor.

It is ironical that the first seeds of communism into Magarat, instead of traveling from the northern Tibeto-Chinese border, came from the south in the mid-1950s through Pyuthan's well-known communist leader, Mohan Bickram Singh (*son of Khem Bahadur Gharti Chetri, later changed to K.B Singh*) and his political workers like Khiman Singh Gurung and Deepak KC who chiefly worked as school teachers. Many of the present-day Maoist leaders from the area are students of those left-leaning school teachers. Kami Budha, one of the first communist in Rukum, was an associate of K. I. Singh and was killed in 1955 in the custody of the Jumla Police. Mohan Vaidhya alias Kiran is supposed to be responsible for organizing the "oppose, expose and boycott" the 1979 referendum¹⁶ in Thawang VDC. After the referendum, the State launched a repressive operation against the communists. The Thawang villagers, in retaliation, elected the leftist leader, Burman Budha as their Pradhan Pancha and he explained "Despite the fact that we didn't know anything about politics, we had been charged with being communists. That is why we were curious to know what communism was". Burman Budha¹⁷, who was elected as a Samyukta Jana Morcha MP from Rolpa, has been falsely accused of burning the King and Queen's photos in Thawang. It was the Upa-Pradhan Panch, Burman Roka, who after getting beaten up by the villagers in the Panchayat office, accused Burman Budha, at that time languishing in the jail, of having burned the royal couple's photos¹⁸.

Thakuri factor.

Rukumkot and Thawang were part of the birta land granted to Shanta Devi Shree (*a ruling Rana's daughter*) after her marriage to Indra Bahadur Shahi, grandson of the last Rukumkot king. Though the birta was abolished by the BP Koirala government in 1959, the politics of development in that region for over three decades invariably revolved around the three Thakuri politicians: Lokendra Bahadur Shah/Rukumkot (*grandson of Indra Bahadur's brother. Kumar Mohan Bahadur Shahi, Princess Shova Shahi's husband, is great-grandson of Indra Bahadur*), Gopalji Jung Shah/Musikot (*sixth generation Musikot raja and cousin of Kumar Khadga Bickram Shah, husband of Princess Sharada Shah*) and Dhruba Bickram Shah/Bafikot (*father of General Vivek Bickram Shah, ADC/military secretary to both Kings Birendra and Gyanendra*). As Rukum had just one Rashtriya Panchayat seat at that time, the three Thakuris took turns to represent the district: first Dhruba Bickram, then Lokendra Bahadur, then Gopalji Jung Shah and once again Dhruba Bickram. It was during the Panchayat tenure of Dhruba Bickram in 1973 that Rukum's headquarter Rukumkot in the east was shifted to Musikot in the west. Lokendra Bahadur alleged "This happened as a result of lobbying by Dhruba Bikram Shah, Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah, Home Minister Sundar Prasad

¹⁶ Pathak, Bishnu. 2005. *Politics of People's War and Human Rights in Nepal*. BIMIPA publications. Kathmandu

¹⁷ After his victory in the 2051 parliamentary election, as one of the 9 elected Samyukta Jana Morcha MPs he came to the Parliament dressed in the traditional Magar kachad, gada and khukuri discarding the usual daura-surwal!

¹⁸ Ogura, Kiyoko. Op. cit. Footnote: 15

*Shah and Home Secretary Khadga Bahadur Singh.*¹⁹ Incidentally, Dhruva's mother is sister of Gopalji Jung's father, that is Dhruva and Gopalji are cousins. The politics of development thus concentrated on the Chetri-majority western Rukum totally alienating the Magar majority of eastern Rukum. After 1990, Gopalji Jung conveniently joined the Nepali Congress, won the election and even became a Minister in Sher Bahadur Deuba's cabinet in 1995. In fact, as the Nepali Congress did not have any grass-root workers in many districts, they were forced to enlist the ex-panchas as their cadres. The other two Dhruva Bickram and Lokendra Bahadur joined the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the party of the ex-panchas.

Hashish factor:

With the American and European youths flocking into Kathmandu for hash and "pot" in the 1960s, the US in 1976 was able to persuade the Nepalese government to prohibit the production, sale and distribution of hashish by enacting the Drug Trafficking and Abuse Act. It is an irony that the proponent of the "free market forces", the US, instead of stringently regulating the use of hash in their own backyards (*like death penalty in some South East Asian countries*), saw it fit to smother the production at the source. This adversely impacted the incomes of the already marginalized hand-to-mouth living farmers. It is believed the US carrot to the Nepalese government was the US\$ 50 million Rapti Integrated Development Project. Some analysts, therefore, swear that it is Uncle Sam that first sowed the seeds of discontent/communism in the Rapti zone. Ganja was one of the main cash crops of the Magars living in the remote interiors. When this was made illegal, it severely impacted their daily livelihood. With the Thakuris ruling the roost, the supposed American carrot in lieu of hash cultivation, the Rapti integrated development programs, never reached the marginalized Magar farmers dwelling high up in the remote mountains.

Migration factor:

There were very few "Lahures" recruited from these two districts in the British Gurkhas, though there were more in the Indian Gurkhas. But like the vast majority of Chetris and Bahuns of western Nepal, the Magars of these two districts were also forced to seek seasonal labour by migrating to India. Traditionally most of them, in the footsteps of their fathers, opted for "Kalapahar" in Himanchal Pradesh to fulfill the menial jobs of breaking stones, carrying heavy loads at road building sites or working at fruit orchards and farms. "*Their earnings barely bridge the annual food gap, enable them to buy a bit of oil and salt and perhaps an annual change of clothes...the rewards are meager though essential.*"²⁰ Despite the earnings being meager with perhaps the annual change of clothes, Kalapahar was and still is a NECESSITY to the people of western Nepal. The Pajero-minded ruling elites

¹⁹ There is an error in this statement. Actually, the Home Minister was Khadga Bahadur Singh and Sundar Prasad Shah the Home Secretary at that time.

²⁰ Gersony, R. 2003. *Sowing the Wind.... History and Dynamics of the Maoist Revolt in Nepal's Rapti Hills*. Mercy Corps International

of Kathmandu never understood this phenomenon of the rural population's annual change of clothes need. This same logic of NECESSITY also applies to the "Gurkha lahures"²¹. Till 1990s, the Lahures' salaries were also meager. It is only in the last decade, particular after the British army withdrawal from Hong Kong in 1996, that their rewards have become high. But these days only the lucky few get recruited, be it in the British or Indian Gurkhas. Now there is, instead, an exodus, again born out of NECESSITY, of a "new breed of Lahures" from Nepal to the Middle East and Malaysia to fill the three Ds' work (*dirty, difficult and dangerous*) there. This necessity, many believe, is born out of the failure of the post-1990 democratic governments to create employment opportunities within Nepal. One must also take note that there is another breed of New *Lahures*, a small but vocal caucus of high salaried white-collar workers in international agencies. These white-collar *Lahures*, some with accounts in foreign banks, were not products of necessity and abhor being bracketed with the poor salaried blue-collar *Lahures* who, to support their families in Nepal, are forced to send their meager remittances back home. It is an acknowledged fact that the conflict-ridden sluggish economy of Nepal has been sustained by the remittances from these very blue-collared *Lahures*.

Other factors:

- i) Iron mining was a traditional source of income but with better quality tools coming from the south and the need to cut down large number of trees for charcoal production, this practice was stopped in 1977.
- ii) In 1969, Dr. David Watters of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (*a sister organization of the Wycliffe Bible Society that translates the bible into indigenous languages*) trekked to Takasera/Rukum and confirmed Kham Magar as a distinct language. The Watters family worked there till 1976 with the villagers and in the process some villagers converted to Christianity. The local administration arrested the Christian leaders and despite imprisoning them for a year continued to harass them. Christians abroad heard about this harassment and in 1983 sent some funds to Takasera. A part of the fund was used to purchase a Swiss made water turbine for grinding grain, pressing seeds for oil and operate a small saw-mill for a small in-kind charge. Local administration again tried to unsuccessfully close the mill, further antagonizing the villagers.
- iii) The Dhorpatan Reserve is home to the Himalayan Blue Mountain Sheep that the WWF recommended culling and foreign hunters paid high price to hunt. The Rukum Magars, in conjunction with UNESCO and WWF, drew up a plan wherein the fees from these hunters would be used for schools, drinking water and other developmental works. The government instead, due to vested pressures, turned over the

²¹ Interestingly, one of the 40 Point Demands submitted to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai on behalf of United People's Front on February 4, 1996 states: "*The Gurkha/Gorkha Recruitment Centres should be closed. Nepali citizens should be provided dignified employment in the country.*"

- hunting reserve to the private tour operators. This further alienated the local community from the government.
- iv) The 45-bed Liwang hospital with an operation room, laboratory, doctors and nurses quarters, a morgue and turn-key contract for X-ray equipment, surgical tools, refrigeration, furniture etc. was ready for services in 1995. The district hospital management committee inspected the work, found some minor deficiencies and because of this the government never completed the taking over process from the contractor. The result was that the hospital unfortunately got vandalized and looted of all the equipments to confirm that the government presence does not exist even in Liwang. It has now become a shed for wandering cows and goats!
 - v) Though the Chaurjhari airport is in Rukum, it is in the extreme western tip of the district and serves more the purpose of Jajarkot's headquarter, Khalanga. Musikot's airport was inaugurated only in January 1996, a month before the Maoists declared their "People's War". Regarding Rolpa, in 1980 the government constructed an airport at Badachaur VDC in south eastern Rolpa. The airport should have actually served the capital, Libang. But the airport siting was misplaced due to, it is alleged, the influence of Rolpa's longest serving Rashtriya Panchayat member and minister, Balaram Gharti Magar.

Police Operation factors:

Operation Romeo, November 1995:

After 1990, the communist Samyukta Jana Morcha party started to have open, headlong collisions with not only their former Panchayat arch enemy, the Rashtriya Prajatantra party, but also the Nepali Congress Party who had enlisted the ex-panchas as their cadres. Prem Burathoki, an RPP worker, was allegedly beaten up and left for dead by Jana Morcha activists. Similarly, Gopalji Jung Shah, now a Nepali Congress, had his face blackened and chased out of south Rukum by Jana Morcha activists. After having lost its majority in the mid-term election of 1994, the coalition government (*NC, RPP and NSP in the Reinstated Parliament*) of NC Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba under the supervision of Home Minister, Khum Bahadur Khadga, a native of Dang (*Rolpa's neighbouring district*), initiated the police campaign known as Operation Romeo²² in November 1995.

When 72 year old Bardan Rokka of Mirul VDC-8, Rolpa was arrested at midnight of November 17, 1996 his 23 year old daughter Kumari Budda went to the Police station next day with her father's clothes as he was just in his vests and shorts. The Police not only arrested her but tortured and repeatedly gang-raped her in front of her father. When she became unconscious, the Police shot her at Reughali Khola along with her father, Bal Bahadur Rokka, Singha Bahadur Budda and Dil Man Rokka the same night. The

²² The Police IGP at that time was Motilal Bohara.

place at Reughali Khola where these five persons were killed is now known as Panchghali. Tragically, Kumari Buddha's marriage was to be solemnized a few days later.²³

INSEC 1995 reported that about 6,000 villagers temporarily left their villages and 132 persons were arrested without any warrants. While the Jana Morcha activists continued to use violence, the ruling NC Party and its coalition partners, it is alleged, used the Police and judicial system to harass and arrest their political opponents. Thus, many innocent people for no reason whatsoever got locked up by the administration from where the chances of acquittal were always very slim. Jana Morcha leaders then went underground. Three months after the campaign Operation Romeo started, the United People's Front Chairman, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai submitted the 40 Point Demands to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on February 4, 1996. Deuba not only ignored the Demands but felt it far more appropriate to visit the Delhi durbar. Nine days later, the "People's War" began in February 13, 1996 with three simultaneous attacks on Police posts in three districts (*Rolpa/Holerī, Rukum/Athbiskot-Rari and Sindhuli/Sindhuligarhi*) plus a raid on Agricultural Development Bank at Gorkha/Chyangli and an attack on the Kathmandu/Coca Cola factory . A week after the "People's War" declaration, Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadga serenely declared, "*I am confident that we will be able to bring the present activities under control within 4/5 days.*"²⁴ Ironically, six years later, Khum Bahadur was again the Home Minister. By then Nepal was sadly reaping the fruits of what he and his team-mates (*Govinda Raj Joshi, Ram Chandra Poudel, Purna Bahadur Khadga etc.*) had sown in their earlier tenures at the Home Ministry.

Operation Kilo Sierra Two, May 1998 – May 1999:

In April 1998, GP Koirala once again became the Prime Minister. The CPN-ML that had split off in March 1998 from the CPN-UML joined the Koirala government in August 1998. However, in December 1998 the CPN-UML replaced the CPN-ML in the Koirala government and the NSP also joined the unholy bandwagon. Public memory is always short, but around that time political analysts note two seemingly minor incidents. Consequent to those two incidents, the policy decision taken by the then government has unfortunately stamped permanently the tragic future political roadmap of Nepal to this day. One was GP Koirala's realization that, after getting heckled during his tour of the Maoist influenced-areas, the situation was getting out of control. The second was the Maoist attack on Kalikatar/Tanahu, home district of the then Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi, a hard-liner like Khum Bahadur.

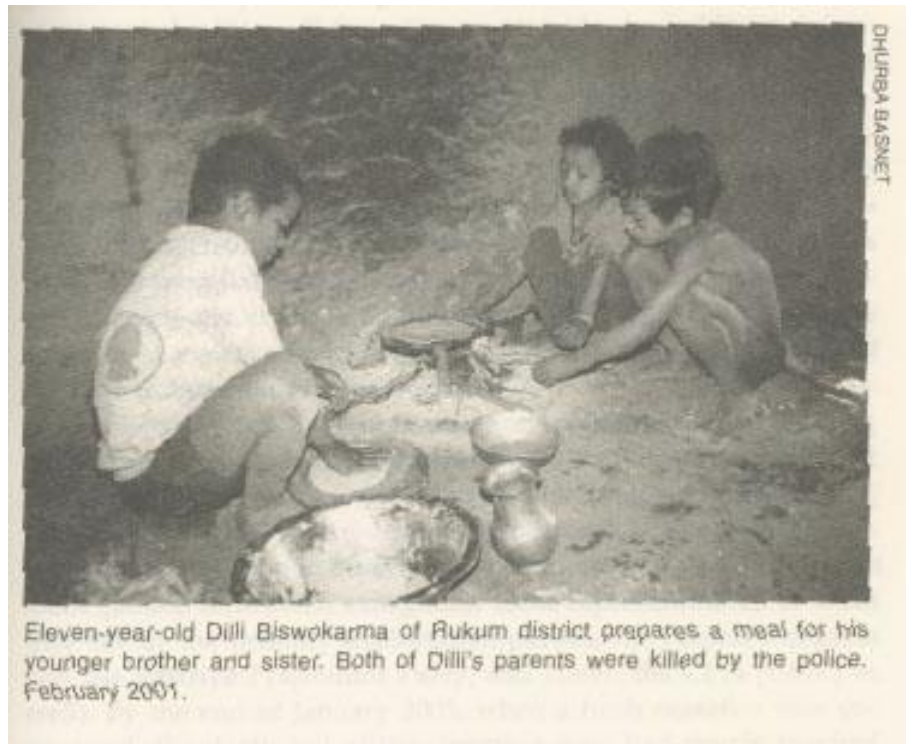
²³ Pathak, Bishnu. Op. cit. Footnote 16

²⁴ Sharma, Sudheer. *The Maoist Movement: An Evolutionary Perspective*. Edited by Thapa, Deepak. 2003. *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*. Martin Chautari: Kathmandu.

Thus, in May 1998, the duo (*GP Koirala and GR Joshi*) unleashed the ferocious Police campaign called Kilo Sierra Two²⁵, the “search and kill” operations in 18 districts killing around 500 people²⁶. The most poignant documentation is the 2001 documentary “*The Killing Terraces*” directed by Dhruba Basnet.

The documentary showed an old Magar woman, whose son and daughter-in-law having been killed by the Police, tending to her small grandchildren. Pained with the burden of feeding and raising the young children, the grandmother attempted suicide and admitted, “Kal na aikana, marnu pani garho hudo rahechha!”

11 year old Dilli Bishwakarma (of Garayala/Rukum) together with his younger brother and sister are also shown huddled (in the picture below) around a bare hearth making chapattis for their meal. Dilli’s father and mother were killed by the police and his two older brothers have already joined the Maoist militia. With intense agony, 11 year old Dilli spontaneously blurts out that he feels like drinking the blood of his parents’ killers, the Police.



Eleven-year-old Dilli Biswokarma of Rukum district prepares a meal for his younger brother and sister. Both of Dilli’s parents were killed by the police. February 2001.

Courtesy: Thapa, Deepak with Sijapati, Bandita. 2003. *A Kingdom under Siege, Nepal’s Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003.* the printhouse: Kathmandu.

The tragic civil war that the State and the Maoists engaged in had no boundaries, with one Nepalese senselessly killing another Nepalese. There were no political leaders of stature who had the vision and foresight to tackle the Maoist

²⁵ The Home Secretary at that time was Padam Prasad Pokharel with Achyut Krishna Kharel as the Police IGP. The wily Govinda Raj Joshi installed AIGP Ram Kumar Bantawa, an eastern Janajati, to head the Kilo Sierra Two operation.

²⁶ Thapa, Deepak with Sijapati, Bandita. 2003. *A Kingdom under Siege, Nepal’s Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003.* the printhouse: Kathmandu.

insurgency. Each of them merely saw it as a law and order problem and attempted to subdue it with the force of arms. While the major casualties were the innocent civilians, the security forces were not insulated from the tragedies that befell them and their families:

Num Bahadur KC of Dang's Tarigaun village joined the Nepal Police Force in the summer of 1999. Despite the requests of his mother, father and mother-in-law to resign, his simple logic was "My elder brother is in the force. My younger brother is in Malaysia. How can I feed my family?" In December 2000, Num Bahadur was killed in the Maoist attack at the Kotwadi Police station. His father, 68 year old Ghanshyam KC laments what was son's crime or for that matter the crime of his 20 year old daughter-in-law with a two month old baby!²⁷

Besides the Nepali Congress, the other three parties, CPN-ML first and then CPN-UML and NSP later, all have their hands drenched with the blood of Kilo Sierra Two victims. The government still does not acknowledge that such a campaign existed. The operation lasted a year and the ferocity of the campaign enabled the Koirala-led government to successfully conduct the May 1999 parliamentary general election. The badly mauled Maoists merely boycotted the election and while licking their wounds reassembled and planned their next strategies. Though the Nepali Congress party won the elections to form their own government (*and still governs the country, as of this writing in October 2006, under the Seven Party Alliance banner*), it was in all respects a pyrrhic victory for democracy and the people of Nepal. The pains and sufferings, inflicted by Kilo Sierra Two, on the rural population of the 18 districts, ignited an unstoppable anti-government conflagration. Kilo Sierra Two totally alienated the rural Nepalese population and boomeranged on the government itself. The tormented and affected families, both males and females, flocked to the Maoists to be willingly recruited.

Army Mobilization/Emergency Declaration, November 26, 2001:

Army mobilization to tackle the Maoists has been a controversial issue. In the initial phases, the Maoists very cleverly avoided the army studiously confronting the police only. Post-1990 governments always perceived the Royal Army as being loyal to the king only. It is true that army mobilization needed the final approval of the king. But this is exactly what the 1990 Constitution, fully endorsed by both the major parties Nepali Congress and NCP-UML, stipulates. Post-1990 governments belatedly realized that the Nepal Police would not be able to crush the Maoists and decided to establish the Armed Police Force²⁸ (APF) in BS 2058. The APF became the government's blue-eyed boy getting the required infrastructural resources which the army interpreted as being at their expenses. While there were no love lost between the government and the army, none of the post-1990 governments made any genuine attempts to activate the National

²⁷ Thapa, Deepak with Sijapati, Bandita. Op. cit. Footnote 26.

²⁸ Shrestha, Chuda Bahadur. Op. cit. Footnote 14. (Armed Police Force Act BS 2058/AD 2001 after the 105 page Regmi Report on Armed Security Force in May 2000.)

Defense Council (NDC)²⁹, the institution comprising of the Prime Minister, Defense Minister and the Army Chief that recommends army mobilization to the king. The Defense Ministry portfolio was always deemed to be an appendage of the Prime Minister thus making the National Defense Council a two man tete-a-tete affair between the PM and the C-in-C. Being too busy with the “*affaires of the State*” (which normally meant *gluing the unholy alliances to stay in power by dishing out the loaves and fishes of the State* to the recalcitrant partners), getting the required government grip on the NDC and thus the Royal Army was not the prime objective of any of the 13 odd Prime Ministers.

The unholy alliances and the squabbles within the governments gave the Maoists the opportunity to make the first major district headquarter level attack at Dunai/Dolpa on September 25, 2000. The army barrack, hardly two kilometers away, was not ordered into action while the Maoists ransacked Dunai, killing 14 policemen and looting 5 crores Rupees from Nepal Bank. The government of the day saw no moral obligation to resign. Furthermore, on July 12, 2001 (*palace massacre on June 1, 2001*) the Maoists abducted 69 policemen from Holeri/Rolpa and Prime Minister GP Koirala is supposed to have resigned due to his failure to mobilize the army to rescue these policemen. To be fair, the army had always wanted the fractious political parties’ consensus on army mobilization and thus demanded emergency declaration as a pre-condition. This was, ironically, handed on the platter by the Maoists themselves when, on the night of November 23, 2001, the Maoists made the first major daring attack on the Bhavani Prasad army barrack at Dang killing over two dozen police and soldiers, looting 6.5 crores Rupees plus, it is alleged, 22 truck loads of arms.³⁰ With the army chief, Prajwal SJB Rana, away in Germany, the National Defense Council (*comprising of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Acting Chief of Army Staff Durga Nath Aryal in the presence of IG/Police Pradip SJB Rana and IG/Armed Police Krishna Mohan Shrestha*) met to recommend the State of Emergency³¹ to King Gyanendra who promptly declared it on November 26, 2001. The government faced bigger setbacks when the Maoists on February 17, 2002 over-ran Mangalsen, Achham district headquarters, killing 107 soldiers, policemen and the CDO also. Within a span of three years from 1999 to 2002, the Maoists’ rag-tag, rabble People’s Army developed into a formidable force capable of challenging the Royal Nepal Army, a 237 years old veritable institution!

Magar factor:

The Magars have been instruments of the Shah kings in the expansion and unification of Nepal. The Magars have also been the instruments of the colonial British Empire (*the First 1914-1919 and Second 1939-1945 World Wars plus in the successful suppression of the 1857 Indian Mutiny*). When the First World War broke out in 1914,

²⁹ Bhusal, Puskar. *PM, C-in-C and HM*. Thapa, Deepak editor, *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*. 2003. Martin Chautari: Kathmandu

³⁰ Thapa, Deepak with Sijapati, Bandita. 2003. *A Kingdom under Siege, Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003*. the printhouse: Kathmandu.

³¹ The Parliament ratified the State of Emergency three months later on February 21, 2002.

Chandra Shumshere humbly offered the Gurkhas to the British thus: “*We shall be proud if we can be of any service, however little that may be*”. The Magar heartland has now become the epicenter of the Maoists’ People’s War. In plain words, the Magars are again the instruments of the Maoists. There are Magars like Ram Bahadur Thapa “*Badal*”, Suresh Ale, Barkhaman Pun “*Ananta*” and Nanda Kishore Pun “*Pasang*” in the higher echelons of the Maoists’ hierarchy. Why have the Magars become instruments? Is this because they are imbued with some inherent qualities?

The Magars are generally perceived as “...*a naïve people...easily swayed... but, who, if they can be enlisted for a task, continue in it or die in the attempt. There is irony in the fact that as many Magars have been killed by the Maoists as by the Police.*”³² Somnath Poudel, an ex-Executive Secretary of Water and Energy Commission Secretariat, while talking of his experiences in the Irrigation Department further adds “*It is easy to execute projects in Magar villages. All you need to do is to convince one senior Magar of the village about the pros and cons of the project. Once convinced, he does the entire lobbying for you. This is just not possible in Bahun/Chhetri villages. One has to go and convince each one of them individually – a very arduous task!*” According to Bam Kumari Budha, a school teacher, social activist and former Rashtriya Panchayat member from Rolpa in 1981, “*All the members of the community had to participate in community work voluntarily. Anyone who didn’t follow a rule decided on by the community was punished. Community involvement*³³ *was considered as an important factor of the society.*” Santosh Budha, president of Magarat Autonomous Region Peoples’ Government, adds “*Group work was our common working style and a capacity for strong unity has been characteristic of the Magar community..... The concept of joint ownership among the members of the community is also deep-rooted in Magar society....All these characteristics of Magar society are actually common to the feelings of communists. That is why Magars can easily accept the ideology of the communists.*”³⁴ Bam Kumari Budha together with many Magars do agree that there is some kind of “*natural communism*” in the day to day behaviours and thinking of Magars!

Conclusion:

The well known scholar-diplomat, Rishikesh Shah, wrote³⁵ “...*it is this very area of Magrat that is now bearing the brunt of the Maoist “people’s war”... 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...*” Shah further noted “*The very foundation and structure of the state seem to have been adversely affected by the nefarious designs of the political parties to politicize the permanent civil service and other constitutional organs of the state such as the judiciary, the Public Service Commission and the Auditor General’s office, which are the formal and external safeguards of democracy everywhere.*” He argued that though

³²Quoted from Awaj Weekly Chronicle, vol. 2, no. 23, 15 February, 1999 by Sales, Anne de. *The Kham Magar Country, Nepal between Ethnic Claims and Maoism*. Edited by Thapa Deepak. 2003. *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*. Martin Chautari. Thapathali/Kathmandu

³³ An example is the Community involvement in Forest Management which traditionally existed in the hills long before the much hyped success of the 1990s Community Forests.

³⁴Ogura, Kiyoko. Op. cit. Footnote 15

³⁵ Shah, Rishikesh. (he was a member of the human rights fact finding mission that visited the region) *Idea and Reality, Nepal and Rolpa*. Edited by Thapa Deepak. 2003. *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*. Martin Chautari. Thapathali/Kathmandu

Nepal has a popularly elected Parliament, the success of a party is not in itself a sufficient condition of legitimacy. Unfortunately, this legitimacy has been misused in the fair name of democracy whether it be by the post-1990 governments of Nepal or the recent military toppled Thaksin Shinawat government of Thailand. Shah further emphasized, “*Legitimacy also entails efficient performance, a sense of accountability and the maintenance of order and stability.*” Sadly this lack of accountability and efficient performance resulted, as of this writing in October 2006, in the tragic deaths of about 14,000 Nepalese lives.

The politics of not only Magarat but that of the State of Nepal itself has many, many redoubtable questions on the table: the true meaning of *inclusive* and *total* democracy, social and economic *integration* of a nation rich in ethnic diversity, *affirmative actions* for equity and social justice, equality to all Nepalese regardless of caste, language and religion etc. These are all much bandied about jargons very difficult to understand. In simple Magar language, these jargons merely boil down to how “*inclusive*” the New Restructured Nepal of the Seven Party Alliance nominated Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and the NCP-Maoist Supremo Puspa Kamal Dahal would be? That is, “*inclusiveness*” in sharing the “*loaves and fishes*” of the State: through inclusiveness in the all important policy making Legislature, Judiciary, Executive and perhaps even in the selection of the Chief District Officers who “*rule*” the 75 districts.

With the same MPs who launched the repressive Romeo and lethal Kilo Sierra Two operations now in the Jana Andolan II garbs of the Re-instated Parliament, many fear that affirmative actions on equity and social justice may still be hijacked by the high caste “*mullahs*”. However, the Magar, like any other Nepalese, still hope to be a respected citizen, a “*tapa*” like any other Nepali, not a “*tapa*” just because a Sher Bahadur Deuba deems it so! Another Magar Nepali, proud of their forefathers’ contribution in the making of the State of Nepal, even if he happens to be a hounded Magar from Palpa! Or for that matter any Magars from the traumatized, hounded districts of Rolpa and Rukum!

The End!

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