

“Samjana: Memories and Resistance” - Film Review



Nepali Maoist women take part in a demonstration.

CORRIE SAKALUK

From December 2006 to January 2007 the All Nepal's Women Association-Revolutionary, the largest and most influential women's organization in Nepal, welcomed researcher Dr. Shahrzad Mojab and documentary film maker Shahrzad Arshadi (both Toronto residents) into their ranks to document their experiences of revolutionary struggle.

On Sunday January 24, 2010, Toronto's own Migrant Women's Coordinating Body (MWCBC) began their public educational programming in preparation for this year's International Women's Day with a screening of Mojab and Arshadi's film, *Samjana: Memories and Resistance*.

Arshadi described her film *Samjana* as a portrayal of “Nepali women who were part of a decade of people's struggle against multiple forces, women who sacrificed so many things and lost so many loved ones to reach equality and freedom, and are still full of life and hope for the future”.

Introducing the film, researcher and co-producer Dr. Shahrzad Mojab described it as “looking at the impact of years of war on women and on women's struggle, as well as the experience of women in post-war Nepal, yearning for sustainable peace, socialism, and secularism”. Mojab went on to say “the film is about women participating in the dream of building a socialist Nepal, and not about the NGO, donorship-from-abroad model that often forms another arm of imperialist expansion and intervention in most regions.”

The namesake of Arshadi's film and a committed Maoist, Samjana – woman commander in the People's Liberation Army – speaks to us in a compelling, humble, honest way about her experiences growing up in Nepal, why she decided to join the revolutionary struggle, and her young life's work in the All Nepal's

Women Association-Revolutionary.

Born in 1976 in the small village of Rolpa, Samjana tells her audience that she was not allowed to attend school because school was only for boys. She secretly began attending school at 9 years of age and became involved with the Nepali student movement when the revolution first started in the 1990s.

She was motivated to become involved because she saw that people were trying to survive without being able to fulfil even their own basic material needs, and it was clear to her that the Nepali government didn't understand the people's needs. She saw that resources like water, electricity, railways and precious metals could be used better and that there was a need to find concrete ways of establishing equality, beginning with abolishing the caste system and its remnants.

From the beginning Samjana said she also saw the need to involve more women in the struggle. So, through education, awareness campaigns, demonstrations more women were recruited step-by-step and district-by-district, to eventually form the All Nepal's Women Association-Revolutionary.

Throughout the film, Samjana shares with us the importance of struggle for women and all the people of Nepal. She clearly states her own opposition to international NGOs by saying, “Their plan is only to survive. They make more women dependent. NGOs should be boycotted because we must stand on our own feet instead of relying on others to help us out”.

She tells of how her daughter, who she celebrated as a “new soldier for the revolution,” was born on the battlefield in a time of many victories and while preparing for new attacks,

without her husband who was lost in battle in 2004. She tearfully recounts her late husband's words to “transfer your worries into determination”. Samjana also describes the difficulty of losing a sister and two brothers in battles in 2000.

Yet never does Samjana seem to sway in her conviction that her chosen path is the only way to true freedom and equality, despite her grief over the loss of many loved ones. “In our world there are many people like me who have lost their family and made a lot of sacrifices. Bringing a revolution to a country is not an easy task. You have to move forward facing many struggles and challenges... there are many countries like Nepal and we are all fighting for peace. If we look at Nepal then this revolution is for Nepal. But if we look at the world it is for the whole world. I know our actions give hope to other countries in the same position as us.”

Samjana opens her heart and mind to the audience in the hopes that, as the Nepali movement has learned and followed other revolutionary movements, so might other movements learn from and follow the example of their struggle in Nepal.

It is these messages of hope and solidarity from Samjana that the Migrant Women's Coordinating Committee and their public supporters took up in formulating their public call for IWD 2010: “Working-class women unite against imperialism!”

For those interested, copies of *Samjana* are available by emailing info@shahrzadarshadi.com. Individual copies are \$20.00 and institutional copies are \$120.00, both with an \$8.00 shipping and handling charge. (*Samjana: Memories and Resistance*. 31 minutes, 2007. Colour, DVD; NTSC, 4:3.) ●