

# Influence of PMPD on Twenty-First Century's Political Movements in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

General Secretary Madan Bhandari's widely embraced concept, People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD): A Program of Nepali Revolution, received overwhelming endorsement during the Fifth Congress of CPN (UML) in 1993. This ideology seamlessly melds democracy and socialism, with distinct Nepali societal characteristics. Originally introduced as a political program, PMPD has since evolved into an indispensable guiding principle in shaping political developments following the restoration of democracy in 1990. In the wake of the publication of the 1848 Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, PMPD stands as a profoundly innovative contribution to communist political philosophy. It stands out for its successful integration of the fundamental tenets of democracy and the well-being of the populace. During a pivotal moment in the global communist movement, marked by the disintegration of the USSR and the downfall of communist governments worldwide, PMPD encapsulates the essence of a New Democracy, embodying the defining characteristics of the burgeoning capitalist democratic revolution within the unique context of Nepali geopolitical dynamics. As a revolutionary concept, PMPD is underpinned by the philosophical cornerstone of opposing feudalism, imperialism, and the stranglehold of comprador capitalism. It achieves this through people-centric programs, active participation in mainstream politics, and the promotion of rational, merit-based leadership. PMPD plays a pivotal role in facilitating a seamless transition from a century-long, centralized unitary system with monarchy to a federal democratic republic. Furthermore, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 incorporates several noteworthy features, including dynamism and flexibility, while firmly affirming the sovereignty and state power vested in the people through periodic elections.

## Introduction

In the 1990s, General Secretary of the CPN (UML) Madan Bhandari formulated the concept of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD): A Program of Nepali Revolution, which seamlessly integrated core democratic values and socialist

principles within the evolving geopolitical landscape of Nepal. This ideology was designed to reshape the trajectory of the Nepali nation-state, strategically positioning it to advance the well-being of its people and uphold national interests. Bhandari's vision for the changing communist movement materialized into a political philosophy

in the aftermath of the USSR's dissolution and the collapse of socialist governments in Eastern Europe.

This philosophy found expression during the Fifth National General Convention of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN [UML]) in 1993 when PMPD was officially ratified as a program for the Nepali revolution. Against this backdrop, the Convention distinctly enshrined PMPD as a seminal blueprint for the Nepali revolution, setting its course in the same year. The post-1990 era in Nepal's political history has been significantly influenced by PMPD, particularly due to the Maoist party's engagement in mainstream politics and the inclusion of key points proposed by Bhandari in the 2015 Constitution of Nepal.

This innovative political philosophy envisions a consolidation period for the democratic system through three distinct waves. The initial wave focuses on eliminating remnants of the previous social structure, while the second wave emphasizes comprehensive development across societal sectors based on new production relationships. The final wave prioritizes socio-economic growth and transformation, promoting a peaceful transition towards socialism through political revolution. Furthermore, PMPD promotes a work policy aligned with the strategic objective, with strategies aimed at serving the Nepali people and broader national interests.

Historically, the cabinet led by Premier Manmohan Adhikari in 1994 marked the world's first democratically elected communist government. In that snap general election, the CPN (UML) secured 88 out of 205 seats, becoming the largest party. Earlier, in the 1991 parliamentary election, the CPN (UML) had emerged as the main opposition with 69 out of 205 seats. Notably, General Secretary Madan Bhandari had won elections in two constituencies in Kathmandu and had also defeated the incumbent Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Following the immense popularity of their 9-month tenure, discussions within the party revolved around governing the nation in the best interests of the Nepali people and the nation as a whole. Furthermore, PMPD enriches the core principles of the new revolution in Nepal with fourteen additional features.

Bhandari's uniquely innovative adaptation of Marxism, PMPD, is redefined in the context of Nepal's geopolitics and the ever-evolving international political dynamics. Currently, PMPD has solidified the political revolution in Nepal, achieved through an alliance with democratic forces, including the Nepali Congress. In this light, PMPD stems from fundamental democratic principles combined with socialism, in opposition to feudalism, imperialism, comprador capitalism, and expansionism.

From a philosophical perspective, Bhandari's understanding of the international communist movement harmonizes with his deep knowledge of Eastern intellectual history and tradition. Marxism-Leninism integrates philosophy, political economy, and scientific communism. With its inherently unified historical-dialectical-materialist worldview, this scientific method of studying society from an economic perspective posits a structure for conflict resolution. Dialectical materialism unfolds the Marxist model of political economy, involving the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in different forms but with the same underlying structure of a dominant producing class and a subordinate working class. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) recapitulated the linear historical progression of human civilization, spanning from nomadic hunter-gatherer societies to the post-industrial modern world, as articulated in *The Communist Manifesto*. In this political treatise, Marx and Engels scrutinize the history of human civilization in terms of class struggle followed by positive progression:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome, we had patricians, knights, plebeians, and slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, and serfs; in almost all of these classes, again subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. (Marx & Engels , 1848: 21)

Karl Marx pioneered the philosophy of dialectical materialism in his work, the “German Ideology,” by synthesizing ideas from Ludwig Feuerbach (concerning matter) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (concerning spirit). Initially, dialectical materialism leaned more toward materialism than idealism, a balance that Karl Marx refined by incorporating elements of Hegelian idealism. In a similar vein, Bhandari’s PMPD represents a reimagining of Marxist-Leninist political thought, harmonizing the philosophies of negation of negation and dialectical materialism. Additionally, it draws profound inspiration from Eastern philosophical traditions and Nepal’s unique geopolitical circumstances.

Bhandari had formulated the foundational concepts of PMPD even before its official adoption as the party’s program. This integration

seamlessly blended the core values of social welfare from the left-wing movement with the democratic principles of individual freedom and competitive political practices. By fusing elements of New Democracy with attributes of the emerging capitalist democratic revolution, PMPD introduces fresh values and assumptions designed to propel such a movement forward, especially in the contemporary landscape where the global communist movement grapples with multifaceted challenges. As a novel principle, Bhandari’s PMPD could serve as a potential solution for democratizing the communist movement.

## **Methodology**

This article introduces readers to the foundational concept of PMPD as an innovative variant of Marxism. Its primary goal is to address significant challenges encountered in the implementation of Marxism, both within the USSR and beyond. The article investigates measures to highlight issues and shortcomings in the application of Marxist political philosophy while exploring various models and structures for its implementation. Furthermore, it employs interpretive and analytical approaches to elucidate concepts such as democracy, multiparty systems, socialism, and national agendas. The paper provides a theoretical framework and analytical tools to comprehend, interpret, and critically assess PMPD, utilizing both experimental and experiential methods in the context of independent nation-states in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Additionally, it sheds light on specific issues and facets of democratic socialist and communist practices within the ever-evolving global geopolitical landscape.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **PMPD as the twenty-first-century Marxism**

PMPD introduces fourteen additional features to the core principles of the new revolution. These features encompass the supremacy of the constitution, the promotion of a pluralistic

open society, the implementation of power separation, the safeguarding of human rights, the establishment of a multiparty competitive system, the conduct of periodic elections, the governance by the majority with recognition of minority opposition, the adherence to the rule of law, the strengthening of the people's democratic system, the utilization of foreign capital and technology in the service of national interests, the policy of compensating landlords for their peaceful cooperation in the revolution, the adoption of foreign policies that prioritize national interests, the formulation of new leadership and dictatorship principles, and the establishment of people's multiparty democracy (Bhandari, 1993). The underlying assumptions of PMPD represent dynamic and invaluable achievements in the realm of humanity, ushering in democratization within the communist movement. PMPD wholeheartedly embraces these accomplishments, firmly believing in their potential to empower and uplift the marginalized class. In this context, Bhandari (1991) expounded that PMPD and New Democracy do not fundamentally differ. Describing New Democracy as a novel capitalist democratic revolution, Bhandari delineated its four distinct aspects:

First, the primary adversaries of the democratic capitalist revolution are imperialism and comprador capitalism.

Secondly, since imperialism and comprador capitalism represent unique forms of capitalism, the leadership of the capitalist class, akin to the previous democratic revolution, cannot guide the political uprising of the proletariat. This point is crucial.

Thirdly, unlike prior capitalist democratic uprisings, this revolution does not seek to establish a capitalist dictatorship but aims to establish democratic predominance for the entire populace, opposing feudalism and imperialism. This is another profoundly significant facet.

Fourthly, the novel social structure established after the revolution does not tend toward monopolistic capitalism and imperialism; instead, it serves as a transitional phase and points the way toward socialism. This constitutes another essential subject. In this manner, the new democratic revolution differentiates itself from its precursor through these four decisive facets, delineating the primary adversary, leadership, system of governance, and trajectory of societal advancement (Bhandari, 1991).

Furthermore, PMPD adopts the perspective of resolving crises within the international communist movement through democratization. In the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, brought about by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, and the failures of Soviet-model socialism in other parts of the world, PMPD lays the groundwork for the rejuvenation of the global communist movement. PMPD acknowledges that socialist nations encountered crises due to their inability to address internal grievances and contradictions while countering external challenges. Within this context, PMPD was formulated in an enduring quest for strategies to avert such crises for future socialism. In this light, PMPD amalgamates the national and international experiences of the socialist movement. Particularly, it serves as a synthesis of experiential insights and experimental elements from historical communist and democratic movements in Nepal. In this light, CPN-UML President KP Sharma Oli not only embraces this political philosophy but also underscores the future directives of the PMPD agenda. At one point, the CPN-UML chairperson amplifies Bhandari's formulation of the political thought. KP Sharma Oli (2009) remarks, "Comrade Bhandari propounded, formulated, theorized, and systematized People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) to the pinnacle of modern, scientific, and democratic principles, encapsulating the essence of human

endeavors in social awareness, transformation, and management.”

During its formative years, Nepal’s communist movement was primarily aimed at opposing autocracy and tyranny, especially under the dynastic Rana regime and the Panchayat system. The Communist Party of Nepal advocated for the election of a constituent assembly. Consequently, “Nepal’s constitutional history in the modern sense of the term began in the wake of the [1951 revolution]” (Malagodi, 2023). Despite securing the mandate for the constituent assembly through the 1951 movement, its realization was postponed. While the Nepali Congress (NC), the main political party of the time, was ready to participate in an election under a new constitution drafted and promulgated by the King, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) stuck to its demand for electing a constituent assembly. CPN ultimately participated in Nepal’s first-ever inaugural general election in 1959 (Shrestha, 2021). In that election, only four CPN candidates won, while NC secured 74 seats out of 109 in the parliamentary election. However, in 1960, King Mahendra staged a coup d’état (Mishra, 1982). In that tumultuous scenario, CPN steadfastly engaged in struggles for over 30 years against King Mahendra’s autocratic Panchayat regime. In their resistance against the authoritarian regime with absolute monarchs, the party’s strategy of leveraging elections with pro-people candidates gained immense popularity in Nepali politics. This policy marked a significant stride toward genuine democracy within the nation. In this context, the success of the historical 1990 People’s Revolution, led by the United Left Front (ULF) and the Nepali Congress, remarkably propelled the cause of democracy. In this light, PMPD stands as a political doctrine cultivated through the experiences of Nepali political movements and uprisings.

Moreover, the pluralistic character of PMPD is rooted in the multiracial, multilingual, and

multicultural Nepali society, situated amidst the geographical diversity of the country. Against this national backdrop, PMPD emerged as the indigenous blueprint for the Nepali revolution when the international communist movement faced a constellation of challenges from myriad fronts.

PMPD incorporates several original tenets even in the context of the international communist movement. The notions of fostering a people’s peaceful revolution and establishing a communist government or participating in a coalition government before the culmination of the revolution exemplify novel concepts encapsulated in PMPD. Furthermore, PMPD redefines the concepts of leadership and dictatorship, diverging from the conventional understanding of these terms in the global communist movement. Adhering to such principles, the communist movement in Nepal has achieved concrete goals on the social, economic, and political fronts of the nation-state. The accomplishments of the 9-month Manmohan Adhikari-led government’s policies and initiatives in the mid-1990s served as verification of the party’s adherence to PMPD’s principles. Similarly, the KP Sharma Oli-led government’s unwavering commitment to national interests during the 2015 Indian embargo boosted the morale of the Nepali people. Furthermore, the same administration signed trade and transit treaties with China, diversifying international trade and commerce options and mitigating the threats posed by the recurring Indian embargo. Besides, the government unveiled a new political map in 2020, encompassing Kalapani, Lipulek, and Limpiyadhura.

After internalizing the principle of participating in the government before concluding the revolution, the CPN (UML) achieved a historic milestone by forming Nepal’s first-ever communist government in 1994, with Comrade Manmohan Adhikari as the Prime Minister. The accomplishments and popularity of this



government played a pivotal role in affirming the relevance of PMPD in Nepali politics. During Manmohan's 9-month administration, innovative concepts for rural development and social security were formulated and executed. Initiatives such as "Let's Develop Our Village Ourselves" and the senior citizen allowance program were implemented. Additionally, a nine-point program was designed and executed to enhance infrastructure development and promote socio-economic transformation in Nepal. These programs were introduced to safeguard the well-being and rights of the disadvantaged populace.

Remarkably, these programs have endured through successive governments, even after the end of the 240-year reign of the Shah kings, the conclusion of the 10-year Maoist insurgency, and the declaration of Nepal as a federal republic. They originally descended from the PMPD-guided the government of the CPN (UML). Notably, the Maoist party embraced the same principle, participating in parliamentary elections, endorsing competitive leadership practices, and prioritizing the utilization of rural-based indigenous resources. Moreover, the CPN (UML) successfully facilitated the inclusion of hardline left parties into democratic practices and led the liberal democratic Nepali Congress toward a socialism-oriented agenda. In the evolving global political landscape, PMPD has integrated human rights as core values within the left ideology practiced by CPN-UML-led governments.

Departing from the centralized communist state system, PMPD emphasizes the importance of democracy tailored to Nepal's unique ground realities within the global geopolitical dynamics. This approach was adopted at a time when the industrialized capitalist world vehemently opposed socialist and communist parties. Situated between the two powerful Asian economic giants, India and China,

Nepal recognized the necessity of pursuing peaceful means to achieve the ultimate goal of a prosperous country and contented Nepali people. In this context, the achievements of local bodies in rural areas, which underscored the success of Manmohan's government, further solidified PMPD's relevance. The establishment of empowered local-level bodies through the constituent assembly now stands as a testament to the triumph of PMPD.

PMPD follows a work policy that aligns with its strategic objectives, assuming that a work policy should serve the overarching strategy. After the resounding success and popularity of the 9-month government, discussions within the party revolved around the appropriate policy approach for governing. One of the key debates at the time centered on whether the party should pursue progressive reforms or consolidate its strength. Ultimately, the party opted for the strategy of acquiring and maintaining strength. Subsequent general conventions upheld PMPD as the dominant ideology of the Nepali revolution. Consequently, the defining features of PMPD laid the foundation for monumental transformations in Nepal.

### **Tracing the origins of PMPD**

The visionary leader of the CPN, Puspupal Shrestha, advocated for a unified movement to dismantle the autocratic Panchayat regime. However, NC leader BP Koirala never embraced the concept of a joint movement during his lifetime. Eventually, the policy of forming an alliance of multiparty democratic forces, encompassing both left and right political fronts, was put into practice, thanks to the persistent efforts of People's Leader Madan Bhandari. At this critical juncture in history, Bhandari devised a strategic blueprint for a people's revolution, in collaboration with NC leader Ganeshman Singh Shrestha. This alliance was a complex undertaking, given not only the differing positions within the NC

party but also the divergences among various left fronts. The idea of such a democracy-centric alliance had already germinated in the creative mind of Pushpalal Shrestha within the left front.

Aligned with the approach advocated by Ganeshman Singh and executed by Madan Bhandari, the joint People's Movement of 1990, led jointly by the United Left Front (ULF) and the NC, made significant strides and ultimately succeeded. This movement effectively dismantled the autocratic Panchayat regime, which some had deemed suitable for Nepal's national context. However, following the success of the movement, differences emerged between the NC and the CPN (UML), eventually culminating in the drafting of the Constitution.

As the NC did not fully embrace the spirit of the people's movement, the CPN (UML) had to articulate its 27-point dissent following the promulgation of The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1991. This same 27-point dissent, championed by People's Leader Madan Bhandari, later became the cornerstone of the People's Movement in 2006. On May 18, the restored House of Representatives officially endorsed the 27-point dissent advocated by the People's Leader. This declaration is often referred to as the Nepali People's Movement's Magna Carta (Bhandari, 1990). PMPD played a crucial role in shaping the historic 2006 movement, which was a watershed moment for Nepali society. This movement firmly entrenched the CPN (UML)'s agenda in Nepal's political landscape, effectively bridging the ideological divide between the CPN (UML) and the CPN (Maoist).

Similarly, amidst the diverse ideologies of the allied forces during the 2006 movement, the outcomes of the movement undeniably challenged long-held assumptions of the CPN (Maoist). Bhandari's democratic ideals, encapsulated within his 27-point demands for inclusion in The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, were later incorporated into The Interim Constitution of

Nepal 2007 and The Constitution of Nepal 2015, thus underscoring the democratic achievements of the Constitution. In this context, Dilli Raj Gautam praised the democratic provisions in The Constitution of Nepal 2015, echoing Bhandari's democratic ethos.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 introduces several notable features, including dynamism and flexibility. The century-long centralized unitary system with monarchy has transitioned into a federal democratic republic comprising seven provincial states. The preamble of the constitution affirms the sovereignty and state power vested in the people. Notably, the present constitution, for the first time in Nepal's constitutional history, extends naming rights of acquired citizenship to both parents. Section 6 of the constitution has replaced the monarchy with a constitutional president and vice president (Gautam, 2020).

The movement raised concerns within the NC about its prospects. In contrast, the CPN (UML) stands as the sole political entity with the satisfaction of having its policies endorsed by the 2006 movement and the subsequent promulgation of the constitution.

In the intricate realm of Nepali political dynamics, the Eighth National General Convention of the CPN (UML) emerged as a pivotal moment, reaffirming PMPD as the guiding compass for the Nepali revolution. This affirmation was rooted in a careful assessment that recognized the deep-seated ideological dominance woven into the fabric of historical people's movements. Subsequently, the Ninth National General Convention echoed as the symphony of consolidation, firmly integrating this conviction into the very essence of the party. The cumulative impact bore fruit, crystallizing PMPD into a distinct Nepali adaptation of Marxism, intricately interwoven with indigenous realities rooted in the Eastern philosophical tradition of social harmony and public tolerance, aligned with the demands of the twenty-first century.

PMPD, as an embodiment of visionary concepts, orchestrates a unique symphony in the realm of party building, centered on meritocracy and rational legitimacy in leadership. Its principles ardently advocate for the cultivation of competent cadres, nurtured and fortified by unwavering public support. Within this narrative, the CPN (UML) embarked on a transformative journey, shaping the concept of democratizing the inner workings of the party, as enshrined in the Eighth National General Convention. This transformative wave rippled through the corridors of Nepali political entities, profoundly influencing their organizational landscapes. Following this current, the NC, formerly adhering to a presidential system, embraced the idea of multiple office-bearer elections, guided by the principle of the separation of powers, a manifestation of its general convention's mandate. The CPN (Maoist), previously advocating centralized leadership, underwent a paradigm shift, adopting a collective leadership approach, accompanied by a diverse array of office-bearers within the party. The echoes of this transformative tide resounded within other splinter Maoist factions, as they cohesively rallied under the banner of collective leadership. This unified transformation vividly underscores the rising tide of PMPD's principles of party-building, gaining unwavering momentum and adorning Nepali politics with a unique and enduring hallmark.

### **The Way Forward**

Forming a robust "Rashtriya Shakti" (national force) is imperative for the steady progress and prosperity of our nation. It serves as the guardian of our national interests and the protector of our hard-earned achievements. Currently, parties and individuals with similar ideologies are fragmented, and it is crucial to unite them based on their shared beliefs. Such ideological cohesion can unite the people,

creating a formidable national strength that can transform Nepal into a prosperous and contented nation. Without this cohesive force, our nation has endured frequent changes in government and leadership since the advent of democracy in 1951, resulting in instability and inefficient governance.

### **Conclusion**

From the inception of the struggle against the autocratic Rana regime, Nepal's political landscape has witnessed an unwavering pursuit of rights. The proclamation of the constitution through the constituent assembly laid a solid foundation for the people's rights. In the post-revolution era, as we stand on the cusp of democratic consolidation, the visionary philosophy of PMPD (People's Multi-Party Democracy) emerges as a guiding light. PMPD, as an intellectual beacon, provides a visionary blueprint for the path to democratic progress.

Within the framework of PMPD's vision, the journey toward democratic consolidation unfolds in three distinct waves. The first wave focuses on dismantling the remnants of the old social order, akin to a strong gale sweeping away lingering vestiges. The second wave orchestrates a symphony of development that resonates throughout society, nurtured by new production relations. This crescendo culminates in the third wave, where the focus shifts to socio-economic transformation. Here, the symphony takes on a profound tone as it guides the nation through the corridors of change toward the tranquil realm of socialism. In this context, the formation of a robust "Rashtriya Shakti" remains essential for our nation's greater good, aligning with the national interest.

Embracing this paradigm, the Ninth National General Convention of the CPN (UML) embarks on a historic journey, driven by a momentous resolution that echoes through time. This proclamation signifies our commitment to



socio-economic development and transformation under the resounding banner of “Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali.” In the backdrop of the constitutional framework established by the constituent assembly and society’s orientation towards socialism, our mission is clear - to establish a resilient democratic system. Until this monumental endeavor reaches its culmination, the principles and programs of PMPD remain steadfast sentinels, guiding the grand transformation of Nepali society and the strategic symphony of development.

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