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**THE 1990 PRO-DEMOCRACY REVOLUTION IN NEPAL: THE INTERPLAY OF  
GENDER, CASTE, AND PARTY IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS**

**By**

**MANJULA GIRI**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy, The City University of New York.**

**1996**

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

III

## Abstract

### THE 1990 PRO-DEMOCRACY REVOLUTION IN NEPAL: THE INTERPLAY OF GENDER, CASTE, AND PARTY IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

By

Manjula Giri

Adviser: Professor Roslyn Wallach Bologh

This study of the 1990 Pro-democracy revolution in Nepal focuses on the interplay of gender, caste, class, and party before, during and after the revolution. Moreover, it compares urban Nepal with rural Nepal in terms of knowledge of, participation in, and effects of the revolution. It examines also the role of financial crisis, international relations, and political economy in sparking the revolution.

Based on field research, interviews, and participant observation, this study provides a case study of an actual revolution that transformed a semi-feudal monarchy into a modern parliamentary constitutional monarchy modeled on that of Great Britain, complete with political parties representing a spectrum from the Communist on the left to the Democratic Socialist in the center to the pro-monarchy Party on the right.

By comparing rural and urban areas, this research points to the problems of development and how the rise of democracy and the concern of political elites with getting re-elected is affecting development, particularly problems of the rural areas, women, and people of lower castes.

## DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to:  
my grandmother, Savitri Giri,  
who was the source of my courage  
and my father, Mitra Lal Giri,  
from whom I learned my primary  
political convictions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to Professor Roslyn Bologh who is my chair of the dissertation supervising committee. She had enormous patience with me, spending countless hours to assist me while I was writing my dissertation as a foreign student. I think without her support, this creation would not have been a reality today.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor William Kornblum from whom I learned that the original idea counts in research more than your inability to compose in text. I would like to express my thanks to the third supervising committee member Prof. Barbara Katz-Rothman who gave me feminist support all along. I would like to thank Prof. George Fischer who has retired from the department now but was Professor in 1986 when I was admitted in the program. He was the one who trusted my intellectual pursuit, and thought that I would be able to complete my dissertation even though I came from the different discipline of journalism.

I would like to thank John Jacoby and Carolyn Jacoby of Ridgewood, New Jersey from whose house in 1985 I began my first journey to the Graduate Center. Since then they have been strong supporters of my graduate studies. Thanks goes to my supervisor in the Mina-Rees Library, Ms. Ofelia Rabassa, who was always behind me even though I had doubtful moments about my graduate studies.

Finally, my sister Pramila Giri and her husband Dr. Hans Bjonness supported and understood my work whenever I visited Nepal for my vacations or research. Thanks to all who have come a long way with me to create this work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 Revolutionary Process in Nepal.....	19
Chapter 3 Urban Women in the Revolution .....	33
Chapter 4 Rural Women and Men Experience the Revolution..	49
Chapter 5 Building A Women's Cooperative in Bastipur.....	81
Chapter 6 Conclusion.....	91
Appendix .....	104
Bibliography .....	113

## Chapter One

### Introduction: Sociological Analysis of the 1990 Pro-Democracy Revolutionary Movement in Nepal: The Interplay of Caste Gender, and Political Parties Comparing Urban and Rural Regions

In 1990 a revolution took place in Nepal. This study provides an account of that revolution. My study involves participant observation and in-depth interviews. An important dimension to this research includes a focus on the role of grass-roots women in the movement.

From my preliminary research it seems that without the contribution of women the movement would not have been successful. Women provided shelter and secret messenger services for underground political activists. Not only did they help underground political activists, they led demonstrations independently in the central and eastern Nepal (Asmita, 1990). However, there has never been any research on their role in the revolution nor any study of how the revolution affected their lives.

Moreover theories of revolution do not adequately address the issue of gender. I have reviewed some of these theories below and have written a separate section on the gendered construction of the revolution in chapter two.

I have interviewed old and young Nepali people who contributed to the 1990 revolution as a mother, sister, brother, wife, father, in-laws and friends. From my

research, I found out that without their contributions, the revolution would not have been successful.

Theories of revolution and their application to Nepal:

For Alan Touraine, democracy must be identified with the notion of representativity. "This notion (democracy) presupposes not only the existence of representative institutions but also that of representable actors (grass-roots) that is, of actors defined, organized and capable of action before they have any channel of political representation" (Touraine, 1988).

My study focuses on female representation in the 1990 movement. Pramod Parajuli also sees the 1990 revolution from the vantage point of ordinary men and women who marched in the street.

According to Parajuli (1990) the revolution of 1990 was not merely as the official media tried to project, a transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. It was rather an advancement in the political culture of Nepal; it was a triumph of people's power over the royal power (Parajuli, 1990). I would like to examine the background of how this people's power came into being in Nepal in 1990; and what that means for "the common people".

I see the 1990 revolution from the vantage point of the common people. In 1950 men from the upper strata (land owning class) and from higher castes fought for greater freedom against the oligarchy which was ruling Nepal for

about 104 years (see the appendix) whereas in the 1990 revolution the fight was for the food, kerosene oil, detergent, fuel for vehicles, shortages, caused by the Indian trade embargo. This time men and women from all stratas were in the revolution.

Theda Skocpol claims that social revolutions that occurred in China, France and Russia were due to domestic and international tensions: "Caught in cross-pressures between domestic class structures and international exigencies, the autocracies and their centralized administration and armies broke apart, opening the way for social-revolutionary transformations, spearheaded by revolts from below" (Skocpol, 1989).

Commenting on Skocpol, John Foran writes that in all three revolutions the fiscal crisis was magnified by elite protests which opened the way for peasant rebellions from below (Foran, 1993). This theory more or less applied to the Nepal case, particularly the 1990 revolution.

Skocpol described how the financial crisis that followed the war of the Austrian Succession (1740-8) and the Seven Year's War (1756-63) brought about the French revolution. In 1787 the financial crisis created a general crisis of confidence within the dominant class in France. A proposal by the government for legal and tax reforms was rejected by notables and parliament. The dominant class demanded a representative body to advise the king and give

consent to any new taxes. In 1788 and in early 1789, the French dominant class was virtually united in wanting a less absolutist, more representative government, thus by the summer of 1789 creating the French revolution. Unmentioned by Skocpol, women played significant part leading a march from Paris to Versailles.

Not unlike the dominant class in pre-revolutionary France, the dominant gentry class of Imperial China played an important role in the Chinese revolution. During the 19th century, China, subjected to intensifying foreign pressures of an unprecedented kind, was running out of available new lands. Closely related to Peking's financial status was the weakening grip of the civil administration over the country, leaving the basic level district magistrates in-charge of supervising ever larger local populations. A magistrate had to lean more heavily on the peasants for tax revenues.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Ching dynasty was confronted from the end of the 18th century with peasant-based rebellion. These institutional and power shifts ultimately led to the overthrow of the dynasty and the Imperial system.

China experienced a humiliating defeat in the 1895 war with Japan. Unlike European nobilities, the Chinese gentry had never possessed corporate organization to represent its class interests. After 1900, as the national crisis

deepened, gentry organized local study groups based on nationalist, constitutionalist ideology which helped to organize communist revolution.

In sharp contrast to the French and Chinese dominant classes, the Russian landed nobility was economically weak and politically dependent vis-a-vis Imperial authority. In Russia as well, the outcome of defeats in the Crimean war brought important effects upon internal politics, for it highlighted the inadequacies of the Imperial system, later culminating in the unsuccessful 1907 and eventually 1917 revolution.

Skocpol's theory of the importance of financial crisis and international tensions weakening the state and making possible the development of these three revolutions applies to the case of Nepal as well. Similarly class plays a critical role in Nepal as it did in two of the three revolutions she studied.

#### **The Nepal Revolution**

Nepal, a semi feudal primarily agricultural society of about 19 million people, went through 50 days long pro-democracy revolutionary movement in the spring of 1990. The target of the revolution was the authoritarian Panchayat system ( see in chapter: 2) which was introduced by the present king's father Mahendra in 1960. (I include a brief historical background to this revolution in the Appendix.).

The pro-democracy movement became active in March of

1989 when India refused to renew trade and transit treaties with Nepal, closing down all but two of the 15 trade routes. India was not happy about Nepal becoming "more friendly" with its northern neighbor. Nepal, located between China and India is a land-locked country, heavily dependent on India for its trade and transit since the highest mountains, the Himalayas, bar feasible transit through China. There are about eleven of the highest mountains of the world, including Mt. Everest, located in Nepal. India claimed that having friendlier relations with China is a violation of the 1950 treaty between Nepal and India. The contents of this treaty are unknown by most Nepali (see chapter:two).

Confirming Theda Skocpol's theory, international relations and financial crisis sparked the tensions caused by trade embargo that resulted in the revolutionary movement in Nepal ( see in the chapter: two: B). In addition, knowledge of the revolutionary movements in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well as the pro-democracy movement in China also played an important role in influencing people's participation in the movement.

There has been much written on revolutions from both a historical and sociological perspective. Particularly influential has been Theda Skocpol's work comparing several major revolutions. However, Skocpol's theory does not address the gendered nature of the revolutions she studied.

In their "Introduction" to Women & Politics in the Age

of the Democratic Revolution, Applewhite and Levy (1993) assert that gender along with race, class, ideology and power politics, shaped revolutionary outcomes in the age of democratic revolution (p. 18). In the case of Nepal, caste and age or generation must also be included. In this volume, researchers document the roles of women in the revolutionary transformation of the political institutions of the old orders. "In England, which did not experience a political revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, the food riot within local communities was one of the principal forms of political contestation. John Bohstedt shows how women's participation in riots was shaped by their roles in the household economy...Bohstedt points out that participation in riots amounted to a practice of proto-citizenship..." (Applewhite and Levy, p. 3). In the Nepali case, too, women were active as protestors against the scarcity and high prices of food. These protests were decisive in the King's eventual concession to allow for a democratic government.

With respect to the French Revolution, "during the last popular insurrection of the Revolution...(1795), women dominated the action -- beating the *generale*, stirring up men to go to the Convention, and confronting the deputies -- but women are not noted in the records for the following day when men deliberated in illegal general assemblies and made an armed assault on the Convention." (p. 5). In Nepal,

women were involved not only in the protests and revolutionary activity; out of 11 cabinet members following the revolution, one woman was nominated as the highest ranking cabinet minister. Later, during the period of constitutional reforms, there were no women in the constitutional assembly. The reformed constitution turned out to be gender biased with respect to citizenship rights.

Applewhite and Levy summarize how in the English, French, Dutch, and Belgian cases, "community provided a matrix for the political participation of working-class women and men." (p. 8). In the case of prerevolutionary Boston, women took part in mob action, and marched in funeral processions. They were conspicuously present as mourners in funerals with political overtones, like the funeral that followed the Boston Massacre of 1770 and the annual commemorations of this massacre. (p. 10). Two articles on the more contemporary Iranian revolution also calls attention to the role of funeral processions with political overtones. Karen Rasler reports that "In the initial stages and after much pressure by local leaders, moderate to conservative religious leaders supported 'mourning ceremonies' around which many people could demonstrate their opposition to the government." (p. 141) In fact, "the most popular form of protest was the mourning ceremony" that culminated in a memorial observance. "These observances produced violent clashes between security forces

and the public and generated new deaths and a new cycle of mourning throughout the country. Each mourning cycle culminated in the participation of greater and greater numbers of people protesting the government's use of force." (p. 142).

In the case of Nepal, the violence against protesters was particularly important in mobilizing women.

Rasler also reports on the role of social networks in the Iranian revolution. She explains the importance of knowing about the willingness and commitment of others to engage in risky collective action, and how social networks play a critical role in reducing uncertainty and providing a forum for exchanging information and coordinating protest actions.

From my preliminary research I found out that Network Analysis has also been utilized to study revolutionary social change in earlier revolutionary social movements.

(Emirbayer, Goodwin, 1994). My description of the revolutionary process in Nepal documents the importance of social networks in that process.

Social networks in Nepal are very much influenced by family tradition, caste, gender and generation. However, as Emirbayer and Goodwin point out, network analysis, like structuralist analysis, neglects the vital role of cultural (ideas and ideals), and historical context. My study rectifies that absence by interviewing participants and learning from them the influences, both social and cultural,

that led to their activism. That is, I discover both social relations influencing participation, as in network theory, but also ideas and ideals. The social, cultural and historical influences can be seen more sharply by comparing differences between the 1950 revolution and the 1990 revolution, and between an urban area, the capital city of Kathmandu, and a rural area- the village of Bastipur. Moreover, I interviewed members of the two opposing dominant parties- the Nepali Congress and the United Marxist Leninist.

I interviewed leaders and grassroots women revolutionaries and homemakers. I interviewed women of upper and lower castes, and women of different ethnic religious groups-dominant and indigenous, and of different generations. The older generation whose political involvement dates back to the 1950 revolution and the younger, affected by knowledge of the contemporary world events and their own different life experiences.

Rasler also discusses the importance of critical or "triggering events" that occurred after there had been earlier protests and demonstrations. These triggering events outrage the population and serve to mobilize popular support against the government. Similarly, Charles Kurzman (1996) reports that "On an individual level, acts of repression that hit close to home were a major source of revolutionary zeal. He quotes the following report, "People

felt this emotion and gained this attitude through hearing about or participating in events in which government forces treated people with violence and injustice...Villagers reported to me their horror, fury, and frustration upon hearing about such events, as well as their resolve that they would never rest until the shah and the government that did such inhuman things to their fellow Iranians no longer existed. (Hegland 1983:233-234, cited by Kurzman, p. 161).

In Nepal, after initial protests by organized revolutionaries (members of the Nepali Congress Party and the United Left) during which demonstrators were killed, more people joined; each time people were killed, more people would join the demonstrations that followed. What started out as a protest for democracy, became in large part a protest against government killings. This larger protest, which included many women as well as men, in turn enabled the movement for democracy to achieve success.

#### Participant Observation: Bastipur

Bastipur, which is primarily an agricultural village, is located in the south-east rural region of Nepal. Since the 1950 revolution, Bastipur has been very politically active. It has been the home of many political activists. I was born in Bastipur. It has a population of about 3,000. Residents of Bastipur are of mixed races and bi-lingual: Nepali and Maithali. Maithali is a language of the state, Bihar, India, which Nepal borders on the south. But both

administration and education are in the Nepali language following the national pattern. Bastipur is a village that has been associated primarily with the Nepali Congress Party( I discuss the 1950 revolution in the next chapter).

Bastipur was the underground place for several revolutionaries in the 1950 revolution. As my mother recalls, the man who became prime minister following the 1990 revolution, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, came with my uncle from India where they had been studying and stayed in my home during the 1950 revolution. My uncle and Mr. Bhattarai were the early founding members of the Nepali Congress party.

Nepali women of Bastipur have been playing a very important political role since 1950. Women provided shelter then as well and got emotionally involved with the 1950 revolution. I still recall some women who were active during the 1959 general election. Bastipur became an underground place again in the 1990 revolution, but this time leadership was coming from the next generation. My brother, Pradeep, was underground and the administration was looking for him and his friends. Women had to go through difficult times. The wife of a political activist of Bastipur told me that her husband disappeared for about two months and the police frequently came to her house and harassed her. Two boys from Bastipur were taken from Bastipur to a nearby police station and while in custody

were beaten over a period of several days by the police.

I was conscious of the political situation in Nepal but was not directly involved until 1973. In the early 1970s, B.P. Koirala (Nepali Congress leader) from his exile in India called for an armed revolution in Nepal. Nepal Congress Party was outlawed in Nepal then. In 1973, Mr. Saroj Prasad Koirala (a popular Nepali Congress youth leader) was assassinated. Saroj Koirala was very close to us. He was also a close associate of my uncle.

I heard the news of S. Koirala's assassination in the Indian Radio; I was going to the college in Benaras in India. B.P. Koirala was also exiled in Benaras. The report of S. Koirala's assassination had a great effect on me. I decided to join my brother, Pradeep, who was already one of B.P.'s close associates and equally affected by S. Koirala's assassination, and take revenge on Koirala's assassination. It is commonly believed that S. Koirala was assassinated by the King's assistant. I felt very much this was the time for me to do or die for democracy. There were many men and women from the Koirala family who were involved in the revolution. In the winter of 1974 this revolution was crushed.

Because of past history involving a family member, my brother and I, despite risking our lives for the revolution, were distrusted by Koiralas. One of our cousins, Dr. Tulasi

Giri, who was also a close associate of B.P. Koirala after the 1950 revolution, took the side of the king when the king arrested and imprisoned B.P. Giri became the head of the King's cabinet in 1960. Because of this event, Koirala (meaning the Koirala family or clan) were always suspicious of my brother and myself. In Benaras, I thought that the Koiralas were obsessed with the betrayal by Tulasi Giri rather than utilising youths, such as my brother, myself, and our friends, who were committed to the revolution. There were several unsuccessful revolutionary attempts under the leadership of B.P. in the early 1970s. During this process, there were series of tensions between Koiralas and us; they thought we were spying for our cousin (Rana, 1994). I was very much frustrated and decided in 1976 to leave to go to Kathmandu, where I started a career as a journalist.

I was a student in New York during the 1990 revolution. After the news of the sexual assault on women by the police in Nepal, I decided to participate in the movement. I became the founder member of the Alliance for Democracy in Nepal which organized a rally and wrote petitions for the support of the revolution in the spring of 1990. After the success of the revolution, I returned to Nepal in the summer of 1990. I was amazed to see both in the city and the village how enthusiastic were women about the change and how they wanted to bring about changes in their status.

### Participant Observation: Kathmandu

Kathmandu is the capital city of Nepal. It has about 200,000 people. The leaders of the 1990 revolution were house arrested in Kathmandu. Kathmandu has been a trade center with Tibet since antiquity. It has been the capital city of Nepal for about two hundred years. Trades people and craftspeople and government bureaucrats have long been located there. Until 1950, Nepal was sealed to outsiders. When it opened in 1950, it welcomed business people, diplomats, and foreigners. Kathmandu became a modern city, complete with British education, modern hospitals, modern communications and transportation. The city has become industrialized and includes the garment industry, the shoe industry, the cement industry, cloth industry, and especially the carpet industry. There are about 2,382 industries registered in Nepal (NPC, 1992).

When I returned to Nepal in the summer of 1990 there were several women's groups being formed in Kathmandu. They were demanding equal inheritance rights and wanted representation in the constitutional assembly which was formed to change the constitution after the revolution. The cabinet that was formed after the revolution was composed of Nepali Congress leaders and United Left Front leaders and leaders of Human Rights organizations. The headquarters of all these organizations are located in Kathmandu.

The cabinet was responsible to make the transition from

the authoritarian regime to a democratically elected government. In order to accomplish this transition, they needed a new constitution. The cabinet proposed to the king the members for the constitutional assembly. No women were proposed. Nevertheless, the male leaders considered this procedure to be democratic and representative. Female leaders of the movement, both grassroots and high ranking, protested, but were ignored.

As I said earlier, leadership in both parties came from the 1950 revolution. These leaders were much like old patriarchs who were not able to understand women's demands or for that matter even the demands of the young generation. Nepal is rapidly moving towards modernization; in Kathmandu city, there are a multiplicity of different professional groups. The population has grown from 11 million in 1972 to 19 million in 1990. The literacy rate has gone from 7 percent in 1972 to 35 percent in 1992. But leaders do not seem to comprehend all this.

High ranking women leaders of both parties who were very active during the revolution have been placed in secondary roles (see chapter: three). Regardless of party affiliations, women leaders have been demanding equal rights for women. The general election was held in 1991. NC got the absolute majority and formed the government. Out of 205 members of Parliament, five women were elected from the NC and 2 from the United Marxist Leninist. [The ULF changed

its name to the United Marxist Leninist (UML) after the revolution for purposes of the election.]

### Methodology

Because of my background as a political activist in Nepal, both before and during the revolution, I was in a good position to write about it. In addition to my own personal experience and knowledge, I asked questions of the people I know personally. However, I did not rely on these personal sources for my research but interviewed other women activists, both grassroots and high ranking leaders, in order to learn about the experiences and perspectives of women from different backgrounds -- both rural and urban, upper and lower caste/class, younger and older.

I interviewed leaders and members of both parties (Nepali Congress and United Marxists Leninist) and independent activists and participants, including leaders and members of non-partisan organizations such as the Human Rights Association of Nepal and the Forum for the Protection of Human Rights in Nepal (both very active during the revolution).

During my preliminary field research, the leaders of both political parties and human rights organizations met with me and introduced me to male and female party workers who had been very active in the movement. I visited these offices again and got additional names from these

organizations.

I interviewed a core group of women of both parties and both Human Rights organizations who participated in the 1990 revolutions. I interviewed both older women who lived through both the 1950 revolution and the 1990 one, as well as younger women who participated only in the 1990 revolution. I conducted the interviews in the Nepali language in Kathmandu because it is the lingua-franca of the country and interviewed in Maithli in the village because Bastipur is a bi-lingual village. I met with some of the people I had spoken with before as well as others.

From my research, I found out that whereas the old generation think democracy and new changes in Nepal are very important, the new generation is restless. They feel that the ruling leadership who belong to the 1950 revolution do not understand their expectations.

The dissertation is divided in six chapters: 1. Introduction 2. Revolutionary Process in Nepal 3. Urban Women in the Revolution 4. Rural Women and Men Experience the Revolution 5. Building Women's Cooperative in Bastipur 6. Conclusion

## Chapter Two

### Revolutionary Process in Nepal

Nepal has been struggling for democracy for three decades. Democracy and autocracy are playing hide and seek since 1950 when king and elite fought together to oust an oligarchy (Rana regime) which was in power for almost 104 years, making the king only a titular head. After 30 years of autocracy (panchayati raj), imposed by the late king Mahendra, Nepali people were granted democracy by king Mahendra's son Birendra in the spring of 1990 after 51 days of a long bloody revolution.

Nepal remains as the only Hindu kingdom of the world. Bhutan is another Himalayan kingdom neighbouring to Nepal, but Buddhism is the main religion of Bhutan. Both Bhutan and Nepal have fairly young kings. The Ranas (see more in the appendix) who made the king only a titular head in their regime for more than a century, had been able to get the royal stamped order or seal ("Sanad" in Nepali) with all the power that goes with it, in 1856 after numbers of bloody royal coups. They then ruled until 1950.

But the present king, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah's grand father, Tribhuvan, revolted against the Ranas and joined Nepali politicians in India who were fighting for democracy in Nepal, and who launched the revolution against Ranas in 1950. The Shah dynasty has been ruling Nepal since 1779. Some Nepali, who were studying in India formed Nepali Congress

Party in early 1940s, decided to launch an armed revolution in late 1940s and subsequently they attacked several army-head quarters in Nepal, finally making Ranas to surrender to the Liberation Army, formed for the revolution by Nepali Congress.

The Nepali communist party which was formed few years later, did not join the armed revolution, considering Nepali Congress a party of aristocrats. It itself could not launch the revolution; the time was not ready for them. However, 44 years later they were heading the Nepali government. Several international media headlined this development as **the first elected communist government in Asia** (see the citation of international medias below by the alphabetical orders). A fast growing urban population and economy enabled the communists to make such a strong impact in Nepal over the years.

Between 1950-60, Nepal experienced somewhat a trial democracy. About four prime-ministers were appointed by the king between 1950-59 and finally the general election was called in 1959. The Nepali Congress party won with two third majority seats in the parliament. B.P. Koirala became the first elected prime minister of Nepal.

But again in 1960, the then king Mahendra dissolved the parliament, banned political parties and imprisoned most of the parliamentarians and ministers, including B.P. Koirala and other politicians. Mahendra did not have a formal education, however he is the popular poet of Nepal. King Mahendra is

considered the most conservative king in the modern history of Nepal. In 1960 Mahendra introduced a guided partyless "democracy" called "**Panchayat System**" in 1961.

**"The Panchyat System"** was comprised of a national assembly with no political parties and the king as the source of all authority, making him an absolute monarch. The assembly was composed of men and women appointed by the king. However, king Mahendra's rule was threatened by his opponents in the 1960s. The rule of his son, Birendra was similarly threatened by several political uprisings in 1970s, 1980s and finally the 1990 revolution. In the spring of 1990, after the 51 days long pro-democracy movement, King Birendra was forced to withdraw his power as the absolute monarch, but agreed to remain as the constitutional monarch.

King Birendra of Nepal was only 26 when he inherited the throne in 1972 and his wife queen Aiswarya is 4 years junior to him. Both King Birendra and queen Aiswarya have graduate degree unlike their parents. King Birendra got his undergraduate degree from Eaton and Harvard University whereas the queen Aiswarya went to the convent school in Kathmandu and went to the local undergraduate college in Kathmandu, Padma Kanya College of which I am also the graduate. Queen Aiswarya writes poems in the pseudo name as "Chandani Shah" and they are very popular.

In one hand the royal couple represented modern Nepal but on the other hand, they inherited a most rigid political

system "the partyless Panchayat system" governed with the strict Hindu code and military. The western educated king inherited the throne from his late father king Mahendra in 1972 after the later's sudden death from heart attack at the age of 52.

One section of Nepali elite believe that King Birendra is quite liberal compared to his father and that he is always interested to run the country in the democratic manner, but it is the royal palace and his ambitious wife, brothers and sisters had been forcing him to remain as the absolute monarch for such a long period.

**1960s:** Several political leaders were imprisoned and several more exiled to India in the 1960s and 1970s. They continued their fight against king Mahendra but were not successful. After King Mahendra's death, there were speculations among politicians in the opposition that King Birendra would come to terms with the opposition sooner, but the signal from the palace was that the royal authority wanted to retain its power as it was.

The former prime minister of the first elected parliament of Nepal, and the leader of the banned Nepali Congress party, B.P. Koirala, gave a statement in the same year that, "If the baby [democracy] was not born naturally, surgery [revolution] must be performed in order to deliver the child." But the palace and the king did not budge.

In the same year of Nepal's history, there were several

assassinations of opposition leaders because it is believed that the king's regime was afraid of political uprising and the regime wanted to wipe out Nepali Congress leadership. I was studying in Benaras India, and B.P. Koirala was exiled in Benaras then. My brother was a very close associate of Koirala's then and also my father was the district Nepali Congress party president, so I was naturally interested in Nepali politics. I keenly observed Nepali politics. Apart from my interest in Nepali politics, I was studying for my Masters degree in Political Science at the Benaras Hindu University.

**1970s:** In early 1970s B.P. called for an armed struggle against the King and several young Nepali people, men and women alike, jumped in to the revolution. My brother Pradeep was able to manipulate me and my younger brother Shekhar as far as I knew then to join the revolution. We later gradually came to know other young men and women who were in Benaras on the call of B.P. to fight against the King.

In the due process, I was devastated at times to learn that several of these friends had been killed in police encounters. I remember particularly when I was so depressed to learn that twins of my neighbouring town, Lahan, Ram and Lakshman Upadhyaya were killed in police encounters in the winter of 1974 and I was preparing for my finals. It was more painful because Lakshman had just visited me at my dorm before he went to against the Nepal government.

I was writing my painful experiences in my journal and when in the process of researching, I got hold of the book by Rishikesh Shah, NEPALI POLITICS: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT and found that he has documented Ram and Laxman's death, citing the Indian newspaper, "Times of India", I matched my date in my journal and I found my own more personal account expressing my grief.

The encounter happened in December, 1975 at the north-east mountainous region, Sagarmatha Zone (Mt. Everest in english). Both Ram Lakshman and myself are from the same region. By that time I was feeling frustrated by the party leadership and was dismayed about the revolution if it meant killings of our near and dear ones.

But history takes its own toll. Due to internal politics, my brother, Pradeep, was out from Nepali Congress politics by then and I myself had lost interest in it. I did not have first hand information why the armed revolution was fading, but it can be said that it failed partly because, men who were sent to the powerful enemy, were themselves not empowered properly. Most have them did not had the "guerilla" skills.

1979 uprising: In 1979 there was an uprising in Nepal of students and peasants. Following this uprising the King Birendra granted political amnesty to all the Nepali dissidents living in India. A referendum was held in 1980 to choose either a multi-party system or the ruling Panchayat

system with "suitable reforms" following the movement. Panchayat system won by a 4 percent margin. It is commonly believed that the referendum was rigged by the government. Political parties remained banned again. However, they resumed their work under the banner of banned names. The tension between the king and party workers eased a bit after the referendum but there were frequent protests and arrests.

**Nepal relations with its neighbour:**

Before the British rule in India, history shows Nepal had close relation with China culturally, politically and economically. There were several exchanges of political, religious and scholarly delegates between two countries. Tibet played the buffer state between Nepal and China then before China took over Tibet in early 1950s (Ghoble, 1991).

Between 1816 and 1846, the prestige and international reputation of the Qing dynasty suffered a setback due to its reversals in the opium war and the incapability of China vis-a-vis the British empire. This made the Nepali ruler side more closely with India, and China kept its neutral stance with Nepal (Ghoble, 1991). India got its independence in 1947 and it is believed that Nepali politicians were backed by Indian politicians to launch an armed struggle in 1950. Several Nepali politicians fought for Indian Independence including the current prime minister of Nepal. After 1950 India and Nepal became closer.

China decided to annex Tibet in 1953; the relation

between Nepal and China was not materialized until 1955 when Nepal and China had their first diplomatic relation since 1816. (Ghoble, 1991). That was the year that Nepal worked out a relationship with the British following the war between Nepal and the British. After annexation of Tibet, China reactivated its interests in Nepal (Ghoble, 1991). After the gap of the century during the British rule, Nepal and China established their diplomatic relations again in 1957 (Ghoble, 1991). From 1957 to 1990, Nepal and China have had cordial relations. India was not happy with this relation. Finally in 1989, when Nepal bought arms from China, India reported its unhappiness and refused to renew trade and transit treaty with Nepal.

Nepal's anxieties towards India became more intensified when its neighbour, another Himalyan kingdom, Sikkim, was annexed to India in 1974. Nepali elite became angry with India; they were afraid for Nepal's fate. This is one of the reasons Nepali elite have been favoring the monarch because they think that either pro-Chinese party (Communist Party) or Pro-Indian Party (Nepali Congress) would favor either one country or other in terms of political or economic dealings. There is a general belief that political leaders from either side would not hesitate to sell out the country (for personal gain) to one or the other country. There is the possibility of monetary gain and also political power to be gained. If Nepal became a part of India, Nepali Congress

leaders would become part of the Indian ruling elite. If Nepal became a part of China, the Nepali Communist Party leaders would become part of the Chinese ruling elite. The King, in contrast, it is believed, represents Nepal. If Nepal became part of either India or China, the king would lose his throne. He has nothing to gain, and much to lose, if Nepal were to be absorbed by either of its powerful neighbors.

**1989 Trade-Embargo by India:** In March of 1989 India refused to renew trade and transit treaties with Nepal, closing down all but two of the 15 trade routes. Nepal suffered from this act of India. Nepal, located between China and India is a land-locked country, heavily dependent on India for its trade and transit since the highest mountains, the Himalayas, bar feasible transit through China. However, Nepal and China are engaged in diplomatic relations.

There are about eleven of the highest mountains of the world, including Mt. Everest, located in Nepal. India claimed that having friendlier relations with China is a violation of the 1950 treaty between Nepal and India. (see below for the 1950 treaty between India and Nepal). Chinese prime minister Le Ping visited Nepal in November, 1989 and made it clear that the geography will bar Nepal from dealing with China directly (Bhattarai, Khatiwada Eds., 1993).

According to my sources, one of the ministers was sent to China in the spring of 1989 presumably to seek help to ease the Indian trade embargo, but the minister returned to

Kathmandu without a positive "nod" from China. Most importantly China was going through its own "Pro-democracy Movement", the famous "Tianamann Square" political uprising.

At that time, Nepali elite thought that the Indian Trade Embargo was a way that India wanted to teach Nepal a lesson that a small country like Nepal should not underestimate a big power like India. But the king of Nepal also seemed determined not to give in. The then Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was beginning to take himself as the most powerful man in the region, considering his inheritance of power through his powerful family. India is the largest country in the south-asian region. South-asia consists of 7 countries: India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Mauritius.

Within a year of the embarago the inflation rate rose almost 300 percent in Nepal, hitting both lower and middle class people. People could not talk freely about their government's stand. If they did, they were imprisoned. The young generation were particularly restless about the ineptness of the panchayat government (see below) to handle the trade embargo by India. Panchayat leaders and officials had been living luxurious lives, creating even more resentment. Young generations of different banned parties urged their leaders to protest against the dictatorial regime.

Because of the immediacy of the trade embargo by India,

the resentment against the King for imposing a repressive political climate intensified. People wanted to debate and participate in the national crisis, but were not allowed to do that. Political discussions and political parties were barred. During the trade embargo, one of the leaders (Pradeep Giri) called for unity of all the banned parties to insist on political participation and dialogue with India. He was immediately imprisoned as were other such leaders.

Not only were more people aroused politically to challenge the political system in the name of democracy than was the case in 1950 due to the crisis. But the class nature of "the people" who were so aroused had changed. Since 1950, Nepal had developed an indigenous middle class due to the growing urban population, making up 17% of the population compared to 8 % in 1982 (NPC, Nepal, 1992).

**1990 Revolution:** In the 1990 revolution, as in the case of the **French revolution** (Applewhite, Levy, 1987) and **Russian, Italian and Spanish communal strikes** (Kaplan, 1987), from the beginning, women joined with men in the street to protest the financial crisis and the politically repressive atmosphere. These protests later culminated in a socialist and patriarchal model of revolution.

Nepal, of about 19 million people and primarily an agricultural country, went through 50 days long pro-democracy revolutionary movement in the spring of 1990. The target of the revolution was the authoritarian **Panchayat system** which

was introduced by king Mahendra in 1961. Party leaders decided to form a united front, comprised of the centrist and leftist parties, thus launching the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) on January of 1990 which lasted until April 6, 1990. On that day the king surrendered to the people's power after a mass massacre of unarmed people who were demonstrating in front of his palace in Kathmandu.

There is still no definition or official account of the numbers of people killed, but about 200,000 people, from Kathmandu and neighboring areas, demonstrated that day and were attacked by the military who opened fire on them. Witnesses reported that military trucks were loaded with bodies and taken away and then buried.

#### **What did the revolution accomplish?**

After the successful pro-democracy movement, the constituent assembly was formed by the interim government, and the new constitution was granted to the people by the king in November, 1990. With the new constitution the first multi-party based general election was held in 1991 after 30 years. The Nepali Congress Party got the absolute majority and formed the government. Out of 205 members of Parliament, five women were elected from the NC and 2 from the United Marxist Leninist in this election. [The ULF changed its name to the United Marxist Leninist (UML) after the revolution for purposes of the election.]

Angry that 36 dissidents of the party failed to show up

at the budget meeting, the prime minister requested that the king dissolve the parliament again in July 1994. He was assuming that the dissidents would be turned out and he would have a free hand. As it turned out, according to these dissidents, they had not been notified of the budget meeting. The king dissolved the parliament and a new mid-term election was called and held in November of 1994.

This time, the Nepali Congress lost its majority and the UML formed the government. Because the communists also had no absolute majority, the Nepali Congress agreed to support them in order that there could be a governing body. Subsequently, the Nepali Congress withdrew its support and parliament was dissolved once again (India Today, June, 1995), but reinstated by the Supreme Court in August. The election had been called for November, 1995 but the supreme court gave the verdict to re-install the parliament in August, 1995. With the support of the party that is known as pro-king party, National Democratic Party, the Nepali Congress now formed the government in September of 1995. Because Korala was so unpopular for asking the king to dissolve parliament, a new prime minister of the younger generation, Sher Bahadur Deuwa, was elected.

**Unresolved issues:** I was interested to find out how the democratic movement of 1990 affected women's status in Nepal after their contribution in the revolution. Women were not included in the constituent assembly. Nepali women believe

that there are several unresolved issues in terms of women's rights which I will discuss in the chapter 5. Women in Kathmandu are organizing themselves to get more than just the right to vote.

I was also interested in finding out how the democratic movement of 1990 affected the rural people. I discovered that in the villages which contain the majority of Nepali population (90% of Nepali people live in rural Nepal), the meaning of democracy is far from understood. The lowest of the class/caste were not even aware of the pro-democracy movement. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

Although there is a political-party based democracy in Nepal, I am frustrated. Political leaders are more concerned about how to retain their parliamentary seats rather than how to develop their constituency. Since Nepal is a poor country and the vast majority of the people are illiterate, politicians have to convince their voters through different means: building hospitals, roads, putting tube-wells among other promises. However, these promises never seem to materialize. Villagers complain that the politicians do not often visit the villages. Political leaders recruit community leaders and spend huge amounts of money for their election campaign, but do not follow up with investment that would contribute to the development of the villages and the people in them.

Since Nepal is a semi feudal country, the monies spent on

elections are being met through debts in most cases. After the election, parliamentarians are worried to pay back the loan and earn more for the next election. I find this kind of situation frustrating and have decided to focus on the grass-root level and rural development in general. I discuss this in chapters 4 and 5.

Also noteworthy is that after the pro-democracy movement some grass-roots level female activists were ignored by the then ruling party (NC) for the fact that they were affiliated with the communist party. An example is the case of Laxmi Karki who is mentioned below. I believe that revolutionaries who suffered during the revolution should be appreciated regardless of their party affiliations.

### Chapter three

#### Urban Women in the Revolution

Due to Indian trade embargo, there was a food shortage in Nepal. Kaplan (1987) discusses the role of women whose traditional female roles and "female consciousness" prompted their protests in response to food crises. She documents the role of these female protests in the communal strikes of Spain, Italy and the Russian Socialist revolutions. However in the case of the Nepali Revolution, there were other issues such as human rights violation and disappearance of loved ones which also motivated women's active participation.

During the revolution, unthinkable forms of sexual violence were used against the female prisoners to attempt to break their morale and force them to confess their political activity and to accuse other militants and activists (Asia Watch, February 1990).

The 1990 revolution took place in the winter. Kathmandu is at about 4,500 ft. (The temperature varies in different parts of the country; the higher up in the mountains, the colder it gets. It averages 20-30 degrees fahrenheit in the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu.) In a taped interview the president of the Nepal Women's Organization, Mangla Devi, told me that women prisoners in Kathmandu were showered first in the cold winter temperature without heat and then asked to kiss police officers who had taken them into custody. In Nepali society, women do not kiss adults except their husbands

kiss police officers who had taken them into custody. In Nepali society, women do not kiss adults except their husbands and that should be done privately as well. Another example of sexual assault is more severe.

A female student, Laxmi Shrestha in Pokhara, north-west of Kathmandu, a mountainous and therefore a very cold region, was reportedly forced to remain naked in freezing cold for 13 hours in police custody before being sent to jail with other detainees. In addition to these accounts of sexual abuse, we know that other women prisoners reportedly have been sexually assaulted (Asia Watch, New York, February 26, 1990). I believe that women were victimized by all kinds of brutality because they have no linkages with high ranking political leaders and are, therefore, seen as powerless by authorities. Although powerless in this respect, their role in society, including their participation in the movement, also makes them powerful. Thus there was probably both contempt for grass roots women and fear of them.

Several women came to the street in outrage over the disappearance of family members and the sexual assaults on women. Family members were barred from visiting their relatives and loved ones. If they did, they were also arrested. There were about 10,000, who were detained during the 1990 revolution (Asia watch, February, 1990). Women took to the street for economic hardship as well.

Here we see the confirmation of some theories developed

by Fanny Tabak (1984) and Navaro (1989) based on some Latin American social movement theories that the "personal is political." When family members are brutalized, women become politicized. The same dynamic also played an important role in Nepal. There were women from different status groups and different party affiliations and from the independent categories. Some women were influenced by the economic crisis, some by the brutal acts of the government, some by the ideals of democracy propounded by the revolutionary leaders.

In Nepal, the revolution was the movement for the restoration of democracy (MRD) as leaders of the revolution decided to call it because as I have mentioned above Nepali people were granted democracy for a decade between 1950 and 1960 and was taken away by the king. The revolution in Nepal was a revolution for a democratic, representative government.

Although women lived through and participated in all of the world's major revolutions, their contributions have not been well documented or acknowledged. Nor have their contributions and participation been analyzed, although there have been some attempts to rectify the historical record. This research is an attempt to provide an account of women's participation in Nepal's revolution and the consequences of that participation.

In Nepal, high ranking women leaders of both parties who were very active during the revolution have been placed in secondary roles. Ms. Sahana Pradhan was the leader of the ULF

during the revolution, but she plays a secondary role in her party now. Ms Shailaja Acharya from NC was forced to resign from the cabinet in the summer of 1992 because she challenged the party leadership.

Both Ms. Pradhan and Acharya were elected in the general elections of election of 1991 and 1994 to the parliament on their respective party tickets, Ms. Pradhan from the UML ticket and Ms. Acharya from the Nepali Congress, however they both in the public talk (June, 1994), have expressed their dissatisfaction over the patriarchal nature of their respective parties. I will be discussing about them in-depth in the following chapter.

Regardless of party affiliations, women political leaders are demanding equal rights for women. **Women in Kathmandu**, regardless of political parties and caste/class, became involved in the revolution because they saw the **panchayati system** as the main cause of the suppression of the people in general whereas in the rural area of Nepal (Bastipur), women played a more passive role. Most of the revolutionary activity in the village was made by the upper class landowners and by middle class men: teachers, local government administrators such as chair and other members of the village council and high school students -- including some female students. Whereas in the city, there were mass demonstrations, in the village women and lower castes and classes, even most middle class men, did not participate.

That is, there was not a general uprising. The revolution was mainly for the male ruling elite who wanted to change the system for the greater freedom. The people in the city were directly confronting the oppressive measures of the government, including killings of demonstrators and shortages of food and kerosene.

But it is interesting to see that both in Kathmandu and in Bastipur, home-makers played an important role in protecting the underground political activists. Women I have interviewed represent both categories: revolutionary and home-makers. Home-makers are important because they provided shelter, food and money, if needed, to political activists who were underground during the revolution. Women in Bastipur (rural part of Nepal) were represented by Maithali and Nepali speaking women. Surprisingly most Maithali speaking women did not know even the name of prime minister and the knowledge of the pro-democracy movement was far from their reality, whereas some Nepali speaking women from the old generation, had participated in the 1950 revolution as members of a political family (Giri in Bastipur) and were quite conscious about the 1990 movement.

UML (United Marxist Leninist) leader Sahana Pradhan who led the 1990 revolution from the left front, is the widow of the Nepal Communist party leader, the late Pushpa Lal Pradhan. However, Ms. Pradhan has been fighting for the democracy on her own.

Ms. Pradhan participated in the 1947 (2004 in the Nepali calendar) Nepal civil rights movement along with three other women - Sahana, her own sister, Snehlata and Kanak Lata Raj Bhandari. She said in the taped interview taken in July, 1994, "We were arrested along with 60 men and imprisoned in Maharajgunj Berek for three days. I recall the then Rana Prime minister, Pudma Sumsher Rana, when he saw us, inquired: why are women in the demonstration?"

Women replied, "we are here for education right, my sister and I had recently returned from Burma during the second world war. We had secondary education in Burma and learned about civil rights, studying civics over there. Burma was under the British rule then. After fifteen days of the demonstration in Katmandu education for girls in Katmandu was granted in the morning shift at the Durbar High School.

And that was also the eventful day, when I met my future husband Pushpa Lal ji first time. [Pushpa Lal became the founding member of the Nepal Communist party.] We were instructed by the party workers to follow the second man who would be demonstrating a victory sign near the corner of the Ghanta Ghar. Pushpa Lal ji was coming to that direction and we followed him.

I recall that my sister Sadhana and I were well prepared to go to the prison that day; I had put on blouses and wrapped two saris." Why did you decide to participate in that picketing? "We went through the atrocities of the second

world war in Burma and the Indian Independence movement had an affect on us, so my sister and I both wanted to do something for our nation and also were very disappointed that we were not getting our further education."

She further said that, "We thought that participating in that picketting would bring some change in the education system." Are other women also active in the politics? "Later my sister and I went to Lucknow, India, for two years college degree and our brothers followed us obviously". [Girls are not supposed to be on their own or go to a city on their own.] My would be husband Pushpa Lal Pradhan proposed to me in 2010 [1953] and I was married to him the same year. His family was an extended family. There were problems in my married life. Family of both sides did not accept Pushpalal's marriage proposal at the first time because of the caste system. [He is from a lower caste than she.]

One of the brothers-in-law, martyr Ganga Lal, was hanged to death by the Rana regime and Pushpa Lal ji was also in politics so my parent-in-law did not want me to be involved in politics." Was it because you were women; also what was the political orientation of Ganga Lal? How did Pushpa Lal Ji and you become communist?

"I became mother of two children and also passed B.A. and M.A. privately. Since my husband was very active in politics, I had no choice but to take care of my family." Did you live far from your in-laws afterwards? "I started to teach in

various campuses starting from 1956/2013 but went to party assemblies and meetings along with my husband. After the 1960/2017 political change in Nepal my husband went to India for political exile and I continued my academic career until 1975\2032 when Tribhuvan University of Nepal expelled me from my job without any reason." Why do you think so- were you disappointed that you had lost your job?

"I did tutoring in five or six shifts to support my family." Did you support Pushpa Lal Ji as well-were you involved in politics indirectly-I mean did party workers come to meet with you etc.

"My son was offered job in 1976/2033 and I was relieved of family responsibilities." What happened to your daughter? Who is the eldest, son or daughter? "She is married."

"I went to join my ailing husband Pushpa Lal ji." Where? "In India- in 1976/2033. My husband was suffering from heart disease and he died within a month after my arrival in India. I was very depressed and did not want to come to Nepal for the time being." What were you doing?

Nepal went through political change in 2036/1979 and my friends insisted that I must return to Nepal from India and take active role in politics. I listened to them and came to Nepal to join the national referendum. This was my re-entrance in politics which I have continued up till now. After the result of the referendum, there was a kind of political flexibility in the nation." Please elaborate on

this-

I did participate in 2042/1985 civil disobedience movement launched by the NC [Nepali Congress] in the later phase, actually I had suggested to the NC leaders that without our co-operation, the movement would not be successful. Eventually after few days, the movement was dying and some of NC party workers came to my residence and requested me that I join the movement. I suggested to them that I must leave my residence in order to participate in the movement so they arranged my stay at a private house in the city. I told the NC leaders that I would not give myself to be arrested just by squatting on the road. I will say some thing about the movement before my arrest. I recall that in the Basantpur area near the market, I sneaked into a lady who was selling the vegetables by the temple and threw pamphlets and gave brief speech and there, afterward, a female police officer arrested me." From that time on, she became active in the democratic movement of Nepal.

Interview with Ms. Shailaja Acharya:

Ms. Shailaja Acharya, niece of the prime minister, became a Nepali Congress activist in 1960 when, along with four other friends, she hoisted a black flag against king Mahendra in the national stadium. She was brutally beaten by the police and taken to the prison where she was imprisoned for three years and spent eight years in political exile to help B.P. Koirala in Benaras [India]. She returned to Kathmandu with B.P in

1976 and was imprisoned for a year.

Ms. Acharya participated in armed-revolution called by B.P. Koirala. She was in-charge of public relations. She participated in the 1985 civil disobedience movement and was imprisoned again for nine months. "I have fought against family values; being a woman was very difficult to struggle in politics."

Ms. Acharya is considered a very dedicated, determined and honest NC high ranking leader. She is now the candidate for prime minister of the NC. She has earned this position because of her seniority and her endless sacrifice. Ms. Acharya comes from Biratnagar, which is in the south-east Nepal, bordering India. The 1950, 1973 and 1990 movement were quite alive in Birat Nagar. Birat Nagar is the second largest city after Kathmandu.

Interview with Mrs. Mangala Devi:

Being a resident of Kathmandu and wife of supreme leader of NC, Ganesh Man Singh, Mangala Devi played very important role in the 1990 revolution. After the death of B.P. in 1982, Ganesh Man Singh was elected the supreme leader unanimously. Ganesh Man Singh had and has the reputation of being very dedicated, honest and committed son of the democracy. Communist parties also accepted him as the supreme leader of the MRD. His wife Mangala Devi accompanied him all along.

Mangala Devi was house arrested along with her husband GM during the momevent, with the exception of GM's

hospitalisation towards the end of the movement. Mangala Devi tells me how she was shocked to know that a young boy who used to carry pamphlets was killed by the police. She used to get secret messages from women prisoners how they were being treated.

What did you miss, when you were house arrested? "I felt very sad to say good-bye to my grand child who used to visit us and I could not keep him for a longer period of time." How long were you supposed to keep him? "Just for an afternoon."

Ms. Singh said that she cannot forget the event, just two days before the dawn of the democracy, when more than two hundred thousands of pro-democracy protestors came to the Bir-hospital to ask for an audience with GM where he was hospitalised and requested him not to accept the King's decision of the appointment of the nomination of the new prime minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand. Police opened fire brutally on these armless pretesters, several of them were killed and many wounded were hospitalised.

She saw the flow of the blood on the floor of the hospital, she was very moved by this event. "After this event, the newly appointed prime-minister came to see GM, but GM turned down his request and told me that I must tell him [the prime minister] to go the royal palace and tell the king that he should kill more people." He was being sarcastic, out of bitter anger. This man, GM [Ganes<sup>h</sup> Man Singh], represented

the democratic force during the revolution (1990). He was as important a figure as the King who represented the repressive system. The king had sent the prime minister to see him because the king knew that if GM addressed the demonstrators and asked them to stop, the demonstrations would end. GM was the supreme leader of the revolution.

"After that GM was asked by the king to visit the royal palace, I remember that event particularly when GM had gone to the palace with informal dress and slippers on his feet. [This was contrary to the norms of royal address; one only goes to the palace dressed in formal Nepali attire; hence this was an offense to the King.] The following day, the king granted democracy in his televised speech on the seventh of April, 1990."

Both Sahana from the UML and NC leader, Mangala, are from the same ethnic group, called Newars. This group is dominant in Katmandu. They speak their own Newari language which is of the Sino-Tibetan language group. The king and the rest of the ruling elite speak Nepali which is of Indo-European language group. The difference in language reflects the history of Katmandu. This difference continues to have political significance, as the Newars had been the rulers of Katmandu valley until the mid 1700s when the present King's ancestor conquered Katmandu valley. There is still a resentment among the Newari people against the ruling elite of Nepal. Among the women activists in Katmandu, that I interviewed, about 50%

were Nawari. Among the activists in the movement in general, more than 50% were Newari. More than half of the seats in the Parliament from the Katmandu constituencies, were taken by Nawar people. These people tend to practice Buddhism so the Hindu caste system with its notions of purity is not so intense.

Interview with Parijat, June 1990

Apart from being the renowned poet, novelist, laureat, Parijat was the vice-president of the Human Rights Association Nepal. She participated in the movement. Bed-ridden-paralysed- she was disappointed to see the moment when police took her friends to the prison, leaving her behind for her disability. Parijat supported the constitutional monarchy for the transition period because only in the democracy, can one function freely. Parijat is affiliated with the Nirmal Lama group, a faction of the Communist Party. She comes from the Tibetan-Burmese group, another ethnic group of Nepal, different from the Nawari and the Nepali.

Interview with Hisila Yami:

Hisila Yami said she participated in the movement for two reasons- from the news about the brutality on women and the descrimination against engineers. Hisila Yami who is the wife of famous left radical leader of Baburam Bhattarai, says that her husband's group United People's front also contributed to the pro-democracy movement. [The United People's front is a

communist party that split from the UML, the centrist communist party. The basic difference is that the UML accepts the constitutional monarchy, whereas the United People's Front demands a republic.

Ms. Yami told me that she was arrested in the general protest meeting organised to protest the sexual assault on women in Pokhara on the International Women's day, 1990. I spent six hours in the police custody that day. In few weeks time, she was among 800 people who were arrested in the Kirtipur campus but out of them 20 who were imprisoned for 16 days and she was one of three women. Ms Yami thinks that, the root of the movement was the Pokhara incident which was a head of the proposed date of the MRD.

In Kathmandu, women from the middle strata from the both parties participated in the revolution out of their anger with the **Panchayat System** and social injustice against women where as in the village middle class women played the subservient role only. It is however, note worthy that it was difficult to find candidates in the Nepali Congress in the lower strata where as in the United Marxist Leninist party, women of the lower strata participated in the revolution with their angers against the system for better life.

I found from my research that politics and family (clan: Koiralas, Giris, Ranaa etc.) affiliations were strongly related in Nepal. Both in Kathmandu and Bastipur, women of a political family took part in politics more actively than

those from non-political families.

Particularly in the Koirala family, **women outnumbered men** in the 1990 pro-democratic movement. However, one must not forget that women's struggle for the revolution came not automatically from being part of a political family, but from their own consciousness as well. This **female consciousness** varies from the city to the village. But at the same time, these elite women who are involved in politics differ from the poor women in general. Poor women in both Kathmandu and in Bastipur do not have privileges to be active in politics or even to know about politics as is the case in Bastipur.

Women who had participated in the revolution had the luxury of engaging themselves in politics because they live in extended families and their children are being looked after by female in-laws in most cases. However in Kathmandu, because of the urbanization women have been demanding child-care centers which are not common in Kathmandu.

In the case of nuclear families, maid-servants look after children, who do this job besides their cooking and house-keeping job. These maids are generally illiterate; that is why women want child-care centers run by professionals. In the village of Bastipur, children are generally looked after by their grandmothers if women are engaged in their professions. Some women of Bastipur are able to get jobs in the local high-school and some have jobs in the nearby town of Lahan. But women from the old-generation resent this fact

that their daughter-in-laws do not keep the family tradition in terms of religious ceremonies and social customs.

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Because of the difference between agricultural work and culture and urban work and culture, women in Bastipur have a different kind of life than women in Kathmandu. Villages, immersed in a rural economy, the female population -- rural women -- are for the most part illiterate. The older generation and the younger generation of women are both engaged in the same kind of work -- gardening, husbandry, and agricultural or plantation work. Gardening involves growing fruits and vegetables; animal husbandry leading the animals, such as cows, buffalo, oxen, goats, from their homes to the common fields to graze; agriculture involves planting and harvesting in large fields. Because they work together, there is not so much overt tension between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law. In the city of Kathmandu, however, the women engaged in urban occupations come to resent having to do the customary work expected of daughters-in-law -- cooking and serving -- while the mothers-in-law do mostly religious activities. Hence, there are more overt tensions in the urban households than the rural households due to generational conflict among women over patriarchal traditions carried over the rural areas to urban areas.

**Chapter: 4****Rural women and men experience the revolution**

As I have mentioned above in chapter 3, women of the upper strata in Bastipur were active in the pro-democracy movement as mothers, sisters, sisters-in law, and wives of revolutionaries. Single women tend to be rare. In contrast women of the lower strata from communities of both the Nepali and Maithali of Bastipur did not even know the term, 'pro-democracy movement,' or even the change of system from the authoritarian to the democratic one. Since today we know about European feudalism only from historical works, it may be illuminating to learn about feudalism as it exists in the villages of contemporary Nepal.

Bastipur falls in the south-east Tarai region, a narrow tract of level, alluvial terrain comprising the Ganges plain, situated between the Indian frontier in the south and the Siwalik hills in the north. The Tarai is about 100 meters above sea level and is only about 45 kilometers in width (Regmi, 1978). It produces a surplus of 368,193 tons of rice over and above the needs of Tarai. It is the ricebasket (like breadbasket) of Nepal. Between 1830 and 1891, trade between India and Nepal increased tenfold; rice accounted for nearly 40% of Nepal's export to India (Seddon, David, 1993, p. 26). This suggests that the Tarai is not only very fertile, but an important wealth producing region. Because of its interaction with India, and its wealth, it is

an important political region.

Due to a lack of female activists, I interviewed both men and women in Bastipur. Men played important leadership roles both in the community and in the revolution; women played a subservient role both in the revolution and in the Nepali speaking community, which is the higher one in the political strata of the village. Nepali were able to acquire this position through their connection with the ruling elite of Nepal in the capital city of Kathmandu.

The ruling elite of Bastipur more or less belong to the same caste/class (Brahman/ Chetri) as in Kathmandu. There are different theories about how these high caste people were able to acquire power in Nepal in general. This process is also termed the "**Sanskritization**" of indigenous Nepali people.

Leonen Caplan writes, "The process of sanskritization has been much discussed in the anthropological literature in South Asia. Essentially, it is a means whereby a subordinate group in a society recognizes the superiority of another by emulating its cultural practices (1972)".

In his book, Caplan refers to the case of an ethnic group in the north-eastern region, Limbu, and writes that Limbu believed that Brahmans have some mythical power, because they were literate in Nepali, whereas Limbu were not. Nepali is the official language of Nepal in which all legal documents are written. In 1779 the present King's

ancestor conquered Kathmandu valley, defeating all princely states. This king was a Nepali and established Nepali as the official language of the kingdom. Newar kings were defeated by the King Prithbi Narayan Shah. As they were subordinated to the victorious Nepali King, their language also became subordinate. Because of the administrative power over all parts of Nepal, Bastipur, like other villages, were forced to conduct legal business in the Nepali language. This gave great power to those literate in the Nepali language, who used that power to manipulate the ethnic minorities and gain even more power -- in the form of landownership.

Maithali people are the ethnic minority of Bastipur, and they speak Maithali. As indicated above, Maithali-speaking community women from both upper and middle strata did not know the term, pro-democracy movement. However, a few men of the lower strata knew about the change, as was reflected in the 1992 local elections.

In the 1992 election of the Village Development Council of Bastipur, Nepal Communist Party/United Marxist Leninist won four seats out of 11. Of course, all were obtained by men. Bastipur's economy is totally dependent on agriculture so I was interested to find out why there are communists at all in Bastipur.

During the Panchayat/authoritarian system, from 1960 through 1990, I never heard of communists working under-

ground in Bastipur. However, both Nepali Congress (NC) and United Marxist Leninist (UML) leaders of Bastipur told me that they worked very closely during the 1990 pro-democratic movement. I found out that UML leaders mainly came from the middle and lower strata, whereas in NC, they came from the upper and middle strata, so it is clear that the UML leadership came from un-satisfied strata. But even among communist families, women did not know about politics. I went to interview men in the Maithali community and requested to interview women as well, but men told me that women-folk in their community do not know anything about politics.

**Pro-democracy movement and ruling elite in the village**

As I have mentioned above, the ruling elite of Bastipur played a very important role in the democratic movement. Our distant cousin, Subhas Giri, and Kumud Baral, as well as other educated men were the vanguard of the movement. Secret meetings were held in my family's visiting lounge when Maithali men from the North part of the village and from neighbouring villages came to participate in meetings.

Subhas was the main target of the police then; police came from nearby towns to look for Subhash several times to arrest him. They were unable to do so, however, because the Bastipur village community was strongly united and police feared to enter private houses. Police conducted their job waiting in the public areas. They later had to leave

Bastipur as they were not able to arrest political activists of Bastipur, eye-witnesses told me.

My uncle, Rudra Prasad Giri, who was the vanguard of the 1950 revolution and who had later joined the repressive panchayat system and held high-ranking cabinet positions in the system, was present in the village. He told the village that he came to live in the village temporarily to settle his property, but the people of Bastipur believed he was there to check or control political activism during the movement. He had left the village in early 1950s to live in the neighbouring town Janakpur and later in Kathmandu. Consequently he did not have much influence in the village and its neighbouring areas.

Bastipur is the strong seat of the Nepali Congress (NC) party which was formed in early 1940s, and was banned until 1990. My uncle, Rudra Prasad Giri, was one of the founding members of the NC. It was an irony to see that the man who gave vitality to the village in the 1940s and 50s was the alien in the village in 1990. Several people (men and women) fondly remember and feel committed to the NC because of Rudra Prasad; he is popularly known as "Girijee" in the family/friend and political circles. The history of Bastipur is strongly attached to the 1950 revolution which I will explain in the chapter on the 1950 revolution.

The 1990 revolution was led by the young generation. Pradeep, my brother, was the leader, in absentia, of the

1990 revolution of Bastipur. My cousin, Subhash, leader of the Bastipur movement, told me that although Pradeep was underground, somehow he was able to send a revolutionary letter that guided the young men of Bastipur. The letter informed them that the 1990 movement would be the decisive revolution; they should not lose heart or become disillusioned.

Subhash was the chair of the village council then and panchyat leader in Bastipur. Because Rudra Prasad Giri, no longer prime minister, was present in the vilage, Subhash would guide the local young men at night. My mother recalled that Subhash would conduct his revolutionary acts wrapping himself in a blanket from head to knee to hide from "Girijee," but the local police knew about Subhash's activism. So did my uncle; however, my uncle pretended not to know what was going on in the village as he was helpless.

But the police did come to Bastipur to arrest Subhash several times. The police came to look for other political activists as well who were hiding in different private houses.

**Mobilization:**

Subhash, my brother Prakash, and Mahendra Jha who was another political activist told me that they followed programs instructed by the central revolutionary command/MRD to mobilize the local people. It turned out that mainly students were mobilized including some middle class/caste

men who were mobilized by their political leaders of Bastipur.

I asked Subhash about the representation of the lowest class/caste in the movement. Subhash told me that they would follow if he asked them. I think Subhash missed my point that I was looking at the 1990 pro-democracy movement from the vantage point of the people at the bottom. Subhash is a revolutionary man when it comes to opposition to the district administration. He has challenged the administration on several occasions and has been imprisoned several times. He is still considered a tough man with the administration, but he, too, represents the local elite.

Local elites believe that politics is the domain of men; women are supposed to play a subservient role only. For these men, women are their **shame** and **prestige**. Nepali women enjoy freedom compared to Maithali women (see below) as they are not confined to their homes. However, Nepali men, too, expect their women to maintain a certain distance with men in their family and men in general.

Lynn Bennett (1983) has analysed in her book, Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High Caste Women in Nepal that high caste Nepali men see their wives as dangerous because of a woman's sexual vulnerability, and they see sisters as sacred because they are in their homes temporarily. Among high caste Nepali, young girls up through the time they get married (usually

age 16 or 17), are treated as goddesses by their family and the other members of the high caste.

In my family's house, I am treated as special and sacred to all my elders and to younger male relatives (but not to younger girls). My brothers and my older relatives (male and female) will bow down and touch my feet with their forehead during religious rituals. All religious rituals revolve around worshipping goddesses. Young girls of the upper caste, up to the age of puberty, are considered goddesses. If I visit my relatives' house, my younger cousin (or my younger brother) must bow down and touch my feet with their forehead.

By being treated in this sacred fashion, young girls are taught not to interact with men, regardless of caste, with the exception of their own family members. Girls are taught that it would be a great shame and stigma to the family as well as to the girl if they were to break this rule. In this way, girls grow up segregated from all men outside their family. This serves to ensure the purity (virginity) of the girls at marriage and during marriage.

But in both cases, as sacred sisters and as dangerous wives, women are safeguarded and given certain privileges along with great restrictions. Married women have authority over the large household; they supervise the farm; make decisions; organize family feasts, etc. However, they cannot interact with men with the exception of their

husbands' younger brothers, unless they visit or are visited by their own family. When women marry they must meet certain social expectations and henceforth are not free to make independent decisions about having life outside of the household. They cannot decide to continue their education or get involved in politics or have a career. The men in the family, particularly the eldest or master of the household, will make those decisions.

I recall that when I was helping B.P. Koirala during the armed revolution in 1974, and I had to visit Nepal to carry a political message from G.P. Koirala, I stopped by my village to see my parents, only to confront my furious father. My father was furious about my involvement in politics. He was outraged that I made such a decision on my own without consulting him. However, he himself being a politician supported my brother Pradeep's involvement in politics.

Dor Bahadur Bista in his book, Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle For Modernization, writes that the caste system among Nepali is much more flexible than in India. He further says that in the Kathmandu valley as well as in other parts of Nepal such as Bulu, Dang, Thabang and Baragaon, women enjoy greater freedom (1993). He refers mostly to the different ethnic groups of Tibeto/Burmese origin who are indigenous to Nepal. He claims that the women of these groups, who are usually not part of any caste

system, or else were converted to Hinduism, have more freedom than high caste women. There are about 36 different ethnic groups in Nepal (NPC, 1992).

Most of the women I interviewed in Bastipur did not participate in the pro-democracy movement with the exception of a few high-school female students. They were mobilized by their school-teacher, another political activist, Kumud Baral, a Nepali high caste elite man. However, Kumud was opposed for doing this by the head master, his distant cousin, Chandra Ranjan Baral.

These elite organized three demonstrations of between two to three hundred people, marching towards the village north-west of Bastipur, Bishnupur, and to the nearby town, Lahan, and in Bastipur itself. Subhash, Mahendra and other eye-witnesses told me that just a day before the announcement of democracy by the king, men and students of Bastipur, along with people of other neighbouring villages, were marching towards Lahan to participate in a demonstration. They intended to burn the Nepali constitution, but were not able to do that because of the arrests of students. Subhash and other political activists went underground again to continue the movement.

Subhash told me that his life would have been in danger had the chief district officer arrested him. There were about four students taken into police custody and two lower caste/class students were tortured in police custody.

But before and after these demonstrations, a lot of underground work had been done such as distributing pamphlets and writing on walls of public places such as on the wall of a nearby shrine and in the High School. Whenever the head master of the high school saw these revolutionary wall posters, he supervised the school worker to wipe out the writings immediately. The head master was able to wipe out these wall posters, but the local authorities could not wipe out wall posters on the public places such as in the shrine and other places.

These wall posters were handwritten in Subhash's house after midnight. Subhash's wife, Ranjana, who is a high-school teacher, was sympathetic to the men who did these works late at night, apart from being the obedient wife of the leader. She cooked meal for these men and provided shelter for them. Political activists were housed in different houses in order to save them. When I asked if she helped the movement out of her conscience or out of obedience to her husband, she replied that she was sympathetic to these men because they worked hard at chilly nights and went for days without proper meals for the sake of democracy. The pro-democracy movement of the 1990 happened during the winter.

The wife of Subhash, Ranjana, told me that she used to give hot rice and butter to the young boy, Bishnu, before he would leave before dawn to post posters in different

locations of the neighbourhood. He hid revolutionary posters in his under-shirt from his hideout in their house.

We can see here that even though women did not play an active role in organizing and did not go to participate in the demonstration, they did play a very important role in sustaining the movement, providing shelter and food to the political activists in Bastipur.

My mother was so emotionally attached to the movement because of the fact that her son (Pradeep) was one of the vanguard of the revolution and her husband remained the district president of Nepali Congress for his life. Other women of Bastipur and my mother told me that she proposed to the men that she was ready to lead a women's demonstration but was prohibited to do so by her community.

Bastipur falls in the Siraha district of Nepal which is located in the south-east region of Nepal. Siraha is considered a liberal district. It voted for the multi-party system in the referendum held in 1979 which was called by the king to vote for whether Nepali people wanted to continue the panchayat system with reforms or wanted a multi-party system. The panchayat won with four percent margin and remained in power until April of 1990.

Siraha became the second district to vote for the multi-party system after Kathmandu (36 thousands votes against 25 thousands). I was in the district for a brief time. I had the opportunity to join a few rallies along

with my father and brothers. My brother Pradeep and Subhash along with their friends were imprisoned then. My mother has spent most of her life in the opposition politics so it was obvious that she was very emotional during the 1990 revolution. She recalls very fondly the involvement of my uncle in the 1950 revolution and cherishes the memory. She is regretful about my uncle's participation in the panchayat system.

**The role of the Communist Party in the village movement**

Leaders of communist parties participated in meetings called by NC leaders, because the 1990 revolution was launched jointly from the high-command in Kathmandu. However, communist leaders did not have to go through what Subhash had to go through.

Communist leaders of Bastipur came from Maithali community. A well known communist leader of Bastipur is Dhanik Lal Yadav. Dhanik Lal comes from our generation; in his early 30s, he is Subhash's contemporary. In my father's generation, there was not a single communist leader in Bastipur. Communism is a movement of the younger generation in Bastipur. Dhanik Lal is a middle class/caste peasant from the north section of the village. He has a middle-school education but has read a little and heard about Marxism through his friend.

Dhanik Lal thinks that the Nepali Congress party only

serves the rich and is not a people's party. He said that Nepali Congress government has killed more people in three years than the Panchayat system did in 30 years. He was referring to the demonstrations that occurred opposing the Nepali Congress government. After the November 1994 election, Nepali Congress party was out of power and the United Marxist Lenin's Party was in power, but only for nine months.

As indicated above my research uncovered that although there was some revolutionary activity in Bastipur, it was limited. Moreover, even when it occurred, it was primarily men who were involved. When women were involved, it was primarily the upper caste of Nepali women. While the men of the lower caste knew about the revolution, they were not actively involved. The lower caste of Maithali women did not even know about the movement or about democracy.

In terms of women's interaction within and between both communities, there are some ethnic differences. Women of Maithali communities did not interact with Nepali women until recently. My mother said to me that she had never visited Maithali houses and does not know women of higher strata in that community.

Maithali communities, which comprise recent migrants from the neighbouring Indian border state, Bihar, practice purdah system among women, and Maithali men expect the same from Nepali women. Nepali women more or less keep distant

from Maithali men, but are more open than Maithali women to social activities. The local high-school has four primary female teachers and they are all Nepali.

On the other side, Maithali women are well known in South Asia for their art and crafts. Maithali art, which is women's art, is internationally famous. The art, including textiles and paintings, also postcards, is mostly marketed in India. A Nepali person of either Maithali or Nepali origin from a neighboring town comes to the village and purchases these arts and crafts. The Maithali women make these crafts for family use and give them as gifts, particularly to daughters for their wedding, but to others as well.

Maithali women live in the "Purdah" system. The Maithali culture pre-dated the arrival of Nepali elite in Bastipur. It was understood until recently that Maithali people of Bastipur were of Indian origin and had migrated to Bastipur but recent research shows that the Maithali region actually encompassed the northern region of India and the southern region of Nepal until the 6/7th century A.D.

#### **Modernizing process of Bastipur**

Despite the feudal traditionalism, including the patriarchal confinement of women, Bastipur is rapidly being affected by the modernising process. It will have electricity in coming months; the local high-school was given its first sub-meter on the day of the celebration of

the "Saraswati Pooja"- worshipping of the learning Goddess on the last week of February-1994. The nearest town, Lahan Bazar, which is 10 km away from Bastipur, is rapidly growing, there are about 19,000 people in Lahan, compared to 14,000 in 1982 ( NPC, 1992).

As the developed town, Lahan has two hospitals, one undergraduate college, several rice and oil mills, two banks, and other modern developments. Lahan is linked to important Nepali towns including the capital city Kathmandu by the east-west highways and is connected by motorable road to India. A new road to Bastipur from Lahan is under construction.

The new emerging trading class is evolving as the distinct class, the intermediate between the peasants and the nobles of Bastipur. Up until now, the villagers had only mud-roads. This means in the rainy season no cars can use the road. The ox-cart is the main means of transportation in Bastipur. There are three rikshawa-ballahs (owners/drivers) in the village. The rikshaw is a three wheel bicycle with a large sofa-like seat divided into a back seat, covered by a hood, that holds two passengers and a front seat for the driver. The rikshaw ballah, always a man, makes an average of Rs.50 (50 rupees which is equivalent to one dollar); a village labourer makes only Rs. 25 (fifty cents) a day.

The ox-cart is used as the means of transportation by

most of Bastipur's villagers. Even though there are few rikshaw-ballas in the village, people in the village can hire one, if needed, in advance, as the rikshaw men go to Lahan to earn their living by rikshaw pulling. So for the people of Bastipur, the road to Lahan and electricity are very important.

#### Chamars of Bastipur

The life of an average laborer and low caste man or woman has not been changed in Bastipur, despite the so-called modernization and the advent of democracy. Like all the lower castes, the untouchables maintain their own community. I observed two cases of their community system of justice, particularly as it relates to gender, family, and patriarchy, in ghetto areas of the chamars. The chamar belongs to the shudra, the lowest in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Chamars live in the southeast section of the village which is called Chamar-tole (neighbourhood).

Traditionally, the Brahmins and Chetris (Kshatriyas in India) engaged in certain, prescribed exclusive activities which implemented their styles of life as status groups. For the Brahmin the sacrifice, study of Vedas (Ancient Hindu sacred texts) and asceticism were assigned, whereas for the Kshatriyas political rule was assigned. The occupation of Vaisyas is tillage and trade, and inferior of all were shudras (Weber, 1967).

The chamar-tole is best likened to a slum area. It lacks

all the facilities that the ruling elite enjoy. There are no toilets. Although electricity is passing through their community, none of their houses have electricity. When I asked, "Wouldn't you like to have electricity?" they explained that to get electricity one must own land to use as collateral.

Most of the chamars are labor class and land tillers who work for the landowners and peasants. Originally they came from the shoe-making profession, dealing with dead animals and their skins. That is a low caste occupation. There are still a few shoe-makers in the community.

Now I come back to the legal cases that I have mentioned above. In February, 1994, a father of a married girl sold his daughter again to another man for a price of two bottles of local liquor, which costs Rs. 20, and for a chicken. That is what I was told. The real husband of the girl came and complained to the father. The husband made a public complaint to the community committee and demanded a public meeting. Subsequently the meeting was held. The law of the community asks for all members of the community (chamar) to be present. ("All members" mean men only.) If an individual of the community does not attend the meeting, he is expelled from his caste and is not invited by his caste to any social occasions. Women are excluded from such meetings. Men are very afraid of losing their caste-status.

Disputes are still negotiated and settled in the

community itself. At this meeting, the sold girl was retained by this community. The case and meeting were public but the Village Development Council did not interfere in this matter, considering it completely a particular chamar caste issue. I was still new to the village and did not want to interfere in the village politics.

I observed another issue, also involving a woman of the same community. Ms. Thakani Ram, who was born in the village but married off to another village, came to live in this community a few years ago with her brother and her mother because her husband brought in another woman and kicked her out of his house. Ram is the family name of the chamar caste.

Thakani has a baby boy from this marriage. She is supporting herself and her son doing daily wage labor; she earns 50 cents a day. She needed desperately a place to stay. Being from the untouchable caste, she cannot stay somewhere else apart from her ghetto. Neither can she buy land in another place. Nobody in the Nepali community or in the higher caste Maithali community would sell land to a member of this caste. At times I am dismayed and wonder what this new democracy means for the poor and the lowest caste people -- the untouchables (chamars).

A chamar couple is employed in the "Ashram" (social and political meeting place), founded by my politician brother who considers himself a democratic socialist. My brother

has admitted he faces very strong resistance from neighbouring villages. I also encountered this sentiment expressed by a middle-aged gentlemen while I was visiting the "Asram" in the winter.

But in Lahan things are a little bit different, because it is a town with people from neighboring villages and towns. People are strangers to each other so these caste conscious men and women would not know whether a particular tea shop has hired a low caste or upper caste employee. In this way urbanisation is influencing rural Nepal. But if an upper-caste man or woman finds out about the caste status of the tea-server boy, he or she will reject the tea offered by him. Thus, it is not urbanisation or cosmopolitanism but ignorance that makes people not identify a particular person's caste. The town becomes the meeting place of traders, marginal labor, crafts men and women.

Max Weber, in his classical work on religion, attributed the eventual rise of capitalism in the West, as opposed to its failure to develop in the East, to the breakdown of caste taboos in the cities, which the congregational religion of Christianity both reflected and furthered. This development was lacking in the East, and was a key reason for its failure to develop capitalism, according to Weber (Weber, 1967). However, we see here that when the city is compared of many "strangers," caste taboos are broken due to ignorance of caste origin.

### Women, Community, Freedom

Differences between town and rural villages can be seen in the case described above. Although the rural village may be conceptualized in terms of class struggle (oppressor and oppressed) in Marxian terms or patriarchy in feminist terms, villages of Nepal are highly community supportive. For instance, if Thakani was not accommodated by her brother and parents, on a temporary basis, some of her relatives or people she knows in the community would accommodate her. This is not the case in the towns where people without means often end up homeless.

In another case, a woman named Bimala, who is of Brahmin caste (the highest caste) within that same Maithali community, was offered rooms from several families of the Nepali community. Bimala is the teacher of a primary school that serves the Maithali community. Bimala has been staying with her parents since her husband left her with her son a few years back. He disappeared; nobody knows where he is.

Bimala did not get along with her parents. She had been asked to leave her parents house a few months before. Being a high caste woman (Bimala is high-school educated and a school teacher), people are more respectful of her than of Thakani who comes from the lowest untouchable caste. People also know that Bimala can pay a reasonable rent for housing whereas Thakani has the problem of day to day survival.

I approached my mother and brother to sell Thakani a

sizable plot of land so that she could build a mud house for herself, but to my grief, both of them did not want to sell a piece of land to her thinking that she would not be able to pay the land price soon. I offered the Center for Thakani's accomodation but both my community and Thakani's community thought that this was an impossible resolution because of the caste factor. I am a high-caste woman and live in a high-caste Nepali neighbourhood. I have to abide by some social norms in order to stay in the village.

Finally Thakani was temporarily given a small spot (big enough for a one room hut) near her sister by our rich neighbour. Thakani immediately built with the help of her husband, who came back, a "mud house" on the land. Building the house entailed gathering straw from the open, public fields; wood from the nearby forest (also open and public); and bamboo, which she had to buy.

The mud house walls are made of cow and water buffalo dung and rice husks. The people believe that this makes for good insulation, warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Thakani's sister Jitani works for another Giri family who are our distant relatives. Thakani must live near her relatives for societal reasons.

#### My involvement in local politics

I was keeping a low profile in local politics until Thakani's case because my eldest brother Prakash is the chair of Thakani's ward and also past village-chair so he

has influence in the village politics. My stance in local politics started when Thakani was beaten by her husband, because she came along with me to file for her Nepali citizenship at the district headquarters, Siraha. Since Thakani and her husband, Jugal Ram, already had a troubled marriage, he feared that I took her to Siraha to file divorce suit.

Thakani did not get the citizenship for the fact that she is homeless, but while she was away in Siraha, her husband Jugal took her son to a nearby village. Thakani was desperate for her child since she raised him on her own from the time her husband had beaten her and kicked her out of the house; the child had been three months old at that time and was now three years old. Her husband believed that if he took the child, she would come back to him.

Thakani's community thought that as a married woman, she must go to live with her husband and accept the beatings. The community was supporting the man. When I arrived on the scene, some women were resisting the "community's" thinking. When Maithali people talk about "the community decision" it is the men that is usually meant.

As an educated, high caste woman, what I say is very important. In the eyes of my community, I am "only a woman." But when I go to the low caste community, my status gives me power and influence. Men listen to me. Being

highly educated makes for great status and influence.

Because Thakani is a member of the Women's Development Center, I went to her community. Her husband listened to me and stopped beating her. I told him that he had to stop beating her, or I would go to the local police and report him. An influential man and relative of Thakani, who was participating in the gathering of people who had come to see what was happening when Thakani was being beaten by her husband, made an interesting comment. When Thakani's husband heard what I told her husband, this man explained to the husband, "See, I told you. There is democracy now. They say men and women are equal in democracy. You shouldn't beat your wife." And then more quietly, he added, "You should treat women and animals properly." This may be what "democracy" means to rural Nepali men.

In the poor and ghetto communities, women, too, believe that their lives are no better than those of animals; the workload in the poor rural communities falls very heavily on poor women who compare themselves to beasts of burden and animals that reproduce.

Bastipur politics has been dominated by high-caste/wealthy men and more so Nepali men (not Mathaili). Untill recently, the position of head of the village was held by Giri men. My late uncle, my brothers, and my cousin headed the village council. After democracy was introduced, 1990, a non Giri man, the late Ek Raj Singh, was elected

chair of the village council, but he died within a year and this position is still vacant.

I should mention that Singh, who had been manager of the Giri property, was not only popular among the general village community but was hand picked by the Giri family. My brother, the former head of the Village Development Council (VDC) who is head of Ward 6 of Bastipur VDC, has strong influence on the decision-making of Bastipur VDC. All the important village issues that come before the VDC are brought to the houses of the Giri family, carrying on the tradition that had long predated the introduction of democracy. Although 6 out of 10 of the VDC men are Maithalli, issues are still brought to the family compound (the visiting lounge) of the ruling leader who is not Maithali but Nepali.

The feudal system of Bastipur also functions as the quasi-judiciary. According to D.D. Kosambi (1967) apart from some characteristics of feudalism such as a primitive level of development, production for the immediate needs of household or village community and not for wider-market, and political decentralization, a key defining feature of feudalism is that the land owning family also possesses judicial or quasi-judicial functions in relation to the dependent population. (pp. 148-149).

Like other ruling elite all over the country, Nepali elite of Bastipur and particularly so, Giris of Bastipur,

were able to acquire vast land (about 1600 acres) through late Kuldeep Giri's (my great grand father) connection with Ranas.

Before 1964, any person could possess an unlimited allotment of virgin lands anywhere in the kingdom of Nepal (Regmi, 1978). In 1964 land act was introduced in Nepal (Pokharel, 1991). According to the Nepali land act, an individual is entitled to more than 25 bighas (40 acres) which still is the highest land ceiling in Asia (Ghimire, 1992).

I asked my brother why decisions are being made at our place instead of the village deputy chair, who is a Maithali man. My brother told me that Maithali men believed that because Nepali men have access to the ruling elite in the Capital, they do better in local politics as well. Before I began the field research, I thought that Bastipur played a very important role in national politics from 1950 to the present. It produced revolutionaries of the 1950 revolution, including the leader (who was my uncle). Bastipur also produced revolutionaries and leaders in the 1990 pro-democratic movement as well, who are still prominent and active in national and local politics. I felt that we, ruling elite of Bastipur, were the sufferers of repressive regimes. I held this feeling with lots of emotion until I experienced and felt the sentiment of the destitute and deprived. As one of the male interviewees,

Lakhana Ram, told me, nothing has changed in Bastipur, and the same family (he meant my family) has had a monopoly over the local politics for about 40 years.

He could express this feeling to me after my continuous effort to convince the poor people of Bastipur that I would have no reservations if they felt that they are discriminated by my family. Lakhan Ram is considered "the communist" of the village. To be called a communist is to be considered a subversive that nobody in the community would support. When I asked about it, he demurred. He admitted that he has some communist friends in the neighbouring village.

Since the Chamar Tole (the neighborhood of the untouchables) is an NC (Nepali Congress Party) dominated neighbourhood, I sensed that Lakhan does not express his views openly. However, he raised some issues that are ignored by the ruling elite of his neighbourhood. He said even if there are welfare programs such as a drinking water project, malaria eradication, or family planning, the Chamar tole is totally ignored. The standard of living has not raised for Chamars for decades. The ruling elite, however, receives whatever facilities become available to the village.

This tension is a reflection of the modernization process of Bastipur. As in the study of two Indonesian towns studied by Clifford Geertz (1963), parochial social

forces still contribute to the formulation of over all development policies and programs. But in the case of Bastipur, in one hand the parochial force is contributing towards the modernizing process of Bastipur for their needs, on the other hand for the poor the parochial forces still remain the same.

I returned to the village Bastipur in October, 1993 for two reasons. I wanted to help the women's development center (WDC), which I had helped establish in February 1993 upon the request of the local women. They thought that a woman of high education from their village could bring changes in their community.

Women were very enthusiastic particularly because we have democracy now in the country and consequently they felt freer now than in the **Panchyati regime**. I wanted to go the village to conduct my field work towards my Ph.D dissertation as well.

I had returned to Bastipur after 20 years to stay for a longer period than a week or so as in the past. Before, I visited my family just on my vacations whether it was from Kathmandu or New York. I had worked as a journalist in Kathmandu for seven years, and I never thought that I would ever settle in my village Bastipur. But after living in New York for about nine years, I began to think that I could do a lot to help the small community. I began to compare things between the city and the village, between urban life

and rural life.

Since I was raised in a third world rural milieu, I felt comfortable working in the rural village. I decided to work in the village and I selected my native village Bastipur. Little did I know that I was to face numerous problems such as conflicts in the family and social denial of me as a person. I would like to elaborate these issues separately, as they reveal the nature of gender, family, generation, and caste in the life of a feudal village. This thumbnail sketch will be from the perspective of a woman who has lived and studied in modern India and the United States -- New York City.

#### Family conflicts

The "single woman phenomenon" is very rare in Nepal, so when I returned to Bastipur, there were lots of questions raised about my coming to Bastipur: where am I going to live permanently? Will I be claiming parental property? My mother even asked me why do I want to settle in Bastipur rather than in Kathmandu? I found out later that she could not understand that an educated woman who lived in Kathmandu and in the west, would choose Bastipur and she was also worried about the forthcoming tensions between my brothers and me regarding the property claim.

In Nepali law, an unmarried woman over 35, can claim parental property. But my family thought that either I would settle in New York or Kathmandu and would not bother

them about village family property. So in the beginning, things were very uncomfortable until I got a small portion of the land from my mother and that is also not without my brothers' opposition. Three out of my five brothers objected to giving me land even though I have a rightful claim to the parental property.

Finally my politician brother convinced my mother to give me the land. Despite the law that an unmarried woman over 35 can claim parental property, my mother was very reluctant to give away land to me because of her sons' opposition to it. For my mother, sons are very important. Because women do not inherit property, it is expected that parents will live with their sons who will care for them in their old age. In traditional Nepali society, daughters are given in marriages at very early ages and most marriages are arranged. My mother was married at the age of 12.

The child-marriage was not illegal then and she had been dependent on her husband ever since. She cannot accept the fact that her daughter can lead her life independently and will share the family property. It was very painful for me in the beginning as my intention was not greed for the family property. I wanted to settle in Bastipur to help the community. I needed a reasonably spacious place and a plot of the land where I could develop a women's multipurpose center which involved: community farming, shelter, learning and meeting center. Over the 10 months of this period my

family and society were only just beginning to understand my intentions and causes.

Social denial of me as person

In the process of building the WDC, I had an opportunity to meet both men and women from low class/untouchable caste (in most cases) on a daily basis. I was treated as the daughter/sister of the ruling family of the village so particularly men were not open to me in the beginning. Relations between the family and the lower caste/class, including management of the farm and daily wages, were always mediated by my family's farm manager. In this way social distance between the castes/classes was ingrained and maintained.

Usually men hesitate to enter other people's private homes, even within the same caste. This practice is specific to Maithalis. Most of the labourers are Maithalis. So dealings with male members take place in the visiting or lounge area of the home which is outside. Among the landowning families, the household area is divided by a wall. The visiting or lounge area is outside the wall. Inside the wall is a courtyard and the houses. (Usually four houses comprise the compound.) The women are confined to the courtyard even among Nepali family.

It was difficult and for the most part impossible, without a long period of great effort, to be treated by members of the lower castes as an individual with my own

thoughts, ideas, feelings, attitudes and beliefs. I remained, and remain, a woman of the upper caste with respect to all things. It is my caste and family that determines my identity. The attitudes and beliefs that are universally assumed to be held by my caste are ascribed to me. The interests associated with the position my family holds in the village are universally assumed to be my interests. It is very difficult, therefore, to gain acceptance as an individual among the lower castes, although it is not difficult (but socially mandatory) to gain respect or the display of respect -- deference. Just as it is difficult and often impossible for my family to understand that I might think differently from them, it is even more difficult for people outside of my family, and especially outside of my caste, to understand that I might think differently than is expected of a person of my caste. Given the nature and history of social relations in a feudal village, it would be extraordinary if that were not the case, despite my attempts to demonstrate otherwise. However, I have been able to gain the trust of women of the lower castes, the reasons for which will become somewhat apparent below.

## Chapter 5

### Building Women's Cooperative in Bastipur

After the U.N.'s declaration of the Women's Decade 1975-1985, various programmes were set by the government of Nepal for the uplift of women such as: a. equal access to education for women b. production credit for rural women c. legal services for women including various income generating programmes among others. These programmes were basically run by government and semi-government agencies.

It is noteworthy that during the **Panchayat** Regime (the regime governed by the absolute monarch) there were only a few women's organizations, but after the 1990 pro-democracy movement, there was a significant increase in Women's NGOS. There are about 94 women's related Non Governmental Organizations in Kathmandu alone. This was a major consequence of the introduction of democracy. Unlike India, women's movement is a very recent phenomenon in Nepal. However, women of Nepal have worked hard to influence the state to change laws in favor of women within a few years span. I will be writing about the formation of the women's co-operative in the grass-root level in this article.

I will be discussing why women needed a cooperative from their own initiative rather than depending on national women's organizations based in the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu. The cooperative, which will be discussed below, is a multi-issue oriented organization, and income-

generation is one of its major projects.

After the pro-democracy movement, women of Bastipur were encouraged to speak out. Unlike their mothers-in-law with whom they live, some daughters-in-law of Bastipur have high school degrees. The literacy rate is 25% for women compared to 5 % in 1972 (Nepal Planning Commission, 1992). These younger women no longer want to confine themselves to household chores only. Because a few women of the community have been battered by their husbands and the society tolerates the abuse of wives (domestic violence), women in this village felt powerless in this situation.

During my visit to Bastipur in 1991, these women expressed a strong desire to form a women's group so that they could engage in extra domestic chores and organize themselves. They turned to me because they thought I could help them since I was an educated and outspoken person. Because I was on a short visit then, I gave them a few names of contact persons in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. However, it seemed that women of Bastipur, were not able to make connections in Kathmandu.

When I visited Bastipur in the winter of 1993, the idea emerged of forming the Center For the Rural Women's Integrated Development (CERWID) in Bastipur, Nepal. The idea came when women of Bastipur met that winter again.

Women thought that depending on the national level of

organizations brings uncertainty to the local level of organization. Because organization at the top has too many branches, the local organization like one in Bastipur does not get proper attention and funding.

As I have mentioned above some educated women (high-school degree) of the village thought that they could help other women to read and write and fight against the domestic violence and gradually get involved with skill development projects and empower themselves along with other women of the community in due time.

There were about 50 women present at the few meetings called by local women at my presence before they decided to form the Women Development Center. Women were very enthusiastic to come to meetings because Bastipur did not have any Women's organizations so far before forming the Women's Center in 1993.

**THE CENTER FOR THE RURAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT (CERWID)** was established on February 7, 1993 in Bastipur. I returned to Bastipur in the fall of 1994 and got involved with the over all development of the CERWID.

The **CERWID** is a district based NGO committed to improving the situation of poor and deprived women regardless of **caste**. Caste is deeply rooted in Nepali society and particularly so in rural areas of Nepal. Women of the untouchable **caste** are the worst victim of this system generally. Untouchables are the labor class so they cannot

afford to go to the school run by the government during the day time, as they are engaged in wage labor.

The CERWID is encouraging women from this caste to join projects run by it. Most projects are run in evenings.

The CERWID has decided to continue Adult Functional Literacy class for **adult** women and has added literacy class for **girl children** as well on the demand of local people, thus literacy classes are run in two groups: A (**adult**) and B (**girl children**), taught by two teachers with minimal stipend.

There are 20 students in each group, representing four neighbouring villages from the different status groups. Even though the main goal of the CERWID is to re-inforce basic Human Rights Education that the **caste** system is against Human Rights. However, it is a very difficult task to convince Nepali people in general about this matter.

Untouchable members of the center confront the society and their families. Higher **caste/class** women see untouchables women from a distance as they (higher) do not want interact with the lower caste women socially. So the goal of the CERWID faces a critical moment.

It is difficult to convince adult women about this issue, but we are trying to educate girl members of the Center. In a year's span, about 10 **adult** and 20 **female children** have become literate and about 24 enrolled students are engaged in the community kitchen-gardening which is

conducted in the CERWID office space on a demonstration basis.

The idea to engage women in the community kitchen-garden was to create commitment towards members of the CERWID and develop the sense of community feeling. During the early monsoon period (June/July, 1994), the women including girls, were able to cultivate the space, I had provided for the CERWID kitchen-garden and later produce and sell vegetables to the community. The money from vegetable sale was used for the class supplies.

During this process both girls and adults were in fact gradually developing commitment towards each other. One member of the CERWID, Ms. Thakani Ram (from untouchable caste), is going through troubled marriage. Things got more deteriorated ever since. Thakani began to attend the literacy class run by the CERWID and became active member. She is the community leader from her neighbourhood to the CERWID.

Out of insecurity, her husband began to beat her. The incidents became more frequent and worsened. One morning, a few girls from Thakani's community came to the center and reported this event. I remember the day when most of the member of the CERWID came out of their houses regardless of the **caste/class** and joined these girls to visit Thakani's neighbourhood to confront her husband. I think this was the first women's demonstration in Bastipur that people of the

community had witnessed ever. And I believe that this was possible due to women's engagement in activities run by the CERWID of Bastipur, however, men of the community protested all the women coming to their community.

Some influential men of the community thought that any issues of the community should be tackled by the community's council not by any other external interferences and particularly women's interference. Thakani's husband left a few days after this incident and has not returned to the village since.

Another widow of Chamar community expressed and wish that such action would happen again because a single woman's plight is like an animal in her community. Chamars who are untouchables in caste hierchy are labor-class and land tillers who work for land owners and peasants.

With Thakani's case not only the Chamar community is being threatened by the CERWID but also the over all structure of the village. Because usually any conflicts of the particular community first must be resolved in their community council. If not resolved then it should be taken to the village development council which is the governing body of the village. In this village council there is no women's representative. So, of course, decision made for women are not in favor of women.

The move made by the CERWID is threatening to the village structure because the decision to protest against

Thakani's husband was made among women collectively and Thakani's husband leaving the village empowered women in a way because they had a "say" in the community this time.

I believe that if the CERWID of Bastipur was to be supervised by the national women's organization, the bond that they have created now would not have been the same. The funding and instructions that would have come from the center would not have such impact as they have now with the CERWID's policy to engage women in community projects ranging from literacy to the income-generating programs.

Another aspect of this bond is that the projects have local meaning in terms of the economy and the environment of the place. Urban-oriented programs and rural-oriented ones are quite different in their characteristics, such as: in the city housing, transportation, sanitation, employment, child-care etc. are important, whereas in a rural village harvesting, planting and lack of modern facilities: such as hospital, college, school are important.

So programs made for the city women will not be suitable for the village women. We can analyse here the **theory of Women in Development and the theory of the location.** Kate Young in her book "PLANNING DEVELOPMENT WITH WOMEN: MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE," recognizing the need of women's collective, writes that because the family does not necessarily constitute a joint economic enterprise, attention should be given to their more equitable

integration into the community beyond the narrow circle of the family.

The theory of the location puts emphasis on issues which have local meanings. Third world feminists scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gita Sen, Uma Narayan, Trin-Min-Ha have made the critique of the western feminism saying that the feminism varies in terms of the location. As Trin-Min-Ha puts it, "Knowledge belongs to the one who succeeds in mastering a language...". I interpret this theory of location (much like that of standpoint theory) here in terms of the contrast between the perspective and needs of the village and those of the city in Nepal and will try to argue that indigeneous programs in rural areas, that is, programs specific to the different indigenous groups, are feasible and important.

I believe that women of Bastipur and of Kathmandu would not only have cultural difficulties with understanding each other evolved from the difference between the city milieu and that of the village, but will have language difficulties as well. Bastipur is a bi-lingual village, and the women of Kathmandu do not know the Maithali language which is spoken by the other half of the population of Bastipur.

In Bangladesh, Mohammed Yunus has developed a theory for how to achieve development in rural areas as well as urban areas of third world countries. He has created the **Gramin Bank** which is unique in terms of promoting the

development of the third world society through collective banking. In this model, small scale credits lines are given to the poor people after they form the group; a leader of the group is responsible for the repayment of the loan. From my experience of the Village Development Council of Bastipur, it was the head of the family who would personally benefit from such credit line, and usually, the head of the family is a man. As in other third world countries, in Bastipur, when men receive money many of them spend it on alcohol and tobacco rather than on food for their families. It has been found in other third world countries, that they are much less responsible with money than are women. The concept of **gender sensitization**, used in the U.N. with respect to developing policies for third world development explains why the model of Bastipur's women's cooperative is important for women's development on the micro-level.

Departing from theories mentioned above (women in development and the theory of the location), the theory I have applied in the Bastipur Women's Cooperative is different because it stresses the importance of developing **personal bonds** between women who work together in communal activities as members of a cooperative organized for learning and generating income.

This Women's Cooperative has significance beyond the level of gender. In developing countries around the world, rural people are migrating in great numbers to the cities.

This is causing great problems of overcrowding, disease, poverty, crime, unemployment, and more. There is a growing awareness that something must be done. To prevent the emergence of urban problems of such great dimension, I propose that Nepal develop in the rural areas, which currently contain 90% of the population, integrated development programs, which includes agriculture, literacy, health care, and income generating programs. The Women's Center in Bastipur is proving to be a model that could be developed elsewhere.

If democracy is going to be successful in Nepal, issues of development will have to be addressed. But planning for development must include addressing the needs of rural villages, of people from lower castes and non-Nepali groups, and especially women of all groups.

## **Chapter Six**

### Conclusion:

The revolution in Nepal was launched in February of 1990 for the restoration of democracy. Democracy is very vibrant in Kathmandu city. After the restoration of democracy in the spring of 1990, various social and political organizations (Non Governmental Organizations) have been formed. We are going to have the third general election (for discussion of the other elections, see in the second chapter) in four years because of the new constitution. Before 1990, under the Panchayati System introduced by the king, all civil liberties were under the control of the king. There are 94 women's organizations in Kathmandu in 1995, compared to 7 in 1989.

But as I have been discussing in previous chapters, vast part of Nepal (90 percent) which is rural, is still far from the reality of modern democratic political life. In villages of Nepal, age-old traditions such as caste system, feudalism, illiteracy, poverty and woman's low social status are deeply rooted in the society. People in a Nepali village, Bastipur, such as Ghogana, Laximinia, Matiarba Bali, Thakani, Jitna (all from untouchable caste) are still under the strong influence of the ruling elite.

Poor people in the village are being patronized in terms of exercising their right to vote. This means that the landowning family, who employs most of the people of the lowest class/caste, influences the voting behavior of these

people who are both illiterate and dependent on the landowners for their livelihood. In contrast, in the city of Kathmandu, voters are influenced by political parties' manifestos such as: National Democratic Party (conservative/pro-king), Nepali Congress (centrist) and leftist United Marxist Leninist.

Politicians, who rule the country in the name of all the people, especially the people in the rural villages who make up 90% of the population, are not sufficiently communicating with the local people. They are relying on their ties with the local elites in the villages to ensure that the lower castes/classes will vote for them. In other words, they are relying on traditional relations of authority, grounded in economic dependence, a distinctly undemocratic system, to get themselves elected in the name of democracy. In order to truly represent the vast majority of the people, and the interests of the country as a whole, these elites must address the needs of rural and poor people as they address the issue of modernization and development.

In 1991 elections 3 out of 4 seats were taken by the United Marxist Leninist in Kathmandu city whereas in 1994 mid-term election all 4 seats were taken by the UML. Kathmandu has a growing urban population. Even though it is a modern city, it has its own problems: poverty, housing, lack of proper sanitation and transportation, constant price-rise etc. which influence lower and middle class. Communist propoganda

seem to influence these people more than charisma or history.

The king has the charisma, and the Nepali Congress party has the history of struggling for democracy. The Nepali Congress Party was crucial in the 1950 revolution and led the 1990 revolution but in 90's (after the 1990 revolution), it is losing its ground. As I have mentioned earlier, Nepal is moving rapidly towards the modernization and has its needs and expectations; consequently, the left slogans seem to have their hold among the young generation crossing the gender barrier.

In Bastipur, as I have mentioned earlier, the practice of democracy is related to the economy. Since it is feudal, voters are afraid of land-owning families. As explained earlier, if the voter goes against a land-owner, he or she might lose his employment as the land-tiller. When I asked a third generation land-tiller of my family (Giri), Ghogana, if he knows about the democracy, he replied to me, "Yes I know and I am not afraid, I voted for Baboo" (he meant he was not afraid, as in the past when there was great fear of the police, and he voted for my elder brother Prakash).

He vaguely knows that there is a democracy now in the village. But he somehow connects the democracy to the Nepali Congress. As I have explained earlier, Bastipur has been under the influence of the Nepali Congress since its history from 1950 to the present. For many, democracy means rule by the Nepali Congress instead of rule by the king.

My father and brother Pradeep have been influential

opposition/Nepali Congress leaders. After the 1990 revolution, general mass of Bastipur have witnessed that Pradeep is able to make decisions in the village whereas before 1990 he was working underground. For Ghogana this is a change because he thinks that to vote for a Nepali Congress candidate means to exercise his political right, which happened after the democracy whereas for Jitana and Jogia, democracy was understood in a different way. However, the actual leader in the village is a different brother. Whereas Pradeep is concerned to develop the nation with socialist ideals, ruling elite of Bastipur who rule the village and is able to win the election, has no vision for uplifting the lives of the poor people in the village nor for the society as a whole. But even in Kathmandu, the national elites of the ruling party have similarly communicated no vision for improving the lives of rural people, the poor, or women. Although people like Pradeep do have a vision for improving the country and the lives of the poor, they seem to be in the minority. The communist party, by default, therefore, appeals to the poor.

Jitana is considered a subversive in his community (Chamar) because he is out-spoken and has a communist friend in a neighbouring village. However he denied the allegation in an interview that he voted for the communist party in the local election held in 1991. But he told me that he is not satisfied with the local politics because he believes that it

second chapter).

In Kathmandu, men and women seemed to escape from the feudal system (they now go to the city for paid employment) but have not escaped from the poverty. In Kathmandu, I found out that it is not the caste system but the poverty that has the greatest influence in the daily life of an average person compared to Bastipur.

In Kathmandu, Goma Parajuli (higher caste) and Bina Lama (lower caste) belong to the lower class. Goma's husband is a plumber, and Bina's husband works for the carpet factory. Not only do they not have adequate housings, their husbands earn so little that they cannot support their family. In the village, two people such as these from different castes would have had very different life conditions. However, in the city, their life conditions, based on class more than caste, are similar.

An average worker makes Rs. 75 perday in Kathmandu, we see here an increase of Rs. 50 compared to 25 in Bastipur but housing and food are expensive in Kathmandu. Goma Parajuli and Bina Lama helped communist party in the 1990 revolution, thinking that it will bring changes in poor people's life. This is a change because women from this same status in Bastipur did not even know the term, democracy.

I believe that whereas ideology, both liberal or socialist democratic and communist, has influenced average people's conscience towards bettering their lives, the reality

still remains bitter. After the mid-term election in November, 1994, the United Marxist Leninist (UML) party formed the government that same month, but it is men from the higher caste who hold important positions of prime-minister, foreign minister and defense minister among others. Out of 205 members of Parliament, there are 3 women elected from the United Marxist Leninist party to the Parliament out of only 7 women in total (the other four are from the Nepali Congress). When the UML formed a cabinet, they did not include any women.

Important issues facing Nepal, apart from party politics, include the problems of trying to come out from the age-old traditions, poor economy, illiteracy, feudo-aristocracy etc. These are burning issues of Nepal. People have been expecting a lot from the democracy, but the way things are going in terms of politics, the outlook is not good.

Instead of focusing on the needs of the country, politicians are now focusing on winning elections and competing with each other. In the U.S. system such competition is considered healthy for democracy. In the parliamentary system of Nepal based on a constitutional monarchy the power struggle between the parties threatens democracy as it is within the right of the King to dissolve parliament if no party wins a majority, especially if they cannot put party rivalries aside and develop a common political agenda.

The elites are beginning to worry about democracy in Kathmandu because the vast majority is still illiterate, and it is expected that they would not react if democracy is once again taken away. One block fears China and communism. Another block is afraid of Indian expansionism because of the annexation of Sikkim, a neighboring kingdom, in 1973. Because one political party is perceived as pro-China and the other as pro-India, the King is seen by many as the only figure independent of ties to either major power and, therefore, as representing only the interests of Nepal. The fear is that this gives power to the King who might use that power to once again suppress civil liberties and a democratic form of government. If neither party is able to get a sufficient majority support and both are unwilling to cooperate with each other, the King could dissolve Parliament and take over. (This power is given to him by the Constitution that states that in the case of internal crisis, the King can dissolve Parliament.)

We have seen how the interests of class, status, and party were involved in the revolution. Status includes caste, ethnic group, gender, and age or generation. However, this study has shown that we must include international power relations (especially with China and India) -- geopolitics -- and political economy in our understanding of this interplay.

We have seen that the revolution was gendered. It was part masculine and part feminine, if by that we mean that

men and women participated in making the revolution, but often in gender differentiated ways. However, in many ways, there was no gender differentiation; women risked their lives by demonstrating just as did the men. Women participated in strategizing and planning, just as did the men. Nevertheless, they were treated differently after the revolution; men excluded the women. This has led to a women's movement and women's organizing.

As men have been in power, women have diagnosed the patriarchal structure of society and have realized that democracy has not aided women in gaining their political rights. Because of the freedom made possible by democracy and the revolution, women are gaining strength by organizing themselves.

Important in affecting women's organizing has been the role of global communication, particularly within the city. Educated women know about women's situation elsewhere and know about the women's movement around the world. Some of these women are traveling around the country to help other women.

Often missing from research and theories on revolution is the importance of global communication and international awareness. Knowledge of other places and other ways plays an important role in revolutionary change. Not only did awareness of Nelson Mandela, the Tianneman uprising, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the change in Eastern Europe have an impact on Nepal and its 1990 revolution, just as firsthand

knowledge of the revolution in India had an impact on Nepal's 1950 revolution. But awareness of the women's movement elsewhere is also having an impact on today's Nepal.

We have seen the importance of gender in the revolution-- the fact that men have taken over political power and are neglecting to pay attention not only to the needs and interests of women, but to the needs and interests of rural people, and of poor and working class people. We have seen also that the rise of a communist party did not significantly alter the gendered nature of politics.

Not only did gender play an important role in the politics and revolution of Nepal, so did age or generation. Just as we find political divisions based on gender, so we find political divisions based on age or generation.

The younger generation generally feel that the older generation is not in touch with modernity. However, the older generation continues to hold reigns of power and to command deference. This in turn has an effect on gender relations as well, since the older generation have little or no awareness or interest in women's rights.

Caste continues to play a role in the power struggles. The leaders and politicians of the non-communist parties and the communist party all tend to come from the higher castes. The privileged castes are the ones who have the education and knowledge as well as being part of social networks that enable them to hold powerful positions in the government. This means

that their class interests as well get represented. Traditionally the higher castes are members of the class of landowners. They also have become capitalists and middle class professionals, entrepreneurs and wage workers. The interests of rural workers, of women, of poor migrants to the city are not represented.

We have seen the importance of political parties in making the revolution and in attempting to secure the interests of particular groups. Power is not simply economic, nor cultural and social. Power is exercised in the decisions made by governing parties. Political parties play a crucial role in the transition and modernization of the nation. They represent interests that go beyond the local level to involve international relations. In addition, political parties also represent nationalistic, ethnic interests.

One political party (NC) is pro-Indian and made up predominantly of upper caste men of Indo-Aryan origin. The other majority party (the UML), although also led by upper caste men of Indo-Aryan origin, has a philosophy that is not pro-Indian but is nationalistic. People of Kathmandu, who are predominantly indigenous people of Tibeto-Burmese origin, do not identify with people of Indian origin and do not hold pro-Indian sentiments. On the contrary, they hold anti-Indian sentiments. Consequently, they vote for the Communist Party.

We have seen the complex politics of gender, race/ethnicity, class, caste, age/generation, and party in

Nepal's revolution. We have also seen the importance of ideas. In the 1950s, the anti colonial struggle for freedom in India as well as elsewhere influenced the struggle for freedom in Nepal. The ideas and philosophy developed by the anti-colonial activists of India influenced the ideas and philosophy of the revolutionaries in Nepal. The aim was to overthrow a system based on the rule of the one family and introduce democracy.

In the 1970s and 80s, the movement was influenced by other movements and ideas, as indicated above. Young people were again willing to risk their lives on behalf of ideas and ideals that seemed compelling to them. They were influenced by knowledge of activists and heroes of revolutionary struggles elsewhere.

In addition to ideas and images, social networks also played a role. Families recruited sons (who sometimes recruited sisters, nephews, nieces and wives) into their political struggles. The social networks among families of the same caste brought new members into these struggles. Friends followed each other, particularly among the young, college age generation.

With respect to class, we have seen the importance of the landowning families in making the first revolution in 1950. These people were leaders in the 70s, 80s, and the successful 1990 revolutionary movements. These leaders did not represent the interests or expectations of the new social classes that

had developed during the period between 1960 and 1990. These classes were able to emerge following the 1950 revolution. That revolution led to opening up the country to outsiders and international social welfare institutions, foreign corporations, and international financial institutions.

The modernization and increased urbanization of the society created new social classes and new economic interests, including large capitalist interests both indigenous and foreign. The modernization and democratization of Nepal is important for Nepal's overall development, but at the same time it is important to me at the personal level because only with the greater freedom offered by modernization and democracy, can a democratically conscious person of the elite like me function and organize properly both in cities and villages of Nepal.

With modernization, the sons and sometimes daughters of landowning families become educated, move to the cities and get jobs. These families have been selling their land to the local peasants. Thus, the landowning class is becoming an urban, middle class of professionals and business people, only some of whom may become wealthy capitalists. But the cities include people of all different backgrounds, so that the distinctiveness of the landowning elite is rapidly declining. Thus Nepal is changing from a caste based feudal society to a class based modern society. From the middle class of this new society, come the leaders and the ideas for developing Nepal.

The burning question now is: will these leaders forget about the villages from which they come.

To conclude, sociological theories of revolution that have focused on the state or on economic class interests or on the importance of social networks have tended to neglect the complexity of class/caste, status, party--including gender, race/ethnicity, age--as well as the role of ideas and global communication. Even social network theory, which places emphasis on personal ties between people, generally fails to include or consider the significance of sentiments of friendship and love, or feelings about injustice, particularly on the part of those in authority. Yet, as I have indicated, research has begun to show that these elements are not only important for an understanding of societal dynamics in general but for understanding revolutionary activity in particular.

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**Appendix: Some Basic Aspects of Nepalese Society**

**Geographic Location:** Nepal borders on China in the North.

It borders on India in the South, East and West. The total area of Nepal is 147, 181 sq. km. of which about two-thirds is covered by hills and mountains. It is landlocked country in the Himalayas with three distinct geographical regions: the fertile, tropical plains of Terai, the central plateaus, covered with rainforest

In 1991, 7.8, 45.6 and 46.6 percent of the population were found in the mountain, hill and terai (flat land) respectively. Nepal is a Hindu state and a multi-racial and multilingual country.

Demography. Of the total population 89.5 percent followed Hinduism in 1981. Buddhists comprised 5.3 and Islam 2.7 percent (National Planning Commission, Nepal, 1992). Nepali speakers were 58.4 percent. Maithali, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang and Newari were 11.1, 7.6, 3.6, 3.5 and 3 percent respectively. Other remaining languages were less than 2 percent each. The literacy rate was 23.3 percent in 1981, which is estimated in 1988 to be 35 percent and women constitute about 19 percent. About 65.1 percent of the total working age group population was economically active in 1981 and more than 90 percent of them were engaged in agriculture and allied activities (National Planning Commission, Nepal, 1992).

Caste System. Traditionally, the Brahmans and Chetris (Kshatriyas in India) engaged in certain, prescribed exclusive activities which implemented their styles of life as status groups. For the Brahman the sacrifice, study of Vedas (Hindu sacred texts) and asceticism were assigned, whereas for the Kshatriyas political rule was assigned. The occupation of Vaisyas is tillage and trade and inferior of all were Sudras (Weber, 1967). Sudras are considered untouchables in the caste hierarchy. The King comes from the Chetris caste, and Ranas are Chetris as well. (See below for discussion of Ranas)

History. The present king's ancestor became the king in the 18th century. There is an interesting political event that happened in Nepal which is quite significant in Nepali political history and relevant to our understanding of Nepali political structure. Due to internal royal fights, in 1856, a confidant of the palace, Mr. Jang Bahadur Rana, was able to manipulate the then weak king to grant him absolute power. This power was retained by his family until 1950 (Upreti, 1992). Jang Bahadur Rana, who became the prime-minister, ruled Nepal with absolutism. This period is called RANA REGIME in Nepal. In this period the king became a titular head under the captivity of Ranas.

The Rana bureacratic apparatus consisted of a pyramid of high to low ranking officers with each layer subject to the one above. There was a hereditary accession to the prime-

ministership as well. This was based on the familial principle and was the basis of civil and military recruitment. Members of the Rana family were recruited in different parts of the country as commander -in-chiefs, regional administrators and other important positions. In turn, they were paid mainly in land. We can call the Rana period a feudal economy. The land owning class was the ruling class. Major revenue came from agriculture. Today, 90 percent of the people continue to live in rural areas.

The Rana period came to an end in 1950. Between 1950 and 1959, Nepal exercised something like a trial democracy. But then in 1960 political parties were banned by Mahendra who imprisoned most of the political leaders. The first ever elected multi-party parliament was dissolved. King Mahendra introduced a party-less Panchayat system in 1961. The Panchayat system was comprised of a national assembly with no political parties and the king as the source of all authority, making him an absolute monarch. The assembly was composed of men and women all appointed by the king.

Political party workers were exiled to India in the 1960's and 1970's. They continued their fight against the king but were not successful. In 1979 there was an uprising in Nepal of students and peasants. Following this uprising the King Birendra granted political amnesty to all the Nepali dissidents living in India. A referendum was held in 1980 to choose either a multi-party system or the ruling

Panchayat system with "suitable reforms" following the movement. Panchayat system won by a 4 percent margin. It is commonly believed that the referendum was rigged by the government. Political parties remained banned again. However, they resumed their work under the banner of banned names. The tension between the king and party workers eased a bit after the referendum but there were frequent protests and arrests.

#### The 1950 Revolution:

Nepal, went through political change in the 1950s which affected Nepal's socio/economic structure as well. The autocratic family regime of Ranas, that had controlled the bureaucracy for over 100 years, was overthrown, civil liberties were introduced, the country was opened up to the outside and a new middle class came into being. These changes were the result of the 1950 revolution. In the 1940s Nepalis who were studying in India, wanted to bring changes to the repressive political structure of Nepal. They formed political parties while exiled in India. Nepali Congress and Nepal Communist parties were formed in the late 1940s. Nepali Congress played the key role in bringing revolution in 1950. The Nepal Communist party did not participate in 1950 (Rose, 1978). Why the Nepal Communist party did not participate in the 1950 revolution needs to be investigated. However, the political changes brought in

1950s lasted only for a decade. Then the king imposed an authoritarian regime on Nepali people again in 1960.

The Nepali Congress (NC) Party played an important role in both revolutions. Nepali Congress political philosophy is based on Democratic Socialism. In both revolutions, the leaders of Nepali Congress were the same, and they came from higher castes. The present prime minister's elder brother B.P. Koirala was the leader of the 1950 revolution. He comes from the Brahmin caste. Both Brahmans and Chtris maintained their caste status very rigidly in Nepal. They are still the ruling castes of the Nepal polity.

In 1950, the leadership of the revolution came from the landowning feudal aristocracy, who were members of the Brahmin and Chetri castes. These men were educated in India under British rule and lived through the period of Indian independence. This was not a popular revolution; participation was for the most part limited to the landowning class. The country was still feudal. In 1990, the revolutionary movement was joined by professionals -- doctors, teachers, engineers, professors, pilots -- factory workers, students, and peasants, as well as landowners. Students played the most important role. They were beaten, raped, and killed, igniting a feeling of rage on the part of family, friends, colleagues and unrelated people.

Even though the Nepal Communist party, which believes in Marxist/Leninist philosophy, did not participate in the

1950 revolution, the leadership of the Communist party in the 1990 revolution came from the generation that made the 1950 revolution. In 1990 different factions of Communist parties were united as the United Left Front (ULF). However, I cannot describe at this moment the stratification of Communist party leaders in terms of caste or class; it needs to be investigated as well.

#### Nepali Culture and the Status of Women

Considering that women play a subservient role in Nepali patriarchal social structure, it is noteworthy that significant numbers of women participated in the 1990 revolution compared to the 1950 revolution. However, female leadership came from the same age group and social status as the male leadership, although younger women were very active.

About half of the population, Nepali women are nevertheless denied equal treatment to that of men. Under Nepali law, women are not entitled to property rights equal to that of men. Lynn Bennett writes: "Although opportunities for women to inherit ancestral property have been greatly expanded by Nepal's present national code, the assumptions of classical Hindu inheritance law remain, i.e. that immovable property must be kept within the agnatic group and that women therefore have inferior claims to such property" (Bennett, 1979).

Since the 1990 revolution, various women's groups are

demanding change in this law, but little can be expected when there are only 7 out of 207 women parliamentarians. However, regardless of party affiliation, women parliamentarians are supporting this demand.

Hindu religion demands virtual submission of Nepali women to men. Religious rituals and rules are made in such a way that women are kept in inferior status to men. In any religious ceremonies, menstruating women are barred. The water, food, green plants, deities, men and even the house (during rituals) are polluted by menstruating women. If such a thing happens ritual purification is conducted by the priest.

In Nepali Hindu society, all funeral rites are conducted by men because the belief is that a woman might menstruate and become impure during the funeral rites. Making women religiously inferior enables the male law makers to bar women from the rights of inheritance. Funeral rites, which can be conducted only by men, are extremely important for Hindu Nepali who fear that if property were left to daughters, the sons would not perform the funeral rites for them. Thus men continue to inherit property which gives them power over women; without property of their own, women remain dependent on men.

Under such repressive social structure, Nepali women still work harder and produce more than men. Rural women's total work burden was at an average of 10.81 hours per day

compared to 7.51 for men. Women not only contribute more time but also generate more income than men and children to the total household: 50 to 44 and 6 percent respectively in 1981 (Acharya and Bennett, 1981). In addition, women's unpaid work, their domestic labor which can be quite onerous, particularly in rural areas, goes uncounted in these statistics.

I would like to add to this research on women and show that in needed circumstances, women are not afraid of police brutality. For the sake of their family, community and nation, they came to the street, demonstrated, got killed, imprisoned, raped. This information has not been documented yet.

#### The role of caste in politics

The Nepali Hindu social structure is based on the caste system. Both the king and prime-minister are from the two highest castes, the Brahmin and the Chetri. This trend has been dominating Nepal since the great ancestor of the present king. It is believed that the high ruling caste from India fled to Nepal during the Muslim invasion of India during the 7th century (Hamendorf, 1978). High caste Hindu who were literate compared to indigenous Nepalis (Tibeto/Burmese) gradually took over the Nepali power structure (Caplan, 1972) and became rulers of Nepal. In addition to holding political power, they also were able to become landowners while the indigenous people who did not

migrate became a subordinate class of peasants who worked the land and paid the landowners in kind (one half of the produce of the land). With the 1990 revolution, deep seated resentment toward the higher castes, Brahmins and Chetris, has surfaced among the other castes and subcastes as well among ethnic groups.

#### Religion, Caste, and Political Power

Nepal was and has been run by the Hindu code. The legal code of 1910 (Muluki Ain) gave the necessary legal sanctions based upon the principle of hereditary caste. The position of the Raj Guru (Royal Preceptor) was held by one Brahman family throughout the Rana period. Family background was very important for any appointment for state services. The priestly authority ran parallel with the temporal power. The temporal authority depended on the religious authority for legitimation. Hence the priestly authority was able to exercise political power. It preserved, protected and at times even redefined basic elements of the Rana Regime (Upreti, 1992). The Hindu Legal codes were very repressive for women. Women were untouchables during religious ceremonies, the significance of which I explain in detail in the section on the status of women.

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