



Theoretical Debates and Emerging Trends of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD): What Does Marx Speak from Nepal?

Mahendra Sapkota, PhD

Tribhuvan University, Email: sapkota.mahendra27@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7854-6554>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v4i1.92169>

Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the Marxist construction of People Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) in Nepal specifically touching on the theoretical underpinnings, the changing interpretations and the current significance. Madan Kumar Bhandari defined PMPD in the early part of the 1990s, which was aimed at aligning revolutionary Marxist ideology with democratic pluralism. The research applies both systematic review of literature and argumentative synthesis of theoretical discussions and political constructs. The paper reveals the potentialities that PMPD had opened up the democratic participation in as well as contradictions and disjuncture that perennially defined its enactment. So, it is the critical question how the theorization of PMPD can be made and inserted the message as if Marx is giving to the rest of world in the version of PMPD, i.e. Janatako Bahudaliya Janawad (JaBaJa). Its construction is rooted with dialectical materialism, and it navigates some neo-Marxist and post-modernist logic replacing conventional nature of movement, class struggle and socio-political changes. The discussion indicates that PMPD/ JaBaJa continues to be an intellectual discourse, as well as a field of political contestation.

Keywords: People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), JaBaJa, Marxism, political theory, philosophy, Nepal

Copyright (c) 2026 by [Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace Journal](#). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).



To Cite this article:

Sapkota, M. (2026). Editorial: Theoretical Debates and Emerging Trends of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD): What Does Marx Speak from Nepal?. *Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace Journal*, 4(1), 6–30. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v4i1.92169>

Introduction

The metaphor used in this paper is the famous quote “In Nepal, Karl Marx Lives” (the headline), which includes an interview with the Nepalese communist leader Madan Kumar Bhandari, published in M. Litvin on May 27, 1991. Karl Marx did not actually live or exist in Nepal. It is a metaphorical expression to state that the concepts of Marx, particularly his ideas, adopted by leaders such as Bhandari in frameworks such as People’s Multiparty Democracy (PMPD or JaBaJa), continue to democratic reformation of the left movement in Nepal, giving a message of a constructivist approach of Marxism to the rest of the world. In other words, it signifies the enduring influence of Marx's ideas in Nepalese politics.

The 1980s saw a significant upsurge in socialist movements and Marxist ideologies worldwide (Callinicos, 1991; Kouvelakis, 2020; Perry, 2021). Nepal was not an exception to this. The emergence of *People’s Multiparty Democracy (hereafter PMPD)*, theorized by Madan Kumar Bhandari in the early 1990s, marked a central ideological turning point in Nepali communist politics. It was first proposed as the program of the communist party in the name of People’s (Janatako) Multiparty (Bahudaliya) Democracy (Janawad), popularly abbreviated as ‘JaBaJa’. Hence, etymologically, this paper uses the binary construction of PMPD/ JaBaJa. PMPD/ JaBaJa sought to blend Marxist principles of class struggle and social transformation with democratic pluralism and electoral legitimacy. It is a critical observation of olden Marxist-Leninist models, which mainly laid stress on the armed struggle and the one-party-rule government. In so doing, the PMPD/ JaBaJa presented a locally situated Marxist paradigm that not only criticized the authoritarianism of Soviet-style socialism, but also rejected the exclusivity of liberal democracy, advocating for a more inclusive political system. It thus tends to cut an independent course of left-democratic development of Nepal.

The historical context in which PMPD arose was critical. Nepal had experienced a recent successful People’s Movement of 1990 that was able to topple the Panchayat system and revive multiparty democracy. At this point, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist, CPN-UML), was situated in a critical strategic quandary: to continue using

radical revolutionary methods or to get accustomed to the democratic breaks of the new political order. This tension was satisfied theoretically by PMPD/ JaBaJa, which justified involvement in parliamentary politics and yet retained a more transformative vision of socialism. This successful direction has enabled the communist movement in Nepal to achieve an unparalleled success in elections and become a significant political force, demonstrating the momentum and progress of the movement.

Although PMPD/ JaBaJa is of historical importance, it is still considered a polemic discourse and a changing framework. Concerns have arisen in academic circles regarding the theoretical consistency, practical application, and implications of this concept in response to Nepal's changing socio-political development. In recent years, intra-left party dynamics, which refer to the internal power struggles and ideological debates within the communist party, challenges of governance, and broader global debates on democracy and socialism, which include discussions on the compatibility of socialist principles with democratic practices, have further complicated the trajectory of PMPD/ JaBaJa. This paper critically examines the Marxist construction of PMPD/ JaBaJa, its ideological strengths and limitations, and the recent developments that continue to shape its relevance in Nepal's political-economic landscape, aiming to convey the message of the global socialist movements at large.

Method and Materials

This study uses a systematic review of party documents, political speeches, historical records, and scholarly publications to follow the theoretical building and practical application of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD/ JaBaJa) in Nepal. The authenticity of the research is ensured by the use of primary sources, which include speeches and writings by Madan Kumar Bhandari, party manifestos of the CPN-UML, and constitutional documents that mention PMPD/ JaBaJa. Secondary sources employed in the study include academic articles, books, and a critical analysis of Nepal's leftist politics. The review process involved three key steps: identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant works to trace the theoretical foundations and practical applications of PMPD/JaBaJa. An argumentative synthesis method was used to interpret

and evaluate different points of view, point out areas of agreement and disagreement, and assess the current relevance of PMPD/ JaBaJa in the political and ideological background of Nepal.

Result and Discussion

Critique of Classical Marxism

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of rapid neoliberalization, a process of economic liberalization and deregulation, the post-1990 period witnessed severe criticisms of classical Marxism. Initially, the Marxist doctrine was focused on the issue of the class struggle and the imminence of the proletarian revolution, and these concepts appeared to become less relevant to the changing socio-political context. The base-superstructure relations went into more dilute and overlapping rather than being deterministic and dichotomous. Marxism was challenged by the fact that the fall of the Soviet Union brought the perspective on its dictatorial and economically backward character into question, against the deterministic forecasts of Marxism. In addition, the alleged global triumph of capitalism and neoliberal flexibility rejected the prediction of the possibly apocalyptic failure of capitalism by Marx, exemplifying the gaps of classical Marxism in dealing with state power, economics, and culture at the present (Das, 2020; Harvey, 2005; Sapkota, 2021).

Increasingly, the emergence of identity politics, a political approach that focuses on the issues relevant to various groups, and postmodern theories, a set of ideas that question the validity of grand narratives and emphasize the role of power in shaping knowledge, also undermined the reductionist tendencies of classical Marxism, where the axis of class determines the locus of oppression. Race, gender, and sexuality movements claimed that Marxism did not pay too much attention to these aspects, so the analysis had to be extended and broader. Scholars such as Wallerstein (1991), Fraser (1995) and Briggs (2019) specifically argued that to analyze power and oppression, one should not focus on the traditional paradigm of class struggle, but should instead analyze intersecting identities to achieve a more comprehensive understanding, making the binary framework of classical Marxism more complicated. Also, the growth of world capitalism and neoliberal structural restrictions

demonstrated the finitude of Marx's analysis in the 19th century, since it did not foresee the intrigues of the global finance and multinational corporations (Harvey, 2007; Milios & Dimoulis, 2018). Following the progress of the modern crises, Kharel (2013) recalls that classical Marxism faced defeat due to two reasons: the loss of the purity of the concept of class and the purity of the base and superstructure.

The disappointing outcome of the traditional Marxist revolutions and the loss of hope in the dictatorial socialism gave way to the reformist and democratic approaches. State seizure and centralized power, emerging as the priorities of classical Marxism, looked somewhat out of touch with the existing democratic desires. It was followed by a trend after 1990 to decentralize power and to wage at the grass-roots, and neo-Marxist and post-Marxist tendencies were found more realistic in terms of contemporary reality (Arditi, 2016; Harootunian, 2015; Wright, 2010). In this context, Sapkota (2025) argues that the Marxist philosophical perspective aligns closely with the critical research paradigm, as it interrogates structural inequalities and the material conditions that shape social relations. From this standpoint, power and power structures are understood not as neutral arrangements but as historically produced mechanisms that sustain domination and limit transformative social change. Given this, PMPD/JaBaJa needs more theoretical and methodological elaboration from power perspective of Marxism, which is unfortunately in Nepal's Marxist literature and academia.

Knowing Madan Kumar Bhandari

Madan Kumar Bhandari (27 June 1951-16 May 1993) was a prominent communist party politician in Nepal, a political philosopher, and a leading figure in the country who proposed the popular program of PMPD/JaBaJa. Bhandari was born in Taplejung in Eastern Nepal, and got involved in politics as an activist in the student movement. He rose fast in the ranks of the leftist movement in Nepal, a period marked by political upheaval and social change, particularly in the politically turbulent decades of the 1970s and 1980s. He was also renowned for his strong rhetoric and superior organizational skills, which made him a transformative figure in

the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), or CPN-UML, and ultimately led to his appointment as its General Secretary.

Madan Bhandari's proposal of People Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) at the Fourth Convention of CPN (ML) in 2046 BS (1990 AD) was a significant theoretical contribution. At the young age of 37, he introduced an idea that would later undergo formal theoretical treatment and codification in the official party policy of CPN (UML) in its Fifth National Convention in 2049 BS (1992 AD). His intellectual articulation of leadership among young people, coupled with a clear vision and the ability to relate Marxist forms to the socio-political situation in Nepal, marked a breakthrough moment in the history of the communist revolution in Nepal (Dhakal, 2024).

This observation is age-related, and we may think of international communism. To compare, Vladimir Lenin guided the Bolshevik Revolution at the age of 47, Mao Zedong led the Chinese Revolution at 56, Che Guevara became an iconic revolutionary on the international scene in his mid-30s, and Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence at a very young age of 55. Fidel Castro was 33 when he headed the Cuban revolution. Similarly, Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher and leader of the Communist Party of Italy, composed most of his writing on cultural hegemony and civil society during his confinement in his mid-30s. This period ended with his death at the age of 46. Similar to Bhandari, Gramsci emphasized ideological struggle within democratic institutions, and he is therefore a close proponent of adapting Marxist strategy not in the classical deterministic paradigm. The untimely demise of Bhandari at the tender age of 41 brought a possible mature transition of the left politics of Nepal. However, it fell short of this, leaving a mark that contributed to the democratic socialist project of a Marxist scheme, just like Gramsci.

Dialectical Materialism and JaBaJa

According to the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism, social change is driven by class struggles and material conditions. It postulates that historical and social changes are driven by ongoing class struggle and the resolution of contradictions inside the material foundation of society (Zwart, 2021). Bhandari's JaBaJa model stands out for its unique

application of dialectical materialism. It strives to address social and economic contradictions through democratic governance, encouraging widespread political participation. This approach, which combines Marxist ideas with a multiparty system, aims to balance several social forces to tackle class conflicts and material inequities (Bhandari, 1993).

Bhandari applies Marxist theory in JaBaJa to demonstrate how dialectical materialism can be used in a political context. PMPD/ JaBaJa strives to resolve class conflicts and social tensions through democratic institutions by combining democratic pluralism with socialist principles. The model's focus on democratic representation and material issues reflects an ambition to address society's tensions and promote a more equitable distribution of resources and power. This fusion of dialectical materialism with democratic governance shows how Marxist theory can shape political strategies in different contexts. Despite the lack of classical documents that clearly demonstrate how it aligns with dialectical materialism, PMPD/JaBaJa's potential to interpret the dialectics of Nepali society and its contradictions through the lens of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis is inspiring. This lack of ontological clarity steers the framework towards a pragmatic perspective on social movements rather than encouraging a critical pedagogical approach. As a result, PMPD/ JaBaJa sometimes echoes the traits of democratic socialism and social-democratic movements seen in Nordic countries, offering hope for a more equitable future.

Analysis of JaBaJa from Analytical and Structural Marxism

Analytical Marxism highlights logical rigor, methodological individualism, and explanation in terms of rational choice (Elster, 1985; Roemer, 1986). This school of thought was developed in the 1970s and got popularity in 1980s within the Anglo-American academic sphere and contributed by key figures such as Gerald A. Cohen, John Roemer, Erik Olin Wright, Jon Elster, and Adam Przeworski. It restores Marxist claims to exploitation, class, and justice through empirically testable attributes rather than vague expressions and abstract notions. Analytical Marxists claim that actors seeking logical interests inside particular institutional settings can explain class struggle and redistribution rather than depending on historical inevitability or dialectical conceptions.

According to this line of thinking, democracy and institutions are places where class interests are deliberately fought, not just structures. These implications for Nepalese political strategies make the topic highly relevant to the audience's interests in Nepalese politics.

Structural Marxism, in contrast, as articulated by Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, shifts the focus from individuals to structures. It underscores the perpetuation of class dominance through the mechanisms of political and economic systems and practices (repressive state apparatus-RSA and ideological state apparatus-ISA), as well as the endurance of social formations beyond individual aspirations (Althusser, 1971; Poulantzas, 1978). Structural Marxists de-emphasize human agency and accentuate structural constraints, thereby highlighting how institutions uphold ruling class hegemony and thwart revolutionary upheaval. From this perspective, democratization within capitalist systems is sometimes seen as constrained or illusory since the fundamental social hierarchies remain intact.

When viewed through the lens of Analytical Marxism, the 14 characteristics of PMPD/ JaBaJa —such as pluralist democracy, rule of law, social justice, redistribution, participation, and class orientation—can be interpreted in unique ways. It represents a rational adaptation of Marxism to Nepal's political context in the early 1990s, a time when armed struggle was unpopular, communist parties were divided in many factions and a multiparty democracy was newly restored in the country. The emphasis of PMPD on institutional legitimacy, competitive elections, and peaceful methods of conflict resolution aligns with the Analytical Marxist commitment to a rational strategy and institutional engagement. For instance, by institutionalizing class struggle within electoral politics, PMPD/ JaBaJa reflects Roemer's argument that socialism can emerge through distributive justice and democratic mechanisms rather than violent rupture.

However, Structural Marxism exposes the limitations of PMPD/JaBaJa. While PMPD/ JaBaJa aims to promote social justice, structuralists would argue that multiparty competition essentially perpetuates existing class hierarchies. State institutions—courts, education, bureaucracy, even multiparty elections—function as ideological and

repressive apparatuses that sustain ruling-class dominance. PMPD/ JaBaJa’s concept of reconciliation and pluralism is innovative, but it could transform revolutionary struggle into reformist compromises that maintain the status quo. From Poulantzas’s perspective, PMPD/ JaBaJa demonstrates the 'relative autonomy' of the state. However, this autonomy is circumscribed by the capitalist mode of operation, which perpetuates the existing social order.

Thus, the 14 characteristics of PMPD/ JaBaJa reflect a synthesis: analytically coherent as a strategic adaptation, but structurally susceptible to the perpetuation of inequality (as presented in Table 1). An analytical Marxist opinion directs that PMPD is a rational institutional arrangement that focuses on constitutionalism, pluralism, periodic elections and multiparty competition as a check against arbitrary power. The positive aspect of this normative power is the expansion of freedoms and accountability in politics; its negative aspect is its uncertainty in distribution efforts and gradualism tendencies, i.e., postponement of socialism to infinity. On the contrary, the Structural Marxism interpretation of PMPD places it in the framework of state, law, and ideology, which reinforces the capitalist relation. From this perspective, democracy, rights, and pluralism operate less as emancipatory ends than as apparatuses that stabilize capitalist reproduction under socialist language.

Table 1: PMPD Characteristics in the Lens of Analytical and Structural Marxism

	Analytical Lens	Structural Lens
1. Supremacy of the Constitution	Rational institutional safeguard; prevents arbitrary authority, but question remains whether it materially reduces exploitation.	Constitution functions as ideological/legal apparatus, unifying society and reproducing class relations through legality.
2. Pluralistic Open Society	Expands individual freedom of expression, but may diffuse focus away from class-based distributive justice.	Pluralism disperses class antagonism, stabilizing the system by channeling conflict into institutions.
3. Separation of Powers	Checks and balances the accountability of state organs, but efficiency in addressing exploitation remains	Distributes power across state apparatuses, ensuring relative autonomy and stability of capitalist

	uncertain.	hegemonic order.
4. Protection of Human Rights	Valuable for guaranteeing freedoms, but abstract rights may not address structural inequality in distribution.	Human rights discourse legitimizes state neutrality while masking reproduction of class domination.
5. Multiparty Competitive System	Increases political choice; yet, if parties serve similar elites, distributive outcomes remain unchanged.	Institutionalizes competition among class fractions, preventing rupture and maintaining hegemony.
6. Periodic Elections	Regular elections provide accountability, but rationally may produce short-term populism, not structural transformation.	Elections operate as ideological ritual of consent, cyclically renewing legitimacy of the state, but may create a cycle of 'election-to-election'.
7. Majority Government & Minority Opposition	Enhances rational debate and contestation, but opposition may be symbolic without power to alter distributive structures. Critique of 'majority are always good, perfect and rational'.	Opposition institutionalized to turn antagonistic contradictions into manageable contestation-but question remains in 'powerless opposition' in the number game of parliamentary system
8. Rule of Law	Creates predictable rules of the game; analytically coherent, but neutrality of law in class terms is questionable; critique of legalism vs humanism	Law as repressive and ideological apparatus: secures property relations, legitimizes capitalist reproduction; critique of 'handful law for the rulers'
9. Consolidation of People's Democratic System	Phased transition appears rational and feasible, but risks indefinite postponement of socialism going into a vicious cycle of 'liberal reforms'.	Phased approach manages contradictions, enabling structural integration of socialist inclination with capitalist reproduction.
10. Foreign Capital & Technology	Rational to attract external resources, but may increase dependency and inequality in the name of development; a critique of dependency	Reflects Nepal's semi-peripheral position; controlled openness balances modernization with dependency in the age of

	syndrome.	globalization.
11. Compensation	Redistribution via compensation seems fair to individuals, but weakens class justice by sparing exploiters.	Compensation pacifies feudal elites; a mechanism to avoid destabilizing rupture in transition.
12. Foreign Policy (Panchsheel)	Rational and coherent principle for a small state; secures autonomy through non-alignment to any power order, but less echoed in realist domain of international relations.	Structural positioning of Nepal between powers; foreign policy reproduces semi-peripheral survival strategy keeping always as a spectators of world politics.
13. Leadership & Authority	Leadership through service/competition is normatively justifiable; reduces risk of authoritarian capture; very critical issue to the communist parties	Leadership framed ideologically as service; legitimizes authority without invoking proletarian dictatorship; issue of leadership transformation
14. People's Multiparty Democracy (Overall Doctrine)	Institutionally rational hybrid: balances democratic norms with socialist framing, but risks incoherence if distributive goals aren't met; a soft radical and hard left critique.	Functions as a hegemonic project (Gramscian): stabilizes multi-class democracy while reproducing capitalism under socialist rhetoric; risk of false consciousness.

Neo-Marxism vs. Classical Marxism

Debate of classical Marxism versus neo-Marxism has been a non-settled issue in Marxist discourse (Briggs, 2019; Humphrey, 2018). Ontologically, PMPD/JaBaJa rejects orthodoxy Marxism or classical interpretation of society and history though it is equally contested issue to level it as of neo-Marxist ideology. Yet, it seems to be neo-Marxist approach is unique in its reinterpretation of classical Marxist principles within a modern democratic framework. This reinterpretation involves adapting Marxist theory to address contemporary complexities, including the integration of pluralism and the evolving role of democracy, class diversities, and culture in social change. PMPD/JaBaJa's approach is a departure from classical Marxism, promoting the constructivist revision of

Marxism, which involves a more flexible and adaptive interpretation of Marxist principles, and opposing its more deterministic and positivist approach.

What is the most conspicuous about PMPD/JaBaJa is its non-revolutionary stance in classical Marxist framework. It does not subscribe to the notion of a grand communist revolution and recall a rigid class struggle aimed at dismantling the capitalist mode of production and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, it believes that all kinds of discriminations and exploitative chores within the capitalist system should be eliminated for the betterment of common people. It supports multiparty democracy as a valid front of class struggle, as opposed to the emphasis that classical Marxism placed on the upending of the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie. Instead of advocating for a revolutionary movement and the principle of the use of force, PMPD/JaBaJa proposes achieving socialism through democratic means, including electoral competition and coalition-building. It emphasizes a peaceful, systematic and step-by-step approach to bringing about socio-political changes. However, this orientation raises the risk of the party being reduced to a reformist agenda. It might be reductionist character of bourgeois parties that focus heavily on electoral rituals and formalities. To counter this, PMPD/JaBaJa has introduced internal organizational measures such as democratic centralism, leadership renewal, and active mobilization of the masses bridging the party with people. This approach reflects a neo-Marxist perspective by working within existing political frameworks to facilitate gradual social transformation.

PMPD/JaBaJa is a mixed system that combines the utopian ideals of traditional Marxism with the practicalities of a multiparty system and the democratic process. Its reformist approach is still devoted to socialism, but it achieves progress through incremental steps facilitated by democratic participation and engagement of marginalized groups and working class within the prevailing political system. The implication of Marxist theory to local conditions, combined with the ideas of political pluralism, places the ideas of PMPD/JaBaJa within the neo-Marxist tradition of the theory. It deals with the localization of ideas of the theory in the light of modern issues. Yet, the unfortunate reality is that Nepali politics is dominated by a

status quo mentality, which prevents the meaningful theorization of PMPD/JaBaJa and instead romanticizes its supposed successes. It is overly simplistic and misleading to attribute all democratic changes in Nepal solely to PMPD/JaBaJa's influence. Such generalizations are neither progressive nor dialectical. They ignore deep-rooted contradictions within Nepali society, which are assembled with class, caste/ethnicity, economic shifts, social dynamics, gender relations, emerging migration patterns, livelihood diversifications, and alternative politics. This narrow perspective risks overshadowing the complex and multifaceted dynamics that shape Nepal's socio-political structure.

JaBaJa in Nepali Political Readings

Scientific writings and publications with a critical reading of PMPD/ JaBaJa in Nepal began in the late 2000s, and recently, it has gained momentum. The studies provide further descriptive accounts, explaining the concept of PMPD/JaBaJa and its emergence. Critical worldviews and observations are yet to address more how and why questions about PMPD/JaBaJa as a potential ideology. Some works, including those of Pahari (2024), Adhikari (2024), and Roka (2024), provide an extensive exposition of both a theory and a practical tactic of People Multiparty Democracy (PMPD/ JaBaJa) in the framework of the Nepal communist movement. Their contributions echo PMPD as an indigenous ideological framework intended to realize socialism in democratic ways, which was situated in the Nepalese socio-political landscape. Pahari theorizes PMPD/ JaBaJa as such a revolutionary instrument based on the class analysis, the mass movements, and participation in parliament. Adhikari, however, develops PMPD as an ideology consisting of pluralism of democracy and socialist goals as a visionary synthesis of Marxist ideology and multiparty practice. Roka (2024) affirms that PMPD establishes the blueprint of socialism, where the democratic struggle is institutionalized due to the competitions. At the same time, the interests of the proletariat remain guarded.

Although the two contributions share a similar theme, the identified gaps remain profound in the area of critical theories. First, although it reappeared in the literature in the 2000s, there is no

comparative context in which PMPD/ JaBaJa would define its conformity or its difference to other left-democratic models worldwide (e.g., between Eurocommunism and Latin American socialism). It is an inward-looking concept, which is usually held, in part, as a fixed tenet, instead of an unfixed reaction to the changing socio-political contradictions. Second, the vast majority of analyses, even those provided by Gyanwali & Khanal (2024) and Pokhrel (2024), are festive and declarative, lacking in dialectical criticism or empirical assessment of PMPD as regards its practical shortcomings. As an example, problems of factionalism, ideological waterism (a term used to describe the dilution of ideological purity for political expediency), and democratic lapse within the party's organizational culture are not pursued far enough or altogether absent. Its status as a success story is an assumption that is not problematized to a large extent.

Moreover, the ideological contradictions and tensions inherent in PMPD/JaBaJa, stemming from the clash between normative commitments and the realistic politics of Nepali coalition-based politics, are absent from the literature. Oli (2025) mentions the democratization of the left but does not go as far as to critique the instrumentalism with which PMPD has been employed to justify political opportunism. Similarly, the biographical synthesis of Madan Bhandari offered by Dhakal (2023) highlights the image of this thinker as a visionary without critiquing how his theory has been transformed over the years or even misused. Altogether, the scholarship indicates the need (a) to critically re-theorize PMPD/ JaBaJa in the context of the contemporary democratic crises, (b) to conduct new empirical research examining the effect of PMPD on class structures and the consequences of such governance, and (c) to pay closer attention to Marxist debate over state, revolutions, and reforms.

Theoretical Crisis in Nepal's Communist Movement from Jabaja Perspective

Although the communist parties in Nepal have been successful in electoral politics, they face a significant theoretical crisis. This crisis is characterized by a conflict between their ideological orientation, which is rooted in Marxist theory, and the practicalities of real-world politics. The

crisis is marked by several questionable issues, specifically in the context of CPN (UML):

Theory vs practice dilemma: The entry of PMPD/ JaBaJa by Madan Bhandari in the early 90s gave a definitive ideological guide to the communist movement in Nepal. It presented a third option, other than armed uprising and liberal reform, with the idea of socialism as seen through competitive multiparty politics, social justice and institutional legitimacy. For a specific period, PMPD/ JaBaJa found a solution to the theoretical dilemma of whether communists could participate in parliamentary politics while still fulfilling their transformational goals.

This dilemma, which is at the heart of the theoretical crisis, revolves around the ability of communist parties to engage in mainstream politics without compromising their socialist objectives. However, over the decades since its articulation, most of the Nepalese communist parties, including CPN (UML), have been engaged with electoral practices of mainstream politics. However, they are hardly able to launch socialist interventions as offered in PMPD/ JaBaJa, leading to what may be called the theoretical crisis of the communist parties of Nepal.

Dilemma of class (continuum vs dichotomous): This crisis has one aspect in the loss of class orientation. PMPD/ JaBaJa also clearly positioned multiparty democracy as a means to fulfill the interests of the proletariat through redistribution, engagement, and empowerment. MMD questions the deterministic and dichotomistic model of the class struggle long supported by classical Marxism. It also redefines society as a battlefield in which numerous classes struggle, and the communist party must take the lead of the working class that encompasses not only the marginalized groups like women, the landless, the occupational caste communities, but also minority nationalities. This inclination shows the transition away from the strict separation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to a more plural view of the socio-political reality of class struggle in Nepal. However, in reality, the communist parties in Nepal have shifted towards bourgeois interests, causing confusion about the revolution's center and raising doubts about whose side will lead the revolution. This uncertainty has raised questions about whose will protect its outcomes, undermining the favor and raising questions about dominance

On the other hand, most communist parties, in practice, have increasingly favored electoral wins and coalition building over class struggles. This shift in focus has led to the rules of redistribution of resources and social justice being watered down to the point of becoming populist promises rather than structural changes. As a result, the transformative potential of PMPD/ JaBaJa has been eroded, and ideological confusion has been established on the very objects of the communist participation in democracy.

Instrumental crisis in the changing context: Use of the PMPD/ JaBaJa instrumentally is another factor in the crisis. PMPD/ JaBaJa has been commonly invoked rhetorically rather than being applied to the field as an ideological framework and has been frequently used to justify opportunistic alliances, factional tussles, and personal leadership. This type of crisis manifests as an inability to adapt PMPD/JaBaJa to new socio-political forces. Although initially designed to navigate the post-Panchayat democratic shift, Nepal is currently faced with issues of globalization, identity politics, federal restructuring, and democratic backsliding, all of which necessitate theoretical rejuvenation.

However, communist parties have been reluctant to reinterpret PMPD/ JaBaJa in any form other than its initial conception; instead, they have taken it as a fixed doctrine, rather than a dynamic paradigm. Such inflexibility has also caused dissonance between PMPD/ JaBaJa normative commitments and the realities of governance through coalitions. The Communist movement must resolve this crisis through critical re-theorization: placing PMPD/ JaBaJa within shifting Marxist arguments on state, revolution, and reform, while remaining committed to advancing socialism through democratic means.

PMPD/ JaBaJa from an Anarcho-Marxist Perspective

PMPD/ JaBaJa, when viewed through an Anarcho-Marxist lens, is a fascinating study in contradiction. On one hand, it critiques orthodox Leninist centralism, accepting the potential of multiparty competition, rule of law, and democratic pluralism as valid tools for socialist change. This echoes anarchist critiques of authoritarian socialism, expressing a fear of new hierarchies forming in the name of proletarian rule. Yet, through its

principles of engagement and inclusiveness with rule of law and incisive governance (Principle 8) and peaceful competition with the people's verdict of periodic elections (Principle 6), PMPD/ JaBaJa creates a political space for mass agency and non-communicative conflict resolution, opposing power concentration under the sway of one party. These aspects align with Anarcho-Marxist principles of decentralization, grassroots organization, and distrust in state domination, creating a complex and intriguing ideological landscape.

However, on the same note, PMPD/ JaBaJa remains a myopic attempt, as it ultimately prioritizes the role of the state and parliamentary institutions. Anarcho-Marxists would criticize its concepts of legitimacy (Principle 7) via election (Principle 6) and rule by law (Principle 8), as forms of reproduction of class domination via the ideology and bureaucratic apparatuses. Although PMPD/JaBaJa reconstitutes a Marxist sense of democracy, it nonetheless finds its transformation in the frameworks of state power and does not destroy it. Therefore, PMPD/JaBaJa, despite its progressive features such as [insert examples here] that appeal to anarchist objections to authoritarian communism, does not go as far as the anarchist ideology of stateless socialism. Instead, it may be interpreted as a practical Marxism reformulation- that is, opposed to the armed uprising, and nonetheless faithful to a state-mediated method to socialism.

PMPD/ JaBaJa from Popular Political and Postmodern Perspectives

In the popular political interpretation, PMPD/ JaBaJa can be considered not a discourse restricted to a narrow scope of the study which addresses justice, recognition, and dignity in the masses more than those of the class. The fact that PMPD/ JaBaJa focuses on participation and inclusion of people with electoral verdict (Principle 6), Human Rights (Principle 4), pluralist social structure (Principle 3), and redistributive democratic policies of justice, equity and transformation (Principle 9) aligns with popular needs for empowerment at lower levels. This inclusivity of PMPD/ JaBaJa makes everyone feel valued and respected,

regardless of their social status. In this regard, PMPD/ JaBaJa is a step beyond doctrinaire Marxism as it propagates the struggle of the people, their demands for land rights, gender equality, and caste/ethnic representation in its ideology. It thereby constitutes one of the versions of the so-called popular politics, which links together the ideas of socialism and the reality of marginalized world populations manifesting in a more permeable and accessible point of contact with mass mobilization.

Alternative politics, populism, and anarchism have been severely rejected in the Nepali leftist discourse, but it points to a deeper shortcoming in the philosophical domain. It was Marxism, however, that focused on counter-hegemony and the dialectical pattern of overturning established theses by antitheses and subsequent synthesis. In this light, antagonism towards other or emerging currents seems like treason, as both Marx and several of the early communist vanguards involved themselves in the populist and anarchist tradition at very early moments in their respective endeavors. PMPD/ JaBaJa and Madan Bhandari were not an exception to this. Indeed, this is the power and beauty of Marxism as it has the readiness to see newer contradictions and new syntheses of socio-political changes in society, such as the rise of digital activism or the intersectionality of various social movements.

Speaking from postmodern perspective, though, PMPD/ JaBaJa is both strong and weak. Such a postmodern critique of the grand narrative would warn against taking PMPD/ JaBaJa as a universal doctrine that can explain all contradictions. Its openness to pluralism and ideological difference (Principle 12) can be seen to portray postmodern skepticism of any one universal truth. However, PMPD/ JaBaJa is still firmly rooted in a Marxist meta-narrative of class struggle and socialist transformation. This tension suggests that PMPD/JaBaJa has selectively internalized postmodern sensibilities, emphasizing multiplicity and struggles that are locally characterized, rather than the relativism that denies the possibility of achieving change through structural reform. In this sense, PMPD/ JaBaJa exists as a kind of hybrid, a unique blend of Marxist and

postmodern ideas, which is intriguing and engaging. It is a Marxist intervention that also touches base with the uber-fragmented, identity-based politics of the present, engaging with those, but also attempting to place them in perspective within a more encompassing program leading toward socialist development.

PMPD JaBaJa: Theory vs. Program Dilemma

The differentiation between the theory and program is fundamental in the literature written by Marxists. Theory is the general analytical explanation of class society, exploitation, and the means of transformation based on the critique of political economy of Marx and the philosophy of history. Marx and Engels expressed the corresponding theory in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), where communism was anchored in historical materialism and class struggle. There is instead a program, the essentially pragmatic and historically relative plan for realizing socialist ends in given contexts. Lenin's classic work *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) emphasized that theoretical elucidation without a practical program could run the risk of being in an abstract maze, and a program lacking conceptualization could turn into opportunism. In Marxism, therefore, theory offers universality, and program offers applicability; and neither can exist without the other.

It is evident in PMPD/ JaBaJa's dialectic that the welfare/emancipation of the working class is closely tied to democratic supremacy. The emancipation is the question of social justice, equity, and transformative livelihood which will not compromise the people's popular legitimacy, enlargement of choices and freedoms, and democratic exercises. As an example of theory, PMPD/JaBaJa changed the nature of the interaction between socialism and democracy in Nepal, going as far as claiming that multiparty pluralism and class struggle would be viable in the post-1990 Nepalese democratic system. It was the rejection of armed insurrection as the only means to socialism a la Leninist orthodoxy, but it was also opposed to liberal reformist tendencies. In that respect, PMPD/JaBaJa was very similar to Eurocommunism in Europe, or the socialist experiments in Latin America, a locally rooted Marxist theory, incorporating socialist aims and democratic mandate. Theoretically,

PMPD/ JaBaJa introduced itself as an indigenous innovation, and in this case, socialism could be experienced through democratic participation without losing its Marxist face.

PMPD/ JaBaJa, however, has at times been implemented as a program more than as a theory. The promise of redistribution of resources and social justice gave way to a programmatic orientation focused on multiparty competition and peaceful engagement as a means to survive electorally. Here, Lenin's warning about the danger of tailism, or simply living according to circumstance without a strategic understanding, can be used to illustrate the point that Nepal's communist parties often used PMPD/JaBaJa to negotiate coalition agreements and position political parties to score some quick political points. This dilemma between theory and program negated the transformative power of PMPD/JaBaJa, revealing it to be merely an electioneering style unrelated to a theory.

In the Gramscian understanding, the dilemma can also be regarded as a hegemony crisis. According to Gramsci (1971), the enhancement of cultural and ideological leadership is necessary so that the struggle of the revolutionary transformation does not include only taking power. In a theoretical form, PMPD/JaBaJa hosted the prospects of generating a war of position by establishing legitimacy for socialist values within democratic institutions. However, it is not so in programmatic practice as it turned out to have become a war of maneuver, in its narrow centeredness on short-term electoral successes. This lack of coherence did not allow PMPD/JaBaJa to establish a hegemonic project capable of integrating socialist principles in a more encompassing civil society in Nepal. The only way to overcome this crisis is by emphasizing the theoretical foundations of PMPD/JaBaJa democracy, not as a zone of competition, but as a zone for building the hegemony of socialism, uniting the class struggle and the consent of the masses.

Zen Z movement and Crisis led with the Election

In September 2025 a huge political agitation took place in Nepal. It is possible to understand the Gen Z movement as a part of new social movement (NSM) theory that prioritizes identity, rights, participation, and democratic accountability, as opposed to the classic struggles based on

classes. In contrast to classical labor movements, which did not pay much attention to economic redistribution, new social movements tend to be digitally mobilized, and centered around such issues as transparency and governance reform, anti-corruption and civic participation (Earl et al., 2022; Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1981). In Nepal, recent youth movements and digital activism exemplify how the generation Z leverages social media platforms and civic networks in addition to mass protests to confront traditional political elites and to force them to respond to their call and to govern them responsibly. These movements are a shift of political participation where youth now are not only involved in electoral politics, but also in all aspects of democracy such as daily political activities, policy formulation and accountability (Sapkota, 2026).

In Marxist and neo-Marxist terms, youth-led protests and demonstrations may also be interpreted as the manifestation of discontent towards structural inequalities, political patronizing, and domination of the elite built into the political economy of the state (Marx & Engels, 1848/2012). Nonetheless, the ideological view of the youth mobilization in Nepal generally overlaps with the discourse of the People Multiparty Democracy (Jana-Janabad / JabaJa) created by Madan Bhandari that tries to unite the Marxist ones with the competitive multiparty democracy and plural political participation.

According to this paradigm, youth activism and Gen Z protests can be perceived not as opposition movement but as mechanisms of democracy aimed at correcting political actors and causing them to become more inclusive, accountable, and ideologically refreshed. Therefore, the new social movement dynamics, the Marxist approach towards structural inequality, and the JabaJa concept of democratic socialism are a valuable perspective to consider the changing role of youth in Nepal's contemporary politics. It may also be examined in the light of the dialectical contradictions of the political economy of Nepal, the shifting class structure (hence the nature of class struggle) and introduction of post-modern political values especially among the young people with rapid migration and globalization. Besides this, the current political events such as the severe electoral losses of leftist communist parties in the March 2026

general elections signify a deeper crisis of the leftist political verdict and ideological legitimacy in the country.

Conclusion and Reflections

PMPD/JaBaJa undoubtedly is the most predominant Marxist innovation in Nepal which synthesizes socialist goals and democratic pluralism during a period of global crisis in communist movements. This is high time to rethink Marx again and again (Resnick & Wolff, 2013), but the question lies on the method or science of thinking and then translating it into the action. By categorizing multiparty competition, peaceful involvement, redistribution, and social justice as instruments of class conflict, PMPD/JaBaJa shifted the perspective from theory to program. It addressed a specific historical situation in Nepal and contributed to broader Marxist discussions on state, revolution, and reform. However, its theoretical vision of transformation was not without its practical limitations. Inconsistencies in its practice, overshadowed by programmatic pragmatism and election politics, coupled with factional rivalries, have led to a coherence crisis in the Nepalese communist movement.

Despite such restrictions, PMPD/ JaBaJa remains significant in the whole world. It shows how, in a neoliberal age of globalization, digital capitalism, and changing class relations, socialism can be sought via democratic legitimation without necessarily leaving behind radicalism too. Based on its postulates, the democracy might be an instrument not only of liberal, but also of socialist transformation, re-conceptualizing the base-superstructure dialectic in a novel approach. To the broader left, given to division and theoretical exhaustion, the experiment of Nepal provides a lesson: socialism and democracy do not have to be incompatible, but can be recombined as a sustainable course of action in answer to not only the old forms of class struggle but also the novel dualities of the twenty-first century.

The paper, therefore, once again comes to the conclusion that Marx is still echoing in Nepal, along with PMPD/JaBaJa program initiated by the leader of the people; Madan Bhandari. However, its foundation is under-investigated or less explored, especially when considering the dialectical materialism, interplay between classes, neoliberal contexts, digital

capitalism and the changing domestic political economy of the country. In this respect, people-centric mobilization, leadership transformation, progressive interventions and party reform are the four especially important steps to make the program relevant. It is disheartening to note that the communist parties in Nepal are increasingly being reduced to mere mechanistic, gravitating towards electoral reductionism amidst the fact that the left-wing verdicts losing popularity in the elections. Indeed, the repeated recycling of the electoral process seems to be accelerating their institutional routinization. This trend could potentially lead to their embourgeoisement, transforming them into mere electoral machines akin to mainstream bourgeois parties. In this context, PMPD/JaBaJa asserts that elections are not the be-all and end-all; they are merely a means to establish political legitimacy. The primary concern is how we, in alliance with PMPD/ JaBaJa, can bring about a transformation in the existing hegemonic structure of society, thereby making Marx's teachings relevant to Bhandari and all in Nepal and beyond.

Funding: Not applicable

Conflict of Interest: The authors declares the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance: AI is not used.

References

- Adhikari, B. R. (2024). People's Multiparty Democracy: A New Vision. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 2, 85-95.
<https://nepjol.info/index.php/ssd/article/download/67221/51090>
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London: Verso.
- Arditi, B. (2016). Post-hegemony: Politics Outside the Usual Post-Marxist Paradigm 1. In Kioupkiolis, A., Katsambekis (eds). *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today* (pp. 17-44). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315603469>
- Bhandari, M. (1993). *Nepali kraantiko kaaryakram, janataako bahudaliya janabad* [People's Multiparty Democracy: A Program of Nepali Revolution]. Central Committee, CPN (UML).
- Briggs, W. (2019). *Classical Marxism in an age of capitalist crisis: the past is prologue*. Routledge India.

- Callinicos, A. (1991). *The Revenge of History: Marxism and the East European Revolutions*. Polity Press.
- Das, R. J. (2020). On the urgent need to re-engage classical Marxism. *Critical Sociology*, 46(7-8), 965-985. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520948930>
- Dhakal, T. P. (2023). Madan Bhandari and his theory of people's multiparty democracy. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 61-76. <https://nepjol.info/index.php/ssd/article/download/58470/43687>
- Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Pan, J. (2022). The digital repression of social movements, protest, and activism: A synthetic review. *Science advances*, 8(10), eabl8198. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl8198>
- Elster, J. (1985). *Making Sense of Marx*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68-93. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i212/articles/nancy-fraser-from-redistribution-to-recognition-dilemmas-of-justice-in-a-post-socialist-age#access-options>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Gyanwali, G. P., & Khanal, K. R. (2024). People's Multi-party Democracy: A Success Story of the Communist Movement of Nepal. *Patan Gyansagar*, 6(1), 35-45. <https://nepjol.info/index.php/pg/article/download/67405/51295>
- Harootunian, H. (2015). *Marx after Marx: History and time in the expansion of capitalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *The Limits to Capital*. Verso Books.
- Kharel, M.P. (2013). *Marxism & the new world order: A discourse on shifting global system*. Oriental Publication.
- Kouvelakis, S. (2020). Beyond Marxism? The "crisis of Marxism" and the post-Marxist moment. In A. Callinicos, S. Kouvelakis, & L. Panitch (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of Marxism and post-Marxism* (pp. 337-350). Routledge.
- Lenin, V. I. (1902). *What Is To Be Done?* Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2012). *The communist manifesto*. Penguin Classics. (Original work published in 1848).
- Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. Temple University Press.

- Milios, J., & Dimoulis, D. (2018). *Karl Marx and the classics: An essay on value, crises and the capitalist mode of production*. Routledge.
- Oli, K. S. (2025). People's Multiparty Democracy and Democratization of the Left Movement. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 3, 1-14. <https://nepjol.info/index.php/ssd/article/download/81283/62309>
- Pahari, B. R. (2024). People's Multiparty Democracy: An Instrument for Social Transformation. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 2, 11-26. <https://nepjol.info/index.php/ssd/article/download/67184/51067>
- Perry, M. (2021). *Marxism and history*. Springer Nature.
- Pokhrel, I. (2024). The Nepali Communist Movement and People's Multiparty Democracy. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 2(01), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ssd.v2i01.67183>
- Poulantzas, N. (1978). *State, Power, Socialism*. Verso.
- Resnick, S. A., & Wolff, R. D. (2013). Marxism. *Rethinking Marxism*, 25(2), 152-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2013.769352>
- Roemer, J. (1986). *Analytical Marxism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roka, D. (2024). People's Multiparty Democracy: A Base to Socialism. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 2(01), 97-107. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ssd.v2i01.67224>
- Sapkota, M. (2021). Nature of the State: Marxist Critique and its Divergences in Contemporary World. *Asian Journal of International Affairs*, 1(1), 99-117. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ajia.v1i1.44756>
- Sapkota, M. (2025). Debating research philosophy in political science: A critical outlook. *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope*, 6(1), 497-508. <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2025.v06i01.02927>
- Sapkota, M. (2026). Gen Z Movement 2025 in Nepal; Agendas, Implications and Unsettled Issues. *Journal of Political Science*, 26(1), 144-173. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v26i1.90793>
- Touraine, A. (1981). *The voice and the eye: An analysis of social movements*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wallerstein, I. (1991). *The decline of the Soviet model and the transformation of global Marxism*. *New Left Review*, 182(1), 10-22.
- Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Verso Books.
- Zwart, H. (2021). Dialectical Materialism. In *Continental Philosophy of Technoscience* (pp. 67-109). Springer International Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84570-4>