

# Chronicles of Socialist Feminist Movement in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

*The women's movement in Nepal has completed a centenary since Yogmaya Neupane demanded the inception of a Dharma Rajya (righteous governance) in the second decade of the twentieth century. Neupane pioneered her movement to end all kinds of oppression and evil practices prevailing in Nepali society during the Rana regime. The spirit of Neupane's movement continued to spiral out in all the subsequent movements in the country. In the middle of the twentieth century, the anti-Rana regime movements initiated by political parties also incorporated women's issues in their policy documents. In this context, the Nepal Women's Association (NWA) was established under the leadership of Mangaladevi Singh in 1947. The NWA's major leadership supported the Delhi Accord, alienating some of the leftist women. Consequently, they formed the All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA) under the leadership of Kamakshadevi Basnet in 1950. Despite their ideological differences, all women's organizations collaboratively contributed to political and rights movements in the country. The political parties also reciprocated Nepali women's commendable contribution to democracy. The most remarkable contribution is Madan Bhandari's "People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD): A Program of Nepali Revolution," which has incorporated the aspiration of the socialist feminist perspective. It has not only incorporated some of the special provisions for equitable rights for women but also influenced all subsequent movements and constitutional and legal provisions. The much-appreciated women's rights specified in the Constitution of Nepal 2015 resonate with many of the provisions inscribed in PMPD.*

## Introduction

Political ideas such as equality and social justice are fundamental aspects of the democratic system. In this context, it is noteworthy that prosperity with social justice is the basis of building socialism. The basis of equality is the situation where every individual can truly act as a genuine citizen with a due esteem of other people and they have an equal status response to fundamental rights and basic human rights. In this light, biological differences between women and men and gender and sexual minorities are

addressed differently based on their needs to achieve substantively gender parity in the true sense.

Convergence in the understanding of women's liberation in the socialist feminist approach is fundamental to gender equality. In reality, discrimination not only exists based on sex and sexuality but also among diverse groups, including class, caste, and region, which create differences among groups. In this context, it is urgent to end the persistent historical discrimination and to avail equal access of all groups to political rights, socio-cultural status, and economic opportunities.

Every person in society has some political opinions. It does not mean that they should be directly involved in political parties and statecraft affairs. Based on their political philosophy, which can be reflected in their approaches and behaviors, they can support certain political parties and cast their votes for them. Since politics is never neutral, people can make up their opinions about political parties.

Every person wants to protect and practice their rights, freedom, and equality, which is also the basic aspect of being a sovereign and self-respecting citizen. It can also be called a bunch of moral political ideals, principles, and concepts. This matter has been expressed by the words ‘Veda or Chintan or Darshan’ in Eastern philosophy (*Pragya Nepali Brihat Shabdakosh*, 2010).

In world history, Eastern philosophy has been the oldest intellectual tradition. In the Vedic period, women were excluded from the ruling statecraft and political power. However, they were highly respected and esteemed in household affairs. In this regard, Priyadarshani’s study reveals that women were more established and influential in household work during the Vedic period. Their social status was equal to men in the private sphere of family and domesticity. No religious work was valid without women. Thus, in the Vedic period, the status of women was well respected.

In the later stage of the Vedic era, their status was changed. Especially entering Manu Smriti’s era, women were categorized into two distinct groups: Satdhyobadini and Brahmavadini (Dixit, 2010). Married women stayed home, were involved in family affairs, and participated in religious functions and socio-cultural activities. They were also having high respect within family and society and were called Satdhyobadini. By contrast, Brahmavadini lived in Gurukul, pursued education, and proved themselves proficient through study and yoga. For instance, Gargi, Bishwavara, Apala, and Ghosha were able to

place themselves in the position of Rishi, i.e., the acquirer of knowledge (Kaudinyayan, 2006).

In every society, some citizens adopt certain philosophies, and others follow different ideologies, and none of them remain neutral. Those philosophical postulations favor certain classes or communities. For instance, leftists advocate for social justice and equality. In this regard, a substantial number of scholars in the past contemplated the development and prosperity of human society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in their *Communist Manifesto* published on 21 February 1848, explicated the male-female relationship in the market-operated economic system: “The bourgeois sees his wife as a mere instrument of production, who are exploited in common” (25). Encouraging women to be part of economic activities is an indispensable part of social justice. Similarly, raising a collective voice for a fair share of remuneration and working hours in the process of production is equally a vital part of social structure. Eventually, such a bold assertion provoked working women of the industrialized world to be organized to raise their voices for equal rights not only in the workplace but also in all spheres of life.

Similarly, the Seneca Falls Convention, held in New York on 19-20 July 1848, deliberated the rights of women amidst social, civil, and religious conditions. Elizabeth Cady Stanton led the convention amidst the gracious presence of the then-famous orator Lucretia Mott and adopted the Women’s Rights Declaration, which was the first-ever document collectively to voice the demand for women’s equal rights (Staff, 2010). Consequently, women from the US cotton factories staged street demonstrations multiple times, demanding definite working hours and higher payment during the 1860s.

In 1865, British women organized a petition for a women’s suffrage bill and collected signatures, which they presented to their parliament the next year through parliamentarian John Stuart Mill.

This was the first ever equality bill in the history of the world (Parliamentary Archives, 1866). This step was considered the first-ever formal initiative to challenge patriarchy in pursuit of equality between men and women in human history.

Under the leadership of Marx, the First International Gathering of Workers was held in 1866. The convention decided to survey the working conditions of women in workplaces. Based on the collected data, a conclusion was drawn that there should be a separate organizational mechanism to organize a large number of working women and mobilize them in the communist movement. At one point, Munoz and Woods (2000) illustrated the three arguments based on biological differences between men and women proposed by Marx. First, men and women may have different needs and demands, which should be discussed and listed separately. Second, as a centuries-long marginalized faction of humanity, women may feel comfortable expressing themselves in women's groups. Third, women may need extra opportunities and resources to develop leadership capacity to compete with men at an equal level. In response to these issues, Marx proposed separate women's mechanisms to accomplish those goals and objectives. Interpreting these policies into actions, Clara Zetkin took the lead in organizing women all around Europe and pushed an equality agenda. In that case in point, Zetkin's logic remains valid to empower the marginalized group first and then help them integrate into the mainstream group to reconcile differences and mainstream the issues to act from a commonplace.

However, Marx said that inequality is created by control over the means of production and exploitation of labor. In this regard, Marx and Engels brought it clearly through the *Communist Manifesto* that labor and the women's rights movements are two integral aspects of a civilized society. The Manifesto also discerns that the cause of poverty in the world is nothing other than

limited ownership of the means of production and exploitation of labor. Moreover, women belong to the most oppressed class who are also under the oppression of working men. For this reason, the workers as the oppressed class, and women as an additionally oppressed community should work together to establish the ownership of the working class over the means of production and get rid of oppression by men as well. In that situation, the end of labor exploitation and the redistribution of power would be possible. In addition, the labor movement should take up the issue of women's liberation, which is countable in number and adds decisive value to the movement. That is the only way to liberate workers and women from both exploitation and discrimination at the same time.

Motivated by this idea, working women started to organize themselves and join the liberation movements. A pioneer feminist activist Zetkin led the movement internationally. Zetkin tabled the motion of 'equal pay for equal work regardless of gender' in the second international conference in 1889. The motion was adopted unanimously. While the equality movement was speeding up, New Zealand women got the voting right first-ever world record in 1893.

As a part of the process of internationalization of the women's socialist solidarity and action, Zetkin led two international socialist women's conferences, which were conducted in 1907 and 1910 to identify and mainstream women's concerns. Respecting and commemorating the history of the women's liberation movement, the second conference in 1910 declared "March 8" as International Women's Day (Chitrakar, 1980). These historical footsteps of the international socialist movement inspired Nepali women as well to shape the agenda and move forward in our context.

In 1917, a revolution broke out in Russia, and the working-class power was established. Thereafter, women's lives have been immensely changed. Although equality was not maintained

as envisioned in *The Communist Manifesto*, some remarkable changes happened in favor of women in Russia over the following decades. However, after decades of the revolution, the state policy and laws began to backtrack in some respects. Yet, some positive changes were sustained. Women were asked to participate in the production sector for self-reliance. It was suggested to organize together with working-class men for rights. To make society democratic, a campaign was launched to institutionalize the equal rights of women. Similarly, women gradually expanded their movement from workplaces to communities, at national and international levels. Eventually, issues of equality were getting established as an integral part of the democratic movement. Nevertheless, it barely came into practice.

Now, times have changed. History has shown that Marxism is the philosophy of organizing the working class against labor exploitation. Feminism is the philosophy of fighting to end patriarchal discrimination and is an integral part of the egalitarian movement. Marxism and feminism are considered ideological weapons to establish an egalitarian society with decent work and gender justice. Around 1990, the two movements were synthesized and named “Socialist Feminism,” which is an upgraded level of Marxist feminism accepting diversity within.

In the modern age, multiple aspects of society-political, economic, social, and cultural have been embedded in discourses of human sciences. The purpose of democracy was taken as a formula to maintain the integrity and unity of the community, society, and nation in terms of the dignity of human society, basic rights of individuals, social justice, economic progress, and social development, which contribute to the continuous development of democratic environment and culture. Including marginalized communities, unity within diversity, respect for pluralism, development

of coordination and harmony, decentralization, and configuration of power between local and central government started to be taken as extended measures of democracy. Later days of the modern world accepted these aspects as basic norms of democracy, and the Nepali communist movement integrated these values, which remain some special features of PMPD.

In this context, Cornwall and Goetz (2010) assert that the point of view on democracy for women means all these aspects, processes, and structures with gender consciousness. In addition, there should be a gender balance in the participation. In today’s world, democratic values and beliefs have to be presented separately from the things mentioned above. However, in the historical context, Vedic culture and values were adopted more in the East, while the modern values of democracy are expanding from the West. However, today the Eastern beliefs of the Vedic period and modern beliefs established by the West have been immersed. It is neither possible nor necessary to separate them from each other. Therefore, in today’s world, the basic values of the democratic system and gender equality have become common themes without borders.

### **Methodology**

This article adopts qualitative and quantitative methods to study and analyze the feminist implications of PMPD and its historical impact on the women’s movement and subsequent achievements. It is based on the published literature on PMPD and the debate on women’s rights in Nepal. Bhandari’s ideas concerning women’s rights have been published in different media: print, audio, video, and online. In this regard, the roles of the Madan Bhandari Foundation, the CPN (UML), and institutions and individuals remain important. The author has also consulted the feminist literature to justify the argument that PMPD has a significant role in uplifting the status of women in contemporary times.

## **Results and Discussion**

Various philosophers have interpreted and analyzed the development of the democratic system in different ways along with the development of world human society. Hutchinson (1991) divided it into three waves based on the process of developing democracy in Western countries. He called the period from 1820 to 1926 the first wave of democracy; in this wave, women were deprived even of voting rights.

The second wave of democracy began at the end of World War II and continued until the dissolution of the USSR. The international women's movement took a new leap during this period. Women in many countries gained formal equality. Because of the war, women's participation in the workforce in the industrial sector increased although the majority of women were still working as informal workers.

Many countries, including China, moved forward on the path of revolution and had political changes. Their policies and laws featured greater gender equality. As a result, the women's liberation movement reached new heights. Taking lessons from the World Socialist Movement, Mao Tse-Tung (1940) spelled out the patriarchy as an additional obstacle to women's liberation. In addition, revolutionaries should fight and defeat patriarchy to ensure gender equality, which was formally mentioned in the program of the Chinese Revolution, named "New Democracy." A Marxist feminist perspective dominated the equality movement in this era. Although liberal feminism continued, a radical feminist perspective also came into existence.

After 1990, the world democratic movement entered into the third wave, which continues today. At this point, women were understood as citizens of equal status with different biological abilities. To achieve fundamental equality in human life, the idea was generated that different policies and programs should be adopted and

implemented to address the different needs of citizens having different biology and sexuality to achieve substantial equality. A Socialist feminist perspective dominated in this period.

Nepali political movement also dovetails with the democratic waves mentioned above. Since the latter part of the Rana regime, the issue of women's equality was included in party policies since its inception. Women themselves took collective initiatives to raise issues of equality. Workers as well as peasant movements were also taking place in the same ways. Through the process, while gearing up the social movement progressively, the depth and width of women's liberation and gender equality agenda were also widening and taking shape in response to the changing world. Arriving in the democratic republic system, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) intends to achieve socialism, which has included an ingredient of Socialist feminism. Now, the huge question is how to change social attitudes, leaders' perspectives, and behavior in general to fulfill the spirit of the Constitution of Nepal 2015.

### **Stepping up the feminist movement in Nepal**

Nepali women took part in different movements for centuries. History has it that, along with the military battalion, a group of women took part in the Nalapani War in 1814 (Kunwar, 2014) for the sake of national sovereignty. British Empire ruling in India intended to expand itself over to Nepal. The British forces attacked Nalapani including other Anglo-Nepal battle points, where women and children fought along with the Nepali Army against the British. Though Nepal lost the Nalapani battle, the bravery of Nepali was highly regarded, even by the enemies themselves.

After almost a century of the Nalapani war, women initiated a movement focusing on socio-political issues. Since 1846, the Rana regime ruled Nepal. Seven decades after the inception of the regime, Divya Koirala in Siraha, eastern Tarai, tried to form a women's committee in 1917



and requested the wife of the then Rana Prime Minister to chair it while posing herself as its Secretary (Pokhrel, 1984). Instead of accepting the offer, Divya's family was compelled to flee into exile. Almost during the same period, Yogmaya Neupane of Bhojpur in the Eastern Hills of Nepal initiated a civic movement called Dharma Rajya (righteous governance). As Neupane was enlightened with the Josmani Saint Tradition, she was motivated to act for social justice. Neupane returned to Nepal from India and started the Dharma Rajya movement, in which gradually hundreds of women and men voluntarily joined. The issues mostly relating to women's oppression such as stopping child marriage, allowing widow marriage, ending *satee pratha* (a practice of immolating a widow at the death of her husband), etc., were raised to transform and humanize the society. At the same time, Neupane demanded the abolition of *das pratha* (slavery tradition) and a pay rise for working people. People from all sectors were allowed to participate in her movement. It was a big step in challenging the then social stigma based on gender and caste. Neupane's activism incepted the feminist movement in Nepal. Thus, the Nepali feminist movement has been a home-grown phenomenon rather than a thing incepted imitating others.

Because of the intensive pressure of Nepali social activists, *satee pratha* was abolished on July 8, 1920, and the slavery system on November 24, 1925. However, Rana rulers did not consider other issues concerning social justice. The Rana regime tried to suppress the movement in many ways. Neupane continued the action for more than two decades. During the period, Neupane and her delegates had an audience with the Rana Prime Minister to get their demands of Dharma Rajya met. Instead of listening to the just voice, the Rana regime suppressed the movement cruelly. By the early 1940s, some of the political prisoners were executed. Then, Neupane took Jal Samaadhi

(self-sacrifice by drowning in water) in the Arun River on July 5, 1941, believing that death was better than living under tyrannical Rana rulers (Nepal, 1995).

In the 1940s, politically aware people started organizing and conducting activities concerned with the issues of gender equality. As a result, women became part of the movement from the very beginning. The first Nepali political party, the Nepal Praja Parishad, was founded on June 3, 1934 (Upadhyaya, 1997: 21; Sharma, 1965) to throw away the century-long Rana regime (1846-1951). Female leaders like Rewanta Kumari Acharya, Seeta Sharma, and Ram Maya Pode joined the party with responsibilities such as managing communication and publicity (Gautam, 2001). Rewanta Kumari was involved in availing political prisoners' photos for the media in Banaras, India. Her job was highly risky, but she braved it at the age of 20 (Gautam, 2001:270-275; Upadhyaya, 1997:157-158). Ram Maya Pode as a cleaner became a messenger between prisoners and the party outside (Pandey, 2002). If, in case it was exposed, Rammaya, a woman belonging to an untouchable caste, was sure to get a death sentence. These are a few examples of how women took risks in favor of democracy.

The Nepali Congress (NC) was instituted in 1946; its first conference was held in 1947 to formalize its inception. Some women activists also attended the inception conference of the party (Basnet, 1996). As the conference decided to fight for democracy, many leaders came back to Nepal and launched the first trade union strike in Biratnagar in March 1947. When major leaders Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, Girija Prasad Koirala, and Manmohan Adhikari were arrested, the strike became weaker. Women under the leadership of Divya Koirala braved coming on the streets and added fuel to the movement. Subsequently, they were also arrested and brought to Dhankuta jail

barefoot (Basnet, 1996: 16; Sharma, 1965: 409). However, the movement reached the climax and negotiation took place with some demands met. Thus, women were part of every battleground to establish democracy in the country.

In May 1947, having shaped the democratic movement, many women joined the first-ever street demonstration for civil rights in the country. Dozens of women including Sahana Pradhan, Sadhana Pradhan, Snehalata Shrestha, and Kanaklata Bajracharya were arrested and kept in custody (Pandey, 2002; Upadhyaya, 1997:127). After being released in two weeks, they realized the need for a political organization to bring more women together and make a collective voice by setting women's rights agendas. Thus, the Nepal Women's Association (NWA) presided by Mangaladevi Singh was formed as the first political organization for women in the country. Snehalata Shrestha became its Secretary (Singh, 1994: 66).

When the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) was formed on April 22, 1949, in Kolkata, India, Motidevi Shrestha was one of the founding members. She was one among other hundreds of women involved in the anti-Rana movement across the country and in exile. The aim of participating in the agitation was to attain equal rights after retaining democracy, which was not different than the mission of the international feminist movement. As a result, a multiparty system was incepted in 1951 overthrowing the Rana regime.

Just after the political change, Biratnagar Jute Mill was closed, and workers were agitated to re-operate it. Three women including Nanda Nepal staged a fast-unto-death strike, which ended after 27 days with the agreement of re-opening the Mill. Parbati Paswan delivered a baby on the agitating field, who was nick-named Hadtali (Agitator) and Parbati as Hadtaliki Maa (mother of the agitator) (Pandey, 2002). The agitating workers were not so much educated but had tremendous courage

to fight for their rights. These were the workers, converting Tractors into Tankers while fighting for democracy against the Rana regime just a few months earlier. Thus, Nepali women actively participated the political movements since the beginning. During crises, women were the ones to brave all odds successfully. Women have been front-liners in all political movements in the country, not passive spectators.

After incepting a multiparty system, an ideological split took place in the NWA, with Mangaladevi leading a faction, which believed that women's rights could be attained through democratic reform. By contrast, another faction led by Kamakshadevi held the belief that only a radical change could provide women with their rights. Because of their party alignments, their perspective on the tripartite (King, Rana, and the NC under the aegis of India's then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) Delhi Accord was also divergent. Mangladevi's faction welcomed the Delhi Accord because the NC was actively involved in and supporting it. By contrast, Kamakshadevi's faction opposed the Accord in line with the CPN's stand on the Accord. As a result, the women with leftist ideology formed the All Nepal Womens Association (ANWA) in 1950. It was the beginning of demarcating the women's movement based on ideology. Leftist women continued their street movement when the CPN was banned. This happened even before the first anniversary of the inception of the multiparty system in the country. (Usha, 1989). As the Nepal Women's Organisation allied with the NC as a sister organization, it was left alone by the leftist women's organization. However, when a joint front including the NC and the Nepal Praja Parishad launched Bhadra Avagya Andolan (non-violent movement) in December 1957 with a demand for declaration of the general election, the CPN supported the movement unconditionally and so did the ANWA. The then-student leaders including Shusila Shrestha, Indu Regmi, and Madhu Sharma actively participated in the

movement and were arrested at a rally (K.C., 1999). This movement was concluded with the declaration of the election date: February 18, 1958.

The demand for equal voting rights was practically achieved when Sadhana Pradhan contested in a municipal election and became the first elected woman representative of the country in 1953 (Pandey, 2002). The long-awaited general election started on February 18, 1958, and Dwarikadevi Thakurani of Dadeldhura was elected as the first woman member of parliament. Thakurani was the only female candidate of the NC; she became the first woman minister of the country (Basnet, 1996:46).

In this sense, women were getting politically empowered gradually. However, after changing the political system, other pillars of the society as economic and socio-cultural aspects did not transform equally to set up an egalitarian society. As a result, the then King Mahendra did a military coup on December 16, 1960. The parliament and cabinet were dissolved. All political organizations were banned, and the King assumed absolute power and imposed a Party-less Panchayat system, which was sustained for three decades.

All the democratic forces opposed the Panchayat system. Many male leaders were arrested and put in jail (Basnet, 1996). Some of them went underground and many others exiled to India. Women stayed back and some of them continued protests. For instance, when King Mahendra was celebrating democracy day on February 18, 1961, Shailaja Acharya led a protest rally against the military coup with black flags and hand-written pamphlets. Acharya and other protesters were arrested and sent to prison (Basnet, 1996; Pandey, 2002).

After a decade-long silence, in 1972, a militant communist group known as the “Jhapali Group”

emerged in Jhapa. The militants started the armed action in May 1973 and continued until 1975. Later, some of the fringe parties came together and formed the All Nepal Communist Revolutionary Coordination Centre in 1975. Having three years of discussion on setting up ideological clarity and organizational structure, the Coordination Centre decided to form a party on December 26, 1978 and named it the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-ML). Finally, the CPN (ML) decided to stop the arms struggle and follow the peaceful path to organize people and mobilize them for change. It was a major ideological shift in the CPN (ML).

Eventually, the student movement was heightened, which compelled King Birendra to declare a referendum to choose whether people preferred an “Improved Panchayat” or a “Multiparty System” for 1980. Anti-Panchayat groups utilized the referendum as an opportunity to reach people. The parties reached out to more women and mobilized them in their campaigns. As a result, the All Nepal Women’s Association (ANWA) as the sister wing of the CPN (ML) was re-organized on Feb. 28, 1981. Then, a flagship term “Half of the Sky” referring to women was coined to prioritize women’s issues and seek their active participation in change.

In April 1981, two girls namely Namita and Sunita were raped and murdered while they were having a holiday in Pokhara; their dead bodies were found at the Seti riverside. In this regard, the ANWA raised the issues of women’s security and staged street demonstrations demanding to punish the culprit and make strong laws to end violence against women. Thousands of people joined the protest. This was the biggest rally ever led by women after the imposition of the Panchayat system in the country. It accelerated the level of people’s anger against the Panchayat system.



In January 1982, while some people in Piskar, Sindhupalchock, were celebrating Maghe Sankranti (a festival), police intervened and shot them. Many people including Kanchhi Thami with her 15-day-old baby were killed on the spot (Himali Prakashan Pariwar, 1984). It was one of the cruelest actions ever taken by the Panchayat regime; the incident aggravated the anti-panchayat sentiment across the country. The government started even to suppress cultural celebration like Teej (a cultural event of Nepali women), while women composed right-based songs and sang at the festival. For instance, many more women including Kabita Paudel arrested many times in Rupandehi (Paudel, 2016). The state suppression motivated people to participate in the anti-Panchayat movement. All repressive actions of the government were also fuelling the feminist movement, and the agendas such as the equal right to descent, inheritance of property, end of all kinds of discrimination against women, strong laws to end violence against women, women's participation in economic activities, etc., became clearer.

When political parties were ready for the people's movement in 1990, Sahana Pradhan became the Chair of the Left Front, and Shailaja Acharya became a team member of the NC task force. Their appointment to leading positions encouraged women to participate in the movement. Laxmi Karki, a student leader of the ANNFSU in Pokhara, and Meena Paudel, the president of the Nursing Association of Nepal (NAN) in Kathmandu demonstrated a courageous role, which motivated more women to join the street protests against the government. In the end, women from all sectors including the ANWA, the NWA, and other organizations jointly protested the repression of the Panchayat government with the demand of multiparty. Finally, the multiparty system was restored on April 8, 1990. People including large masses of women were expected to regain equal rights and treatment legally. However, when the

new constitution was declared, women were not respected as citizens of equal status. Then, women engaging in different organizations collectively realized that unless they held the decision-making positions themselves, the system would not work in their favor.

After nine months of the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1991, two major communist parties the CPN (ML) and the CPN (M) unified and became the CPN (UML). Then, four decades after the inception of the communist party in the country, a major communist party appointed a woman to the central leadership when Sahana Pradhan became a Member of the Standing Committee of the CPN (UML).

The CPN (UML) conducted its Fifth National General Convention in 1993, adopting the program named People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD). This is the first time the CPN (UML) openly accepted and included the aspiration of a socialist feminist perspective in its policy documents.

### **Feminism and People's Multiparty Democracy**

In 1993, the CPN (UML) adopted People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), which was a revolutionary program in the context of Nepal. This program carried women-centric policies policy (Mahilahrako Sambandhamaa) as separate points of PMPD (1993:13), as the continuation of the program adopted by the CPN (ML) fourth congress in 1989 (CPN [ML], 1989: 20). The policy aims to liberate women from subordinated positions and promote them as citizens of equal footing. PMPD includes five sub-points in this regard: (a) ending all the kinds of exploitation and suppression of women including abduction, trafficking, prostitution, and socio-cultural maltreatment; (b) establishment of equal rights on inheritance property and equal remuneration of equal work; (c) guaranteeing equality in all sphere of national and social life; (d) running a special program to eradicate women's backwardness

and guaranteeing security for women as well as formulate strong laws to heavily punish culprits of violence against women; and (c) encouraging active women participation in politics, economic and social lives (CPN [ML], 1989 & CPN [UML], 1993).

In the course of its development in two decades, PMPD has been defined, elaborated, and adopted as the UML's principle in 2014. The gender policy and perspective of PMPD are in line with socialist feminism, which aims for every citizen to be equal regardless of gender differences.

### Adoption of gender agenda

The gender policies of the CPN (UML) as such are progressive enough in response to Nepali society. However, the problem was the lack of programs and action plans for proper enforcement. Realizing that, to work focusing

on the gender issue, the CPN (UML) formed the Central Women's Department (CWD) in 2004 for policy feedback. The CWD closely works with the ANWA, civil society organizations, and expertise as an individual on the issue. After having a series of interactions, eight points of gender agenda were identified, which was adopted as the gender agenda of the CPN (UML). Shortly those points became a common gender agenda among all the political parties before launching the second People's Movement in 2006. Finally, some of those issues were adopted by the re-stated parliament as a motion on May 30, 2006 (GoN, 2006). Then, the issues owned by the state. It was one of the milestones regarding the Nepali women's movement. After the adoption of the gender agendas, the CPN (UML) has taken a series of decisions regarding gender issues, which have been summarized below.

**Table 1: The decision of the CPN (UML) on gender issues from 2005 onwards**

Date	Decision
2005 August	Decided 8 points on gender agenda through the 9th session of the 7th Central Committee including the right to descent, property, 1/3rd participation, to end VAW & Reproductive Health, Democracy and sustainable peace, special program for women, HR protection of women in conflict (Apani-12, 2005).
2008 May	Equal inheritance property to both son and daughter, by a member of central to district committee, special package to promote women membership & leadership, action against culprits and campaign for ending VAW, etc. (Apani- 20, 2008).
2009 February	8th National Convention constitutionally insured 1/3rd of women's participation in the internal structure. If women having constitutional criteria are not available, those seats should be kept vacant (Constitution, 2009).
2012	Equal rights on descent, citizenship, property, 1/3rd participation in all state mechanisms (Position paper of the CPN [UML] for new constitution)
2014 July	Right to descent, property, 1/3rd participation, and code of conduct on VAW (documents adopted by 9 <sup>th</sup> National Convention).
2016 April	Enforcement of 1/3 women in party executive and rank & files, 50 percent women candidacy including executive posts in a local election, enforcement of the code of conduct on VAW (Resolution of CC 6th session)

Source: *The CPN (UML) 2005b, 2007a, 2009a, 2014b, 2016*

Based on the motion adopted by parliament, equal rights to descent, inheritance of property, maternal health, and participation in state mechanism has been part of the fundamental right of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 (Nepal, 2015). In addition, criminalizing violence against women has guaranteed the punishment of VAW culprits and compensation to victims. To mainstream women, special provision regarding education, health, employment, and social security has been mentioned as a constitutional right of women. In addition, Nepal is a state-party of sustainable development goals, which should take should be taken into account, while setting policy and making changes.

The fourth national conference of the ANWA elected a 35-member committee chaired by Bidya Devi Bhandari. After Bidya Devi Bhandari was elected the president, a new wave of history of the ANWA began. The multifaceted contribution of Bidya Devi Bhandari not only accelerated the women's movement in Nepal but also consolidated the democratic political movement in the country. For the first time, the Fourth Conference adopted a 14-point program, in which the issue of 33 percent participation of women in all public spheres was put forward. Bidya Devi Bhandari was elected the Chairperson again by the Sixth National Conference of the ANWA in 2012.

Under the strong leadership of Bidya Devi Bhandari, the ANWA smoothly advanced the women's movement. Especially, the 14-point programs and campaigns of women's concerns formulated by the Fourth Conference and modified by the Fifth Conference were effectively implemented under the leadership of Bidya Devi Bhandari.

King Gyanendra made an announcement declaring the restoration of sovereignty, political power, and governance to the Nepali people in 2006. After the People's Movement, the

House of Representatives was restored. The first meeting of the House abolished the 240-year-long monarchy in Nepal. During the meeting, Bidya Devi Bhandari presented a proposal of significant public importance regarding women's rights, emphasizing the context of women's rights as human rights. The proposal included the following points:

1. Immediate removal of discriminatory and divisive provisions that require the recommendation of the father as a basic identification for Nepali citizenship, ensuring that children can obtain citizenship through their mother's or father's name without any reservation.
2. In every mechanism of state structure and construction, ensure proportional participation of women based on the population ratio, aiming for at least equal participation of women.
3. Establish a system where sons and daughters have equal rights to ancestral property.
4. Promptly eliminate all discriminatory provisions existing in active laws and regulations in the Nepali state, along with establishing provisions to end all forms of violence against women.

Under the leadership of Member of Parliament Bidya Devi Bhandari, the 'Joint Women's Struggle Committee' continued a sustained movement for the establishment of women's rights and empowerment, which eventually led to the incorporation of various provisions in the 'Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007.

Following the constitutional compulsion, one-third of women in federal parliament, provincial assembly, and party structure, and 40 percent of them in local government have been included. In this context, it is noteworthy that True, Niner, and Parashar (2012) studied the impact of quotas and concluded that gender quotas and reservations have significantly improved women's political representation at national and local levels, as notable results in Mongolia, Nepal, Timor-Leste,

Afghanistan, New Caledonia, and the non-independent territories of French Polynesia.

We have gone through the two rounds of the election of three tiers of local, provincial, and federal parliament in 2017 and 2022. The result

from the gender perspective is rather regressive in the second election. None of the parties has respected the constitutional provision of proportionate representation even in candidacy (Nepal, 2015) rather limiting to fulfill the compulsion of legal quota (GoN, 2017).

**Table 2: Women elected in different levels and bodies in 2017 & 2022**

SN	Level of the state bodies	Total	2017		2022	
			Women	Men	Women	Men
1.	Members of the House of Representative	275	91	184	91	184
2.	Members of the National Assembly	59	22	37	22	37
3.	Members of Provinces	550	189	361	200	350
4.	Mayor and Chair at the local level	753	18	735	25	728
	Deputy Mayor and Vice Chair at the local level	753	714	39	569	184
	Elected ward chair	6743	62	6681	69	6674

Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017/2022

In this like, PMPD recognizes the diversities within society and among women as well. Based on the diversity, their needs and demands should be responded to differently to achieve equality in real life.

### Conclusion

The CPN (UML) has played a leading role in setting up the gender policy and agenda. PMPD's gender policy is progressive enough in line with the changing demands of time. It is very much linked with the socialist feminist perspective as well, which recognizes and considers diversity and should respond to it differently to attain substantive equality as a result. However, the enforcement process through developing a proper action plan is weak. Social mindset is the main obstacle behind this. Carol S. Dweck (2017) has defined mindset as a fixed mindset and a growth (the writer used the word 'growth' instead of dynamic mindset. The fixed mindset believes that qualities are carved in stone and creates an urgency to prove them over and over. However,

the growth mindset believes that basic qualities can be cultivated through efforts, strategies, and help from others. Since PMPD is an outcome of the creative implementation of Marxism in the Nepali context, the growth mindset is a must for its proper enforcement. However, the problem in our politics is an unchanged fixed mindset.

At that point, the CPN (UML)'s Central Department of Women (CDW) was gearing up to take these issues into account despite their resistance to the leadership. Onward the eighth convention in 2009, the CDW has been removed from the structure. As a result, both as party structure and state mechanism, women's participation just counted as numerically to fulfilling the legal provision.

While talking about gender parity, gender issues, and power relations should be redefined. Breaking the glass ceiling and glass walling is necessary in terms of power sharing and achieving equitable, prosperous, and sustainable social transformation. Clarity on the issues in the changed context, just participation

in the state mechanism and political organization, and listening to their voice are the basis of power redistribution toward parity and social justice. A growth mindset is required for the cause.

The CPN (UML) itself has not taken the gender policy of PMPD seriously, at the time of implementing them within the party structure as well as in the state mechanism. The government coalition has misused the legal loopholes to snatch women's rights even to be a candidate in the local election in 2022. This is a clear reflection of the fixed mindset of the leadership of the parties. Though the constitution itself carries a socialist feminist perspective, it should be reflected systematically in the plan and program to develop informed leadership and enforcement of gender policy within parties and push the issue in state mechanism for gender balancing in the executive structure for power redistribution. The ultimate impact of the initiation would bring the change on the right track of state mission as the nation's prosperity and happiness of the people as a whole, which is set by the CPN (UML) while it was leading the state.

Time has not been lapsed yet. As a major political force, the CPN (UML) should take major responsibility to keep itself on the right track with proper enforcement of constitutional and PMPD's gender provisions in respect of progressive realization as mentioned in the constitution and keeping the nation's commitment to sustainable development goals by 2030 as well. For the cause leadership in the rank and file should change their mindset, sensitize the politics and balance the power within and influence the state as a whole. In conclusion, social transformation can be possible only through transformed leadership. In addition, the public audit of the state policy and major laws through the perspective of gender and inclusiveness. It can be used to harmonize with set demands, policies, and commitments, which

would expand the space and create an opportunity to keep the support and belief of the people from the diversity.

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