

**Ina Zharkevich. 2019. *Maoist People's War and the Revolution of Everyday Life in Nepal*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.**

Political event often acts as active historical agent in bringing social change. However, a significant question remains if changes brought by ephemeral political events can lead to an enduring change? Moreover, can one measure such changes brought by a political event in the everyday lives of the people who were part of it? These are the key questions explored in the book *Maoist People's War and the Revolution of Everyday Life in Nepal*.

The book is divided into eight chapters. A lengthy introduction offers an ethnography of Thabang village in Rolpa. Zharkevich traces the genealogy of revolutionary Thabang by placing it within the larger history of modern Nepal. Moving beyond the idea of Thabang filtered through secondary literature and media representations, the author captures the everyday banality of the place in 2008. Having arrived in Thabang barely two years after the conclusion of the People's War, she notices the physical and cultural remnants of that era, such as communally built roads and commune provisional stores. These everyday aspects of life together with what the author calls "structure of emotions" have shifted the center of Nepali politics to the far western villages of the Nepal.

Chapter One "Thabang: From Remote Village to Revolutionary Myth" deconstructs the image of Thabangis as prototypical *sojho*, *sādhāraṇ mānche* (ordinary people) and instead traces their evolution from "organic

intellectuals” to extraordinary revolutionaries. Thabang has had a long history of dissent against the state power going back to the Panchayat period.

The second chapter “The Moral Economy of War: The Making of the Base Area” analyses this multi-layered political history of Thabang to unpack its mythical status as a revolutionary hub. Through the ethnographic account of Burman Budha, the oldest leader in Thabang, the author reconstructs the political agency of Thabangis from the 1970s to 2016. What made Thabangis such a revolutionary group? Communal living practices and egalitarian values in the Kham speaking Magar community of Rolpa in the backdrop of state marginalization of the region facilitated the revolutionary embrace.

In the third chapter “Becoming Maoist in the Time of Insurgency” the question of why one becomes a Maoist and what it means to be a Maoist in everyday life is explored. At the same time, how to reconcile the fact that when the whole village claimed to have been supporters of the Maoist (*Thabangko māto pani Maoist ho: everybody, even soil is Maoist in Thabang*) who are the people they were hiding in their houses? The chapter discusses an emergent hierarchy between the full-time Maoists and Thabangis. This hierarchy was also expressed through gender hierarchies.

The next chapter “The Marital Economy of War: Reconfiguring Kinship Loyalties and Conjuality” dissects the notions of *chutti basne* (night courtship), purity, marriage, and sexuality before, during and after the People’s War. Unfortunately, the discussion does not go beyond the exploration of heterosexual conjugal relations.

Chapters Five and Six “Remarking the Tribe: A Farewell to Bad Traditions” and “Subverting the ‘Sacred Cow’: When Beef Becomes Edible” deal with the cultural aspects of the people of Thabang. Stereotyping the tribal people as “brave...natural communist” (p. 154) has been common not only in Nepal but also elsewhere in South Asia. It essentializes the other and denies them historical agency. Both the Maoists and Thabangis, the author argues, participated in this process of essentialization. These two chapters examine the deeply rooted concept of purity embodied in the physical body by Thabangis. But in the midst of the state repression, old cultural practices gained new meanings and blurred caste boundaries.

Particularly, Chapter Seven “When All Castes Become One: Transgressing Caste Boundaries during War” explores how the necessity of protecting blood relatives and friends from the state violence led to the disregard for caste purity. The author also indicates “generational locations” as another

contributing factor to such blurring of caste and commensality rules. Likewise, questioning and demystification of religious practices were more directly pushed by the Maoists. Yet as shown in the last chapter “When Gods Return to Their Homeland in the Himalayas: Maoism, Religion, and Change” people who did not participate in public and communal religious rituals such as *pūjā* during the People’s War continued to perform them quietly in their personal spaces. Ironically, Maoists who had been vociferously against religion organized “*Jaljalā pūjā*” and utilized the money earned from it towards welfare and development works in Thabang. As such, the last chapter probes the political economy of the place *Jaljalā* and the socio-cultural practices that are further inflected by the involvement of the Maoists.

To return to the question of change framed at the beginning of the review, the People’s War deeply transformed the caste practices. This was evidenced in the Dalits refusing to call themselves Kami-Damai. It also produced new forms of cultural and political agency by expanding literacy, developing of new language to discuss social relations and most importantly in offering new vocabulary to question existing hierarchies. The people of Thabang use the term *aba jamānā badaliyo* (the times have changed) to describe these changes.

The strength of this book lies in offering a thick description of Thabang and Thabangis in a decade following the People’s War. It captures the Thabangi voices of dissent and their agency during and after *jamānā badaliyo*.

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