

Book Reviews:

Pyakurel, Uddhab Prasad. 2007. *Maoist Movement in Nepal: A Sociological Perspective*. New Delhi: Adroit Publishers. NRs. 450. 228 pages.

Review author: Mark Turin, PhD*

The decade-long armed conflict between Maoist rebels and an increasingly heavy-handed state has left over 13,000 Nepali citizens dead. The civil war has also spawned a growing number of studies on what took place, how it occurred and why it happened at this time in Nepal's turbulent political history. Alongside the more traditional fare of anthropology and glossy coffee table books of mountains and yaks, Kathmandu's bookshops are now doing good business in monographs and collections devoted to the conflict.

Unfortunately, Uddhab Prasad Pyakurel's recent contribution to this genre does not live up to its name: *Maoist Movement in Nepal: A Sociological Perspective*. Aside from the surprising absence of the definite article from its title—an error repeated countless times throughout the book where what should be 'the Maoists' are referred to simply as 'Maoist'—this monograph, based on the author's MPhil thesis from Delhi, contributes very little original data or insight to the structural or social causes that contributed to the conflict.

According to his introduction, Pyakurel sets out to 'examine the social causes which helped the origin and spread of Maoist Movement [sic] in Nepal' (p. 15). Pyakurel's hypothesis, we learn, is that the Maoist movement has 'capitalized on the agenda of socially, culturally and economically marginalized people of Nepal especially the women, the Dalits and ethnic groups' (p. 60). The assertion is quite plausible, and one which many other writers—not least the Maoist leadership themselves—have repeatedly pointed out. However, having established this working thesis, Pyakurel invokes few sociological techniques and very little evidence to support his claim.

* Mark Turin is the Director of Digital Himalaya Project, Department of Social Anthropology at University of Cambridge.

The book is divided into four chapters: a definition-heavy introduction, a chapter entitled 'Process of Hinduization and Nepalization in Nepal', a third chapter on the 'Origin, Growth and Spread of the Maoist Movement in Nepal' and an insubstantial conclusion. Seventy pages of annexes (the 40-point demands presented by the Maoists in 1996, various peace accords and agreements), followed by references and an index round off the volume.

The introduction reads somewhat like a term paper, with an over-reliance on everyday definitions, such as 'Problem: According to the Oxford Dictionary, problem is "a thing that is difficult to deal with or to understand"' (p. 19) and hollow assertions such as 'Sociologically, the Maoist Movement in Nepal can be defined as a social movement' (p. 23). Good sociology is far more than the invocation of some unspoken social processes, and requires more than the occasional decontextualised citation from a social theorist to be compelling.

Chapter Two, on 'Hinduization and Nepalization' is also rather thin. It is surprising that the author could devote over thirty pages to this topic without once referring to the great Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas, the grandfather of the concept of Sanskritization from which all other '-izations' derive. Srinivas is also notably absent from the references, as is Michael Hutt's seminal 2004 collection *Himalayan 'People's War': Nepal's Maoist Rebellion* (London: Hurst & Co.), which addresses many of the same sociological causes which Pyakurel itemises.

The third chapter is the most substantial, and also the most readable, with some helpful tables and considerable political detail. However, it cannot be called sociological, but rather more politico-historical. It ends on a resoundingly positive note: 'Today, everyone is optimistic on the resolution of ten years long armed conflict in Nepal' (p. 126). This evaluation may either reflect the fast-changing course of Nepali politics or some wishful thinking on the part of the author.

As becomes clear from the conclusion, *Maoist Movement in Nepal: A Sociological Perspective* should really have been an article rather than a book, and would have benefited from a rigorous copy edit by Adroit before going to press. An editor would have helped weed out some of the more unbecoming errors, such as 'Marx, Karl and Angel, Frederick' (p. 216) — particularly regrettable in a book on Maoism.

In all, then, a choppy and unsatisfying book, which covers much of the same ground as Deepak Thapa's *Understanding the Maoist Movement in Nepal* (2003, Martin Chautari), but far less thoroughly.