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RICHARD BOWNAS

THE NEPALESE MAOIST MOVEMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: LEARNING FROM THE HISTORY OF NAXALISM IN INDIA

This paper compares the contemporary Maoist movement in Nepal with the Naxalite movement in India, from 1967 to the present. The paper touches on three main areas: the two movements' ambiguous relationship to ethnicity, the histories of prior 'traditional' mobilization that both movements drew on, and the relationship between vanguard and mass movement in both cases. The first aim of the paper is to show how the Naxalite movement has transformed itself over the last 35 years and how its military tactics and organizational form have changed. I then ask whether Nepal's Maoists more closely resemble the earlier phase of Naxalism, in which the leadership had broad popular appeal and worked closely with its peasant base, or its later phase, in which the leadership became disengaged from its base and adopted urban 'terror' tactics. The paper ends with some speculations as to where the Maoist movement in Nepal is heading, based on the comparisons made earlier.

INTRODUCTION

This paper places the Maoist movement of Nepal in historical context with the Naxalite movement in India. I am certainly not claiming that the future of the Maoists can be read in the evolution of the Naxalites. Rather, the paper highlights aspects of the thirty-year history of Naxalite revolt in India that parallel the current Maoist insurgency in Nepal. My hope is that an analysis of India's Naxalite movement will provide scholars with insights that can guide future research on the Maoist movement in Nepal.

Social movements are rarely if ever unified, homogeneous phenomena.¹ The Naxalite movement in India is no exception and this is perhaps the most valuable lesson the comparison can teach us: while the Maoist movement in Nepal may superficially appear ideologically united and highly organized around common goals, it arose from particular historical events that affected specific peoples at certain identifiable places.² Examining the Naxalite movement from the longer perspective its history provides may allow us to identify these local and historically grounded roots of rural insurgency and use the insights this perspective provides to analyze the case of Nepal.

In this paper I will not address another important issue: the direct connections between Naxalism and Nepal's Maobaadi, in terms of resource sharing, mil-

itary training and ideological borrowing. This could be the topic for a different strand of research.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT

To understand the events and processes that have come to be termed 'Naxalism' I will first present a 'top down' account of the educated leadership of the movement and their ideological splits, and then make a 'bottom up' analysis of the experiences and beliefs of the peasant supporters.³

The 'top down' history of the movement would begin with the series of splits that affected the Indian communist movement in the 1950s and 60s: a fragmentation of the Left that parallels Nepal's. The main ideological argument was between those communists who imitated the success of the Congress Party by setting up patron client networks to ensure electoral success at the regional level, and those communists who chose the Maoist-inspired approach of revolution in the countryside, followed by the encirclement and capture of the cities.

The "revisionist" electoral path to power advocated by the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India had induced its more radical members to form the Maoist-oriented Communist Party (Marxist), or CPI (M) in the 1950s. By the late 1960s, when the Naxalbari unrest began, this more revolutionary party faced new internal divisions. The CPI (M) had entered into

a new coalition government in Bengal with the CPI and was keen to preserve its new institutional status. The more revolutionary elements of the CPI (M) broke off in 1969 to form the CPI (Marxist Leninist), the party most closely associated with the Naxalite revolt. This newest party was dominated by the forceful, some would say Stalinist, personality of CPI (ML) leader and propagandist,⁴ Charu Mazumdar. Mazumdar's domination of the CPI (ML) conveys the impression that the Naxalite movements which allied themselves with the CPI (ML) were under the CPI (ML)'s control, but at no time did one party, leader, or organization have overall control of events.⁵

The Naxalite movement began in 1967 at Naxalbari, near Siliguri in West Bengal. After the police had beaten and raped women of the tribal "Santal" group, Santal peasants and tea plantation laborers revolted and were joined by some non tribal lower and middle peasants. The actions undertaken included the execution of landlords, redistribution of grain, and the destruction of land deeds. Although this was a short-lived, locally based movement, it was immediately claimed by the CPI (ML) as part of its revolutionary project and was publicized by China's Peoples' Daily, which declared in a headline that "Spring Thunder is breaking over India." But an Indian revolution did not follow. Instead, the Naxalbari revolt was crushed after just four months by police.

Nevertheless, the Naxalite revolt provided a model that was imitated in a sporadic fashion across India's "tribal belt," her northern and eastern states. The greatest success came in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, where the 'Girijans,' another tribal people, were able to form a longer lasting movement. I will discuss the reasons why particular regions were more successful than others in organizing later in this paper.

By 1969, with most of the attempted rural uprisings weakening and cadres not able to inspire mass support, Naxalite tactics changed. Those movements, under the influence of Charu Mazumdar, started a program of 'class annihilation' and covert assassination coordinated by an influx of CPI (ML) students from Calcutta.

This emphasis on terror reached its peak in 1970-71 when the assassination program moved into Calcutta itself.⁶ When the police cracked down in Calcutta, they killed as many as 5,000 supporters, most in extra judicial fashion. By 1972

Naxalism appeared to be a thing of history and its leader, Mazumdar, was dead.

However, the movement had an afterlife. After surviving a few years underground, the end of the 'emergency' period in the late 1970s allowed Naxalite-inspired movements to re-emerge in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. This has been the pattern since: as repression increases the movements disappear only to emerge when conditions relax, as for example during the early 1990s when the Congress went through a period of internal fractiousness allowing the "Maoist Communist Center" to rise up in Andhra and the "Peoples' War Group" to attack landlords in Bihar.

The focus of the more recent movements has been less ambitious, because revolutionaries realize that they cannot realistically seize control of the state. However, Naxalite groups do exercise effective power over millions of Indians in the Telengana and Dandakaranya regions of Andhra and in large parts of anarchic southern Bihar. They have had strong enough support from 'dalit' ('untouchable') populations and from tribal peoples to establish local 'administrations' that perform many

governmental functions that the state has failed to do in rural India.

"OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS" AS CAUSE OF REVOLT?

Can the Naxalite revolt be explained by "objective" class conditions in the Indian countryside? The Naxalites, in language prefiguring Nepal's Maoists, claimed they were fighting a war against 'semi-feudal, semi-capitalist forces,' and that the objective nature of exploitation in the countryside, with its combination of pre-capitalist bondage and capitalist market relations, was impoverishing and abusing the poor majority and inducing them to revolt.

Clearly, objective economic conditions contribute towards revolt. Routledge (1997) identifies five main variables in his analysis of the Naxalite movement:

1. Land inequality in which the bottom 50% of households controlled just 9% of available agricultural land by the early 1970's.
2. Underemployment of landless laborers leading them to



PHOTO: LI ONESTO

take loans at exorbitant rates of interest.

3. Harvest failures in 1965-67, just before the Naxalbari revolt began, which were exacerbated by a cut in US food aid in 1966.

4. The unequal regional impacts of the Green Revolution, whose benefits were concentrated in the wheat-producing areas.

5. Urban recession, which hit West Bengal especially hard and thereby made unemployed student activists available to the CPI (ML).

However, this list of variables fails to provide a complete explanation. Most social scientists long ago abandoned as over-simple explanations for contentious politics that posit changes in economic situation as adequate incentive for revolts. Such conditions applied over large swathes of Northern and Eastern India, but Naxalite revolts only emerged in a few places.

In an article in India's Economic and Political Weekly in December 1982 Alice Thorner critically examined a large number of Marxist analyses of the "objective conditions" of the rural poor in India, many of which had sought to explain Naxalite violence. Thorner found that issues of caste and consciousness had been largely overlooked, as these scholars mechanistically attempted to place Indian peasants into class groupings and to explain their political behaviors as the result of their class position.

Thorner concluded that we must go beyond economic reductionism and examine the connections between ethnicity, social structure, and economics in order to understand phenomena such as the Naxalite movement.

THE ETHNIC ROOTS OF NAXALISM

Naxalite rebellions were most enduring in the hill areas of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, where tribal peoples are concentrated. The history of the Santals in West Bengal and of the Girijans in Andhra is a crucial part of the history of Naxalism that might cast some light on the 'ethnic' character of Maoism in Nepal.

Calman (1985) describes how the Girijans in Andhra suffered in the 1960's from increasing state incursions into communal forests. Traditional users of forest resources found themselves restricted in their access by state appointed forest guards. Accompanying this threat to communal resources was the more general monetization of social relations in the countryside, which had disproportionately negative consequences for tribal peoples, who found themselves increasingly in debt to money lenders in order to preserve their standard of living. The Girijans did not have access to the patronage networks and party officials of the Congress or CPI. They had

no state officials who would intercede on their behalf when it came to legal battles over land tenure or usurious debts. It was in this context of imperiled communal life that Maoist cadres were able to mobilize tribal people to resist threats to their communities in ways described in the following section.

In West Bengal analyses from Mukherjee (1987) and Duyker (1987) shows a different pattern of exclusion of tribal peoples, but with similar consequences. Here, Santal peoples (previously semi-sedentary slash-and-burn agriculturalists) had been imported into the area by the British in order to work on the tea plantations. Like the Girijans, the Santals remained outside of the reciprocity networks of the Hindu community. This, according to Mukherjee, gave them a peculiar sense of class exploitation, as compared to those Hindu peasants who were included in a system of noblesse oblige. They were therefore more liable to be mobilized along class lines by Maoist cadres, who, in Duyker's analysis, adeptly used ethnic symbolism to unite them.

In the case of both Girijans and Santals, ethnic outsider status made these groups fertile ground for mobilization, but it is important to bear in mind the differences: the Girijans were resisting state incursion onto communal land, whereas the Santals were already partly proletarianized wage laborers who were mobilized around communal tribal motifs.

Parallels to Nepal's Maoist affected areas are not straightforward. In Nepal, too, ethnic outsiders have become increasingly impoverished and lack access to state-sponsored sources of jobs and money; in Nepal, too, Maoists have used collective ethnic identities to mobilize villagers. However, patterns of exploitation differ, with ethnic groups in Nepal having longer histories of tributary relations with the state. Research may help to show whether Nepal's Maoism has been organized around the struggle for ethnic autonomy over resources what Routledge (1997) terms the 'ethno ecological' aspects of insurgency to the same degree as Indian Maoism.

NAXALISM AND PRE-EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURES OF RESISTANCE

So far I have briefly discussed the economic crises and conditions that preceded Naxalism and the reason that ethnic minorities were most likely to participate in revolt. However, I have not said much about the actual organization of the Naxalite movements, specifically, the structure of the movement and the symbolic tools its leaders used to inspire peasants to undertake the enormous physical risk of revolt. We need to know how the costs of action were reduced. Naxalite movements lasted longest and had the most social impact in those areas where there was a pre-existing infrastructure of resistance and where memories of historical battles against the state could be drawn upon by leaders to make symbolic

appeals.

In Naxalbari, local-level communist cadres had been working with Santal tribes since 1951, a full sixteen years before the actual revolt.⁷ These cadres had integrated themselves into local communities, even marrying Santal women. The strategy at this point had been one of community building and raising consciousness rather than revolutionary action. In Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, Calman (1985) describes a similar story, where Communal units called 'sanghams' were built up at the village-level by communist cadres living in the community. These units acted to protect local communities from state attempts to commandeer communal resources, to intercede on their behalf with the courts, and to protect communities from landlord / police incursions. As in Naxalbari these communist leaders were working on a mainly local basis, and the issues that they pursued were chosen mainly by the communities they worked with.

These leadership or 'vanguard' groups (to use the favored revolutionary term) were embedded in the communities with whom they worked. Although these leaders were clearly trying to create a form of class consciousness in the countryside, they realized that issues of class were inextricably bound up with ethnicity and with the demand for cultural and ecological preservation.

Ranjit Guha (1983) in his classic work on peasant insurgencies in nineteenth century India describes how 'territoriality,' that is, the commitment to a local place, and 'solidarity,' or kinship ties, were the binding factors behind insurgencies against the British colonialists. Actions like looting, the burning of documents, and the redistribution of grain which were typical of the initial stage of the Naxalite revolt and of their earlier antecedents. These were not Maoist innovations, but, like Maoism itself, were partly rooted in ancient forms of peasant resistance.

For Guha, these traditional forms of insurgency stand on the boundary between a 'conservative' attempt to maintain community (which might be led by tribal elites) and a more radical sense of class consciousness, through which peasants begin to see connections between their plight and that of others similarly placed in the productive process.

Indeed, there is a direct link between some of the rebellions Guha analyzes and the Naxalbari revolts. A tribal group, the "Hul," had revolted against the British in the 1850s. The Santals had preserved stories of the Hul revolt in their oral traditions, so they were able to draw on knowledge of these revolts to motivate their cadres (Duyker, 1987). Duyker shows how Naxalite leaders drew on such oral histories and incorporate them into their tactics. For example, the cadres who led the 1967 uprising deliberately encouraged the use of traditional bows and arrows, despite their impracticality, in order to keep warriors conscious of their ethnic group's long term connec-

tions to the land.

Historical legacies also help account for the success of the movement in Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, where not only the memory, but the very leaders of the Telengana revolt of the 1940s were still alive and active in the new movement. In sum, the Maoist action in rural India before the late 1960s involved a careful balance between progressive politics and traditional demands for conservation of community and resources.

THE DEMISE AND REVIVAL OF NAXALISM: 1975-2000

Until about 1969 the relationship between the peasants and the CPI (ML) vanguard was one of cooperation and symbiosis. In 1969, under the direction of CPI (ML) leader Charu Mazumdar and an elite of West Bengali intellectuals the direction of the movement changed. Mazumdar tried to revolutionize the peasantry using the strategy of class annihilation:

Once an area is liberated from the clutches of class enemies the state is deprived of its eyes and ears in the village . . . the political units [i.e., the vanguard] raises the slogan "seize the crops of the class enemy" and even the most backward peasants join the battle. The state does not sit idly by however. The police raid the villages and small guerilla squads now annihilate class enemies as well as the reactionary police force. The annihilation campaign will bring into the hands of the guerilla force the modern weapons of the reactionary state machinery.⁸

This tactic temporarily seemed to succeed in Srikakulam (Ram 1971, p117), but the success was primarily due to traditional mass mobilization / resistance techniques employed by Nagi Reddy, the senior Maoist leader⁹ in Andhra who opposed Mazumdar's 'annihilation line.' In fact, the 'annihilation line' brought down the full force of state repression on the peasantry, a disaster which undermined the links between vanguard and mass movement.

From 1969, Mazumdar relied on urban students from petit bourgeois backgrounds to lead secret assassination squads in the countryside. The open, mass assaults peasants had made to defend their home territories gave way to a secret campaign of assassination carried out mainly by outsiders. Guha (1983) notes these tactics have little or no value in raising consciousness and are poor organizing tools. Despite the stated aim of making peasants aware of the repressive power of the state, this tactic was regressive. The movement had abandoned its roots in the local in favor of increasingly nihilistic and secretive violence against individuals. The movement had lost its way.

The history of Naxalism did not, however, end in 1971. Rather, the movements survived by returning to the local as the source of their power. The Naxalite-inspired movements

that survive in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh are based mainly on 'identity politics,'¹⁰ in other words on claims not directly connected to economic struggle. In the 1980s and 1990s issues of caste, ethnicity, gender, and environmental preservation have been used more frequently in their propaganda. Naxalism in Bihar has been instrumental in promoting caste-based militias to protect lower caste groups from upper caste violence. The 'protection' of forest resources has also been a vital tool in attracting the support of tribal communities.

The economic side of this localism is that the Naxalites are firmly rooted in the local economy as quasi-enterprises or mini-states. They demand protection money/taxation from villagers and in return provide protection from landlord/police violence, basic community services such as clean water and elementary education, and development loans like a micro finance NGO. This new focus on the local and the marginalized has won Naxalism support among India's human rights community. Naxalites are seen almost as fellow travelers with anti-dam campaigners and environmentalists.

There is another side to this localism, however. With the abandonment of attempts to 'scale up' the movement or to appeal to broader constituencies, the Naxalite groups have become enmeshed in profitable local activities such as the sale of tendu leaf and bamboo from the forests, or trade in the mineral bauxite. Profits from these activities now exceed earnings from more traditional fundraising activities such as looting from banks and rich landlords. According to some sources, profits are being reinvested in the drugs trade and other, more legitimate businesses. In Bihar this 'economism' has brought the two leading Naxalite operations, the Maoist Command Center and the Peoples' War Group (PWG), into conflict over territory. Some reports in the Indian press also point to collusion between Naxalite groups and local politicians. For example, Naxalite leaders may have made deals with local BJP parties to ensure that elections are boycotted. Guerrillas have also been hired out as mercenaries.

As contemporary Naxalism has entrenched itself in the local economies, state officials may have little incentive to launch a full scale offensive against their strongholds because the state may not be able to provide the basic services that the Naxalites offer. The Naxalites themselves have little incentive to expand their aims or try to form progressive coalitions with other groups, because they are economically self-suffi-

cient in the areas they control. Local people in Naxalite-affected regions may sometimes complain that "Naxal Raj is no better than police Raj," but in the absence of state protection they have little choice but to pay the 'taxes' required and receive the limited services and advocacy that the Naxalites can provide.

APPLYING INSIGHTS FROM THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT TO NEPAL

The history of the Naxalite movement shows that the vanguard and mass movement can be in very different relations with each other at different times and places, despite the superficial appearance of ideological uniformity. The question is important for the way we view insurgencies and for the policy

approaches we take to deal with them. At the risk of simplification, there are three possible types of vanguard/mass movement relation:

1. The vanguard is aloof from the masses it claims to represent. Tactics tend to involve secret killings directed by elite groups from geographically distant locations. Political discourse tends to be abstract and removed from local culture. Mass action and consciousness raising and education take second place to territorial expansion. Naxalism in the late 1960s under Mazumdar's leadership approximates this type.

2. The vanguard is responsive to the mass movement and its leaders, and, if not actually from the local community, the vanguard members have strong personal ties to local communities. Action is primarily directed to raising consciousness and building the strength of the community, though with longer term strategic ends in mind. Violence tends to be characterized by 'resistance' to external threats rather than territorial expansion. Local history and culture inform the political discourse. Pre-Naxalite communist activities in Bengal and Andhra Pradesh approximate this type, or that part of the movement (in Andhra) led by Nagi Reddy.

3. The vanguard enters into a symbiotic relationship with the local. The movement becomes fragmented into regional or even village-level movements. No attempt is made to expand the area of action; consciousness raising is not attempted. Political discourse takes on an ethnic coloring, possibly in an exclusivist manner. Violence may be directed against rival factions over territorial control, but is sporadic and mainly justified as "resistance". The main aim of the movement is survival, with larger political ambitions abandoned. The con-



PHOTO: TATSURO FUJIKURA

temporary Naxalite movement may approximate this type.

Why do movements end up in one type or change from one type to another? Ideological commitment and the strategy of particular leaders are obviously a vital part of the explanation, but strategy and ideology are also shaped by the political and economic resources available to the vanguard of the movement. The process may be determined by the extent to which the vanguard need the mass movement to obtain their ends, and the ways they need it.

In the early 1960s communist cadres worked closely with local communities and incorporated local history and culture into their political symbolism and tactics. Why did this change in the late 1960s? One reason could be the perception that the movement would receive the backing of an external power, China (based on its praise for the movement in the 'Chinese Peoples Daily' in 1967 and though informal contacts). The assumption that this political resource would become available may have made Charu Mazumdar and his allies more confident as they pursued their elite-led assassination campaign, which actually was eroding the social basis of radical politics in the countryside.

In the 1970s it became clear that China would not intervene on behalf of revolutionary movements in India. The Naxalite movement now had to return to working with local communities. However, the way they did this was shaped by the availability of economic resources, in particular those from the forests. As the extraction of bamboo and other forest products became their chief source of income, Naxalite leaders had to cooperate closely with local communities to manage forest product extraction sustainably. The profits from this forest-based trade are substantial but not enough to allow the Naxalite leaders to lose their reliance on local cooperation. Thus, the vanguard has become bound to the local through its source of funds.

Here, a comparison with Peru's 'Shining Path' Maoist movement is informative: Sendero Luminoso, the 'Shining Path,' funded itself through the coca trade and its choice of strategy was guided by the need to control coca growing areas. Coca fetches a high price, Sendero Luminoso leaders accumulated large profits, and the vanguard of the movement did not need to develop strong bonds with the local community in order

to maintain its income stream. The extreme violence of the 'Shining Path' must be strongly connected to the high economic rewards coca produces and to the need to defend those rewards by keeping the state and rival groups out of coca producing territory.

So what about Nepal: what vanguard/mass movement relations characterize the Maobaadi? Without recent direct experience in Maobaadi controlled territory this question can be addressed better by other authors of this volume. But I can address the factors that are most likely to shape those relations.



PHOTO: TATSURO FUJIKURA

The areas in which the Maobaadi are strongest are generally resource poor compared with Northern India, let alone Peru. Does this mean the vanguard has to work closely with local communities or does it have the opposite effect of creating a pure extraction economy, in which villagers are expected to hand over food? In India contemporary Naxalites have tried to improve local production and have distributed loans for development purposes.

In Nepal, in the absence of sustainable sources of income due to low productivity of the land and the limited number of banks and landlords to loot,¹¹ the movement may be led to political compromise or to increasing violence to try and seize more productive resources.

The question of the political resources facing the Maobaadi vanguard is also crucial. Unlike the Naxalite leadership, Maobaadi leaders have strong personal connections to Nepal's high caste elite. This may provide the vanguard with an incentive to defect from the mass movement (if a mass movement does indeed exist in Nepal) and obtain personal political rewards instead.¹²

CONCLUSIONS

My analysis of the Naxalite movements in India suggests several key questions to consider regarding the Maobaadi of Nepal: To what extent is Nepal's movement 'new' and to what extent does it draw on pre-existing memories of ethnically conceived struggles? Are there geographical variations in the degree to which the movement is rooted or embedded in the local? Second: what is the relationship of vanguard to mass movement? How does it change from place to place and through time? Do the tactics of the Maoists resonate with local

practices or are they perceived as external impositions, or are they some subtle combination of the two? How do local populations perceive the Maoists: as either external threat or as a solution to local problems? How have resource needs shaped the relationship between elite vanguard and local mass movements? How may these relationships change in the future?

The Naxalite movement shows that the answers to these questions will be place specific and will have changed over time. If the comparison tells us anything, it is that a unitary approach to the analysis of the Maoist movement is bound to be unsatisfactory.

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ENDNOTES

¹ See for example the latest work on social movement theory by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001).

² This is also the message that comes across from Sara Shneiderman's piece in this volume.

³ I am drawing on several secondary accounts, especially by Damas (1991), Ram (1971), Mohanty (1977) and Ray (1988). Most of these accounts, though not Ray's, are written by scholars on the Left who sought to explain deficiencies in the strategy of the Naxalites though expressing sympathy with their broad aims. India's *Economic and Political Weekly* is also an important source. Mohan Ram's article in the August issue of 1972 provides a useful overview of Naxalism from the perspective of the democratic left. The Naxalites' own version of history can be accessed on the website of one of their factions: www.fas.org/irp/world/para/mcc.htm.

⁴ Mazumdar's propaganda is found in the revolutionary Indian newspaper *Liberation* in issues between 1968 and 1970.

⁵ Omvedt (1993) makes this especially clear.

⁶ The nihilistic 'urban terror' in Calcutta is the focus of Ray (1988), although he overlooks the great differences between this urban violence and the movement in the countryside.

⁷ See Bannerjee (2002)

⁸ Charu Mazumdar quoted in Bannerjee (2002) p 147

⁹ Reddy strongly opposed the annihilation line but at this point Mazumdar had effectively 'hijacked' the movement and flooded the various local movements with his Bengali allies.

¹⁰ I am drawing here on a large number of recent newspaper articles obtained on the internet, which are too numerous to list. A Google search under some of the themes discussed above will reveal a lot of material. The Maoist Command Center's own web site now openly uses the language of 'identity politics' alongside the more traditional Maoist rhetoric.

¹¹ Maoists in Nepal also rely on donations from businesses in Kathmandu, but it seems doubtful that this is as sustainable a form of funding as the ownership of productive land.

¹² The current ceasefire process of Spring 2003 is a testing ground for this proposition.

ASIA

NEPAL'S MAOIST THREAT

The slaughter of the royal family may spur a growing 'people's war'

BY MELINDA LIU AND PATRICIA ROBERTS



THE CIA DID IT, WITH HELP from Indian spies and other outsiders. That was the message spread last week by Nepal's Maoist insurgents to explain the massacre of the country's royal family on June 1. Eyes witnesses told different stories that the king, queen and other royals had been slaughtered in a drunken rage by the crown prince, who then shot himself in the head, and finally died. That version of events was so bizarre that many Nepalese were inclined to believe conspiracy theories instead to believe that the king had been killed. And that was a stroke of luck for a Maoist who's eager to take advantage of a scandal to recruit new members.

With the country slipping toward chaos, Maoist leaders are secretly in Kathmandu to plan their strategy. "They are gathering in the capital," reported a local businessman, "one of those paying protection money to the insurgents." They believe they could have a chance to take the country if they play their cards right. In fact, an immediate Maoist takeover of the world's only Hindu nation seemed to be a very long shot. Only about one-third of the country, mostly

... is controlled by guerrilla sympathizers, who want a one-party communist state, opposed to "imperialism, feudalism and bourgeoisie" exploitation. The U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu and other Western tourists or private contractors for Western tourists are especially unloved.

Still, the likelihood at the palace was a boon to the Maoists and a severe threat to the monarchy, especially because the tragedy, especially because it first, the killing of one person was officially described as an "accident." When dozens of

... his apparent, King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah, 53, younger brother of the murdered King Birendra, is a hardline nationalist who apparently hopes to roll back some of the democratic reforms that have made Nepal a constitutional monarchy. His son, Prince Feroz Shah, 27, is known as a party animal who was involved in at least one bad hit-and-run accident last week, one of the Maoist leaders, a shadowy figure known as "Comrade Prachanda," said the killings were not just a family feud. He charged that Prince Manjendra and other power brokers were Gyanendra's "last King Birendra's could not believe the "last King Birendra's

... half-Indian sweetheart, Devyani Rana. Sources linked to the palace said he and Devyani had already been seated in a Hindu marriage ceremony called a rite, which is not largely recognized in Nepal. During the day on June 1, Devyani was "held by his father that if he married Devyani, the throne would have to go to his brother [Prince Nirajan]," said a diplomat in Kathmandu who has high-level contacts. Devyani was popular with the public, but in the palace he was known for a party that got worse when he drank. He

... mother, Queen Sitajitra, then he said that happened because of how the royal have that these were other



PHOTO: SARA SHNEIDERMAN