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Socio-political Transformation of Nepalese Society: Women's Representation in
Maoist Insurgency

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

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Abstract

This research explores the socio-political transformation that took place due to the Maoist insurgency. In particular it examines the representation of women in the Maoist insurgency and its impact on social transformation of gender roles. The Maoist insurgency, as I contend, opened new path of inclusive culture and republicanism. It also empowered oppressed class of people who had been historically marginalized and oppressed by the elite ruling class, including a system of hereditary monarchy. Based on the examination of political documents, social research data, and expert views, I argue that the Maoist insurgency helped Nepalese women and minority groups to register their voices and identity. This study sheds light on status of women in the post-insurgency Nepal and answers the question as to how Maoist insurgency contributed to bring inclusive social structure. More importantly, by raising political consciousness and self-worth, the Maoist insurgency allowed women to share political power and social responsibility. Thus, this research also reveals that, despite their declared policy of gender equality, women who participated in the insurgency also experienced gender discrimination due to lack of education and the prevalence of patriarchal mindset within the Maoist party organization.

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Acronyms

CA- Constituent Assembly

CPN- Communist Party of Nepal

HD –Historical Documents

PLA –People’s Liberation Army

SDI –Some Important Documents of CPN (Maoist)

I. Socio-Political Transformation and Women's Representation in Maoist Insurgency

This research examines the socio-political transformation of Nepalese society due to Maoist insurgency and women's representation in it. The Maoist insurgency began from February 13, 1996 with the proclaimed aim of establishing new democratic socio-economic system of the state by overthrowing contemporary politico-economic structure. Maoist insurgency changed the old social system of Nepalese society. By abolishing old century long feudalistic monarchism it inaugurated the new wave of federal republicanism. The suppressed marginalized groups in terms of gender, backward region and dominated culture have got the new path for uprising. People got the lost identity and were included in mainstream social system.

Nepal was ruled by monarchy and *Rana* dynasty since the last 238 years which was based on hereditary rule of monarchy. To pave the path for democratic rule in nation, various political, civilian and social activists have launched the resistance movements during its long history. For the quest of social progress and independence people have rebelled against the high elite ruling class people. But it could not succeed for long time due to the social structure of the nation.

Nepalese society was injected by the high elite class' ideology and all of the resources, institutions, social structures and higher political positions were in the control of elite ruling class people. High class elites utilized the state bodies to serve their purpose and interests. The unitary and exclusive nature of state was being frequently challenged by peoples protest. Due to the suppressive nature of elites, brutal treatment of state towards minorities, marginalized groups including women, *dalits*, and ethnic groups, Maoist insurgency got the warm environment to spread along all over the country. The suppressed nature of high elite ruling class encouraged people raise the dominated voice of people. So, today's setback is basically the outcome of the suppressive nature of high class elites, blatant

abuses of state power and resources by them. The conscious movements challenged the long unstable political and social condition of the state which led towards the federal republican setup by declaring the abolishment of feudal, unitary, elite-centric and exclusionary monarchy.

Various movements which occurred in several times since Peoples Movement of 1950 to People's Movement of 2062/2063: People's Movement of 1950, Peasant Movement led by Bhim Dutta Panta, *Jhapa* Uprising, Student Movement of 2036, People's Movement of 2047 focused on the contemporary form of exploitation of Nepalese people. The demand of equality, democracy and nationalism has played the decisive role for today's politico-social transformation. It represents the class consciousness of people, quest of self identity and the feelings of national integration. One cannot underestimate that quest of freedom for nationality and progress.

But this research sheds light on the Maoist insurgency and representation of gender in insurgency which is one of the historical movements based upon all earlier conscious movements of Nepalese people. "In fact the Maoist insurgency builds on the many unfinished movements of the past that aimed to establish democracy to bring an end of political repression and socio-cultural injustice" (Karki 15). Maoist "People's War" is one of the important movements which contributed to the Nepalese society in the process of reformation and which could succeed to lead towards the inclusive republican setup. This research also investigates how Maoist insurgency succeeded to establish the 'othered' voice of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and how insurgency transformed the Nepalese society into the inclusive system.

CPN (Maoist) launched armed struggle against the state from 13 February 1996 with the proclaimed aim of establishing new democratic socio-economic system and state by overthrowing contemporary feudal structure. "Maoist applied the strategy of "Protracted

People's War" to achieve their goals. This strategy follows the path of Mao Zedong on guerrilla warfare, based on the experiences from the revolution in China" (Nepal reports...).

The main stimulation behind the insurgency was the historical relation of oppression upon people by high elites ruling class, feudal lords and feudalistic modes of relation production. The document of Third Extended Meeting of CPN (Maoist) states that "Party determines the political and strategical strategy against feudalism and imperialism on the basis of leadership of proletariat class, labor-peasant unity which accomplish the new democratic revolution along with dictatorship of proletariat class" (HD 7). Nepalese people were 'othered' by ruling class in various aspects: racial-ethnic, upper-lower caste, gender, culture, language, religion and regional. The dominance of certain high class people has been privileged in political, social, and cultural domain where the majorities of people like; *dalits*, women, ethnic groups and madhesies were kept outside. They were deprived of the powerful position of the state institutions. In this concern Karki cites about the representation of people in state bureaucracy in this way: "Brahmins and chhetris occupied 87 percent of positions of the gazette third class in government offices while the ethnic groups, who constitute some 31 percent of total population, occupied only 0.5 percent of these positions" (33). The main reason of such condition is that those people did not belong to elite category. They have been facing various kinds of exploitation and suppression, and they claim that the state has shown the biased nature towards the marginalized people and regions. The 'othered' mentality of those oppressed people started to raise the voices of dissatisfaction against state. Karki writes about the protest of those people in such way: "The low caste (*dalit*) people of Nepal are struggling against higher caste Hindu chauvinism and *Khasa* ethnic domination" (454). Due to the exclusion in all sector people faced different difficulties. Suppressed people felt that their future is controlled by elite ruling class and their life is moving towards pitiable condition because of subjugative nature of state. Loss of hope, loss of security, and

decreasing livelihood played the vibrant role to stimulate the feelings of resistance. So, such kind of continued discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity, language and ecological regions provided a fertile ground for social conflict which ultimately took a form of Maoist insurgency.

The issue of gender is very strong in the insurgency raised by CPN (Maoist) by which Nepalese women got a new turn and debate. In documents of Maoist party gender liberation has got important space. “Maoist leaders placed an emphasis on the issue of gender equality and emancipation as central to the Maoist discourse and political agenda along with the class struggle” (Villegla 9). Despite of social and cultural obstacles voice for women’s empowerment has increased. Due to the involvement of thousands of people in the insurgency, it aroused not only the class consciousness, but also awakened the people about their social, linguistic, cultural, regional, gender, ethnical injustice. Because of the patriarchal feudal system, women were confined in the ghetto of so called norms and values.

In patriarchal society women are taken as only means of production, they are possessed by male; their condition is like an object. The society based on patriarchal system, categorized the women as a second sex, coward, emotional and fragile. Liquidating various stereotypes, women raised the voice of voiceless women through the banner of Maoist movement. To wipe out the patriarchal feudal structure, women have shown active role in various fronts of struggle. To smash their domestic barrier women came out from stereotypical identity and joined the Maoist insurgency. In this concern Chairman of CPN (Maoist) Prachanda says:

Today thousands of women have come out of the confines of their kitchens to graduate in to people’s warriors. Thousands of women have borne untold misery to assist the people’s war. The party had now made organized efforts

and plans to develop women communist leaders as a guarantee of the success of the revolution. (Karki and Seddon 271)

CPN (Maoist) from its formation period raised the issue of gender equality as a prioritized demand and it encouraged women for their equal rights and emancipation. The Maoist, have clearly stated on its documents to specify the slogan for the equal rights and resistance against patriarchal discrimination, prejudice and superstitions in all walk of economic, political and social life. Regarding the women's right, in memorandum with 40 points demand submitted on the eve of insurgency to then government by Baburam Bhattra on 4 Feb. 1996, number 19 states "patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women should be stopped. Daughter should be allowed access to paternal property" (197). Patriarchy provided confined role to women. Nepalese women always tried to redefine the patriarchal definition of female and inaugurate new culture of equality and inclusiveness. But due to the social structure and prejudiced psyche of political leadership, the achievements of struggles could not be legitimized in proper way. The democratic movements of 1950s and 1990s emerged the new enthusiasm in people but those movements could not institutionalize the achievements of history.

The history of Nepalese women is a history of sacrifice, protest and bravery. But that sacrifice of women is not mentioned properly. Nepalese history has been also created from the male perspective where women's history of struggle kept outside. Shobha Gautam writes "Nepalese history has not recorded the names of those women who carried their children along with their homemade weapons and fought along with Balbhadra Kunwer against the British in Nalapani in the Anglo-Gurkha war" (134). Since Nalapani to people's movement of 2062/2063 and in the Maoist insurgency women have been given heroic space. "During the Rana oligarchy Yogmaya Neupane presented a list of demands to the Rana rulers. Yogmaya resisted the Rana's exploitation and committed suicide by jumping in to the Arun river with

her 68 supporters as a protest saying that it is better to commit suicide than to live a humiliated life” (Sapkota 93). In the movement of 1950, women have participated with the enthusiasm of hope of democracy, equality and progress. In every political movement their presence is remarkable “the Nepalese women have a long history of being involved in political movements such as people’s movement in the 1950, 60,70 and 1990.They participated in large number and took active role to restore democracy but remained like puppet” (Bhadra 110).

Nepalese women have been deeply affected by Maoist insurgency. Armed conflict always affects the social structure and culture. In Nepal, due to the Maoist insurgency people faced the both positive and negative effects. The political and social awareness, positive changes in social norms and customs are important positive outcome, whereas losing the life of people, destruction of infrastructures, and psychological terror are the negative consequences of Maoist insurgency. The social reality of Nepalese women was always of that exclusion and discriminatory. When there is injustice obviously there come voices of resistance. In the history of world people raised the voice against oppressors when oppression has unbearable. In the case of Nepal people resisted against the exploitation of Rana’s and Shah Rulers. In this concern Shova Gautam writes “The history has already shown that in 1950, the conflict in Nepal is due to social injustice and poverty” (134). Maoist insurgency somehow played a vibrant role to change those values of discrimination. Due to enforced or voluntary involvement of people, Maoist insurgency got new height in terms of inclusion. The active participation of women in the insurgency, among the base level of political structure like; guerrilla, fronts, militia etc has received attention from layman to international community. Due to the growing involvement of women in armed and political fronts, it generated the new kind of concept towards Nepalese women’s role. The proportional participation of women was remarkable among guerilla “People’s Liberation Army”.

The women's involvement in guerrilla was around 40 or 50 % of the total combatants. But the final report published by United Nation Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) after the verification process revealed a much lower data than earlier. According to the report of UNMIN, out of 19,602 PLA combatants the number of women combatant is only 3846 that is 20 % of the total. In any case, although this is a much smaller figure than the earlier claimed by the Maoist during the insurgency period. This fact also represents the significant participation of women which was in opposition of traditional role of women provided by male dominated society. Generally, the participation of women is taken as a burden on the organization's effectiveness in armed field. But quite opposite, in armed struggle and post insurgency period the case of gender inclusion was remarkable. The women's participation is taken as the significant achievement of movement which played a decisive role to conclude the insurgency. The participation of women in the armed conflict in Nepal reflects the ambivalent picture of courage and gender awareness.

Murguialday indicates in an analysis of the consequences of the Salvadorian armed conflict for women: "Wars do not only cause considerable suffering for women but neither are they a panacea for female liberation" (39). In Nepal, neither insurgency played extremely positive role nor absolutely did negative as Murguialday mentioned about Salvadorian arm conflict. The Maoist insurgency increased the level of awareness upon excluded population for behalf of their rights. Bharadwaj remarks that "One positive effect of the Maoist insurgency is that many of these marginalized groups now feel that they have a greater awareness of their rights along with the ability to stand up and demand equality" (36). By such involvement of minorities in the insurgency aroused the self consciousness among them. They claimed that, they were utilized by ruling class as serf. So, such aroused consciousness transformed the mentality of people and inspire them to join insurgency.

The condition of Women in the remote areas was very plaintive and difficult. It could not change till now. About such kind of pathetic condition of Women, Dipak Sapkota writes: “the situation of the women in remote places and Terai has been pathetic. They are regarded as feeble, and most of Nepali women don’t have any identity” (92). The suppression of female is not only due to the male ruled state rather it is guided by religious and cultural phenomenon. Hisila Yami one of the women leaders of CPN (Maoist) regards, Hindu religion as an oppressive institution. According to Yami, “women’s social oppression is firmly rooted in the state-sponsored Hindu religion, which upholds feudal Brahminical rule based on the caste system which disparages women in relation to men” (Karki and Seddon 167). Despite of an emphasis on the issue of gender equality by Maoist Leaders, the equality between men and women was never seen in the Maoist leadership structures. Gender inequality has clearly seen in the sector of political fronts and combatants. It was not only in political leadership rather it covered the whole structure of Maoist organization.

The female cadres were under physical and psychological terror due to their low age group. Most of them were below 25 years. “The majority of the Maoist combatants in rural areas were aged under 20, particularly girls were aged between 14 and 18” (Manchanda 250-251). Due to physical structure, women cannot continue after certain age. Hisila yami writes “While Men are continuing to develop in the military field even when they are reached beyond 40 years of age; women are hardly seen to continue in the field beyond 25 years” (27). Although representation of women in the top leading position is very poor but in the base level or in the organizations, the participation of female is remarkable. About the involvement of women, Yami writes:

One of the historical achievements of PW was that it made a big leap in women’s lives. They joined all the fronts, the party, united fronts and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the three instruments of revolution. For the

first time women became professional whole-time revolutionaries not in tens but in hundreds, not in hundreds but in thousands! Before PW started there were only 2 women whole-timers in then CPN Unity Centre (Women's participation...)

The including of marginalized groups in Maoist war was important for transform the society. To liquidate various stereotypes, women and other minorities supported the insurgency with strong commitment "there are many grounds for women's participation" (Karki and Seddon 181) for independency, democracy and livelihood. The participation of people from various nationalities and regions with the commitment of transform the people's daily livelihood, challenged the elite ruling class and it also added the stone on series of struggle. A developed sense of self identity amongst the marginalized groups encouraged to tie the all sorts of organization in to a centralized and univocal flow of protest. So, the unified voice of people in the form of Maoist insurgency pressurized to overthrow the discriminating kind of social and political institutions. The chairman of CPN(Maoist) Prachanda writes on the paper of Maoist central committee meeting: "Today, workers, peasants, women, students, teachers, intellectuals, dalits, oppressed nationalities and cultural activists are fueling the fire of organization and struggle as allies of the people's war with new zeal and zest" (Karki and Seddon 221). According to CPN (Maoist), Nepal has been injected by feudal- imperialistic "semi-colonial oppression since Sugauli treaty" (Prachanda 133) affections and it captured the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres.

The Maoist claimed that people were suffocated from such condition and united under the slogan of "People's War" for the search of equality, equity, democracy, nationalism and inclusiveness. The people of remote areas were wondering for fundamental necessities. They were boycotted from access of state bodies and avoided from mainstream social system. They got only dissatisfaction, humiliation, abuses and ill-treatment from the high elite ruling

class who controlled the each and every resources of nation. Arjun karki writes: “there is wide dissatisfaction, anger and the feelings of revolt among the poor, the ethnic minorities, the dalits and women” (453). In the Nepalese history time and again proved that without a violent blow of resistance the high class elites would never agree to handover the power to the people. It was clearly seen after the 1990s change. The monarchy was reluctant to transfer the command of the army to elected government and controlled over these institution as its own turf. To overthrow such kind of despotism CPN (Maoist) declared that “People’s War is needed for the achievement of civilian supremacy ending the control of elites.” (Sapkota35). Such kind of despotic behaviors have happened upon the people from not only elite class people rather by the external power centers and tendencies. The Chairperson of CPN (Maoist) Prachanda mentions: Nepalese society has been infected by “semi-colonial oppression since Sugauli Treaty” (133). That oppression has been deep rooted in various aspects.

Nepal is a country, which never fall under the direct colonial claws of any colonizers. But, when Nepal was defeated by British Empire in 1816 it could not remain the independent country and various kinds of treaties were imposed upon Nepalese people. The article V of 1950s agreement of peace and friendship between Nepal and India exposes the imposed unequal relationship, which hints the semi-colonial status of Nepal. The article V reads: "The Government of Nepal shall be free to import, from or through the territory of India, arms, ammunition, or warlike materials and equipments necessity for the security of Nepal” (Treaty of...). According to this treaty Nepal gets authority to import anything from third country only after the permission of India. So, Nepal’s economic and security affairs were controlled by India in such way which pushed the country into the semi-colonial condition. Moreover it evoked the feeling of humiliation and aggression in the people’s psyche. Dipak Sapkota writes about how India imposed the various suppressions upon Nepal in the name of compromise and agreements. He mentions: “mainly through the 1950s treaty, India

maintained its semi-colonial and commercial, industrial, financial monopoly over Nepal's industry and commerce" (39).

Today's accomplishment of the inclusive Federal system is the outcome of the cultivated ground of elite class people's indifferent manner towards the marginalized people. The flagrant abuses of state power and prejudiced tendency of that class towards minorities, created the hostile background for movement. This background gave the fertile land to unite the political parties and people. If there had not the regressive step of monarchy, vibrant role of indigenous, marginalized peoples and regions, there would not be possibility of today's republican uprising. Almost all the indigenous people are awakened and the reservation in every sector for those minorities have guaranteed in constitution. For women 33% reservation has guaranteed in CA election of 2008. In every government sectors and institutions of Nepal women's reservation is guaranteed which is one of the important achievements for Nepalese Women's movement.

Although many writers, critics, reporters, intellectuals, international society and concerned authorities have analyzed the Maoist insurgency and Women's position in insurgency through different perspectives, but none of them has touched the inner reality of the burning issue of gender participation in the movement. It was not so easy to struggle with male dominated society for Women. In Maoist insurgency there is also discrimination, gender violence and social crime. So, the researcher examines the documents about Maoist insurgency, social research data, insurgency related- journals and other related documents of gender issues to excavate the representation of Women.

This thesis has been divided into four parts. The first chapter is discussion about the transformation along with women's political representation in whole movements and specifically in Maoist People's War. The second chapter of this research focuses on the position of women in Maoist movement and its impact upon socio-political domains. It also

reveals the attitude of male dominated society towards the issue of gender equality and inclusion. The third chapter focuses on the liberation of women and causes of poor representation of women in Maoist insurgency. The last chapter is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It is a sum up of the entire thesis.

II. Political Representation of Women and People's War

Nepal was ruled by strong uni-centric patriarchy based monarchism since centuries. Nepalese society is characterized by strong patriarchal structure where woman are suppressed by male dominated social system. Their roles and positions have been determined by patriarchal traditions, norms and values. Due to this pre-determined role women are confined in the walls of kitchen. In the history of Nepal women have been dominated and exploited from male-dominated society and state. Women's social, political, cultural and physical oppression is based on deep rooted male dominant economic and social relations. The gender discrimination started with the emergence of class society which is continuing till now in the name of second sex. Along with the developed form of class society female were encircled into the house work in the name of daughter, wife and mother. Women have been entangled more deeply in the net of so called social norms and value and it increased when society got a new transition from the ancient to feudal based and then to capitalistic mode of production.

In feudalistic-patriarchal society, women's position is defined on the basis of biology and biology is used to justify the male supremacy in the society. Women are objectified by men, they do not have control over their own bodies and they do not have any fundamental rights to use their own ration. Sapkota on his book *Ten years of Upheavals Reportage of the Decade Long Maoist People's War in Nepal* writes about the women condition in this way: "They are regarded as feeble, and most of Nepali women do not have any identity. In their childhood, they are known by their father's name, after marriage they would get an identity from their husband and later in their life they may be known by their son's name and deeds" (92). This kind of oppressive mentality of patriarchal society oppressed the women in double way. In the name of gender they are exploited as the domestic serf and on the other hand they have been suffering from class exploitation. Patriarchy provided various stereotypes for

women instead of well behavior. There are hundreds of stereotypical words to humiliate women.

Although women are represented as the emotional, fragile and weak, but in the political history of Nepalese women they showed the very bold and admirable courage. During the various movements and nationalistic fronts women had shown the greater courage and sacrificed for behalf of nationality. To challenging the patriarchal-feudal-stereotypical identity women have been fighting against imperialistic invasion and domestic oppressors. Women have been shown vigorous role since Nalapani to Maoist insurgency. Sapkota writes:

Women had participated actively in the nationalist war fought in early nineteenth century particularly the battle of Nalapani. In those battles women and children together with men had displayed courage while resisting the British Empire. At those battles women had proved they were not less capable than men rather they could fight as efficiently as men. (93)

The above statement shows that women are not fragile and emotive rather they can handle the all kinds of challenges and maintain it properly as male. The gender discrimination is created by male ideology and exaggerates it for their interest. They contributed in every social movement. In anti-*Rana* movement, women played the important role. Women started fighting against oppression of *Rana* oligarchy under the leadership of Yogamaya Neupane in 1974 BS. She presented the 24 -point list of demands to *Rana* rulers because of the dictator system. About this Sapkota writes:

If we turn the history, resistance of women is very bold. In 1917, Yogmaya Neupane presented a list of demands to the *Rana* rulers. She resist against *Rana* oligarchy, committed suicide by jumping into the Arun river with her 68

supporters as a resistance saying that it is better to commit suicide than to live a humiliated life.(93)

In Nepal, women have traditionally little opportunities to participate actively in politics as politician's nearer and dearer like a wife and their family's political background but women's voice has long been silenced. They were discouraged by society to involve in political activities. Although in political movement and resistance the participation of women is remarkable. During the ending time of *Rana* regime various women's organizations were formed by the help and suggestions of male leaders. "In 1917 AD, Krishna Prasad Koirala attempted to form a women's organization named Nari Jagriti" (Karki and Seddon 379). Another wing of women's organization is led by Chandrakant Mathema. "Chandrakant Mathema also led a movement for women's study and eventually a women's school was established in the year 1936, at Makkhan in Kathmandu" (379). It shows that women were more actively involved in the transformational movement for their rights and they wanted to establish inclusive social system.

The representation of women, among contemporary political parties was very poor because of illiteracy and so called patriarchal social norms and values. The first political party of Nepal 'Nepal Praja Parishad' included women as activists. According to Sujita Sakya, "Karma Devi Basnet and Rewanta Kumari Acharya actively participated in the establishment of the first political party, the Nepal Praja Parishad in 1993 BS (1936 AD)"(379). It was historical participation of marginalized group such as women. At the same time, worker's movement occurred in Biratnagar. In that uprising also women's participation was remarkable. During the formation of Nepal Communist Party in 2006 BS, the party included the one woman Moti Devi Shrestha as a founder member. Then after, the establishment of Communist Party, the women political activists formed the "women organization 'All Nepal Women's Association' in Raxaul, India chaired by Tara Devi, and

another was founded in Kathmandu, chaired by Punya Prabha Devi”(380). About the formation of women’s organizations during *Rana* regime, Sujita sakya in her essay “The Maoist Movement in Nepal: An analysis from the women’s perspective” remarks:

At this point, the demands of the women’s movement included the rejection of a variety of practices around marriage, education and employment: widow marriage, child marriage, polygamy, exploitation in the name of religion and culture, lack of female education, employment opportunities and the adult franchise. (380)

After the abolition of *Rana* oligarchy, Nepalese political movement got a new height and nation got a democratic uprising. In the same manner, the women’s movement also got a new direction. Regarding to the Delhi agreement, women’s movement polarized into two groups: ‘reformist’ and ‘revolutionary’. In this context Sujita Sakya writes:

When Nepali Communist Party proposed that the Delhi agreement was acceptable, different views emerged with in the women’s movement. Mangla Devi and her followers strongly stood in favor of the motion, whereas Kamakchya Devi and Shnehalatta were completely opposed to the motion. After this, the movement polarized between ‘reformist’ and ‘revolutionary’ factions. (380)

On 7th March 1952 another women’s organization was formed in the leadership of Kamakchya Devi named by All Nepal Women’s Association. It aimed to mobilize the women for their rights and liberty. “Apart from that general objective, the association also fought in patriarchal ways against different kinds of exploitation and discrimination” (381).

Women took active participation not only in the 1950s movement but in all kind of uprising resistances, focused against every kind of exploitations. Women have strongly defended the internal and external interfere. The All Nepal Women’s Association, led by

kamakchya Devi actively involved in to the internal and external interferences of different power centers. Sujita Shakya writes, “The All Nepal Women’s Association also actively participated in the movement against imperialism, mainly against American and European imperialism, and Indian expansionism” (381). In different times the institutions for women’s right and protection have played a positive role which helped them to fight against patriarchal-feudalistic society. As a result, somehow women got a chance to participate in state authority as a representative.

In the election of 1958 only six women contested the election, and only one of them—Dwarika Devi Thakurani—succeeded to win. During the era of *Panchayat* women’s role was underestimating. It was a period of dictatorship, political institutions were banned and political parties were active through underground activities. From 1960 to 1990, monarchy by a royal coup, established direct rule under the party-less *Panchayat* system. “The justification for the *Panchayat* system, touted as a party-less democracy, was made on the grounds that the country was not ready for multiparty politics and that the new system was suited to the “climate and soil” of the country” (Thapa 18). In this period, political activities of the women’s movement became very limited as other political institutions. Although various women activists were participate into the underground political activities. During this period, the women’s organizations actively participated on the underground movement against social discrimination and inequality. The revived Nepal Women’s Association formed under the leadership of Shanta Manawi, raised the voices in opposition of social discrimination and oppression. “The association became active both openly and underground. It raised its objective voice for an end to inequality and social discrimination and oppression” (382).

For the restoration of multiparty system, Nepalese political parties launched the united movement in 1990. During this period, various communist parties were involved to mobilize

various section of Nepalese society in opposition of the dictatorship of *Panchayat* system.

Arjun Karki and David Seddon write:

By early 1990, an alliance of seven communist parties had been created, as a United Left Front, to constitute-with the Nepali Congress Party – a broader movement for the Restoration of Multi-Party Democracy- ‘united front’ to bring about the end of the Party-less *Panchayat* System. (14)

Women played a decisive role in people’s movement to enhance the power of people.

Women, ethnic groups, non-Hindus, lower castes groups, etc joined the 1990s movement on the various banner such as party cadre, social activists, civilians and students. But, the leaders of the most prominent parties were typically from upper class male who handled the movement.

After the restoration of multi-party democracy, contemporary political parties could not maintain the people’s expectations and demands. The political change has brought high hopes and expectations but, when then state structure failed to address people’s needs, gradually the symptoms of people’s dissatisfaction has exposed. The people were hopeful that, in the new policy there would be no prejudice, no discrimination, no centralization of power and no personalization of bureaucracy and no gender discrimination. But, movement could not change the system and the mentality of leadership. The old system remained as it was.

Throughout the *Rana* and *Shah* regime in Nepal, so called untouchable caste and ethnic minorities were excluded from land grants and land rights. This biased treatment still exists upon them and it has created a deep-seated frustration among the vast majority of the rural people. This kind of frustration has created the warm environment to uprising the armed struggle. In this concern Karki writes:

The people have expected, after the people's movement of 1990, that the elected government would implement a radical agrarian reform and make them land owners. But their dream of coming out of the poverty trap through access to land never came true. This frustrated expectation has inspired many land-poor and the landless people to join the Maoist insurgency. (16)

Around that period United National People's Movement (UNPM) an embryo form of CPN (Maoist) rejected the new constitution and boycotted the general election for May 1991.

The CPN (Unity Centre) rejected the November 1990 constitution promulgated by the king, considering it an inadequate basis for the genuine democracy and continued to demand a constituent assembly, with a view to drawing up a new democratic constitution and, eventually the formation of a People's Republic .(15)

Although the Nepalese communist parties, marginalized groups and gender played vibrant role to restore the multi-party system but those groups could not achieve the credit of transformation. Then political state holders deprived minorities from the fundamental rights. The injustice and oppression of state upon people have continued, which played a role of catalyst to enhance the rebelled mentality. "The history has already shown that in 1950, the conflict in Nepal is due to social injustice and poverty" (134). While the political chaos was growing amongst the parliamentary political parties, the 'third plenum of the Central Committee of the Unity Centre which held on March 1995, decided to occupy the strategy of armed struggle, denounced the electoral way and "adopted 'The Strategy and Tactics of Armed Struggle in Nepal encouraged by 'the conscious peasant class struggle developed in the western hill districts, particularly in Rolpa and Rukum" (SID 23). Although, Communist parties involved in to then political uprising but they could not grasp the people's expectations.

CPN (Maoist) launched the “People’s War” against the state from 1996. While Maoist declared the insurgency; it also declared some programs and policy about social problems and women’s emancipation. CPN (Maoist) formally agreed on the equal rights of male and female on the every sector of society. In the 40- points demands memorandum submitted to the government before the insurgency it was clearly stated that “the patriarchal oppression on the women must be ended. Girls should be given equal property right to those of their brothers” (Roy 197). Although, Maoist stated the equality on the formal documents of their party but in implementation it never seen as documented, it remained only on papers. Even in the organization of Maoist Party, women were not treated equally as men. Except some exceptional case, women did not have a chance to reach on a top position of Party organization. The top leading position of United People’s Front, Nepal was run by women leader during the preparatory period. “The party nominated Pampha Bhusal as a chairperson of its over front, United People’s Front, Nepal” (Sapkota 94). In the grass level of insurgency several women actively participated in the military and political trainings during the initiation. During the time of initiation the involvement of women was very poor. Among the 19 members of Central Committee there was only one woman member and 10- 15 full-timer women had been involved in the initial period. “There was just one Central Committee member in the 19-member committee” (Yami 96). Those women also joined from the marginalized caste like *dalits* and ethnic communities.

Despite of poor participation of women cadres during initiation period, Maoist insurgency succeed occupy the 45 percent women cadre in the guerrilla organization till the peace process. Most of the female who joined the insurgency were young girls who were victimizing from state and state’s armed force. According to Deepak Sapkota women’s involvement was in extraordinary scale and it was a major significance of Maoist insurgency. Sapkota writes: “quite different from their traditional role in Nepal, women played an

important role in People's War" (96). Especially women from backward areas and groups have forcefully and enthusiastically joined the Maoist insurgency. Women have played the multiple roles in insurgency. As guerrilla, women were fighting in warfare and indirectly they played assisting role. Hisila Yami writes about the women's role in the insurgency in this way:

Where women are not directly involved in fighting guerrilla warfare they are working as support force for the people's war. They function as organizers, as propagandists, as cultural activists, as logistic suppliers, as nurses for the wounded fighters and cadres, as espionage workers, as cover for the party cadres or combatants, as visitors, and source of inspirations in jails and in martyr's family households. (21)

Women have supported as a back force of Maoist party. In rural areas they provided shelters to Maoist cadres and most of women joined as volunteers in militia. In some cases women were used as carrier of dead bodies in battle field. According to Shova Gautam, women participation in the Maoist's People's War with the exercising in the field of political, militant and domestic spheres is equally important. She writes:

Women agency can be observed not only in the militancy but also in the domestic sphere where women have become heads of the households, as bread earners, taking care of the families, participating in the community meeting etc. women are able to exercise their agency also within the Maoist cadre where women's question has been ideologically and programmatically incorporated. It also recognized the importance of women activism in the People's War. (240)

The recruitment of women guerrilla in the insurgency was much more the result of terror, regression and ill-behavior towards women by their family members, society and state armed

personnel. Terror of attack, sexual harassment of female in village by state force, regression of losing their family members and dearer and nearer has become the main catalyst for involved in war. From the state's security armed personnel, women have faced much more danger of sexual harassments. According to Ranjana Thapa, "rape and sexual assaults have been used by security personnel as a tool of revenge and harassment. Between 1996 and 2003, 48 women have been raped and 29 have suffered rape attempts" (103). Female faced the sexual and psychological harassments not only from state's personnel but also from the Maoist guerillas. "Even within the Maoist militia, there have been reports of sexual harassments of women soldiers" (Dhakal 29). Those women, who jumped in to underground guerrilla warfare have faced the double exploitation.

Women faced various problems in society and even in family by their family members. Among the marginalized society women have faced the double suppression; in one hand they are treated as patriarchal objects and on other hand they faced the exploitation of ruling class. They were beaten by drunkard husband and avoid due to minor reasons which compelled them to accept armed struggle. "Joining the Maoist has also been seen as an answer for many women who have been abandoned by their husbands or who have felt the government will not and cannot do anything about the inequality women faces" (Onesto 46). According to Sujita Sakya: "The Maoist Party has recruited many women as cadres; they are attracted because the Maoist recruit them as guerrillas and militia, but in practice such women are often ill-treated and raped" (391). Moreover, Maoist's members took girls towards their program and in the name of 'Abhiyan' younger girls and boys were kidnapped by Maoist cadres. "Likewise the Maoist has kidnapped women forcing them to participate in their calibrations and to support Maoist with food and shelters" (Thapa 256). In this way women faced the various difficulties and dangers during the period of insurgency from both sides as a patriarchal object. The Care Nepal's report also shows the same condition faced by

the innocent women. How females were utilized and recruited forcefully in armed conflict. It states:

During the conflict many women and girls were subjected to abduction, displacement, trafficking, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence. Some were killed. Women were deprived of education and health-care. Their reproductive rights were not protected. Many girls were forced by their families to marry at increasingly younger ages out of fear they would otherwise soon be raped, thus ruining their marriage prospects later. Men joined the fighting, fled or migrated to seek alternative employment to support their families. Thousands of young single women and widows were left with sole responsibility for families. Women combatants, activists, researchers, journalists, became victims of Human Rights' abuses by both State forces and Maoists. (4)

The impact of patriarchal structure cannot be abolished by only slogans and 'revolutionary' speech; it has deep roots in the every cell and quantum of human phenomenon.

Hence, Maoist Party formally illustrates the abolition of patriarchal and feudal structure of society in its documents but in the psyche of male cadres and even leaders it still remained. They were guided by same prejudice. Women cadres have faced the discriminatory behavior in the field by their guerrilla friends. They were blamed as disqualified to take a higher leadership of party and warfronts by their male friends. It happened not by anything else rather due to the discriminatory mentality of male. About the gender discrimination Hisila Yami presents her view "this becomes particularly challenging for women and Party organization when women in leadership in various committees and guerrilla units are not easily acceptable because of feudal prejudices" (28). This statement shows that discrimination based on sex has been imposed on women since the development of human

history and it is still continued. In outer layer one claimed the abolition of gender biasness but in the inner layer of his/her psyche it has carved deeply and cannot change in one clap. In the male cadres' inner level of mind such kind of male dominated thought were carved deeply by which, female faced discriminatory behavior from their male co-fighters. Despite of poor inclusive party structure, Maoist insurgency is more responsible which could transform people's perspective towards women in society. In pre-insurgency period women were displaced and humiliated by so called patriarchal norms and values. Maoist activists dictate upon the ill-treating behavior and culture which is based on Hindu religions like avoiding the untouchability to menstruating period, lower caste people and their social criteria. It created the courage and inspired among women to speak about their rights. Exclusion of women from the public areas has been highly realized for a long time. Maoist insurgency reduces the boundary; imposed upon women by male for public sphere. They joined the armed struggle by neglecting the male-product social norms and values.

To gain social and political status in society women sought the space in politics and social organization. Maoist insurgency became a suitable platform for them. This was one of the major motivate factor to join Maoist revolution. In Maoist guerilla structure, almost all the female combatants were from lower socio-economic community. They felt that elite ruling class people have been oppressed them and avoid them from the mainstream national socio-political domain. Most of them were from mid-western and far-western hilly areas of Nepal, where people were 'othered' by religious hierarchy, they are suffering from a fierce cycle of poverty over many generations and excluded from social activities. Most of them belonged to marginalized ethnic groups and low caste like: Tharu, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Tamang and Dalits. They aimed to change contemporary existing discriminative social and political system of the nation which had created unfair distribution of resources between people.

During the insurgency period there was speculation that the presence of women combatants was as high as forty to fifty per cent of the total Maoist guerrillas. The Maoist Party claimed that the equal number of participation of women in every front and organization challenged the traditional definition of women's role. In Space Time on April 18, 2003 the Vice Chairman of CPN (Maoist) Baburam Bhattarai has said that: 50 % of cadres at the lower level, 30 % of soldiers and 10 % of members in Central Committee were women. According to the report of UNMIN, among the total verified numbers (19,602) of combatant's women combatants occupied approximately twenty percent (3,846). It shows that, Maoist party claimed that participation of women in every sector is remarkable but data shows the unequal proportion of gender involvement in Maoist combatants. Although the high level of women participation in Maoist insurgency drives the world's attention towards them but among them lots of women were joined PLA and Militias because of the pressured posed by Maoist cadres. In the dissertation paper of Sharada Khadka, she states that:

20% of informants said that they joined Maoist PLA because of the pressured posed by Maoist PLA and members. Maoist political cadres used to come to village for their organizational developments and cultural programs.

According to those informants, Maoist party had announced compulsive slogan that "one house one person for PLA" and started campaign to make people any how join Maoist party. (52)

This shows that, despite an ideological commitment of gender equality, there is a clear gap between practical field and documents. The position of the Maoist Party on women's issues remained largely unstated, and their commitment to bettering women's position is zigzagged.

Seira Tamang in her article, "The politics of developing Nepali women", stated that:

the image of "Nepali women", which is very poor, illiterate and oppressed (by Hindu patriarchal domination) individuals in need of empowerment was

constructed within the development discourse by and for Kathmandu-based high-caste Hindus. “The creation of ‘the Nepali woman ‘was as much the work of development agencies in search of ‘the Nepali woman ‘to develop as it was the result of the active dissemination of state-sponsored ideology. The patriarchal oppressed, uniformly disadvantaged, Hindu ‘Nepali woman as a category did not pre-exist the development project. (Dixit 163)

Religion has also created the oppression of women. On the base of religious thought society imposed so called discriminative values upon women. It helped to male dominated patriarchal thinking by providing religious dogmas. Hisila yami in her writing claims that, women have been exercising their agency in the militant movement. They were the first to break the tensed silence throughout Nepal caused by the first historic strike that marked the initiation of People’s War. They were the first to snatch rifles from reactionary armed forces. Women were courageously involved in jailbreak from heavily fortified jail. “Women have reached the policy making bodies in the party, Army and the United front, and have joined the government and the parliament in significant numbers” (Yami 32). The Maoist movement provided the well platform for women, marginalized ethnic groups, indigenous and low-caste *dalits* to raise their issues.

During the initial phase of insurgency, it inspired mostly the poor peasants, women from the low caste and marginalized ethnic groups. “The ideological thirst of the movement is oriented towards expanding the rights based the poor and the marginal including women” (Gautam 225). Another reason of attraction towards movement is the policy of banning alcohol production in countryside, discouraging gambling and ill-treatment towards female. By this policy of control over social misbehaved, created the environment for join insurgency to rural women.

Among the party structure of Maoist, there were merely two members in the Central Committee; only two among the nine ministers are women, 34 percent women in the parliament, during the interim government. Such evidences open space to question towards the Maoist leadership. In this regard, a senior woman leader in the Central Committee says:

The Maoist is the only Party to implement its policy in practice and there are numbers of examples to substantiate this claim. For examples, the Interim Parliament of 2007 where 54 percent of women were from the Maoist party and 37 percent women while comparing with the male members within the Party, Constituent Assembly election where 24 women were elected through direct voting and proportional representation which provided 50 percent seats to the women. It takes hundreds and thousands of years to end patriarchal attitude within and among the individuals. However as a Party, it is far ahead in implementing policy decisions into practice. (Arya 150)

Answering to the question why there are only two women in the Central Committee of the Party out of 29, she says:

Party and state are two completely different things. Special rights and Proportional rights provisions are made to promote women's participation within the state domain. Party is the place to have rigorous debate and discussions in order to shape its vision. Thus, there is no special rights provision in the party. Rather it promotes equal competition among the people regardless of their class, region, caste or sex. It is also not true that the policies result in favor of women if the number of women is significant. Rather is the result of the values and principle one believes in. It is also not true that women's participation is not necessary but it has to come progressively on competitive basis. In the context of Nepal, there is no long history of women's

political participation. While talking about the Maoist, it is a very young Party which expanded only after 1996. Thus, we cannot expect equal participation of women at all levels which comes only through a gradual process. Many women have developed leadership within this 10 years claiming 30-40 percent representation at district level and 25 percent women in mid leadership level.(50)

Her claims still fail to answer the question of women exercising agency when the numbers remain incomparable with men in the Party. It also makes us think that whether women have not developed capacity for reasoning in order to contribute on policy formation or it was male psyche which controlled the top level of organization.

By the large number of women participation in insurgency, it succeeded to change the stereotypical definition of female which was major ill-souvenir of patriarchy. Partially, the Maoist insurgency and other political movement of post-insurgency period succeeded to establish the women's proportional participation in every sphere. The Interim Constitution 2063 declares that: "No one shall be discriminated against in any form merely for being a woman," (Article 20) and "Women... shall have the right to participate in the state mechanism on the basis of proportional inclusive principles" (Article 21 Government of Nepal). In the same way the election of CA female's quota was reserved by 33% seats.

The election committee has set criteria of filling candidates for the PR seats on the basis of fifty- fifty percent of male and female candidates. And among party candidates it was mandatory to have 31% from *Madhesi*, 37.8% from ethnic groups, 4% from backward region and 30.2% from others. Total 601 CA members were elected out of which 240 members were elected on the basis of FPTP, 335 on the basis of PR while 26 were nominated by the main

parties with the view of incorporating those communities which has been left out. (Women's Role)

The Maoist insurgency created the new path for women's liberation movement in Nepal. In this aspect this uprising played a positive role, which could succeed to transform Nepalese society in to the inclusive federal republicanism. If there would not the vibrant participation of minority groups it will not be possible to gain new height of liberation. The quoted statement shows the same reality and fact. It mentions:

Without women's active participation, whether as combatants during the conflict or as Civil Society advocates, the *Jana Andolan II* Peoples movement in April 2006 which resulted in the end of the Monarchy and the opening of the path to peace and the CA elections would not have happened. (Care Nepal 14)

By abolishing monarchism, Nepalese society inaugurated the new process of inclusive social system. Especially, for marginalized group and gender, it gave the new wave of equality. After the republican setup, the cabinet of 2009 had included 5 women out of 44 members, one deputy- prime minister out of two. Generally pre-republican period there were usually women members in cabinet. After the result of decade long insurgency and people's movement II Seven Party Alliance clearly mentioned that:

We also believe that only a system which is inclusive and encompasses the rich social, cultural, geographical, racial and linguistic diversities in the country can be strong. We also express our full commitment to reservation of seats for women, *dalits*, marginalized indigenous peoples, *madhesis* and people from economically backward region. (Seven party)

After the success of People's movement and Maoist war, all parties and civil society realized the unity of diversity through the true representation of all diverse culture.

All in all, the Maoist insurgency could transform old social-cultural definition of women and established the new notion towards marginalized groups. It provided new culture based on equality and inclusion. Not only this, Maoist insurgency succeeds to transform the socio-political structure of nation and changed in to federal republican setup.

III. The Maoist Insurgency and Women's Liberation

During the time of Maoist insurgency, women were encouraged to enroll in rebel for gender emancipation along with class liberation. Maoist claimed that gender emancipation is possible only after the liberation of class. Maoists always raised the slogan of gender inclusion on their documents, manifestos and press conferences but the result of implementation of that declaration could not match with slogans. The documented papers, manifestos and distributed slogans and distributed dreams created an illusion upon innocent female cadres. They joined the armed struggle in the hope of elimination of century long oppression. But, the Party structure of CPN (Maoist) also injected by gender discrepancy. It could not remain outside from the prevalent patriarchal culture. In the sector of guerrilla, united fronts, and party structure, smell of discrimination has emerged. Although there are various causes behind exclusion of women during the Maoist insurgency which helped to boycotted women from the periphery of main leadership of CPN (Maoist). Nepalese society faced various kind of gender violence due to the 'phalo-centric' male dominated society. Shova Gautam in her essay cites about the women's oppression and violence in this way:

Trafficking of women, domestic violence against women, discrimination against women, child marriage, polygamy and unequal marriages, the dowry system, rape and other sexual violence and the disease (including AIDS) are some of the problems women are forced to suffer across the country.(153)

By Nature women are not 'othered'. There are no any specific natural causes to women for being out casted. Nature does not discriminate in the name of gender, region, and language rather it is culture which exposed discrimination between male and female. CPN (Maoist) which always tried to show the different from other political groups, failed to maintain the gender issues. Whether male leaders of CPN (Maoist) were reluctant to upgrade female cadres or women themselves were unable to snatch the leadership or they were incapable to

lead, is one of the vibrant questions about gender inclusion. In one interview the Chairman of the CPN (Maoist) Prachanda speaks about women participation of his party in this way:

... our party has tried to develop the leadership of women comrades. There have been problems in doing this, but now we are, step-by-step, working to solve this problem. Masses of women have come forward as revolutionary fighters. And we had a plan right from the beginning that the women and the men comrades should be in the same squad, the same platoon and that all things should be done in this way. We have worked to make new relations between men and women—new relations, new society, new things. (Interview, Himal)

In the grassroots, the empowerment of women was somehow implemented but in the upper level of Party organization it did not implement properly. Why this has happened? Were women weak? Neither women are weak nor incapable rather the perspective of male leaders was biased towards female and other technical aspects were also played negative role for women's leadership. The CPN (Maoist) also veiled by patriarchal nets and structures, male leaders have a patriarchal ego by which they are guided and reflect it on one way and other. Hisila Yami finds the contemporary patriarchal socio-economic condition as an obstacle of women's liberation. She writes, "Women's political oppression is rooted in patriarchal economic and social relations" (16). CPN (Maoist) claimed that, Maoist movement emerged to eliminate such kind of relations but they could not clear it properly because Maoist themselves were the product of same socio-economic relations.

The main obstacles behind gender variation are social, economic, cultural, political, educational, physical and psychological aspects, which have been playing the decisive role in every political movement. Nepalese society is divided and dominated by a Patriarchal worldview; women are seen as a lower to men and are treated as their dependants regarding

their education or economic attainments. Discrimination against women, starts from their birth and continues throughout their life in the name of 'daughter', 'wife' and 'mother'. At father's home they are treated as a daughter, second to their sons and in adult age as a wife treated inferior to husbands, work as a housemaid serf. In old age women are treated as a weak and dependent mother by their sons. In the public life they are used as only representative, eye witnesses of decisions and male try to avoid them from a decisive status. Nepalese women are always kept behind their male counterparts.

The CPN (Maoist) shows that discrimination of women is sponsored by religious worldview. In the Hindu religion women's status is lower than men. The caste system based on Hinduism keeps women as secondary people. So, Nepalese women also bitterly treated by the Hindu based state's ideology. "Patriarchal exploitation and discrimination accurately sums up the fact that in the world's only officially Hindu state, dominant and often state-supported ideologies towards women are based upon conservative Hindu concepts of femininity"(Women in the Maobadi...). About women's social oppression, Hisila Yami writes that "women's social oppression is firmly rooted in state sponsored Hindu religion which upholds feudal *Brahminical* rule based on caste system, which disparages women in relation to men" (15). The Caste system, which is based on hierarchy, made people blind to accept the discriminatory norms and values. In the hierarchy of caste system, status of women is reduced in twice time. In Sujita Shakya's perspective "women are made back warded by economic, Political, social and cultural forces. Religious books and religious suppression also 'minimize' women" (376). In every sphere women are taken as subordination of male. They are marginalized by their male partners in the name of 'female'. Most of the women were participated in insurgency from ethnic communities where as few from upper caste. In the Chairman of CPN (Maoist) Prachanda's words, "among these groups had contributed to the success of the People's War" (Arena 137). The situation of gender equality among ethnic and

indigenous groups is more progressive than others. Ethnic societies are more liberal in comparison of Aryan communities.

Women faced the insurgency differently than men in each and every spheres of life. Due to the feudal based patriarchy women faced gender discrimination in the one hand and sexual violence on the other hand even in Party structures.

This affects women in particular as they have to fight at two fronts, from class perspective and gender perspective. This becomes particularly challenging for women and party organization when women in leadership in various committees and guerrilla units are not easily accepted because of feudal prejudices. (Yami 28)

The gender biasness emerged in party organization, because those who joined the insurgency could not transform them as their documents speak. They were remaining as a product of feudal-patriarchal ghetto. Although, Maoist cadres strongly pronounced the slogan of equity, equality, and inclusiveness but that remained only in tongue. The old thoughts have injected in whole structure of society which controlled every individuals and socio-political structure. They could not abandon the male-dominated psyche which continued till today in one and another way. According to Hisila Yami:

..male cadres have a problem of relinquishing the privileged position bestowed on them by the patriarchal structure. This is manifested in many ways. This is mainly seen in the form of formal acceptance of women's leadership, while in essence not accepting their leadership. (40)

People cannot digest newness if that is in opposition of their culture. Male cadres could not avoid male ego by which women were victimized. In majority of Nepalese society the traditional concept about female is rooted deeply. Most of people think that women should stay at home, up bring children and run the household. But such kinds of concept are

challenged by the participation of women in Maoist armed conflict. Shova Gautam writes: “The Maoist war has generated a discourse that Nepalese women are as capable as men in political and military struggle” (137). Behind the increasing number of female participants in the insurgency, aggressive mentality towards old, narrow and conservative thoughts played a thrilling role. Sexual and gender violence are the outcome of same narrow phalo-centric thinking of male dominant society. “Many have joined the rebel because of gender based violence (rape, desertion) or because of security force’s harassment” (143). Women are made confined in to household activities, used as machine and sex objects by male.

Not only male, rather female themselves are responsible for their oppression. In the name of tradition and continuation of generation, women themselves advocate the patriarchal views. According to Sujita Shakya, “...women themselves advocate the bearing of children for the protection of ‘tradition’ and ‘the nation’; mothers protect daughters for becoming involved in politics; women are the preservers of caste, untouchability and other conservative traditions” (Karki and Seddon 376). In the Maoist insurgency, women were also made mere cadres. They were controlled by male commanders and male leaders schooling them about ideologies or thoughts. They could not gain the authoritarian responsibilities and recruited as a simply to forward information. In the sector of guerrilla, they did not reach around the power position of the organization. Although, few females occupied the higher position of Party and combatant’s but there was only male have access to control over organization. This situation is an outcome of male dominated psyche and its hangover. The traditional prejudicial concept of then period’s power holders towards women was erected upon the culture of exploitation which did not want to provide any kind of rights and equality to them even in the documents. Regarding that condition Chairman of CPN (Maoist) Prachanda speaks: “in reality they do not write that thing and if they write, in practice they will not provide that rights to women” (Prachanda 153).

CPN (Maoist) claimed that, then political structure was totally biased towards women, indigenous, and minority groups and they declared that, those groups will gain equality if they include in to the armed conflict. Maoist leaders exaggerated the slogan of liberation of marginalized people. They exaggerate the issues, as only CPN (Maoist) is a provider and it will guarantee the rights of women along with minorities. But, in the level of implementation those slogans and reality emerged as contradictory. According to Hisila Yami, “In the practical front, this leads to spontaneity whereby women’s issues are addressed but not implemented because one leaves it to circumstances, leading to gradualism” (38). Why this has been happened in communist movement she further writes, “instead of taking women as reliable long term equal partners in the communist movement it takes women’s role as supportive” (38). Behind this situation of discrimination, various kinds of dominant values played the vibrant role. Male always questioned about female capacity and doubt upon their leadership. Nepalese society is injected deeply by dominant traditional norms and values. In Sujita Shakya’s view “In our society, there is a dominant view that ‘nature’ has made women weak” (375). Despite of such kind of view women involved actively in to the every progressive revolution for their emancipation. Although natural causes have also discouraged them but it is not dominant aspect of discrimination. She further advocates the radical view of resistance and writes, “women cannot be made free only by providing legal and other rights, unless and until women are themselves actively involved in the destruction of the old structure of feudalistic and male-dominated societies” (375). During various peaceful movements, women’s participation is remarkable but it is not properly mentioned and they could not obtain any credit. In this sense peaceful or legal activities cannot lead towards implementation of women’s rights. Women’s rights must be documented whether through peaceful movement or illegal movement.

Nepalese women, who belong to backward rural areas and oppressed communities, have raised the voices for equality. Regarding the involvement of women in Maoist insurgency CPN (Maoist) Prachanda writes:

Conquering over death, glorious participation of women in battlefield, revealing the new step of new thought and women's movement. The women liberation movement which is committed to develop, to apply and to offence revolutionary thought will be powerful base for accomplish revolution and stop counter revolution, has developed as a new thought through the peoples war. (Prachanda 55) My own translation

Nepalese women's liberation movement, which has been move gradually towards new height and it, got new direction during the Maoist insurgency. Women did not care the personal interests and jumped in to armed revolution. Women have fulfilled the 30 to 45 % of total cadres in every sphere; combatants, political field and volunteer sector. In battle field, women joined the front line equally as their male comrades. In spite of establishing the proclaimed aim of new democratic system, female cadre resist against the old, conservative patriarchal thought which was based on male dominancy. It remains as a main obstacle of freedom.

By accepting Marxist ideology and Maoism thought, women political activists developed the new record for accomplishment of democratic revolution. In this concern political document of second national conference of CPN (Maoist) speaks, "Hundreds of Nepalese heroes and heroines have shed their blood in order to bring the great process of achieving the great ideals of communism to this height" (47). In every condition as a patriarchal society, in all sphere Nepalese women faced cultural and social barrier for leadership. No any place remained untouchable from dominant old- rutted patriarchal notion.

Despite of strong commitment for providing the equal space for women's leadership, Nepalese political parties failed to establish common ground for female. The Survey Report

and Strategic Action Plan, 2009 exposed: “Discrimination between man and woman has prevailed glaringly in the Nepalese society due to the male-dominated social structures” (25). Due to this dominant biased perspective, women are deprived from opportunities. In our society, negative traditions have been deep rooted since long time. It is saying that women should not participate in public sphere, should not study and work in to house. Particularly in Hindu society women should not touch the religious books, they should appear as a loyal towards husband. Such kinds of attitude towards female are the main obstacles of developing women’s individual background. Everywhere such attitude is dominant and no one wants to escape from this conservative net.

Another important factor behind women’s discrimination is low educational status of women. According to the report of Ministry of Education and Sports of 2006 women’s literacy rate is very poor. In rural and backward area, illiteracy of female is higher than developed areas. In 1952/54 women literacy rate was 0.7 % where male literacy rate was 9.5 %. In 1991 it was increased around 25% and male literacy rate was 54.5%. After ten years, the gender gap did not reduce rather it increased by 29.5%. In 2001 female literacy rate was 42.5% and 65.1 was male. In this way gender gap is increasing day to day which creates inequality among male and female. This imbalanced condition of gender played the vital role in Maoist insurgency. Due to the illiteracy, women could not gain the higher position of party structure. Before five years of the initiation of Maoist revolution, the literacy rate of women was around 25% and male literacy was 54.5%. Such poor situation of education affects the women’s role. Majority of women participants in insurgency was from the rural and marginalized groups. Who found themselves as excluded from power centers and jumped in to the insurgency.

In rural areas literacy rate is absolutely lower than urban areas. Due to poverty and traditional concept girls could not got well education. The report of Care Nepal (2010) shows

that: “The poverty incidence in rural areas 42% is higher than urban areas (25.2%). The incidence is most pronounced in the mountain areas, followed by the *Tarai* plains and the hills. Regions such as the rural mid-west have a poverty incidence for higher than the valley” (3). This variations shows that poverty rate is higher in west mountain areas than other areas. Due to such variation, people joined armed struggle to obtain the dream of equality. By this poor background of poverty and education women were remain outside from the core part of decision making of every sectors. In this way women who joined Maoist insurgency also remained outside from its top position and decisive level. In grass roots level, women were used as loyal and honest cadres but in responsible position they kept outside. Generally, women are deprived from the access of higher education because being a daughter is main cause.

In patriarchal society, sons are in more priority than daughters. So lack of women’s access to higher education is one of the important reasons for women’s low participation in high political sphere. According to CBS report 2001, women’s access of higher education is 30.2 % only. In 1991 access of women in graduate and above level was 22.5% and in 2001 it was just 22.9%. The above data shows that around initiation of Maoist insurgency women’s literacy rate was very poor and who joined the armed struggle belong to lower status; educational, economic, social etc. Few women who involved in the Maoist’s central level have higher education but they are also being outsiders. Most of women cadres have not higher educational background. The data itself shows that women’s educational background was not proper in that time. Most of the participants in insurgency were from outcaste and marginalized groups. According to report of Ministry of Education 2007, literacy rate of *Dalits* is 33.8%, graduation and above percent is 0.4, SLC and above percent are 3.8 only. The ratio of literacy rate of ethnic groups is also lower than *Brahmin* and *kshetri*. In graduation and above, total percent of ethnic groups is 2.0 where as *Brahmin* and *Kshetri*’s

5.4%. Above SLC their percent is 12.9 where as *Brahmin* and *kshetri*'s 24.7%. (CBS Report 150) In this way the educational status of ethnic groups and *dalits* is low. The Maoist cadres who joined the insurgency by avoiding "bourgeois education" in her/his early age prevented higher level education. Lack of higher education, less priority to women, lack of empowerment, negative attitude of society towards active women, poor economic background, and cultural aspects were the main reasons behind poor representation of women in political movement especially in Maoist movement. To addressing the Mongolian nationalities one of the oppressed ethnic groups, Chairman of CPN (Maoist) Prachanda says "more and more militant and revolutionary women cadres are coming from those nationalities. And we are trying our best to develop the leadership of those comrades" (110). Although official documents of CPN (Maoist) speak empowerment of women but in practical level above reasons become hindrance of developing leadership.

Due to the cultural aspects, women have faced various challenges. It becomes barrier for women to freely take part in every incident. Although women joined in Maoist insurgency by announcing the transformation of conservative cultural dogmas but they could not turn century long cultural activities. Human are guided by cultural norms and cannot avoid it easily. Culturally Nepalese people are also bounded. In comparison with ethnic communities non-ethnic communities are more oppressed by patriarchal culture. In this regard Prachanda says "in the Aryan community, as there was more exploitation and greater atrocities against women, the People's War provided a concrete method for women's liberation, and there has been increasing participation of women from this community as well" (72). During menstruation period, female are forced to remain outside from home, not allowed to touch other person, and in front of senior person female must occupy the traditions. Regarding the political involvement there is general saying that women should not involve in to politics rather they take care of household. Such kind of concept has injected in society by which

everyone is mobilized. Women do not get encouragement to involve in politics by their guardians. Hisila Yami writes:

The prevailing division of labor, according to which men undertook mental work, while women were relegated to physical work, led to cumulative experience of men in the field of analysis and synthesis of the world, while women were lost in the hidden world of household activities. (34-35)

Patriarchal social system automatized people on its ill-practices. It formed certain values for men and women regarding public sphere. By such concept, women were remained inside of the walls for bearing children as a machine. Women cannot continue their field due to the physical and reproductive reasons. The question of political continuity and development of leadership is challenging one “women’s lack of continuity in this field due to marriage and reproductive functions is robbing them of leadership position in PLA” (Yami 62). Women’s physicality becomes barriers to continue the political field. In insurgency period they have faced such kind of problems. In this question Chairman of CPN (Maoist) Prachanda says “Some women comrades have a strong will to continue working, but the practical problems of caring for a baby become a big obstacle”(Karki and Seddon 111). Not only this other aspect also responsible for women’s poor access to power. Economically they are depended upon someone; psychologically women feel themselves as insecure and weak.

According to 1991 Census, women comprised 40.38% of economically active population and 90.5% of them were engaged in agriculture. During Census 2001 the proportion of economically active women comprised of 48.9% (CBS, 2004) showing an increase of 8.5% within a decade of which 73% were engaged in agriculture as against only 60% of economically active men engaged in agriculture. Moreover, in comparison of male “Female comprise 31% of all paid workers as against 69% male”. (CBS, 2001). Women could not destroy whole patriarchal system so that they are ill-treated till now. If woman take active

role in politics she is criticized by society as an outcast. They are discouraged even by family members. So, women have been faced such kinds of bitter realities in society which helped to increase gender discrimination.

IV. Symbolic Representation of Women in Maoist Insurgency: A Conclusion

Maoist insurgency provides the platform for women, oppressed caste, marginalized ethnic groups and back warded region to boost up the rights, which have been seized by elite-feudal social system. Maoist insurgency succeeded to transfigure the socio-political realm but could not reconstruct the whole system; old patriarchal thought, semi-feudal condition, discriminatory thoughts etc. Despite partial reformation among social institutions, Maoist insurgency failed to provide well representation of minorities in every sector. From the perspective of minorities and oppressed class, it was one of surpassing in the history of Nepal which opened new path for comprehensive socio-culture setup. It gave the respect to them who were ill-treated by Hindu-elite culture based political and social system. Since long time in the name of '*matwali*', '*dalit*', '*women*', '*bhote*', '*madhesi*' etc. people were suppressed. They compelled to participate in insurgency due to such kind of attitude towards them which blasted as the decade long armed struggle. Minorities have emerged in the mainstream political, social, cultural, historical domain by adopting new role and responsibilities. It opposed the Hindu dominant patriarchal society where women were bounded in to four walls of household and treated as second class people. Maoist insurgency provided influential position in the political and military realm to them. They occupied typically different responsibilities during war. They involved in the battlefield with gun and gun powders.

Hence, Maoist armed struggle provided the opportunity to raising hands of rights to outcaste groups and gender but for them it was also more difficult among Maoist organization. Especially, in one hand they joined insurgency to transform the so called social system and on other, to implement the dream of liberation and new lifestyle based on equality, equity and liberty. But, due to the patriarchal narrow thought they were remain victim of old concept. In patriarchal society, role of women is determined by male dominated

mentality. Women are confined in household by so called norms and values. So, Nepalese women's role has been affected by such kind of tendency since beginning of 'modern Nepal'.

The Maoist insurgency contributed to transform the long statuesque in to Federal republicanism through its forceful movement. Nepal entered into new political domain and opened space for then minorities and oppressed people to participate on the process of inclusion and they got chance to participate in decision making process. Unlike the other political parties, CPN (Maoist) gathered the various excluded people in terms of class, caste, gender, ethnicity and religion that have been frustrated due to the biased treatment of the state.

In case of participation of huge mass of women in to the insurgency gave the long term impact; positive as well as negative. It created the new aspiration among oppressed people and region, as well as it gives the traumatic experiences to people. Women could not get positive supportive role of the society for their active participation in armed struggle. Women leader faced the lack of encouragement to empower female cadres among party structure. Nepalese society is dominated by various discriminatory norms and values. Due to negative criticism of society towards women, family member does not support them to join politics. Such kinds of contradictory behavior helped to increase negative notion about women's empowerment. Because of the lack of political orientation, women have faced the problems like lack of increase in competitive capacity, tendency of fear from competition, declining interest towards politics, lack of intra-party and inter-party collaboration among women, growth in unhealthy competition, humiliating tendency of male etc. Despite of the obstacles, women succeeded to register the new wave of courage and scarification. By completing old contradiction, decade long insurgency created complex contradiction about history, democracy, nationalism, federalism, secularism, and inclusion. It helped to create the new paradigm among world.

Regarding the issue of transformation and women's empowerment various notions are presented. The claim of CPN (Maoist) regarding the issue of equal representation is exaggerative. They did not provide the equal platform to exercise leading capacity and self evaluation to women. It seems symbolic representation of female. Male superiority was reluctant to involve women on decision making. Regarding the case of power transformation, male leaders were hegemonies by patriarchal essence. Despite of male dominated social structure, Maoist insurgency created the historical situation for the behalf of women to develop inclusive social system. It sprouts awareness among suppressed people and raised the hands of equality. Insurgency succeeded to change ill-social trends and conservative traditions. *Dalit* people were misbehaved by so called upper caste people in the name of outcaste and untouchatable. It tries to established new notion towards humiliated people. The government of post insurgency period provided the legal provisions and reservation to suppressed group in state's body.

Hinduism based social system and high elite feudalistic culture, which is deep rooted in Nepalese society since hundreds year, was prejudice towards multiculturalism. It was in opposition of providing rights to indigenious and suppressed people. It never gives response to the diversity and national unity. Because of such situation, those people have involved in to various movement for the search of own cultural identity since long time. In the political history of Nepal, this group always remained victim by high elite ruling class' culture. In the case of Maoist movement women were also victimized by male dominated patriarchal tendency. Maoist insurgency could not remain untouchable from such kind of inclination. In one way or another way, women were being victimized by that kind of attitudes. Hence, Maoist armed struggle helped to empower indigenious people and spread awareness about women rights but it could not upgrade them from the low status. Due to patriarchal old male

dominated culture CPN (Maoist) could not participate to women in to the higher level political position and responsibilities.

To sum up, Maoist insurgency played the vibrant role to transform social and cultural structure from old, traditional one. Despite social reformation, Maoist insurgency could not reconstruct the whole socio-political system of Nepalese society from the semi patriarchal-feudal condition. The question of representation of marginalized group, caste, back warded region and women remained incomplete.

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