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New York, New York

**POOR AND MARGINALIZED WOMEN ACTIVE IN THE PUBLIC ARENA
DURING NEPAL'S PEACE-BUILDING PROCESS AFTER MAOIST
INSURGENCY**

A thesis submitted by:

Rakshya Pandey Shrestha

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Members of the Examining Committee

Mentor: Prof. Ramona Hernandez

Second Reader: Prof. Reuben Thomas

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABBREVIATIONS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	iv
SECTION 1: <i>Introduction to the Research</i>.....	1-4
1. Statement of the Research Problem.....	1
1.1 Aims and Objectives of Study.....	3
1.2 Hypothesis.....	3
1.3 Methodology.....	3
1.4 Structure.....	4
SECTION 2: <i>Contextual Background</i>.....	5-16
2. Overview of Nepal.....	5
2.1 Women of Nepal.....	6
2.2 History of Political Context	8
2.3 Emergence of Maoist Insurgency.....	12
2.4 Brief Overview of Maoist Insurgency’s Impact on Women	14
SECTION 3: <i>Efforts of Peace-building Process</i>.....	17-33
3. Concept of the Peace-building Process.....	17
3.1 Women of Nepal in the Peace-building Process.....	18
3.2 International Policies on Women’s Participation in Peace-building.....	21
3.2.1 Security Council Resolution 1325	22
3.2.2 1820 & 1888	23
3.2.3 1889.....	24

3.3. Role of Non-governmental and other organizations in Bringing Women to the Fore during Peace-building Process.....	25
3.4. Women as Leaders in Peace -building Process.....	26
3.4.1 Through Involvement in Communities.....	28
3.4.2 Through Involvement in Women’s Organizations.....	29
3.4.3 Through Involvement in Cooperatives.....	32
3.4.4 Through Involvement in Government and Parliament.....	33
SECTION 4: <i>Conclusion</i>.....	37-42
4. Social Implication.....	37
4.1 Challenges and Recommendations.....	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	43

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Rakshya Pandey Shrestha

May, 2012

Abbreviations

CA	Constituent Assembly
CARE	CARE International
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CCA	Canadian Cooperatives Association
CIA	Central Intelligent Agency
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMF	Central Micro Finance
CPN-M	Communist Party Nepal-Maoists
GoN	Government of Nepal
IC	Interim Constitution
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
INGO	International Non Governmental Organization
LACC	Legal Aid Consultant Centre
NC	Nepali Congress
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PSWG	Peace Support Working Group
SAP	South Asia Partnership
SCR	Security Council Resolution
SPA	Seven Party Alliance
UML	United Marxist Leninist
UPF	United People's Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nation Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Abstract

In Nepal, a country where more than half of the population is female, the society is blatantly patriarchal, and the social system is based on caste, class, ethnicity and gender discrimination. It cannot be denied that the violent Maoist insurgency led to socioeconomic and political deterioration in the country. The decade-long violent conflict killed an estimated figure of more than 13,000 people and has displaced even more. Currently, the country is in the process of transformation and peace-building and is moving towards adjusting the past discrepancies to address root causes of the insurgency. However, the Maoist insurgency also brought some positive changes to the society including issues relating to women such as, encouraging them to raise their voice for their right to justice and reparation, their right to education, employment, and meaningful participation in decision-making. They became more aware of the gender based discrimination and were able to address the issues that were especially relevant to the poor and marginalized women. This study, therefore, attempts to identify and analyze the roles played by these women in the public arena during the peace-building process in Nepal after the Maoist insurgency. Additionally, it also tries to examine how their roles improved their social standing and offered solutions to the patriarchal society.

Keywords

[Maoist, Insurgency, Conflict, Victim, Patriarchy, Gender, Empowerment, Peace-building]

SECTION I

Introduction to the Research

1. Statement of the Research Problem

“Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment.”- Karl Marx (Source: Yami, 2007 p.13)

The historical subordination of women continues even today as women suffer discrimination and marginalization in Nepal. The prevalence of discriminatory laws against women, women's lower literacy rates, higher health hazards and the absence of women in decision-making are evidences of patriarchal domination. There is a persistence of inequality between men and women, which has become one of the major huddles for the well-being of the people in Nepal. Hence, Nepal's culture and tradition is such that women of Nepal especially poor and marginalized women of Nepal do not get the chance to do anything of their interest without male member's permission at home. Therefore, the women Maoist leader Yami (2007) in her book *People's War and Women's Liberation in Nepal* writes, “Women in Nepal have reasons to fight for New Democratic revolution as it addresses their economic, social and political oppression” (p.16). Likewise, Hutt (2004) states, “ Though Maoist insurgency has its own multiple dynamics which consists of social, ethnic, economic issues and also basically an ideological and political offensive against the political system of the country” (p. 59), resolving women's issues was an important item in its revolutionary agenda. The revolutionary agenda of Maoist included 40 demands.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Maoist revolution was completely violent. People were made vulnerable to hunger, thirst, lack of shelter and disease. This

movement has affected rich and poor, young and old, powerful and powerless alike. Do & Iyer (2009) even found in their research that “The so called “People’s War” that took place between 1996 and 2006 killed over 13,000 people and displaced thousands more” (p.5).

While conflicts and wars are seen as having destructive effects on society, the fact that such tragedies can produce some positive results cannot be overlooked. The Maoist insurgency gave the privilege to poor and marginalised women of rural communities to come out from the situation of deprivation and discrimination and provided confidence to speak for their right. More importantly, the communities are also sensitized and have started giving their daughters and women education and other opportunities, otherwise women had no other paths to follow than marriage and devotion to the family (Aryal, 2008, p.14-15). Maoist’s ideology of women’s emancipation and their success in revolution has undoubtedly lifted and improved the lives of so many marginalised isolated women in the rural communities. Women’s empowerment and their involvement in public sphere during peace-building process of Nepal has been a great achievement after the insurgency, which has helped in improving their social standard. Likewise, Falch (2010) also claims on his research study that,

The conflict’s negative impact on women notwithstanding the increase in female-headed households empowered many women by leading them to enter public life, where they have engaged in activities previously reserved for men (...) Yet many women also became engaged in peace-building activities at the grassroots level working for democracy, disarmament and a peaceful end to the conflict (p 20).

I personally noted during my visit to conflicted areas in Palpa, Dhading, Dhulikhel and Nagarjun of Nepal in 2006 at the start of peace-building process period

that women seemed enthusiastic to work in public with the consent of men. They were also making decisions in their households. They were happy with their better socio-economic status because of involvement in public-arena and earning identity as well as income and in turn were successful in keeping their children and family happy. In this way, the poor and marginalized women who were confined to the kitchen are empowered and able to come forward and participate in public arena.

1.1 Aims and Objectives of Study

The main objective of this study is to explore women's empowerment in public arena after the Maoist insurgency through their participation in the peace-building process. This study will pay attention to poor and marginalized women. Specifically, this study seeks to shed light on the different roles that poor and marginalized women have played in the peace-building process after the Maoist insurgency. In addition the study will analyse whether the roles these women played have improved their lives in Nepalese Society or not.

1.2 Hypothesis

“Poor and marginalized women have improved their social standing after the Maoist insurgency.”

1.3 Methodology

The study is the result of desk-based research using secondary sources from related books, journals, articles and the reports of national and international non-governmental organisations in the Internet. To ensure reliability and validity of the information obtained from the sources mentioned above, I have crosschecked with other published researches related to this subject. In addition, I have used my

personal observations and notes about the roles women played in the peace-building process from my visit to conflicted areas of Nepal such as Pipaldanda of Palpa district, Dhadhing, Dhulikhel, and Nagarjun during the course of my work in 2006.

1.4 Structure

This research study is divided into four sections. The research is introduced in the first section. The second section contains contextual background incorporating a brief overview of Nepal, women of Nepal, the political scenario, the causes of the Maoist insurgency and a brief overview of the Maoist insurgency's impact on women.

In the third section, the study explores and discusses the peace-building efforts undertaken after the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and the participation of poor and marginalized women in said process. This section will discuss the roles women played in the peace-building process and after the Maoist insurgency. This section also explores the consequences of women's participation in the peace-building process in Nepal.

Finally, the research concludes with a discussion of some social implication for women's status in Nepal as well as the challenges ahead for improving women's lives and creating a more egalitarian society. The conclusion includes recommendations to address these challenges from a public policy perspective.

SECTION 2

Contextual Background

2. Overview of Nepal

Nepal is a South Asian sovereign state found between India and China. This poor country has an area of 147,181sq.km and a population of approximately 29 million. The nation's capital is Kathmandu. Nepal is geographically, culturally and ethnically diverse. The diverse landscape ranges from flat plains to hilly region at the center to Rocky Mountains in the north. The highest point on Earth, Mount Everest is a part of Nepal which along with other seven of the world's ten highest mountains. 80% of the people in Nepal are Hindus having other religions in the minority (Central Intelligence Agency World Fact, Nepal Fact updated April 2012) with people comprising with 101 caste and ethnic groups and 91 spoken languages (Thapa, 2009, p.1). According to World Bank (2012), Nepal is a small country with per capita annual income of less than US\$ 650. However, Nepal is not only popular for its highest peak of the world Mount Everest but Nepal is also famous for the "birthplace of Lord Buddha" (UNESCO 2012).

Nepal, since past three decades, has endured, experienced and undergone number of socio-political turbulences. It has undergone and witnessed two People's Movements, government turmoil, massacre of a king and his family, more than a decade long armed conflict and abolition of almost three centuries long monarchy. Currently, country has become a federal republic state. In the course of this period, Nepal has had lots of setbacks, disappointments and few irreparable losses. Nepal is a society whose social system is based on caste, class, ethnicity and gender

discrimination. However, it cannot be denied that at the same time, positive changes have also occurred benefitting rural communities especially to rural poor and marginalized women because of the socio-political turbulence in the country after Maoist insurgency.

2.1 Women of Nepal

Although comprising over 50% of the nation's population is women, the Nepalese society is blatantly patriarchal across all the different cultures and traditions in the country. Therefore, women's lives are very much controlled and dictated by their fathers and brothers before marriage and then by their husbands, in-laws and sons after they get married. To make the matter worse for women, Nepalese legal system is also very much pro-patriarchy (Asian Development Bank, 1999, p.7). I, personally being from Nepal, have first-hand experience of male-dominated society. I was influenced by my father when was young; I had to follow whatever he said and there were strong restrictions for mobility. I was not even allowed to talk to any male friends other than relatives or to make any decision on my own at home. It was logical for my father to control me because if he had not restricted me and if I had walked on my own way by not listening my father, I would have been considered as ill-mannered girl in the view of relatives, neighbors and society. In that situation, my father would be blamed for not controlling and not teaching his daughter, the things that a daughter has to follow.

Being controlled by the male population, most women in Nepal have to struggle to pursue education, work in public arena and make decisions on their own. My personal understanding is that, the women in Nepal, for the most part, are neglected,

discriminated against and exploited; even more so in rural areas. According to Bacchan & Mitra (2004) “Various cultural, practical, attitudinal, conceptual, social and political factors have limited women from moving in equal footing with men leaving them far behind of men to compete or take part in national development” (p.123). It cannot be denied that the factors mentioned by Bacchan and Mitra have contributed to the exploitation and discrimination of women. Girls are discriminated from the moment they are born. For Nepalese people, sons are a prestige and honor to the family whereas daughters are often considered the property of other family. It can also be noted from Yami (2007)’s book where she writes, “Women without their sons are mostly abandoned or socially ostracized or co-wived” in Nepal (Yami, 2007, p. 16).

In the context of Nepal, women are already oppressed in various other ways also such as victims of child marriage, sexual exploitation, face the demands of dowry and in their daily lives are subject to verbal and physical abuse, and even untouchables and isolation during menstruation cycles. A Maoist women leader, Yami (2007) in her book “*People’s War and Women’s Liberation in Nepal* argues, “Today because of monopoly capitalism, on the one hand the rift between rich and poor is increasing and on the other hand within these poorer classes, women are becoming poorer (p.126). Hence, Nepalese women are lacking in confidence in handling the issues generally affecting themselves even in their day-to-day lives because of encountering with above-mentioned issues. Women’s contribution in Nepal is always overlooked and is not considered equal to men in spite of their hard work at home. Subsequently,

women especially who are poor and marginalized in rural communities are likely to remain poor because of obstruction in moving with equal footing with men.

Few of the popular proverbs reflecting the belief of women in Nepalese Society given by Malla in her article “Property Rights of Women” (2001) are:

- Dhilo paye, chhora paye (“Let it be late, but let it be a son”);
- Chhora paye swarga jaane (“The birth of a son paves the way to heaven”);
- Chhori ko janma hare ko karma (“A daughter is born with a doomed fate”);
- Chhora paye khasi, chhori paye pharsi (“If a son is born, it is celebrated by sacrificing a goat, if it’s daughter, a pumpkin is enough”);
- Chhora bhaye sansar ujyalo, chhori bhaye bhanchha ujyalo (“Son brightens the whole world, whereas a daughter brightens only the kitchen”);
- Mare paap, pale punya (“It’s a sin if the groom kills the bride, charity if nurtured”);
- Srimati bhaneko paitalako dhulo ho (“Wife is the dust of the foot”);
- Pothi base ghar mahscha (“A woman ruled house is sure to be destroyed”); and Swasni mancheko buddhi pachhadi (“Women are always shortsighted”).

(Source: Posted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Beliefs Reflecting the Derogatory Attitude towards Girl Child/Women, Para 4)

Thus, the situation in Nepal is such that the majority of women are not even aware of their basic right and are exposed to such values as mentioned above by Malla because of lack of access to modern education.

2.2 History of Political Context

Prior to 1950 AD, the socio- political system was based on Hindu caste system and the laws such as Muluki Ain, Law of Land were formulated accordingly. Peoples’ social and political lives were very much regulated according to this Hindu concept of ritual purity. Monarchs of Shah Dynasty then ruled Nepal. But during the mid period of Shah Dynasty the special royal courtiers known as Ranas became very

powerful and snatched the power from the monarch who ruled the country in anarchism by making the monarch merely a symbolic head of state. The laws were arbitrary. Thus, the people having being fed up with this autocratic rules of Ranas supported the then monarch King Tribhuwan and then an underground political party known as Nepali Congress to bring down the Rana regime in 1950 through democratic revolution. It was after 1950 that modern period actually started in Nepal (Shakya, 2009, p.16).

After the reinstatement of monarchy and adopting the multiparty system of government, the country was in the path of reformation of more democratic pattern of government system. However, then the king Tribhuwan passed away and the throne went to his eldest son King Mahendra. “In 1960, King Mahendra used his emergency powers and took charge of the state claiming that the congress government had fostered corruption, promoted party above national interest, failed to maintain law and order and encouraged anti- national elements”(Ibid). King Mahendra then introduced Naya Sambidhan 2019 (New constitution 1962) adopting Democratic Panchayat System of governing of the state. Then, Nepal was ruled by an absolute monarchy under the single party Panchayat System (Shrestha, 2007, p. 2).

However, the writing of Kievelitz & Polzer, (2002) reveal, “The Panchayat regime repressed opposition political leaders and was characterized by arbitrary law making and human rights abuses” (p. 25). Then, in April 1990 there was another democratic revolution called “Peoples Movement of Nepal (Jan Andolan) for democracy and human rights led by Nepali Congress Party and United Left Front consisting of seven communist parties” (Hutt, 2004, p.3). This brought an end to 28

years old Panchayat regime and restored multi-party democratic system in 1990 which was the beginning of constitutional democracy where by the monarch became constitutional. General population after the abolition of absolute monarchy and with the emergence of a democratic government had a great hope of policy reforms and social changes in the communities and the country.

Thereafter an election was held in 1991 but no such major changes were seen as per the public's expectation. Due to the conflict between internal parties, Nepali Congress party also fell apart which eventually led to the parliament dissolved until the midterm election was held. None of the party won a majority as the United People's Front Party (UPF) which was led by Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai withdrew an election. United Marxist Leninist (UML), as the biggest party in parliament and also one of the opposition parties, formed a minority government and was also ousted after 9 months. Later Nepali Congress along with former members of Panchayat system called Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) formed a coalition government with the Prime Minister Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba (Kievelitz & Polzer, 2002, p.25). Upreti (2004), then asserts "It was during the premiership of Deuba in Feb 4, 1996 United People's Front (UPF) submitted 40 demands to the Nepali Congress Government. They declared they would wage a "People's War" if the government did not respond to these demands within 15 days. Unfortunately, the Deuba government went to India for an official visit ignoring the deadline" (p.245). This ignorance led to the start of the revolution. However, as the time passed by, after four years of the start of the revolution, Nepalese people also encountered with the massacre of the king and his family in between the insurgency which has still

remained alive in everybody's mind today. All Nepalese were alarmed and stunned at night hearing the news that a son killed his parents and the entire family. In line to this Hutt (2004) articulates, "In June 2001, King Birendra and the whole of his immediate family members were shot by Crown Prince Dipendra which was released to general public that he did this as he had an issue with his parents over the choice of his marriage partner. However, it remained unconvinced to the general people" (p7). Subsequently, the throne was then crowned by King Gyanendra, the brother of Late King Birendra.

In this way, various historic events occurred within ten years of time. In the writing of Torry et al. (2010), it is mentioned that for over a decade to follow (1996-2006), Nepal experienced a violent civil war between Nepali government forces and Maoists rebels (...). During the ten-year insurgency, there were a series of ceasefires in 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2006. The conflict finally ended in November 2006 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) (p.8). Eventually, Nepalese Government was left with drafting a new constitution for New Nepal. Still, today, Nepal is drafting a new constitution. According to eKantipur news, Nepal will bring out the new constitution by May 27, 2012 (Posted on April 11, 2012). Hence, Nepalese people are anxiously waiting for the forth-coming constitution with the incorporation of various issues along with the issues of women's right and marginalized and Dalit's (Dalit refers to lower caste in hierarchy and also considered as untouchables) issues.

2.3 Emergence of Maoist Insurgency

When the people are suppressed with any kind of poverty, inequality, political, socio-economic oppression, cultural discrimination against particular groups such as women or any other groups, a social movement may occur. According to McCarthy and Zald (1977), “A social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of society” (p.1217-1218). As such, Nepalese people also have the reason behind this decade long historic social movement called Maoist insurgency. These people were hoping to bring the improvement and changes in the above-mentioned aspects through revolution in the country.

Although Nepal had seen major changes in the political arena after 1950, the leaders and rulers again engaged in power conflicts, self and party interests ignoring the people’s aspirations of fair, lawful, democratic and participatory form of government. It cannot be denied that Polzer & Kievelitz’s (2002) study of Nepal declared that the insurgency in Nepal emerged because of “frustrated political expectations, bad governance, social and economic inequality, poverty and corruption” in the country (26). Nepalese people living in despair, poverty, who have been alienated from exploitative and oppressive society raised their voice through Maoist insurgency. The whole idea of the movement was to overthrow the government to eliminate or minimize corruption, unequal and unfair distribution of resources, neglected attitude towards poor and marginalized people including women, discrimination on sex, ethnicity, caste and socio-political recognition. The Maoist party raised these issues to challenge the government and to earn sympathy and

support from the victimized sector of the population by convincing them that the party is for the marginalized people and to establish people oriented government. In line to this, Wheen (1999), quotes Karl Marx, who expresses, “Social reforms are never carried out by the weakness of the strong: but always by the strength of the weak” (p.140). So one can argue that the Maoist also followed this principle and began their revolution from the rural Western Tarai. Eventually their revolution became intensified in rural areas where they took control and captured under privileged, marginalized and poor communities. Thereafter it slowly captured every corner of the country including the capital city, Kathmandu. Its method of war was totally violent.

It has also come to know from Shakya’s study that Maoist became much impressed with the writings and experiences of Moa Tse-tung and the experiences of Asia and Latin America’s popular movement called Shining Path movement in Peru. Maoist thought that even with the onset of new democracy after People’s Movement in 1990, no such great development was seen in the country. Thereafter, they thought of the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the ruling class government and bring in to the government representing the poor, peasants, women and marginalized people with an aim to end an inequality and corruption (2009, p.17). One of the essential aspects of the Maoist’s ideology was the emancipation and leadership of women also.

“Women’s issues raised by the Maoist were: equal access to inheritance rights and elimination of patriarchal exploitation and discrimination, equal payment for equal job and the vulnerability of low caste women to sexual exploitation” (*Ibid p.18*).

Women are always oppressed and their voices are hardly heard in Nepal. Hence,

Maoist wanted to bring in equality, justice and the identity of women in the society and to prove to the society that a woman is not just a mere daughter who brightens the kitchen but also can brighten the society.

2.4. Brief Overview of the Maoist Insurgency's Impact on Women

“The decade of conflict in Nepal has had a disproportionately negative effect on women, but at the same time, women have emerged as important strategic partners for building peace” (Women Count for Peace, 2010).

In Nepal, although entire communities suffered the consequences of armed conflict, women and girls were particularly affected. Women and girls in conflict have faced gender-based violence, trafficking, HIV/Aids, displacement and other forms of exploitations. They even faced rape as a tactic of war during the conflict period. Other forms of violence against women included murder, sexual slavery, forced recruitment and forced pregnancy (CARE Nepal, 2010, p.4). Shakya (2009) in her research study also states that “ Pervasive image of women in conflict situations throughout the world are as victims, grieving mothers, widows, “half widows”/missing husbands, refugees, female heads of household and innocent civilian (p.47). Maoist insurgency in fact shook the country at the national, societal and family levels. The conflict, like any other in the world caused a lot of physical as well as mental pain. Women were inevitably the most affected victims of the insurgency; however the effects are positive as well as negative.

Even though Nepalese women were badly hit by conflict, they were not just victimized but also were empowered in many ways. Yami (2007) declares, “They are now increasingly being involved in human rights organizations to show their concern for human rights abuse of women and children” (p.127). Women's status especially

of poor and marginalized women in Nepal has changed in society in different ways. An increasing number of women have assumed the key roles of ensuring family livelihood in the midst of chaos and destruction. Due to internal conflict, male members of the family have left their home leaving behind the household burden to women. Women are now playing the roles of household head fulfilling responsibilities in managing livelihood, natural resources, household energy, financial resources and other needs. Aryal (2008) during her research also found:

In the Maoist movement, emancipation of women was linked to the idea of liberating women from the constraints of the patriarchal social order (...) one can clearly notice that participation of women in the public sphere including politics was a significant change in the history of Nepal that happened after the revolution (34).

Through the platform of present ongoing peace-building process, women who were once confined to home are now empowered, encouraged, and confident playing the role of men. That is how mostly poor and marginalized women, despite being the victim, have gained courage and became leaders in various public arenas. In order to address such issues, the rural women are playing the roles of a manager, mobilizer, motivator, facilitator, peacemaker, peacekeeper and peace-builder from various communities whether it is inside home or outside in public sphere. Credit definitely goes to Maoist's insurgency and to all the NGOs and INGOs including other organizations who are involved in peace-building process for bringing in the women from home to public. Maoist's ideology was to bring justice to women for whom they fight for and various national and international based organizations through peace-building activities brought in numerous programs in public by which women got the chance to engage themselves and became successful in improving their social

standard. More importantly, “As the question of women’s leadership became an important issue (...) After joining the government in 2006, Maoist nominated more than one third of women in parliament and one third in ministry” (*Ibid, p.17*). So Interim Parliament has passed a resolution to ensure at least 33% women’s representation in all the state structure (Renaissance Society Nepal, 2009, p.32). Changes in women’s participation in parliament became possible because of the efforts of Maoist government. This increase in number seems encouraging and motivating and women of Nepal must be enthusiastic to see the numeric participation. However, the success of their participation will depend on what kind of strategy they will take and what kind of vision they have in order to make their representation effective and how their changes will be institutionalized.

SECTION 3

Efforts of Peace-building Process

3. Concept of Peace-building Process

As I have mentioned, being from Nepal, I have had first-hand experience with the conflict and ongoing peace-building process there. I have heard my parents, in-laws and my friends incessantly give their take on the political issues in addition to the newspapers, television news and different magazines; political events are everyone's business in Nepal. Hence, in my experience, peace-building is an effort towards steadying a country reeling from conflict and seeking a justifiable and long term peace. In any conflict conditions, there is an opportunity and a necessity for peace-building and the Maoist war in Nepal is no different. CARE Nepal's Strategies on Conflict Sensitivity and Peace-building (2008) defines peace-building as "A programming which seeks to consolidate peaceful relationships, strengthen political, economic and cultural institutions and mechanisms to mediate conflict and then create conditions for sustained peace by bringing positive benefits to the target population by avoiding or overcoming negative impacts and maximizing positive ones" (p.vii).

In order for Nepal to fulfill the above strategies as CARE Nepal has defined, the country needs support to continue in this new direction. In this regard, Nepal has been fortunate as it took the membership of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 which helps to identify the major impact that the Maoist insurgency has on women and children. As Nepal is a country where women have been left out of the political process, this resolution helps in explicitly stating the fact that women have historically been ignored in the peace-building process. This resolution wants to

include women in discussions of and solutions to all issues at all levels in the peace-building and reconstruction process. To make this intervention successful, “North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its partners are taking intensive action to support implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325” to the conflicted countries. (NATO 2012)

In “*The Price of Neglect: From Resource Conflict to Maoist Insurgency in the Himalayan Kingdom*” Upreti (2004) points out several models of peace-building undertaken in various countries: South Africa took on the model of collaboration between religious people, businessmen, politicians and civil societies; the resolution of the conflict in Guatemala was the outcome of sincere efforts by a Citizen Assembly composed of several civic organizations, churches, indigenous unions, women’s groups and business people and in Northern Ireland, women from different communities formed a strong Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, which had greatly contributed to the 1998 Belfast Agreement, popularly known as the Good Friday Agreement (p.326). In Nepal, the peace-building process entails justice, equal rights, harmony and safety of the Nepalese; hence, in Nepal women are working hand in hand with various national and international non-profit organizations, government, other organizations and communities to achieve these goals.

3. 1. Women of Nepal in Peace-building Process

From 2006 onwards, Nepal has been engaged in peace-building after the end of Maoist insurgency; the beginning of the peace-building process also marked the end of Nepal’s monarchy which was almost three centuries old. Nepal’s low literacy rate, discriminatory traditions, poor economy, weak and unstable government, and diverse

and numerous ethnicities, languages and religions are the major barriers that have confronted ongoing peace-building activities in Nepal.

Unlike women in other developing countries, women in Nepal have multiple roles ranging from taking care of their household to taking care of their family and working outside of the home when necessary. One can imagine how women of Nepal, especially poor and marginalized, have suffered when they had to provide food and shelter for their family in the chaos after the conflict.

However, there were significant changes with the rise of the Maoist insurgency. As mentioned by Abdela (2010), “Women had previously never comprised more than 6% of Nepal’s Parliaments. As of late 2010, 5 out of 43 Government Ministers are women but major political decision-making positions are still held by men. Around 9% of members of the political parties’ in central committees are women” (p.47). This is a good indicator for Nepalese women to see revealing the increase in numeric participation. It is an undeniable fact that women faced various obstructions; but women also have historically played integral roles in peace-building around the world. In line with this, Schirch & Sewak (2005) in their study found:

The contributions of women’s groups to peace-building have been significant, whether it is the example of Women in Peace- building Network in West Africa, which foregrounds the principle of positive peace in its work; the Women in Black who provided the only sustained civil society opposition to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia; the Women of Bougainville who initiated a range of peace building processes, the most significant being a peace settlement between secessionists and the Papua New Guinean government; or the example of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women crossing ‘enemy-lines’ in Kashmir in India to initiate projects on development, trauma healing and reconciliation (Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, p.7).

Likewise in Nepal, in spite of various impediments, women are playing essential roles in various sectors to show their strength gained from the conflict in the peace-building process. Conflict in Nepal has made those women strong, has empowered them and has built up their confidence in order to prepare them to clear the mess left by the Maoist insurgency. In the study of Vilella (2010), women didn't participate directly in the negotiations and signing of the agreements for the end of the Maoist war in 2006 but women's organizations came to prominence and claimed that there should be a greater presence of women in political sphere to design and plan the agendas with gender perspectives (p. 7). Looking at this one can argue that some courageous women from women's organizations managed to represent the women's side of the issue. If those women had just been sidelined and representatives from women's organizations had not come when they were banned from participating directly, then women would have never got the chance to express women's issues and raise their voice in the negotiations to end the Maoist war. However, because of women's vital involvement in decision-making in the peace process, the issues of gender equity, women's needs and concerns are sure to find their place on the national agenda if they can participate in the decision-making process. Also, women will prioritize the issues and significantly help fill the political gap plaguing the peace-building process in Nepal. Therefore it cannot be denied that women are the major stakeholders in the peace-building process of Nepal currently being undertaken from different sectors including the government, communities, women's cooperatives and various women's organizations which are being described in the later part of this section.

3.2. International Policies on Women's Issues and their Participation in Peace-building

“Investing in women’s capabilities and empowering them is the surest way to contribute in economic growth and overall development” (Acharya, UNDP 1996, p.6).

Working closely in a non-governmental organization on the issues of women’s rights and improving the status of women, offers an opportunity to learn about various international policies which directly affect women. Nepal is a signatory to almost all of the treaties on women’s rights passed by the United Nations. One such milestone policy regarding women and their right is “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and came into force in 1981. Today 186 countries are signatories to CEDAW and hence bound to take appropriate measures to promote women’s participation in decision-making and leadership position” (Falch 2010, p 5).

As pointed out by Falch, there are some more facts about the initiatives taken after CEDAW on women’s issues at the international level. The Platform for Action was adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. The section on Women in Armed Conflict shows the agenda for women’s empowerment and calls for women’s participation in conflict resolution at high levels of decision-making emphasizing the need for governments as well as regional and international organizations to incorporate gender perspectives in resolutions on alleviating the impact of armed conflict. Thereafter, UN Security Council held a special session on peace and security from women’s perspectives and new resolutions mentioned below came into existence, providing the first legal and international

framework for recognizing the role of women in peace-building after an armed conflict (*Ibid* p.5-6).

3.2.1 Security Council Resolution 1325

Another such milestone is the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. This resolution addresses effects of war and conflict and the role of women in peace- building. According to the researchers, Torry and his group explain the framework of SCR 1325 mainly in 3 pillars: “**Participation:** representation of women in all aspects of peace-building and security; **Protection:** of women as a group within all aspects of peace-building and security including protection from conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence; **Prevention:** ensuring women’s participation in early warning, peace-building and the prevention of the escalation of conflict” (Torry, et.al, 2010, p 5).

SCR 1325 in Nepal

“If not for advocacy space provided by the mandate of 1325, given the patriarchal structure and the lack of political will, things in Nepal would not be happening as quickly as they are. 1325 has enabled a wider set of conversations to occur at the highest level of policy making” (Bandana Rana, 2010).

UNSCR (United Nations Security Council Resolution) has been the most frequently encountered policy in my working experience. I can tell from my experience that it is the prevailing topic in governmental as well as non-governmental women’s agencies. This norm is very effective and plays a decisive role in the peace-building process; even more so, because it is an international tool. The High Level Steering Committee endorsed SRC 1325 and 1820 National Action Plan in October 2010. These two resolutions were the result of a two- year process started in 2008 by UN agencies and members of the Peace Support Working Group (PSWG).

Upadhyaya (2011) mentions that as of February 2011, Nepal became the first country in South Asia to adopt the plan. By doing so, Nepal helped the government to realize its commitment to incorporate a “gender-based approach” and create the place for constructive dialogue to building peace in the country (p.98). The adoption of resolution SCR 1325 in Nepal is helping women to move forward their initiatives at women’s desired level.

3.2.2 1820 & 1888

Various research studies claim that poor and marginalized women also play numerous important roles in a war-torn society. Today, these women also have been increasingly seen at the fore in conflicts such as those in Burundi, Sri-Lanka etc including Nepal. However, women face increased level of sexual violence during wartime. That is why, Torry et al., (2010) writes, “A former United Nations force commander contends that it is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo” (p.5). Further, Torry’s team found that, SCR 1820 came into existence in 2008 and addresses the issue of “sexual violence used as a tactic of war” in its agenda. It basically aims to protect women from sexual and gender based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. “SCR 1820 also strengthens SCR 1325 in this area by prohibiting amnesty for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). SCR 1888, adopted in 2009, strengthens the implementation of SCR 1820 by assigning leadership, building judicial response, expertise and reporting mechanisms” (*Ibid* p.5).

3.2.3 1889

SCR 1889, adopted in October 2009, provides an important framework for realizing more effective gender-responsive aid in post-conflict contexts. It specifically recognizes that funding for women's security and peace-building needs is vital to effective post-conflict peace-building. Building on aspects of SCR 1325, SCR 1889 focuses on financing women's security and peace-building needs and ensuring their access to adequate safety and services. It also lays the groundwork for progress in monitoring and reporting on women's rights, peace and security commitments (UNIFEM, 2010, p 5).

Nepal is a party to CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration regarding women's rights and SCR 1325 policy framework which deals with conflict related issues and participation in peace-building. As a result, in the current situation of post-conflict, the governments, international organizations and donors in Nepal are all liable to follow and implement the principles and provisions of SCR 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 (*Ibid*). So these resolutions have stimulated efforts to address the gender dimension of armed conflict and enhancing women's participation in the peace-building process. Government, donors and international organizations play important roles in facilitating women's participation in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction by removing legislative and other barriers to women's participation and by providing technical and financial support to women's organizations and leaders.

3.3. Role of Non-Governmental and Other Organizations in Bringing Women to the Fore during Peace-building Process

It is an undeniable fact that non-governmental and other non-profit organizations play an essential role in different ways. Moreover, in the contemporary context, these organizations are coming center stage to help and support the government directly or indirectly by undertaking numerous interventions especially in under-developed countries. Nepal, which is a small and under-developed country, cannot abide without getting support from non-governmental and non-profit organizations especially in the matter of working and helping rural communities. Therefore, today the credit goes to these organizations for their effective mobilization and advocacy for and making progress in peace-building activities of Nepal. Various studies and also the SCR 1325 resolution indicate that they are the key actors which push people to run their interventions effectively. One might be curious to know what kind of organizations play major roles in peace-building. According to World Bank (2012), there are multitudes of other non-profit organizations along with NGOs who are contributing to peace-building from different angles:

- NGOs, who are supporting for peace process or capacity building activities;
- Human Rights Organizations, social justice advocacy groups and peace networks;
- Special or Collective Interest Group Organizations (such as faith-based organizations, women's youth's and professional associations, trade unions);
- Community Based Organizations, institutions and initiatives (including women and youth groups, farmer associations, traditional self-help groups traditional leaders, informal networks and associations); and
- Informational and Educational CSOs (for e.g. independent media, journalists, associations, research and academic institutions and think tanks). Hence, there are numerous typologies and ways to categorize

[other organizations] actors in peace-building (p.9).

Thus, various research studies and also my personal experiences of having worked in non-governmental organization show that international non-governmental organization play roles in co-operation with the above-mentioned organizations in the conflicted areas of Nepal in compliance with the agenda of SCR 1325. Currently, these organizations are mainly focusing their work in post-conflict areas and making an effort to raise poor and marginalized women's voices at the grassroots level. They are also trying to raise their awareness and guide them in peace-building activities especially in the area of policy-making so that issues of women's and girls' needs and rights will not be overlooked.

3.4. Women as Leaders in Peace - building Process of Nepal through the Involvement in the Public Arena

“No Peace without Women-You cannot build peace leaving more than half of the population out of the picture” (Ghimire, 2010, CARE Nepal).

As mentioned earlier, there is more women population than men in Nepal. Women play multifaceted roles at home and because of their abilities in playing important roles, poor and marginalized women of Nepal were especially targeted during Maoist insurgency; gone are the days when men fought in the battle while women and children stayed home. Abdela (2004) affirms, “ Without women's active participation, whether as combatants during the conflict or as civil society advocates, (...) the People's Movement in April 2006 which resulted in the end of Monarchy and the opening of the path to peace and the CA elections would not have happened” (p.4). Falch (2010) noted, “Since the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in October 2000, there has been increasing interest in

women’s role in conflict resolution and peace building” (p.1). After the Maoist insurgency, Nepal is notable for large numbers of women engaged in various organizations in the public arena, which undoubtedly deserve praise for their mobilization and efforts throughout the peace and post-conflict process. The conflict and the following peace-building process have sensitized the nation to the root causes of the uprising and have helped in the formulation of policies that can wrestle with these women’s issues. So women are asserting themselves as actors in different key roles in different components of peace-building which are mentioned in the following pages.

The chart below gives the glimpses of Women’s leadership role at various sectors:

Statistical Data of Women’s Public Life and Security Service (2010)

Selected Fields	Female	Male	Total	% Of Female	% Of Male
Nepal Army	1070	90930	92000	1.16	98.84
Police Service	2999	52260	55259	5.4	94.60
Armed Police Force	623	30630	31262	2.02	97.98
Civil Service	8766	68560	77326	11.34	88.66
Chief District Officer	0	75	75	0	100
Judiciary	124	2613	2737	4.53	95.47
Judges	5	214	219	2.28	97.72
Teachers	49570	125899	175469	28.25	71.75
Constituent Assembly	197	404	601	32.78	76.22

(CARE Nepal, 2010, p.52)

3.4.1. Through Involvement In Communities

Most of the international organizations like CARE Nepal, USAID (United States Agency for International Development), UNFPA (United Nation Population Fund), UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), UNDP (United Nations Development Program), Safer World in Nepal, Inter Safer World in Nepal, International Alert in Nepal and many more including national based organizations are maintaining partnerships with communities along with government agencies and other private-sector organizations and are conducting increasing numbers of women's empowerment projects in the rural areas, especially after the Maoist insurgency. According to PACT (Project for Agriculture Commercialization and Trade, 2006), "Peace-building approaches are based on values and principles grounded in respect, mutual understanding, inclusion and human rights" (p.6). In order to strengthen the linkages and to support communities' initiatives, peace-building approaches have been developed and implemented in various ways with the participation of those poor and marginalized women. According to USAID, youths are purposely prioritized and focused with an aim to make them aware in various activities and make them engage in local planning process. (...) Another important approach that has been undertaken is increasing support for local and agricultural or other incentives which help community members develop marketable skills with an aim in improving economic opportunities (p 7-8, 13). This approach can definitely become the center of attraction which most of the community members including women gravitate toward.

Hence, the above-mentioned approaches implemented at the local level incorporating the women at community level have helped to build up women's

awareness, capacities, skills and confidence to speak up for their right. Besides, there are number of activities that are being implemented by various INGOS/NGOs at community level undertaking education activities, training in household structures, gender relations and income-generating activities to uplift the status of women. After being equipped with knowledge and gaining skills through educational trainings, these marginalized women have the chance to play important roles in successfully implementing the programs brought in to the communities through the effort of NGOs and INGOS which are directly helping them to improve their social-standard. These roles have made poor and marginalized women feel empowered and participate in the peace-building process of the country. Women are working as facilitators, social mobilizers and even as peace ambassadors in the village in completing the tasks. Nagarik Awaj, a Nepal-based NGO, has mobilized 5 youths including women as “Peace Ambassadors” chosen from 5 different regions “ to assist and initiate building work and raise awareness on peace and development in the communities” (Nagarik Awaj, 2012).

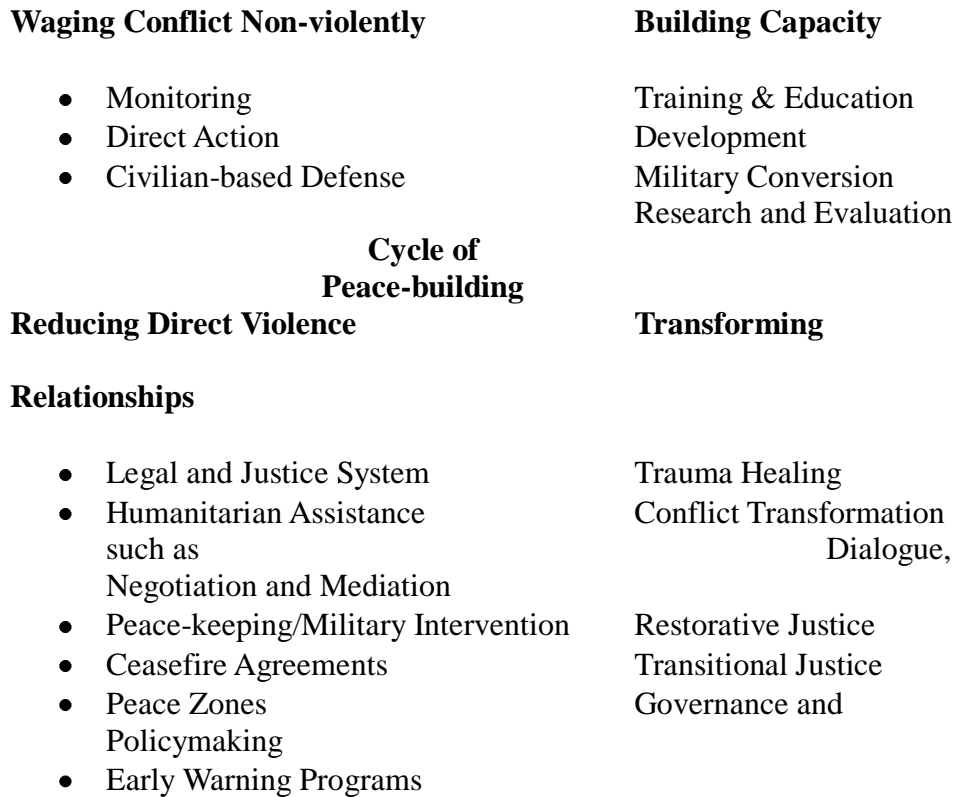
3.4.2. Through Involvement In Women’s Organizations

It is already recognized that the worst victims of the conflict that resulted from the Maoist insurgency in Nepal were women and children. Various research studies signify that women’s organizations in Nepal have been the most active participants working with UNSCR 1325 to improve the condition of women during and after the conflict. They have been the strongest and loudest advocates for women’s rights, justice, rehabilitation, reparation issues and empowerment during the peace-process. These organizations have been persistent in incorporating a gender perspective in the

design and implementation of the peace-building process through national and local policies and advocating social and economic independence for women since the insurgency. Paudel in her article “Women’s Roles in Peace-building” highlights some of the prominent organizations active in peace-building such as Women for Human Rights (WHR), working on rehabilitation, reconciliation, and income generating activities for conflict victim women. Likewise Sancharika Samuha, a forum of women journalists is trying to protect women from social discrimination and empower them through media intervention. In the current situation, media through FM radio and various other channels, television have been increasingly spreading awareness to those poor and marginalized women encouraging them to raise their issues and come into the public arena. Similarly, Nagarik Awaz works in conflict transformation and peace-building, sharing the experiences of victims with other concerned development professionals, as well as educating them about the conflict. Didi Bahini, another activist organization, is facilitating gender- mainstreaming into the development process at the grassroots level. One of the popular legal organizations called Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre (LACC) has been working for the elimination of all forms of discrimination such as exploitation, sexual abuses and violence against women (Posted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2001). These are just some of the many organizations in rural areas where marginalized women have had the chance to show their potential leadership role and empower themselves, which has directly helped them in improving their social standard and economic well-being as well. As a woman from Nepal, I can confidently say that social and economic issues always go side by side. For instance, if women’s status is improved due to empowerment in the public arena, their economic

situation also gets better that leads to earning. Likewise, if they get the chance to engage in public arena, again they gain confidence and can raise their voices for their rights and can build up an egalitarian society. The figure below explains the roles of women's organizations.

Peace-building Activities of Women's Organizations



(Source: Schirch/Sewak 2005-World Bank Report)

Hence, the activities as mentioned-above are a good start and offer chances for any poor and marginalized women to become prominent in public. Women involved in women's organizations perform these activities. The ultimate aim is not only to improve the conditions of the victims but also to make them aware and help them to gain confidence to speak for their right. However, the activities may sometimes "overlap" and be performed by other types of organizations than organizations which are not listed by Paudel (2001) above. For instance, "dialogue initiatives, trauma

healing” may be carried out or supported by the majority of other organizations which specializes in those sectors (World Bank report, 2006). Hence, one can be assured that these marginalized women of poorer communities have found a space to raise their voice, to help them become empowered and show their leadership role through the platform of the peace-building process, walking into public-arena through these kinds of women’s organizations.

3.4.3. Through Involvement In Cooperatives

One can clearly identify that women’s participation in employment and entrepreneurship helps not only them but also the economy of the society and entire communities. This kind of independence helps women in building up their confidence in constructing an egalitarian society. When women are empowered, they will be aware and recognize their basic rights, and become enthusiastic about making use of their knowledge and potential ability to enhance their social and economic status. More importantly, they will gather confidence to fight against their exploitative and discriminative lives. As women are exposed to traditional norms and values in Nepal, the trainings and their involvement in various organizations in communities will help them play an essential role in the reconstruction of the society as a whole.

Currently, there are many women’s saving and credit cooperatives that are playing key roles in various districts of Nepal. As per Ramnarain and Brown (2011), “In the aftermath of the Maoist conflict in Nepal, women’s savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) have been at the fore of an attempt to integrate development with conflict mediation and peace-building at the local level ” (p.1). Women’s cooperatives are providing loans and also financial services to the very poor and

marginalized women and making their effort in engaging women in the entrepreneurship. We all know that finance is a vital element for anyone starting any business of their own in addition to from motivation and encouragement. These women, who were not getting help and support from family members, have been fortunate since Maoist insurgency in getting encouragement as well as financial support. Ramnarain (2011) affirms that these cooperatives,” in Nepal have empowered their women members to emerge as peace-builders within households, neighborhoods and community in general” (p.56). Cooperatives not only finance but have also come forward as mediators of justice, reconciliation and peace in communities representing women whose voices would not otherwise be heard. Below is one of many examples of possible intervention and prevention by women’s cooperatives.

A sixteen-year-old girl was being trafficked into India from here. Her own relatives had abducted her while she was returning from college and they planned to take her to India. The cooperative got to know about this and rescued her. We then sent her to rehab centre for abused women and took legal action against her family, which had sold her and the persons who were taking her away. You might have read about it in the newspaper (Sharda Sharma, Saraswati Chapagaon, Ibid, p. 69).

The other sectors that cooperatives have helped needy and marginalized women in are: resolving domestic violence, fighting for equal access to education, gender based and sexual violence, lack of property rights, unequal legal rights, persecution of widows/divorced women, witchcraft accusations caste and ethnic discrimination.

3.4.4. Through Involvement In Government and Parliament

Women in Nepal who were deeply entrenched in patriarchal society played an important role during and after Maoist insurgency. They were the ones who were

brutally affected as victims. However, there has been a significant change in the country, which has been a historic for all Nepalese people. Arino (2008) affirms, “After strong lobbying and protests from women activists, the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee (IC), initially made up of six men and no women, was subsequently expanded to include women. A clause calling for affirmative action for women’s political representation was incorporated into the new IC, and adopted in January 2007” (p10). Women’s right according to Interim Constitution, 2007 are as follows:

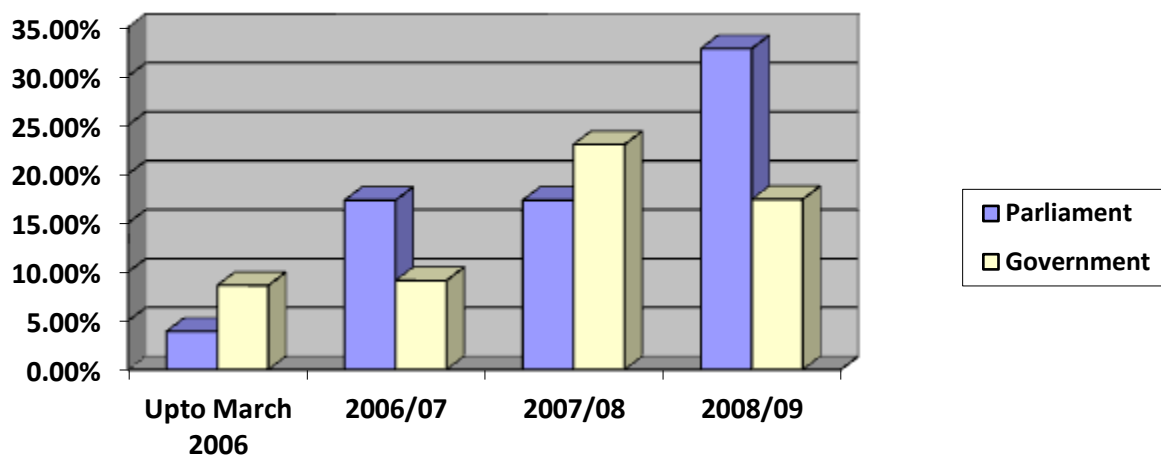
- No one shall be discriminated in any form merely being a woman;
- Every woman shall have the right to reproductive health and other reproductive matters;
- No physical, mental or any form of violence shall be inflicted to any woman, and such an act shall be punishable by law;
- Son and daughter shall have equal rights to their ancestral property;
- Provision of making 33% representation of woman candidates in the Election Act for the CA election. (Constitution Member Election Act, 2007, p8-9)

The Interim Constitution (IC) reflects the importance of women’s rights. The above policy has shown the path to poor and marginalized women of rural communities to engage in the public spheres. This policy can give hope for positive change to these women. Likewise, families and communities have been sensitized to treat daughters and sons equally and have started educating their daughters as well. There has been an increase in mobility of women and as a result girls and women are getting the opportunity to participate and work in the public arena. This interim constitution incorporates the poorest of the poor and marginalized women. More importantly, representation by women amounts to one third of the Constituent Assembly and other public institutions, which can be considered a great

achievement. Likewise, Upadhyaya (2011) asserts, the inclusion of women's rights in IC and subsequent incorporation in our forthcoming constitution is basically a result of women's heroism, their strength and their voice during the insurgency. More importantly, the leaders declared equality for women and the end of feudal and patriarchal structure of society to be one of the prominent achievements after the insurgency (p.95). Therefore, it cannot be denied that these changes are slowly becoming visible in rural communities through the platform of peace-building activities.

According to CARE Nepal (2010) 3,500 women stood as candidates in a general election for Constituent Assembly. 197 women were elected out of 601 members (32.8%). Women from diverse ethnic cultures, traditions, groups, and geographical areas were elected, including 45 widows, and wives of missing husbands and Dalit (untouchables) women (p.47). As per the commitment of IC towards the inclusion of marginalized women who were excluded before, it offered political space to Dalit women for the first time in history. Hence this opportunity for Nepalese women to enter into political sphere will help by incorporating gender equality and ending the patriarchal system into the national agenda. These women, as they have had the chance to show their leadership are sure to be motivated and enthusiastic to work for the betterment of women's social standards. The following figures 1 and 2 gives an overview of the comparative status of women's representation in the parliament and the government and the comparative figures of Dalit women's representation in parliament before and after the insurgency respectively.

Figure 1. Comparative Status of Women's Participation in the Parliament and the Government before and after II Peoples Movement and Maoist Insurgency



Source: Renaissance Society Nepal, 2009

Figure 2. Comparative Figures of Dalit's (marginalized) Representation in Parliament

Year	Parliamentarian/CA Members	Total	Approx. %	Remarks
2000	4	265	1.50%	House of Representative
2008	49	601	32.27%	Constitutional Assembly
<i>Source: CA Secretariat, 2008 (cited at Shakya, 2009, p.66)</i>				

SECTION 4

Conclusion

4. Social Implications

Having worked on a project based on rural technology designed to ease the life of women living in rural area of Nepal, I have witnessed the exploitation and oppression of women. One does not even have to go very far from the city in order to find the worst situation of women. Various research studies as mentioned in the earlier section of this thesis claimed that there were few policies of women's empowerment endorsed by the government through the effort of various NGOs and INGOs in Nepal before the insurgency. However, it could be, because of lack of awareness among the general population, prevailing caste and ethnicity divisions and the dominant patriarchal society, people were still following and practicing discriminatory and conventional norm.

Nonetheless, Maoist's firm commitment to bringing equality and enhancing women's social status along with the effort of NGOs and INGOs which are implementing numerous programs in rural communities according to endorsed National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, it can be seen that more and more women have been realizing their potentials and have been motivated to be active in the public arena through the platform of peace-building activities. One major thought of Karl Marx has become deeply entrenched into my mind cited in the very beginning in the introduction. It became ingrained into my mind during the entire period while I was writing this thesis. Now, at this point, having come to know about the achievement of women and their active involvement in public arena, my belief in Karl Marx's

thinking that social changes are possible through feminine ferment appears to be true.

As was mentioned in the earlier section of this thesis, there has been a significant increase in the involvement of women from different sectors as they have been playing roles as leaders, social mobilizers and facilitators after the Maoist insurgency. Various researchers such as Torry, Bhadra and Rana (2010) also found during their research study that “ As a result of the interventions and advocacy of women’s groups at various levels and sectors, much sensitization, awareness-raising and capacity building is underway by women’s organizations in addressing women’s specific security and peace-building needs in line with SCR 1325” (p.12). Women are socially empowered in different ways, which are visible in their different communities. They are able to change their mindset and build up the confidence to raise their voice. Before describing in detail how empowerment in the public arena has brought changes and improved women’s social standing, it is necessary to understand what exactly is empowerment? According to the UNDP Human Development Report (2004) empowerment is defined as “Women making choices to improve their well-being and that of their families and communities – a process, by which women define, challenge and overcome barriers in their lives and, ultimately, change the circumstances that relegate them to subordinate status” (p.57).

Accordingly, the traditional assumption that girls and women are shy, timid, lacking in confidence, fearful in nature seems to be fading away. Women especially of marginalized groups seem to have developed awareness of their rights and have become capable of demanding equality. They have built up their confidence to address the gender issues and raise their voices for their right to education, employment,

meaningful decision making, women's rights, property rights, women's justice and reparation issues and getting rid of various undesirable cultural norms and discriminatory practices.

Likewise, NGOs are playing an active role as mediators and offering a helping hand to those women to uplift their status, raise their voices in their communities, get rid of discrimination and take part in making decisions about policy which is indeed a great achievement. Slowly, women are getting rights as their families are treating them equally. They are getting chances to get involved in public spheres. When they are active in the public arena, they have started speaking up for themselves. They also have become successful in raising their living standard by involving themselves in income-generating activities. So, male members have also started realizing the importance of making their women capable and independent. These women who have got the opportunity to become empowered in the public arena have managed to improve their social status and construct a more egalitarian society by overcoming various barriers.

These changes have definitely helped men to ease their financial burden as well. More importantly, women have started giving priority to their children's education. Shevotion (2010) reveals that in the absence of men, women took on leadership roles in villages throughout civil society in the grassroots' peace-building, Human Rights and disarmament movements. Women and girls (...) subverted traditional Hindu symbols of the subordination of women, for example by rejecting the tradition of Dalit caste women being "untouchables" (p2). These women after getting the opportunity to get involved in the public arena gained confidence and now are able to

participate in a constructive dialogue. With these initiatives, the country has also become aware of gender-based violence and recognized women's abilities when they saw women combatants during the insurgency and their role and enthusiasm in the peace-building process. So currently a new constitution in the process of being drafted is believed to include policies of women's empowerment by addressing their rights to equality in every aspect of social, economical and political status. Today, in Nepal, the NGOs, INGOs Medias, women politicians, women's organizations, human rights activists, and general public including myself are very hopeful that specific issues of the rights of women, Dalits and other marginalized groups will be protected in the constitution. According to eKantipur news of Nepal, this constitution is expected to be promulgated by May 27, 2012 as per the dead line given by the verdict of Nepal's Supreme Court (Posted on April 12, 2012).

4.1 Challenges/Recommendations

Although the emergence of democracy in 1990, women were excluded in getting opportunities solely on the basis of their sex and as a result they became marginalized and oppressed. The rigid patriarchal society of Nepal has resulted in unequal treatment and unequal opportunities for women in all spheres of life. The majority of the female population is illiterate. Despite the adoption of a constitution before the Maoist insurgency that guaranteed equality and freedom for all, traditional discrimination such as in education, work, marriage and mobility still continued.

However, various NGOs and INGOs recognized and advocated the need to change women's existing status and efforts toward equality have been made from their side by initiating various programs in favor of women implementing the

international policies such as CEDAW, SCR 1325 after Maoist insurgency during the ongoing peace-building process. Eventually, they are also trying to incorporate the voices of grass root level women and relay them to policy levels. However, even though there has been a significant improvement on those issues, patriarchy and gender stereotypes have not been eliminated completely and still present major obstacles to women's empowerment and equality in spite of the various efforts undertaken with the help of international organizations.

The patriarchal norms and values that are reflected in law and policy must be abandoned completely. The lack of gender sensitivity has led to biases against women, which generally result in violation of women's basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. Hence, women must continue to make an effort in fighting for their rights in order to get rid of patriarchal domination and exploitation. Hopefully these issues will be incorporated in the forthcoming constitution.

In a country like Nepal, there are limited resources, a fact that can present another major obstacle to women's development. After the Maoist insurgency, the government, parliament and other organizations such as NGOs and INGOs took initiatives to eliminate discriminatory laws and sensitize the people. However, in Nepal, this has to be achieved against the background of cultural practices and traditions which are one of the root causes in obstructing the way. Hence, there should be a strong political commitment to address these issues while formulating the policies. Discriminatory laws must be repealed. Then, there should be interventions geared toward changing social values. As there has been a significant increase in the amount of women's representations in parliament, traditional gender roles and

patriarchal values do not encourage women's participation in politics Hence, there is a fear of whether women will be able to maintain this opportunity or not. The problem is still aggravated by the low level of education and awareness in the country. For this reason, many educational programs need to be made more gender-sensitive.

There are still many challenges for women at the grassroots level who lack necessary training and knowledge. Therefore, there is a need for government and other concerned actors in cooperation with other national and international organizations to provide adequate capacity-building and educational trainings to equip them with skills to meaningfully participate whether in government or in other public spheres. For the new generation, there is a need to focus on education which incorporates gender aspects e.g. in their curricula in order to raise awareness starting in childhood. At this instant, it is still necessary to continue to empower women economically, socially and politically in order to build up their confidence to help them take over decision-making positions. Gender sensitization training is a must for law enforcers, interpreters and male CA members to bring an end to inappropriate and demeaning comments and harassment. More importantly, research is needed in rural communities and monitoring mechanisms must be introduced in those public arenas where women have started their involvement in order to encourage and maintain their participation.

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