

May 2016

Review of 'The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution' by Aditya Adhikari

Matjaz Pinter
Maynooth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya>

Recommended Citation

Pinter, Matjaz. 2016. Review of 'The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution' by Aditya Adhikari. *HIMALAYA* 36(1).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol36/iss1/29>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the DigitalCommons@Macalester College at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.



Detailed and wide in scope, this book satisfies the long-elt need for a comprehensive book-length critical analysis of contemporary Pakistani fiction in English.

Dinesh Kafle on *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State*.

identities in the post-9/11 era when the figure of the migrant became the subject of suspicion even as the 'War on Terror' caused unprecedented migration from the third world to the first. She dwells upon migrant novels such as Moshin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, which represent characters that move beyond the borders of the nation, thereby transcending the borders of national identities. She argues that such representations "assert revised definitions of the nation or attempt to reach beyond that concept's definitional parameters" (p. 11).

Cilano quite successfully establishes the point that a singular 'idea' of Pakistan undermines the demographic and topographic diversities of the country, and thus she reconsiders multifarious 'ideas' of Pakistan that take into account the multiple subjectivities expressed through differences in class, community, gender, language, ethnicity, and many other identity markers. Even as she uses the issues of the 'idea, nation, and state' as the common thread of her analyses, the book as a whole lacks a single thesis, which makes it complex and loosely structured. Her chapters end abruptly without giving a justified closure to her arguments, just as the book ends without a conclusion. A book that celebrates multiple subjectivities does not necessarily

need to be without a consolidated thesis. Though not a chronological literary history, Cilano's study covers a significant portion of contemporary English-language fiction from Pakistan. Detailed and wide in scope, this book satisfies the long-felt need for a comprehensive book-length critical analysis of contemporary Pakistani fiction in English. Cilano deals more or less with the entire history of Pakistan, from emergence to the present, so the title of the book would have looked equally perfect without the term 'contemporary'. This book is valuable for scholars interested in South Asian literature and indispensable for those trying to understand Pakistan through its literature.

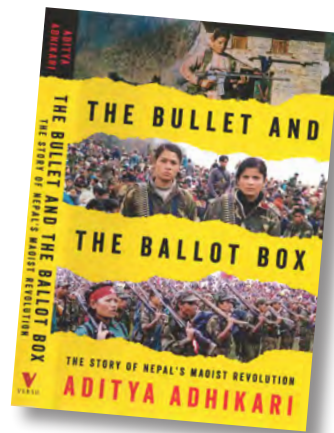
Dinesh Kafle is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has published two books in translation, and his reviews have appeared in Contemporary South Asia, Indian Literature and The Kathmandu Post, among others.

The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution.

By Aditya Adhikari. London, New York: Verso, 2014. 304 pages. ISBN 9781781685648.

Reviewed by Matjaz Pinter

Nepal's turbulent political history has been widely discussed from many ideological angles. It has become a popular topic not only in Nepal, but also in other parts of the world. There is a collection of professional foreign and domestically published works from various fields that uptake a multitude of approaches, making it difficult to determine which offers the most comprehensive analysis on the topic. Aditya Adhikari, a young journalist based in Kathmandu, employs a very wide yet clear focus, with coherent intentions and research questions that transport the reader directly into the dynamics of a revolutionary movement. His argument penetrates the history and culture of the 'People's War,' and presents the reader with the insiders' viewpoint of the peasants, guerrilla fighters, and activists. It also succeeds in understanding the role of the movement in the state formation process, with a detailed insight into the political process that was activated by the movement. *The Bullet and the Ballot Box* traces the developments of the complex communist history in Nepal, from small organizations



based in the Nepalese countryside to a nationwide movement. Adhikari also provides an overview of the ideological developments of the Maoist movement and its 'cultural revolution' to expand his argument within the context and the role of international politics. To this end, he closely examines the roles that both India and the United States played during the revolution and in the peace process.

The book opens with an overview of the communist ideas prevalent in Nepal and explains their origins, main actors, and the political parties involved. In the second chapter, Adhikari moves directly to the local conditions of rural oppression at the end of the autocratic Panchayat system. By combining Maoist political sources and summaries of Maoist memoirs, novels, and poems, the book offers an original observation of the rise of Maoist activism, political consciousness, and its ideological shifts. With the use of an array of relevant primary and secondary sources, Adhikari paints the complex picture of the early rebellion that was born in the neglected areas of Nepal.

Against this background outlining the formation of political consciousness in rural Nepal, Adhikari illustrates further developments of the revolution by following the stories of prominent Maoist leaders Mohan Bikram Singh, Baburam Bhattarai, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Before

we get to read more about these prominent political figures, Adhikari vividly paints the accounts of some of the famous guerrilla battles, like the attack on Beni (Chapter 5). The range of detail is sometimes astonishing, as it explains the conditions in which the guerrillas were living for years, the way they were trained, and how they fought against their political rivals. Adhikari clearly separates two different phases of the revolution. In the first phase the movement's main political enemies were the ruling political parties (mainly the Nepali Congress) and their security extension, the police force. At the time the Maoists did not present a major security threat to the state. Only at a later stage, in the second phase, was the army that was under the kings' rule recruited to fight the Maoists. But as Adhikari notes, certain political changes had to arise in order to reinstall a stronger response to the Maoist threat from the national elites. The movement exposed the weakness of the state and the process that was in the making for a longer time: the reconstitution of the national elite and the system of government. Nepal had gone through mayor political changes by the mid-1990s, introducing a multi-party system for the first time since King Mahendra usurped power in 1960. As Adhikari notes, the deficit of democratic practices in the new state formation in many ways lead to brutal responses and the inability

to incorporate minorities in the democratic decision-making process.

Adhikari connects the parliamentary disarray with the crisis of the monarchy, and discusses the contradictions of the state formation process in Nepal. He explains the events that led to the end of democracy and brought military rule to Nepal, of which the royal massacre of 2001 was the most noted incident. Within this political history he deliberately exposes the main actors and the mute spectators that allowed the instalment of a crude military regime that was fuelled by the global War on Terror in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. The reconstitution of the Nepali elite, with the concentration of power in the king's hands enabled the state to start a new offensive against the Maoists. In the post-2001 offensive, the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), which now possessed more sophisticated weaponry (including helicopters supplied by the US), was prepared to strike the last blow to the Maoists. The aftermath of the military offensive was catastrophic, as the RNA measured its success by the number of casualties and was in most cases unable to distinguish between Maoists and civilians. Adhikari explains how this prompted a revolutionary response in largely marginalized sections of the population, in most cases peasants that were arrested, violently harassed, or brutally killed.

A first-rate political portrait of an era that saw the rise of ethnic and communist activism and its reactionary response.

Matjaz Pinter on *The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution*.

To understand the political success of the Maoist movement, we must understand the culture of its politics. Even though poorly armed, Adhikari argues that the Maoists were stronger because of their ideological and cultural weapons. He presents previously untranslated sources of Maoist literature that allow us to better understand the 'janabadi' culture. On the basis of these cultural and political circumstances, the book leads us through the development of a nationwide movement that mobilized so many young people and abolished the monarchy, but, for many, ended in a long and tiresome peace process.

Aditya Adhikari follows the inter-dynamics of the Maoist movement through its ideological evolution, and places it in contrast to the shifting conditions of Nepali state politics. The book successfully explains the interconnectedness of the Maoist politics and ethnic movements, on the one hand, and parliamentary elite and the old royal elite and the army, on the other. Adhikari provides us with a first-rate political portrait of an era that saw the rise of ethnic and communist activism and its reactionary response. The book will be of great interest to anyone interested in Nepali history or politics, and I would recommend it as a first read on the topic. With

its broad yet clear political and historical focus, it is, however, not only useful in the field of political science, but could also be of use to scholars and researchers in the fields of sociology and anthropology, as it is a great resource for understanding contemporary social movements at the periphery.

Matjaz Pinter is a PhD candidate at Maynooth University in Ireland. He is mainly concerned with anthropological political economy and social movements. Specifically, he has been working on the topic of the formation of political consciousness in Nepal and has conducted long-term fieldwork in Mid-Western Nepal as a part of his research project.



**Jamyang Dorje Chakrishar, *The Root of the Tantra is Samaya*.
Ink on canvas. 12x10cm, 2013.**

Used by permission of Imago Mundi (Luciano Benetton Collection) and published in the catalog *Tibet: Made by Tibetans*, 2015.