

Parliamentary Intervention and *Bikas*: Former President Bhandari’s Motion for *Mahila* Empowerment

Mrigendra Bahadur Karki, PhD

Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, CNAS, Tribhuvan University
Corresponding Email: mrigendrarakarki@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Communist Party of Nepal—Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN [UML]) has undergone significant political transformations since 1949, particularly reflected in its political and election manifestos. I have introduced a procedural periodization model to assess mahilas’ (women) advancement within the ideology of People Multiparty Democracy (PMPD). Former President Bidya Devi Bhandari’s “motion of urgent public importance” in Parliament in 2006 marked a notable biash (advancement) in the PMPD gender aspect. This study traces the evolution of mahila ideology within PMPD through four periodizations: formation (Node, Scale-Up, Party Building), guiding principle, intervention, and bikas. It builds on the philosophy of onto-epistemological determinants and co-determinants, embedded in social justice theory. Employing archival research and qualitative interviews, the study utilized election manifestos and interviews. These interviews with mahila motion architects reveal philosophical underpinnings, theoretical influences, political landscapes, and practical challenges, portraying a movement for equality born from past struggles and political realities, shaping Nepal’s path toward inclusion. The motion exemplifies collective action and national unity in advancing gender equality, democratic justice, and social change through solidarity. The study claims: i) Nepal is moving towards inclusive democracy; ii) the party’s fundamental principles evolved through the interplay of strategies, policies, initiatives, and encounters; iii) further legal interventions are required to uphold PMPD’s evolving guiding principle as an urgent public motion for mahila; iv) this analysis model could be applied to other dimensions of PMPD to advance it at ‘thought’ level; finally, the CPN (UML) must deliberate on whether to prioritize ‘mahila’ or ‘women’ in its ideological discourse.

Introduction

In 2006, as a Member of Parliament, Mrs. Bidya Devi Bhandari introduced a groundbreaking “motion of ‘urgent public importance’” in the parliament of Nepal advocating for at least one-third mahila women’s representation in all state structures (see Annex 1). Additionally, the

motion supported abolishing unfair legal systems and ending violence towards mahila. This motion was a significant move towards ensuring gender equality in mahila’s participation and representation, diverging from previous demands of the Communist Party of Nepal for equal rights across various national aspects, maternal benefits, children’s welfare, free education, and

the repatriation of sons and husbands serving in foreign armies (Nepal Communist Part, (maoist), 2012).

Although she initiated and took the leadership to put the motion of urgent public importance in the parliament, the proposal garnered unanimous support across party lines, demonstrating a widespread agreement on gender equality in Nepali politics. B. D. Bhandari, representing the CPN (UML), secured endorsements from Kamala Panta (Nepali Congress), Narayan Prasad Saud (Nepali Congress Democratic), and Mr. Nawa Raj Subedi (Rastriya Janamorcha). The parliament uniformly endorsed the motion, subsequently enshrined in the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 and in the present constitution - 'Constitution of Nepal, 2015'. As a result, the conventional notion of the 'parliament' underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a 'society-blind assembly' to a more 'society-reflecting legislature,' underlining the mandated female representation and embracing inclusivity for various social and ethnic groups.

'Mahila' in Nepali language translates to 'woman' in English; however, its significance surpasses a mere definition. Throughout Nepali history, 'mahila' has become an influential catalyst for uniting individuals and shaping political landscapes. It plays a dual role: embodying a distinctive identity and harmonizing with a spectrum of political ideologies. Regarded as a philosophy, a doctrine, and a pragmatic tool, 'mahila' has propelled collaborative endeavors towards liberation from prejudice, marginalization, and social seclusion. Despite its empowering capabilities, the dynamic essence of 'mahila' encounters obstacles attributable to the constantly shifting political climate and entrenched societal conventions that impede the complete realization of mahila's rights and freedoms.

The concept of 'mahila' has undergone notable development within the historical context of the Nepali Communist Manifesto. The inaugural

manifesto in 1949 acknowledged the challenges faced by mahila due to patriarchal and feudal structures, emphasizing their significant role in the nation's *bikas*. In the recent NCP 1959 election manifesto, there has been a paradigm shift towards addressing gender disparity, underlining the active participation of mahila in nation-building and framing their entitlements within a rights-focused discourse.

Expanding upon principles of equality and rights, the election platform persisted in advocating for these fundamental values. It prioritized i) safeguarding and ensuring the welfare of citizens, ii) improving their economic and social standing, and iii) bolstering legal frameworks. These *bikas* occurred within the framework of PMPD, which was launched in 1993. The guiding principle of the PMPD states that the emancipation of the proletariat (working class) inherently results in the liberation of all marginalized factions, including mahila. This stance is under Marxist theory's focus on abolishing societal hierarchies rooted in economic frameworks. Nonetheless, it introduces a plausible obstacle: the marginalization of gender-specific concerns within the encompassing struggle of classes.

The PMPD further elaborated on the concept of *mahila*, positioning it as a constitutional imperative for participation and representation. It envisioned comprehensive empowerment through cultural and legal reforms, fostering a more inclusive and equitable Nepali society. In this context, former President Bhandari's motion can be seen as a significant *Bikas* (development) within the PMPD framework. Does the dominance of the Western concept of "Woman" overshadow the *Bikas* of a distinct mahila identity within Nepali communist documents and constitutions, and how does this deviation impact the *bikas* of mahila's rights in Nepal's People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) framework?

This article aims to explore these questions, tracing the historical evolution of mahila in Nepali politics, analyzing constitutional developments,

and examining the philosophical and practical implications of former President Bhandari's mahila motion. Through a comprehensive analysis of archival documents, election manifestos, and interviews, this study will provide insights into the progression of mahila rights within the PMPD framework and their broader impact on Nepali society.

Methodology

Conceptual orientation

Initially, an analysis was conducted on the approach of the CPN (UML) to mahila's issues across six distinct periods: Node (before 1949), Scale-Up (1950-1959), Party Building - UML Formative (1960-1990). The research adopted a combined approach, drawing upon archival and qualitative interviews to achieve this. Underpinning this methodology is the philosophy of onto-epistemological determinants (Barad, 1998; Foucault, 1972) and co-determinants (Barad, 2007; Stengers, 2011). This framework acknowledges the intertwined nature of social being (ontology) and the ways of knowing (epistemology). Social justice theory is further woven into the research design, emphasizing the importance of equity and inclusion in political representation. PMPD Guiding Principle (1990-1999), Intervention (2000-2006), and Bikas (from 2007 onwards). These six periods underscore the groundwork of PMPD, given that the research was centered on its evolution. The initial three periods are regarded as the foundational phase of PMPD. The inaugural communist manifesto introduced a framework for tackling mahila 's issues, with the 1959 election manifesto broadening the party's ideologies, initiatives, and obligations with these matters.

During the Panchayat Period (1960-1990), the prohibition of all political parties was enforced, and the CPN (UML) was actively involved in political strife and the establishment of a political organization. Madan Bhandari (1993) introduced the PMPD program, later solidifying it as a guiding principle. Furthermore, in 2006, President

Bhandari intervened within the framework of PMPD, advocating for the inclusion of 33 percent of mahila in all structures of the Nepali state, signifying a notable bikas within the PMPD framework.

The periods exemplify the political context and social ideology prevalent during each significant political and social era (Karki, 2010 & 2012). This analysis is guided by the theoretical perspectives of Tilly (2004), Tarrow (2003), Marx and Engels (1848), Lenin (1917), Luxemburg (1900), and Gramsci (1971), whose contributions on social movements, political opportunities, class struggle, democratic engagement, and cultural hegemony offer a comprehensive framework for comprehending the evolution of the CPN (UML's) policies and ideological transitions.

In a democratic system, elections serve as a mechanism for the citizens to endorse the underlying political ideologies of parties. Once elected, the party's representatives, including the President, Prime Minister, and Ministers, translate their party's ideology into concrete actions through plans, policies, and activities. This process represents the manifestation and bikas of that specific ideology. For instance, the CPN (UML) has consistently ranked among the top three parties in every election since 1991. The PMPD gained widespread acceptance through elections, and its principles were subsequently advanced by Mrs Bhandari in the mahila resolution. This approach applies to all aspects of the PMPD, illustrating how electoral success can facilitate the implementation and bikas of a party's ideological framework.

The role of election manifestos and legislative *bikas*

The reason for addressing mahila 's issues is rooted in the fluctuations within the political landscape and the UML election manifestos. These manifestos embody PMPD's ideologies and policies regarding mahila. By mobilizing female cadres and seeking their support, these

manifestos play a crucial role in shaping a dedicated political cohort (Whittier, 2004). Social movements entail a series of contentious performances, displays, and campaigns through which ordinary individuals collectively assert claims about others (Tilly, 2004). Likewise, Lenin (1917) underscores that the state arises due to the irreconcilability of class conflicts. Each election manifesto mobilizes female cadres and fosters new social environments and political cohorts.

This legislative bikas mandated a minimum of 33% female representation in all government structures. This marked a significant step forward in addressing the core principle of mahilas' concerns. This progress highlighted the unwavering commitment of the then-Nepali parliament to empower mahila and foster a more equitable political landscape.

While this study aligns with the foundational principles of the UML party and its evolution, it is important to acknowledge that other political parties, both democratic and communist, have played crucial roles historically and in the present day. Their contributions to advancing mahila 's causes in Nepal are significant and deserve recognition. However, this research focused on the UML party and the *bikas* achieved through President Bhandari's intervention within the PMPD framework.

The article centered on procedural inquiries regarding the bikas within the PMPD, particularly within the mahila component. Mahila's evaluation was based on active participation in a dynamic political environment crucial to the Nepali societal structure and following fundamental institutional norms. Conversely, Western viewpoints emphasize mahila's position in hierarchies, dialectics, and contentious associations with men (Kvam, Schearing, & Ziegler, 1999).

The Node, enlargement, and organization construction within the framework of People's

Multiparty Democracy encompass principles and strategies rooted in Marxist and Non-Marxist ideologies. Coined by McAdam (2003), the concept of 'scale shift' elucidates the transformation in collective endeavors that propel extensive protest movements, uniting diverse stakeholders and their assertions.

Drawing upon Max Weber's theory of general causal logic, introducing new cultural manifestations results in the onset of novel consciousness (Tilly 2005:5 and Matsuda 2001:128). Nepali mahila, like all individuals, demonstrated ingenuity and proactive behavior in their everyday routines and political engagements.

In this conceptual and legal context, the study employed a layered approach to exploring i) manifestation and ii) designing the trajectories of mahila in Nepal from a communist viewpoint up to 1990, particularly focusing on PMPD post-1991. It exclusively assessed the development of mahila's beliefs in PMPD over different years: 1959, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2017, and 2022 for parliamentary elections, and 2008 and 2013 for Constituent Assembly polls. The progress of PMPD was examined through the evolving view of mahila in the election manifestos.

The primary approach involved the examination of historical documents such as King Jayasthiti Malla's Manav Nyaya Shatra (BS 1436), Ram Shah's 26 Thitis (BS 1663-1693), the first Civil Code (BS 1910), and the subsequent civil code as crucial references for comprehending the beliefs of Nepali mahila.

The study analyzed nine election manifestos, seven from the UML and two preceding the UML's formation (the initial communist manifesto in 1949 and the 1959 general election manifesto of the Communist Party of Nepal). These records delineated the historical evolution of the mahila concept in the PMPD guiding principles and methodologies.

I analyzed these documents to monitor the evolution of ideas and actions across various historical periods: pre-1949, 1950-1959, 1960-1990, 1991-1999, 2000-2006, and from 2007 onwards. The analysis primarily focused on electoral platforms and the political environment, particularly pre-1949 and during 1960-1990. My methodology involved a combination of archival research and an assessment of the PMPD and President Bhandari's 2006 decree to comprehend *bikas* in gender equality within legislative and political realms. The research focused on former President Bhandari's decisive intervention in PMPD through an Urgent Public Motion among the Nepali communist parties. Only UML manifestos were analyzed to evaluate the *bikas* framework of PMPD.

Key terms and concepts

In addition to the archival data set, qualitative interviews were conducted with significant individuals driving mahila's rights in Nepal. Notably, interviews with President Bidya Devi Bhandari were carried out in 2023 and 2024 to acquire firsthand insights into the motivations, challenges, and impacts of her motion on mahila's representation. Kamala Panta, Narayan Prakash Saud, and Nawaraj Subedi formally endorsed the motion (*samarthak*) and were subsequently interviewed for the same purpose in 2024. These interviews offer valuable perspectives on the practical implementation of the motion and its broader implications for gender equality in Nepal.

I interviewed Ram Karki, Lal Babu Yadav, Bishnu Rijal, and Som Rai in 2024 to determine the impact of President Bhandari's motion in PMPD. These individuals have been actively involved in various roles in Nepali communist movements. Their insights enhance the interpretation of archival discoveries, deepening the comprehension of the changing landscape of mahila's rights and role.

By integrating archival research and qualitative interviews, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the concept of mahila rights and its

evolution in PMPD. This multi-method approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both the historical developments and the contemporary implications of gender equality initiatives within the framework of PMPD. While assisting with the issue, the paper has used a few key terms and concepts. Node: In the realm of UML, the concept of 'Node' originates in the inaugural Nepali communist manifesto of 1949. Within the UML framework, a 'Node' signifies crucial junctures in the progression of the mahila's movement, emblematic of pivotal instances of doctrinal transitions or ideological transformations. Scale-Up: 'Scale-Up' denotes the expansion of the scope and impact of gender equality initiatives, signifying the wider dissemination of these policies and their deeper integration into the political structure. Party-Building: Between 1960 and 1990, UML developed its core principle, PMPD, amid challenges, conflicts, and negotiations while also being involved in the 1990 People's Movement. Scale Shift: 'Scale Shift' refers to fundamental changes in the strategy or intensity of actions to promote gender equality. This includes shifts in policy focus, legislative changes, and alterations in advocacy strategies. *Bikas* (Advancement): '*bikas*' denotes considerable progress toward achieving gender equality and empowerment. It encompasses the cumulative impact of Nodes, Scale-Ups, and Scale Shifts in the historical and political context.

Results and Discussion

Nepal's road to *loktantra*

The Nepali state has evolved through various transformative processes. Historical milestones include Jayasthiti Malla's *Nyayawikashini* (BS 1436), Ram Shah's 26 *Thitis* (BS 1663-1693), Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Divya Upadesh*, and the *First Muluki Ain* (BS 1910). The *Thitis* and civil codes drew from Sanatana Dharma, although Ram Shah's 26 codes were notably more mundane. Before 18 February 1951, Nepal was under an autocratic Rana family dictatorship characterized by a hierarchical, authoritarian,

and ritualistic governance structure (Gellner, 1997). The state's laws and formal education syllabus were influenced by Hindu sastras and dharmashastras (epics), (Sharma, 2004).

After the successful democratic revolution of 1951, Nepal enjoyed a monarchical democracy until 1960, constitutionally opening various political and social avenues for collective and individual opportunities in activism and economic advancement. However, from 15 December 1960 until 8 March 1990, Nepal reverted to a traditional monarchy under the partyless Panchayat system, promoting modern education, the rule of law, and economic development (Gellner, 1997a). Despite these advancements, the system banned multi-party politics and outlawed oppositional activism (Karki, 2010). In response to a massive student movement in 1979, King Birendra announced a referendum that initiated public discourse. The 49-day-long People's Movement-I in 1990 ousted the Panchayat system, reintroducing a parliamentary constitutional monarchy and shifting sovereignty from the King to the citizens for the first time.

A Maoist insurgency began in 1996, severely disrupting governance. Following the joint effort of constitutional parties and the Maoists during the People's Movement-II, the Second Constituent Assembly promulgated the Constitution of Nepal in 2015. Nepal was established as a republic, a federal, and a secular country.

Padhera and Kol: Stri's domains and early voices

King Ram Shah (BS 1663-1693) legislated the mundane Thiti, legal codes, on Stri, a first-come, first-served policy. Among the 26 Thitis, Padhera (the place where people fetch water) and Kol (oil processing wooden tool) were the 6th and 7th, respectively. The pairing was historically significant for Stri, providing a meaningful voice. Stris became socially visible and a domain to the king to form laws

on them through these domains. "Water and Oil" transcended into vital public institutions and crucial landscapes for social interaction. These spaces often emerged as conflict sites. Therefore, the King formulated the 6th and 7th Thitis to address the issues.

While conflict undoubtedly played a role, Nepali Stris (mahila) were far from passive recipients of resources. Their active participation significantly shaped the social and political landscape. These public spaces served as gathering places and became platforms for developing and analyzing political ideologies, fostering discussions, and even influencing state policies. This period marks the most documented public spheres prominently involving Nepali Stris throughout history. However, it is important to note that there are earlier examples of Stris leadership in Nepal. Pandey (1997) describes the existence of a "Stri Raja" (Mahilas' State) in Western Nepal, and Chemjong (2003) discusses the "Mundane" rule for women during the Kirata period.

Water, oil, and contentious politics

In the modern period, these spaces have turned into politically contentious issues. Padhera has emerged as one of the political tools to mobilize Nepali people, particularly mahilas. The space has been depicted as a product of feudal traditions and practices in Nepali communist songs:

... A gathering at the water tap,
Your seminar is there,
There's a podium for speeches, ...

The song illustrates the historical marginalization of mahila in Nepal (Tuhure, 1991), depicting their confinement to spaces like the Padhera for about 500 years (Ram Shah's 26 Thiti). In these spaces, mahila have their informal kachahari (courts), where their voices and concerns remain limited and unheard in the broader public, political, and social spheres. The song conveys that despite

these limitations, mahila's voices from these communal spaces have influenced later political, social, and cultural lives. UML cadres used this sentiment to mobilize and recruit mahila, Dalits, and Indigenous nationalities by highlighting their grievances and fostering political awareness.

This narrative underscores the critical role of Padhera in mahila's lives, symbolizing both their exclusion and their potential for political mobilization. Through songs and other cultural forms, these communal experiences were transformed into powerful tools for political engagement and social change, addressing long-standing inequalities and advocating for inclusive representation.

Framing periodizations

The time divisions were determined based on the Communist Manifestos. The first manifesto of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) in 1949 laid the ideological foundation for all Nepali communist parties. That was philosophically rooted in Marx-Angles Communist Manifesto, 1848. The study analyzed election manifestos from the 1959 to 2022 federal parliament elections. In 1959, the Communist Party of Nepal contested the election. It was presumed that the UML party was also part of the election manifesto due to the sustained adherence to Nepal's Communist ideology.

The PMPD was founded on Marxist-Leninist principles but integrated key democratic components such as constitutional supremacy, regular electoral processes, multi-party competition, and the separation of powers. As a result, a fusion of Marxist-Leninist and non-Marxist ideologies shape this framework. Societal transformations stem from resolving inherent contradictions within the social framework (Marx and Engels, 1848). In his work of 1917, Lenin underscores the crucial function of a vanguard party in orchestrating revolutionary shifts. McAdam (1982) also highlights the significance of political opportunities, mobilization structures, and framing mechanisms in achieving success in social movements and sustaining political

evolution. These foundational concepts contribute to the 'Periodizations Framework' for evaluating bikas within the PMPD, illustrating how gradual transitions lead to substantial societal *bikas* through structural modifications and collaborative endeavors.

From node to PMPD bikas

During the Node period of 1949, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) manifesto emphasized promoting awareness and advocating for fundamental mahila rights under the formative stage. Establishing mahila unions was deemed crucial in addressing systemic oppression. The emphasis on wage equality, entitlements, maternity benefits, and access to education at no cost exemplifies a fundamental drive for gender equity and societal justice. This period was a foundation for future policy progress, establishing essential rights and freedoms as core principles.

The Scale-Up period of 1959 signifies the shift from basic awareness to the initial execution of policies focused on gender equality. The manifesto emphasizes tangible initiatives such as paid maternity leave and the creation of supportive amenities like maternity homes and nurseries. This era demonstrates an acknowledgment of the necessity for institutional assistance to facilitate mahila's complete engagement in the workforce and their attainment of educational and professional credentials (Table 1).

During the Party-Building period from 1960 to 1990, the UML prioritized internal consolidation and incorporating global communist ideals. This developmental phase included assimilating and customizing international communist doctrines to suit the local milieu. The focus was on establishing a robust organizational base capable of advocating for the rights and welfare of marginalized communities, including mahila. This era established the foundation for implementing more methodical and systematic policy formulation and political advocacy strategies within the CPN structure.

Table 1: Issue of mahila in policy documents of the communist party in Nepal

Period	Manifesto Year	Themes	Policies and Measures
Node	1949 (The Communist Manifesto of Nepal)	Awareness and Basic Rights	- Form mahila's unions to fight against social, economic, and political oppression. - Equal pay for equal work. - Equal rights in all areas of national life. - Maternity benefits and secure life for children. - Free education. - Return of sons and husbands from imperialist armies. - Independent, people's democratic Nepal.
Scale Up	1950-1959	Recognition and Initial Implementation	Equal pay for equal work for men and mahila. - Paid leave during maternity. - Provision of maternity homes and nurseries. - Full rights to achieve qualifications.
Party-Building	1960-1990	Formative Stage	Digestion of Global Communist Movement

These periods delineate separate phases in the evolution of UML's approach to addressing mahila 's issues, showcasing ideological progression and pragmatic implementation. The Node period in 1949 laid down basic rights, followed by the Scale-Up period in 1959, which commenced the conversion of these rights into actionable policies. Subsequently, the Party-Building period from 1960 to 1990 concentrated on fortifying the party's ideological and organizational foundation.

This progression highlights increasing sophistication in the UML's strategies, transitioning from fundamental understanding to concrete policy initiatives and to a more

profound ideological establishment. Each phase iteratively enhanced the preceding one, culminating in a substantial influence that has greatly influenced the party's position on mahila's rights and their incorporation into the broader socio-political environment of Nepal.

PMPD: Scale shift guiding principle

The Scale Shift period (1991-1999) is distinguished by notable progress in the legal framework and social security measures to promote gender equality. This era prioritizes the eradication of social discrimination and establishing equal pay, demonstrating a dedication to substantive equality between men and mahila (Table 2).

Table 2: Issue of mahila in the communist party's documents after the adoption of PMPD

Period	Manifesto Years	Themes	Policies and Measures
Scale Shift	1991-2005 (1991,1994, 1999)	Legal Framework, Equality, and Social Security	- Eliminate all social discrimination between men and mahila. - Establish equal pay for equal work. - Ensure daughters have equal rights to paternal property ansha as sons. - Guarantee social security for mahila and enact laws to punish crimes like kidnapping, trafficking, rape, and murder. - Launch special programs to make mahila economically self-reliant. - Encourage mahila's participation in social and political activities. - Implement special programs to eradicate mahila's illiteracy.

An essential policy initiative at this juncture is the acknowledgment of daughters' equitable entitlement to paternal assets, mitigating enduring gender inequities in succession legislations. This period also highlights the significance of welfare provisions for mahila, as delineated by statutes focusing on offenses like abduction, trafficking, sexual assault, and homicide, to foster a more secure milieu for mahila.

Economic self-reliance constitutes a pivotal theme, featuring specialized programs tailored to enhance mahila's economic empowerment. This resonates with the overarching objective of fostering mahila's involvement in societal and political realms. Furthermore, educational initiatives aimed at mahila epitomize a comprehensive strategy for gender parity, acknowledging education as a primary catalyst for empowerment.

In its entirety, the Scale Shift period exemplifies a holistic approach designed to amalgamate legal, economic, and social initiatives to improve the standing and entitlements of mahila in Nepal. By tackling the manifestations and underlying factors of gender disparity, these regulations signify a diligent endeavor to establish a fairer community.

These periods delineate discrete phases in the UML's progressive approach to addressing mahila's issues, showcasing ideological progression and practical enactment. The Node period in 1949 laid down foundational rights, followed by the

Scale-Up period in 1959, which commenced the translation of these rights into operational policies, and the Party-Building period spanning from 1960 to 1990 focused on strengthening the party's ideological and organizational foundations. Subsequently, the Scale Shift period from 1991 to 1999 further bolstered these endeavors by implementing comprehensive legal and social policies aimed at fostering gender equality and enhancing the empowerment of mahila.

This development highlights an increasing refinement in the UML's approaches, transitioning from fundamental understanding to concrete policy initiatives and to a more profound ideological integration. Each phase has expanded on its predecessor, resulting in a collective influence that has notably influenced the party's position on mahila's rights and inclusion in Nepal's wider socio-political sphere.

Background and justification of the motion

The emergence of the mahila's motion in Nepal significantly manifests the country's socio-political development and deeply ingrained philosophical principles. As elucidated in the interviews, this motion is founded on the imperative to redress historical inequalities and the enduring marginalization of mahila. The philosophical, theoretical, urgent and social justice themes present a sturdy foundation for comprehending the motivation and rationale behind this legislative initiative (Table 3)

Table 3: Interventions within PMPD

Period	Manifesto Year	Themes	Policies and Measures
Interventions	2006 (Urgent Public Mahila Motion)	Constitutional Guarantee	Urgent Public Motion on mahila - Motion President Bhandari - supporter Kamala Panta, Narayan Prasad Saud, and Nana Raj Subedi - unanimously passed by parliament

.Complementarity and mutual respect

The philosophical rationale behind mahilas' motion is complementarity and mutual respect between genders. President Bhandari's statement that 'mahila are on par with men, yet they are not

opponents. Purush (male) and mahila complement each other and coexist; progress for one is interlinked with the other' which encapsulates this standpoint. This ideology, regarding purush and mahila as essential components of a unified

entity, is firmly entrenched in philosophical doctrines promoting equilibrium, collaboration, and the inherent worth of each person.

Cultural and spiritual foundations

Kamala Panta's mention of Sita Mata as a role model emphasizes this philosophical position's cultural and spiritual aspects. Sita Mata, esteemed in Hindu tradition, embodies virtues such as strength and resilience, qualities esteemed and strived for by mahila. NP Saud's assertion that 'mahilas are integral components of creation, as elucidated in the Sanatana epics' reaffirms this perspective, emphasizing that gender parity is not a contemporary imposition but an intrinsic element of human existence, firmly rooted in cultural and spiritual legacies.

Inherent dignity and equality

The philosophical underpinnings also stem from the concept of inherent dignity and equality. The motion asserts that mahilas are entitled to equal rights and opportunities in alignment with their humanity. This sentiment resonates with NP Saud's envisioning of a community where 'every individual should live a life of righteousness and dignity.' The dedication to guaranteeing the inclusion of mahilas' rights in legal frameworks reflects a profound philosophical conviction in the equal status of every individual and the imperative role of institutional structures in safeguarding this equality.

Historical context and persistent inequality

The interviews unveil a historical context characterized by enduring subjugation and systemic inequality experienced by mahila in Nepal. President Bhandari's recognition of "the enduring subjugation of Nepali mahila" despite their active engagement in political and social initiatives signifies the entrenched nature of this disparity. Kamala Panta's discussion on the imperative to tackle mahila's issues through an immediate public decree following the parliamentary declarations in 2006 underscores

a pivotal moment where the imperative for legislative intervention became apparent.

Mobilization and social movements

The theoretical framework underlying the motion is substantiated by social movement theory, as expounded by Charles Tilly (2003 & 2005). The mobilization of mahila and their allies signifies a broader framework of contentious politics in which marginalized communities collectively assert their claims against established structures. Kamala Panta's strategic deliberations and covert preparations for the motion, even in the absence of initial endorsement from prominent figures such as Girija Prasad Koirala, the former Prime Minister of Nepal and the Party President of the Nepali Congress Party, exemplify the grassroots mobilization and advocacy that form the foundation of such legislative endeavors.

Constitutional and legal frameworks

President Bhandari's focus on constitutional guarantees for empowerment aligns with the fundamental principles of PMPD in empowering mahila during the transitional period from 1991 to 2005. This correlation reflects the ideological tenets of liberal democratic theory, emphasizing the crucial role of legal frameworks in safeguarding individual rights and ensuring justice. By emphasizing constitutional amendments, the proposition strives to institutionalize mahila's rights and lay a robust groundwork for gender equality. Symbolically, it signifies that substantial constitutional assurances can be attained through dialogue, consensus, and nonviolent means rather than armed conflict.

Urgency and immediate action

The conveyed sense of urgency in the interviews stems from the recognition of enduring disparities and the immediate requirement for redressal. President Bhandari and Kamala Panta highlight the crucial significance of promptly addressing matters concerning mahila, demonstrating a profound

understanding of the sociopolitical momentum instigated by movements like the II Jana Andolan. NP Saud's all-encompassing viewpoint on inclusive justice, encompassing diverse marginalized communities, further emphasizes the pressing necessity for legislative measures to promote social equity. He reiterated that his Party President, Nepali Congress Democratic Party, Sher Bahadur Deuba, instructed him to endorse the motion despite specific queries regarding the pre-approval deliberation on the motion's content.

Social justice and inclusive democracy

The motion represents a significant step in pursuing social justice by addressing systemic inequalities and promoting impartial representation. Subedi's emphasis on the essential need for equitable rights and justice for marginalized groups, such as 'Mahila, Dalits, and Indigenous Nationalities,' broadens the scope of the motion to encompass intersectional justice. He also highlighted that the foundation of social justice and inclusive democratic realization was laid during the Maoist insurgency period. NP Saud's portrayal of the motion as a 'transformative endeavor for mahila and a constructive stride towards a fully inclusive democracy' underscores its pivotal role in advancing social justice and fostering a more comprehensive political framework.

The central concept

Mahilas' motion in Nepal is strongly based on philosophical principles of equality, mutual respect, and inherent dignity. It originated from a historical backdrop of enduring disparity and was driven by the pressing demand for legislative measures to uphold social justice. The motion embodies a holistic strategy encompassing philosophical rationale, theoretical underpinning, and a profound understanding of the current social and political milieu. Nepal aims, through this motion, to reaffirm the equal standing of mahila and foster a fairer and more inclusive society.

The bikas within PMPD

From 2008 to 2022, bikas in the PMPD demonstrated a profound commitment to gender

equality and human dignity. Central to this *bikas* is the promotion of gender complementarity and respect. Policies are in place to guarantee a minimum of 33% female representation across all state sectors, recognizing females as equal societal and political counterparts (Table 4).

From a Marxist perspective, these policies address the historical materialist understanding that mahilas' oppression is rooted in capitalist exploitation and the private ownership of property (Marx & Engels, 1848). The policy advocating for equal rights to paternal property for both sons and daughters addresses economic justice. It aligns with this critique by challenging the patriarchal inheritance systems that perpetuate economic dependence and inequality.

Eliminating all forms of violence, exploitation, and oppression against mahila highlights its intrinsic dignity, a fundamental aspect of human rights philosophy. By discontinuing practices such as Kamalari, Deuki, and Jhuma through legal measures, the policies demonstrate a dedication to preserving the integrity of human dignity and liberty.

Initiatives in maternal and reproductive health emphasize bodily autonomy and well-being, core aspects of Nussbaum's capabilities approach. This model supports creating favorable conditions for people to live dignified, fulfilling lives (Nussbaum, 2000). Laws allowing dual parental acknowledgment for citizenship and guardianship promote gender equality, challenging patriarchal norms.

The rigorous regulation of human trafficking and the establishment of educational and vocational initiatives for mahila are under feminist ideologies advocating for the eradication of institutional impediments to gender parity (Hooks, 2000). Enacting constitutional mandates enabling mahila to occupy pivotal roles in governmental bodies reinforces the principled dedication to an all-encompassing and diverse governance model.

Table 4: Bikas within PMPD

Period	Manifesto Year	Themes	Policies and Measures
Bikas (Advancement) of PMPD	2008-2022 (2008, 2013, 2017 and 2022)	Comprehensive Empowerment and Participation	- Ensure at least 33% female participation in all national sectors. - Equal rights to paternal property for both sons and daughters (ansha). - Eliminate all forms of violence, exploitation, and oppression against mahila. - End practices like Kamalari, Deuki, Jhuma through legal means. - Implement special programs related to maternal and reproductive health. - Enact legal provisions allowing citizenship and guardianship in the names of both parents (bansha). - Strictly control human trafficking. - Implement special programs to ensure mahila's access to education and employment opportunities. - Establish constitutional provisions for mahila to hold key positions in the government. - Declare society free from violence against mahila, child marriage, polygamy, witchcraft, and superstitions. - Conduct a cultural transformation campaign to free society from sexual violence, rape, and misogyny.

Marxist and Leninist frameworks underscore the significance of the state in realizing classless and stateless societies. Lenin advocated for the proletariat's imperative control over the state apparatus to deconstruct bourgeois supremacy (Lenin, 1917). By integrating mahila into prominent governmental positions and guaranteeing their substantial involvement in governance, these measures epitomize Leninist ideologies of utilizing the state to promote gender and class parity.

Declaring society free from violence against mahilas, child marriage, polygamy, witchcraft, and superstitions embodies a comprehensive strategy to eliminate entrenched cultural practices that violate mahilas' rights. This inclusive vision is based on the principle that genuine societal advancement necessitates cultural change, underpinned by the philosophical premise that societal standards and principles should adapt to promote fairness and equity.

The cultural transformation initiative aims to eradicate sexual violence, rape, and misogyny, demonstrating a profound dedication to fostering a respectful and equitable society. Social justice principles and the imperative to alter societal perspectives are underlined to empower and uphold the dignity of mahila.

These measures collectively represent a notable philosophical *bikas* towards gender equality and the empowerment of mahila within the realm of PMPD, underscoring a dedication to cultivating a just, inclusive, and respectable society.

Conclusion

The First Communist Manifesto of Nepal emphasized wage equality but did not contemplate a constitutional requirement for mahilas' representation. Analyzing President Bhandari's Mahilas' Motion within the PMPD framework delves into the progression of gender equality in Nepali politics.

It investigated essential aspects of gender representation and epistemological frameworks, demonstrating the catalytic effect of the 2006 motion on governmental bodies from a gender perspective.

The Mahila Motion, a notable intervention within the PMPD, embodies the fusion of individually initiated collective endeavors and ideological dedications. The unanimous parliamentary approval and its integration into the Interim Constitution of Nepal in 2007 indicated a paradigm shift towards an all-encompassing polity that recognizes and addresses longstanding gender disparities.

Conceptually, the study explored the evolution of the mahila concept within the PMPD over successive periods, guided by Marxist and feminist ideologies. This evolution signifies an ongoing dialectical interplay between theoretical propositions and practical realities as envisioned in PMPD. The foundational tenets of class struggle and the abolition of private ownership emphasize the crucial necessity for structural reforms to promote social justice (Marx & Engels, 1848). Concurrently, contentious politics, resource mobilization, and political opportunities provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of social upheavals and the importance of collaborative efforts in bringing about systematic change (Karki, 2010; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2003; Tilly, 2003 and 2004).

The study introduced a periodization model for assessing *bikas* within the PMPD framework. This approach integrated archival research with qualitative interviews to comprehend the complex interaction between theoretical constructs and political implementation. Emphasizing the significance of historical context, evolving perspectives, interventions, and *bikas*.

The Mahila Motion incubates significant theoretical significance as it embodies the principles of equality, mutual respect, and inherent dignity. It challenges patriarchal hierarchies and

reforms the normative frameworks governing political participation and representation. This motion demonstrates the enduring influence of collaborative endeavors and cooperation in fostering societal change. It aligns with Marxist ideology, promotes proletarian revolution, aims to eliminate exploitation, and supports structured reforms to achieve gender equality.

In conclusion, the Mahila Motion starkly contrasts the First Communist Manifesto of Nepal, which focused on wage equality but overlooked mahila's political representation. This motion, born within the PMPD framework, embodies the transformative power of feminist principles integrated into political frameworks. The unanimous adoption and enshrinement in the Interim Constitution signal a *bikas* towards gender equality and democratic justice in Nepal. This study engages to the ongoing dialogue on social justice by demonstrating how theoretical concepts, like Marxist and feminist ideologies, through the lens of PMPD can shape the tangible progress of gender equality in a real-world context—Nepali democracy. Constitutional intervention is crucial in efficiently addressing real-world issues and avoiding the need for armed conflict or struggle.

Democratic elections serve as a vital mechanism for the realization (*bikas*) of political ideologies. Electoral victories confer legitimacy upon a party's platform, enabling its representatives, from presidents to ministers, to translate doctrine into concrete actions through policies and programs. This process epitomizes the realization of the party's ideological vision. Nepal offers a compelling illustration of this phenomenon. The consistent electoral success of the CPN (UML) and the advancement of the PMPD principles through President Bhandari's "mahila motion" demonstrate how parliamentary interventions facilitate the implementation of a party's ideological agenda and reciprocal *bikas* of the respective ideology.

A deeper understanding necessitates a territorial philosophical approach to "mahila" (Jasper, 1965; Karki, 2010). Unlike the potentially hegemonic Western concept of "woman," "mahila" within the Nepali context emphasizes interdependence and interconnectedness, as Bhandari, Panta, Saud, and Subedi proposed. The nuanced understanding acknowledges the persistent subjugation, discrimination, and marginalization mahilas have faced in Nepal. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort across legal, social, cultural, and political domains. Such intellectual engagements would be cataleptics to upgrade PMPD from a 'guideline principle' into a 'thought.'

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End Notes

1. *I am sincerely grateful to former President B. D. Bhandari for the interviews held in 2023 and 2024. Grateful to Ram Karki, Lal Babu Yadav, Dhruva Karki, Prem Sagar Chapagain, Som Rai, Mina Bhandari, and Babita Mishra for their support. Also, valuable input from Laxman Gautam, Narayan Gartaula, Ratna Mani Nepal, Pitambar Bhandari, Prawesh Rai, Chandra Lal Giri, Neel Kumar Chhetry, Chakra Karki and Pukar Chaudhari, Jagdishor Pandey, Umesh Thapa and Tika Bhandari. I also appreciate my students (junior colleagues) from the Conflict, Peace, and Development Studies and Sociology Department at TU (2021-2023 batch). I express my appreciation to Upasana Maharjan for translating Nepali text into English. This article would not be in this shape and design without the help of anonymous reviewers; thus, I highly acknowledge their comments, suggestions, and critiques. However, whatever shortcomings exist in this article are mine.*
2. *B. D. Bhandari was the first Mahila (Woman) President of Nepal (2015-2023), vice-chairperson of CPN (UML) (2009-2014), and Chairperson of All Nepal Women's Association (1998-2015).*
3. *The conscious use of the term 'mahila' in the article, instead of 'woman' or 'women,' is rooted in territorial philosophy (Jasper 1965; Karki 2010). These terms delineate the corresponding roles, responsibilities, and obligations. 'Woman' is a Western construct*

embodying hierarchy, contention, and dialectical relationships with men under its precept. Conversely, the concepts of 'Nari,' 'Sri,' and 'Mahila' emphasize interdependence, interconnectedness, and mutual correlation exist in this territory's precept, as articulated by Mrs Bhandari, Kamala Panta, NP Saud, and Nawaraj Subedi in their interviews. However, it is acknowledged that 'mahila' in Nepal faces subjugation, discrimination, and marginalization, necessitating comprehensive and coordinated efforts across various domains—legal, social, cultural, and political.

4. *Even though the UML 1999 election manifesto did not explicitly advocate for the thirty-three percent representation in all state structures B. D. Bhandari introduced the important public motion in the parliament.*
5. *Under President Bhandari's leadership, all Nepal Women's Associations passed a 14-point program in 1999 (BS 2055). Of these 14 points, 33 percent of representation demand was in the third number. However, it never emerged as an election manifesto issue of the CPN (UML).*
6. *I borrowed the 'party building' concept from Xie (2017).*
7. *Although the Unified Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (UML) officially embraced the People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) structure in 1993, the party's election manifesto of 1991 already embodied these ideals. Drafted during the tenure of the then UML General Secretary, the late Madan Bhandari, this precursor document highlighted the principles of PMPD even prior to its formal incorporation.*
8. *I created this period based on Xie Chuntao's (2017) study of the theoretical and methodological framework of the Communist Party of China.*
9. *Janataka Geetharu (Peoples' Songs) BS 2047, JB Tuhure singer cum musician.*

Annex 1

Motion of Urgent Public Importance Registered on Jestha15, 2063 BS (2006 May 29)

श्री महासचिव,
संसद सचिवालय ।

देहायको जरुरी सार्वजनिक महत्वको विषयमाथि छलफल गर्न सूचना दिएको छु :-

जरुरी सार्वजनिक महत्वको प्रस्ताव

आमा वा बाबु मध्ये कसैको नामबाट पनि सन्तानले नागरिकता पाउन सक्ने कुराको ग्यारेन्टी गर्न, समानुपातिक सहभागिताको लक्ष्यमा पुग्ने कुरालाई ध्यानमा राखि हाललाई कम्तीमा एक तिहाई महिलालाई राज्यका सबै संरचनामा सहभागिताको ग्यारेन्टी गर्ने, त्यस्तै विभेदकारी कानूनको खारेजी गर्न र महिला प्रति हुने गरेका हिंसाको अन्त्य गर्न जरुरी भएकोले यो जरुरी सार्वजनिक महत्वको प्रस्ताव पेश गरेको छु ।

छलफल गर्न पर्नाको कारण :-

समान नागरिकको हैसियतले महिलाहरुको समान स्थान हासिल गर्न अत्यावश्यक भएकोले ।

प्रस्तावक

हस्ताक्षर :-

नाम, थर :- श्रीमती विद्यादेवी भण्डारी

क्रम संख्या :-

मिति :-

समर्थक

१. हस्ताक्षर :-

नाम, थर :- कमला पन्त

क्रम संख्या :-

मिति :-

२. हस्ताक्षर :-

नाम, थर :- नारायणप्रकाश साँउद

क्रम संख्या :-

मिति :-

३. हस्ताक्षर :-

नाम, थर :-

क्रम संख्या :-

मिति :-

2063/जेठ-15,16
श्रीमती विद्यादेवी भण्डारी
जनरल

प्रतिनिधि सभा

वैठक

कार्यवृत्त

१५ जेष्ठ २०६३

सोमवार

(वैठक - १६)

आजको वैठक प्रतिनिधि सभाका मा० सभामुख श्री सुभाष नेम्बाङ्गको अध्यक्षतामा दिनको १:२० बजे प्रारम्भ भयो ।

...

तत्पश्चात मा० श्रीमती विद्यादेवी भण्डारीले "आमा वा बाबु मध्ये कसैको नामबाट पनि सन्तानले नागरिकता पाउन सक्ने कुराको ग्यारेन्टी गर्न, समानुपातिक सहभागिताको लक्ष्यमा पुग्ने कुरालाई ध्यानमा राखि हाललाई कम्तीमा एक तिहाई महिलालाई राज्यका सबै संरचनामा सहभागिताको ग्यारेन्टी गर्न, त्यस्तै विभेदकारी कानूनको खारेजी गर्न र महिला प्रति हुने गरेका हिंसाको अन्त्य गर्न जरुरी भएको" भन्ने विषयको जरुरी सार्वजनिक महत्त्वको प्रस्ताव पेश गर्नुभयो ।

तदुपरान्त निम्नलिखित मा० सदस्यहरूले प्रस्तावको समर्थन गर्दै छलफलमा भाग लिनुभयो ।

१. मा० श्री कमला पन्त (आचार्य)

२. मा० श्री नवराज सुवेदी

तत्पश्चात मा० सभामुखले मा० सदस्य श्रीमती विद्यादेवी भण्डारीद्वारा प्रस्तुत गरिएको उक्त जरुरी सार्वजनिक महत्त्वको प्रस्ताव माथिको छलफल अर्को वैठकमा जारी रहने व्यहोरा जानकारी गराउनु भयो ।

तदनन्तर वैठक २०६३ साल जेष्ठ १६ गते मंगलवार दिनको २:०० बजेसम्मको लागि स्थगित भयो ।

—सुभाष नेम्बाङ्ग—

वैठक स्थगन : ४:२० बजे

...

तत्पश्चात मा० श्रीमती विद्यादेवी भण्डारीले वैठकले महिलालाई राज्यका सबै किसिमका संरचनामा तेत्तिस प्रतिशत सहभागिता गराउने प्रस्ताव पारित गरिसकेको अवस्थामा वार्ता प्रक्रिया संसदीय अनुगमन समितिमा पनि सोही अनुपातमा महिलाको प्रतिनिधित्व हुनु पर्ने भन्नु भएपछि मा० श्री महेश आचार्यले तत्काल दुई जना महिला सांसदलाई उक्त समितिमा समावेशको लागि प्रस्ताव गर्नुभयो र यसै बीच मा० श्री रामबहादुर बिष्टले मा० श्री काशी पौडेल र मा० श्री तीर्था गौतमको नाम प्रस्ताव गर्नुभयो र मा० श्री नारायणप्रकाश साँउदले मा० श्री सुशिला स्वारको नाम पनि प्रस्ताव गर्नुहुँदा वैठकले सहमति जनायो ।

तदनन्तर वैठक २०६३ साल जेष्ठ २१ गते आइतवार दिनको २:०० बजेसम्मको लागि स्थगित भयो ।

—सुभाष नेम्बाङ्ग—

वैठक स्थगन : ५:१० बजे