



**Female Combatants and Ex-combatants in Maoist Revolution and Their  
Struggle for Reintegration in Post-war, Nepal**

**Master's thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation discusses the “roles of female combatants and ex-combatants in Maoist People’ War in Nepal” landing evidences about their experiences as a combatant in PLA life. The study documents and analyses their struggle for integration into their own family and society.

The role of female combatants changed many times. Firstly, their traditional subordinate role got changed undergone political transformation. Their roles were equal and no less than male combatants during decade long civil war; however, the challenges they faced were much more than the male combatants—pregnancy, motherhood, physical complicacies and alike. After discharged, their role had to change again into the same old traditional subordinate role. As a result, female combatants are facing persistent problems in adjusting in their traditional family and society owing to the fact that they lived in a different combatant communist ideology dominated society for a decade long time; because, the dualism between adopting and rejecting this new culture to integrate into old orthodox culture still persists.

## ABBREVIATION

AMMAA	Agreement on Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPN (M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPS	Center of Peace Study
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
FPTP	First past the Post
JMCC	Joint Monitoring Coordination Committee
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PR	Proportional Representation
NA	National Army
NC	Nepali Congress Party
NP	Nepal Police
RIM	Revolutionary Internationalist Movement
UN	United Nation
UNPF	United National People's Front
UNMIN	United Mission in Nepal
UNRIP	United Nations Integrated Rehabilitation Program
UML	United Marxist and Leninist
ULF	United Left Front
URNG	United Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca
VMLR	Verified Minors and Late Recruits

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study:

Women have offered practical support for male combatants, and sacrificed their virtues as mothers, sisters and wives which have been used in symbolic representations of nationhood and motherhood. But, in contrast, women have been shown themselves as brave fighters also, like men as in Latin America, South Asia, and Africa. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women had played not only active but vital roles in liberation struggles against foreign domination in many countries such as civil war of Vietnam. They fought along with men, got same physical military and technical trainings, i.e., map reading, engineering etc., and had same combat dress as male counterparts. Primarily though, women and girls supported male combatants sometimes voluntarily otherwise compulsively. Even though, they did not engage in combat, they carry supplies, cook food, wash clothes and provide sexual services.<sup>1</sup>

During war, homes become the target of the enemy group. Women's bodies become an area of violence and power struggle. Rape is a means of exploitation to break the honor of their enemies' society, village, clan and family. Along with that, in order to acquire information about the enemy, women have been raped and assaulted—tortured. Many societies do not flatly define this as a war crime and refuse to place their full support behind the victims. Women who return home from the battlefield or prison are being suspected of having been raped. For example; Palestinian women resistance fighters were not welcomed back in their families and communities, because they were suspected to be violated by the interrogators. It has been hard to regain their previous honored position in the family and society<sup>2</sup>.

In the civil wars in Angola, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Sudan, extreme level of violence was experienced by many people. Girls were used as soldiers, sexual slaves and mine detectors. Acts of mass rape and sexual violence of extraordinary brutality (like cutting off breasts and genital mutilations and

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<sup>1</sup> Afshar, Haleh, "Woman and Wars: some trajectories towards a feminist peace", in Afshar Haleh, Eade, Deborah (eds.), 2004, *Development, Women, and War. Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxam

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

castration of men and boys) was meted out by various armed rebels and government forces.<sup>3</sup> In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of intrastate wars declined and the numbers of interstate conflicts have risen sharply. In this new international situation, the United Nations has taken on a new demanding responsibility through different kinds of peace keeping and stabilization missions. At this moment the UN is engaged in twenty-three post-conflict countries out of twenty-seven either in the name of political or peace keeping mission.<sup>4</sup> The role of national actors may vary from being limited (buy-in), to being substantial or being the sole guaranties for a peace process. An example of the latter is the Sri Lankan government after defeating the Tamil Tigers. Therefore, national and international level actors play crucial, yet often tension-ridden roles in building peace after devastating civil wars.<sup>5</sup>

The immediate post-war environment requires a number of interventions from national and international actors. The international community has developed several mechanisms and methodologies to assist in stabilization and recovery strategies that support the wider peace process, which is often a fragile transition from armed conflict to stable peace, often at risk of relapsing into a new phase of armed conflict. One of the most immediate international interventions has generically been defined as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs.<sup>6</sup> DDR programs mainly focus on two parts: continuation of political dialogue for ensuring political stability in the country and often if not always on disarmament; and demobilization and reintegration expanding to encompass the transformation of the military organization as well as the requirement of the individual fighters to become civilians. Combatants – whether women or men - are often persons who have been fighting to change the social and political conditions that they were discontent with. In most cases, combatants are given a choice between being integrated into the security forces (or forming a new security force) or being so-called reintegrated or rehabilitated into the society. The term reintegration is often problematic, since it is signaling a return to the same conditions as

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<sup>3</sup> Mazurana, Dyan, “**Gender and the Causes and Consequences of Armed Conflicts**”, in Mazura, Dyan, Raven-Roberts, Angela, Parpart, Jane Gender (eds.), 2005, *Conflict and Peacekeeping*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher.

<sup>4</sup> Pathak Bishnu (2008), “*Modeling the Integration of the Maoist Combatants: DDR or SSR?*” Conflict Study Center, Kathmandu, Nepal.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Meintjens Sheila, Pillay Anu and Tursen Meredith (edt.), (2002), “*The Aftermath Women in Post Conflict Transformation*” Cumbria, UK

before the war.<sup>7</sup> If those former fighters, who want to return to civilian life, do not involve in processes of democratization including political participation and socio-economic revival. They may become frustrated, unwilling and unable to consolidate deeper social changes that they fought for. A former study of the demobilization and reintegration process of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and of the civil defense patrols in Guatemala concluded that - for the URNG - the size of the international assistance and the content and direction of the projects had a strong influence on the ex-fighters' ability to become socially and politically active in the post-conflict phase.<sup>8</sup> The study further concluded that collective reintegration contributed to more social and political activity among the reintegrated. Female ex-fighters can play an important role in processes of change and peace-building –if and when they are allowed to. Many of the same necessities and conditions needed for a successful reintegration of male fighters are also applicable to female, but gender research has revealed that demobilization and reintegration processes of women pose additional, gender-specific challenges.<sup>9</sup>

Elise Barth, in her comparative study on demobilization and reintegration processes in Africa, found that many female ex-combatants had positive experiences from their time as guerrilla soldiers; and that, they preserved positive identifications with the guerrilla movement, in spite of having many hard and bitter experiences during the fighting.<sup>10</sup> Many of the ex-female-fighters experienced a setback during the peace process when they were reintegrated back into a poverty-stricken society with rigid traditional gender relations. One major obstacle has been that, reintegration projects are often not sensitive to and adapted to the needs of female fighters. Besides, their group-identity and the networks from the war were undermined and even lost, and many of the women ex-combatants have struggled quite alone, without anybody to look after their children when they took up civil occupation.<sup>11</sup>

Reintegration programs often focus predominantly on economic reintegration, providing food, allowances and skills training; and less on social, psycho-social and political reintegration.

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<sup>7</sup> Stankovic Tatjana, Torjesen Stina and Bleie Tone, (2010), *“Fresh Insights on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: A Survey for Practitioners in Nepal”* Center for Peace Studies, Tromso University, Norway

<sup>8</sup> Meintjens Sheila, Pillay Anu and Tursen Meredith (edt.), (2002), *“The Aftermath Women in Post Conflict Transformation”* Cumbria, UK.

<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> Gjelsvik Ingvild Magnas, (2010), *“Women, War and Empowerment: A Case Study of Female ex-combatants in Colombia”* Master's thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation, University of Tromso.

<sup>11</sup> ibid

Yet, ex-combatants and their families may also require several types of social backing, awareness raising and economic support, including psychological trauma counseling, to painstakingly rebuild their lives. For ex-combatants, the transition to peacetime can be stressful and difficult at the least. Arguably, for female ex-combatants, social reintegration into their old communities or into new communities might be a very conflict-ridden experience, basically unwanted, as this study also will illuminate. They might be suspected of having transgressed patriarchal moral norms. The reaction might be suspicion, accusations and often high rates of domestic violence. Women might feel compelled to hide their wartime experiences of love affairs, informal marriages, uncompleted pregnancies, the real father of their child and forced sex. Such forced denials, might be immensely taxing psychologically and lead to post-traumatic stress symptoms for women and men ex-combatants and even worse, severe depression, self loathing and suicide attempts.

In the bubbling cauldron of South Asia, moving beyond the rigid religiously-sanctioned standards of virtues mothers and sacred sisters, women have defied passivity and a sense of being powerless victims.<sup>12</sup> Instead, they have not only forced survival strategies, but also mobilized for empowering resistance and entered into negotiations of power with the security forces, administration and courts. Women have formed mothers' fronts and coalitions for peace. Women have become guerrillas and soldiers, and women have emerged as agents of political and social change, conflict resolution, and social transformation. Women of different castes, ethnic groups and generations participated in mass-based political nationalist anti-colonial struggles in India and Bangladesh and in Revolutionary Peasant Movements in the 1930s and 40s in British India.<sup>13</sup> The different nature of the conflicts have ranged from ethno-nationalist conflicts as in Nagaland and Kashmir in India, to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, to the mainly class-focused revolutionary Maoist Peoples' War in Nepal, the latter being the focus of this thesis. In South Asian conflicts, the men as part of, often, high-caste leadership in both revolutionary and nationalist struggles have found it necessary to mobilize women in both combatant and non-combatant roles. But if one analyzes all these conflicts, one can discern a tendency in these male-dominated societies of pushing leading women activists back

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<sup>12</sup> Bennet Lynn, (1983), *"Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters"* United States of America, Columbia University Press

<sup>13</sup> Meintjens Sheila, Pillay Anu and Tursen Meredith (edt.), (2002), *"The Aftermath Women in Post Conflict Transformation"* Cumbria, UK.

into the private sphere in the aftermaths of war. Once the peace process begins transforming the conflict, male negotiators marginalize the mobilized women and devalue their activism.<sup>14</sup>

Maoist guerrilla movements have blossomed in South Asia long after the demise of Mao Zedong (December 26, 1893 – September 9, 1976) and his particular brand of communist ideology in China. Operating from Indian soil, a loose confederation of Maoist rebels has been active in a swath of territories, from the jungles of the Deep South to all the way up to the northern border of Nepal. The CPN (M) was formed following a split in the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre), and used the name CPN (Unity Centre) until 1995. On February 13, 1996 the CPN Maoist party launched "Nepalese People's War". The movement started with a small number of political cadres turned combatants in Mid-Western Nepal (Rolpa and Rukhum). Gradually, and especially after 1999, the Maoist guerilla had grown into a highly mobile army that gained control over most of rural parts of Nepal before the final and successful ceasefire agreement was reached in 2006. One of The Maoists' aims in the 'People's War' is to establish a 'People's Democracy' in Nepal. Maoists view this civil war as, a "historical revolt against feudalism, imperialism and reformists".<sup>15</sup>

In 2001, the Nepalese Army was finally mobilized waging a brutal military campaign against the Maoists, focusing their efforts in the rural and western parts of the country. Although there were intermittent ceasefires of a short while, fighting roughly continued throughout the decade till 2006. By then, they controlled much of the country and had their own systems of political governance and so-called peoples' courts. In 2005, the CPN (M) was also worn out after nearly a decade of fighting with some painful losses; approximately more than 13000 death casualties.<sup>16</sup> They sought a different strategy for ending the war, forming a pro-democratic alliance with several other mainstream political parties in opposition to the monarchical dictatorship of King Gyanendra. Following massive popular uprisings and protests (involving over a million people), a prolonged nineteen days long movement in 2006, and several violent clashes between protesters and the Royal Nepalese Army, the monarchy finally got an end. The CPN (M) gained international legitimacy as they agreed to lay down

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<sup>14</sup> Meintjens Sheila, Pillay Anu and Tursen Meredith (edt.), (2002), *"The Aftermath Women in Post Conflict Transformation"* Cumbria, UK.

<sup>15</sup> Uprety, Bishnu Raj, (2009) *"Nepal from War to Peace- Legacies of the Past and Hopes for the Future"*, Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, India

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

arms and participate in the new electoral process. In the aftermath of the conflict, several western European powers removed the CPN (M) from their government's terrorist lists except the US.<sup>17</sup>

Women and girls were also active professional fighters in Maoist insurgency. Also, even though large number of women and girls of the Nepalese society were not directly involved in fighting guerrilla warfare, they worked as a crucial support force for the People's War. They functioned as organizers, as propagandists, as cultural activists, as logistics suppliers, as nurses for the wounded fighters and cadres, as espionage workers, as cover for the party cadres or combatants, as visitors and source of inspirations in jails and in martyrs' households.<sup>18</sup>

“They were also trained to prepare locally made gun-powder. Most of the women combatants were from poor economic background, including pre-set up caste groups and ethnic groups who have been economically, politically, sexually and socially exploited. Quite many had bitter experiences from state-based violence against family members in the late Panchyat and post-1991 era. They had joined the revolution for the emancipation of all kinds of gender-based social and cultural exploitations and violence by state actors.”<sup>19</sup>

On 21 November, 2006, the Maoists signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and ended the decade long civil war. According to the peace accord, the Maoists would sequester their armed cadres in temporary cantonments and camps, while the Nepalese Army would return to its barracks. They agreed to lock up their weapons, but to hold on to the keys to the containers. The United Nations who had played a quite active role during the decade-long conflict were requested to take on a limited mandate for supervising the implementation of the CPA, including monitoring and closely supervising of the weapons through a system of closed-circuit cameras. The office of United Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was established in Nepal along with many UN organizations. UNMIN came to play a crucial, but always controversial role in the fragile peace building process from 2006.<sup>20</sup> UNMIN played leading role in a two-steps verification process of combatants. During the first verification in

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Communist\\_Party\\_of\\_Nepal\\_\(Maoist\)](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Communist_Party_of_Nepal_(Maoist)).

<sup>18</sup> Yami, Hisila, (2007), *“People's War and Women's Liberation in Nepal”* Jhandhwani Publication, Kathmandu Nepal.

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> Uprety, Bishnu Raj, (2009) *“Nepal from War to Peace- Legacies of the Past and Hopes for the Future”*, Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, India.

cantonments, 32,250 Maoist combatants registered their names. In the second round of verification only 23,610 were verified, giving rise to a hot discussion of why so many were missing. The Maoists from the outset wanted their troops to be integrated into a new national army, more effectively and politically controlled. UML-led government was in power due to being backed by the Nepalese Army and India, the regional dominant power of Asia. Maoist and non-Maoists have been in content. Already in 2007, four thousand and eight young individuals were verified as “disqualified”, which gives negative connotation in Nepalese language and discharged from Maoist Army in early 2010. A major UN-interagency reintegration effort focusing on socio-economic rehabilitation within a community approach has been underway since 2010.<sup>21</sup>

As a researcher of this dissertation, I like to return in some more depth to the circumstances around the CPA, which is a context to the specific research questions to address in this thesis.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem:**

Among the verified 23,610 Maoist combatants, 4,008 were discharged in 2010, being identified as Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLR). Verified minors were defined as those born after 25 May 1988. Among them, 3,846 were women, that is, approximately 20% of the total combatants. The other verified combatants have been living in seven main cantonments and twenty-one camps under the UNMIN’s supervision, after the completion of registration. Under Resolution 1740 (2007), UNMIN has given a limited mandate to Joint Monitoring Coordination Committee (JMCC) to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel of the Nepal Army and the Maoist army, in line with the provisions of the Compressive Peace Agreement (CPA) and assist in implementing their agreement on the management of arms and armed personnel.<sup>22</sup> Discharged combatants have been given the opportunity to enroll in United Nations Integrated Rehabilitation Program (UNIRP).

This study intends to examine many, discharged and demobilized female combatants’ situation. The focus will be on their struggle to find their place as non-militant citizens in a largely conservative society. Failure to re/integrate or “rehabilitate” themselves is assumed in the mainstream society to result from those combatants’ continuing identification with a

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<sup>21</sup> UN Country Team Rehabilitation Program Weekly Report, Reporting Period: 09-15 July, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/nepal/document/papers/peaceagreement.htm>

radical communist movement and the para-militant youth-wing of the Maoist Party, hampering their effective reintegration<sup>23</sup> into normal non-violent community life. The actual links between reintegration into communities as “lived spaces”, and communities as “imagined spaces” based on political ideology of commonalities such as class, caste, ethnicity, and region or on other non-political group boundaries needs to be properly investigated.<sup>24</sup> Since many of the ex-combatants are women, efforts have been made by the UN and others to mainstream gender considerations into police and program implementation in Nepal, in line with international resolutions and guidelines.

In the national election after the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), women took part in the elections as voters and as candidates. Some former women combatants were nevertheless successfully elected and are now quite prominent members of the CA. It is not known how many female combatants chose not to go through the verification procedures and simply went back to a civilian life on their own. But a quite sizable number of women went through first and second round of verifications and have chosen to live as combatants in the cantonments, waiting to reintegrate into the civilian society or to take up a carrier in the National Army (NA) or any other security force. Quite many have married during the long camp life. Some have become single mothers, and are looking for a future as civilians.<sup>25</sup>

Historian Linda Grant De Pauw writes, “Women have always and everywhere been inextricably involved in war, (but) hidden from .....During wars, women are ubiquitous and highly visible; when wars are over and the war songs are sung, women disappear.”<sup>26</sup> The women, who were treated as equals in the PLA, bore arms, and were advancing in the military hierarchy, encountering rejection from their communities and struggling with conservative very rigid gender roles. Women ex-combatants seem to be facing stigma in their families and the society at large, because of the country’s traditionally patriarchal nature, the persistent caste system, ethnic discrimination; and geographic location may aggravate their struggle and legitimize continued subordination. As researcher, I want to address these gender complexities in this thesis. My assumption is that these complexities are a reflection of the

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<sup>23</sup> Reintegration means in my study is return back of ex-combatants into their own or new society and culture.

<sup>24</sup> Bleie Tone and Ramesh Shrestha, “DDR in Nepal: Stakeholder Politics and the Implications for Reintegration as a Process of Disengagement”, Policy Report, CPS, University of Troms, forthcoming February 2012

<sup>25</sup> [http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal\\_conflict\\_peace.pdf](http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal_conflict_peace.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Goldstein Joshua S., (2001), *War and Gender*, Cambridge, United Kingdom

deep-rooted gender notion that they have crossed a social and moral boundary of what is considered acceptable for women. We may assume that perceptions of family honor and sexual purity underpin this notion of a precarious gendered boundary. Many families believe that while their daughters were on the battlefield, they were living “sinfully” with other men without marrying—something that could bring great shame on their family. Hence, families and communities have mostly been determined to treat them in a very controlling and suspicious manner or out-rightly ousted them from their homes and community. During their time as soldiers, many women married outside their caste and ethnic tradition, partly due to the encouragement or order of their party leaders and commanders, without their families’ consent. This makes their current and future acceptance into community life more difficult. Based on the interviews with combatants and ex-combatants, I intend to examine many former female soldiers’ reproductive health problems, their confrontation with gender-based violence and their need to support their children born during the war or during the cantonment period.

The general objective of this study is to document and analyze the roles and experiences of discharged female PLAs, but also to give some attention to the situation and experiences of current female combatants in cantonments. More specifically, the study intends to get some insight into their the main reasons of joining PLA at an early age and even more so, study the exiting process from discharge and demobilization, enrollment in the UN’s Rehabilitation Programme and the early stages of building a civilian life. I am in particular interested in investigating whether discharged female combatants are facing stigmatization or rather social approval and recognition within their own families, communities and the society at large. In light of this introduction of my theme, my motivation to undertake this study is to at least in a small way, assist peace scholars and especially scholars working in the field of reintegration and DDR-practitioners, in understanding better the situation of women who were fighters in the Maoist People’s War.

This dissertation’s main focus is therefore on the recent (and still ongoing) social reintegration of the demobilized female combatants, who are VMLR and were during my empirical data collection enrolled in the UNIRP program or in a very early phase of establishing themselves in local communities and in family life. Some emphasis is as already noted, on female combatants who have been living in the cantonments for approximately five years. With this quite special background of an exceptionally drawn-out DDR process by any

international standards, only ending as this thesis is completed, this topic appears very interesting and worthy of study. In order to cast some new light on this theme the following research questions have been the base for my empirical study:

- Why did these female combatants and ex-combatants choose to join PLA in their early ages?
- What kinds of roles and formative experiences did they have during war-time and during the long cantonment period; and how have the emerging new gendered roles and experiences influenced the early stages of social reintegration into local communities and into families?
- Are discharged young women combatants facing social stigmatization or social approval and recognition within their own families and local communities?

In view of these questions, the empirical investigation will first study the causes that led women to carry guns in their early age, followed by a focus on their experiences in different stages of combatant life, including the formative experiences in the cantonments. Finally, I like to focus on the exit process, including enrollment in the UN rehabilitation programme and their experiences of resettling into their own families and new communities. It is hoped that my documentation and analysis may also provide some insights of more general use for gender-aware reintegration efforts in post-war countries with considerable gender inequalities.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis:**

I have divided this thesis into six chapters. After the introduction, I explain the methodology; I applied and sketch out how I conducted my fieldwork, the sampling procedure of informants and how I gained access to them. I also discuss limitations of my study. The third part consists of a brief overview of political history of Nepal which is important to understand the context and development of Maoist Peoples' War. Then it follows chapter three with the background of women's involvement in armed conflict, their roles in war and their position after war. In this chapter, I also look women's participation in Maoist party in Nepal. The analysis of findings starts in chapter four as I discuss female combatants and ex-combatants' motives for joining PLA, the role and experiences of female in war and post-war period and the struggles for reintegration into their society and family. Last chapter is six which provides a final summary and conclusion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter will describe the systematic procedures of my research. Use of effective methodology is vital for the success of every research. In the field of research, it is quite important to follow certain methodology in order to meet the objectives set. In the following chapter I will describe the methodology and methods that I deployed in my study.

#### **2.1 Research Design:**

Designing is a preliminary step in every research activity because, based on a clear understanding of the purpose for which design is being prepared. This study is based on descriptive and exploratory research design which has focused on two main categories of female combatants: female PLA living in cantonments and discharged female combatants from the cantonments. It can be said to be a limitation of this research design and its sole focus is on female combatants. The considerations behind this choice is the fact that a large number of women are living in cantonments as combatants for such a very long period is an important phenomenon, which deserves to be studied. As noted in the literature review, there are very few studies of lives and situations of female combatants. Time constraint is another factor, if a fair number of male respondents could be included; however, my sub-sample of female combatants would have become quite small. In view of the scarcity of empirical evidence on female combatants and ex-combatants, it is pragmatically important to concentrate empirical research on them. Difficulties of getting access to the cantonments were there, but commitment to attempt to find ways of getting access led to success. Different research strategies deployed in this research are explained below. This design element is also enabled by some level of contact between the Centre for Peace Studies and the UN Interagency Project supporting the rehabilitation of verified minors and late recruits (VMLR). Through this institutional link, I got some support from the UNIRP national team in getting access to regional training centers and access to some of these projects' processed monitoring data.<sup>27</sup> Interest of this dissertation was in the lives and needs of women who fought and chose

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<sup>27</sup> I would like to thank the support provided by the UNIRP Senior Advisor Desmond Molley and UN regional field office staffs.

to register and remain PLA-soldiers, and it goes beyond a narrow focus on these women in the early rehabilitation process. How very limited access to the cantonment, data collection by interviews in tightly supervised situations, and having hardly any time for informal observations and in-depth interviews, have no doubt limited scope of this research.

Research strategy is discussed in brief below in terms of getting access to data, application of methods that have been chosen and the tools used. The challenges faced at different stages during intensive fieldwork during the summer 2010 and implication drawn about the reliability and validity of my data will also be outlined.

## **2.2 Rational for the Area Selection:**

In the selection process, the UN field offices are considered to be strategic arenas for getting in touch with the female VMLR's who were discharged and enrolled in the UN-project. While contact was made in these field offices, all of discharged female were met outside these field offices in community settings in order to conduct the interviews in a more neutral space. Intent was to prevent being to be associated as an UN affiliated staff, which I feared, would lead to highly biased information, in the sense that the respondents would give highly polarised views. The reasons for this assumption was that in this early phase it was learnt that quite many of the enrolled were highly negative towards UN rehabilitation program for a number of reasons like limited budget and limited choice of programs.<sup>28</sup> UN field offices in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Banke and Bardiya were visited. Selection of these offices was based on their geographical location where most of the discharged females were living because of different reasons and it was relatively easy to meet more number of informants.

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<sup>28</sup> Discharged ex-combatants, enrolled in UN rehabilitation program were at the point of my fieldwork dissatisfied with UN reintegration program because of limited budget for essential stipend and other support services and training programs, Evolving learning mechanisms (monitoring, reviews and studies) in the second year of this program was lead to improvements in service delivery and outputs.

# Nepal



In other to get information about the female combatants', Surkhet, Kailali, Chitawan and Ilam's cantonments were chosen. The reason for these sites selection was social connections. This project covered altogether five regions and eight districts because it was to document a wide variety of female combatants from different regions and with different cultural values assuming that I could get insight into how such differences influenced the formative experiences during the war period and the cantonments period.

The first part of my fieldwork was conducted in mid-western and far-western part of Nepal where female combatants both discharged and living in cantonments were met. Interviewed were conducted with both female combatants and VMLRs in the Eastern part of Nepal. Finally, researcher went to mid and western region of Nepal.

Secondary data was also collected from the UN Rehabilitation Project (UNIRP), in particular, from its regular monitoring data; and, from published and unpublished research papers, articles, journals, newspapers, books, and internet sites etc.

### 2.3 Sources and Nature of Data:

In order to get some preliminary evidence about the gender specific experiences and challenges to reintegrate into the society, focus-group discussions were also conducted with Maoist commanders of one cantonment and with female combatants inside and outside the cantonments. In order to collect primary data Interagency UN project staff were also interviewed at their field offices.

### 2.4 The Universe and the Sampling Procedure:

The total number of combatants, 19,602 were verified and settled in cantonments or camps. Four thousand and eight ex-combatants (minors and late recruits) were discharged from cantonments in 2010. Among them, around one thousand were women. I followed *Snowball sampling procedure* to meet some of my informants who were outside the cantonments and living in different places. To get access to meet some of my informants, I got help from UN Regional Office in Biratnagar, Nepalgunj and Bardiya and in some places I got assistance of some local people.

Inside the cantonment, it was very difficult to choose informants. All the informants in the cantonment were selected by Maoist commanders. Researcher conducted a total of thirty interviews during intensive fieldwork. These women were from different regions, socio-economic backgrounds, classes, ages, ethnicities and had different ranks and roles in the groups.

Characteristics	Number (Total =25)	Percentage
<b>Caste</b>		
Brahmin	4	16
Chhetri	4	16
Dalit	5	20
Ethnic Group	12	48
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	22	88
Buddhist	3	12
<b>Region</b>		
Terai	8	32
Hill	17	68

<b>Education</b>		
Primary Level	9	36
Lower Secondary Level	3	12
Secondary Level	7	28
Higher Secondary Level and above	6	24

*Source: Field survey, 2010*

I have divided my informants into three groups. My first group of informants consists of fifteen discharged female combatants (VMLR). Second group of informants were female combatants residing in the already described cantonments for more than four years awaiting reintegration or rehabilitation as civilians. Ten women combatants were interviewed from the mentioned four different cantonments. The third groups of informants were UN program local staffs, out of which four were male and one was female. All these staffs were directly involved on the reintegration process.

In addition to the individual face-to-face interviews, three focus-group discussions were conducted—with female combatants living in the cantonments, with discharged female ex-combatants, and with Moist Commanders of Chulachuli First Brigade.

## **2.5 Techniques of Data Collection:**

**2.5.1 Semi-Structure Interview Schedule:** For the primary data collection, semi-structured questions were included in the interview schedule. From this interview schedule, basic social, demographic, economic and combat-related information regarding women ex-combatants, their family background, psychological and physical health needs, and other conditions during cantonment life, their war-time experiences, their current needs and barriers for reintegration into the society were gathered. Before going to field for data collection, pre-test has been done on semi-structure interview questions in Banke district with three volunteers and revision of some questions has also been done. Fifteen such interviews were conducted with discharged female combatants in different districts. Ten interviews were taken with female combatants who were living in cantonments. Five separate semi-structured interviews had conducted with UN project-related staffs.

**2.5.2 In-depth Life History Interviews:** These life story interviews were conducted to know the information which the interview schedule did not cover. There were three such case studies, in order to depict the psychological, economic and social aspect of the life carrier of

the women ex-combatants; if and how they were/are stigmatized or empowered in the society as well as in the Maoist Party; their personal experiences and perspectives of the Maoist armed struggle; their dignity as shaped by patriarchal and caste-conscious society; their present living condition; and their expectations and aspirations for the future. One in-depth life-history interview had been taken with female combatant in cantonment in Surkhet district and two such case studies were taken from discharged female ex-combatants.

**2.5.3 Focus-groups Discussions:** Three focus-group discussions were conducted; one with female combatants who were living in cantonments, another with young female discharged from the cantonment, and one with Maoist commanders in Chulachuli cantonment. During the discussion, mainly three phases are covered— role and experience during the war time in the group with male counterpart, their experiences in the cantonment, and their challenges for reintegration in the societies and families.

**2.5.4 Observation:** Observation in the field and in the cantonments was done in order to add some participatory observational data which could supplement the other data sources. Observation was made to know ways of speaking and behaving, living, dressing, using codes and interactive patterns—between the discharged and community members, between the female and male fighters in cantonments, and female combatants and male commanders in cantonments.

## **2.6 Challenges of Getting Access to Informants:**

“If you are contemplating fieldwork, it simplifies access if you draw upon your existing circle of contacts. Trying to enter new fields is likely to involve time-consuming negotiations and may end in failure, particularly if you want to research an ethically sensitive area.”<sup>29</sup>

The first method, I have called the *Top-down* strategy. “(...) *access to an organization usually requires seeking permission from people in authority*”<sup>30</sup>. With this in mind and knowing from former experiences that Nepal is a highly hierarchic and bureaucratic country, fieldwork contacts was made by seeking to gain permission from gatekeepers of high ranks. Attempt to meet Maoist

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<sup>29</sup> Silverman, David (2010), “*Doing Qualitative Research*”, SAGE Publication Ltd.

<sup>30</sup> Jorgensen, Danny, L. (1989) *Participant observation. A methodology for human studie*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park.

central committee vice-president, Babu Ram Bhattarai, was difficult. Nepali Congress Central Committee member, Krishna Prasad Sitaula, called him and talked on the behalf of researcher and Maoist leader agreed to meet researcher next morning at 6 o'clock in his house. Next day, at 5.45 in the morning, researcher rang the bell of the gate, and guard came to ask about the purpose to meet and went back. After 10 minutes, he came back to tell that Bhattarai was busy that day, so researcher had to go there tomorrow again at the same time. Another day, at the same time, same attempt repeated but Bhattarai was already out. Again researcher went to meet Sitaula to negotiate for the meeting with Bhattarai. He again did a phone call to him and explained about my research briefly. Then, Bhattarai promised Sitaula to meet researcher next morning. This time researcher got chance to meet him. He introduced female leader, Ganga, name changed, who is central committee member of the Maoist Party. They welcomed researcher and heard the project. He asked some questions about researcher's connection to Nepalese Congress Party (NC) leaders and political inclination suspecting of being connection with opposition party, NC. Researcher discussed about project, and the motive then he got convinced to help. Woman leader seemed more impressed. She introduced some commanders of the cantonments in three days. In this process, researcher spent two weeks to get access to enter into the cantonments.

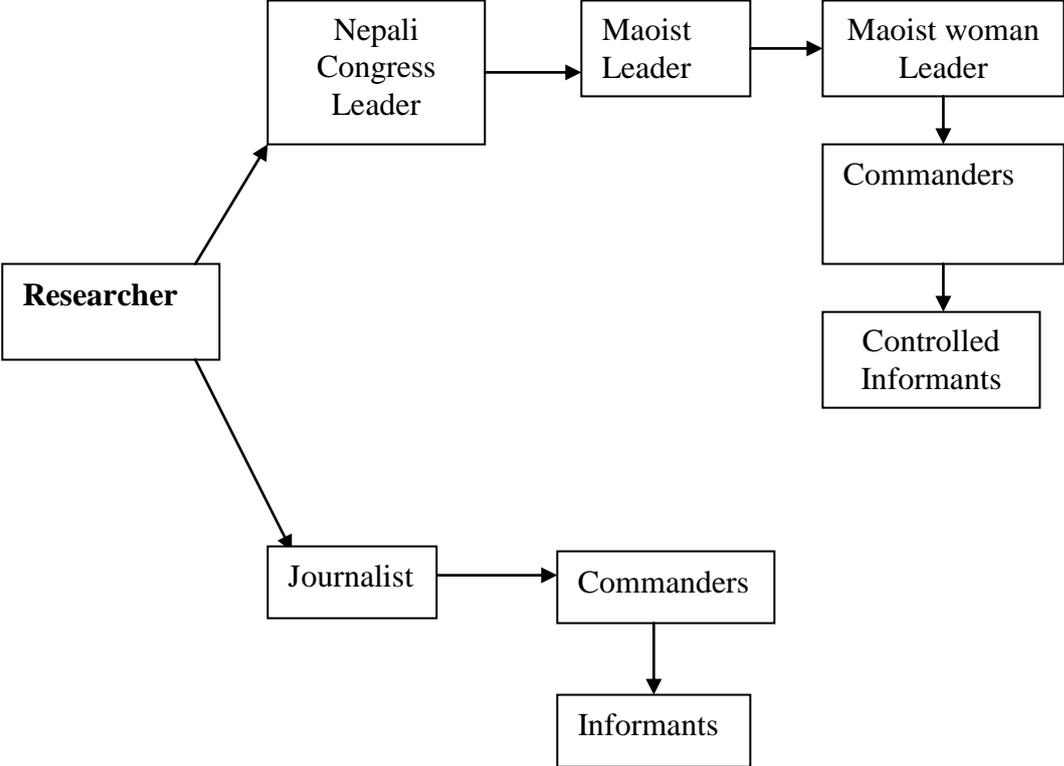
Maoist leader took researcher as a spy—misjudged in the first meeting. But on the other hand, woman leader seemed trusting in researcher and it may be because of both being women. Objective of research was to study the role of women combatants during the civil war and revolution period, along with their present situation and further reintegration process. These objectives were seemed convincing to her. Having in mind the theory of gate-keeping, she played the role of a gatekeeper of the cantonments. She selected two cantonments and called commanders of those cantonments. She gave mobile numbers of those commanders as well. Firstly, Chulachuli cantonment was visited that was in eastern part of Nepal. It took two days to reach there. After reaching there, long conversation took place with a Maoist cadre in the entrance gate. Then after meeting commander, researcher had to face suspicion of commander again. He asked a number of questions about financing and other for two hours and asked researcher to come back tomorrow. There was no hotel and neither any accommodation arrangements. It took one hour to walk to main highway to go to nearby village in search of accommodation. In the village, one old woman gave shelter to researcher for that night. Next day, researcher went to the cantonment again, the commander agreed to let entry into the cantonment but he did not allow taking any paper, pen, camera and any other instrument

inside the cantonment. Researcher left the bag at the gate and went inside the cantonment; commander called one women combatant to give interview as a controlled informants. In one room, commander, researcher and informant were managed, but researcher requested commander to leave the room during interview but he refused to go out. Interview was taken in awkward situation; informant could not feel free to put her expression into question. Researcher asked informant whatever she remembered to ask according to research objectives. Two interviews were taken in that cantonment and returned to capital. Interview was taken with controlled informants in the cantonment which affected research methodology and sampling process seriously.

Assessing difficulties, limited time was the main; shift to an alternative strategy was required which many researchers use: *the backdoor approach*. Researcher started making contact with other contact persons who were connected directly to Maoist cantonments and commanders, i.e., journalists. Some reputed local journalists in western part of Nepal were approached. They arranged small informal gathering with some Maoist commanders in restaurant.

Some of the people in these informal gathering turned out to be very good key informants. Journalists helped in introducing each other. Research project and objectives were introduced. Soon after, commanders were seen to be interested in helping researcher thinking that researcher was a friend of the journalist. In Nepal, a journalist is considered to be fourth part of the nation, as a powerful professional in a society who often has good connection with all political leaders. Those commanders were invited for lunch to build a good relation. After listening overall objective of research, they agreed to give permission to enter the cantonment.

**2.6.1 A way to get access to informants:**



Negotiation with high level gatekeeper was lengthy and time-consuming process where bottom level coordination was short and easy to get access to informants.

**2.7 Scope and limitations of the Study:**

The study is undertaken with an academic purpose. It intends to document and understand the roles and status of discharged women combatants of decade long People’s War, and not discharged who are in the cantonments in their social, economic context and how it affects their further reintegration process in the society and in communities. The study also aims at taking a community and gender-aware approach while scrutinizing in context of what “community” means for these young girls and women. And finally, what community means during their painstaking re/integration in the family, community and society. Data were collected both from hilly and plain (Terai) locations as well as from rural and urban areas, in order to present a rather diverse and reasonable representative situation of societal attitudes towards female combatants.

Some of the top political leaders and journalists were mobilized in order to reach cantonments. Successful persuasion of some commanders provided opportunity to stay in two cantonments for five days. To meet the discharged combatants, UN senior consultant of the rehabilitation program provided valuable help. Most of the ex-combatants shared their experiences with researcher without much hesitation. Due to the time and financial limitation, covering large study area was not practical. Field visit was in June and July, rainy season in Nepal. During field visit, many difficulties were faced because of flood and land slide which extended time in travelling. Much time was spent in negotiation as well.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF NEPAL

#### 3.1 Nepal before the End of the Rana Regime in 1951:

Absolute Monarchy was the political system of Nepal after World War II until 1990 when King Birendra bowed down owing to the pressure from a coalition parties and social movements that established a constitutional monarchy.<sup>31</sup> The landlord group had prominent position in Nepal along with the King. His political representatives, main administrators and advisors were mostly from high-caste Brahmin and Chhetri people. Until 1950, all of the land in Nepal was considered to be the property of the state, which was controlled by the Hindu kingship. The state partitioned land out to government officials and other allied individuals and groups. This had the advantage of both securing political allies, and increasing tax income for the state, that also imposed heavy taxes on the common rural population. This class of landlords opposed attempts of land reform, and changes in power structure of Nepal. Hinduism has legitimized the rule of the king, and in Nepal, king has been seen as the incarnation of the God Vishnu, which is the protector of the world. Hinduism also preaches that people are divided into castes. At the top of the caste-hierarchy are the priests, which in Hinduism are called Brahmins. They have enjoyed a privileged position in Nepalese society, and most political leaders and business people belong to either the Brahmin or Chhetri caste, second highest caste. They are also over-represented in the state administration. Since the end of the Rana regime in 1951, there have been several attempts to challenge the hegemony of the monarchism and the landlordism. Later, during a ceasefire between the Maoists and the parties in 2003, the demand for a constituent assembly was the main issue of the CPN (M). For the landlords, an election to a new constitution could mean a loss of power, both in terms of reduced influence in the state, and reduced landownership resulting from an eventual land reform.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Weinstein, John (2005), "*Intelligence Brief: Nepal*", Naxal Terror Watch (online posted in [www.naxalwatch.wordpress.com/2005/09](http://www.naxalwatch.wordpress.com/2005/09))

<sup>32</sup> Uprety, Bishnu Raj, (2009) "*Nepal from War to Peace- Legacies of the Past and Hopes for the Future*", Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, India.

### 3.2 Formation of the Modern Nepali State:

The modern Nepali state was finally formed in 1768, when Prithvi Narayan Shah from the state of Gorkha conquered other small ancient Newari states in the Kathmandu valley, and claimed the throne of Nepal for the Shah dynasty and their descendants. In 1846, well-known military leader in Nepal's history, Jang Bahadur Rana challenged the Shah family's hold on power. Shah Queen Rajendra Lakshmi Devi Shah plotted to remove Jang Bahadur, but the plot was discovered and there was a bloody massacre between advisors and assistants of the queen and military personnel in which Jang Bahadur Rana succeeds killing other advisers and ministers who were chiefs of the army at that time.<sup>33</sup> This famous event has later been known as "Kot Parva". As a result, Rana family gained supreme power in Nepal, entrenched itself through hereditary prime ministers and reduced the monarchy to a figure head. The Rana regime was a highly centralized autocracy.<sup>34</sup> These historical events were marked a change of leadership in the power structure in Nepal, but did not bring about substantial change in Nepali society.

That era of Rana rule lasted in 1950, when the King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah (of the reigning Shah family) fled to India. He getting support of Nepali Congress Party, other parties, sympathizers in India started a series of armed attack against Rana autocracy in different parts of Nepal. India wanted a stable Nepal, in order to secure their northern border and make Nepal more resistant to Chinese influence. The last years of Rana rule had been characterized by factionalism and infighting within the Rana family. At the same time, growth of a democratic opposition movement on Indian soil was evident.<sup>35</sup> After Second World War, established both the Nepali Congress (NC) party in 1947 and the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) in 1949. The British; however, were satisfied with Rana regime in Nepal, and supported a policy of keeping King Tribhuvan in power as a figurehead for Rana regime, while setting up a constituent assembly. This policy failed, great movement of 1950 began and ended with the end of Rana Dynasty. And then King Tribhuvan came back from India to Nepal to be the King of Nepal again; though, a cabinet was set up consisting of Ranas and

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<sup>33</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), "*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*" Master's Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromso

<sup>34</sup> [www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5283.htm)

<sup>35</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), "*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*" Master's Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromso

“representatives of the people”.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the NC and Shah King managed to break the Rana monopoly on state power with Indian support. In this time, especially from 1947 to 1952, several women’s organizations were established to raise the political and social consciousness among women in Nepal influenced by India’s freedom struggle against British colonial rule.<sup>37</sup> These gains were secured in the interim constitution of 1951, which was to function until a constituent assembly could be held. Meanwhile, it guaranteed the sovereignty of the King. Three main political parties controlled the Nepali state after the 1951 agreement: The king, the Congress Party and the Ranas (still in the government), with the King as the real ruler at the top of the power structure. Communist Party of Nepal was not happy with the agreement between King and NC known as the “Delhi agreement”, and called it a betrayal by the NC to communist party. From this time, Nepali leftist party always doubts NC and developed a tendency to view NC as an Indian pawn in Nepali politics. King Tribhuvan announced, in February 1951 that, “The governance of the nation shall be in pursuance to a democratic constitution as framed by the constituent assembly elected by the people.”<sup>38</sup> The constituent assembly; however, did not come into existence in that era. But in 1954 the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) held its first convention and agreed on conducting election for a constituent assembly and establishing a republic set-up as their most important goals.<sup>39</sup> The CPN leadership accepted constitutional monarchy in order to get political recognition from the palace after two years. On the 1st of February 1958 King Mahendra announced general elections to the parliament. Both the NC and the CPN protested and held that any elections should be to a constituent assembly. Elections to parliament were held, with both parties participating, but with severe tension inside the CPN, due to disagreements concerning whether one should boycott the elections or not.<sup>40</sup> The NC won the election with majority. In 1960 King Mahendra used the emergency powers given to him in the constitution of 1951. He dismissed the parliament and gained supreme powers. At the same time, the communist movement was bitterly divided into those who wanted to work within the new regime in order

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<sup>36</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), “*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*” Master’s Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromsø

<sup>37</sup> [www.articlebase.com/history-articles/womens-political-struggle-in-nepal-a-shared-history-of-south-asia-962970.html](http://www.articlebase.com/history-articles/womens-political-struggle-in-nepal-a-shared-history-of-south-asia-962970.html)

<sup>38</sup> Bragtvedt Stain (2007), “*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*” Master’s Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromsø

<sup>39</sup> ibid

<sup>40</sup> Thapa, Deepak, (2004), “*A Kingdom under Siege: Maoist Insurgency 1996 to 2004*”, Kathmandu, The Printhouse.

to change it from the top, and those who wanted to uphold the revolutionary demands for a constituent assembly.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.3 The Panchayat Era:

In 1959, King Mahendra declared a new constitution for the country. That constitution was not made by constituent assembly as written in the interim constitution of 1951; but, that constitution of 1959 lasted in 1962 when King Mahendra decided that country was not still ready for multiparty democracy; as a result, he declared another constitution in 1962. That new constitution endowed full authority to the king to be the head of the state, head of both cabinet and parliament. Parties and any political movements were forbidden. He developed *Rastriya Panchayat System* which in practice resembled a one-party state, with the king and his circle of advisors as the ruling party. Representatives to the national assembly were elected indirectly, with the people voting for representatives to the local councils, which then elected representatives to the national assembly. Nepal was declared a Hindu kingdom, and Nepali was the official language. “One nation, one language” became the motto for national unity. In Nepal, there were more than 60 ethnic groups, more than 100 different languages and followers of different religions. Declared motto “One nation, one language” was a mode of suppression of minority groups by elite group. Ethnic diversity became an important aspect of Maoist rhetoric and mobilization.<sup>42</sup> Women were also politically active against this era, in protest against the Panchayat system. A group of women openly waved black flags as a symbol of bad luck for monarchy, and it was protest, but these people, involved in public demonstration, were imprisoned.<sup>43</sup>

In 1970s, first communist movement took effect in the eastern district of Jhapa, in Nepal. The CPN regional department in Jhapa raised arms against the state on their own initiative, but was soon suppressed by state forces. The movement was inspired by the Naxalite<sup>44</sup> movement in India, as well as the Cultural Revolution in China. King announced referendum in 1980

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<sup>41</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), “*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*” Master’s Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromsø

<sup>42</sup> Thapa, Deepak, (2004), “*A Kingdom under Siege: Maoist Insurgency 1996 to 2004*”, Kathmandu, the Printhouse.

<sup>43</sup> [www.articlebase.com/history-articles/womens-political-struggle-in-nepal-a-shared-history-of-south-asia-962970.html](http://www.articlebase.com/history-articles/womens-political-struggle-in-nepal-a-shared-history-of-south-asia-962970.html)

<sup>44</sup> The Naxalite movement was a peasant rebellion in the district of Naxalbari in India inspired by Mao and the political rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution.

over the question of multiparty democratic system in Nepal. That referendum gave result for the continuation of the Old Panchayat system. But still, political parties and social democracy was banned. Forth Convention divided into two groups. The latter formed the CPN (Masal), led by Mohan B. Singh. In 1985 CPN (Masal) split into two parties; Masal (Patalo) and Mashal (Moto). In the leadership of the latter was Prachanda, who would later become the chairman of the CPN (M).<sup>45</sup>

### **3.4 The People's Movement of 1990:**

During the period of 1980s, political tension in Nepal was rising, and opposition against the Panchayat regime became more outspoken. In 1989, at the end of the Cold War, the Nepali Congress Party and the Marxist Leninists together presented King Birendra with an ultimatum; for removing ban on political parties by 18th of January 1990 with a peaceful movement. The King did not respond to the ultimatum from the parties, so massive protest took place in all over the country organized by the coalition of Nepali Congress, United Leftist Front and other several Marxist parties like; Marxist Leninist party (Male), United National People's Front (UNPF).<sup>46</sup>

The protest heightened its climax between the 6th and 9th of April 1990, when the UNPF called a nationwide strike. King's control over protest was over. Then compelled by people, King Birendra became ready to negotiate with the politicians, and promised to abolish Panchayat system. As a result movement was called off. New constitution was announced which provided women with equal political rights, voting rights and freedom to compete in local and national election, involve in political parties, and support and adopt any political ideology.<sup>47</sup> During May, an interim government was formed without interim constitution under the old Panchayat constitution. The interim government faced a number of problems concerning political situation and balance of power in the country. The composition of the interim government was not the result of democratic process. It was full of traditional men from especially Kathmandu, who were Brahmin—already privileged groups, mainly from the

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<sup>45</sup> Bragtveldt Stian (2007), "*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*" Master's Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromsø

<sup>46</sup> ibid

<sup>47</sup> [www.articlebase.com/history-articles/womens-political-struggle-in-nepal-a-shared-history-of-south-asia-962970.html](http://www.articlebase.com/history-articles/womens-political-struggle-in-nepal-a-shared-history-of-south-asia-962970.html)

Nepali Congress, United Left Front, Royal Nominees and Independents neglecting of various classes and groups in Nepalese society. There were no women, no representatives from the countryside, no people from the unprivileged castes, no landless people and no one representing any of the suppressed ethnic minorities of Nepal. Among these representatives there were neither women nor all the parties who protested against the King.<sup>48</sup>

In 1991 there emerged a number of tensions in between the NC and the ULF. The parties forming the ULF merged and formed the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) (UML). The result of the elections was a clear majority for NC with 53% of the total seats, while the UML became the second biggest party in parliament. The electoral front of the smaller Maoist parties, the United National People's Front, became the third largest party.<sup>49</sup>

### **3.5 Years of Multiparty Democracy, 1990-1996:**

Nepali Congress Party remained in power for almost all the time during many years of multiparty democracy in Nepal. CPN (UML) was in cabinet only for a nine-month period in 1994-95. In June 1995 the UML reign was stepped down by a vote of no-confidence by NC and other parties. In many ways, the 1990s was continuation of Panchayat System. Former leaders of Panchayat had joined the NC in large numbers, and were always in power. For example; Surya Bahadur Thapa, who was the prime minister of Nepal from 1963 to 1964, 1965 to 1969, 1979 to 1983, 1997 to 1998 and 2003 to 2004. In 1991, the two most dominant caste groups in Nepal, the Brahman and the Chettris who make up 29% of the total population, had 55% of the representatives in congress. After eight years of democracy, this percentage had risen to sixty three. Another example of this biased representation is evident when 69% of candidates entered into civil service as bureaucrats. In 2001 this percentage had raised to ninety per cent—in other words, a monopoly of Brahmin and Chettri in bureaucracy of Nepal.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), "*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*" Master's Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromso

<sup>49</sup> Thapa, Deepak, (2004), "*A Kingdom under Siege: Maoist Insurgency 1996 to 2004*", Kathmandu, The Printhouse.

<sup>50</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), "*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*" Master's Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromso

After the election in 1991, the CPN (Unity Centre) made a clear declaration that NC and King are the main enemies of the nation and people and US imperialism as main international enemy. Unity Centre had the link to the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM). The RIM was an international network of Communist organizations, who agitates armed uprising based on Marxist principles. In 1994, the Unity Centre split again, with one faction led by Prachanda. The electoral front, the UNPF also split, with one faction led by Bhattarai, who joined Prachanda's faction later.<sup>51</sup> One year later this new faction changed name into the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) who did not participate in elections. They also passed the document *Plan for the Historic Initiation of the People's War*. This document outlined the strategy and reasons for an armed uprising in Nepal, with the aim of establishing "New People's Democracy". On the 13th of February 1996 the CPN (M) launched their guerrilla war in six districts in Nepal, which marked the start of nearly eleven years of civil war in Nepal.<sup>52</sup>

### **3.6 The People's War, 1996-2006:**

During the initiation period of the People's War, especially, on the 13th of February 1996, Maoists owned very few weapons. Their military arsenal was limited to a few Lee Enfield 303 rifles, along with homemade socket bombs and homemade gunpowder. Maoists had a strong grass-root organizational base after many years of political activism in Nepal's countryside. They got strong support of people in Mid-Western Nepal, in the districts of Rukum and Rolpa. They gained control in most of the Nepal's countryside after few years. One of the strong reasons for Maoist success was the frustration among people owing to the long regional and national elite monopoly. Politicians were seen as corrupt and only interested in themselves and their relatives not in people and nation. People outside Kathmandu experienced inequality and exclusion from mainstream politics.<sup>53</sup> Maoist party succeeded to catch the frustration of people in countryside of Nepal. State force had brutally suppressed many anti-government movements. In November of 1995 the police launched an operation which had code name Romeo in Rolpa district. The official reason for the operation was to fight criminal activity, but the government in reality sought to reduce Maoist activity in the

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<sup>51</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), "*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*" Master's Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromso

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Uprety, Bishnu Raj, (2009) "*Nepal from War to Peace- Legacies of the Past and Hopes for the Future*", Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, India.

area. Hundreds of members of leftist parties were arrested, executed or “disappeared”.<sup>54</sup> Also women and girls were subjected to harassment, torture and sexual violence. These suppression and brutality of government helped to increase number of Maoist activists that supported Maoist movement in Nepal.

The insurgency on the go in the Mid-western hills of Nepal, which is characterized both by economic inequality and several ethnic minorities who had bitter grievances from state exploitation. The Maoist agenda was of land reform and rights for ethnic minorities and women that helped gain large support of people; and they also benefited from a history of communist activism in Nepal. In Nepal the division between urban centers and countryside periphery were evident and significant in terms of economic opportunities and infrastructure.<sup>55</sup> “The police operations in 1995 in the areas of Rolpa and Rukum in Mid-Western Nepal played a huge role in creating frustration with the state among the population and strengthened the Maoists. Most people were sympathetic towards the demands of the Maoists, and disillusioned with the politicians. Still there were many people that were apprehensive towards the methods of the Maoists.”<sup>56</sup>

### **3.7 The Military Doctrine of the Maoists:**

Maoist applied the strategy of “Protracted People’s War” to achieve their goals. This strategy follows the path of Mao Zedong on guerrilla warfare, based on the experiences from the revolution in China.<sup>57</sup> These strategies were based on taking control of the rural areas, and encircle the city from the countryside. The Maoists had favorable geographic location for waging guerrilla war. Since state had weak control in countryside, Maoist got good chance to exercise their control. Their struggle gradually took place in mainly three stages: strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive. The first stage was the start of the war, where guerrilla tactics of hit and run were the most important. The enemy were forced to defend in urban centers was the second stage and the Maoists had control over most of the

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<sup>54</sup> Human Right Watch (October, 2004), “*Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Civilians Struggle to Survive in Nepal’s Civil War*” (online [www.hrw.org/reports/2004/nepal1004/2.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/nepal1004/2.htm))

<sup>55</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), “*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*” Master’s Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromsø

<sup>56</sup> ibid

<sup>57</sup> Thapa, Deepak, (2004), “*A Kingdom under Siege: Maoist Insurgency 1996 to 2004*”, Kathmandu, The Printhouse

countryside. In the third stage, the Maoists were strong enough to wage a conventional war against the enemy, and attack fortified urban centers.<sup>58</sup>

This strategy got massive support from peasant population which provided strong resource for recruiting people in Maoist army. These people supported Maoist providing manpower, information, shelter, food and so on. This support was gained by linking the war effort to questions farmers' better future—agenda like land reform and so on. These kinds of agenda make the war “People’s War”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bragtvedt Stian (2007), “*Strategic Firmness – Tactical Flexibility, Why Did the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) Decided to Join the Peace Process*” Master’s Thesis for MPTC Program, University of Tromsø

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WOMEN IN ARMED CONFLICT

#### 4.1 Women Considered Subordinate to Men:

Women's position in sedentary and hierarchical societies, as far as we know from gender research into historical and pre-historical state formations, has been the position of subordination under male authority within the household, family, clan, community and state. With notable exceptions, women in many societies have been confined to domestic domain, a sphere of care and nurture of children and gray population, and sexual reproduction. Since the industrial revolution and entry of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class, a new kind of distinction between the private and the public has been emerged. The concept of Men as free citizens and breadwinners is established in the political and public domain. Men thus became identified as "public", while women got associated with family and "private".<sup>60</sup> This gendered opposition has remained remarkably unchallenged in industrialized state-based societies. While sexual ideologies and stereotypes vary greatly in modern societies, certain symbolic associations between gender and many other aspects of cultural life occur across a wide range of societies. Men is associated with up, right, high, culture and strength while women are associated with their opposites, down, low, nature, and weakness. These values are not biologically inherited but culturally constructed. Women are always dependent in access to resources, the condition of work and the distribution of the products of their labor.<sup>61</sup>

From history, it is evident that women have been active participants in wars, not only as camp followers, care-givers, providers, but also as combatants and also top commanders. At the time of Prophet, 14th centuries ago, both the majority Sunni Muslims and the minority Shiias had historically famous female warriors who are still remembered in the scriptures and

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<sup>60</sup> Moore, Henrietta L., (2000), *"Feminism and Anthropology"*, Cambridge: Policy Press.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*

traditions.<sup>62</sup> In early history of modern Nepal, Queen Rajendra Laxmi Devi Shah fought with different state kings for the expansion of modern Nepal.<sup>63</sup>

#### **4.2 Motherhood and Martyrdom:**

The cult of motherhood has been exploited as an instrument of nationalist leaders who need powerful imagery in order to mobilize support for wars, in which it is depicted as a defense force for the mother nation and party. In other words, imageries and ideas of motherhood were in many parts and current societies been politicized by political leaders for legitimizing war and mobilizing the population to send their sons to fight at the front. They use art of language to honor women for their ability to give birth to child which is the only thing men can't do. Women are considered as core-stones of the nation's future by raising brave man in their laps. In Fascisms, Christianity and Islam also, motherhood is depicted as the central and glorified contribution of women during wars. These political war-mobilizing ideologies and rhetoric elaborates women's sacrificing nature and their duty as wives of soldiers, as sisters of soldiers, as mothers and grandmothers of the brave soldiers who actively support war efforts.<sup>64</sup>

*“Celebration of death and martyrdom becomes the hallmark of suffering and achievement for women across cultural and national divides”.*<sup>65</sup> By sacrificing young sons and husbands, women are made heroines of the expansionist nation. They were used as an example for the next generation to encourage them to sacrifice their loved ones in the name of nation. Concept of martyrdom is deeply rooted in the theology of the Shiia sect. There is long standing belief that giving one's life for a just cause is a noble act that is rewarded in heaven. Such a way, religious interpretation is used for using women's emotions in the battlefield.

During times of war, there is often a dramatic increase in the number of women heads of households and they bear additional responsibilities for meeting the needs of children and

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<sup>62</sup> Afshar, Haleh, “woman and Wars: some trajectories towards a feminist peace”, in Afshar Haleh, Eade, Deborah (eds.) 2004, *Development, Women, and War. Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxam

<sup>63</sup> Gautam, Shova, (2001), *“Women and Children in the Periphery of People's War”*, Institute of Human Rights Communications Nepal, Kanchan Printing Press, Bagbazar, Kathmandu, Nepal.

<sup>64</sup> Afshar, Haleh, “woman and Wars: some trajectories towards a feminist peace”, in Afshar Haleh, Eade, Deborah (eds.) 2004, *Development, Women, and War. Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxam

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*

ageing relatives, since the male family members have either joined the war groups or been captured, or died. Women face new demands in providing for themselves and their children, with increased workloads and limited access to and control over the benefits of goods and services. Furthermore, as a result of conflict and the breakdown in law and order, women and girls face increased risks of sexual violence and abuse. They become targets for deliberate attacks by the opposing factions for purposes of revenge.<sup>66</sup>

### **4.3 The Female Soldier as Symbolic Power:**

Female soldiers have been in most parts of the world and in most of the times. In Africa, for example, we can read cases where women fought bravely as guerrilla armies in liberation movements in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa and Algeria. In such cases, the role of women has been both to increase the number of soldiers in general and to serve roles that were unique to women.<sup>67</sup>

Women may have been important not only because they increase the number of soldiers but also because they add legitimacy or symbolic power to the warfare. First of all, female soldiers symbolize a unity in the movement. Such symbolic power is expressed when movements use pictures of female soldiers for propaganda reasons to convey the message that they want to get through. This message might be that the movement's cause must be just, since even women fight for it. The principles of the ideology are also further justified by women's participation. In this way, women are used symbolically, as an argument to the outside world. This struggle deserves support and obviously even women sympathize with it.<sup>68</sup> Ideological support from outside has been important for the survival of many liberation armies.

The message of the unity of the group is conveyed to the enemy—as a deterrent—and to the outside world in order to gather sympathy and support. The female fighters' symbol has been proved to be very important both in Eritrea and in several other guerrilla wars. As one

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<sup>66</sup> <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR09/fmr9.5.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Barth, Elise Fredrikke (2002), *Peace as Disappointment; The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa* International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*

historian puts it, 'Indeed, so noteworthy was women's courage.....that women partisans performed more bravely than men'.<sup>69</sup>

Stefanie Kurg, a German Anthropologist, has done fieldwork among long-term women fighters in Tigray, Ethiopia. She describes how women were used as a symbol to strengthen the guerrillas. Female fighters were turned into shining examples of liberation of the people from feudal structures and oppression.<sup>70</sup> In the contemporary Maoist Movement in Nepal, both men and women have been regarded as oppressed by feudal regime, and the emphasis has been given on unity through class struggle. It is most important reason why pictures of armed women frequently appear in revolutionary guerrilla movements, be that in China or Nepal.

There appears to be a contradiction between the ideas of using women and femininity as religious and political symbols and making their actual contributions during war time invisible. While it seems correct that women's participation in armed conflicts is often invisible, it seems also true that imageries of female combatants are important symbolic elements in guerrilla wars. What can be presumed is that the importance of the struggle and the very goal of the war justify exploitation of whatever symbolic means which are assumed to be efficient in reaching the goal.<sup>71</sup>

#### **4.4 Women after Armed Conflict:**

In the post-war period, women and girls are often expected to make the necessary practical and emotional adjustment to go back to their traditional role of women. "Ideologies don't change during war, they are simply suspended".<sup>72</sup> Considering the basic notions underlying DDR processes currently, the simple term of reintegration as coming back to the same state as before the conflict, seems to match quite well the expectations in many conflict-ridden

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<sup>69</sup> Barth, Elise Fredrikke (2002), *"Peace as Disappointment; The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa"* International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

<sup>70</sup> Kurg, Stefanie, (1999), *"Former TPLF Women Fighters in Ethiopia: Concepts of Equality within the Context of Guerrilla War"*, paper presented in University of Hanover, Germany.

<sup>71</sup> Barth, Elise Fredrikke (2002), *"Peace as Disappointment; The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa"* International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

<sup>72</sup> Afshar, Haleh, "woman and Wars: some trajectories towards a feminist peace", in Afshar Haleh, Eade, Deborah (eds.) 2004, *Development, Women, and War. Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxam

societies, including Nepal as commented in previous chapter. This is ironic that, Maoist movement promised transformation, and the concept of reintegration is again deployed. In most documented post-war countries, conflict was supposed to be for either radical or incremental positive changes in every sector; but, during the DDR processes and recovery period, women have been tended to be excluded from the same benefits granted for male combatants. Moreover, their special needs as young women in reproductive age and often mothers have been at the most partially ignored, hindering their access to all kinds of trainings, employment opportunities and financial compensation. At the same time, women who took part in the armed conflict, face social stigmas and humiliation. There are various social prejudices against these women and girls who have crossed the boundary of the private domain and served in a highly public domain as combatants, which is considered totally a male's field. These women have gone beyond the limits of a socially acceptable sexual division of labor. Because of this prejudice, they face stigmatization, exclusion from social activities and many psychological problems, which will take long time to heal.<sup>73</sup>

During the course of the Maoist armed conflict, there was speculation that the proportion of women combatants was as high as forty to fifty per cent of the total militia. During peace process, the final figures offered by UNMIN after the two-step process of verifying the Maoist combatants, revealed a much lower proportion. The reasons for this discrepancy are not fully understood. On one hand it seems that the Maoist leadership has given too high numbers of female combatants than reality in order to legitimize the movement as being very broad-based, including nearly an equal number of women. There can be other important reasons for this discrepancy which shows more stable forms of discrimination. For one, it is assumed that quite many female combatants never went through the verification process at all, because they precisely were afraid of being known as combatants. Secondly, one needs to look at the figures of both the first and the second round of verification. According to the United Nations, during the first verification 32,250 Maoist Army personnel registered their names. In the final round of verification, 19,602 (61%) ex-combatants were verified. Out of them 3,846 were women, that is, approximately 20% of the combatants.<sup>74</sup>

Constitutional assembly election took place in 2008 after the comprehensive peace accord. By using First Past the Post (FPTP) together with Proportional (PR) in the election system, it

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<sup>73</sup> Onesto, Le, (2006), *“Dispatches from the People's War in Nepal”*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, India

<sup>74</sup> [http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal\\_conflict\\_peace.pdf](http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal_conflict_peace.pdf)

became possible to bring inclusiveness and proportionate representation of the various oppressed groups present in Nepal. The election committee has set criteria of filing candidates for the PR seats on the basis of fifty-fifty per cent of male and female candidates. And among party candidates, it was mandatory to have 31.2% from Madhesi, 13% from Dalits, 37.8% from ethnic groups, 4% from backwards region and 30.2% from other. Total 601 CA members were elected, out of which 240 members were elected on the basis of FPTP, 335 on the basis of PR while 26 were nominated by the main Parties with the view of incorporating those communities which had been left out. The CPN (M) won the highest number of CA members; 120 CA through FPTP and 100 through PR. NC had 37 CA through FPTP and 73 through PR. CPN (UML) had 33 through FPTP and 73 through PR.<sup>75</sup>

Women elected in three major parties were as follows:

Women elected	CPN(M)	NC	UML
FPTP	24	2	1
PR	50	36	35

<sup>76</sup>

The whereabouts of many female combatants is a matter of considerable interest, but very few numbers of researches has been done. One may assume that quite many never registered, and the drop-out number might be rather significant. However, a quite sizable number of women combatants are still living in cantonment waiting offers to either integrate into the security forces or return to a civilian life in family and community. Among them are also single women combatants, having children and having a lot of challenges in ensuring a dignified life with freedom.<sup>77</sup>

**4.5 Women’s Participation in the Maoist Party and Army:**

If we look at the socio-economic drive of the armed conflict in Nepal, we can find a number of problems: untouchability; injustice; oppression; discriminations on the basis of race, religion, gender, caste; and ethnicity; social hierarchy; elite based power centers and

<sup>75</sup> [www.monthlyreview.org/commentary/womens-role-in-the-neplese-movement](http://www.monthlyreview.org/commentary/womens-role-in-the-neplese-movement)

<sup>76</sup> [http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal\\_conflict\\_peace.pdf](http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal_conflict_peace.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> [http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal\\_conflict\\_peace.pdf](http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/qcp/nepal_conflict_peace.pdf)

discriminatory social practices—these are the drive forces to instigate war.<sup>78</sup> 81% of the total population is still engaged in agricultural sector. Agriculture accounts for 42% of the total GNP of the country. The fact was that 65% of poor peasants own only 10% of land while 10% of rich peasants and landlords own 65% of land in Nepal. According to one of the main female leaders of CPN(M), Hisila Yami, this unequal distribution of the resources was the main reason behind Maoist Revolution.<sup>79</sup>

Hisila Yami writes in *Monthly Review* that women joined all the fronts of CPN (M): the party, United Front and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), three main dimensions of revolution. Women revolted joining PLA, militias and production brigades and turned into more revolutionary as well. They served party as policy maker, couriers, organizers, health workers, and radio anchors also. For the first time, they got opportunity to learn about west model democracy and state as instrument of class and gender oppression. First time in Nepal’s history, they were fighting on an equal footing with men combatants in war fronts. To some extent, they became able to choose their partner on the basis of love and ideology without caring caste, class, region and ethnicity. Women’s participation in party was not in hundred but in thousands.<sup>80</sup>

#### 4.5.1 Organizational Structure of the CPN-Maoist Party:

People’s Liberation Army	United Front	Party
Standing Committee	Central Military Commission	United People's Central Committee
Politburo	Regional Military Commissions	United People's State Committees
Central Committee	Sub-Regional Military Commissions	United People's District Committees
Regional Bureaus (Five)	District Military Commissions	United People's Area Committee
Sub-Regional Bureaus (In Some Places Special Sub-Regional Bureau)	Included In This Are: Temporary Battalion	United People's Village Committees

<sup>78</sup> Uprety, Bishnu Raj, (2009) “*Nepal from War to Peace- Legacies of the Past and Hopes for the Future*”, Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, India.

<sup>79</sup> Yami, Hisila, (2007), “*People’s War and Women’s Liberation in Nepal*” Jhandhwani Publication, Kathmandu Nepal

<sup>80</sup> [www.monthlyreview.org/commentary/womens-role-in-the-neplese-movement](http://www.monthlyreview.org/commentary/womens-role-in-the-neplese-movement)

District Committees	District Committees	United People's Ward Committees
Area Committees	Platoons	
Cell Committee	Squads (Separate People's Militias Also Exist Under United Village People's Committees)	

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Women have been prominent constituency in the CPN (M) recruiting policy of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during decade-long Peoples' War. There were usually two women in each unit of 35-40 men. They were assigned to gather intelligence and acted as couriers, in addition to being operative fighters at the levels of foot soldiers and mid-level commanders. The erstwhile Vice-Chairman of the party and its ideologue, Baburam Bhattarai was quoted in Spacetime on April 18, 2003, saying that fifty percent of cadres at the lower level, thirty percent of soldiers and ten percent of members of central committee were women.

#### **4.6 The Comprehensive Peace Agreement:**

After ten years of People's War, finally CPN(M) had peace talks to the then seven-party alliance. In November 22, 2005, CPN(M) and seven party alliances had signed 'twelve-point agreement' to end the autocratic monarchy, to conduct constitutional assembly election in a fair manner and to keep the Moist Army and the Royal Army under the United Nation or other reliable international supervision. In May 26, 2006, Code of Conduct relating to Arm and Arms Management had been signed which prohibited to mobilize, display or use armed forces to create fear or terror among the people; to recruit new in their military force; to spy on each other; to participate in public meeting, conferences or other political activities in combat uniform carrying arms.<sup>82</sup> In 8 of August, 2006, Prime Minister and CPN (M) president Prachanda sent five-point joint letter to UN Secretary General requesting UN to monitor and supervise whole ceasefire process including: human rights, conducts during ceasefire, management of arms and armed personnel of both sides; verification of CPN (M) combatants, their weapons, cantonments and Nepal Army in their barracks. After rounds of peace talks held between the CPN (Maoist) and the government of Nepal, the Maoist leaders

<sup>81</sup> [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Communist\\_Party\\_of\\_Nepal\\_\(Maoist\)](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Communist_Party_of_Nepal_(Maoist))

<sup>82</sup> Pathak Bishnu (2008), "Modeling the Integration of the Maoist Combatants: DDR or SSR?" Conflict Study Center, Kathmandu, Nepal

were ready to put an end to the ten years long People's War signing the Comprehensive Peace Accord in November 21, 2006.<sup>83</sup>

On November 28, 2006, 'Agreement on Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies' (AMMAA) was signed in the presence of UN Representative Ian Martin, between Krishana Bahadur Mahara on behalf of the Maoist and K.P.Sitaula on behalf of the Government of Nepal to seek UN assistance in monitoring the management of the arms and armies of both sides, to guarantee the fundamental right of Nepali people to take part in CA election.<sup>84</sup>

Maoist army combatants, People's Liberation Army (PLA) were temporarily accommodated in 28 cantonments (7 Divisions) scattered from the west to the east of southern Nepal. When the future of the 19,602 PLA is decided, the cantonments will be dissolved.<sup>85</sup>

#### **4.7 DDR Process in Nepal**

The UN, an important initiator, coordinator, and implementer of DDR programs shortly defines: 'Disarmament' as the collection, documentation and control and disposal of weapons; 'Demobilization' as the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups; and 'Reintegration' as a process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income<sup>86</sup>. DDR provides a mechanism by which combatants have to hand in from at least some of their weapons and begin to break up chain in command structures. DDR provides rebel groups with a way of laying down arms without being seen as having surrendered; beginning to build trust and confidence among and between former combatants and non-combatants that may enable other elements of the peace process such as elections, SSR, reconciliation processes and economic recovery to go forward. DDR provides ex-combatants with a much needed transition period and an opportunity to begin to reintegrate into civilian life, providing a short time safety net.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Pathak Bishnu (2008), "*Modeling the Integration of the Maoist Combatants: DDR or SSR?*" Conflict Study Center, Kathmandu, Nepal

<sup>84</sup> [www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cnotes4%5Cnote353.html](http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cnotes4%5Cnote353.html)

<sup>85</sup> GTZ report, "Towards peace: The Maoist Army Combatants and the adjacent communities" Format Printing Press, Kathmandu, June 2010

<sup>86</sup> Torjesen, Stina, (2009), "*New Avenues for research in the study of DDR*" in conflict, security and Development, Volume 9, Routledge, London

<sup>87</sup> Ball, Nicole and Goor, Luc van de, (2006), "*Mapping Issues, Dilemmas and Guiding Principles*", Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 'Clingendael' Conflict Research Unit.

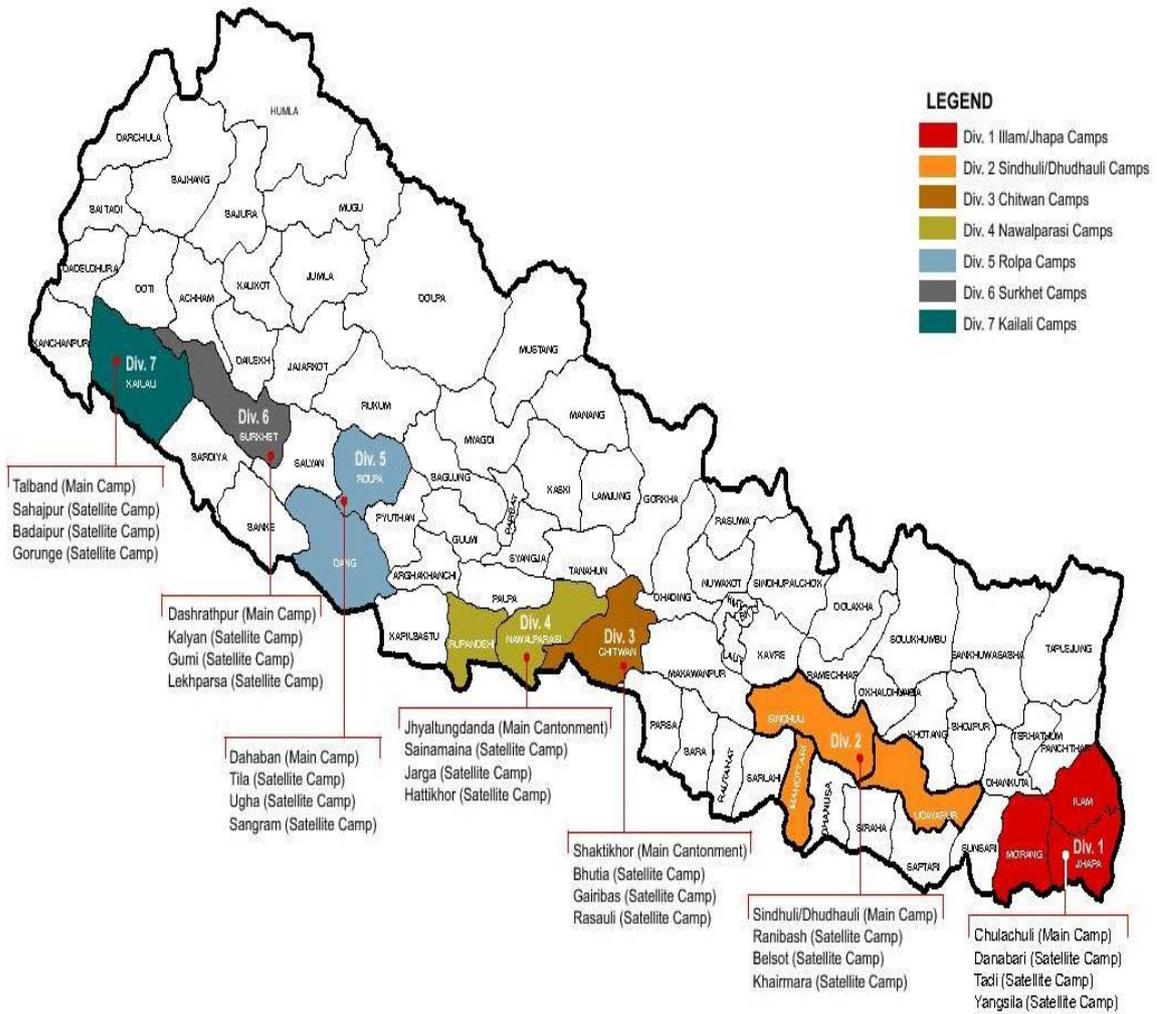
By February 2010, all of the 4,008 who did not meet the criteria set by the Joint Monitoring Coordinating Committee (JMCC) under United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) had been discharged. Meanwhile, 19,602 were qualified as combatants after meeting those criteria, who have been confined in seven main and twenty-one satellite military cantonments. Successful rehabilitation and integration of these combatants is dependent upon implementation of the political deal and consensus of all political parties, including the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M)—name of the CPN Maoist has been changed when it and Samyukta Janamorcha get merged—and state security agencies.<sup>88</sup>

The United Nations Integrated Rehabilitation Program (UNIRP) was established in March 2010 and given the responsibility of managing the implementation of rehabilitation packages for the discharged combatants. The UN Interagency program is working in collaboration with local NGOs and INGOs. Four education and training rehabilitation packages are available, on a voluntary basis to all those who were discharged: Vocational Skills Training, Micro and Small-Enterprise Development, Education Support, and Health Services Training. Until the date of September 16, 2010, 1,563 discharged combatants had taken career counseling and as referred by service provider agencies. Among them, 941 have enrolled in one of the four rehabilitation packages, 234 had completed the training and among them 20% got job related to their training skill.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Pathak Bishnu (2008), *“Modeling the Integration of the Maoist Combatants: DDR or SSR?”* Conflict Study Center, Kathmandu, Nepal

<sup>89</sup> Safer World Briefing, (2010), *“Rehabilitation of Discharged Combatants of the Maoist Army; Lesson Learned and Recommendations for Improving the Rehabilitation Process”*



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **5.1 Data Processing:**

My data-analysis procedure started from translation from Nepali to English after returning from the field to university. Interviews were taken in Nepali language because it was easier for to note down fast during interview in native language. Although, Silverman<sup>90</sup> gives importance of using modern technologies like; digital audio-recorder to understand how participants organize their talk and body movements in qualitative research, but these modern technologies were not feasible because Maoist commanders did not allow them to use in the cantonments. Even, while interviewing outside the cantonments, discharged combatants refused to take photos and record their voices. All of my interviews were hand-written fieldwork notes and on daily diary. Fieldwork notes were followed where noted contexts of the interview situation were required—such as date and time, remarks, atmosphere and some important expressions of informants etc. It was helpful to understand implicit expressions beside their answers. Identification for all informants was by code number; for example, 001SKT that refers to first informant in Surkhet district.

#### **5.2 Analysis of Research Findings:**

In this chapter, empirical data will be analyzed and discussed on the basis of findings from fieldwork by mainly focusing on the in-depth interviews taken with 25 female combatants of both type: living in the cantonment, and discharged. In this research, in order to answer research questions like: what kind of role and experiences women combatants had during the war and during the living in cantonment; are many of the discharged young women facing social stigmatization or social approval and recognition within their own families, kin groups, rural and urban communities, peer groups and political parties. Some important questions were asked to female combatants like: what kinds of responsibilities and duties did you perform in the war and in the cantonment; when thinking about your past, would you say that you were treated as male combatants or treated differently; what kind of political and military training did you do in the cantonment; what kind of support and services for later

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<sup>90</sup> Silverman, David (2010), “*Doing Qualitative Research*”, SAGE Publication Ltd.

rehabilitation did you get from UNMIN; if you have children, how did you manage their education, and living; did you give birth to them in the cantonment; how do your family and society behave towards you after your were discharged from cantonment; and what kind of challenges are you facing to reintegrate in the family and society.

The female combatants' experiences involve a number of aspects: economic, political, social, cultural, psychological etc.; however, it is not feasible to discuss all of them; rather, this research especially focuses on social reintegration aspect of female combatants. To be able to describe and analyze women's experiences and to see the impact of those experiences, researcher divided the interviews into three main parts; reasons and process of joining PLA, roles and experiences during decade long war, and the gradual process of social reintegration after they have been discharged. These three phases made a solid structure on which to base the analysis on.

### **5.3 Reasons of Joining PLA:**

- **The Struggle for Social and Political Empowerment:**

To gain social and political empowerment<sup>91</sup> was one of the major motivations of joining Maoist PLA for current and discharged female combatants. Almost all the current and discharged female combatants, who were interviewed were from lower socio-economic community backgrounds, reported that they felt oppressed by the state and excluded economically from the mainstream national development agendas. 68% of total informants were from mid-western and far-western hilly areas of Nepal, where people are suffering from a vicious cycle of poverty over many generations and from exclusion from political activities. Around 68 per cent of the informants belonged to marginalized and ethnic groups like: Tharu, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Tamang and Dalits. 99 per cent of informants expressed that the main reason of joining the Maoist PLA was to change existing discriminative social and political system of the nation which had created unfair distribution of resources between social classes. Some informants

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<sup>91</sup> In this study, empowerment refers to access to equal participation of women ex-combatants in all kind of social activities.

had mentioned more than one reasons of joining party. For example, a female current combatant stated:

“I belong to a marginalized lower caste and poor family. My family has to work for rich people for more than 16 hours a day but still we do not have enough food at home. We never get access to resources in community as well as state. My family never sees the face of school and hospital. I thought it’s all because of the exploiting system of the state; therefore, I joined PLA to fight against the system, and to establish new state with equal distribution of all resources to all.”- SKT03<sup>92</sup>

In societies, deeply rooted hierarchic orthodox caste system and untouchability practices are main causes for social discrimination. During the interview, one of the former combatants shared that:

“We are discriminated in every place, even in the street. We cannot touch other people. We are untouchable creature in this world. We have to live outside the yard when we go to rich upper caste people’s houses, as a dog. I always felt humiliated in my life so I wanted to fight against this” – BDR01<sup>93</sup>

In assessing these statements, it is obvious to assume that that they might be rationalized ideas, the result of ideological influences during and after war, motivated by political leaders.

- **To Take Revenge with State Security Force:**

Twenty-one per cent of the total respondents mentioned that they had to join the Maoist Party because it was their last option in order to remain alive from state security force: Nepal Police, Nepal Army and Unified Command. State security force used to raid their houses randomly, give physical torture to the members of family, rape old women and young girls and torture. Some respondents said that they joined

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<sup>92</sup> This female combatant was interviewed in one of the cantonment in Surkhet district.

<sup>93</sup> This discharged ex-combatant was interviewed in Bardiya district.

CPN Maoist Party after being tortured by state force for the reason that their one of the family members was Maoists. They even got physical tortures for supporting Maoists when they were underground by giving them shelter. Regarding this, one of the former combatants shared:

“One night, I was at my room studying. A group of Nepal Army came to my home and asked many questions to my parents about my brothers who were Maoist and away from home. They beat my father mercilessly; and my sister-in-law who was pregnant at that time came to rescue my father. Two of the Armies raped her in front of my parents and beat her until she was unconscious. I was hiding myself in the room but watching all the brutal activities of those Armies. At that moment, I decided to join Maoist party to take revenge of that brutality.” JPH02<sup>94</sup>

- **Struggling for Gender Equality:**

To gain gender equality is one of the most important and motivating reasons for all former and current female combatants to join Maoist PLA. In rural societies of Nepal, women were always subordinated in the family as well as in all the spheres of social, political, economic and cultural life. The patriarchal structure of Nepali society is the main reason behind the suppression of women especially in rural societies.

Nearly thirty-five per cent of female combatants explained that political ideology of Maoist Party promotes gender equality and empowerment of women. The party's agenda for “women's emancipation” was quite fascinating for all the women who joined PLA. One of current combatants said:

“I was always dominated by men in all stages of life. I never got freedom to choose what I liked to do. When I was child, I did whatever my father said. After getting married, I obeyed my husband even though he used to beat me almost every day in a small issue also. I never argued with them because I had taught from my childhood that men know more than women, we have to

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<sup>94</sup> This informant was met in Jhapa district who was discharged and she was continuing her study in high school with the support of family.

always respect them. If we disobey them, it will be great sin. I was never valued in my home and society.” – JPH04<sup>95</sup>

- **Attraction towards Maoist Ideology and Programs:**

Thirty-seven per cent of the informants emphasized that one of the main reasons of joining the PLA was Maoist ideology. They had found Maoist political ideology and Marxist-Maoist doctrines relevant and practical for addressing the plight of poor people of Nepal. One of the Maoists political agendas was: class struggle is necessary for women’s emancipation also which they seem to believe was scientific, visionary and based on people’s interests.

Another motivating dynamics of Maoist Party was their cultural programs. Many young boys and girls used to come to villages with different kinds of musical instruments and cultural programs as a part of their recruitment campaigns. One of the former female combatants said:

“In my village, Maoists used to come to show their cultural programs like dancing and singings. They used to sing revolutionary songs about social discrimination, injustice and poverty which were heart-touching. I liked their programs so I joined party. Later, I got training as a fighter and moved to PLA.” -BNK02<sup>96</sup>

- **Forced Recruitment by Maoist PLA:**

Twenty per cent of informants said that they joined Maoist PLA because of the pressure posed by Maoist PLA and members. Maoist political members and combatants used to come to village for their organizational developments and cultural programs. According to those informants, Maoist party had announced compulsive slogan that “one house one person for PLA” and started campaign to make people anyhow join Maoist party. Informants claim that, Maoists threatened of seizing land

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<sup>95</sup> This informant was met in Chulachuli cantonment. She was studying for a bachelor degree and she had one child with her.

<sup>96</sup> This informant was met in Banke district who was discharged from cantonment and she was taking training as a beautician with the help of UN

and give physical punishment to all the members of family if they don't join PLA. Some women joined because they wanted to protect and prevent the male members of their household from joining PLA. Male members of the family were the main bread winner for the family. One of the current female combatants said:

“I am from Western part of Nepal and my family was dependent in farming and was poor. I had three brothers and two elder sisters. My sisters were married already and brothers had gone to India to work. When Maoist announced one house one person to join party, I had to join party at the age of fifteen to save my old parents from physical punishment and seizing the small piece of land that they had. In the beginning I was in cultural group and later I was transferred to PLA.” -KLI01<sup>97</sup>

#### **5. 4 Role and Experiences during Civil War:**

Women made up a large percentage of the gorilla soldiers in Nepalese Civil War. In this section, women's role during the civil war, their participation and their experiences as members of the guerrilla group will be discussed. Traditionally, the image of women in war has been limited to their roles as mothers, wives, daughters, victims and supporters. Little attention has been paid to women as combatants. In the Maoist PLA, women combatants fought actively along with male combatants in every combat attacks and counterattacks against state's security forces. Both male and female combatants had equal duty in their unit.

- **Roles in the Armed Units:**

Most of the current and former female combatants described that all newly joined PLA combatants had to work part-time in non-military roles to be visible and directly connected to communities. They had participated in numerous advocacy programs as organizer and mobilizer. Before getting full-time work as PLA, eight of total informants worked as bomb-makers, five were engaged in gathering intelligence information, nine had worked in cultural program, rest of three were involved in political campaigns as part-time for some years. All informants interviewed had full-

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<sup>97</sup> This informant was interviewed in Masuriya, cantonment in Kailali district. During interview, she shared that some of small pieces of bomb were still in her left leg from the war time.

time duties under either specific sections, or platoons and battalions. Fighting was their main job, but they had to work in kitchen, logistic section, cleaning department, nursing department and others. One of current combatant said:

“I was working in one platoon. We had to be standby for twenty-four hours. Although my main duty was fighting, I used to work some time in kitchen and logistic section also turn-wise with my friends.” -JPH05<sup>98</sup>

- **New Socialization Process:**

After joining Maoist PLA, women experienced a new socialization process in the Maoist Party. During interview, most of the informants told that they were young when they left home to join party. Nine of the total informants were fifteen years old while joining party; likewise, eight were fourteen, four were sixteen and rest of four were seventeen years old. In the party, they encountered a military structure and a new ideology. Whole purpose of that was to fight against all kinds of social discriminations. It was totally different from their pervious life. They were taught new political ideology and introduced to a new gender role as fighter. Many of my informants changed their old names and got new revolutionary name to hide their old identity. For example, combatant's changed name was Bidrohi which means revolutionary, but actually her name was Maya. Current and former combatants expressed that they were not allowed to visit home for first some years to cut attachment with family members. One of current informant told:

“When I joined party, I was just 14. I worked as a political mobilizer for two years and then I was shifted to PLA. I did not have any contact with my family for first three years. Then after, I sent a letter to my family to inform that I was still alive. After five years, for the first time, I got permission to visit my family. I had almost forgotten my family during that period. Friends and party was everything for me.” -SKT03<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> This informant was interviewed in Chulachuli cantonment in Jhapa district.

<sup>99</sup> This informant was interviewed in Jeet Brigade, in Surkhet district. She was Vice Commander in the cantonment.

- **Gender Equality during Warfare:**

All the combatants who were interviewed stated that there was an equal division of labor between men and women. Women and men did the same work. One of the current combatants said:

“Party followed the ideology of communism and equality. When man was put on guard’s duty, a woman was also asked to do the same. We, man and woman, carry same size of gun and other necessary things while we were in training and other times. Just because you are a woman does not mean that you should carry less than a man or walk less than a man.”- KLI01<sup>100</sup>

Unity in a number of groups of soldiers was very important for Maoists. To achieve targeted goals of party, it was essential to create “We-Group”, a group with a common identity. Equality must be emphasized at the expense of individuality. It is not important whether one is woman or a man, whether one belongs to this or that ethnic or religious group. As a step in this direction, uniform dress and appearance was encouraged and group achievements were rewarded. Therefore, female fighters experienced new gender role. Another former combatant asserted:

“Both men and women cooked and both washed their clothes themselves. When I was in PLA it was totally different from home. When you are in home you have to do different works than men do. In my home, my father, and my brother never cook food, wash clothes, clean home; rather they work in the field, carry woods and do heavy works. Household work is just for women. But in PLA, it is different because women and men are equal. The women do the same work as the men with the same equipments.”- BTR01<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> This informant was interviewed in Masuriya cantonment in Kailali district.

<sup>101</sup> This informant, I had interviewed in Biratnagar who was discharged and taking training as a waitress with the help of the UN rehabilitation programme.

When researcher got chance to enter into the kitchen in one cantonment, four men were busy to prepare food for all. They were doing so called women's daily work according to the society. Some women were playing football along with men colleagues. They experienced new social role in which gender was deemphasized. One of the former combatants said,

“We had same tasks everywhere. Rules and regulations were not different for men and women. We proved that we are not inferior to men. We have participated in difficult battles, ran alongside men and helped dig trenches. We were always considered as peace lover but we fought more aggressively in battles than men. We never ran away from the battle.”- BTR01<sup>102</sup>

- **Rank:**

To some extent, the rank gained by women also indicates gender equality and empowerment in the Maoist PLA. Most of the informants claimed that to get higher rank, they had to work hard and prove to be capable of that position. It did not depend on gender. One of the current combatants said:

“In my platoon, we had women commander. All male and women comrades were under her command. There was no difference between male and female. Who was more discipline and active, higher rank used to be awarded to him or her” –SKH004<sup>103</sup>

Among all informants, one informant was Vice-Brigade Commander and two other informants were Platoon Commanders. One of current combatants explained me that there were four levels of rank: squads, company, platoon and brigade. During her nine years in Maoist PLA, she became a vice-commander of a brigade. Even though both men and women equally had to compete to get their rank in Maoist PLA, there were few women that achieved higher ranks.

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<sup>102</sup> This informant was interviewed in Biratnagar who was discharged and taking training as a waitress with the help of UN

<sup>103</sup> This informant was interviewed in Jeet cantonment in Surkhet district.

During focus group discussion with commanders in Chulachuli Brigade, one of the commanders shared,

“I am working for party for 16 years; I did not see women comrades working for higher position. I think it’s because of lack of self-confidence, not believing in them, and unwilling to take more responsibilities.”-JPH07<sup>104</sup>

- **A Sense of Empowerment:**

Current and former female combatants openly mentioned that they felt empowered politically and physically in the Maoist PLA during the conflict. They explained that they were continuously involved in mandatory political training and military exercises. Political training was based on Marxist and Maoist doctrine which was conducted once in a month. They said political and military training provided them strong political view and physical ability to defend themselves. One of the former combatants said:

“We, both men and women, had same lifestyle and daily routine. When I used to carry gun along with male cadres I felt myself different than other women in the society. When we used to go to the society, people used to look at us fascinatingly. At that time I felt so proud of myself. I used to think that I became successful to break the traditional unfair patriarchal value of the society.”- BDR01<sup>105</sup>

Three current female combatants had their hair cut like boys. They were wearing pants and t-shirts and shoes like men. They did not have any ornaments and they looked physically strong. At that time, I thought about their counterparts who would have been wearing traditional dresses. This social transformation had made female combatants empowered.

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<sup>104</sup> This informant was commander in Chulachuli cantonment.

<sup>105</sup> This informant was interviewed in Bardiya district. She was discharged from cantonment and taking tailoring training along with her 2 children.

Not all female combatants perceive situations and experiences in the same ways. Their education, social, familial background and their abilities and expectations determine their perception. Not all female combatants experience being empowered in PLA. One of my informants shared during the interview:

“I lost almost everything being a combatant. Form my childhood I wanted to get higher education to be a doctor. I was compelled to join PLA, while I was in sixth grade. Therefore, I could not study. I was PLA for seven years and provided free services. Now they discharged me without concerning about my future.” -BNK02<sup>106</sup>

### **5. 5 Women in the Reintegration Process:**

After signing Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in 2006, Joint Monitoring Coordinating Committee (JMCC) started verification process of Maoist combatants. Total 19,602 combatants were verified; among them twenty per cent were female. Additionally, 4,008 combatants were disqualified and discharged in 2010.<sup>107</sup> United Nations Integrated Rehabilitation Program (UNIRP) has been implementing rehabilitation programs for discharged combatants. In war-torn society of Nepal, opportunities are limited and combatants' expectations are often very high. During civil war, these expectations of a future society were the motivations that kept the combatants on. Immediately after the war, optimism and happiness prevailed, but gradually pessimism and disillusionment took over. “The history of many revolutionary struggles suggests a widespread regression after the war when comes to women's political representation. Large number of women have been carrying arms in revolutionary movements, peace seems to put enormous pressure on those women to return 'home' and give up both jobs and political representation in favor of men.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> This informant was interviewed in Banke district. She was discharged from cantonment and she was looking for some job to survive.

<sup>107</sup> Pathak Bishnu (2008), “*Modeling the Integration of the Maoist Combatants: DDR or SSR?*” Conflict Study Center, Kathmandu, Nepal.

<sup>108</sup> Barth, Elise Fredrikke (2002), “*Peace as Disappointment; The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa*” International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

- **Back to the Old Society:**

Combatants who have spent many years in the military, it is extremely hard for them to come out of such a militarized life. When they were in a PLA group and the Maoist movement, they had common identities and common goals. In fact, the long cantonment period resulted in unifying.<sup>109</sup> But, in the society where they come from, there exists still deep-rooted traditional value system, caste discrimination, and religious orthodox structure. When they returned to their society, they experience a dramatic conflict between their own values and experiences and that of others in their family and community. Some of the former combatants expressed that in many situations, they feel they know more than other civilians. One of the discharged combatants said:

“When I was discharged from PLA, I came back home. My family welcomed me heartily. Next morning, my mother asked me to go to temple to worship God. At that time, I thought my mother was so silly to worship God. I had learnt during the war that religion was made to oppress poor people in the society and there is no God. One time when I went to meet my childhood friend, who belongs to upper caste, she treated me as untouchable so I did not feel like going out.”- BTR01<sup>110</sup>

- **Marriage:**

During interviews, all the informants told that they were unmarried while they joined Party. Nineteen of the informants got married after joining party. Two of them were widows and one is divorced. Inside the party, inter caste marriage was rewarded as a model for the society. Among them, thirteen were inter-caste and six were intra-caste marriage. Former combatants described that when they were discharged from PLA, most of the informants’ family did not accept their inter-caste marriage and their children. Social norms and traditions were not changed. One of former combatants stated:

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<sup>109</sup> Bleie Tone and Ramesh Shrestha, “DDR in Nepal: Stakeholder Politics and the Implications for Reintegration as a Process of Disengagement”, Policy Report, CPS, University of Tromso, forthcoming February 2012

<sup>110</sup> This informant was interviewed in Biratnagar. She was discharged and taking vocational training with the support of UN

“I got married with Dalit PLA while we were in same platoon; although, I belong to Brahmin caste. My decision was appreciated even by Prachanda at that time. In one battle, my husband was killed by enemy. When I was discharged, I went to my husband’s home, they felt so hard to accept me as a daughter-in-law and when I went to my family with my four years old son, they did not accept me warmly. I felt abandoned in my own both families and society.”- BDR04<sup>111</sup>

One of another informant stated:

“I belong to Magar ethnic community and I got married two years ago with Chhetri commander here in cantonment. After marriage, my husband tried to introduce me in his family but his parents rejected to accept me as their daughter-in-law. I am happy with my husband but I need family and society to live. I always feel humiliated and lost my own identity. I am afraid to go back to the society to live there.”- KLI02<sup>112</sup>

Rita Manchanda<sup>113</sup> in her article writes that most female cadres from rural areas are under twenty. Majority of Maoist women fighters were unmarried at the time they joined the movement. Rita further discusses that marriage is a means of controlling female cadres making it difficult for them to leave the party; and in a way they wanted to produce loyal cadres for the party. Young boys and girls were together for long time so it’s natural to have physical attraction between them. During Rita’s interview Maoist woman leader, Hisila Yami said, “A code of conduct has been formulated for women and men, particularly for combatants, so that sexuality leads to marriage. If both partners are not married and if one or both are already married, they are warned and punished”. In Rita’s interview, Maoist woman leader Parvati says, “Maoist women soon face internal party pressure to get married covertly or overtly as unmarried women draw lots of suspicion from men as well as women for their

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<sup>111</sup> This informant was interviewed in Bardiya district. She was discharged from cantonment and taking training as tailor with the help of UN.

<sup>112</sup> This informant was interviewed in Masuriya cantonmet. She was pregnant at that time.

<sup>113</sup> Manachanda, Rita (2004), “*Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Radicalizing Gendered Narratives*”

unmarried status. This results in marriages against their wishes or before they are really ready to get married.”

- **Motherhood and Fatherhood:**

Parenting remained gendered; women took primary responsibility in Maoist Movement. One of the current combatants said:

“When I became pregnant, I got leave for three years to take care of my child. I could not go back home because of danger from enemy, so I was sent to remote village. There were three other pregnant PLA also. We lived together in one house and got all the required support from party. My husband used to come to meet us often. In that period I was out of other political as well as other military trainings. After two and half years, I came back to my duty. My husband and other colleagues had promoted but I got left behind.” –SKH06<sup>114</sup>

For they had to mother, most of the combatants were deprived of getting equal benefit to men. During the interview, the Maoist woman leader, Parvati says to Rita, “With the birth of every child, she sinks into domestic slavery as disciplinary action of women”. Women who gave birth during the war had a difficult time then and often have a difficult time afterwards.<sup>115</sup>

On the other hand, children born during the war also have to face different adjustment problems in the society. Combatants expressed that they were more worried about their children’s future than their own. Thirteen informants had either one or two kids. One of discharged informants mentioned that her children are facing bullying because society still has different view towards ex-combatants and their children. They are considered as more violent and dangerous creatures in the society.

- **Social Change Versus Adjustment:**

During interview, most of the discharged combatants mentioned that they have been facing problems in adjusting into the society and family. As already discussed, many

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<sup>114</sup> This informant was interviewed in Jeet cantonment in Surkhet district.

<sup>115</sup> Manachanda, Rita (2004), “*Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Radicalizing Gendered Narratives*”

had new radical ideas and values of gender relations and wanted to see fundamental changes, but the entrenched nature of hierarchical gender and religious notions and practices soon were caught up. They found that even their closest comrades reversed to reactionary old attitudes. One of the discharged combatants said:

“I and my husband were discharged at the same time, and came to his house together. We had same daily task in cantonment but when we came home, my husband totally changed. I had to work at home and farm from 4 o’clock morning to 11 o’clock night but my husband used to talk about war experience with other people outside the house. I could not tolerate that. As a result, we got divorced and I came to this city to find some job for living.”- BNK04<sup>116</sup>

As a result, women combatants experienced a much greater rupture between civil society’s expectations and the role they learnt when they were combatants. Afterwards, they were challenged, and expected to return to roles very different from their war time roles. This situation is harder for their reintegration into society.

“When male and female discharged combatants return to the civil society, they are not welcomed in the same way. While men are perceived to have strengthened their gender role through military life and are considered even more masculine than before, female fighters are increasingly marginalized”<sup>117</sup>

- **The UN Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Program (UNIRP):**

The UNIRP was established in February 2010 and tasked with managing the implementation of rehabilitation packages for the discharged combatants. UNIRP has been providing Vocational Skill Training, Micro and Small-Enterprise Development, Education Support, Health Service Trainings and so on. Unemployment rate is very high in a postwar society of Nepal. The discharged female combatants, I interviewed, had a main goal to find any kind of job for their survival. During research, fifteen discharged female combatants were interviewed. Among them, eleven had been participating in UNIRP program. Five were taking Beautician Training and rests of six

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<sup>116</sup> This informant was interviewed in Banke district and she was looking for some job to live.

<sup>117</sup> Barth, Elise Fredrikke (2002), *“Peace as Disappointment; The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa”* International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

were taking Tailoring Trainings. These female combatants explained that they were not interested in further education. One of the informants expressed:

“I chose Beautician Training to get job to live. I really did not find other options. UNIRP has been providing trainings like: beautician, tailoring, waitress, mid-wife etc. They give us 3000 NRS per month and 3 meals a day. I have three years old son with me. This money is not sufficient to live both of us in an urban area. May be we have to join some criminal groups to live.” - BDR02<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> This informant was interviewed in Bardiya district. She was taking Beautician training.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

The objective of this dissertation was to study female combatants and ex-combatants' situation and experiences during the war, in the cantonments, and during their early social reintegration process into both "the big society" of political and social participation and into "the small" society of local communities, families and households. As researcher, I have tried to make my empirical study as relevant and representative as possible, but as I have made clear, my methodological challenges have been considerable in a much politicized environment. The problem got "vicious", when my access to the cantonments and even my interview situation was attempted controlled under the chain of command. My informants in the cantonments, on the one hand, were not selected by me as researcher. As I have explained, my informants were only allowed to give interviews with presence of their commanders. As researcher I have tried to make the most out of this demanding fieldwork situation, and to make the interview situation as conducive and trust-oriented as possible. The female combatants own accounts of their war and post-war experiences has been documented, interpreted and analyzed with a focus on reasons for entry, experiences during the war and in the cantonments and the early exit process. In presenting and analyzing my material I have made some direct references to their expressions, but guided by the methodological critical awareness that their own reflections and recall during the challenging interview situations to some degree has been influenced by their ideological training during the war and indeed also in the cantonments.

#### **Key Findings of the Study:**

Women combatants' reasons for joining Maoist PLA is found to be a result of many factors, including socio-economic background, family relation, social discrimination, gendered sexuality (also as victims of sexual violence), forced recruitment and self-defense (a result of brutal state interrogations, and other forms of gross brutality). The Maoist ideology in general and specific political agendas for women and poor and discriminated people (based on caste and ethnic discrimination) was also to some degree a central motive for many of them when they joined PLA.

In the mainly Hindu, patriarchal Nepalese society, women are seen subordinate in most spheres of public and social life. Politics, war, public spaces are considered men's preserve. Women are still mainly supposed to domestic "goddesses", tending the home and their family. Hindu notions of fierce warrior goddesses apart, at the level of gender stereotyped public perceptions, are that men are by nature war-like and active while and women are peace-loving and rather passive. This study casts some light on women's agency, empowerment and subordination during and after Nepal's civil war which ended very recently, a few years before, I conducted my study, in the a highly turbulent post-war phase with continued political struggle and little progress in implementing the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. The complicated political situation, with the Maoists still in command of the cantonments, forms the critical backdrop for my empirical investigations, as summarized briefly above.

I have found that all my female informants experienced so to say full gender equality in terms of roles, responsibilities and opportunity in PLA during the war and even in most respects in the post-war period while being cantoned. Female combatants are found to carry guns of the same size and weight as the male combatants. These female combatants are recalling that they fought in front line as bravely as the male PLA. In fact, some female ex-combatants shared that they were more aggressive and courageous than male combatants in battle. Arguably, this does not prove that they were objectively more aggressive, but their past and current reflections of their acts and deeds are very likely influenced by their traditional gender socialization during childhood years. But as fighters in their war units and in the PLA "society", so they had so quite some degree gender neutral military duties and exercises and found themselves being gradually promoted to junior and mid-level officers. This study has found that female combatants developed solid competences and skills as male combatants, doing same military trainings, intelligence operations and combat techniques. These experiences as fighters are found to be seen as empowering in certain respects. But my material brings out some interesting contradictions in war time experiences. Female combatants were also ordered to use their traditional feminine qualities and skills in intelligence operations as spies. Arguably, the PLA leadership on the one hand advocated an ideological agendum of women's equality and liberation, but on the other hand, they also utilized their female cadres' ingrained qualities of obedience and loyalty for tactical military purposes.

I have found that there are strikingly few female combatants in leading positions in PLA. This finding suggests that there are still patriarchal structures prevalent in Maoist party that hampers upliftment and promotion of women's senior leadership. This might not be the full explanation though. In the male dominated PLA structure, women's participation is after all a radically new phenomenon; therefore, women do not have as long political experience than men. Another reason might be that many female combatants have not strived for higher ranks, because of their childhood socialization process and unconscious drives. The role of commander was highly risky. Motherhood during the war was another immense challenge for the female combatants who had to return to the battlefield few days after the delivery. Many more became mothers in the cantonments. Since the PLA commanders granted 3-years maternity leave, these female combatants also lost promotion opportunities due to this policy. Therefore, the Maoists military leadership is found to be quite traditional in terms of certain policies and practices, but quite radical in terms of gendered political ideology.

After discharge and demobilization, more than male combatants, female ex-combatants are found to challenge to the traditional patriarchal Nepalese society, because they resisted returning to the old hierarchical gender relations. Dramatic tensions in households, families and local communities are unfolding in this social process, in which many female ex-combatants based on their formative empowering experiences during the war and during live in the cantonment try to resist succumbing to the Nepalese society's slow-changing gender values. Many female ex-combatants were out of the mainstream society for a long time and socialized in the new PLA society, as a big highly radicalized "community" of political militarized cadres. Many female ex-combatants have both internalized Maoist ideologies; and practiced those partly empowering ideologies during their practical life in the PLA, but are also acutely aware of the persistent conservative ideals and expectations of their nearest family members and community members.

One may in conclusion say that female ex-combatants are at the forefront of some of the most conflict-ridden and painful slow social transformations within post-war Nepal. They have experienced war-time empowerment and currently a sense of disillusionment, indeed a difficult experience. Firstly, they went through incredible difficulties and formative experiences during the war, which taught them new warrior skills, a sense of empowerment.

Secondly, after the discharge, they are found to have to cope with the feudal, gender differentiated society that they had abandoned long ago and hoped to radically transform by the barrel of their guns.

THE END

## ANNEX

### **Specific questions for the experiences as young combatants (to be part of life-history interview)**

When did you join and how were you recruited (clarify if it was voluntarily or forced)?

In case of voluntary recruitment, what motivated you to join?

What kinds of responsibilities and duties (political, in combat, security res. after the ceasefire, cultural, logistical, social) did you perform (invite them to give changes over time)?

When thinking back, would you say you were treated equally as the young boys or treated differently in any important manner (pls. give an illuminating example)?

Can you tell me about your war-time experiences that have had a very strong influence on you later on (invite a longer narrative)?

Collect basic socio-demographic background data at the time of recruitment

I hear from others that they enjoyed quite some personal freedom during their time as combatant/supporter. Did you also experience personal freedom – pls share.. (Friendship with boys, romance, getting engaged, getting married?)?

While being recruited, could you share if you still to some degree keep up your responsibilities in your family (give examples)?

Were you ever engaged in encounters with the enemy?

Were you ever ordered to engage in punishments and torture of suspected enemies?

Did you ever have to commit violence against people from your own community or family?

If you have killed or tortured anybody from your own community, do you expect to be punished or not (ask for explanation)?

If not, and you hope to be forgiven – how will you behave towards your victim(s) and victims family?

Were you ever wounded in combat or during interrogation by RNA or the Police?

Have you sustained long-term physical or psychological injuries from violence during military encounters or in detention?

Did you experience being harassed or beaten by family members before you were recruited?

At the time of handing in your weapon – how did it happen and how did you experience this moment?

### **Specific questions about cantonment life**

#### **How many months have you been in the cantonment?**

How your daily routines in the cantonment were (share in some detail)?

What were your responsibilities in the chain of command in the camp?

Did you advance in the chain of command while in the cantonment?

Do you know about some friends who were active in YCL - while living in the cantonments?

Were you also an active member of YCL inside the cantonment?

Or, did you venture outside the cantonment to join in YCL- activities?

What kinds of political and/or military training did you receive in the cantonment?

As to the best of your knowledge, have some of your comrades in the cantonment in secret bought weapons and kept it secretly?

What kinds of support services for later rehabilitation did you get from UNMIN during your time in the cantonment?

(Counseling, skill training, education, health services, allowance..)?

Was what you got sufficient or insufficient and why?

How did you use your cash allowance (ask - were you allowed to keep it all for your personal purposes or if some part had to be paid to the party via the leaders/commanders)?

Did you have any other way to earn some money while being in the cantonment?

Were you allowed to visit your home (how often, was this done openly or discreetly)?

How did you manage your private life in the cantonment (sexual, familial.....)?

Do you know if any of your female friends/comrades were sexually exploited or beaten while in the cantonment?

Have you been ever beaten or in other ways been humiliated by other comrades or cantonment staff in charge?

Do you have any experiences of sexual exploitation and domestic violence in the cantonment?

How did your family members treat you when you were in cantonment?

How did other society members behave with you when you were in cantonment?

If you have children, how did you manage them (their education, living....., did you give birth in the cantonment ...)?

If you gave birth while in the cantonment, could you keep the child and did you get some assistance for that in the camp, or did you have to rely on your family caring for your baby?

Were you treated fairly or did you feel humiliated in the verification process (give examples)?

What do you think of being called “disqualified” – is that OK for you?

What would you like to call yourself if you were asked?

### **Specific questions after being discharged**

Will you tell me what are you doing nowadays (daily life.....)?

Where are you living and with whom (temporary or permanently/in natal community or in a new place)?

Have you enrolled in the UN Rehabilitation Programme (yes/no)?

If yes, tell me in detail?

Were you first using the call-in service or did you contact this programme by other means?

Which individual rehabilitation package (the micro and small-enterprise package, or the vocational skills package, or the education support or health services training are you using or plan to use?

What motivated you to chose this very package?

Have you used career or psychosocial counseling?

If yes, what were you advised and are you:/ quite satisfied/ very satisfied/ or not at all satisfied with the counseling?

Are you having any troubles like scary dreams, sad memories, feelings of alarm, depression etc. (ask them to share if they feel ready) that may be connected to your war-time experiences or the time in the cantonment ?

If you used counseling has it helped?

If you did not, have you sought any support from friends-comrades in the camps/friends outside/family members/healthworkers/dhami/deota, any other (not exclusive options)?

Are you still undergoing training/education or are you in the process of seeking employment/establishing business or planning further education?

If so, do you get any post-training/education support from the UN project – and how helpful this?

At this stage, pls. tell me if this UN program so far is really helpful for giving you a socio-economic foundation for establishing you as a civilian in the society?

If not, why did not you take support from UN agencies (ALLOW THEM TO SPEAK IN SOME DETAIL)?.....

If you could choice, where would you want to establish yourself (in your native community, or in a new place in Nepal or abroad .....)?

How was the UN project (via partners?) been in touch with your community?

If yes, explain the nature of this contact (information campaigning/social and economic investments/training of service providers?

Has this contact and been important in making your community more positive to your return to the community?

Are you fearing to be prerequited legally or to be punished by locals when you return home?

So, what are your actual plans for resettling and building your future life?

What do you want to do in your future (job, business, politics, and others.....)?

Are you planning to return home and resettle in your native place or your inlaws' house?

How do your family and society behave with you after your discharge from cantonment?

If your are treated not so warmly and well after you were discharged - why do you think so?

Are you still an active/passive member of YCL?

What kinds of responsibilities and do you have and are you an elected cader?

Are you member of any other political or non-political organization (explain)?

Will you actively participate in your party in future?

Are you ready to join the Maoist milita/YCL/Nepalese Army/ Police and under what circumstances?

If you compare your life in terms of freedom and respect while you were a combatant, while you in the camp and now, when did you enjoy the greatest freedom and respect?