

Bishnu Raj Upreti. 2004. *The Price of Neglect: From Resource Conflict to Maoist Insurgency in the Himalayan Kingdom*. Kathmandu: Bhrikuti Academic Publications.

*The Price of Neglect* by Bishnu Raj Upreti joins several other recently published studies of conflict in Nepal. In particular it is a timely contribution to our understandings of resource conflicts and the discourse of the Maoist insurgency in the country. The book has 10 chapters and is divided into three parts. The first part (chapter 1) is focused on basic understandings of conflict and different approaches to conflict analysis. It serves as the theoretical basis for the book. The second part (chapters 2 through 6) draws from the author's PhD research and previous publications. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are based on empirical research. The second part of the book highlights the political economy of resource governance and its impact on conflict. The third section (chapter 7 to 10)

sheds light on the evolution of the Maoist insurgency and causes of its growth. Chapter 10 is a concluding chapter. About 100 pages at the end of the book (pp. 346-446) are allocated to References, Annexes, and a Conflict glossary. I found this length to be legitimate given the theme of the book. The annexes are especially useful in understanding the process of the Maoist conflict given that access to this type of information is usually restricted.

*The Price of Neglect* tries to cover many aspects and hence may appear overly ambitious. However, I am interested here in its by-product. Conflicts occur in any society and they may or may not be resolved. Two main schools of thought exist in conflict analysis. One school of thought views conflict as “pathological and dysfunctional.” The second school considers that “conflict can also be a functional means of social change.” The author explicitly states that he supports the view that “conflict could be a constructive social process to establish group boundaries, strengthen group consensus, develop a sense of identity, contribute towards social integration, community building and progressive economic and social change” (p. 25). Theoretically there are several approaches and methods available to analyse and interpret conflict. In this book the “interpretative method” is used. Using this method helps to examine conflict by analysing structures, processes, functions and their relationships as well as the pattern of interaction among people (p. 28). Chapter one provides a useful classification of approaches to interpret conflicts. It also provides an overview of conflict management techniques like negotiation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication and litigation.

Chapter 2 is used to present the issues of resource governance, scarcity, and their cumulative effects in conflict. Upreti defines resource governance as a set of policies, laws and regulations, institutions, technologies, and cognitive aspects like values, perceptions, understandings, and actions through which people manage (conserve and utilise) natural resources in a transparent, accountable, participatory, and equitable manner (p. 59). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are written on empirically tested case studies. In these chapters Upreti successfully argues that “conflict not only creates problems but also promotes co-operation, generates alternative resources and changes unequal social relationships in society” (p. 137). The three cases studies on water resources in chapter four illustrate how conflict situations can teach people how to manage scarce resources. By presenting the two cases studies on land based conflicts (in Chapter five) the author shows how conflicts can serve as a means of social change. Drawing on 23 years of professional experience,

Upreti is critical of governmental policies and donor strategies in the country in the last five decades, arguing that they have been too focused on narrow, sectoral management and control of natural resources (p. 61). He questions donor strategies and the relevance of their developmental projects. This is an important issue that should receive further thought by donor representatives, NGOs, and other policy actors. The issue of donor support becomes even more crucial in the present context, especially when donors are threatening to withdraw their development support. It is common knowledge that Nepal thrives on donor support and derives sixty percent of the total development budget from external funding sources.

In Chapters 7, 8, and 9 the author introduces the Maoist conflict. In previous chapters the author discussed resource-based conflicts that he termed non-violent conflicts and their interrelations. In chapter 7, Upreti provides a detailed account of the emergence and growth of the Maoist movement, its root causes and implications to development and society, and the role of donors. In chapter 8 and chapter 9 he discusses the peace process and concludes in Chapter 10.

The book—as the title suggests—argues that the Maoist insurgency is the result of the historical neglect of ethnic communities by the Nepali State. The author concludes that the Maoist insurgency is the “manifestation of combined result of century old inequalities, injustice, and discrimination, poverty and governance failure.” He argues that the Maoist conflict is not simply the product of the failure of the last 13 years of multiparty democracy. Rather, it is the cumulative result of thirty years of the autocratic Panchayat system and after. The post 1990 governance failure gave space for the Maoist conflict to escalate (pp. 258, 339). In this context it is important to acknowledge that though the multiparty system proved ineffective, corrupt, and power seeking, nevertheless the restoration of democracy in the country did open avenues for expression. Political discourse has been more open and a free media has facilitated a larger political consciousness and questioning in the country.

The Maoist leaders seemed to be successful in exploiting unrest among youth while also gaining access to modern technologies including arms. Ethnic support is a foundational strength of the Maoist insurgency. The insurgency brought the ethnic movement to a turning point as it awakened ethnic groups to the project of seeking rights and articulating demands (p. 282). Hence the Maoist issue is multifaceted and culturally and politically deep-rooted. Upreti rightly argues that “many villagers are Maoist sympathisers not because they know the Maoist ideology or the policy and programme of the CPN (Maoist) but because they hope to see

change in the century old exploitations, injustice and discrimination.” The core causes of conflict, as Upreti discusses in detail, are political, constitutional, geographical, socio-economic, ideological, and international (pp. 258-270). To resolve the Maoist conflict he advocates different approaches such as police operations, military mobilisation, integrated security and development, cordon and search procedures, state of emergency legislation, the use of special terrorist control acts, ceasefire and peace talks, etc. (p. 307). The author is critical of how the State has encouraged only formal conflict management mechanisms that are expensive, pro-elite, administratively complicated, and procedurally lengthy.

By the end, readers may find that the book’s main title (*The Price of Neglect*) is somewhat misleading because the bulk of the work is devoted to discussing resource-based conflicts, not the Maoist issue directly. The title also suggests that the Maoist issue is the result of a history of neglect on the part of Nepal’s ruling class. More emphasis on the historical process (why and how) of neglect would have been useful for non-Nepali readers who are not familiar with Nepali history. In this book Upreti makes an effort to link the Maoist conflict (as a form of socio political conflict) with natural resource-based conflicts that he discusses in the second part of the book. But why must one know about resource-based conflicts in order to understand the Maoist conflict? This link appears to be weak and needs further conceptual grounding. However, I am left with a sense of comfort at the analysis of resource conflicts offered in this book. The theoretical chapters serve as useful reference material for students and researchers interested in resource conflict studies.