

Women's Movement Scenario in Nepal

Nepal is one of the least developed countries in the world. Our socio-economic life and hence the national life is largely dependent on agriculture. 42 percent of the national income is being contributed by agriculture and almost 81 percent of the population is employed in this sector. However, agriculture itself is in a very miserable condition. It has become away of life to majority of the population, but its fruitfulness is decreasing every year.

In the Nepalese context, the women struggle started against British imperialism. Patriotic struggle against British imperialism dates back to the battle of 1814 at Nalapani. Women marched shoulder to shoulder with men in the civil right movement of 1948. Women took active part in the democratic revolution of 1951 which overthrew the 104 year autocracy of the Rana family. Its goal was to overthrow the 104 years of Rana autocracy from Nepal. The first women organization the "Nepal Women Association" was established in 1948, it worked to inculcate political awareness among women.

After the fall of the Rana regime and dawn of democracy in 1951, political parties became active. Women's organization began to be affiliated with various political parties. During the thirty year rule (1960-1990) of the party-less Panchayat system, all political parties and independent women 5 organizations were banned. However, the left democratic forces continued their struggle against the suppressive political system. The communist organized peasants and workers to fight against the exploitative regime. Women came out in large number during the struggle for democracy. The All Nepal Women Association (ANWA) functioning under the party, was very active in organizing revolutionary women. It is during this period of struggle that ANWA established itself as a revolutionary wing of the party. Many members of ANWA were tortured by the rulers. The persistence in the struggle attracted women to

join the movement. The movement was successfully expanded throughout the country.

Also there were some sectoral women movements in existence against the feudal exploitation of landlord and Rana regime. But they were limited in coverage and could not take larger shape to include women from all over the nation. In order to understand the shaping of the movement, it is necessary to mention how the women's political and organized form of movement was connected with the political parties.

The first underground mass meeting of All Nepal Women Association was held in 1980. The gathering discussed and analyzed situation of the country, set goals and strategies of women struggle to achieve the women's rights and liberation. It formulated the long term and short term national policy and programme for the women struggle.

The period of eighties is the most active and important period for Nepalese women movement. The oppression from the then rulers was intolerable. Many women activists were jailed and tortured, more than 70 women activists were full-time underground and semi-underground activists. They developed thousands of activists who were over-ground, and they continued their underground activities. It played a crucial role in creating political awareness and played significant role in organizing women of different class, profession and strata. During its underground political training, the All Nepal Women Association equipped its cadre with true ideals in the struggles for political rights, social justice and economic equality. It also made best use of the 8th March International Women's Day (started since 1972, 8th march), and national festival such as Tiji (exclusive women festival) and Tihar (festival of light) celebrated each year for five days culminating the worshipping of brothers by sisters on the last day. On this day women folk gather at their parental houses, hence an opportunity to make best use of gathering.

ANWA organized its first National Conference in 1989 in underground way, second National Conference in 1992 and the third National Conference in 1995 with the theme "Social Security and Employment, Equal Rights in all Sectors". All members of ANWA and other women organizations cultivated a dream-a dream of new progressive and democratic Nepal where women participation in all walks of national life is ensured.

In spite of all these struggles, sacrifices and enthusiasm, women have been marginalized in politics as in any other sectors. The paternalistic structures of the family, society and the male-dominated political organizations gave little space to women. There exist a big gap between saying and doing, preaching and practicing about women's participation and leadership in Nepal.

Constitutionally, 5 percent seats of the total candidacy in the parliamentary election are reserved for women, in each political party. Recently the government has decided to provide 15 percent reservation in each VDC and Municipality. Altogether there are 4000 VDCs and 58 Municipalities and in each VDC there are 9 Wards (Unit). Each ward of the VDC will have 5 members including chairperson elected. Among four members one seat is reserved for women. There is a provision of Advisory Committee in VDC and municipality and participation of women is provisioned. Thus, at the local level altogether more than 120,000 women will be mobilized representing all parties. It is a welcome step forward to include women in politics at the local levels.

The position of women in civil service is also very bleak. While the 1990 High Level Administration Reform Commission gave suggestions to improve the situation, only 5 percent of the civil servants at officer level were women in 1992. National and international efforts have been made to bring multilateral and bilateral agencies for aid and assistance for women's cause. In spite of all these efforts, gender gap is still very wide. Inequalities are rampant in all fronts--cultural, social, economic, political and in education. Women have no separate identity of herself. They are identified in relation to her father, husband, son and grandson.

Women in the society

The Patriarchal system is the root cause of social injustice in Nepal. Sons are preferred over daughters. Sons are considered economic insurance in old age. They carry the family name, perform death rituals and rites. Girls are considered as other's property to be given away in marriage. They are unwanted, neglected and overworked. They are seen as auxiliary contributors to the household. Thus, the women are caught in the corrupt circle of the family system of exploitation and deprivation. The socialization pattern of Nepalese society is very discriminative. From the childhood, boys are groomed towards productive work and decision making and girls are confined to an "inside world" conditioned to be home makers, dutiful wives, loving mothers and service providers. A

woman is subjected to the protection of man and has no mobility. Women are controlled by men and are considered as a property of men. Hence they do not have their own property. Even religion, education and rituals are denied to women. A women's life is not for her self.

Health status of Nepalese women is deplorable. Nepal is one of the three countries in the world where the life expectancy of women is lower than that of men. In Nepal 20 percent of pregnancies are said to be in the "high risk" category. Violence on girl-child and child prostitution is alarmingly increasing.

Trafficking of girls into India are increasing and of those trafficked 20 percent are minors under 16 years of age. The overall health condition is alarmingly poor in Nepal. The average life expectancy is 55.9 for males and 53.5 for females. Only 10 percent of the pregnant women get maternal service. The maternal mortality rate is 850 per 100,000 live birth. Average child bearing age among 40 percent of women is 15 to 19 years. The fertility rate is as high as 5.7. Women have been the focus of population policies and the main target for family planning and fertility control.

The girl malnutrition rate is double than that of boy under 5 years. 78 percent of rural women suffer by anaemia in the delivery period. 85 percent of women depend upon the traditional birth attendants instead of health post and hospital services. Even in the urban areas, the maternal mortality rate is 8.5 per 1000 but in rural and geographically distanced rural area the MMR is 15.4 per 1000.

Economic Status of Nepalese Women

Nepal is an underdeveloped agricultural country with a per capita GDP of US \$ 202 (1994). Almost half of its population is below the poverty line. It ranks second among the poorest countries of the world. Studies have shown that women's contribution in the economy is large and significant with 57 percent of agricultural activities being carried out by women. They contribute about half of household income and work 11 hours a day. Despite women's substantial contributions both as cultivators and managers in the production process, all their labour is unnoticed, undervalued and unaccounted in the economy.

Women as the workers

Women constitute a little over one-half of the Nepalese population. 95 percent of employed women are confined to agricultural work compared to 75 percent for men. Besides agriculture, women are again mostly confined to traditional jobs such as sewing and knitting. They are rarely engaged in professional and technical jobs. Very few are in community services, commerce, manufacture etc. Jobs are low-paid, requiring relatively simple skills. In the service sector, women are mostly engaged in teaching, health and financial institutions. Women lag far behind in the legal field and media service. Only 6 percent are found at officer level positions in the civil services.

Women in Nepal generally work for longer hours compared to men, and rural women devote much longer hours than urban women. His Majesty's Government of Nepal has fixed the minimum wage and salaries in the industrial and organized sectors without any gender discrimination but in practice such discrimination are noticed. Discrimination in organized sectors are more prominent.

Effective and in built participation of women in the development process, both as a producer and consumer of development output, has been accepted as a necessary condition for balanced, equitable and sustainable growth. But Nepalese women are yet to obtain such participation. In terms of labour force participation, women are behind men, are predominantly confined to agriculture, account for the majority of unpaid family workers, number predominantly among the unemployed and are heavily concentrated in low-paid jobs, The constraints against women's employment in industry can be summarized as follows,

- Women are poorly qualified or not suitably trained
- Protective legislation has acted as a deterrent to women's employment
- Women are prepared to work for lower wage
- Both women and men look upon women's income as supplementary
- There is no solidarity and no unions among women Women lack the collateral to become entrepreneurs, therefore have no access to
- They lack entrepreneurial knowledge

They have dual responsibilities and lack societal support credit loans or Ninety percent of the employed women are confined to agricultural activities where as it is less than seventy five percent in the case of men. Less than 6 percent of them are engaged in personal and community services, 2 percent are found in commerce and 1 percent in manufacturing. The employment of women in sectors

like electricity, gas and water, construction, transport and communication finance and business services is extremely low or negligible (table No.3). Economically Active Population (10 years and above) by Major Industry and sex 1991 (in percent)

Table 1: Occupational Structure of Women and Men (1991)

Occupation	Male	Female Total	Female as % of	Total
Professional technical Workers	2.5	0.7	1.8	15.1
Administrative Workers	0.4	0.1	0.3	9.3
Clerical Workers	1.6	0.3	1.1	10.0
Sales Workers	3.9	1.7	3.0	22.6
Service Workers	7.8	3.8	6.2	25.1
Farm/Fish Workers	74.7	90.4	81.0	45.1
Production Labour Workers	5.8	2.0	4.2	18.8
Others	3.0	0.8	2.1	15.8
Not Stated	0.3	0.2	0.3	35.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	40.2

Source: Population Census 1991

Table 2: Women in the Labour force 1991

Describe	Male	Female	Total
1. Population(in '000)	9221	9270	18491
2. Labour force (Population aged 10 years and above in '000)	6445	6554	12999
3. Labour forces% of total people	69.9	70.7	70.3
4. Economically active population (Aged 10 years & above in '000)	4428	2982	7410
5. Labour force participation rate (4 as% of 2)	68.7	45.5	57.0
6. Economically inactive population (aged 10 years and above'000)	2017	3572	5589
7. 6as%of 2	31.3	54.5	43

Source : Population Census 1991

Table 3: Economically active population (10 years and above)
by major industries and sex, 1991(in percent)

Industry	Male	Female Total	Female as % of	Total
Agriculture	74.9	90.5	81.2	45.0
Manufacturing	2.6	1.2	2.0	11.9
Construction	0.7	0.1	0.5	10.9
Commerce	4.5	2.0	3.5	23.7
Transport and communication	1.1	0.1	0.7	3.9
Finance and business services	0.4	0.1	0.3	13.4
Personal & community services	13.6	5.3	10.2	21.0
Others	0.6	0.1	0.4	6.7
Industry not stated	1.2	1.6	1.0	23.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	40.4

Source : Population Census 1991

Women are facing problems created by government new economic policy of privatization and liberalization. The policy of privatization and liberalization is yet to show its full impact in Nepalese economy. Even then we expect to encounter the following problems in the field of women workers and employment in the days to come.

1. The employer may prefer men to women or unmarried to married one
2. Difference in salary of men and women may persist
3. Government may not be responsible for capacity building program for women
4. The dignity of women workers might erode as they will be treated as commodity by their employers.
5. Prostitution, sex tourism and sexual harassment will grow together with success of privatization and liberalization
6. Women will have to be restricted to low skilled and low paid jobs.

The new policy will reduce the opportunities for formal education and vocational training for upgrading the skills, with a result that women do not qualify for promotions, job up gradation and higher wage.

Education and Nepalese Women

For a long time, education was a privilege for a few in Nepal. The first government school for girls opened in 1948 a year after the Civil Rights Movement. It was only in 1951 that education was gradually prompted throughout the country. The literacy rate in the country is 40 percent. Literacy rate among women is only 25 percent. In the schools the dropout and irregularity of girls are higher compared to that of boys.

Progress in the promotion of girls education has been made as a result of international women's year and the international women's decade. Several measures have been taken to augment girls education. Female teachers were appointed in each school. Nevertheless, education is yet to be effective in empowering women in Nepal. Education in Nepal is not yet linked with the lives of the people. Equality and empowerment of women is simply a lip-service.

Government Policy and Women's Advancement

There has been some changes in the interests and attitudes of the policy planners after the change in the political system. However, the changes are not satisfactory and are still sectoral. A new ministry looking after women issues has been created. The ministry is to coordinate and further the policies and programs related to the women.

Women constitute half of the population in Nepal. Unless they participate fully in the nation building task, economic development of the country will not be possible. Taking this reality into account sectoral strategy and working policy were outlined in the eighth plan (1992-97), the first plan of fully democratic. The strategies to be followed as outlined in the plan are;

- Encouraging women's participation in traditional as well as non traditional sectors
- Extending access to be formal and non-formal education to women
- Adopting affirmative action in training program
- Increasing women's access to health facilities especially FP/MCH facilities
- Increasing women's access to credit, technical knowledge, entrepreneurship development programs, marketing facilities and employment opportunities

- Extending to rural areas those kinds of technological changes which reduce the time spend in gathering an fetching fuel fodder, water and household work
- Revising laws discriminatory to women

Though the government of Nepal started a policy on Women In Development (WID) since sixth five year plan (1980-85). The policy aimed to promote the status of women by recognizing women as development agent. The plans stressed on technical and non technical fields of training for women. The Women Training Centre was formed under the Ministry of Local Development (MOLD) for skill development of rural women. Of course there has been some changes in the interests and attitudes among politicians and policy makers. However the change is not overall satisfactory and still is sectoral. Women should be recognized as partner and not as subordinate to men. No doubt, the newly formed Ministry of Women and Social Welfare should take up a leading role in asserting this concept.

Girls trafficking and prostitution as major Social Problems of Women in Nepal

In Nepal girls trafficking and prostitution problem are becoming similar to that of problems in Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Taiwan. Over 200,000 Nepali girls/women are reported to be indulged into prostitution in India. It is said that between 5000 to 7000 young girls are trafficked to India annually; of which one-third are trafficked forcefully. According to the Indian Health Organization (IHO) 100,000 Nepali girls/women are working as prostitutes in Calcutta, Mumbai and New Delhi alone. IHO estimates that of the 15,000 prostitutes working in the state of Utter Pradesh, 12,000 are Nepali girls and women.

The Girls, sold against their will, are subjected to severe mental and physical torture. Most of the girls and women engaged in prostitution are usually from broken families while others come from poor families. Many innocent teenage girls are abducted or lured from their homes in the countryside and are forced into the job. They are either lured or deceived on fake promises and sold to the brothel houses in Indian cities by the middlemen. As such the Nepali girls/women are found serving as prostitutes in almost every city and towns of India and the practice is, unfortunately increasing. Intra-regional and Inter-regional trafficking has also increased rapidly as more and more people migrate to the cities. There are more than 5000 girls/women from surrounding countryside

working as prostitutes in Kathmandu and it is said that there are more than 200 brothels in Kathmandu city alone. Similarly, major market centres work as transit centres for ultimate trafficking into India. The East-west Highway is a fertile ground for prostitution which is being called commonly as highway prostitution. Some reports and investigations have revealed that large number of girls/women have been trafficked via carpet and garment factories. Many who fall victim are those destitute and helpless women who are neglected, abused and abandoned by their husbands and relatives. Many women belonging to lower castes are also made to be the victims.

No doubt the trafficking of girls/women to the urban areas of Nepal and to the brothels of foreign countries tell us a story of fraud exploitation, domination as well as despair frustration and poverty. We need to look beyond the facade of economic problems and try to come with the possible reasons within a larger cultural, historical and socio-political framework.

While the subjects of sex remains taboo in Nepalese society, prostitution has gained a big momentum. It is no longer limited to the traditional red light areas of Salyan, Pyuthan and Dang districts where the women of the "Badi" community adopt prostitution as profession. They adopt prostitution as a social practice. Under the "Deuki" system the girls are surrendered to temples by people by the way of religious gift or "Bhokal". The Deukies are not expected to marry and thus, they adopt prostitution as a means of livelihood when they grow up.

The Deuki system has been operating under the guise of religious and cultural beliefs. The cultural practice of Deuki system and Badi community have given way to socially recognized prostitution in Nepal.

In Nepal as banning of prostitution remains a matter of dispute, there can be no question on the urgent need to address the issue that force girls and women into the flesh trade. The immediate risk groups like the poor and ignorant girls in the countryside, girls children working in the carpet and garment factories and the children on the streets should be made the immediate target for protection activities. All the government and non government organizations and the conscious citizens need to act actively to abolish the practice of flesh trade.

Everybody should realize the gravity of the problem which is posing a big threat to a very fabric of Nepalese society. Everyone should work to contribute for he prevention and control of prostitution and girls trafficking. Well coordinated efforts need to be made in creating the congenial environment to discourage the sexual exploitation of women.

There should be an effective implementation of laws relating to trafficking of girls. Income and employment generating programs such as knitting, sewing, weaving, bamboo work, sericulture etc. are necessary so that economic status of women in the countryside, the fertile ground for the traffickers is bettered.

The profession of flesh trade can not be checked with the legal measures alone. Alternative means for survival are necessary. Both income generating activities as well as programs generating awareness are equally important in this respect.

Despite all the existing laws, the enforcement and the threat of AIDS, girls/women trafficking and prostitution still remain a growing problem in Nepal. Nevertheless, it is a matter of great satisfaction that since the last few years some of the NGO and INGOs have started taking keen interests on the issue of women trafficking and practice of forced prostitution in Nepal. Similarly, the international and United Nations agencies have also started creating an awareness against girls trafficking and immoral prostitution practices.

In the western and far western part of Nepal there is residue of slavery system called Karnaiya. The bonded labourers do not receive their full labour cost. They have to work free of charge for 15-18 hours/day The system is spread in 5 district of Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke, Dang and Bardiya. In all these districts there is approximately 50 thousands Kamaiya. Generally women from Kamaiya family are required to work free for the landlord. Women under Kamaiya system are more exploited even than the Kamaiyas themselves. Physical and sexual abuse are common among Kamaiya women.

Global context of and its effect to Nepali Women

In the present context globalization has inflicted its worse effect all over the world. Globalization is generally used to designate an aggregate of policy measures which seek to expand market relations on world level

and to enlarge the scope for the free movement of capital internationally. Some of the key components of globalizations are trade liberalization i.e. breakdown of tariff barriers, privatization of formerly public sector companies and the reduction of state intervention and the promotion of export oriented production for instance of cash crops agriculture. In the countries of the south, such policies are generally imposed by WB, IMF, in the name of structural adjustment. While the ideology of globalization states that such policies serve to promote human welfare an increasingly large body of literature migration from rural areas and to a shift from secure to insecure forms of employment and production.

Under structural adjustment programmes, government world wide have been compelled to sell of public sector companies to the private sector, and such transfers to the private sector have frequently been accompanied but massive dismissals and the flexibilization of labour relations under structural adjustment and liberalization, workers loose various forms of minimal security previously provided by the state or state owned companies.

The declarations and programs of action adopted at the four global women's conferences held since 1975 have added important dimensions on the empowerment of women. The second global conference in Copenhagen in 1980 and the third one in Nairobi in 1985 contributed to the adoption of the advancement of women by the year 2000. Now the UN is working on the fourth phase of progress of women. All the four conferences have the message that no progress is possible without a full and equal participation of men and women. Although in many countries women remain most deprived, discriminated and powerless in most societies.

With this global context we should raise some pertinent points regarding Nepalese women's movement which will give the picture of Nepalese women, their social, cultural, economic and political status who are the threshold for the 21st century.

Conclusion

From the mid 1980s women's movement in Nepal can be characterized in three distinct features. Firstly, women's movement was all activism. The role of academia was insignificant. But now there has been forging links between these two in a variety of ways in different fora,

conferences, conventions, and demonstrations. A strong belief among many groups has emerged that the struggle against gender inequalities can not be waged in isolation from struggle in many other fronts. Thirdly, the women's movement is not secluded within the country and is increasingly interconnected with the international women's movement. The four international conferences on women have been successful in bringing women's all over the world in common platform of action

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