

Article

Women's Participation in People's Army

-Com. Parvati

Nothing is impossible if you dare to scale the heights.

-Mao.

Introduction

The historic People's War (PW) was started under the leadership of CPN (Maoist) in 1996 with mere sticks, sickles, khukris and literally two guns*. Today after eight years of PW the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has GPMG, LMG, SMG, SLR, rocket launchers. Similarly in the initial phase of PW there were combat, defense and self-defense forces, today it has expanded to the level of two divisions, 7 brigades, 19 battalions, several companies, platoons, sections and tens of thousands of militias. Earlier the preliminary forces of CPN (Maoist) were engaged with local police force but today it's fighters have to face American backed Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), also called Royal American Army. Amongst many specificities of Nepalese PW, women's phenomenal participation in PLA, particularly in direct combat, is one such important characteristic.

In the historic third expanded meeting of CPN (Maoist) in 1995, it was decided that at least two women will be made mandatory in each defense squads. Today they represent about one third in the PLA. Qualitatively they have reached vice-commander in battalion level and commanders and vice-commanders up to company level and political commissars at the battalion level. Recent martyrdom of Com. Sapan Shiela, who was a company commander, on September 17, 2003, is one such example. She met a heroic death while fighting against RNA in Bhawang-Jamkot area, in Western Nepal.

In several daylight daring urban guerilla actions in Terai, Kathmandu (the capital city of Nepal) and urban centres, women have participated in capturing banks, selective annihilation of enemies and destroying key points of the state. At militia level their participation has been phenomenal, sometimes even surpassing that of men in places. They constitute important vanguards to protect several regional and district level revolutionary people's councils and at the same time consolidating base areas by participating in several construction activities. In this way they have become part of the spine of the new emerging state from their earlier spineless position. The concept of "one citizen, one army" brought by the Directory for Administration of People's Power (United Revolutionary People's Council, 2004) makes it all the more relevant to militarize the women, who hold half of the sky.

* Out of the two guns only one was functioning and it was popularly called WT (whole timer).

Today the development of PW has reached the stage of transition to strategic offensive from the stage of strategic equilibrium. Since the coming period is a decisive period for the Nepalese revolution, it is important to generalize and synthesize the experiences of women combatants in the PLA, and to know the scope, limitations and challenges they face. But before putting these, it is worth noting how women have participated in wars in general.

Women and Wars

Ever since the end of matriarchal primitive system, the contradiction between the human race and nature has shifted to contradiction within the human race in the form of class wars. In pursuit of private wealth, profit, women were relegated to biological function of reproducing and maintaining the classes. Under such a situation their participation in war as combatants has been generally supportive. They are seen as morale boosters (such as famous actresses and celebrities sent to war-fronts), as heclers (by making gifts of bangles to men symbolising their loss of masculinity) as logistic supporters (as was widely mobilized in World War I and II) as nurses (like Florence Nightingale) as spies (like Matahari). Where they have actively participated in war-fronts as combatants, they have done at a very limited and indivisual level, that too under sheer compulsions such as Laxmi Bai in India, under sheer desperation such as Joan of Arch in France. In such cases many of them had to join war wearing men's clothes in order to hide their gender identity. The much published Amazon women fighters in the 18th and 19th century Dahomey Kingdom was in fact a result of desperate act whereby armed regiment of women were placed at the rear so as to make Dahomey's force appear longer and bigger. But in actual fight, the king discovered that they fought valiantly. This resulted in recruiting women in regular army. Even in Tamil liberation movement, the LTTE women were at first recruited as logistic supporter or as secondary force to assist the main men's force. It was only after they proved their prowess that they were incorporated into more visible frontal battles.

Women and Class Wars

It takes revolutionary class wars to mobilize women to the scale and quality that precedes earlier participation in wars. This is because class wars directly address the oppressive socio-economic relation, production relation and poverty related other issues from which the women are the worst sufferers. Class wars have direct bearing on women's oppression thereby not only shaking the foundation of reactionary states but also family structure, which is deeply entrenched in religion. Unlike ethnic, religious, regional wars, class wars are not divisive; instead they lead to universality the more they develop to higher levels. They draw their strength from collective actions of the masses, particularly the oppressed masses, amongst which women constitute the largest encompassing oppressed mass. Also the application of dictatorship by the revolutionary states over those who oppress them and safeguarding the democracy of the oppressed masses has big appeal for women. Such states not only consolidate their productive functions but also safeguard their reproductive functions. Since oppression of women is deeper than other oppressed communities hence they understand the need to wage deeper class wars. Hence history is replete with their participation in class wars.

Direct participation of militant proletariat women in the revolution, Paris Commune in 1971 marks the first watershed in oppressed women's movement. The lining of them together with their male comrades before the firing squads of invading reactionary force proves the height of hatred generated amongst reactionary forces for their participation in the revolution.

Similarly women combatant's participations in Soviet Union during World War II while fighting against Nazi occupation were phenomenal. The following figure gives the idea.

"The official figures states that about 800,000 women participated in the Red army and about another 200,000 in partisan (irregular) forces. These figures put women at about 8 percent of overall forces (with 12 million men). Of the total of 800,000, about 500,000 reportedly served at the fronts, and about 250,000 received military training in Komsomol schools." (Goldstein 2001: 65).

In China exclusive women militias were formed to attack on areas controlled by Japanese force during their occupation in China and later to fight against the white army who continued to raid its borders even after the birth of Republican China.

Vietnam war is in fact marked by women's high participation. The picture of burly big American soldiers being led by small, scantily clad Vietnamese women keep haunting American rulers, even today. The following description gives the quantity and quality of their participation in Vietnam's national war. "Madame Dinh was made a general of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) based on her credentials as a co-founder of the NLF and the leader of the Ben Tre uprising. Her position also reflected the significance of women in PLAF...about 40 percent of the PLAF regimental commanders were women." (Barry 1996:47).

Protracted People's War (PPW) and Women's Participation

Women are the powerhouse of the War.

-Ho Chi Minh.

The very nature of class and sex oppression of women is protracted, thus this makes protracted People's War (PPW) very attractive to oppressed women. Although PPW is a methodology of attaining New Democratic state, but within this process, continuous transformation, breaking down feudal culture, and resisting imperialist culture helps women in realizing their worth as dignified human beings. PPW is specially important in Nepal where women have to take a leap from medieval feudal patriarchy (where virgin women are still worshipped) to new democratic revolution, demanding long period of metamorphosis in their mindset.

Distinct features of PPW, such as learning warfare through war, putting ideology before weapon, need for mass based, local initiative, self-reliant, conservation of force, attacking on weakest link of the enemy or inducing enemy to make mistakes or luring the enemy in deep, attacking when in strong position and retreating when in weak position and specially the sixteen character formula: "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue" etc; all these are conducive to women's

participation as this war-fare is the methodology used by weaker section of the society to fight against stronger state force. The concept of base area is especially conducive to women's liberation as it is here that the gains and fruits of their struggle (even when war is going on) can be practically realized. The implementation of equal rights over parental property, co-operative or communal farming, restaurants, and child-care centers can be realized. Similarly their special rights to the seats in new emerging states are guaranteed. The progressive development of war to the advanced formation, gives women enough scope for reflecting, correcting and improving their newly acquired skill of fighting. Not only that PPW prepares women for insurrection war where speed, surprise and concentrated efforts are needed for the final capture of the central state power.

In specific condition of Nepal, the property less status of women together with their gross negligence by the state despite being the backbone of self sustaining peasant economy has prepared material ground for joining women in mass in PLA. Being left alone to tend old and young children while men go to mercenary service or as labourers in urban centres of Nepal and India, they are like de-facto single women who have to fight against hunger in remote difficult terrain. What makes them desperate for revenge is when most of them land up getting co-wived after having shouldered double burden. And the feudal legal system condones such multiple marriages with light punishment. Thus allowing their daughters to join PLA, while they themselves become sympathizers or whole timers for the PW manifests this revenge. Also the tendency to get the daughters married at young age to offload the burden of chastity makes young Indo-Aryan unmarried women to run away to join PLA to break the feudal chain. Similarly Tibeto-Burman women, although relatively free in making their own choice of partners land up being caught up in vicious circle of rigorous, monotonous reproductive life, thus PLA offers them direct chance to explore and experiment with their relative freedom. PLA has also offered new avenue for the recently freed bonded labours of Tarai, the Tharu women who were not only economically exploited but also sexually exploited by the higher castes Brahmins and Chhetris from the mountain region. By arming Dalit women, PLA has given them teeth to bite against the rigid caste system, which treats them worse than dogs. It has given authority to women belonging to oppressed nationalities.

Unlike men, women in Nepal have little scope for economic up-liftmen in terms of having access to banking transactions or even finding jobs in urban centres, especially in India where they fall into the trap of prostitution racket. So they land up working alone in most difficult terrain with least infrastructure and it is them who are being targeted by royal Nepal army (RNA) in the form of looting and burning their home, cattle, standing crops and often raping and killing them. This has accelerated the process of joining in PLA for direct revenge. They are thus like what Marx had said about the proletariat, they have nothing to lose but their chains!

Role of PLA in transforming Women Combatant's Character

“The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations, no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional idea.” (Marx and Engels 1977: P.126)

The PLA has not only transformed women in essence but also in form. Basically it has given meaning, value, respect, dignity not only to their lives but to their deaths as well. For too long they have been taken for granted. For too long they have been bearing private and public violence silently. Today hooligans, goondas, womenisers can't dare to come near Maoist women, unless accompanied with armed reactionary force. It has turned insecure women to insurgents. In form it has totally undressed them from their feudal frills to functional unisex dress. Today she is not only conscious of her ideological development but also her physical development. Not only that she is very conscious with her sexuality as it is directly related with her marriage and reproductive activities which has direct bearing on her work. PLA has not only helped her from breaking the four walls of her house, it has also stretched her reach to four corners of the country. It has transformed her from anonymous domestic slave to a very visible rebellious professional fighter. Earlier she had no idea of time, slogging from dawn to dusk (even past midnight), today she is recording time while planting time bomb. Previously she could only pull other's hair, today PLA is teaching her to pull 3-0-3. From a god-fearing woman she has transformed onto a fierce woman! In the past her ears earned for gossip today she is craning her neck to hear local FM, national and international news in the radio. Earlier she only bled to throw away her menstrual blood; today she is bleeding to throw away American imperialist backed monarchy system.

Fighting on the strength of ideology and using warfare skill her body language has changed into a very confident smart dignified woman, from illiterate woman she has become literate with enriched vocabulary of ideological and military terminologies. Today she has become philosophical about life and death as the two sides of the same coin, defining it in terms of necessity and chance etc. She understands dialectics in terms of seeing positive in negative and vice versa. She understands the laws of contradiction in terms of identifying principal (enemies) and secondary (enemies), she knows how to judge things in relatively, in contradiction and in leaps and bounds. She now knows relationship between state and government, between imperialist and Third World countries and even between American imperialist and other imperialist countries. Thus PLA has enabled village woman to be more confident, conscious and composed woman than urban educated woman! Indeed women in PLA are found to be more forward than women in frontal organizations of the Party. The rate of transformation in PLA is so fast that women hesitate to leave this field when their health problem or reproductive function comes on their way or are transferred to other fields. It has expanded her sphere of activity from uterus to universality. It has steeled her physically as well as mentally making her more objective minded and detached for fulfilling the rigorous life of combat. From an ignored woman she has become an authority. All these remind one of Com. Lenin's saying that war brings transformation in 10 days what it takes 10 years in normal time.

Role of Women Combatants in Transforming the Nature of PLA

Strategic participation of women in PLA has not only made it wholesome, it has also lent mass character to the army by making it multi-functional, multi-character thus making it truly people's army in appearance as well as in essence. The infusion of women in PLA has made it easier to expand its activities from fighting to organizing and engaging in productive activities. It has brought gentleness, compassionate feelings in rigorous combatant life. Above all it has

smashed the masculine image of the fighting force. Their input has facilitated PLA to swim smoothly in the sea of masses by acting as barometer to check the temperature of water so that PLA can sail through smoothly.

Fighting Force

Women's participation has made fighting force more tenacious, disciplined, and high cultured and more focused. In field it has been generally found that where men combatants gave up, women continued to fight, and where men left their weapons, women combatants clutched their guns even in most adverse circumstances, where men faltered in the face of enemy's torture, women resisted even at the cost of torture and death. It was also found that where men hesitated to go in offensive assault, women were found to go for it without looking for excuses. They seldom refused the task given; they would always give it a try. Also during set backs, it was women who showed more patience and sense of composure, while men tended to feel restless and irritable. Their sense of commitments and hard work has helped in shedding go-easy attitude amongst the men combatants. Also their involvement has self-cleansing effect on PLA as drinking, gambling, cheap entertainments and womanizing cannot go hand in hand with their participation in war. It also boosts men's morale in PLA while it demoralizes enemy's army. Lastly their infusion makes PLA gender friendly and class-conscious force. This gets more reinforced when their women combatants are brutally tortured, raped and killed by the reactionary force.

Women's participation has made PLA more approachable to reactionary army's families, thus increasing its persuasiveness and politicizing power to discourage their men from fighting with PLA and to join it instead. It has enabled the People's Army to get wider and deeper intelligent networks at local level. It has also made medical work more efficient and gentle in PLA. By infusing women in PLA it has catalyzed the process of integration between different castes, races, ethnic groups, regional groups through inter-marriages between these communities within PLA, thus mitigating non-class distinctions and making PLA more class conscious and multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-racial. This is in sharp contrast to what exists in RNA, where the fighting force is divided on the caste, class, ethnic, religion and regional basis.

Women's participation in PLA not only helps in checking militarist tendency but also from drifting to roving guerillas. It has made the job of militarizing the masses for their defense easy.

Organization Force

What makes people's army distinct from the reactionary army is that it also acts as an organizational, political force. In fact PLA is essentially an ideological army with military face. In hostile areas, it is the PLA, which organizes the masses in which women combatant's input is very vital. This is because women combatants are more readily accepted and believed thus it helps in removing initial fear of the masses. Their presence in people's court makes masses, particularly women more accessible, more at ease and more hopeful for egalitarian justice. This increases the organizational power of PLA. Also the multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-regional and multi-gender character of PLA enriched by mixed marriages together with widow re-

marriage makes PLA a real social engineer in removing decadent monolithic feudal culture of the backward society. Women's participation in PLA has facilitated in rehabilitating runaway families and reactionary families in base areas. This is because handling of relationships and contradictions within the families and the communities has been the traditional domain of the women in general, thus, their incorporation in PLA helps in strengthening the organizational capacity of the PLA.

Production Force

The existence of base area even while on war, makes possible for PLA to work as production force for consolidating the base area. Infusion of women in PLA has made production work more diversive. By involving women combatants in otherwise male dominated construction works such as building roads, bridges, houses, culverts, irrigation channels etc and by involving men combatants in otherwise women dominated work such as collecting fodder, fuels, food processing, mess works et. PLA has thus been able to break the traditional division between physical and mental work and public and private work, thus helping the masses to identify with new progressive culture. Their infusion in PLA has also made production work more pleasurable, complimentary, cooperative and catering to all sections of masses such as men, women, children, old aged and disabled. There have been many instances where PLA has helped single-headed families to complete their seasonal works in peak hours. Due to the presence of women combatants, people find PLA more approachable as it is much easier for them to communicate their problems through women combatants in PLA than men.

From above it can be said that the revolutionary Communist Parties all over the world should take note that the emphasis that PLA is people's army and not the old, anti-people, bureaucratic and barricaded standing army of the reactionary class can only be realized if PLA takes women's participation as strategic, because its incorporation will not only make the PLA visibly people's army but also makes armed institution structurally radical to counter the old habits of centralized barricaded standing army.

Women Combatants and Royal Nepal Army (RNA)

Know the enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles.

-Sun Tzu

One of the biggest contradictions faced by reactionary army around the world is that while it is an instrument of coercion for the ruling class, but it has to rely upon the oppressed class from which it draws its manpower to enforce its rule. It tries to solve this contradiction by creating a strong centralized hierarchical bureaucratic set up whereby a limited few but highly powerful rank of officers (mostly belonging to the ruling class, caste, gender, religion, region and lingual group) make decisions and pass on the most arduous, risky and dirty job to ordinary soldiers belonging to the oppressed class. Having monopolized its power within the armed institution, it then goes about killing natural class affinity soldiers have towards the masses by deliberately brutalizing and dehumanizing soldiers so that they can crush the masses ruthlessly. It is here that women as an instrument of brutalization takes specific feature which needs to be highlighted.

First of all brutalizing women of its own class is much easier and effective because it is an extension of domestic violence, which can be easily co-opted in military training. Secondly, such acts on soft targets give them fake sense of superiority complex badly needed to boost their morale in absence of justifiable ideology. Thirdly, their long barricaded life style makes them insecure about losing their wives, thus it becomes easy for the reactionary class to direct such men's frustrations against the rebellious women by raping and killing them. Fourthly, reactionary army is fed on religious ideology, which sees rebellious women as heretics who deserve to be punished. All these combinations make reactionary army all over the world most brutal, anti-people and an alienated institution.

In Nepal's context the RNA is in fact one of the most hated armed forces of the reactionary state, for the masses in general and women in particular and specifically for the women combatants in PLA. The reason being it is the traditional support base for the monarchy system, which has been consistently used against any democratic movements in Nepal since 1951 (when oligarch Rana system was overthrown). Of late it has become even more hated because it has additionally become puppet of US imperialism, thus losing even semblance of its so-called nationalistic characteristic. For women in particular this institution represents the defender of much hated masculine feudal patriarchy, which keeps them under the darkness of ignorance, oblivion and religion. For women combatants in PLA specifically, it represents a force against which they have to not only wage class war but also gender war in order to overcome rape, torture and death.

The universal phenomenon all over the world is that reactionary class always underestimates the strength of people. This is all the more true for women in general and oppressed women in particular. Hence the reactionary feudal army, the RNA has been generally under-estimating the strength of women combatants in PLA. However this is changing. In the initiation period of PW the police force took men more seriously than women combatants in PLA, by killing them in mass but not yet killing women combatants in such a scale. They were often jailed and were raped sporadically. When the concept of armed police force came, then there was a marked increase in rape and torture cases along with sporadic killings. In the latest move when RNA came into the scene there is a mark shift of brutality on women; now women combatants, cadres, even sympathizers are getting raped and killed. The perpetuation of mass rape by RNA is seen amongst the people too, which often go under-reported or not reported at all.

RNA has always looked at women combatants in PLA from sexist point of view. They see their involvement in PLA in the form of gaining sexual gratification with men combatants. There are many instances where they have highlighted the discovery of condoms in jungles in media. Rude, dirty abuses and obscene body languages showed on women PLA in war zones has at one end made women more gender conscious, determined, committed and fierce-ful while fighting against them, at the other end it steels the determination of male PLA to take revenge on the reactionary army. The brutal rape, torture and murder of women PLA has made PLA more gender-sensitive, thus reinforcing class unity while it has made reactionary army more brutal and sexist in attitude.

Increasing brutality on women has in fact created impetus for women to join directly in PLA in order to take revenge against army who rape them or kill their near and dear ones. This

has resulted RNA to reverse its earlier policy of banning recruitment of women in RNA. Recently they have advertised for recruiting women in their force. How far this is going to increase the firepower of RNA can be judged by experiences in other countries. The class character and the gender aspect of reactionary armed force hinders their very purpose of recruiting women, as a result women's position is still secondary, more for decorative value than for actual fighting. The fact that they are recruited not as choice but as necessity because of increasing participation of women in street fighting and various movements and wars, makes their involvement as a temporary, practical and tactical phenomena.

The experience of much referred women combatants in Israel need to be demystified. They are not deployed in combat (Goldstein2001: 86). They are used as secondary force, mostly in civilian department as nurses, para-medics, typewriters, driving tanks etc. Women combatants in rich countries like USA, are seldom sent in direct combat zone since experiences has shown that men combatants tend to show excessive concern for the well-being of their women combatants (another form of humiliating women combatants) at the expense at the mission. Also there are repeated cases of verbal abuses, sexual harassment and rape of combatant women by their colleagues, which are time and again reported in various medias. In Third World countries like India the experience is even worse. Women armed forces are humiliated and often ridiculed as "Token Battalion" or "Petticoat battalion", " by their men (Singh 2003: P16). Thus class nature, hence the patriarchal outlook and henceforth the bureaucratic structure of the army will not allow full participation of women in combat zone. One such combatant woman aptly puts it: "Either they are overprotective like knights in shining armor during operations or they are just against us." (Singh 2003:p.16). It is certain that women's experience in RNA will be no better than above examples, in fact much worse, because RNA draws its strength from most reactionary archaic patriarchal institution: the Monarchy.

Challenges that Lay Ahead of Women Combatants

".....Fight, fail, fight again, fail again, fight again... till their victory; that is the logic of the people, and they will never go against this logic..." (Mao 200: P.68-69)

Any new experiment, especially in the field of breaking age-old fossilized tradition; one is bound to face some initial hiccups and challenges. This is no less true in the field of fighting force where women in Nepal are participating in People's Army for the first time along with men. There are multiple factors, which they have to overcome.

Patriarchal Outlook

Feudal patriarchal outlook first of all do not treat women as individuals, secondly it sees them in the light of their reproductive function. This outlook is bound to effect on PLA too, in some way or the other, although political education is trying to remove them. This is reflected by men's tendency to underestimate women's capabilities*. Even if they prove their prowess, men

*Com Shilu, the commander of the historic Gorkha jail break, who was already a commander of squad when she was imprisoned, told me personally how men comrades missed their chance of escape because they did not believe in women's jail break plan. They had in fact left escape route

tend to see it as temporary phenomena, which will wear off after they get married and bear children. Hence there is strong tendency to see any inconvenience, temporary rest, or illness related to reproductive system as sign of physical weakness or to see marriage as solution to women's problem. There is also tendency amongst most men to see women's leadership positions in army as imposed by the Party, rather than as a result of their hard work. They are thus not that enthusiastic to establish women's authority in PLA, as they would have done to men. This also results in not involving women in framing new plans, policies, instead relegating them to traditional gender specific works. Women thus have to work hard twice, even thrice to establish their authority over the PLA; fortunately they are able to do so in majority of cases.

Problem of docility

If men have problem of being too confident, women have problems taking initiative in their hands. It is generally found that even if they have necessary skill, they wait for men to take initiative. They are found diligent, obedient, sacrificing but when it comes to formulating new plans, handling new weapons, debating on political lines they are found shirking. As a result they land up doing repetitive gender specific works more than the challenging ones. They also allow themselves to be victim of circumstances; this is often seen in their unplanned motherhood status, robbing their continuity and chance of developing leadership quality in PLA. This is also seen in the field of reporting, they have problem synthesizing their work despite having rich experience in their field, and this results in underreporting and marginalizing their work. Due to feudal patriarchal oppression right from childhood they are more prone to suffer from inner conflict, resulting in reflective reactions such as fits, hysteria. Their narrow outlook gets reflected more amongst themselves than when they are with men. This is manifested in showing jealousy amongst themselves, in doubting women's leadership and thereby taking men's leadership more seriously.

The Question of Continuity and Development of Leadership in PLA

Women in Nepal have indeed taken a big jump from kitchen to combat arena. However, the question of continuity and development of leadership in this field is still challenging. This can be generally seen by the fact that in combat activity while men well above 40 are fighting where as one hardly finds women above 25 fighting in the field. Since the progressive development of leadership in army is intimately linked with rigorous, continuous practice and focused attention, women's lack of continuity in this field due to marriage and reproductive functions is robbing them of leadership positions in PLA. This has also resulted in progressive decline in numbers as one moves from militia to division level.

While limiting the minimum age of marriage to 20 (the official minimum age of marriage for women as stipulated by old state is 18) has to many extent given women longer space to concentrate on their newly acquired activity but by not stipulating minimum age for conceiving this has lead to early pregnancies leading to their discontinuity. There are many reasons behind

for male comrades while making their own historic jail break in which 6 women escaped from highly fortified jail, Gorkha in 2001.

these phenomena, which needs to be addressed at philosophical, ideological, physical and practical level.

It is often found that it is the men who insist on early pregnancy. The rate of casualty and uncertainty of death seem to make them keen to leave behind their physical mark. Political maturity would have made them more conscious of leaving behind their ideological mark. Although women-combatants in general are not happy to be mother at such productive age, however it is generally found that they land up becoming a mother, at least a mother of one child. This is despite the fact that their lives as combatants are uncertain and vulnerable. This implies that although there is no dearth of courage to sacrifice one's life for the sake of revolution, but there is still hesitation to sacrifice mother-hood or fatherhood for the sake of revolution. Thus from theoretical point of view the question of continuity and development of leadership in PLA becomes more complex for women as they have to deal with natural division of labour which is associated with their reproductive functions. It is here that the question of freedom and necessity needs to be delicately and dialectically handled. The rigorous, uncertain, war conditioned life style does demand sacrifice from motherhood, fatherhood, at least for certain period. But this cannot be forced upon them; this can be instilled in them by raising their ideological sharpness.

From the practical point of view, the unavailability or the high rate of failure amongst the available family planning measures have also contributed to unplanned childbirth. On top of it the one sided burden of childcare and absence of proper child-care facilities has also been contributing to loss of women in PLA. Luckily boarding facilities for children of martyred families and whole timers have come up in special zones at regional level in Rolpa and Rukum. Similarly many childcare centers have come up in special zones at district levels. Also the rapid expansion of PLA has enabled it to have many auxiliary departments. Earlier pregnancy, childbirth, injury or sickness etc was factors for transferring them to organizational fronts. Such transfers often resulted in learning new skills all over again and at the same time it resulted in permanently losing armed manpower, thus wasting newly acquired military skill. But now they can be observed within PLA, carrying their positional status without having to lose connectivity with the military related activities. This has also facilitated them to return to trench faster.

Health Problem

Health problem has been one of the general problems men and women combatants face in Nepal. However there seems to be greater awareness for women's health problem. Women are found to be more malnourished than men when they join People's army. The rigorous life style of combatants, together with irregular food supply makes them more vulnerable. This is especially seen during menstrual period, when additional nutrition is most required. On top of this there is scant awareness of the importance of maintaining reproductive system in order.

There is a tendency to hide problems related to menstrual disturbances and white discharges. Timely intervention often consisting of simple surgery or medication or preventive measures can prevent these problems. There have been cases where women combatants have deliberately hidden their problems (despite concerns showed by their male commanders and commissars) fearing their chance of missing big training camps or military operations. Often

women themselves feel that their source of weakness is their womb; that it is the menstrual period that makes them weaker than men; that men are stronger because they are bigger, taller and more muscular. What needs to be understood is that the self-cleansing system of menstrual period and the biological protection that womb gives to women against any epidemic disease in its pursuance to save expectant fertilized egg from outside disease, makes them biologically stronger than men. Similarly while men may exhibit more strength in short duration it is the women who can retain energy for longer period. Hence the quality of strength in both cannot be compared precisely because they are different. Therefore the knowledge about the anatomy, specificities of man and woman's health in terms of their specific strengths and weakness should be imparted in PLA. Similarly there is tendency to blow out of proportion the problems related to menstruation while at the same time under-reporting the problem of hydro-sill faced by men in combat activities.

It would be appropriate to say that the concept of women as weaker sex is as much notional as the concept of accepting men as the stronger sex. Such simple categorization harms both men and women. Hence this all the more proves men and women are more complimentary in their association than competitive.

Of all the three instruments of revolution, the People's Army is one arena where there is fast rate of transformation. The rate of changes in tactics, mobility and flexibility makes it the centre of contradiction, possibilities and transformation. In fact most of the contradictions related to gender-relation and women's development gets quickly reflected in the PLA. Solving these contradictions will on a long run solve contradictions in other fields too. The recent decision by the CPN (Maoist) to open women's department in PLA is a welcome step to solve women specific problems within PLA.

Political Line and its Effect on Women's Participation in PLA

“Correctness or otherwise of the ideological and political line decides everything. If it is correct, everything is gained, but if it wrong, everything is lost.

-Mao Tse Tung

War is the highest form of struggle for resolving contradictions between all contending classes, nations. (Tse-Tung). Hence which class the armed forces stands for, is both vital for not only making revolution but also counter-revolution. In order to make revolution and to check counter-revolution it is very important to make the army politicized. However correct political line itself is not enough to guarantee the success, it should be reflected in organization structure too. This is all the more true in PLA where the question of necessity outstands more prominently than the question of freedom, and hence military conservatism can easily come which is detrimental to the participation of women in PLA. At present there are three tendencies seen in People's Army; Right capitulationist, dogmato-revisionist and creative scientific application of MLM and Prachanda Path.

In the present day the main danger to the revolutionary movement is from the rightist capitulationist deviation that overestimates the strength of the enemy and underestimates the strength of the people. In PLA underestimating the fighting power of the women combatants manifests this tendency. It is also seen by taking women's participation as a secondary force for the main force. Thus they use women's force as tactical force whenever their specific skill, body language, traditional division of labour are needed. This results in using women combatants as assistants in rear areas of war such as intelligent workers, as couriers, as medical assistants etc rather than in main war fronts. Even when they are given chance in combat zones, any initial hiccups, hesitations, or small medical problems is quickly taken as a proof of their inability to participate in war fronts. Their approach is very pragmatist, and this is most apparent when it comes to addressing women's sexuality. They do not make conscious efforts to postpone marriages and check pregnancies, which has direct bearing on their fighting capacity. And when pregnancies occur then they are looked upon as women specific problem. This then becomes an excuse to transfer them to other civil departments of the army or to frontal organizations of the Party. Thus by relying too much into objective reality of women's problem, which in essence is the product of feudal patriarchy of Nepal, it fails to put politics in command resulting into pragmatic solution to every problem that crops up amongst women in army. This ultimately results in negating women's strategic participation in People's army.

Since CPN (Maoist) is at present in war path, the rightist capitulationist tendency cannot dare to come out in open, hence it takes the mask of dogmatic revisionist tendency whereby it appears left in appearance but right in essence. This it does by advocating radical slogans, extreme positions, swearing by class and class alone. By swearing with what is literally written in classical books and by not relating to the specific situation, they undermine or underestimate women's specific problems, gender discriminations in combat zone. They tend to look at pregnancy and reproductive function of women combatants as an opportunity given to them to prove their metal at two fronts: at battle and at cradle fronts. It is similar to the super-mother concept the capitalists want to project: perfect in corporate office and perfect in kitchen. Thus it underestimates the practical difficulties women face in the name of romanticizing struggle. And when their expectation of women combatants don't match with the result they expect, then they are gradually transferred into non-combat departments of the army or in other fields in the name of necessity. Thus they too fall into the same trap of negating women's strategic role in People's Army as the rightists have done. By relying too much in to the subjective efforts at the cost of objective reality they fail to transform their righteous ideology into physical force, thus inviting militarist outlook in PA.

The creative application of MLM-Prachanda Path lies in seeing the problem and challenge of women's participation in PLA dialectically. This they do by addressing women's specific problems, gender-related problems under the overall framework of MLM ideology. They look at women's pregnancy, reproductive functions as not women specific problem, but as a challenge for the whole revolution and hence the Party. They try to solve these problems dialectically by negating pregnancies or controlling them or spacing them depending upon the level of women's consciousness, their present work, the positions they hold in their work, and on the nature of the place where they are stationed. Thus they are able to demonstrate before this feudal society that biology cannot be women's destiny! The question of facing life and death at

every moment with ideological mind makes PLA a very conscious, sharp flexible but also a resolute force. Thus they encourage new culture, new ideas in PLA since they can be easily accepted and practiced if they are scientific and rejected immediately if they are unscientific.

Conclusion

The aim of war is to eliminate war

-Mao Tse-tung

People's War is a defensive War. The fact that Maoist People's War lays emphasis on disarming the reactionary state army (so as to arm itself against its attack) than entering into deadly arms-race competition with it (as currently seen amongst the ruling states, particularly amongst the imperialist countries) itself proves its defensive nature.

War as a rule brutalizes both men and women, it in fact brutalizes whole human race. The concept of standing army, barricaded army for any healthy society, country or continent is on a long run harmful not only to the society, country or continent but to the combatants themselves. But, in an increasingly polarized and class divided world, war has become necessity for the proletarians: first of all to fight against war-mongering imperialist countries and secondly to protect their hard won democracy against the imperialist sharks who operate through internal reactionary stooges. This has all the more become necessary for the oppressed women who have been victim of both class and patriarchal violence. They understand the necessity for waging war in order to end all wars, so as to save their productive and reproductive power. Most importantly, to save the whole community from killing each other, from orphaning innocent children.

In war it is said that it is wise tactics to attack an enemy on his weakest point. In bourgeois, particularly in feudal state like Nepal, women's question is the weakest link. The incorporation of women as combatants to the level of quantity and quality in People's Army has at one end exposed many loopholes in the reactionary mindset, their army, their state functioning, at the other end, it has opened up many unexplored possibilities in women's liberation and gender relations thus challenging sectarian feminists. Lastly it has enriched People's War experience.

Reactionary ideology which draws strength from patriarchy, private property and papal (or any religion) can never involve women's participation to the scale and quality that People's War can. In absence of scientific ideology it relies on patriarchal values to boost reactionary army's morale thus encouraging them to punish rebellious women by raping, torturing and killing them. Such crimes have exposed not only class biasness of the state but also gender-biasness. On a long run it helps in forging class alliance between men and women. It has helped in demystifying ruling army as a protector of the country by drawing them to class war but it has also unmasked their guardian image of saving the honour of the country's women by exposing their heinous crime against women.

PLA has also challenged the myopic view of sectarian feminists who see women as just victims of war, not as agents of change. It has shattered the peace image that these brand of feminists want to give to women. Revolutionary women are not for eternal peace that are to be found in

graveyard, rather they want hard won peace by fighting against class and patriarchal enemies. By being silent spectator to the mass rape, torture and killings of women by the state and by shouting at roof tops against individual men in domestic violence, it has exposed their sham “all men hater” image or “all women, all sisters unite” image. What sectarian feminists should observe that such rape torture and killing of women by the reactionary state has in fact helped mitigate hair splitting gender divide that they want to create. At the other end PLA has offered scope for direct revenge against oppressors who molest, co-wives, rapes and tortures them by allowing them to join people’s army. It has provided teeth to women’s movement by making women’s liberation physically possible!

It has been found that like revolutionary state, revolutionary People’s Army too can get degenerated, bureaucratized and alienated from the masses once the revolution succeeds. Subjecting the state and the PLA under the constant vigilance, control and intervention of the people can fight such tendencies. Militarizing the masses can do this. This has become all the more important in today’s uni-polar world, because any challenge to the so-called stable government in any part of the world by any nationalist or revolutionary resistance groups, ultimately invites the wrath of American imperialist intervention. And everywhere they have intervened, they have made no distinction between rebellion forces and masses, killing them ruthlessly like in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is here that women’s combatants’ input becomes strategic. They being the largest oppressed, all encompassing, all permeating group and social engineer of all households can facilitate in militarizing the masses as they have better connectivity with the people. And they being the last oppressed group to be liberated, they will always actively fight in making continuous revolution till their own liberation is realized and guaranteed. Hence their input in PLA will not only hasten revolution but will also hasten the process of continuous revolution.

Also their input will help in checking bureaucratization in PLA as this tendency run counter to women’s active participation in PLA. Thus it will discourage barricaded army concept at one end, and it will encourage bare footed army concept at the other. As a result their incorporation eventually helps in democratization the people’s army. This helps in withering away of the army, which, in turn creates physical environment for withering away of the state. Thus People’s Army should have strategic participation of women combatants! •

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