

**A STUDY OF  
RECENT NEPALESE  
POLITICS**

**BHOLA CHATTERJI**

*With a Foreword by JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN*



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**Jayaprakash Narayan**

**CALCUTTA  
THE WORLD PRESS PRIVATE LTD  
1967**

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37 College Street  
Calcutta - 12

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*First Published : April, 1967*

PUBLISHED BY S. BHATTACHARJEE FOR THE WORLD PRESS PRIVATE LTD., 37 COLLEGE STREET, CALCUTTA-12 AND PRINTED IN INDIA BY ARUN CHANDRA MAJUMDAR AT AVA PRESS, 6B, GURIPARA ROAD, CALCUTTA - 15.

*To*  
**ALAKANANDA**



## PREFACE

There is a dearth of authentic account of the 1950-51 armed struggle for democracy in Nepal. The growth and development of this aspect of Nepalese history is quite fascinating, and important too. Being an active participant in the struggle, I was, so to speak, an insider who had had an opportunity to witness it from within. In the pages that follow, an attempt has been made to delineate the complex pattern of contemporary Nepalese politics and to place them in proper perspective. The narrative rests on hitherto unused primary sources, particularly the experiences of the men who had been in the forefront of the struggle.

My debts of gratitude remain to Mr. Indra Sen, Assistant Editor, Hindusthan Standard, for his criticism, suggestions and many another generous help in the preparation of the book. I express my thanks to the members of the staff of the National Library as also of the Indian Statistical Institute Library for the assistance received, particularly to Mr. Nakul Chatterji, and to Prof. Arindam Sen who very patiently prepared the index. Acknowledgment is also made to Hindusthan Standard for the use of materials from the many articles on Nepal I wrote for them between 1959 and 1962.

For the opinions expressed, I assume sole responsibility realizing that a good many of them are controversial.

Sir Gooroodas Banerjee's House,  
28-D, Sastitola Road,  
Calcutta-11.

B.C.





*For Bisweswar Prasad Koirala  
who may not agree  
with all I write.*



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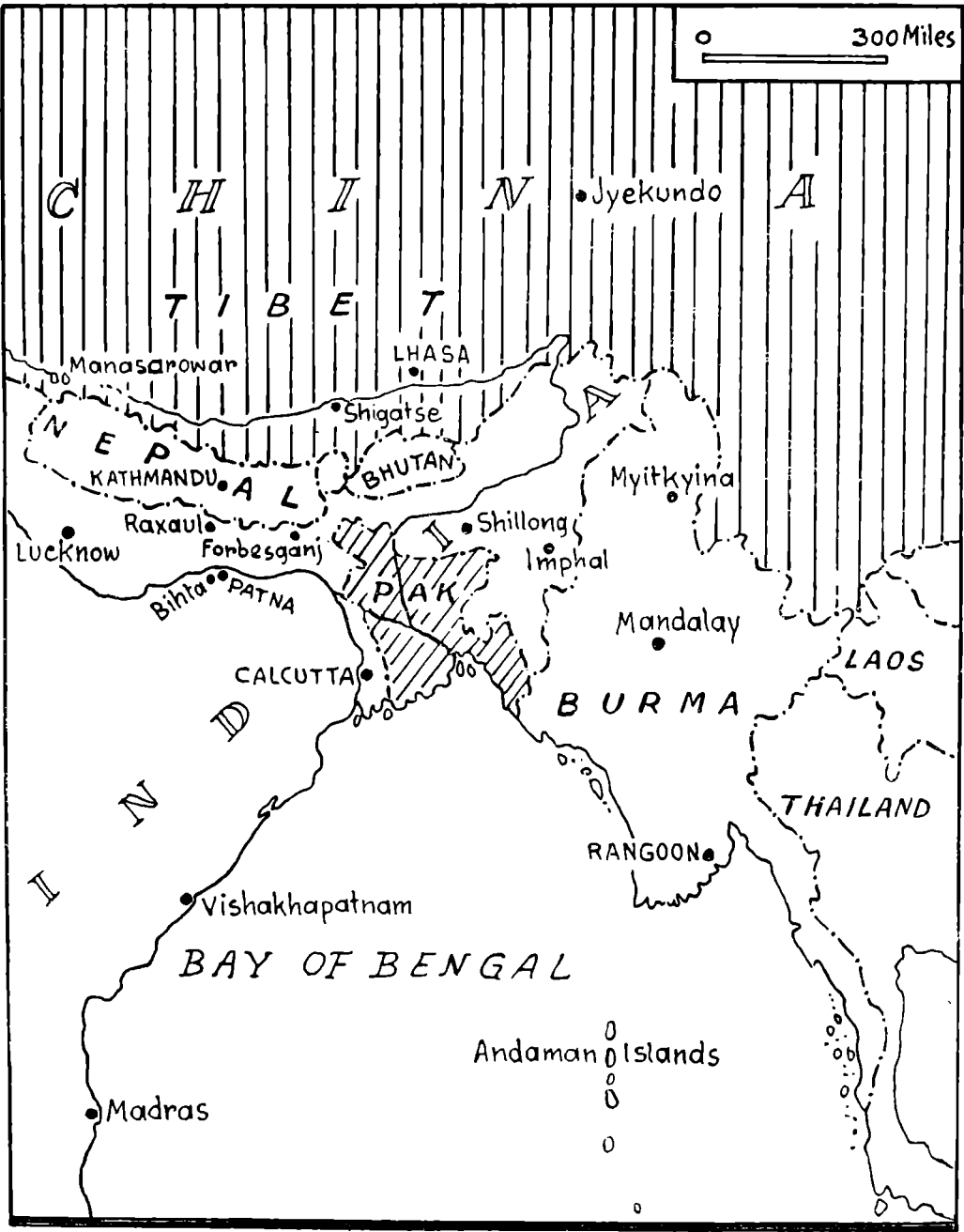
## FOREWORD

The author, Bhola Chatterji, was a co-worker of mine in the Indian Socialist movement. This book of his tells an important story of which little is known, its focus being on the revolution of 1950-51 led by the Nepali Congress for liberation of their country from Rana autocracy. The Indian Socialist Party had closely associated itself with the struggle of the Nepali Congress, and Bhola was in fact among the *dramatis personae* of the story that unfolded itself during those fateful days of 1950-51, which culminated in the first experiment in democracy in Nepal. Being an 'insider's' account the book, apart from providing interesting reading, makes a contribution to contemporary history. To be sure, it is not dry-as-dust dispassionate history, but an account by a deeply committed person. But that only imparts to it a warmth that has its own charm and appeal.

I cannot help, before concluding, to be painfully reminded that the central figure of the revolution of which this book tells, and Nepal's first Prime Minister to be chosen by the people, is, after five long years, still languishing in prison for no proved offence whatever.

Kadam Kuan,  
Patna.  
November 13, 1966.

  
Jayaprakash Narayan



## PROLOGUE

Tucked away in the fastnesses of the Himalayas, Nepal conjures up an image of mystery. Legends clothe the land, girdled by the mist-mantled hills whose purple hue spread an eerie charm, with colour, romance and enchantment. One such legend has it that the valley of Kathmandu was once upon a time a huge lake surrounded by tall mountains. The runaway legend also says that, moved to pity by man's prayer, divinity had the lake's water drained out through a passage that was cut through the mountains. That was how man came to possess, as God's gift, the pretty valley of Kathmandu.

Somewhere along the line legends merge in history that credits Nepal with a hoary past, glorious and creative. Way back in time when Europe was still struggling to be itself, when America was patiently waiting to be discovered, when Galileo had yet to say *E pur si muove*,<sup>1</sup> Nepal had a culture that left its imprint on man's civilization through its philosophy and religion, literature and art. The country had the freedom to think for itself; it had the liberty to act the way it thought best.

What Marco Polo observed about Nepal—"the country wild and mountainous and is little frequented by strangers whose visit the King discourages"—was true only in parts.

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<sup>1</sup> "Yet it does move"—Galileo is supposed to have said this after being compelled to renounce his doctrine that the earth moves round the sun.

Facts corroborate it but in a political sense and not otherwise. Innumerable instances are there when Nepal's southern frontiers were thrown open to men who came there from lands far and near. Those were different sort of men; the message they carried was uncommon, too. They were men of peace. Into the land so aloof in the heart of the Himalayas, they brought the sublime message of man's spirit, of compassion, of beatitude.

Records may not speak of it, but the graceful beauty of the land's many temples do. Man's creativity was at its best when some of these temples were built. Ages have rolled by, yet they stand as unfailing tribute to those that were no mere craftsmen but something more. If civilization in this part of the world has a story to tell, these abodes mortal men created for immortality do it so eloquently.

But something went wrong at some point in time in that land. The spurt of creativity came to an abrupt end, the fount of ideas dried up, and society became moribund. What could once dare the Nepalese to attempt the impossible had lost all its evocative appeal. The land of the intrepid Gurkha quietly went to slumber, underneath the shady seclusion of the majestic pines. Only the hibiscus and the gardenias grew with gay abandon.

By the time the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth, Nepal resembled a thing of antiquity, a relic of the times before a French monarch could say that he was the State. The men who came to determine Nepal's course of journey in the twentieth century had lost touch with reality. The world in which they lived was bizarre; it was a world of fairyland fantasy.

They refused to admit that one of life's basic laws was change; that it was as much true in the life of man as in that of the State and society. Imperiously intolerant of anything that might even remotely suggest change in the Nepalese way of life, they had Nepal converted into a forbidden land. And, sealed in the cocoon of their petrified thoughts and ideas, they merrily ruled the country almost exactly as their ancestors a century back did. Having said



all this, we may now justifiably concern ourselves with a little more detailed information about what Nepal was like, particularly at the time we intend to study subsequently.

Coming to the 40s of this century, Nepal bore all the traces of mayhem, of agony and despair that make a mockery of the divinity man's face is supposed to mirror. The Nepalese was denied his essential freedoms although the UN Charter was no longer a mere statement of pious wishes. Truth to say, it was as irrelevant to Nepal as, say, to the Portuguese colonies in Africa. And this despite the fact that Nepal in the 1940s had a semblance of independent polity which the latter had not.

That freedom meant little to the people of Nepal. For them it did not inhere in certain concrete objects, so imperative if freedom should have any positive meaning. All power, political as well as economic, was held by the hereditary Rana Prime Ministers. Government, as it is understood in any civilized country, was totally unknown. Depraving poverty, rampant illiteracy, and despotic politics were the hallmarks of Nepalese society.

With a total land area of 54,345 sq. miles—a large part of which was covered with hills and jungles—Nepal's population stood around 8 millions. The average density of population was approximately 155.1 per sq. mile. Land dominated the nation's economic life. Almost all land was held in perpetual ownership by a handful of Ranas under the "Birta" system—tax-free land assignment. Ninety per cent of the people, may be more, were dependent on agriculture that was mostly practised with Babylonian technology. Wheeled traffic was nearly unknown, there being about 200 miles of motorable roads in the entire country. There was hardly any industry except for an insignificant number of cotton spinning, jute, sugar and match factories—mostly Indian-owned<sup>2</sup> and situated in the plains near the Indo-Nepal frontiers.

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<sup>2</sup> The various figures quoted here are approximate, for such statistical data then were a thing unknown in Nepal.

Nepalese society was multi-racial that absorbed diverse racial groups who had, in the distant past, immigrated into the land from across the northern as well as the southern frontiers. While Hinduism was the prevalent religion, Buddhism also existed. Muslims were about one in a thousand. As in India, the caste system with all its vile rigidity held the Nepalese in its grip. And he was illiterate, the percentage of literacy being about 3 or 4. Education in the arts and the sciences at the university level was almost non-existent. The study of medicine, engineering and other allied sciences was conspicuous by its absence.

In Nepal's system of polity, the King was a mere figure-head whose writ did not run beyond the palace compound. The hereditary Rana Prime Minister ruled and he ruled absolutely. Also, he enjoyed the unheard of privilege of being the sole custodian of the State's entire revenue. What this meant to the people of Nepal was nothing but unrewarded toil and unmitigated tyranny. Nepal looked more like a gigantic prison house, where darkness prevailed even at noon.

It is difficult to guess how long the country would have continued to wallow in the feudal quagmire had not a series of epoch-making events occurred elsewhere. The termination of the second world war saw the attainment of freedom in India. This created an unprecedented situation, unleashing the forces of change in the hitherto traditional societies in Asia and Africa. As the pace of liberation quickened in these countries, as virile and dynamic ideas from across Nepal's frontiers made their daily impact upon its stagnant society, the Nepalese' subdued voice of protest against the age-old rule of exploitation rose to a crescendo.

Then it happened in 1950—an armed uprising of the people. Led by the Nepali Congress, the Nepalese rose to a man to assert their right to a place in the sun. They came from the steaming swamps of the Terai and they came from the dizzy heights of the Himalayas, for this was their date with destiny.

That 1950 marks a turning point in Nepal's history can hardly be disputed. One winter morning that year, the seemingly quiet country was shaken out of its torpor. Guns boomed, and an arduous struggle commenced to break the chains feudalism had forged for it. Passion and fury were let loose and, in their gigantic sweep across the fair land, they carried away the citadels of feudal power and pelf. Nothing could save the patriarchs of the ancient regime any longer. Those recalcitrant children of history were drawn by an inexorable fate to their crucial place in time and space, so that they could no longer play fast and loose with their Nemesis. The wheel of history turned in Nepal. To appreciate the complex amalgam of forces that culminated in this uprising, it is necessary that we take a quick look at Nepal's history anterior to 1950.

## PERSPECTIVE

At the outset, let it be clearly understood that remote is my desire to burden the reader with an academic resume of Nepal's past. For one thing, there is little scope for that here. For another, too many details would defeat the purpose this account is expected to serve. Suffice it to say that Nepal's history seems to suggest that it admits of a rather distinct division into three phases: (1) From the earliest times to the advent of Islam, around the seventh century A.D., in the Indian sub-continent. During this period Nepal, for all practical purposes, was not outside the pale of the polity that obtained in this sub-continent. (2) From the Islamic conquest of India to the coming of the British in the eighteenth century. This was Nepal's period of existence as a more or less independent political entity, except for what socio-cultural links it had with India. Also, Nepal emerged during this period, from a congeries of mutually antagonistic and exclusive communities, as a unified, if only loosely, political unit. (3) From the British conquest of India to the attainment of freedom in the late 1940s. During this period Nepal enjoyed an autonomous status subject, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, to its "special relationships" with the British Government of India.

It is well to remember that the political unit known as the State of Nepal today just did not exist in ancient times. "The Nepal of ancient Indian history means the restricted

valley about twenty miles long and fifteen broad, in which the capital Kathmandu and other towns are situated... the bulk of the territory now comprised in the Nepal State whether in the hills or the strip of plain at their base, used to be occupied by independent tribes and principalities."<sup>1</sup>

For a reconstruction of the first phase of Nepal's history, the *Vamsavali*, or Chronicle of Nepal, suggests itself as a possible source of information. But authoritative opinions differ as to its credibility, for, in the first place, no manuscript is known to reach beyond the sixteenth century. In the second place, the accounts of the *Vamsavali*, as Regmi observes, "lose much of their significance in view of their undue emphasis on the numerical strength of the genealogy, which they have pushed to a limit unwarranted by facts... An analysis of the accounts of the *Vamsavali* shows beyond doubt that they have allotted fictitiously long years of rule, introduced imaginary dynasties, reversed the order of succession and sacrificed contemporaneity of events to effect a wrongly detailed adjustment."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore it is necessary to look elsewhere for whatever reasonably coherent account of this phase of Nepal's history may be had. Of the available accounts, Landon's is objective to the extent historiography can be. He is of opinion that "...Nepal in its earliest days looked to India not only for its masters and its religion, but also for such trade as existed... The fame of Nepal as a Buddhist centre challenged the pious pilgrims of those days to make the journey from northern India to Rummindei<sup>3</sup> and the adjacent holy sites... In speaking of Rummindei as being in Nepalese territory it must be understood that I do not

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent A. Smith, *Ancient and Hindu India*, Oxford History of India, Part II.

<sup>2</sup> D. R. Regmi, *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent A. Smith observes: "The Rummindei, or Padaria, inscription, which is in absolutely perfect preservation, has the great merit of determining, beyond the possibility of doubt, the exact position of the famous Lumbini Garden, where...Gautama Buddha first saw the light." (*Early History of India*, p. 156).

assert that in those early days anything like the present State of Nepal existed. These territories were then and long afterwards remained in the hands of the ruling dynasty of the Ganges Valley, and are included here because at the present moment they form part of the existing territory of Nepal".<sup>4</sup>

Indeed it is difficult to dismiss this as the product of romantic imagination. For Landon substantiates his observations with a mass of evidence that apparently leaves little room for any extensive controversy. This perspective of ancient Nepalese history is also readily accepted by others including Regmi who does not hesitate to admit: "The valley of Kathmandu was never regarded as outside India's sphere of influence, all forces, cultural or political, seem to have affected it. Kathmandu did not stand in splendid isolation and at every period of history its relation with India has been intimate... Buddhism entered Kathmandu at its very birth. The Maurya Princes and the Lichchavis were at the head of administration. Temporarily even the Kushans and the Guptas held sway over the country. Then there is the fact of Indian dynasties ruling in the valley; all ruling dynasties of Nepal—the Mauryas, the Lichchavis, the Thakuris, the Karnatakas, the Mallas and the Shahs<sup>5</sup>, were emigrants from the plains."<sup>6</sup>

It would not be wide of the mark to say that Nepal was first mentioned in history around the middle of the third century B.C. This was the time when the Emperor Asoka felt the insistent urge to pay a visit to the Lumbini Garden, where, according to a categorical statement of the earliest Buddhist chronicles, the Buddha was born. To mark the spot where the Buddha first saw the light, the Emperor set up a pillar—extant and mercifully almost unchanged—the inscription on which runs as follows: "The King Piya-

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<sup>4</sup> Perceval Landon, *Nepal*, Vol. I, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> The present incumbent to Nepal's throne, King Mahendra, belongs to the Shah dynasty.

<sup>6</sup> Regmi, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

dasi, beloved of the Gods”—this was the mode of introduction Asoka generally used in his inscriptions—“having been anointed twenty years, came in person and worshipped here, saying, ‘Here Buddha, the Sakya ascetic, was born’, and he caused a stone capital in the shape of a horse to be constructed and a stone pillar to be erected, which declares, ‘Here the Blessed One was born’. King Piyadasi exempted the village community of Lumbini from taxes, and bestowed wealth upon it.”

And Asoka stayed on, there was nothing important to compel him to return immediately to Pataliputra—the capital of his farflung empire. He went further along the unbeaten track; he went right into the heart of Nepal. For “The valley certainly formed part of Asoka’s empire . . .,”<sup>7</sup> concrete evidence of which the Kathmandu valley still bears. The four great extant stupas, out of the many Asoka had built in the valley, are proudly bearing to this day an eloquent testimony to the glory the Maurya empire had been.

So much about that aspect of Nepalese history, the reconstruction of which may not always appear strictly objective. But from the fourth century A.D. onward we are on a rather dependable ground. The pall hanging over the past is now lifted gradually, allowing a measure of its delineation in detail. There is more or less a connected account available of the period between the last quarter of the fourth century when Vrsadeva held sway over the valley and the first half of the seventh century when Amsuvarman ruled. The record of this period is largely based upon the inscriptions found in and around Kathmandu, most of which have been deciphered by such eminent scholars as Sylvan Levi, Dahlmann and Butler.

At no point during this period, Nepal was permitted to stray from the system of politics that determined man’s life in the Gangetic valley. The Gupta empire, at its farthest point of expansion under Samudra Gupta in the

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

fourth century A.D., "had extended up to Nepal".<sup>8</sup> But around the beginning of the sixth century the magnificent structure of polity the Guptas had built was reduced to a shadow of its former glory. The Huns forced their way into the heartland of the Indo-Gangetic plain, despoiling the splendid empire of the Guptas. With the break-up of the Gupta empire India was politically in a state of flux. During this period Nepal's political link with India was anything but close, to be sure.

Not for long did this state of affairs continue. The sun of Indic civilization once again broke through the temporary clouds of confusion. In the seventh century A.D., Kanauj became imperial in the grand sense of the term—and Harsavardhan the ruler.

Having established peace, justice and order in the realm, Harsa eagerly strove to restore the lost links with the region up north beyond the Gangetic valley. This had to be achieved—Harsa reasoned out—so that the unity of Indian history could be recovered. He was a missionary of peace, of religion, above all, of Indic civilization. The message of that civilization had to be reached beyond the frontiers of his realm to the neighbouring lands, that had not yet been structurally integrated into the empire. Understandably enough, he could not afford to leave Nepal out of his concept of an integrated political society in this sub-continent. He reduced Nepal "to the position of a tributary state about 638 A.D."<sup>9</sup>

Once again Nepal's destiny was linked with India which, in Harsa's time, had attained a "comparatively unique state of civilization. In Europe at that time forces of anarchy and barbarism had completely destroyed the civilization of Rome. Persia was in its last stage of degeneration in which it fell an easy prey in a few decades to the onslaught of Muslim invaders. In China, the great and glorious dynasty of the Tangs assumed the throne only in

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<sup>8</sup> Radha Kumud Mookerji, *Ancient India*, p. 300.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *Early History of India*, p. 307.



618... To the Chinese of the time India was the sacred land... It is undeniable that India in the 7th century was the most civilized country in the world."<sup>10</sup> And Amsuvarman had the privilege of keeping the lofty message of this civilization alive in Nepal.

The course of history changed, however. By the time the mortal remains of one of the greatest empire-builders of ancient India had unto dust been returned, India once again slid into chaos and confusion and conflict. Gone for ever was the light of peace, progress and enlightenment that radiated from Kanauj. Consequent to the disintegration of Harsa's empire, centrifugal forces were let loose that eventually threw Nepal out from under the suzerainty of the paramount power in India. Thereafter Nepal's relation with Tibet to the north, then a substantial power in Asia, became rather close.

Meanwhile, from across the wastes of West Asia came in successive waves bands of fierce warriors imbued with a religious frenzy hitherto unknown to this sub-continent. Like birds of prey and passage, they came on repeated forays of loot and ravage and inconoclasm. This went on until Islam decided on having here a more durable and less nomadic arrangement, capable of yielding a yet richer reward. And Islam's career as the ruler of India commenced.

This marks the second phase of Nepalese history, dissolving the political connexion that had existed between India and Nepal. For the seizure of power in Delhi did not enable Islam to lay hands on Nepal. In spite of the Islamic conquest of India, "Nepal had never had—and never has had—to submit to the drastic changes and limitations that followed in the train of a Mohammedan conquest..."<sup>11</sup>

Nepal was politically insulated from India, during the long period of Islamic rule, except for occasional encounters. One such encounter stands out of the rest, although it did

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<sup>10</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *Sri Harsha*, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

not produce any lasting effect on Nepal. Around the mid-fourteenth century, Shams-ud-din Ilyas Shah, the ruler of Lakhanwati,<sup>12</sup> made a dashing bid for the conquest of Nepal, "which was yet untrodden by Muslim soldiers. He advanced as far as the capital Kathmandu, destroyed the holy temple of Swayambhunath and returned with a rich booty. The invasion, which was of the nature of a plundering raid, took place in A.D. 1350 and the Nepalese claim to have defeated the Muslim invader."<sup>13</sup> It was just another repetition of the same grisly business that frequently disfigured the Muslim invader's career in this sub-continent. Nepal did not have to face many such encounters, however.

Following Amsuvarman's death Nepal was confronted with unsettled politics for a considerable period of time. To disentangle the truth from this coweb of confusion is hazardous indeed. There are scrappy accounts that tell us of the doings of numerous Kings and potentates. From these it is doubtless difficult to "draw any satisfactory picture of the political state of Nepal during the following centuries."<sup>14</sup> Nor for that matter do they permit us to reconstruct the chronology in a historical sequence. Much of the difficulty in harmonizing the chronology arises from the fact that, from the earliest times, Nepal had often been ruled conjointly by several rulers. Also occasions are not infrequent when the country had been forced to witness the not quite common spectacle of sons wielding political power in their father's lifetime.

During this troubled period of Nepalese history a new group of adventurous people—the Mallas—appeared on the country's political scene. Destined to play an important role in shaping the country's destiny, they soon made their presence felt. About the origin of the Mallas, it is said that they came from one of the hereditary landowning clans in India. Around the middle of the twelfth century,

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<sup>12</sup> Capital of North Bengal in the fourteenth century.

<sup>13</sup> R. C. Majumdar, *et. al.*, *The Delhi Sultanate*, p. 197.

<sup>14</sup> Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

they were found to have established themselves in Kathmandu as well as in some other parts of the country. Not all the Mallas, however, were as significant as Yaksa Malla who occupies a rather conspicuous place in the annals of Nepal. For this was the man who, after a successful reign of about fifty-three years, worked out in 1480 the harmful scheme of parcelling out his kingdom between his three sons. The whole idea was disastrous and it only unleashed forces of discord and disunity. Bitterly jealous and suspicious of each other, the three principalities soon got entangled in reckless conflicts. This proved to be the ruin of the Mallas.

While the stage was still occupied by the Mallas, certain powerful forces were taking shape in the womb of history. The power that was ordained to hammer the warring tribes and autonomous principalities into a united people and one State, had its humble beginning in the hilly tracts to the west of the valley. And the valiant Gurkhas were the people who then ruled the roast in this region. But unity was not to be achieved so early. Ages had to go by before Nepal could emerge as a united political entity. It was no doubt an agonizing process the people of Nepal had to go through before they could claim for themselves the status of nationhood. Before we study this let us digress for a while to have a little close look at the Gurkhas.

Interesting is the story of the Gurkhas. Early in the twelfth century the Gurkhas started migrating in considerable numbers, from their original home in Rajputana, to the hilly tracts in the western parts of Nepal.<sup>15</sup> It all began with the capture of Chitor—the citadel of Rajput sovereignty—by Ala-ud-din-Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi. The spirit of freedom that encouraged the Rajputs' uncompromising attitude toward the Muslim invaders, also impelled them to move away from their homeland into the

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<sup>15</sup> In his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, James Todd observes that toward the end of the twelfth century the Gurkha dynasty was established by the third son of Raja Samarsi of Chitor.

refuge of the Himalayas. Here in these rugged hills of Nepal they settled, intermarried and got merged in the life of their adopted homeland. For a considerable period of time they were quietly engaged in consolidating their position and building up their power. And they patiently waited for the opportune moment to expand. When that fateful moment arrived some time in the eighteenth century, they were all set for their tryst with destiny. More about that later.

Before the emergence of the Gurkhas as an organized political force, the Newars<sup>16</sup> were the masters of the valley's three principalities for a substantial part of the eighteenth century. Of the three principalities, Kathmandu was undoubtedly the most important. These principalities were perpetually on hostile terms with each other. Although unmistakable indications of the storm that was later to sweep over the valley were already there, the feuding chiefs of the three principalities would simply have nothing to do about that. The Gurkha chief, Prithwi Narayan, on the

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<sup>16</sup> Far down the ages, in the half-light of history and fable the Newars are said to have recorded their presence in the life of the valley. Sylvan Levi thinks that the Newars originated somewhere north of the Himalayas; while D. R. Regmi observes that the Newars belong to those peoples as are found in north-eastern India "the same stock as has produced the Manipuris, Rajbansis and Assamese tribals". When Buddhism entered the valley, the Newars were found equipped with a rather organized social order divided into tribes, clans and sub-clans. Religious tolerance is a remarkable characteristic of the Newars in that they have achieved a sort of fusion of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Newars have greatly contributed to the architecture, painting and literature of Nepal. The pagoda style of architecture that predominates in the valley is originally a Newari creation. No less creative have been Newari painting and literature. A. Coomaraswamy observes that Newari painting is "remarkable for its brevity of style, freshness of composition and richness of colour". And it would be no exaggeration to say that Nepali literature is the creation of the Newars. The Newars are not, as understood in common parlance, a martial community like the Gurkhas. In fact, the Newars until recently were not even taken in the Nepalese army. Nepal's trade and commerce are to a great extent controlled by the Newars.

other hand, did not make any secret of his ambition. His early actions proved beyond doubt that he was hell-bent on carving out a kingdom much larger than his tiny principality that had until now been a vassal of Kathmandu. Prithwi Narayan, according to Father Giuseppe, an eye-witness of the Gurkha conquest, "took advantage of the dissensions of the other Kings of Nepal and attracted to his side several of the hill chiefs, promising them not only to confirm them in their possessions but to increase their importance and authority. If anyone among them failed to keep his engagement, Prithwi Narayan at once annexed his territory..."<sup>17</sup>

The internal dissensions among the three chiefs reached a climax. Unable to resolve his conflicts with the chiefs of Kathmandu and Patan, Ranjit Malla, chief of Bhatgaon, was soon in the field seeking the assistance of Prithwi Narayan. This was what Prithwi Narayan had eagerly been waiting for, and he hurriedly responded to Ranjit Malla's request. But it did not take long for Ranjit Malla to realize the folly he had committed. In haste he came to terms with Kathmandu and Patan. Even so, it was a bit too late, for the die had already been cast. Kirtipur, a town belonging to Patan, was the first to fall to that daring, crafty chief of the Gurkhas. This was soon followed by an attack on Patan itself. The situation in the entire valley was now so desperate that the chief of Kathmandu, Jayaprakash, looked around for assistance from outside.

And that offered England the opportunity to appear on the political stage of Nepal. The British who had come to work the trader's scale in India stayed on, following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, to wield the sceptre. To them Jayaprakash turned for help in the 1760s. They did not disappoint him; they had valid reasons not to. Two major considerations prompted them to send military assistance to Jayaprakash: (i) commerce; (ii) security of the newly

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

acquired territories. That the British were very much concerned about the question of commerce was made amply clear in the Select Committee's letter to Thomas Rumbold, the East India Company's chief at Patna: "We are strongly induced to prosecute the intended expedition into that country [Nepal]. In the present declining state of commerce and scarcity of current specie, we the more readily embrace a measure which promises to open new sources of trade and stores of money to replace those annual drains of Treasury, we are directed to make for supplying China investment."<sup>18</sup> And more. The question of "security of Bettiah against recurrent incursions from the adjacent Terai and Prithwi Narayan's threatened forcible occupation of the villages north of the Bettiah border demanded military action against the Gurkha Rajah."<sup>19</sup>

An expeditionary force was now dispatched under Captain Kinloch. But the first feat of British arms in Nepal offered a poor spectacle. Nor for that matter did it render any effective assistance to the besieged valley. The Gurkhas dealt a severe blow to the expedition, forcing it to beat a hasty retreat. Thus was belied Jayaprakash's fond hope of being relieved by the British. The Gurkhas then took possession of Kathmandu. This was followed by the capture of Patan, and later of Bhatgaon. Finally, the control of the valley passed from the Newars into the hands of the Gurkhas in 1769, not very long after the British had stumbled into the possession of Bengal.

The valley's journey as a State under one political authority now commenced. The astute statesman that Prithwi Narayan was, he apprehended the danger that the British regime in India posed. He had some knowledge of their doings in the plains down south; and their attempted assistance to Jayaprakash gave him an idea as to what might follow. He made up his mind to steer clear of the Euro-

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in K. C. Chaudhuri, *Anglo-Nepalese Relations*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

peans and not to allow them to come anywhere near his domain. For with the white trader went the white soldier and his commerce never remained aloof from politics for long.

Acting on this policy, he expelled the Capuchin missionaries who had taken shelter in the valley following their earlier expulsion from Tibet. "He also shut his passes to all European merchandise, and in a letter to the Dalai Lama he implored that, in return for free access of Indian goods to Tibet, the Lamaic Government should join with him in forbidding the entrance of anything and everything that was associated with the now gravely suspected ambitions of the East India Company in Bengal."<sup>20</sup> Although the British regime in India had not yet cast off its swaddling clothes, Prithwi Narayan was shrewd enough to anticipate the shape of things to come.

Prithwi Narayan died in 1774. One of his two sons, Pratap Singh Shah, succeeded him. After a brief period of rule, he died in 1777. He was succeeded by his infant son, Ran Bahadur Shah. His uncle, Bahadur Shah, acted as regent, a short break apart, until 1795.

Nepal's career of expansion commenced about this time. The disintegration of the Mogul Empire had left India a carcass on which many came to feast, the Nepalese not excluding. What with the continuing vacuum resulting from the crumbling of the central authority in India and what with the newly acquired confidence resulting from the unification of the Nepal valley, the Gurkhas felt emboldened to expand in all directions. Not long did it take for the Kingdom of Nepal to enlarge its territory by the annexation of a number of adjoining principalities. This process continued until its frontiers extended from Bhutan to Kashmir, and from Tibet to the borders of the British territories in India.

Soon their expansion into Tibet—Tibet, "according to a

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<sup>20</sup> Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

legal fiction, was dependent on China and the Tibetan Lama was the spiritual father of the Chinese Emperor"<sup>21</sup>—brought them into conflict with China. The Gurkhas had been extending their conquests in the direction of Tibet, and they finally pushed forward as far as Digharchi. The Tibetans promptly appealed to China for armed help. Being apprehensive of the Chinese, the Gurkhas had in the meantime made efforts for the restoration of their relations with the British, which resulted in the commercial treaty of 1792.

In response to Tibet's appeal for help the Chinese Emperor despatched a thirteen-thousand strong army, which soon created havoc in Nepal. The Chinese army advanced to Nayakot, within about twenty-five miles of Kathmandu. The Gurkhas, the commercial treaty apart, now appealed to Lord Cornwallis, then Governor-General of India, for military aid.

Lord Cornwallis was not very enthusiastic about rendering any military assistance to the Gurkhas. In deciding against military aid, he was influenced by the consideration of the then existing commercial relations between China and England. He was at the same time not unmindful of the East India Company's policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the hill Rajas, followed since the time of Warren Hastings. He offered instead to negotiate between Nepal and China. A mission under Colonel Kirkpatrick was instructed to proceed to Nepal.

The Gurkhas in the meantime had come to terms with the Chinese. This in turn obliged them to acknowledge "at least a semblance of allegiance to China. The Nepal Government was required to send presents to the Chinese Emperor as a token of their allegiance; the Chinese Government would also reciprocate by sending present in acknowledgment. The China trade would be open to both the Nepalese and Tibetan traders and the Chinese Go-

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<sup>21</sup> Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 65.



vernment would pay money to Nepal to compensate the loss sustained by the Nepalese Government during the conflict."<sup>22</sup>

That this arrangement acknowledging China's nominal suzerainty was more in the nature of a tactical move necessitated by the Gurkhas' suspicion of the British—hence the desire to keep them away from the frontiers of Nepal—would be evident from their subsequent communication, requesting cancellation of the Kirkpatrick mission. But Kirkpatrick was not to be discouraged so easily from his settled course of action. His insistence on visiting Nepal finally got him the necessary permission. In view of the recent changes in Nepal's political situation, he was given fresh instructions that virtually required him to lead a fact-finding mission to Nepal. In any case, Kirkpatrick failed in his efforts to achieve any marked improvement in relations, both commercial and political, between Nepal and England.

Ran Bahadur Shah was no longer a minor. He took over the reins of power in 1795 by removing his uncle from the regency. His tenure between now and 1800 was marked by a series of provocative actions that eventually compelled him to abdicate in favour of his son, Girban Juddha Bikram. And he retired to Banaras with one of his two wives, apparently to lead a life of meditation. Since Girban Juddha was still a minor, Ran Bahadur's other wife was appointed regent. An interesting point to note in this connexion is that the British Government remained rather aloof in these affairs. What followed since Ran Bahadur's arrival at Banaras is an entirely different story, however.

The political significance of Ran Bahadur's presence at Banaras was not lost upon the Governor-General of India, Lord Wellesley, least likely to let go by default any opportunity to enlarge the East India Company's interests. The subsequent appointment of Captain Knox to attend Ran

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<sup>22</sup> Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

Bahadur as Political Agent was dictated by one very important consideration: to use Ran Bahadur for whatever he was worth in securing the Company's political and commercial interests in Nepal. An opportunity for this was soon provided by Ran Bahadur himself when he requested the Company's help for his restoration to the throne.

The British Government also favoured Ran Bahadur's restoration and not without reason. This would be clear from their instructions to Captain Knox: "The primary object of the Governor-General-in-Council is to be instrumental, by his mediation, in the re-establishment of the Rajah's [Ran Bahadur's] authority and by this service to conciliate the gratitude of that prince and to obtain from him in return such concessions as should be effectually calculated to improve and secure the commercial intercourse of the two countries."<sup>23</sup> The British, however, were not prepared to force decision by resorting to arms.

A combination of forces and factors eventually paved the way for the conclusion of a treaty in 1801 between Nepal and the East India Company. The major provisions of the treaty were the settlement of an estate for Ran Bahadur, effective working of the treaty of 1792,—now a dead letter—and the establishment of a British Residency at Kathmandu. The British at the same time were careful enough not to include such items in the treaty as might rub China the wrong way, thereby jeopardizing their substantial trade interests in that country. One thing the treaty of 1801 made clear: British power in this sub-continent would not allow Nepal to go the way it wanted to.

Captain Knox was appointed the first British Resident. He reached Kathmandu some time in April, 1802, and was well received by the Nepalese. But soon he was in for trouble, for the Nepalese never took kindly to the idea of a British Residency at Kathmandu. Nepal's political life was now beset with intrigues and factions, rendering it extremely difficult for Captain Knox to function in a

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<sup>23</sup> Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

manner that could pave the way for simultaneous expansion of British political and commercial interests. Meanwhile, Tripura Sundari, the elder wife of Ran Bahadur, suddenly returned from Banaras to Kathmandu. An ambitious woman, she had never reconciled herself to the state of affairs that obtained in the country. She rallied her followers, overthrew the regency, and herself took over charge of Girban Juddha and the Government. What followed made it impossible for Captain Knox to function. It was not long before he withdrew from Nepal in March, 1803. This was followed by Lord Wellesley's formal dissolution of the alliance with the Nepalese Government of the day.

Ran Bahadur also returned to Nepal early in 1804 and resumed power. Immediately afterwards, Damodar Pande was replaced by Bhim Sen Thapa as Prime Minister. Once again Nepal took to the path of territorial conquests under the able leadership of the Nepalese General Amar Singh Thapa. Ran Bahadur was not spared much time to enjoy the fruits of these conquests, for he was killed in a dispute with his brother. All power now passed into the hands of Bhim Sen Thapa, who also obtained possession of the person of the minor King Girban Juddha.

Bhim Sen Thapa's policy of expansion brought him quite early in conflict with the British. The British Government's remonstrances against Nepal just did not affect Kathmandu's forward policy a wee bit. Nor did the protracted parleys, conferences and commissions yield any result. Bhim Sen Thapa reckoned, not without reason, that Britain's preoccupation in the Napoleonic wars would prevent it from putting up any effective resistance against him.

It took some time for the relation between the two States to worsen. Whatever efforts were made to put things straight proved futile. And, then, the inevitable happened—war was declared on the first of November, 1814. Although both sides suffered reverses in the ensuing engagements, the tide finally turned in favour of the

British. The war was concluded by the Peace of Sagauli in November, 1815. But the ratification of the treaty being withheld by Nepal, the war was renewed. The British, notwithstanding the daring resistance of the Gurkhas, advanced to a point about three days' march from Kathmandu. Thus confronted, the Nepalese ratified the treaty on 4 March, 1816. Under the terms of the treaty the Nepalese were obliged to give up their claims to the disputed territory. They were also required to cede their recent conquests west of the Kali, including the Kumaon Division consisting of Naini Tal, Almora and the Garhwal districts as also Dehra Dun and parts of Simla in India. A considerable extent of territory was also ceded to the chief of Sikkim and the Nepalese had to agree to receive a British Resident at Kathmandu. From this time dates the practice of the admission of Gurkha soldiers in the British army.

The situation was such that Great Britain, if it wanted, could have annexed the entire Kingdom of Nepal; but it did not. A plausible explanation for this may be had in, besides the "Chinese question", what is known as the British "buffer State" policy for border areas. The general idea was to leave Nepal alone insofar as its domestic affairs were concerned, ensuring that it did not stray from the sphere of imperial influence.

The Peace of Sagauli may be called the starting point of the third phase of Nepalese history. Henceforth Great Britain's policy regarding Nepal was to follow the line of limited liability and expense, at the same time closely linking up Nepal with the British administration in India. In matters affecting its internal affairs, Nepal was left entirely on its own. There was very little or no interference in so far as that went. But quite a different thing it was when it came to the question of its external affairs. Here the British exercised full control, leaving no room for the Nepalese to have any say. The subsequent rulers of Nepal, with minor variations here and there, also found it convenient to function on these terms. Indeed they were

happy so long as the British left them undisturbed internally to ride roughshod over their little, feudal Kingdom.

Bhim Sen Thapa lasted as Prime Minister for another twentyone years after the 1814-16 war. What brought about his downfall in 1837 was the death of his patron, Tripura Sundari, followed by a Pande-Brahmin combination. Rana Jang, son of Damodar Pande whom Ran Bahadur had executed, was installed in the office of Prime Minister by Raja Rajendra Bikram, son of Girban Juddha. Before long, Rana Jang's somewhat anti-British policy got him into trouble. This exacted a rather heavy price from him : he was cashiered at the subtle suggestion of Brian Hodgson, the very able British Resident at Kathmandu. By this time the Raja had become powerless to the extent that the authority of State passed into the hands of Maharani Lakshmi Devi, a sort of a psychopath with an intense infatuation for a man called Gagan Singh. She hated the Pandes, staged a kind of *coup d'etat* and got Matbar Singh, a nephew of Bhim Sen Thapa, appointed Prime Minister in 1843. A point may well be noted here : before becoming Prime Minister, Matbar Singh had been living in comfortable exile at Simla on a handsome British pension.

There was no end to intrigues and internecine violence that had become a permanent feature of the ruling cliques of Nepal. Matbar Singh was not allowed to enjoy his office very long. He was murdered in 1845, at the instance of the Palace, by his nephew Jang Bahadur. In the meantime, Gagan Singh, the Maharani's paramour had also been murdered at the bidding of the Raja. The Maharani was now in a state of insane fury, and cried murder. One day she summoned all the chief officers of State, both civil and military, to assemble at the Kot (the courtyard of the Royal Palace), where most of them were executed by Jang Bahadur's men. She paid Jang Bahadur handsomely for doing the hangman's job so efficiently : he was appointed Prime Minister.

With Jang Bahadur's assumption of the office of Prime

Minister, a near hundred-year period of Nepalese history commenced when the Prime Minister came to be invested with greater power and patronage than the King himself. The Prime Minister now became the *de facto* ruler of Nepal. To ensure its continuity, Jang Bahadur had a Sanad signed by the King that made the office of Prime Minister hereditary<sup>24</sup>. That is, after the death of the Prime Minister his next brother would automatically succeed him to his office. For the unlimited and irresponsible exercise of his power the Prime Minister was accountable to none. His whims and caprices were all that the Prime Minister could care for. Jang Bahadur wanted that all power and most wealth should belong to one family—the Rana family. And so it did for the next hundred years or so in Nepal.

Anglo-Nepalese relations in their post-Sagauli phase were put to a severe test in 1857, when the whole of India was afire. The people had risen in revolt against British rule. The fire of the struggle fast spread to countless hamlets and villages and towns of this sub-continent. Against the counsel of those that wanted him to help the rebels, Jang Bahadur aided<sup>25</sup> the British with a sizable contingent of troops. Also, he himself took to the field at the head of 8,000 men. Of course these Nepalese troops were paid by the British, and the wounded and relatives of the killed were liberally compensated. In return for his ser-

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<sup>24</sup> In this Jang Bahadur followed what the Mahrattas had done earlier in India. In the 1720s the Mahrattas also made the appointment of Peshwa hereditary. Balaji Visvanath was succeeded by his son Baji Rao (1) as Peshwa, overshadowing the Raja who became a mere figurehead.

<sup>25</sup> Besides the obvious explanation that Jang Bahadur considered his relations with Britain as of capital importance, another plausible explanation for this might be found. As is well known, Oudh played a direct role, much to the detriment of Nepal's interests, in the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16. Since Oudh was in the vanguard of the Indian revolt, Jang Bahadur took the opportunity to settle the old score. In fact, Nepalese participation in the Indian rebellion was limited to the territory of Oudh.

vices to the British, he received a handsome prize : he was rewarded with a title by them, and some land in the Terai—formerly ceded to the British in 1816—was restored to Nepal.

Prior to the outbreak of the Indian revolt, there had been a renewal of conflicts between Tibet and Nepal. As a matter of fact, Nepal's relations with Tibet had never been particularly friendly and that for reasons not very vague either. Now assured of the British goodwill, Jang Bahadur thought he could deal with Tibet—little did it matter whether the cause justified an appeal to arms. A short period of hostility and protracted negotiations was followed by the conclusion of a treaty. Under the terms of the treaty Tibet was obliged (i) to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000 to Nepal ; (ii) to receive a Nepalese envoy in Lhasa ; (iii) to exclude the Nepalese from the imposition of any tax ; and (iv) to allow their goods a duty-free entry into Tibet. The treaty was a virtual admission of Nepal's supremacy that cut at the very root of the legal myth of China's "suzerainty" over both Nepal<sup>26</sup> and Tibet.

Jang Bahadur's quietus from the political scene left Nepal again open to intrigues and assassinations. It is not proposed to follow all that in detail. Between now and the rule of Mohan Shumsher, the last of the Rana Prime Ministers, we propose to restrict ourselves only to such salient points as have a direct bearing on our narrative. Suffice it to say, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur was succeeded by one of his sons, Bir Shumsher, who held the office of Prime Minister until 1901. Between him and Chandra Shumsher, Deva Shumsher was Prime Minister

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<sup>26</sup> It may not be out of place here to mention that, in 1792, Nepal had agreed to send a mission every five years to Peking. True, the mission took presents to Peking. But equally true was the fact that it returned to Nepal with more presents from the Chinese. The last of such missions, however, went in 1908. That this mission business was not meant to be anything more than a matter-of-fact exchange of courtesies was amply demonstrated on a number of occasions.

for a few weeks. He was deposed to make way for Chandra Shumsher.

With Jang Bahadur started the era when Nepal's destiny was no longer to be shaped by the Kings but by the Prime Ministers. Chandra Shumsher was determined not to deviate from that course. He was also determined not to do anything that might adversely affect Anglo-Nepalese relations. Following the Treaty of Sagauli, Nepal had been, to quote Rishikesh Shah who walked in and out of many important Nepalese Government offices including that of Foreign Minister in the 50s and 60s, "for all practical purposes turned into a recruiting ground for the British India Army."<sup>27</sup> Chandra Shumsher saw to it that Nepal continued to remain so.

Britain's hostility with Tibet in 1904 saw Chandra Shumsher, notwithstanding Nepal's obligation to come to Tibet's aid under the terms of the treaty of 1856, come to help the Younghusband expedition as best as he could. When the first world war broke out, Chandra Shumsher promptly came to Britain's aid with the only commodity Nepal could offer—the Gurkha soldier. For all these acts of demonstrative loyalty, Britain rewarded Nepal with what was appreciated most by its rulers: it firmly stuck to its policy of non-interference insofar as the internal affairs of Nepal were concerned. Thus assured, Chandra Shumsher could keep his country as far away from the twentieth century as he desired.

True, the title of the British Resident at Kathmandu was changed to that of Envoy in 1920. But this was just an ostensible diplomatic move, particularly in view of the changed circumstances following the first world war. This was just to allay such quarters as might suspect something unnatural in Britain's very exclusive relations with Nepal. That this was not meant to have any real meaning was soon evident when, on 21 December, 1923, Britain signed a new treaty of "perpetual peace and friendship" with

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<sup>27</sup> Rishikesh Shah, *Nepal and the World*, p. 10.



Nepal, confirming all previous treaties and agreements since the Treaty of Sagauli.

The political status of Nepal, notwithstanding certain superficial changes here and there, continued to be exactly what the Imperial Gazetteer had observed : "The political status of Nepal...may be said to stand intermediate between Afghanistan and the native states of India. The point of resemblance to Afghanistan is in the complete freedom which Nepal enjoys in the management of its internal affairs, while in both countries foreign relations are controlled by the Indian Government. The analogy of the native states is that, by treaty, Nepal is obliged to receive a British Resident at Kathmandu, and cannot take Europeans into service<sup>28</sup> without the sanction of the Indian Government."<sup>29</sup> Chandra Shumsher held the office of Prime Minister until he decided to quit voluntarily late in 1945.

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<sup>28</sup> This was a protective measure against the entry of any other European power into Nepal to upset Anglo-Nepalese relations.

<sup>29</sup> *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, Vol. XIX, p. 38.

## PRELUDE

Juddha Shumsher's tenure of office requires a rather detailed treatment. For it was during his term that the story of Nepal ceased to be an exclusive account of the tyranny, exploitation and violence of a handful of families belonging to the ruling caste. With him begins a new chapter that would henceforth also record what the people of Nepal thought and spoke and did. The fact is that, starting from Sagauli until the 30s of this century, the people of Nepal had very little to do with what went on in the realm of politics in the land. They stood aloof in the contests for political power without any feeling of interest, save the mortal fright that their homes might become the seat of combat, or the tracks of the opposing groups of armed men which were alike destructive to the people. More, to live in continual fear, to be drafted for forced labour, to be perpetually at the call of the feudal master, no matter what his own interest might be—this had been the lot of the common man in Nepal ever since Jang Bahadur decided that his family should hold the country to ransom.

Nothing could have better served the interests of the country's ruling circles than the perpetuation of such a state of affairs. Indeed if they could they certainly would have left everything exactly as it had been so long. But that was not to be. From across the plains down south, a rough wind was blowing that carried a message of freedom

from fear and tyranny and enslavement. India was awake. Its struggle for freedom raged in unabated fury, challenging the very citadel of British power in Asia. This could not but inspire those Nepalese who looked upon the Rana regime as an extension of British rule in India to act ; to act so that the grip of the feudal octopus would loosen, paving the way for a humane system of government in Nepal.

The beginning was humble ; and it could not be otherwise. For the peculiar character of Nepalese society precluded the possibility of the emergence of any large-scale mass movement for re-vitalizing a static society, so that it could effectively respond to the challenge of the twentieth century. The important reason for this was the absence of even the nucleus of a middle-class intelligentsia with firm moorings in the twin principles of social change and democracy. That the middle-class was non-existent was mainly because the feudal oligarchy prevented its growth. Society was agrarian all along the line, without the least trace of industrialization—so necessary for its emergence. What began, therefore, as the first popular effort at organizing a movement for the overthrow of the Rana regime was bound to be secretive and restricted to a small group of men. These in turn were the men destined to be the forerunners of the armed struggle that finally delivered Nepal from the shackles of feudalism in the 1950s.

Let us now turn our attention to the scene of opposition politics which had their beginnings in the 30s ; and which had brought to the fore two major groups of contradictory forces with the identical object of liquidating the Rana regime. We will first review the position of the group that comprised such men as might be said to have been motivated by the more enlightened and impersonal aspect of the whole thing—that of establishing a sort of democratic form of government.

Around 1936 a group of young men led by Tanka Prasad Acharya,<sup>1</sup> a Brahmin of very ordinary birth, formed a secret

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<sup>1</sup> It may be noted that Tanka Prasad Acharya survived

political organization called the Nepal Praja Parishad. The Praja Parishad was inspired by rather militant political ideas. What was particularly significant about the line of action the Praja Parishad adopted was that, from the outset, it made every effort to exploit the bitterly hostile relations between Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher and King Tribhuvan who had ascended the throne—though a minor then—way back in 1913. The Praja Parishad was successful in enlisting a measure of King Tribhuvan's support to its scheme of things. This did not exclude the use of any available means insofar as the liquidation of the Rana regime was concerned.

On the loom of Nepal's history, a highly dramatic and complicated story was now being woven. The Praja Parishad's politics were essentially conditioned by the lack of any mass participation in them. For the Rana family, like a boa-constrictor, held the country in a grip of compression that ruled out the people's association with politics. This in turn tended the Parishad to put its faith in acts of individual or, at the most, small-group violence. That the Parishad should act in this manner was not at all exceptional: it only followed in the footsteps of what others in similar, at times less ruthless, situations had done. The denial of the open avenues of protest through legitimate political action entitled it as a matter of course to the moral sanction necessary—so it reasoned out—to organize violence in order to put an end to the already entrenched violence of the rulers.

Prompted by this line of argument, Tanka Prasad and his men plotted the liquidation of the Rana regime by murder. But their luck ran out much before the plot could be executed, when Juddha Shumsher got wind of the whole thing some time in October, 1940. This was enough for Juddha Shumsher to throw the country into a nightmarish state of persecution. The law of the jungle prevailed, and

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many hazards to be nominated Prime Minister in one of the many Governments that followed one another in quick succession in the 50s.

the Ranas cried vengeance. A large number of men were arrested—a conservative estimate would put the number around sixty—of whom four were summarily sentenced to death. About thirty-eight persons were sentenced to various prison terms ranging from life to a year. Since Tanka Prasad was a Brahmin,<sup>2</sup> he was spared the gallows and given imprisonment for life.

As if all this was not enough, attempts were made to implicate King Tribhuvan in the plot. This did not work out. For Juddha Shumsher, being unable to persuade the Crown Prince to step into his father's shoes, was left with no alternative but to tolerate Tribhuvan's meaningless existence as King. Frustrated, he prepared quite a long list of names of Tanka Prasad's supposed collaborators in India and presented it to Geoffrey Bentham, the British Minister<sup>3</sup> at Kathmandu, demanding their immediate extradition to Nepal, so that he could deal with them in his own accustomed way. Instead of conceding the demand, the British Government in India had a number of men named by Juddha Shumsher detained in prison for varying periods of time.

The other group of men who challenged the Rana regime were not so much motivated by any revolutionary political philosophy as by the question of power and pelf for themselves. They belonged to the various ramifications of the Rana family itself, the very involved account of which looks like a jigsaw puzzle to the non-initiate. Shorn of verbiage, their story would look something like this: Chandra Shumsher restricted by law the succession to the offices of Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief only to the immediate elders in the family. Since polygamy

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<sup>2</sup> Normally Nepal's rulers did not bother much even about the letter, let alone the spirit, of the nation's basic laws. They, however, were scrupulously law-abiding when it came to the question of legally putting a Brahmin to death, for Nepal's law prohibited it.

<sup>3</sup> In 1934 the title of the British Envoy at Kathmandu was changed to that of Minister. Also, Nepal was allowed to appoint a Minister to the Court of St. James.

helped the Rana family to multiply beyond all reasonable proportions, there cropped up the possibility of a large army of aspirants for office and power. To prevent this, an ingenious scheme was devised that classified the Rana progenies into A, B, and C Class Ranas.

A detailed analysis of Chandra Shumsher's scheme of classification is not intended to be undertaken here. For our purpose it would suffice if we followed Toker's observation on this. "There are various interpretation of the terms A, B, and C Class Ranas: probably the simplest and most easily understood is this. The A Class Ranas were the children of wives of equal caste with their husbands: the B Class, of those wives entitled by caste to every form of association with the husband except the eating of rice together: the C Class, of those with whom no eating in common at all was permissible. The children of the Maharaja's [Prime Minister's] first, or Bada Maharani, were A Class Ranas; those of the second or third—Kanchi or Mali—Maharani might be B Class: the C Class were the children of his various mistresses."<sup>4</sup> Small wonder, in this weird set-up feudalism took to the breeding of its own enemies.

Determined to prevent any further swelling of the ranks of the dissident Ranas, Juddha Shumsher took to the idea of banishing the C Class Ranas from the valley. Some time in 1934 he asked his nephew, Mohan Shumsher, to do what was necessary in order to get rid of these Ranas. Thus expelled, a number of them migrated to India. Their presence in India only added further grist to the mill of intense hate and resentment the already exiled Ranas nursed against the overlordship of the A Class Ranas. And they did whatever they could to plot the overthrow of the Rana regime.

Most of these Ranas, needless to say, were in possession of substantial wealth. This gave them confidence to go in for rather ambitious plots. They worked their way into

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Toker, *Gorkha*, p. 205.

the various formations of the Nepalese Army, inciting the men to rebellion. Some time in 1940 a dangerous situation developed due to large-scale disaffection in the army, the chief protagonists of which belonged to the ranks of the exiled Ranas. This was dealt with severely, followed by further expulsion of them from Nepal.

Apart from this, there were other attempts also—India-based and non-Rana, to enlist the support of Gurkha soldiers for the overthrow of the Rana regime. As Taker, a soldier himself, observes: "A 'People's Committee'... distributed pamphlets both in India and Nepal setting themselves up as the intending liberators from Rana oppression and disapproving of the despatch of Gurkha soldiers to aid the British. Its secret policy was to subvert Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army and of the Nepalese contingent recently sent to India, so as to use them on their return to Nepal for the massacre of the Ranas and the setting up of the King in their stead. It was noteworthy that those plotters in no way planned to use the disgruntled Ranas for the furtherance of their plans... In 1940, at Kohat in India, a battalion of the Nepalese contingent mutinied... When the outbreak was quelled the battalion was disarmed and sent back to Nepal where twenty-two men were tried, one hanged, one sent to life imprisonment and the rest sentenced for periods from six to eighteen years."<sup>5</sup>

Another drama, though not on the political stage of Nepal, was being enacted elsewhere; and which was, following the second world war, destined to alter the course of Nepalese history. This was being staged in India and the *dramatis personae* included, besides other Nepalese, Bisweswar Prasad Koirala. Since he is going to be with us throughout the course of this narrative, we had better get acquainted with him now.

Son of a poor Brahmin, Krishna Prasad Koirala—an exile at Banaras because of his uncompromising attitude to

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

the Ranas—Bisweswar, in 1935, entered the University of Calcutta, then a hot-bed of revolutionary politics. It did not take him long to feel the intensity of the urge for freedom with which the entire Indian nation was then pulsating. Having done his law, he went to Darjeeling in Bengal to practise as a lawyer. It did hardly suit him, and he came to Patna to stay with Devendra Prasad Singh, an intimate friend since his Banaras University days. A member of the Congress Socialist Party<sup>6</sup>, Devendra Prasad soon got him in touch with its shining lights, Narendra Deva, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan and Asoka Mehta. And the die was cast, Bisweswar became a whole-time worker of the Congress Socialist Party. He was entrusted with the task of organizing the students and youth section of the Party.

As we have already observed, most of those Nepalese who were drawn into the vortex of radical politics that, in the second quarter of this century, generated innumerable storms of protest against all forms of exploitation of man by man considered Nepal's feudal regime as an extension of British rule in India. The prevailing idea among them was: should they be denied the opportunity to fight the Ranas in Nepal, they would rather participate in India's fight against British imperialism. After all, any weakening of British power in India, so they reasoned out, certainly would not leave its protege in Nepal unscathed.

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<sup>6</sup> The Congress Socialist Party was organized in 1934 as a left wing group within the Indian National Congress. The CSP's major idea was to make the working class, which the Congress had very slightly touched, restive and class-conscious, and to draw it into the arena of struggle by the economic appeal of socialism. The group's decision to retain its link with the Congress was chiefly motivated by the desire not to isolate itself, as its chief spokesman Narendra Deva expressed in his presidential address at the All-India Congress Socialist Conference in Patna on 17 May, 1934, "from the great national movement against British imperialism which today the Congress symbolises... In the peculiar conditions of India, the socialist can very well work within the Congress and combine the national struggle with socialism."



Bisweswar, too, was influenced by this consideration when he decided to throw in his lot with the fighters for India's freedom.

The August days of 1942 found India in a mood of final reckoning with the British. Led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Indian National Congress had launched the "Quit India" struggle; and, among the many who participated in it, Bisweswar was there. From here the road to prison was understandably short. Before long, Bisweswar found himself behind prison bars in Patna. His father, who had since been permitted to return to Nepal, was placed in the meantime under house detention for anti-Rana activities; he died not very long after. The tragedy of his father's death in detention could hardly be expected not to add to Bisweswar's pent-up rage against the Rana regime. But there was nothing he could do about it at the moment, for the day of reckoning with the Ranas had not yet come.

Despite all these happenings, Juddha Shumsher did not feel any the less confident about the future of Rana rule. The misery of the common man in Nepal, his protest against tyranny and injustice, utterly failed to make him realize the extreme seriousness of the situation. By the time he made up his mind to go into voluntary retirement in 1945 Nepal's cup of misery had been full to the brim. That, of course, was none of his concern. Happy having demonstrated once again his unfailing loyalty to Great Britain by helping it with about 2,00,000 men during the second world war, Juddha Shumsher "taking with him his vast wealth and the strippings of the treasury... retired to Hardwar in India to live a life of contemplation [!] in sacred surroundings."<sup>7</sup>

Not without opposition from other aspirants for power among the A Class Ranas, did Padma Shumsher, a nephew of Juddha Shumsher, find his way to the office of Prime Minister in 1945. Time now had gone completely out of joint in Nepal. And the trickle of discontent against the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

feudal regime turned into a torrent. The shadow of the now not-too-distant catastrophe was lengthening across the valley. So desperate had the situation become that even the impossibly complacent Ranas were forced to acknowledge the necessity for dealing with it politically, and not by resorting to their accustomed method alone—of force and oppression and bribery.

Padma Shumsher was not too late to realize that, in the context of the post-second world war developments, the old system of absolute family dictatorship would have to be modified. There was no escape from it, he reckoned, particularly in view of what was then happening across the southern frontiers of Nepal. Convinced of this, he started considering how best he could respond to the challenge of time. Let us now leave Padma Shumsher for a while, and review what meaningful events had since taken place, particularly on the anti-Rana level.

The termination of the second world war was marked by a dramatic change in the life of this ancient continent of Asia. Subsequent events proved that colonialism had come to its autumn. All over the sprawling landmass stretching from Jordan to Jakarta, people eagerly looked forward to the day when their lands would be out of the slough of bondage, of exploitation, of despondency. That the way was now prepared for the liquidation of Europe's age-old colonial rule in Asia was taken for granted. This was enslaved Asia's hour of triumph. And the fact that the day of reckoning was not far off in this sub-continent, inspired some of the Nepalese exiles to more determined efforts at snapping their bondage.

But how to do it? was the most important question. That individual or small-group efforts, however brave and determined, would in no conceivable time achieve the desired objective was admitted. It was clearly understood that there must be an organization, ideologically oriented and with a mass base. With this end in view, Bisweswar Prasad, now an exile, came to Calcutta to exchange ideas with Nepalese exiles, who might be willing to participate in

the task of forming an organization. By now a number of other Nepalese had also come down to Calcutta.

The task did not prove an easy one. Innumerable consultations and parleys took place at Gunada Majumdar's<sup>8</sup> residence, where Bisweswar Prasad was staying. An attempt was made to forge a united front comprising all the opposition forces, including some of the banished Ranas, one very prominent of whom, Mahabir Shumsher<sup>9</sup>, had since been residing in Calcutta. This move, however, was premature, and it did not succeed. Mention must be made here of the very useful service rendered by the socialist leader, Rammanohar Lohia, one of the remaining few prisoners of the '42 struggle to be released in April, 1946. As a matter of fact, Lohia's persistent efforts finally paved the way for the formation of the Nepali National Congress, at a conference held in Calcutta toward the end of January, 1947, with Tanka Prasad—still serving life imprisonment in Kathmandu—as chairman. Bisweswar Prasad was appointed working president of the party.

By and large, the leadership of the party was composed of young men still in their 20s and early 30s such as Ganesh Man Singh<sup>10</sup>, Krishna Prasad Upadhyay, Balchandra Sarma, Gopal Prasad Upadhyay, D. R. Regmi. Interestingly enough, Matrika Prasad, Bisweswar Prasad's half-brother who became the first commoner Prime Minister in the 50s, did not participate in these activities as he was still an employee of the Rana Government.

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<sup>8</sup> A prominent member of the Congress Socialist Party, Gunada Majumdar was one of Bisweswar's early associates in his political activities in Calcutta.

<sup>9</sup> The family background of Mahabir Shumsher deserves notice. His Prime Minister grandfather, Bhim Shumsher, had raised his three sons, Rama, Hiranya and Prakash Shumsher to the Governorships of Palpa, Birganj and Eastern Nepal respectively, and to the rank of Commanding and Major-Generals. Prakash Shumsher's son was Major-General Mahabir, his army rank being hereditary and honorific.

<sup>10</sup> Ganesh Man Singh had been imprisoned earlier for political activities. He broke prison and fled to India to attend this conference.

Not quite unexpectedly, the policy statement of the Nepali Congress bore clear evidence of its close association with the Congress Socialist Party. Although the policy statement at this stage was more emphatic on the question of the liquidation of the Rana regime and the establishment of a democratic system of government, its tone and temper was sufficiently indicative of the formulators' ultimate faith in socialism. As a first step, it was decided that Bisweswar Prasad should visit places in eastern Nepal to establish contact with the as yet unorganized forces of opposition there, and to organize them as the *avant garde* of the Nepali National Congress.

Some time after the Nepali National Congress was formed, King Tribhuvan once again came to Calcutta for the ostensible purpose of medical treatment. Surely his failing health required special medical attention, but there was also another purpose behind the visit. The conflict between the Royal and the Rana families had assumed such proportions as made it necessary for the King to look for support, in his efforts to clip the wings of the ruling Ranas, beyond the frontiers of his country. It may be recalled that the King was in favour of some sort of liberalization of the regime, and that he had amply demonstrated it by assisting the forces of opposition. During his Calcutta visit he was accompanied, besides others, by Subarna Shumsher<sup>11</sup>, then Deputy Director of Nepal's Development Board. Subarna Shumsher did not fail to avail himself of this opportunity to get in touch with the Nepali National Congress. In fact it was precisely this that had prompted him to accompany the King. He met Bisweswar

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<sup>11</sup> A cousin of Mahabir Shumsher's, Subarna Shumsher, who had had a liberal education in India leading to an M.A. degree in economics, succeeded his father, Hiranya Shumsher, to the Governorship of Birganj in 1945. On Padma Shumsher's assumption of power, Subarna Shumsher relinquished his job, returned to Kathmandu and accepted the new job. The idea was that, Padma Shumsher being a liberal of sorts, his presence in Kathmandu might enable him to strengthen the incipient move for the liberalization of the administration.

Prasad and had discussions with him, about which Tribhuvan was duly informed. Also, the decision was taken to maintain such contact as might be possible in the circumstances.

Faster became the pace of events in the spring of 1947. The Nepali National Congress decided to launch a limited struggle to bring political issues to the forefront. Also, the need was felt to test the organizational strength of the party, and to ascertain what mass support it enjoyed. The immediate issue concerned the industrial workers employed in the cotton and jute mills of Biratnagar<sup>12</sup>, the solitary Nepalese industrial centre on the Indo-Nepal border separating Bihar from Nepal. The call for a general strike had been given and this was actively supported by the Congress Socialist Party, particularly its Purnea unit. The Ranas met the situation with police violence, oppression and mass arrests. A large number of people, many of them Indians, were arrested. Bisweswar Prasad, who led the strike, was arrested too; so were his sisters, Nalini and Indira, and brothers, Tarini and Girija. Bisweswar Prasad along with some other prisoners were forced to a month's foot-march all the way across the hills and jungles to Kathmandu. Doubtless it was a rough treatment that shocked public opinion in Nepal as well as in India.

This had a wide repercussion all over Nepal, and was followed by the intensification of the activities of the Nepali National Congress. The Congress Socialist Party under the leadership of Lohia took the initiative, and assisted the Nepali National Congress to organize a civil disobedience movement in Biratnagar. With the launching of the movement the situation became very critical whereupon

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<sup>12</sup> Biratnagar in north-east Nepal had a jute mill, a sugar factory and some other small-scale industrial units. Most of these were owned by an Indian capitalist, and the majority of the workers employed—about 10,000—were also Indians. Some Ranas, Padma Shumsher and Juddha Shumsher included, had substantial capital invested in these undertakings.

Lohia made it known that, unless Bisweswar Prasad and the others were released, a country-wide struggle would be started. Jayaprakash Narayan also took up the issue and wrote a strong letter to the Nepalese diplomatic representative in India, Bejoy Shumsher, the eldest son of Mohan Shumsher.

The letter, sent through Devendra Prasad, demanded, besides humane treatment to the political prisoners, immediate release of all the arrested persons. Jayaprakash also wrote to Gandhiji, urging him to lend his voice in favour of the Nepalese cause. This Gandhiji did. While addressing the Delhi session of the first Asian Conference, Gandhiji gave expression to his views on Nepal. There was also considerable behind-the-scene activity. Subarna Shumsher—he was a member of the Nepalese delegation to this conference—considerably helped the cause of the political prisoners. He had several meetings in this connexion with Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Vallabhbai Patel. Nehru intervened and sent a telegram to Padma Shumsher, requesting him to release the political prisoners.

This had a sobering effect on the Ranas. The fact that it would only be a matter of months before India became free also had its effect on Padma Shumsher who at least could be credited with having a measure of understanding of the mood of the new rulers of India. Certain personal factors were there, too, which the Ranas could not afford to ignore. They had considerable investments in India, in the interest of which they thought it wise not to alienate the Indian leaders by allowing the political situation in Nepal to take a turn for the worse. Padma Shumsher announced the setting up of a committee to go into the question of constitutional reforms. He released Bisweswar Prasad but had him externed to India.

These measures were not unjustifiably interpreted as half-hearted, Bisweswar Prasad's externment adding further strength to it. The Nepali National Congress made it clear that nothing short of a total change by way of democratization of the administration would satisfy it. Hence

the agitation continued inside Nepal as well as outside. In alliance with the socialists, particularly Lohia, Bisweswar Prasad made determined efforts to shape the Nepali National Congress into a fighting instrument. It was evident that the democratic forces were bent upon a showdown with the Ranas, which in turn prompted Padma Shumsher to act. He turned to India to draw Dun out of the mire for him. Some time in May, 1947, he requested Nehru for assistance in drawing up a Constitution for Nepal. The request being granted, Mr. Sriprakasa and two others, on behalf of the Indian Government, went to Nepal.

The fixing of a deadline for India's freedom in the meantime had set apace, on the international political plane, certain moves regarding Nepal's status as a sovereign State. Apprehending that free India might desire to succeed to the not-quite-orthodox relationship that existed between Nepal and the British, the Ranas got the U.S.A. recognize Nepal's sovereign status in April, 1947. The British Foreign Office on the other hand announced, on 12, July, 1947, that an agreement had been reached with the Nepalese Government to upgrade the status of the British Legation in Kathmandu and the Nepalese Legation in London to that of Embassies. These moves were also calculated to stabilize the Rana regime, now so directly exposed to the gusty wind of change blowing over this sub-continent.

Not without reason has it been asked not to attempt to wash a blackmoor white. This was obvious when Padma Shumsher's promised reforms in Nepal's administration were announced in January, 1948. The draft Constitution prepared by the Indian advisers provided for a bicameral legislature, an Upper House composed of elected members of the Rana family and a Lower House elected indirectly through a system of electoral colleges. It also recommended for the division of Nepal into several administrative units enjoying local autonomy.

This evidently fell far short of what the Nepali National

Congress had demanded. Still whatever limited change it offered was cancelled by the simple fact that "on all important matters decisions were still to be left in the hands of the Maharaja [Prime Minister] and the rights of the ruling family to succession in the premiership were declared to be unalterable and inalienable for all time."<sup>13</sup> The people rejected it because it came nowhere near their aspiration. Rather it was considered to be a clear fraud. Acceptance of the proposals, the Nepali National Congress reasoned out, would amount to a sabotage of the people's trust.

On the other hand, the Ranas led by Mohan Shumsher opposed even this conservative draft Constitution because, other things apart, it did not entitle them to nominate a majority of the members of the Lower House. Nepal now faced an impasse, the way out of which through the accepted methods of non-violent politics was made increasingly difficult by the intrigues of Mohan Shumsher and his followers. The resultant situation was too complicated for Padma Shumsher to continue as Prime Minister.

But Delhi wanted Padma Shumsher to continue in his office, the reasons for which are not very difficult to understand. The Government of India believed in a policy of gradualism and wanted to avoid a head-on clash with the Ranas, if possible. As Prime Minister Nehru on a later occasion observed: "We have tried for what it is worth to advise Nepal to act in a manner so as to prevent any major upheaval. We have tried to find a way, a middle way, if you like, which will ensure the progress of Nepal and the introduction of or some advance in the ways of democracy in Nepal. We have searched for a way which would, at the same time, avoid the total uprooting of the ancient order."<sup>14</sup>

Padma Shumsher was not quite unwilling, in the face

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<sup>13</sup> Toker, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>14</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru's speeches (1949-53)*, Publications Division, Government of India, pp. 176-177.



of mounting opposition at home and steady pressure from Delhi, to buy peace on the basis of a restricted liberalization of the administration. But what reforms were agreeable to Padma Shumsher were not quite up to Delhi's expectation. Even so, the Indian Government was prepared to put up with him for a reasonable period of time. The idea was that once a beginning could be made in the process of liberalization, it might be possible to persuade him to follow the logic of it.

Things turned out differently, however. For Mohan Shumsher and his cohorts created such conditions as compelled Padma Shumsher to resign, seeking refuge in India. In April, 1948, Mohan Shumsher, the man whom Delhi had more reasons than one to detest, took over the reins of power.

Little did Mohan Shumsher suspect, while entering the office of Prime Minister, that it would be his lot to preside over the liquidation of the Rana regime. The situation in the valley was explosive, requiring just a little spark to set it off. Yet Mohan Shumsher continued to double and twist. He might have continued to do so but for a significant event that took place in India at this point; and which in turn compelled him to revise his policy to a certain extent.

India's successful "police action" against the Nizam of Hyderabad<sup>15</sup> was naturally interpreted as a conclusive evidence of its strength of determination; and this made Mohan Shumsher rather apprehensive. Discretion being the better part of valour, he thought it prudent not to allow Nepal's political situation to drift to such an extent as might invite Delhi's active intervention. In haste he announced

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<sup>15</sup> Hyderabad was a native state in British India. Following India's independence, the Nizam of Hyderabad conspired to declare Hyderabad an independent State, failing which he would accede to Pakistan. The Indian Government, however, considered Hyderabad—and rightly so—an integral part of India and demanded of the Nizam to act accordingly. The Nizam thought otherwise and indulged in terror and violence against its people; whereupon the Government of India ordered its Army to march into Hyderabad and clear it of the conspirators.

certain constitutional reforms, providing for a partially elected legislature consisting of a Council of Elders and a Lower House. It was at the same time made clear that the reforms would be introduced gradually over a period of three years. This was interpreted by the Nepali National Congress as a clever attempt at temporization and nothing else.

The situation in Kathmandu was fast deteriorating as a result of the increasing tempo of the Nepali National Congress' activities. Efforts to hold protest meetings were ruthlessly suppressed. Harsh measures were adopted to strangle the Congress, finally leading to its suppression and the imposition of pre-censorship on the Press. The cat was now out of the bag, and Mohan Shumsher's promised reforms proved to be nothing but a gigantic fraud on the people. Massive protests by the people followed, inviting the arrest of a few hundred persons in November, 1948. The Nepali National Congress met at the border town of Raxaul in India, adopted a resolution condemning the atrocious measures of Mohan Shumsher's Government, and called upon the people of Nepal to take once again to the path of non-violent struggle for the realization of their basic political rights.

Bisweswar Prasad and Krishna Prasad had at some point entered Kathmandu surreptitiously to give the growing movement for democracy the necessary push for a nation-wide mass struggle. But not for long was Bisweswar allowed to move about the valley undetected, for treachery soon showed its hand. He was arrested in January, 1949, and thrown into a dungeon, while Krishna Prasad gave the Rana police the slip and returned to India.

Bisweswar Prasad was subjected to severe torture, the idea being that this should be enough to break his spirit. Far from it. Realizing that pleadings and protests would never secure a square deal for the political prisoners including himself, he resorted to the last weapon available under the prevailing conditions—he went on hunger strike. He also made it clear that, unless the political prisoners

were given a civilized treatment, he would fast unto death. This had a magic effect. In Nepal as well as in India public opinion was seriously agitated, demanding their release.

The echo of this dramatic episode was audible in Delhi, too. The Indian socialists, not unpredictably, organized protest meetings and marches. While leading a protest demonstration to the Nepalese Embassy in Delhi, Lohia was teargassed, arrested with a number of other socialists, and put to prison. This incidentally was Lohia's first imprisonment in independent India, and that not for something that had a direct connexion with any national issue. Nor did Jayaprakash keep silent. He did his best to add an edge to the increasing public criticism against Mohan Shumsher's doings.

Prime Minister Nehru finally took up the issue. He sent a stern telegram to Mohan Shumsher which read something like this : Should anything happen to Bisweswar Prasad Koirala in your prison, it would surely do much harm to Indo-Nepalese relations. An interesting aspect of the whole thing was that the eminent scientist, Professor Satyen Bose, who was then in Kathmandu as the leader of the Indian Government-sponsored goodwill mission, also did put in his voice in favour of Bisweswar Prasad's release.

This was too much even for Mohan Shumsher to withstand. The fact that the Indian Government, besides the ceaseless campaign of the socialists, felt very strongly about his high-handed action put Mohan Shumsher in a position he thought he had not bargained for. Bisweswar Prasad was released, but only after he had gone through an excruciating period of 27 days' fasting. Immediately after his release he was deported to India once again.

Oppression could not break him. It only strengthened his determination to shape the party into a fit enough weapon to fight the Rana regime with. And the struggle for democracy continued in Nepal with sporadic outbursts of the people's anger here and there. Unable to come to

grips with the situation, Mohan Shumsher became more violent, more oppressive, and turned a deaf ear to the soft voice of wisdom that wafted from afar.

We now propose to digress a little so that we could recapitulate the momentous events that were shaping the world's numerically largest nation across the northern frontiers of Nepal. For the aftermath of what was then happening in China was bound to affect the pattern of politics in South-East Asia. Communism's victory in China was in fact destined to act as an indirect agent in hastening the pace of the Nepalese revolution.

Not long after Bisweswar Prasad was externed from Nepal for the second time, Mao Tse-tung got himself securely entrenched in the seat of power in Peking. A breathless world just did not know how to size this man up, for his inscrutable face never betrayed for a moment what was up in his sleeve. For a while, a very brief while, Peking's "agrarian reformers" put up a facade of sweet reasonableness, of "charity for all and malice toward none." Still Delhi had an uncanny feeling. It realized that things would not be quite the same up north in the regions in proximity to the frontiers of Communist China. It was felt necessary that relations with the Himalayan border States of Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal should be put on a firm basis of enduring friendship and cooperation, for the strategic importance of these States could hardly be ignored. This prompted the Government of India to initiate talks with, besides Bhutan and Sikkim with whom India's links were organic, the Nepalese authorities.

But, like a slippery eel, Mohan Shumsher evaded the issue. Protracted negotiations took place, and drafts of the proposed treaty were exchanged between the two Governments. Nothing came off all this because Mohan Shumsher had other things in mind. He was playing for time, just enough time for the situation to crystallize; so that he could bargain, by playing his two giant neighbours against one another, for the terms that suited him most.

The Government of India's insistence, however, finally

brought him to Delhi in February, 1950. His presence in Delhi did not prove very useful, for the proposed Indo-Nepalese treaty of friendship could not be got through. This was, understandably enough, a bitter pill for Delhi to swallow. Although Prime Minister Nehru forbore from any public mention of it, he made categorical statement on one point—the question of security of this sub-continent. In a speech in Parliament on 17 March, 1950, he said: “Geographically, Nepal is almost a part of India, although she is an independent country. Recently the Prime Minister of Nepal visited India. We welcomed and conferred with this distinguished personage and it was clear that, in so far as certain developments in Asia were concerned, the interests of India and Nepal are identical. For instance, to mention one point, it is not possible for the Indian Government to tolerate any invasion of Nepal from anywhere, even though there is no military alliance between the two countries. Any possible invasion of Nepal... would inevitably involve the safety of India.”<sup>16</sup>

Prime Minister Nehru did not stop here. If India was interested in the question of security, it was equally interested in the well-being of the people of Nepal. He further stated: “Freedom interests us in the abstract as well as in the guise of a practical and, in the context of Asia, a necessary step. If it does not come, forces that will ultimately disrupt freedom itself will be created and encouraged. We have accordingly advised the Government of Nepal, in all earnestness, to bring themselves into line with democratic forces that are stirring in the world today. Not to do so is not only wrong but also unwise from the point of view of what is happening in the world today.”<sup>17</sup>

It is necessary now to pick up the threads from where we have left them at the other end of the Nepalese political spectrum, and piece them together. While Delhi and Kathmandu were locked in futile efforts at saving the situation,

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<sup>16</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru's speeches (1949-53)*, p. 147.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

multi-dimensional developments had taken place that compelled the anti-Rana forces to face the logic of the situation. By now the two major groups of opposition that between themselves represented the exiled Ranas and the democratic elements had arrived at a meaningful conclusion. They agreed on the point that, in the context of the recent developments in Asia, Mohan Shumsher would not yield alone to the pressures simultaneously created by Delhi's diplomatic efforts and the people's non-violent struggle, no matter how strong the cumulative effect of these might be. The fact was, since his second externment from Nepal, Bisweswar had ruled out the possibility of the Gandhian technique of non-violent mass action ever achieving the party's objective. He conveyed his misgivings to his friends and colleagues, particularly Jayaprakash and Lohia. He had also talks with Prime Minister Nehru, in the course of which he apprised him of his doubts and difficulties.

By the time 1949 rolled out, the top leadership of the Nepali National Congress had admitted the necessity of a reorientation of the party's basic policy of struggle through non-violent methods. The conviction was now firmly rooted that the ultimate overthrow of the Rana regime could not be effected except by force. Of course, the difficulties involved in such a drastic change of policy were not by any chance under-estimated by the Nepalese leaders. The problem was viewed in proper perspective and the various aspects examined. The important thing was the attitude the Indian Government might adopt regarding the question of the contemplated change of policy. The logic of the situation was such as would not permit them to do what might embarrass the Indian Government—this the Nepalese leaders unreservedly admitted. Being expatriates operating from bases in India, the Nepalese never for a moment permitted themselves the luxury of ignoring the one very important factor involved in their scheme of things, the Indian Government's Nepal policy. That policy might not be partisan; it might not be even benign always insofar

as they were concerned. But it was of cardinal importance to them that this must never be hostile. It is well to take note of it here that this consideration had to a large extent conditioned the thoughts and actions of the Nepalese and would continue to do so, the reasons for which are too obvious to require further elaboration.

The other aspects of the problem also presented a formidable challenge. The Nepali National Congress was confronted, besides the Indian Government's attitude toward the contemplated change of policy, with three major questions: (a) organization; (b) resources; (c) unity in the opposition camp. It cannot be denied that, from a purely organizational point of view, the Nepali National Congress was not in a position at this point to embark upon a course of armed struggle. The party organization still was nothing more than a loose structure the major props of which were a few select whole-timers. Since they were forced to operate in exile, the Nepalese leaders had to depend mainly on the sympathy and support of Indians of Nepali origin and the socialists for organizing the party.

The organization the Nepali National Congress had inside Nepal was of extremely limited growth. The party no doubt had sizable pockets of passive supporters in the country; but the Rana reign of terror made it impossible to forge them into an effective organization. The conditions under which the Nepali National Congress was compelled to function had certain inherent limiting factors which in turn severely restricted the scope for organizing the people in Nepal. The Nepalese leaders agreed that, without the expression and organization of the people's will, it would not be feasible to give the party an effective base inside Nepal.

The problem of resources was again very complicated. The funds at the disposal of the party were meagre, so much so that even the minimum routine work had often to be curtailed. The party depended for funds mostly on local sources, the number of which was very limited. The Socialist Party of course helped the Nepalese from time to

time, but its capacity to do so was never too large. This was a great predicament which plagued the Nepali National Congress all along the line, circumscribing its activities to a great extent. It was of utmost importance, should the execution of the contemplated change of policy be decided upon, that new avenues of substantial resources be explored. It called for efforts which the party alone could never be expected to initiate. It was also clear to the Nepalese leaders that their hands would not be strengthened either by India's ruling party or, for that matter, by the Government of India.

Last but not least was the issue of unity in the sphere of anti-Rana politics. There was, in the period immediately after the second world war, little organized activities in the ranks of the anti-Rana elements other than those of the Nepali National Congress. The Nepali National Congress, besides the very limited efforts of the Praja Parishad, took the field as the first organized voice of protest and resistance against the Rana regime. The reason for this was rooted in the circumstances which facilitated the birth of the Nepali National Congress in India. The spirit of Nepalese nationalism was essentially forward-looking; and the diverse elements which nursed it were determined, despite the many differences of opinion on other counts, to keep it so. This also conditioned their attitude toward the anti-Rana forces which in turn paved the way for the democratic elements, and not the exiled Ranas, to form the Nepali National Congress.

Nevertheless, following the formation of the Nepali National Congress, the exiled Ranas initiated the move for organizing such members of their clan as were opposed to the Government of the, by the, and for the A Class Ranas.

Some forward-looking elements among them, particularly Subarna Shumsher who had, subsequent to Padma Shumsher's resignation, given up his job and retired to India, wanted that the Nepali National Congress be reconstituted as the united front of all opposition forces. Notwithstanding the efforts of such persons as Subarna Shum-



sher, this could not be achieved for the reasons that (a) a rapprochement between the Nepali National Congress and D. R. Regmi<sup>18</sup> was rendered impossible by the latter's insistence on being made the party's permanent president ; (b) Surya Prasad Upadhaya<sup>19</sup> and Mahendra Bikram Shah, two prominent members of this group, had their own personal reasons to oppose the move.

The failure of this move led to the formation of the Nepali Democratic Congress in 1948 with Mahendra Bikram Shah as president. The policy statement of this group, its published version at least, was almost identical with that of the Nepali National Congress. One significant point of difference the new party had with the Nepali National Congress, particularly at this stage, was its emphasis on armed struggle as the only means of getting the Rana regime liquidated. Of course this was not loudly proclaimed, but the leadership of the Democratic Congress, particularly Subarna Shumsher, started making efforts toward that end from the outset.

In the context of the situation then prevailing, top priority was given to the problem of unity in the opposition ranks. It was generally agreed that the achievement of unity would clear the decks for the resolution of the other two related issues namely, organization and resources. The Nepali National Congress initiated the move for unity, in which it was splendidly assisted by the socialist leaders, particularly Lohia whose support to Bisweswar was unreserved.

In so far as this was concerned, the Nepali National

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<sup>18</sup> D. R. Regmi had been one of the founder members of the Nepali National Congress. During Bisweswar Prasad's first incarceration in Kathmandu, Regmi was empowered to officiate him as the party's president. Subsequent to Bisweswar Prasad's release, Regmi was ordered to hand over charge to him. This he refused. And more. He usurped the party's name and continued to function in his own sectarian way.

<sup>19</sup> Surya Prasad Upadhya, one-time Inspector of Schools under the Nepalese Government, was cashiered from his job for his participation in India's freedom struggle and imprisoned.

Congress did not have to plough a lonely furrow. Its moves were reciprocated before long by Subarna Shumsher, the Nepali Democratic Congress' *de facto* leader. The need for united effort for the overthrow of the Rana regime was not lost sight of, particularly at this point. In the negotiations that followed, Bisweswar Prasad and Subarna Shumsher were appointed spokesmen respectively of the Nepali National Congress and Nepali Democratic Congress. What differences cropped up had little relation to policies and principles, the two parties having almost identical attitudes to most issues of importance including that of the rejection of non-violence. Such differences as they had were entirely of a personal nature that quite often vitiated the atmosphere, resulting in suspicion and mistrust.

Some men, Surya Prasad and Mahendra Bikram in particular, did all they could to wreck the merger talks. This was evident when these men stood against the largely supported proposal for appointing Bisweswar Prasad president of the united party. When the talks had almost reached the conclusive stage, Surya Prasad and Mahendra Bikram so engineered that a compromise choice regarding the presidency was rendered imperative, much though Subarna Shumsher disapproved of it. In spite of the majority's choice, Bisweswar Prasad, the proposal was to appoint Matrika Prasad<sup>20</sup> president of the united party. This eased the situation and the two parties merged to form the Nepali Congress in March, 1950. Matrika Prasad was duly elected president of the party, while Mahendra Bikram and Subarna Shumsher were appointed general secretary and treasurer respectively. The policy statement of the new party was explicit on (a) fundamental rights ; (b) democratic system of government ; (c) economics of welfare ; (d) immediate intensification of the struggle.

Although the unseemly wrangling over the question of

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<sup>20</sup> A half-brother of Bisweswar Prasad, Matrika Prasad Koirala was employed in the forest department of the Nepalese Government at the time of the formation of the Nepali National Congress in 1946.

the selection of the new party's president left a bitter taste in the mouth, the merger of the two parties was widely acclaimed. To those that were in the know of things, this was an evident indication that cunning men with not-too-clean motives had had a field day. Indeed this was an act of indiscretion. More important, in this was sown the dragon's seed, the bitter harvest of which Nepal was destined to gather in the post-1950 revolution days. But those men that were responsible for this had their conscience stifled and judgment warped by self-interest. And they could not care less.

Efforts to persuade Regmi to join the united party proved futile, however. The heavens might fall and the earth split, Regmi was determined to keep the fire of schism smouldering. Despite the ego-centric Regmi and the incipient Communist Party,<sup>21</sup> the Nepali Congress took immediate steps to revitalize the organization and to prepare for the coming struggle. Bisweswar Prasad was entrusted with the task of shaping the party's "political wing", and Subarna Shumsher the "action wing". It was obvious for the world to see that these men did not believe in half-measures when it came to the question of putting an end to feudalism.

But the Ranas of Nepal thought otherwise. Like the Bourbons, they were determined "to learn nothing and to forget nothing." In the fading twilight of the glory that once was theirs, the Ranas were unable to see the lengthening shadows of the coming events. The tallest among them, Mohan Shumsher, who could yet save the situation just would not. For his petrified gaze was fixed toward the

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<sup>21</sup> In the autumn of 1949 a handful of Nepalese communists met in India, under the patronage of the Indian Communist Party, to form the Nepali Communist Party. Monmohan Adhikary (a relation of Bisweswar Prasad), who had earlier been a member of the Nepali National Congress, was appointed secretary of the Party. From its very inception the Nepali Communist Party was opposed to the democratic nationalist forces, the reasons for which will be discussed later.

distant past when most men were born to slave and to die for the few. Sphinx-like, he stood resolute watch over the offals his ancestors had left behind. And he refused to listen to the voice of history. Here he was not alone. He only tried to emulate his illustrious predecessors who, mightier and more remorseless, had so often in the past set their face against the lessons of history. In terms of what endures and what is not transient, this was indeed poor company. But Mohan Shumsher could not care less. To him the moment as flux, and not eternity, was all that mattered, for he was determined to live for the moment of feudal privileges.

To return to the point. The talks between the two Governments of India and Nepal continued in a desultory manner, the Ranas showing little inclination to pay heed to Delhi's entreaty for constitutional reforms. Once again Mohan Shumsher sent his emissaries, Bijoy Shumsher and N. M. Dixit, to Delhi in April, 1950, "for further talks on the terms of the proposed treaty. The Government of India returned to the subject of the liberalization of the regime... The progress on the treaty was also slow. By the time the treaty was signed on 30 July, 1950, Indo-Nepalese relations had come under cloud."<sup>22</sup> This was largely because of Mohan Shumsher's morbid determination not to consider even Delhi's very moderate suggestions for the solution of Nepal's internal political problem. There was little that the Indian Government could do short of precipitating a crisis. This was ruled out at this point.

That the Indian Government did not consider it proper to take more positive measures was resented very much both by the Nepali Congress and the Indian socialists. The latter were emphatic in their demand for immediate, positive action and they accused Delhi of passivity. As Lohia, Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee of the Socialist Party, observed in his report to the Party's eighth national conference held in Madras in July, 1950: "Tyranny of a

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<sup>22</sup> Girilal Jain, *India Meets China in Nepal*, pp. 17-18.

small clique in Nepal has caused a vacuum and, unless its people are actively helped to self-rule, Atlantic or Soviet Power would inevitably rush in. The Socialist Party has striven to help the people of Nepal to fill up the vacuum with their own power of a self-rule movement. The Indian Government must give up its policy of doing nothing until the milk is split and then of crying over it."<sup>23</sup>

Nepal's internal situation continued to drift dangerously. Each passing day would see a new dimension added to the already complicated picture, defiance of Rana despotism by increasing acts of sabotage and destruction the long arm of the Nepali Congress helped to organize. In the encounters between the Government and the Nepali Congress, the odds against the former were heavy. Being cooped up in the valley—the absence of modern means of communications made it inevitable—the Government was hardly able to put up any effective show of strength when and where necessary.

More disadvantageous was the Government's position all along the Indo-Nepalese border. Here the Ranas perforce had to act from a position of weakness, while just opposite was the case for the Nepali Congress. The Ranas suffered from an unavoidable handicap, for they had a limited force at their disposal—any effective deployment of even this was rendered difficult by the absence of communication—and a 500-mile-long open frontier to guard. While the Nepali Congress operating from its string of bases in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—this evidently was possible because of the Indian Government's tolerant attitude—could adopt the tactics of hit and run, causing widespread trouble in this region. Presumably, even if the Ranas could mobilize an adequate force, the Indian Government would stand between them and the Nepali Congress. To this the Ranas had no answer, other than that of turning their violence inward upon the defenceless Nepalese.

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<sup>23</sup> Rammonohar Lohia's *Report to the eighth national conference of the Socialist Party*, Madras, July, 1950, p. 22.

The situation worsened rapidly. This prompted the Nepali Congress to overcome whatever initial hesitancy it might have had regarding immediate recourse to the technique of violent mass action. Arguments against and objections to this were quietened by the forceful advocacy of the case both by Bisweswar Prasad and Subarna Shumsher. Of course they were not unaware of the complicated nature of the business which was rendered all the more difficult because they were forced to function from bases outside Nepal. Nor could they afford to overlook the fast changing political situation in Asia.

What was of basic concern to the Nepali Congress was the attitude of the Indian Government to the question of armed struggle. It was readily admitted that unless the Indian Government could be persuaded to support it, failing which to adopt an attitude of benevolent neutrality at least, any thinking along this line would be of little consequence. From their limited contact with the Indian Government, the Nepalese leaders were convinced that its attitude in the matter was a queer amalgam of, alternately, reservation, sympathy and suspicion. The Government of India still stuck to its "middle way" policy which aimed at a compromise, initiating a process of democratization. As such, any precipitation of the course of events by an appeal to force on a mass scale was ruled out.

Some influential members of the Indian Government were known to be favourably disposed toward the issue, particularly in view of the growing recklessness of Mohan Shumsher and the increasing manifestations of China's aggressiveness regarding Tibet. Even so, the Indian Government's attitude got clouded at times because of the very close association the Nepali Congress had with the Indian socialists. The very nature of it was such as made Delhi suspicious, more so when the question of armed struggle was mooted. Should an armed struggle engineered by the Nepali Congress in collaboration with the Socialist Party succeed in liquidating the Rana regime—Delhi's probable line of reasoning ran somewhat like this—the resultant

situation would not be quite comfortable for it. Also, the Indian Government's foreign policy of non-alignment and its emphasis on peaceful methods in the settlement of all international political issues made it sensitive, at this stage at any rate, about any direct involvement in Nepal's internal problem. It was apprehensive that, in the event of any direct aid being rendered to the Nepali Congress, it would find itself accused of interference in the domestic affairs of an independent State and even perhaps of territorial ambition.

There were other related, and no less important, issues regarding the question of armed struggle. In order of priority these could be stated as (a) sources of supply of arms; (b) recruitment and training of volunteers; (c) setting up of operational bases inside and outside Nepal. No doubt these issues were far from easy the solution of which was certainly beyond the competence of the Nepali Congress alone. The Nepalese leaders discussed the matter among themselves and agreed that efforts should be made, on the one hand, to persuade Delhi to adopt a sympathetic attitude, permitting them the liberty of unhampered functioning. The Socialist Party should, on the other, be approached to render all possible help. The Socialist Party, it may be recalled, had already expressed its support of the proposed change of policy and was determined to participate in the task of mobilizing all forces for the final showdown with the Ranas.

While cautious feelers were thrown to gauge Delhi's reaction, the Nepalese leaders, particularly Bisweswar Prasad, discussed the whole matter with Lohia and Jayaprakash. Bisweswar made it clear to them that, objective conditions being what they were, Nepal's problem could not be solved without armed struggle. He also did not minimize the magnitude of the task of planning and organizing it. It should be squarely stated here that Lohia's or for that matter Jayaprakash's objection to the use of violence was overcome only when they were confronted

with the choice between passivity and doing nothing and an armed struggle.

The Nepalese were assured of all cooperation by the socialist leaders. The general idea was that the Party units in the three border States of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh would be particularly activated and instructed to cooperate with the Nepali Congress in these regions. The need for a drive for the required ideological orientation of the Nepali Congress was also agreed upon. Arms were necessary for waging the struggle for democracy, no doubt. But ideological clarity in the ranks of the party was just as necessary. The consensus of opinion was that the Nepali Congress, in leading the masses to struggle, must be capable of providing a unified and ideologically oriented leadership rooted in the twin principles of democracy and an egalitarian economic order.

About the search for arms, Lohia suggested to Bisweswar Prasad that, to begin with, efforts should be made to collect such arms as were available locally. For a number of reasons such as the second world war and the Muslim League-engineered civil war in support of its claim for Pakistan, there were quantities of clandestine arms in the possession of people in various parts of the country, particularly Assam and West Bengal. Lohia also suggested that a few selected socialists including the present writer should be contacted in this connection. The idea was that these socialists should not only help in the collection of arms, but also should be actively associated in the task of building up the organization for the armed struggle. He suggested the names of such persons as had been active participants either in the '42 struggle or in the Socialist Party-sponsored armed resistance movement, prior to the Indian Government's "police action" in Hyderabad against the "Razakars", the strong arm of the Nizam.

Henceforth a streak of personal element—much though I should like to avoid it—will enter into the course of this narrative. This is embarrassing, to be sure. Still for the



sake of the truth this cannot be avoided. Let us, therefore, put up with it for what it is worth. One more point. In spite of my personal involvement in the armed struggle, no pains have been spared to maintain objectivity—as objectivity is understood in the historical sense—in the present narrative. The facts of history, however, being quite distinct from the facts of the natural sciences, objectivity here is not necessarily coterminous with what it would signify in the field of study in any of the natural sciences.

I was at that time getting ready to start for Madras to attend the eighth national conference of the Socialist Party there. All of a sudden I received a telegram from Bisweswar Prasad, saying that I should next day, probably 2 July, 1950, meet him in Calcutta where he was due then. I saw him at the house of the late Phulan Prasad Varma<sup>24</sup> at Alipore with whom Bisweswar Prasad was staying.

A matter of fact exchange of courtesies over, he straightway got to a discussion of our programme of work. He said that the Nepali Congress was convinced that the Rana regime could be effectively put an end to only by a popular uprising. Mohan Shumsher's Government understood no language other than that of bullets and bayonets. In these circumstances, the people will have to change their tactics and they should adopt the same means as their opponents'. But the problem was how to obtain the necessary arms and to organize and equip volunteers for the ensuing fight. These were the immediate problems which faced the Nepali Congress. Bisweswar then turned to me and asked me pointedly whether I could join the Nepalese struggle for democracy.

Not prepared to commit myself to a hasty decision, I

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<sup>24</sup> One of the founder-members of the Socialist Party, Phulan Prasad Varma had been a socialist member of India's first Constituent Assembly convened to draft free India's Constitution. Subsequently, at the suggestion of the Party, he resigned and joined the Damodar Valley Corporation as a member of its Board.

gave him an assurance that I would carefully think over the matter and let him know my decision next day.

With much hesitation I met him on the appointed day. A number of questions had forced themselves into my mind: How could we collect arms. What about the organization? Even if arms were available how were these to be reached to the insurrectionists? Further, it was not possible to organize and equip secretly a force that would fight with the army of the State. There was also the very difficult problem of raising funds for the struggle. I turned to Bisweswar for the resolution of my doubts.

What he said in answer was this: if it was looked at from the point of view of difficulties, the entire scheme would appear impossible of accomplishment. The Nepali Congress was fully conscious of these difficulties, and with the full awareness of the situation it had decided to embark upon the struggle. The obstacles that lay in the path would have to be overcome, come what might. Nothing much was there to worry about funds, for Subarna Shumbsher had promised to look after that. However, the appeal of the freedom-fighters of Nepal would have to be reached to whoever did not conceive of humanity, freedom and democracy merely in the abstract. He was sure that arms would, somehow or other, come to them.

After some further discussions, it was settled that I should go to Madras to attend the Socialist Party conference. This was necessary for a number of reasons: first, I should meet Jayaprakash there with whom I was required to have a detailed discussion on the subject. Secondly, if Jayaprakash agreed, I should proceed to Hyderabad.

This visit to Hyderabad was rather important. In 1948 considerable quantities of arms had been supplied to the socialists in their fight against the armed mercenaries of the Nizam. I had participated in that struggle, the principal architects of which were Lohia, Jayaprakash, Mahadev Singh and Aruna Asaf Ali. The plan was to recover these

arms for the struggle in Nepal. It was decided that, immediately after the completion of this task, I should get back to Calcutta and then proceed with Bisweswar Prasad to the Indo-Nepal frontier adjacent to Biratnagar. This area was selected for our visit because the Nepali Congress had its most organized unit with a sizable mass base in Biratnagar. Besides, at this stage, the idea was that this area should be made into the main operational base for the struggle.

That indeed was a difficult July day when I reached Madras. For the first two days of the conference I could not meet Jayaprakash. On the third day I had a meeting with him. Sitting at a corner of the conference pandal I apprised him about my mission. With his accustomed patience he listened to my report and gave necessary instructions to Kabra, a party member from Hyderabad.

On 11 July, a day before the conference was over, we set out for Hyderabad. Our search for arms in the towns and villages of Hyderabad did not yield any satisfactory result. Nor could we obtain any clue to the arms reached to the people who had participated in the resistance movement. However, with the very few pieces of arms that could be collected in Hyderabad, I returned to Calcutta toward the end of July. This indeed was sufficient cause for despair, and Bisweswar made no secret of it. The disappointment was only heightened by the failure of Subarna Shumsher to procure anything more than a few odd pieces of arms from various parts of India. And Surya Prasad just could not collect anything in spite of having had spent a considerable amount of money. Whatever it might be, I accompanied Bisweswar, in the beginning of August, to Jogbani, the last railhead on this side of the Indo-Nepal border in Bihar, separating Biratnagar by a distance of about six miles.

Next day we reached Jogbani late in the afternoon. Reality harshly looked us in the face when Girija escorted us to a two-storey tin-roofed brick house, the makeshift headquarters of the Nepali Congress. Here I

met the Nepali Congress president, Matrika Prasad, had a brief discussion with him, and it was decided that I should go to Biratnagar next day with Tarini. The idea was that I should meet prominent members of the Nepali Congress, inspect the arms that had already been collected and make a first-hand acquaintance with the general situation. Neither Matrika Prasad nor Bisweswar could come with us, for their entrance into Nepal was forbidden.

An unmetalled, dusty, narrow road connected Joghani with Biratnagar. Vehicular traffic on this road was conspicuous by its absence, save for what carried trade and commerce between the two towns. I procured a horse and set out, with Tarini, for Biratnagar. The kutchha, winding road, zig-zagging sometimes along paddy fields, sometimes skirting a jute mill or a sugar factory, terminated at the market place of Biratnagar. We reached the town quite late in the afternoon.

What I saw at Biratnagar was not at all reassuring. True, there were men—and a considerable number of them—determined to do what men elsewhere could do in a similar situation. Most of these men, particularly Shivari, Shiva Jung Rana, Tarini, Girija and Biswabandhu Thapa<sup>25</sup> appeared to be made of the mettle that could withstand hard beating. That was about all. Their mind was not at all clear as to the nature of the task they were expected to perform. There was not much clarity either regarding the form of the struggle, particularly in the context of the prevailing situation in Nepal. In the discussions that followed, I could clearly see that the line separating terrorism and mass insurrection faded out in a mess of hazy notions.

The arms that had been procured were a poor sight, a few automatic pistols, about 3 or 4 revolvers, half a dozen sten guns and Lee Enfield rifles. Although there was no

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<sup>25</sup> Biswabandhu Thapa was destined to rise high in the hierarchy of the Nepali Congress' leadership, only to desert the party at the time of the worst crisis in its career in 1960.

lack of volunteers, they had but little acquaintance with weapons. One saving grace was there, however. The Biratnagar unit of the Nepali Congress had been able to recruit some of those Nepalese who had served in the police and armed forces under the British in India. No doubt these men would be quite useful, provided they could be put through a process of political indoctrination.

Bisweswar was acquainted with a detailed report on the situation at Biratnagar. The Nepali Congress surely had a nucleus of the necessary human material; but that was only one factor—very important though—in the overall scheme of things. Serious thoughts would have to be given to recruitment, training, procurement of military hardware and, above all, to an integrated plan of action, covering all the contemplated strike-points along the entire stretch of the Indo-Nepal frontier. At the same time, considering the conditions of irregular warfare, any attempt at highly comprehensive planning as in regular warfare should be avoided. It was time the Nepali Congress realized that its requirements of arms could not be met in India, unless, of course, the Indian Government stepped in. The only alternative, therefore, was to look for arms elsewhere, outside the bounds of India.

Both Matrika Prasad and Bisweswar agreed on all points, one reservation apart. They admitted the necessity for searching for arms abroad, but the matter, they said, was very delicate and that no decision could be taken without consulting the other leaders of the Nepali Congress, particularly Subarna Shumsher. The party's "action-wing" was his charge, hence the final say in the matter ought to be his. That settled everything. Now it was necessary that we should hurry back to Calcutta and decide, in consultation with Subarna Shumsher, the future course of action.

Delhi had been contacted in the meantime for a clarification of its attitude toward the proposed change of policy. At first, it was in no mood to give any serious thought to it. Negotiations through various channels were still going

on between the Indian Government and Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher, and Delhi still believed that a compromise solution of the problem would be possible if the Nepali Congress continued to maintain sufficient pressure through non-violent mass action. Such actions as might result in a sudden radical change in Nepal's situation were not to be permitted—this decision the Indian Government was determined to adhere to. No small was its sympathy for the welfare of the Nepalese, but a little more was its concern for the basic requirements of its foreign policy. Hence the question of its identification with armed insurrection in Nepal was ruled out.

This was an exasperating situation, yet the Nepalese leaders did not give up trying. Nor could they afford to. Reality was more harsh than what the most runaway imagination could conceive. In this case the Nepalese leaders were not found wanting to look reality in the face. They knew perfectly well that the situation being what it was, they just could not proceed with their daringly ambitious plan without the concurrence of Delhi. Therefore, no matter how despairing the position might appear, they must continue with their effort to change it to their advantage.

And the Nepalese leaders finally succeeded. It was a partial success of course. Their case was cogent and without any sophistication: the Nepali Congress was at the end of its tether, and it just could no longer carry on with non-violent mass movement. Unless Delhi agreed, it was apprehended, the movement might degenerate into a stalemate. In that eventuality the Ranas would get a breathing-space to reassert their weakening authority and to rally their forces. This could be prevented only if Delhi so desired.

There was a thaw. The thaw gradually melted into Delhi's qualified support of the Nepali Congress' proposal. It was permitted to proceed with its programme of action on conditions that, first, Delhi under no circumstances would be actively associated with this. Secondly, the

scope and nature of the struggle must be well defined and restricted. That is, the Congress should create such pressure as would soften up the Ranas to the extent that they would be forced to accept Delhi's terms of agreement. Thirdly, it would be allowed to go about preparing for the struggle so long as—and Delhi was adamant on this point—it did not compromise Delhi's position.

This was a subtle hint to the effect that the Nepali Congress would have to fend for itself, within the stipulated limits, insofar as the procurement of arms and other allied activities were concerned, and that Delhi would maintain an attitude of indifference toward this. Although this fell far short of the Nepali Congress' demand, it was an improvement on what had so long been Delhi's policy.<sup>20</sup> Assured that their activities henceforth would not incur Delhi's hostility, the Nepalese leaders addressed themselves to the task in right earnestness.

The question may arise here as to the evidence in support of the Indian Government's Nepal policy. The fact that documentary substantiation of the Indian Government's Nepal policy would not be possible at every stage might even lead to doubting the validity of much that has earlier been stated. For an answer I should suggest recourse to what is known as the inductive process in logic. A critical study of the sequence of events leading to the final resolution of the Nepalese crisis should leave little doubt about the correctness of our reading of the Indian Government's Nepal policy during this period. As we proceed with this narrative—many important events of which would be substantiated by recorded evidence—we will find it not very difficult to sustain what has

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<sup>20</sup> This apart, some influential policy-makers of the ruling party, for instance, Union Cabinet Minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, made it clear to the Nepalese leaders that they would have their fullest cooperation. Incidentally, Rafi Ahmed's relations with some of the Nepalese leaders, Subarna Shumsher in particular, had all along been very close. Also, Rafi Ahmed acted as the most trusted spokesman of the Nepali Congress in Delhi.

already been said about the Indian Government's Nepal policy.

A word on the character and composition of the Nepali Congress leadership. For this would facilitate appreciation of the policies and actions which shaped to a large extent the course of Nepal's history at this crucial stage. The hard core of the leadership, if the Nepali Congress were a triangle this would be its apex, comprised three men, the two brothers, Matrika and Bisweswar, and Subarna Shumsher. In all vital matters these three men together could take a decision, if necessary, without prior consultation with any or all of the other important leaders of the party. Of the three, Bisweswar alone could be credited with faith in socialism; the rest were more concerned about the immediate objective, a democratic system of government in Nepal.

Bisweswar was the chief contact between the Nepali Congress and Socialist Party. Relations with Delhi used to be maintained by both Bisweswar and Subarna Shumsher, the latter particularly enjoyed Rafi Ahmed's confidence. Although Matrika had been the party's president, his voice in these matters perhaps was the faintest. The party finances had largely been Subarna Shumsher's responsibility, with Mahabir Shumsher making up the rest. Also, it was mostly Subarna Shumsher's responsibility to maintain clandestine contact with King Tribhuvan.

Others who were considered as front rank leaders included Surya Prasad, Mahabir Shumsher, Krishna Prasad and Mahendra Bikram. These men functioned more in an associate capacity and constituted what may be conveniently called the outer circle of the leadership. Besides, with a wide gap in between, there were the regional and local leaders who formed the base of the triangle. It was their task to maintain direct, day-to-day contact with the people. The leadership as it was constituted was narrow at the top and broad at the base. Inevitably this disproportionate structure of leadership resulted in an unhealthy centralization of power which, in turn, triggered



off a chain reaction of unconcealed animosity and sullenness. More, the predominance of the Koiralas in the party, albeit none their fault, for most of the Koirala brothers and sisters worked their way to whatever positions of power they held, only added fuel to the flames. From this the path to factionalism was but very short, it just could not be otherwise.

To return to the point. Subarna Shumsher was apprised of the situation in Biratnagar. Reports were then exchanged about the progress in the procurement of arms. What came out was that little progress had been made in that direction. Subarna Shumsher had been told of a few sources but the cost at which arms could be had from these, the price asked for sten guns being Rs. 3000/- a piece, was just prohibitive. Indeed the situation appeared bleak, a bit unnerving, too.

It is in this setting that Bisweswar placed my proposal for securing arms from abroad. The immediate reaction was unfavourable. Any attempt to procure arms from outside India would, it was held, only involve further heavy expenditure and fetch no arms. That was not all. The Indian Government would not tolerate any such move—it had made its position amply clear. Any effort in this direction might also result in serious international complications. Even if this obstacle could be cleared, the most difficult question of source would remain. What country would be willing, notwithstanding the risks involved, to oblige the Nepali Congress.

Surely there was solid reason in the arguments. These just could not be dismissed out of hand. But reason, as we all know, does not govern man's thoughts and actions at every point. Had man's history always moved along the highways of reason, it might have taken an entirely different turn. Therefore, however unreasonable the proposal might appear first, it would have to be given a serious consideration. Otherwise what chance did the Nepali Congress stand to get things done the orthodox way.

I suggested that Burma could be the country whence

arms might be had. For Burma had a socialist Government and it could be approached rather easily. Both Jayaprakash and Lohia should be consulted, and, if they agreed, I could proceed to Burma on a mission of exploration. Also, there was no need to send any feeler to Delhi until the proposal took a concrete shape. It was agreed that Bisweswar should meet Jayaprakash and, in consultation with him, settle the future course of action. I was required to apprise Lohia of this and get him to do the needful.

As was to be expected, not many words were necessary to convince the socialist leaders. Certain preliminary discussions over, Jayaprakash and Lohia agreed to request the Burma Socialist Party for a favourable consideration of the proposal. Their letters to the Burmese socialist leaders, for obvious reasons, would not contain any concrete proposal. This I was expected to explain. They also properly briefed me for the occasion, particularly because Burma then was passing through a rather trying time.

Jayaprakash wrote a brief letter to U Ba Swe, chairman of the Burma Socialist Party and Defence Minister, introducing me and saying that the nature of the mission would be explained on the spot. Lohia's letter was addressed to U Win, Religious Affairs Minister, and the message was more or less identical. Before the journey could be undertaken, some necessary business had to be attended to. This was settled in consultation with Bisweswar and Subarna Shumsher. It was decided that, in the event of the Burma Socialist Party agreeing to help us, matters concerning the mode of transport and place of delivery of arms should be left at its discretion. The Nepalese leaders would make discreet attempt to gauge Delhi's reaction toward this, without confiding anything in particular.

Now started a not too long journey full of hopes and fears. My passport was ready and, therefore, did not call for further trouble. Armed with the two letters and

accompanied by Thirbhom Malla<sup>27</sup>, I arrived in Rangoon on 10 August, 1950. There was no difficulty in getting accommodation at Strand Hotel, where both of us put up. What proved difficult was the business of establishing contact with the Burma Socialist Party. A whole afternoon was spent in the attempt and nothing materialized. Only after persistent efforts I was able to get in touch with Chit Maung<sup>28</sup> in the evening—Ba Swe just could not be contacted yet. Introducing myself, I referred to the letters of Jayaprakash and Lohia and said that I wanted to meet Ba Swe. This, he said, would not be possible at the moment. Instead he would convey my message to him and, if necessary, would see me next morning at the hotel.

Around 8 in the morning of 11 August, Chit Maung came to the hotel. Formal introduction over, we got down straight to the subject and made a clean breast of everything. We also told him that we were pressed for time. Therefore, it would be much appreciated if an immediate meeting with Ba Swe could be arranged. He promised, saying that he would come round in the evening and take us to Ba Swe. Before he left, as an incidental precaution, a suitable alibi was worked out. It was agreed that we should be formally introduced to Party members as a two-man delegation from the Indian Socialist Party on a study tour.

As scheduled, we met Ba Swe around 6 in the evening. He was not alone. Others including U Kyaw Nyein<sup>29</sup> were also present. A series of questions regarding the exact

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<sup>27</sup> A nephew of Subarna Shumsher, Thirbhom Malla was a successful cadet of the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun.

<sup>28</sup> A prominent leader of the Burma Socialist Party, Chit Maung was its deputy general secretary. Subsequently, on the issue of the Party's China policy, he resigned and organized a united front of militant socialists, the major policy emphasis of which was on closer collaboration with China. During the present and subsequent visits Chit Maung acted as the chief contact man.

<sup>29</sup> One of Burma's top socialist theoreticians, Kyaw Nyein was a member of the Cabinet and secretary-general of the Party.

nature of the help required as well as detailed information about the policy and programme of the Nepali Congress were asked. They naturally wanted to know all about the character of the Rana regime, for little information on this was available in Burma. Ba Swe was also concerned about the Indian Government's policy. The businesslike conference was over in a couple of hours and we were told that their decision would be communicated to us in due course.

Chit Maung had, as a cover, drawn up quite an impressive programme for us.<sup>30</sup> Meetings, seminars and receptions were arranged, and these kept us considerably busy for a few days. A splendid opportunity was thus offered to us to acquaint ourselves with the manifold activities of the Party and to get an idea about the way the Burmese socialists faced the many problems that plagued their country. However, having been guests at numerous teas, luncheons and dinners we thought we should at least for a change entertain our friends. We requested Chit Maung to invite on our behalf Ba Swe, Kyaw Nyein, U Hla Aung, Ko Ko Gyi, Lu Aye<sup>31</sup> and a few others to dinner. After consultation with our friends both Chit Maung and Lu Aye informed us that the dinner proposal should be dropped<sup>32</sup>. For they wanted to avoid unnecessary publicity that the acceptance of the dinner invitation would certainly have caused.

While minutes ticked into hours and hours rolled into days our anxiety increased. Chit Maung was still unable to convey us any positive information about the crucial "decision". Malla left for Calcutta as he had other business to attend to. I was required to wait alone. Doubtless

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<sup>30</sup> See "Appendix" A for a photostat copy of Chit Maung's note in this connexion.

<sup>31</sup> Lu Aye was secretary of the Socialist Party's Rangoon District Committee.

<sup>32</sup> See "Appendix" B for photostat copies of the letters Chit Maung and Lu Aye wrote requesting cancellation of the dinner proposal.

this indefinite waiting was exasperating, but it just could not be helped. For the nature of the job was such as ruled out any expeditious decision—this I realized. The delay caused anxiety—and not unmerited—elsewhere, too; and Subarna Shumsher expressed it in a telegram<sup>33</sup>.

The period of waiting at long last was over. In the morning of 18 August, Chit Maung came to the hotel with the message so anxiously awaited. The Socialist Party of Burma had decided to help the Nepali Congress. The request for arms would be met. It should be possible to supply some bren guns and the requisite number of sten guns, but everything depended on a particular officer in the army. The decision was that this officer should settle the details of the arms aid programme. But it was not possible for them to arrange for the transport of arms to Nepal, Chit Maung said. This would have to be settled by the Nepali Congress. I should, therefore, return to India to get the necessary arrangements made.

Burma's decision to aid Nepal was significant for a number of reasons. This was a daring decision, in fact, revolutionary. To the European this may sound a trifle trite, for he is not quite unacquainted with such things. Ever since the storming of Bastille when the message of liberty, fraternity and equality was given a positive content, the West has not been found wanting in giving, albeit within the confines of its own culture pattern, succour to man, tyrannized and in bondage. Byron went to Greece, Hemingway to Spain.

But free Asia's, this perhaps was the first instance, except what help India offered to Indonesia's freedom-fighters, when one free nation resolved to reach help to another struggling for the basic rights of man. Enslaved Asia had not the courage to allow even the imagination to conceive of such a thing happening. Neither had it the means. When tiny Burma took the man-size decision to render help

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<sup>33</sup> See "Appendix" C for a photostat copy of this telegram.

to Nepal, it only signified Asia's coming of age. More, it marked Asia's hour of idealism.

Consider for a moment the Burmese political scene in 1950. After successive struggles against British imperialism and Japanese fascism, Burma wrested freedom from the British only in 1948. The nationalist movement of the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League<sup>34</sup> (A F P F L) which had successfully waged the struggle for freedom formed Burma's first free Government under the able leadership of Aung Sang, one of Asia's boldest and most adroit national leaders. But Burma's fascist thugs were in no mood to face reality in the changed context of things. They cried murder. Not long afterwards, Aung Sang and a few of his top associates were murdered. Then it seemed Burma would be forced into the labyrinthine channels of a full-fledged civil war.

The situation was saved, and saved so courageously by the socialists. Led by Ba Swe, the socialists stepped in, formed the Government with U Nu, an A F P F L member with liberal views, as Prime Minister. Here was a group of young men—most of them were in their 30s and 40s—who had been schooled in the exacting climate of wars and revolutions. With confidence and determination they set about the task, and a modest programme of socialist reconstruction of Burmese society was launched. To see this programme through, it was absolutely necessary that they should be granted a reasonable period of respite, if you like, of reprieve.

But that was not to be. For international communism had decided otherwise. Toward the end of 1947 a shift took place in Russian policy and consequently in world alignments of communism. At the "South-East Asian Youth

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<sup>34</sup> The AFPFL had been, during the freedom struggle days, a united front of all progressive nationalist forces including, curiously enough, the communists. The communists, however, left the organization at independence. The ideological basis of the post-independence AFPFL was built by the socialists, who also were its numerically major constituents.

Conference”, which, in fact, was an important assembly of communist policy-makers, including men from Russia, details of communist policy as applicable to Asian countries were thrashed out. “At this conference it was laid down that the Communist parties should initiate and lead violent insurrections and civil wars in the South and South-East Asiatic countries.”<sup>35</sup>

Not long afterwards Burma became a victim of this evil scheme of politics. Desultory in nature at the beginning, the communist inspired insurrection gradually gathered momentum, creating a dangerous situation for the nascent socialist Government. To make matters worse, a secessionist uprising of a section of the Karens took place about this time. And the Cassandras prophesied that Burma would disintegrate in no time. This it did not, for the socialists just would not let it happen.

Consider, then, the nature of the decision with all the complications inherent in it. The fact that this was not the act of a group of individuals without any immediate responsibility to conform to the exacting norms of political conduct in the sphere of international relations made it audacious indeed. A party in power resolved, particularly at a point when things had gone completely out of shape in its own country, that the struggling people in a far-away foreign land should be helped with clandestine arms. Suppose if anything went wrong at any point, the consequence for Burma would inevitably be very serious, both at the national and international levels. Still the Burmese socialists decided to help, not with platitudinous advice, though.

Altruism surely had not been the motive behind the decision, nor the do-gooder’s spirit. What inspired the decision was the strength of idealism that, despite the many vicissitudes, had not been lost to the Socialist Party of Burma. To the Burmese socialists the existing feudal-colonial nature of Asian society was as tyrannous, therefore

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<sup>35</sup> M. R. Masani, *Communist Party of India : Short History*, 1954, p. 90.

to be fought, as the growing menace of Chinese communism. As Ba Swe observed on a later occasion : "We must address ourselves to the task of providing the Asian masses with an effective barrier against both capitalism and totalitarian communism."<sup>36</sup> In tune with this, the Burmese socialists took the decision to aid the Nepalese. To help the struggle for democracy in Nepal would in all probability be paving the way for Nepal's entry into the Asian socialist camp against both capitalism and communism.

To get back to the point. On my arrival in Calcutta, I learnt that Bisweswar had left for the Indo-Nepal frontier region near Birganj. I saw Subarna Shumsher and gave him a detailed report on the outcome of the Burma mission. He suggested that I should immediately contact Bisweswar, particularly because of what the Burmese leaders had said regarding the transport of arms. For this it would be necessary to visit the Birganj area as Bisweswar was there for a not-too-short stay.

Bisweswar's presence there was called for as the situation in Birganj was rather complicated. There were special reasons for this. As has been already stated, Nepal's political life, prior to the beginning of the struggle, had been split into two rival groups. The merger of the two groups took place only when the situation had worsened, making the struggle inevitable. Internal organizational troubles persisted which in turn weakened the party organization at several places, Birganj being one of them.

Birganj was the second largest town in Nepal. Also, it had a special military importance: a partly motorable direct road connected it with Kathmandu. Because of this comparatively easy accessibility its defence arrangements had been strengthened by the Ranas. The object of Bisweswar's visit was, first, to clear the decks by resolving whatever troubles were there in the ranks of the party. Second, to assist the local party leader, Tej Bahadur, to get through

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<sup>30</sup> *Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference, Rangoon, 1953, p. 66.*



the necessary organizational preparation for the setting up of a second strike base here.

I met Bisweswar and recapitulated to him the Burma talks. He seemed somewhat disappointed but made up his mind soon on the future course of action: the problem of arms transport would have to be solved in consultation with Subarna Shumsher and Mahabir Shumsher, the latter in particular. He forbade me to mention anything about the Burma mission to the local workers. But he convened a meeting of the local workers in the party office and asked me to say something encouraging to them. This was supposed to act as a morale-booster, so he said.

After prolonged discussions at Subarna Shumsher's Chowringhee apartment, it was decided that a chartered plane should be used to ferry arms from Burma. Surely this plan was full of risks, requiring careful attention to a number of ticklish points, particularly the question of out-witting the Customs officials and the police. But if the Burmese friends could make the necessary arrangements at their end—which, incidentally, they had agreed to—most of the major road-blocks would disappear.

At this end the plane need not land at a regular airport, it could come to any of the less frequently used landing grounds of Bihar. Bihta was one such place, which had a very rarely used landing ground. This place had the added advantage that it did not have either any Customs office or police station. If arms were landed there, these could be despatched to Biratnagar or Birganj by train with little difficulty.

The organization of the whole thing need not prove unduly hazardous. Mahabir Shumsher was the managing director of Himalayan Aviation which ran regular passenger as well as freight services. From this firm a plane could be chartered—this was the generally accepted plan to solve the transport problem.

Regarding the most intriguing aspect of this plan—the Indian Government's attitude—it was settled that Rafi Ahmed should be approached. He should be briefed about

it in a general manner and requested for the issue of the necessary charter permit. Under no circumstances, however, any vital information should be communicated to him. For this might jeopardize the whole thing, leading to very embarrassing complications for Burma.

Mahabir Shumsher was persuaded to agree to procure a chartered plane. It was also confirmed that he would give necessary instructions to Tomsett, the manager of Himalayan Aviation, and that I should see him to work out the details of the plan.

I went to Great Eastern Hotel where Tomsett had been staying. The preliminary introductions over, I explained the purpose of my visit. I learnt that Tomsett had already been briefed about it by Mahabir Shumsher. There was, therefore, not much discussion on the subject. A middle-aged Englishman, Tomsett had the Englishman's admirable restraint over the tongue, without of course being taciturn.

He assured that to send abroad a chartered plane was no problem. But it was necessary to be careful about certain matters. The idea was that the plane should be chartered by Himalayan Aviation for carrying freight from Rangoon to Calcutta. But the official log book there should register that the plane was returning empty. This would ensure that the plane, on its return to Calcutta, would not have to face any Customs troubles.

Another equally important point had to be attended to. It should be taken for granted that Rangoon would inform Calcutta airport about the time of departure of the chartered plane. Should the plane fail to reach Calcutta within about an hour of the due time of arrival, the airport authorities would immediately be on the alert.

The Bihta detour might take more than an hour's time over and above the time required for the flight from Rangoon to Calcutta. It was, of course, possible to cut on the time if the weather was favourable, otherwise there might be trouble. This was an additional risk that ought to be taken note of, Tomsett said. He agreed at the same time to complete as soon as possible necessary arrange-

ments so that the plane could be flown out immediately on receipt of intimation from Burma.

Now that there was promise of substantial aid from Burma, the Nepali Congress felt impelled to reshape its plan of action. The fact that the problem of arms was about to be solved, the previous scheme restricting the scope for action to small-scale engagements required radical alteration. Therefore, the party's immediate programme was to reconstitute its organizational structure, to recast its tactics, and to attend to the task of evolving an integrated plan of action.

The Nepalese leaders were convinced that the organization for the mass uprising must of necessity begin at the beginning. The organizational structure should consist of a well-regulated chain of command, with the requisite number of links to be determined by the number and size of the field units and their geographical spread. More, the establishment of base areas would be necessary as also recruitment and training of volunteers. Another important point would be to straighten out relations with other political groups in the operational areas.

The need for sufficient number of trained volunteers was quite pressing. With the available man-power at its disposal, the Nepali Congress could hardly expect to challenge the Ranas to a final showdown. The leaders had to do some hard thinking before chalking out a workable proposition. For this they grudgingly thanked the erstwhile masters of this sub-continent—the British. The large number of Nepalese ex-members of the British Indian Army and police offered a splendid source of trained man-power, almost inexhaustible, from which the requisite number of recruits could be drawn. The Gurkha had, on numerous occasions, fought for others but always as a mercenary; this time he should do it for himself.

The struggle, however, could not be launched before arms were received from Burma. Also, the preparatory phase of recruitment and training would take some time. But the Nepali Congress could not afford to remain inac-

tive. For inaction would only corrode the morale of the people and tamper with the sense of direction and purpose. So the party must act, it mattered little how or in what form.

The general feeling at this point was that any form of resistance, however restricted it might be, would mark one step forward from no-resistance. With this end in view, it was planned that sabotage, attacks on unguarded or poorly guarded military targets and, should the situation permit, attempts on the lives of the chief architects of the Rana regime should be undertaken.

This plan of action was expected to serve two major purposes : first, each successful execution of such an action would have a demoralizing effect on the supporters of the Government, in general, and the administration, in particular. Also, this would create a psychological state of fear in the top echelon of the Government. Secondly, this would go a long way toward deflating the supposed invincibility of the Government. In order to maximize the effects of this scheme, Kathmandu was chosen as the major field of operation.

The situation in Nepal had by now taken a turn for the worse. The number of political refugees were daily on the increase. Information received from Kathmandu indicated that political prisoners were being subjected to yet harsher treatment. Mohan Shumsher was not unaware of the preparations the Nepali Congress was making, and he took measures to increase the strength of the Nepalese army.

The Indian Government still persisted in its striving to persuade him to come to the conference table. But this he just would not agree to. He did so on the assumption that the Indian Government would not permit any large-scale armed action by the Nepali Congress. Not only that, shrewed as he was, he figured out that the rapid intensification of the cold war situation would also deter the Indian Government from precipitating the issue. With each passing day tension mounted and anxiety increased, but the Nepali Congress was subjected to a period of forced

idleness save for occasional acts of sabotage here and there. There was no news from Burma yet. Bisweswar suggested that I should again go to Burma, for my presence on the spot might help matters. The necessity, after all, was ours. Therefore, we should be prepared for a little waste of time and money.

Immediately after my arrival in Rangoon in the first week of September, I contacted Chit Maung. Somewhat surprised at my sudden arrival, he apologized for not having sent any information. It was deliberately done, he said. They were expecting arrangements for the delivery of arms any day and were awaiting this development. Unfortunately this was not to be and that for a number of reasons.

The army officer entrusted with the task of collecting arms was compelled to be away from Rangoon on some urgent mission, hence the unexpected delay. Even now no definite assurance could be given in the matter, although it was possible that the whole thing might be straightened out any day.

With the arrangements made for the transportation of arms, he expressed his satisfaction. As regards the arrangements at their end, he said he would see to it that the arms consignment got a safe passage through the airport. There was absolutely nothing to worry about that.

A few days were spent in waiting for the news but nothing materialized. Chit Maung informed me that it would take some more time still to finalize their arrangements. As further waiting was not possible, I came back empty-handed.

Subsequently another couple of visits were paid to Rangoon but the same old story of failure was repeated. Hopes nevertheless were not abandoned, at least Chit Maung would not let us.

The Nepali Congress had meanwhile deputed Ganesh Man to enter Kathmandu surreptitiously. He was entrusted with a mission, the purpose of which was (a) to work out a plot aiming at the liquidation of Prime Minister Mohan

Shumsher and a few high-ranking State officials and (b) to execute it.

Not without reason was Ganesh Man given the responsibility to see the plot through. Being a Newar and a native of the Kathmandu valley he enjoyed certain advantages. He knew the valley as intimately as he knew the lines on his own palm. And he enjoyed a considerable amount of support in his own community—incidentally, Newars formed the majority of the valley's population—which could be expected to facilitate his movements in the valley.

In view of the fast deteriorating situation and the fact that it would be a matter of weeks before the struggle could be launched, the Nepalese leaders decided to go in for a more centralized organizational set-up. It was also decided that the party's adoption of the technique of insurrectionary action should be openly declared. These militant postures were deemed necessary for the reasons that, on the one hand, these would leave no doubt about the party's determination to meet the challenge of Mohan Shumsher; and, on the other, these measures were expected to inspire the people's confidence and to arrest the growth of demoralization in the ranks of the party. In September, 1950, the Nepali Congress formally declared its decision to abandon the technique of non-violent mass action. Simultaneously the working committee of the party was dissolved, investing the president, Matrika Prasad, with all executive powers.

This decision was evidently facilitated by Delhi's increasingly accommodating attitude. Not that Delhi had made up its mind that there should be an all-out armed struggle for the establishment of democracy in that Himalayan Kingdom. Far from it. But Mohan Shumsher's intransigence had of late reached such an intolerable extent and the need for a resolution of the crisis had become so pressing, that postures like these with veiled threats were considered necessary. The reasoning was that this might force him to return to the path of sanity, so that the impasse

could be broken. Otherwise Delhi's "middle way" policy might founder on the rocks.

The Devil sick would be a monk and so was Mohan Shumsher. He had recourse to a stratagem, presuming that this would take the wind out of the Nepali Congress' sails. In 1948, as we have already observed, Mohan Shumsher had introduced certain constitutional reforms providing for a partially elected legislature consisting of a Council of Elders and a Lower House. But this was considered utterly inadequate, and consequently rejected, by the Nepali Congress. Now on 22 September Mohan Shumsher formally convened the promised legislature. The Nepali Congress would not have anything to do with it as it did not break any new ground for the party to revise its previous opinion. The Indian Government also made it known that these measures were inadequate, for both Houses consisted largely of officials and exercised little real power.

A series of incidents now occurred and tension reached a new high. Ganesh Man's mission failed because treachery would have it so. The Nepalese Government reacted with the only weapon it had—terror. Ganesh Man and a large number of others were arrested followed by the imposition of a virtual reign of terror. Many of the arrested persons, including Ganesh Man, were summarily sentenced to death. The resultant situation was such wherein the contestants would neither give any quarters nor ask for any. In the deluge of man's destructive passion against man all sense of compassion and reason was swept clear out of the fair valley of Kathmandu. And the menacing shadow of a bloody insurrection kept lengthening over the hearth and home of the humble Nepalese.

Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher officially announced on 29 September, 1950, that an attempted plot, engineered by the Nepali Congress, to murder certain high officials of the State, including himself, had failed. This was followed by the accusation that the Royal family and a number of Ranas were involved in the plot. Although King Tribhuvan's involvement in the plot was not directly mentioned, Mohan Shumsher's statement left little doubt about it.

The fact of the matter, however, was that Subarna Shumsher had maintained clandestine contact with the King all along. Aside from this, Ganesh Man had been instructed to maintain contact with the King. The King also had been informed in advance about the plot.

The failure of Ganesh Man's mission, Burma's continued silence, Delhi's negative attitude regarding arms aid—all combined to create a stalemate. This worried the Nepali Congress as much as the King whose position was fast becoming untenable. King Tribhuvan's sympathy for the anti-Rana camp had been no secret all these years, but the latest development was meaningful for a number of reasons. Mohan Shumsher's almost open accusation of his complicity in the plot indicated that, henceforth, he would have to face the increasing wrath of the Prime Minister. The dominant idea was that, to cut the Gordian knot, the Nepali Congress must act and act quickly. But it did not have the wherewithal to act. True, some arms had been collected locally, a measure of training was being imparted to the volunteers and certain other necessary details attended to. But these were far from sufficient for any formal engagement with the enemy.

Biratnagar's atmosphere was, however, surcharged with an insistent demand for an immediate showdown with the Ranas. Friends there were of opinion that further delay was out of the question. In such a context, some time in the first week of October, the situation came up for discussion with Bisweswar at the office of the Nepali Congress at Jogbani. Many others were present at the meeting. Even Bisweswar found it rather difficult to drive the point home to them that, the conditions being what they were, they would perforce have to put up with the situation for some more time. Help from Burma did not figure in the talks, however.

Our stay at Biratnagar had to be cut short as Bisweswar was scheduled to go to Delhi and I to Rangoon. The Delhi visit was necessary for further talks with the Indian Government. I was required to proceed to Rangoon in order to acquaint Ba Swe with the current situation in



Nepal and to press for immediate delivery of arms. On 10 October we left Biratnagar for Calcutta en route to our respective destinations.

For Rangoon I left once again on 15 October. But this time things looked up, and Chit Maung had very heartening news to convey. The Socialist Party of Burma had finalized all arrangements for the delivery of a substantial consignment of sten guns, a few bren guns and the requisite quantity of ammunition. It was now for the Nepali Congress to get the transport arranged. The date of the delivery of arms would be settled in the course of a week's time, Chit Maung assured.

I sent a coded telegram to Subarna Shumsher. Promptly came his telegraphic reply in code stating: "Reference yours 18th stop purchase six ivory statues and six ivory tusks more stop Willing pay price as quoted stop Sending brother as soon as passport arranged stop Await wire."<sup>37</sup>

There was no difficulty in deciphering the code words which, in fact, had been worked out before my first visit to Rangoon. The meaning of the code words was as follows: ivory statues and ivory tusks signified bren guns and machine guns respectively, while brother stood for the chartered plane.

I did not waste any time to convey Subarna Shumsher's request to Chit Maung. He said he would see what could be done about the further request for bren guns and machine guns. He cautioned at the same time that it might not be possible at this stage to add anything new to the schedule already drawn up. He was surprised that money had been promised for the arms. This was something they had not bargained for. The Burmese socialists agreed to help the Nepali Congress at the instance of the Indian Socialist Party. And the help was intended for the people who were struggling against feudalism and for the establishment of democracy in their country. In this the question of payment just did not arise.

That settled the matter and I informed Subarna Shum-

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<sup>37</sup> See "Appendix" D for a photostat copy of this.

sher accordingly. A few more days passed and it transpired that the delivery of arms could not be effected before October was out. As further waiting would be useless I came back to Calcutta on 24 October.

Significant developments had by now taken place on the "Roof of the World". Since China's open declaration, in the autumn of 1950, of its intention to "liberate" Tibet, the march of events took a menacing turn on the high Himalayas. Delhi expressed its concern at the turn of events but kept on counselling the Chinese for a peaceful settlement of the matter with Tibet. This had little effect on Peking, and the situation drifted dangerously toward a crisis. Peking's bellicose stance not only threatened peace in Tibet but also posed a danger to Nepal. Apart from Tibet, Delhi's concern for the security of Nepal—with which the security of India's northern frontiers was inextricably linked—had a new dimension added.

Such had been the circumstances when, on 23 October, the Nepalese leaders met at Patna to review the position. On a critical examination it emerged that Delhi had given a restricted "go-ahead" signal. In effect this boiled down to the fact that the Nepali Congress was permitted to a conditional use of Indian territory as its base of operation. This, however, did not mean that they were to be rendered any active assistance by way of military hardware or otherwise. It was just that their movements would not be restricted. Nor for that matter they would be prevented from using Indian territory for pooling their resources for the struggle.

Before a dead-line for the launching of the struggle could be fixed, it was necessary for them to take certain important points into account. In the first place, no final date should be decided upon until arms were received from Burma. Secondly, definite information was there that the King's position had reached a crisis and that anything might happen in the immediate future resulting in the precipitation of the conflict between the King and Prime Minister. Until that crystallized the Nepali Congress should hold its hands—this was what they decided at the meeting.

This was necessary for a number of reasons. The fact that the King had made his position clear in regard to the struggle for democracy and that he enjoyed a large measure of support from all sections of the people were of considerable significance. Because of this the Nepali Congress was committed to the continuance of the institution of monarchy. Of course, in the democratic set-up of its conception the King would be required to function as nothing but the constitutional head of State. The Indian Government also was in complete agreement with this. In the circumstances, the leaders were of opinion that the King's position should be utilized to the extent the situation permitted. Therefore, they must wait—not indefinitely though—until the King's position was cleared up.

Agreement was reached on the point that Biratnagar and Birganj should constitute the main bases of operation. Besides, certain other strategic points along the Indo-Nepalese frontiers between these two towns were to be constituted as secondary bases. It was also agreed that simultaneous attacks against the Rana forces should be launched from these points, the objective of which would be to secure control of a sizable chunk of territory inside Nepal. Once this was achieved two notable consequences were likely to follow. On the one hand, loss of control of Birganj and Biratnagar would at once deprive the Ranas from the most important sources of revenue and cut off their communication, trade and commerce with India. The occupation of this area, on the other hand, would give the Nepali Congress a base to set up a provisional Government.

The Nepali Congress at this stage remained committed, although hamstrung by the Indian Government, to the policy of total overthrow of the Rana regime. All or nothing appeared to have been its resolution, notwithstanding the full awareness of the Indian Government's attitude in the matter. The general idea seemed to have been that, once the struggle got into full swing, it would not be long before the people's wrath would tear the Rana regime into shreds. All that was necessary now was to unleash the people's fury and the rest would be taken care of by them.

This surely would leave little opportunity for anybody to undertake any salvage operation on behalf of the Ranas.

The hereditary Prime Minister of Nepal, Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, was not ignorant of these developments. Even so, he did not betray any inclination to ease the tension or to desist from thwarting Delhi's attempt at mediation. It is anybody's guess how long he would have been permitted to continue the policy of drift, if an event of immeasurable magnitude had not occurred in the meantime. By the end of October, 1950, China's brief period of amiable demeanour was over. Then the serpent raised its hood and, at one fell swoop, had its victim writhing. Disinterring the long buried myth of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, the "People's Government" of China indulged in unprovoked aggression against another people, and Tibet was occupied.

It was obvious that, in its mood of chauvinism resurrected under the garb of communism, Peking was bent upon "aggressive expansion into certain specific areas beyond China's periphery in an effort to extend China's control and influence."<sup>38</sup> And, in a trice, the people living up north in man's fairest and the most frigid mountains were rocked out of their somnolence. The breath of the Chinese dragon was hot enough for them to feel a singeing sensation.

Delhi felt it, too. Shocked beyond the farthest point of endurance, Delhi protested against the savage act of aggression. While the clouds of evil potentials gathered across the northern horizon, the Indian Government's angry voice<sup>39</sup> could be heard to say in a note dated 26 October, 1950: "In the context of world events, the invasion by Chinese troops of Tibet cannot but be regarded as deplorable, and in the considered judgment of the Govern-

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<sup>38</sup> Ping-chia Kuo, *China : new age and new outlook*, p. 226.

<sup>39</sup> Of course, it is entirely a different story when, at a subsequent point, Prime Minister Nehru said in the course of his speech in Parliament on 6 December, 1950: "We did not challenge or deny the suzerainty of China over Tibet". Thereafter India's strident voice of protest against China's occupation of Tibet fast softened into a whisper, finally petering out into *de facto* acceptance of Tibet as a province of China.

ment of India, not in the interest of China or of peace. The Government of India can only express their deep regret that in spite of the friendly and disinterested advice repeatedly tendered by them, the Chinese Government should have decided to seek a solution of the problem of their relations with Tibet by force instead of by the slower and more enduring method of peaceful approach."<sup>40</sup>

But this did not have the slightest effect on the new masters of China. On the contrary, they took umbrage. Bluntly they told India that China would brook no interference in its settled policy regarding Tibet. The Chinese Foreign Minister stated in a reply on 30 October, 1950: "The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China would like to make it clear: Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory, the problem of Tibet is entirely a domestic problem of China. The Chinese people's liberation army must enter Tibet, liberate the Tibetan people, and defend the frontiers of China. This is the resolved policy of the Central People's Government."<sup>41</sup>

Almost like a bolt from the blue, the very intricate problem of the security of India's northern frontiers suddenly loomed large. Slowly and painfully Delhi realized that the textbook maxims of political theories did not necessarily guide the political behaviour of every nation. The questions of ethics and ideologies apart, there were also other factors including that of geo-politics which went into the shaping of a nation's political conduct; and China was no exception.

But, following Great Britain's withdrawal from the sub-continent, Delhi's conduct in international affairs had mostly been shaped by a sort of not-very-precise ethical-ideological concept. In the case of Nepal, independent India had not been a day too late to renounce the exclusive relationship that had existed between the British Government in India and Nepal. More, Delhi made a solemn declaration to the effect that Nepal's sovereignty was beyond any dis-

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in *Jawaharlal Nehru*, by Frank Moraes, p. 461.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462.

pute, and encouraged it to develop foreign relations with other countries.

Delhi, it is true, had given qualified support to the Nepalese fighters for democracy. But this was determined more by other considerations and less by that of geo-politics. Prior to China's conquest of Tibet, the prime motive behind Delhi's support to the Nepali Congress had been the desire to see that the ideals which supplied the sap to India's freedom struggle, also did have a meaning in the life of the people still under the yoke of feudalism. And the close association of some of the Nepalese with India's freedom struggle prompted Delhi to do them a limited good turn in their hour of need. Of course, this does not mean that Delhi slept over the question of India's security so intricately involved in its relations with Nepal. The point is: it had not yet become pressing enough to force the Indian Government to pay more serious and sustained attention to the requirements of geo-politics.

China's rape of Tibet radically altered the situation. It made Delhi instantaneously conscious of the fact that the requirements of geo-politics made it imperative that Nepal must be maintained as a friendly buffer State. Any infringement of this, it was well appreciated, would automatically imperil India's security. This was evident when Prime Minister Nehru declared, shortly after Mao Tse-tung's hordes had marched into Tibet, "that any transgression of the Indo-Tibetan border would be resisted. The same principle would apply to the Nepalese-Tibetan border. India proclaimed her determination to do this by guaranteeing the integrity of the Himalayan border States of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. There could be only one transgressor—China."<sup>42</sup>

To state the policy was one thing, to implement it was quite another. Any effective execution of this policy presupposed the existence of a friendly Nepal, not disinclined to listen to Delhi's voice of reason. There were two alternatives before the Government of India: First, to strike a

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

bargain with Mohan Shumsher for his responsive co-operation to India's over-all defence policy, assuring him at the same time of India's strict impartiality in the matter of Nepal's internal politics. Second, to reach a reasonable agreement on the basis of a "middle way" policy that would ensure a phased process of liberalization of the regime, avoiding "the total uprooting of the ancient order". The Government of India stuck to the second alternative that, in fact, had so long been the guiding principle in its policy toward Nepal.

Much as Delhi might want to pursue this "middle way" policy, the growing intransigence of the Ranas rendered it utterly infructuous. The train of events released such forces as made the situation acutely dangerous. What with the increasing tempo of the people's struggle and what with the mounting violence of the Ranas, Nepal was now well-nigh on the brink of disaster. To retrieve the situation, it was granted, Delhi would have to act. But act in what manner? Certainly it could not, by reposing faith in the shifty Ranas, look forward to an agreeable solution of Nepal's problem. Besides, feudalism would be a poor breakwater against the surging waves of expansionist communism—it required precious little expertise to comprehend this. Such a bulwark against the expansionist Chinese could only be raised on the basis of a democratic regime in Nepal.

The Government of India was now convinced that unless immediate "steps were taken to democratize the regime, difficulties and embarrassments would arise which Nepal's northern neighbours were certain to exploit."<sup>43</sup> It also realized that its policy, alternately, of persuasion and limited pressure would not be enough to bring Mohan Shumsher to his senses. There was no escape from the fact that the logic of the situation called for more resolute measures, such measures as would leave no alternative for Mohan Shumsher but to agree to a reasonable solution of the problem.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

This in turn made it imperative that the anti-Rana democratic forces must be encouraged to make a more determined bid to widen their field of activity, so that a denouement to the crisis could be forced. As necessity has propelled man from time immemorial to do such varied and impossible things—apparently incongruous and contradictory more often than not—it now compelled Delhi to allow the Nepali Congress a larger measure of freedom of action than what had been granted prior to China's invasion of Tibet. The Government of India, in its subsequent talks with the Nepalese leaders, did not beat about the bush regarding the necessity of an immediate resolution of Nepal's problem. Still it was not prepared to consider the question of any direct arms aid to the Nepali Congress. Any involvement in this the Indian Government was determined to avoid. But, just short of that, the Nepali Congress was to receive every facility necessary for the struggle.

If the situation was critical for Delhi, it was more so for Mohan Shumsher. His apprehensions increased; and he was forced out of his wits. A rebellious people, a scheming clan and a hostile monarch—all these combined internally to create a situation that, indeed, was too complicated even for Mohan Shumsher not to be unnerved.

Other things apart, there was an element of tragedy in the whole thing. Here was a man—ambitious, cruel and despotic—who was determined not to face the fact that the nineteenth century was no more and that Queen Victoria had long since been buried. Caught in the tornado of revolutionary change that, following the termination of the second world war, hurtled across the continent of Asia, this feudal patriarch was incapable of distinguishing between what was a safe anchorage and what was not. Like all tragic heroes, he also obstinately refused to come to terms with reality, to reconcile himself to the changed pattern of life, and, ultimately, to come to peace with himself.

He was still determined not to relent. He was also aware of the fact that the Indian Government's patience had been taxed to the limit and that its voice was fast grow-



ing harsher. More important, China's occupation of Tibet had overnight altered the balance of power in the Himalayan region. From a country that paid tribute to Nepal until the other day, Tibet had suddenly become a province of China.

A creeping fear gripped him : he was rudely brought to face the repugnant fact that Nepal also had once been a tribute-paying country. Under the terms of the treaty of 1792, Nepal was required to acknowledge "at least a semblance of allegiance to China", and to send a five-yearly mission with tributes to Peking. True, this practice had stopped way back in 1908. But when the need arose the devil never lacked a pretext. Pursuant to its expansionist policy, China might any day, should it be found necessary, resurrect the myth of its position of privilege vis-a-vis Nepal. Should that eventually occur, Nepal alone would find it impossible to protect its freedom. For that there must be some form of guarantee from some other quarters.

This guarantee Mohan Shumsher did not solicit from India. As a matter of fact, to his way of thinking the need for a guarantee was no less, perhaps a little more, pressing against his southern neighbour than against the neighbour up north. And he turned to his country's traditional patron—Great Britain—for a reassurance of friendship.

On 30 October, 1950—less than a week after China's invasion of Tibet—a treaty of "perpetual peace and friendship" was concluded between Great Britain and Nepal. The treaty was signed by Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher and the British Ambassador, Sir George Falconer. Of the many terms of this treaty between feudal Nepal and socialist Britain—the Labour Party was then in power in Britain—most were of a very formal nature. The significant clause of the treaty was related to an earlier agreement concluded in 1947 between Nepal, Great Britain and India, which permitted both Great Britain and India to continue recruiting Gurkha mercenaries for their armies. The new treaty left the tripartite agreement of 1947 unaffected, thereby upholding Great Britain's right to draw upon Nepal's manpower resources.

Whatever service the new treaty might or might not render to Great Britain, it certainly came very handy to Mohan Shumsher. If foreigners could not be taken in, he could at least use the treaty, by demonstrating Anglo-Nepalese friendship, as a prop to his cracking regime. No doubt he was able to do this to an extent.

Such had been the state of affairs when the summons came from Burma to take delivery of the promised arms. Before leaving for Rangoon on 31 October, I looked up Mahabir Shumsher to acquaint him with the latest development. Subarna Shumsher was in Delhi; I had to get the transport arrangements finally checked with Mahabir Shumsher. It was decided that the chartered plane would reach Rangoon around 11 in the morning of 3 November. This arrangement was tentative, subject to confirmation by the Burmese friends.

On reaching Rangoon I was informed by Chit Maung that arms could be delivered any day. Necessary arrangements at their end were complete. It had been worked out that as soon as the chartered plane would land, a certain army officer should be informed over phone. An army truck in charge of that officer would then carry the arms to the plane. An urgent telegram was to be despatched to Calcutta, with instructions to fly the chartered plane to Rangoon on 3 November. On that day, I was to be accompanied by Lu Aye to the airport.

Immediately I despatched two telegrams to Mahabir Shumsher and Subarna Shumsher respectively, informing them of the arrangements at the Rangoon end. Without the least delay came their joint reply which said: "recd both telegrams. Brother reaching Rangoon definitely 3 Friday as instructed."<sup>44</sup>

Another day dawned. The day advanced and along with it increased the heat of the tropical sun. Long before 11, Lu Aye and I reached the airport. The cloudless autumnal sky ruled out the possibility of any storm or

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<sup>44</sup> See "Appendix" E for a photostat copy of this telegram.

rough weather. This strengthened our hope that the chartered plane would arrive on time.

There was yet some more time to go before the plane would arrive, and my one desire was to let that fatal space of time drift as innocently as possible. But Lu Aye was visibly itching for talks. Although unencouraged, he let loose a veritable barrage of questions.

Gradually the talks warmed up into an animated conversation, and Lu Aye started introducing some seriousness in it. With all the intensity he was capable of mustering, he pointedly asked as to how was it that the Indian socialists were actively associating themselves with the armed struggle in Nepal. The land of Gandhi and Rabindranath was against violence in any form.

Not only this. Indians, the socialists not excluded, were the most insistent advocates of non-violence. Whether in international parleys or in their talks and writings, the Indians kept on preaching, day in and day out, the positive virtues of the philosophy of non-violence.

I was not quite prepared for such a question, particularly at that point. A serious discussion was just about the last thing I was in any mood for. This I said to my friend, but he did not seem to appreciate it. Naturally, then I had to give him an answer. And I said that India's faith in the philosophy of non-violence had not diminished a whit and that certainly not because it was the land of Gandhi.

Pages of history were strewn with the record of India's traditional preaching of the message of non-violence. Its religion and philosophy, literature and art, in fact, its entire civilization passionately produced one harmonious tune—that of peace and non-violence.

The Buddha's message of non-violence was translated, way back in the third century B.C., into the statecraft of Asoka. But, then, it was not the non-violence of the surrendering weak, it was that of the forgiving brave. That land of humanism would remain, from here to eternity, devoted to the philosophy of non-violence.

But in a country where the aggressive violence of the few was engaged in butchering every basic value of life, to

preach the doctrine of non-violence would be nothing but a cover for the base inaction of the idiot. A congenial environment was absolutely necessary to keep alive anything that pulsed with life. Non-violence certainly was not a philosophy of passivity, it was the dynamic philosophy of life of the living.

Certainly violence should be ruled out in a political system where even a minimum of man's democratic rights was respected. But an entirely different condition obtained in Nepal. A despotic few were determined to murder peace and non-violence there. The way of non-violent struggle in Nepal would only lead to the phantom peace of the grave-yard, for which the Nepalese had no love lost. That should explain why the Nepalese had resorted to armed struggle for the basic rights of man.

Time was now up, and we hurried to the tarmac where a chartered Dakota belonging to Himalayan Aviation had just landed. I telephoned the particular army officer, who had been deputed to reach the arms to the airport. He said that he was coming within half an hour. Meanwhile, Lu Aye had the work done in connexion with the log book. Now it was a matter of barely half an hour's time before the whole business would be over.

The army officer, a young colonel attached to the army headquarters, arrived with the cargo just on time. He drove the army truck straight down the tarmac and parked it alongside the plane. The engines of the plane had been kept running and as soon as the sealed boxes containing the arms were loaded in it, it took off.

Detailed preparation had been made at Bihta. Hence the landing of the plane at Bihta went off smoothly. It had been settled earlier that the arms should be transported first to Patna and thence would be distributed to different centres of struggle.

The arms were brought to the house of Devendra Prasad Singh at Patna, which had been converted into the temporary headquarters of the Nepali Congress. It was a small building, all the rooms of which were packed to capacity with men and materials. A medium size wireless trans-

mitter had been installed in a room, and a radio message was sent, asking the leading men from the various centres to come to Patna for instructions as well as arms.

Around 6 November regional leaders of the Nepali Congress assembled at Patna. The chief architects of the struggle, in consultation with these men, reviewed the situation. The position of trained men and arms being what it was, they decided that a two-prong drive should be made simultaneously from Biratnagar and Birganj. Under the overall command of Subarna Shumsher, Thirbhom Malla and Tej Bahadur were directed to lead the attack from Birganj, the objective of which was to capture the town and to dig in for positional engagement with the enemy. In view of the strategic importance of this town, the defence of which had since been substantially strengthened by the Ranas, it was felt that the operation should be conducted with as much care and within as little time as possible. Besides, the plan for the forward thrust along the link road between Birganj and Kathmandu should be put into operation only after the Nepali Congress' position had been consolidated in this area.

The Biratnagar contingent was directed to draw up its own plan of attack, more or less along the same lines as Birganj. At the instance of Subarna Shumsher, it was settled that Bisweswar should personally supervise the arrangements made for Biratnagar. Regarding the other centres in between these two points, the decision was that they should undertake such operations as the local conditions would permit. Whatever plan of action they would agree upon, their major aim should be to destroy all centres of Government authority in their respective areas, to immobilize the enemy forces, and to capture as much arms as possible. This last item was absolutely necessary in order to replenish the slender stock of arms at the party's disposal.

No final date for the launching of the struggle was yet fixed, the reason for which, however, was not disclosed to the general assembly of men. The top echelon of the leadership had very pertinent reason to keep the date open,

for secret messages from Kathmandu had for the last few days been giving increasing indication of an imminent confrontation between the Palace and Prime Minister. The leaders were of opinion that, until the situation got a trifle clear, they should hold their hands. At the same time, they agreed that under no circumstances the waiting should be prolonged indefinitely. For they were apprehensive that this might have unwholesome repercussion on their own camp.

Far away from the gaze of the world Mohan Shumsher was now confronted with a crisis, no clue to the solution of which could be had from Nepal's past history, recent or remote. Convinced that the Indian Government would not, short of liberalization of the regime, agree to any compromise formula, he now contrived to render the King's position totally ineffective. This was considered necessary because of the King's active sympathy for the oppositionists. Insistent pressures were there to get him to sign the death warrant of the condemned political prisoners, arrested in connexion with the "September plot". But Tribhuvan, aware of the momentous developments, refused to yield. The result was a deadlock, the way out of which seemed unknown to the parties concerned.

This was the Nepalese political scene during that fateful first week of November, 1950. Nepal's history, it seemed, had entered a blind alley, to come out of which a passage would have to be opened. But, between themselves, the chief participants in the drama just did not possess the key to open the passage, so that Nepal's history could resume its march forward. For they were actors in a scene which had a surprising similarity with what the celebrated German comedian, Karl Vallentin, once enacted. The scene was, in the words of Erich Heller, somewhat like this : "the curtain goes up and reveals darkness ; and in this darkness is a solitary circle of light thrown by a street-lamp. Vallentin walks round and round this circle of light, desparately looking for something. 'What have you lost ?' a policeman asks... 'The key to my house'. Upon which the policeman joins him in his search. They find nothing ;

and after a while he inquires : 'Are you sure you lost it here ?' 'No', says Vallentin, and pointing to a dark corner of the stage : 'Over there'. 'Then why on earth are you looking for it here ?' 'There is no light over there,' says Vallentin."<sup>45</sup>

The key in the case of Nepal was far away in the place where the light of the Nepaiese sun never reached—it was in Delhi.

And Delhi finally permitted the Nepali Congress a limited use of the key, when the situation took a turn for the worse. Unwilling to strike a bargain with his Prime Minister, encouraged by the Nepali Congress' clandestine message of hope and expectation and assured by Delhi's attitude of firmness, Tribhuvan ultimately decided on an irrevocable precipitation of the issue.

On 6 November, 1950, Kathmandu announced that His Majesty the King of Nepal, the Maharajadhiraja Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah—the living incarnate of Lord Vishnu—together with his two Queens, the Crown Prince, the latter's eldest son, and other members of the Royal family, had sought asylum in the Indian Embassy. This news was confirmed by the Indian External Affairs Ministry on the following day.

Frustrated at his failure to prevent, notwithstanding the very rigorous security arrangements, the King's flight to the Indian Embassy, Mohan Shumsher sent his emissaries to persuade the Royal fugitive to get back home. But Tribhuvan refused to meet these officials ; he also refused to hand over the Crown Prince's eldest son to them. Enraged beyond any measure, Mohan Shumsher worked out a sinister scheme the central idea of which was to wean away the people's ingrained sense of loyalty to this living "incarnate" of the Hindu trinity of gods.

What Mohan Shumsher schemed was nothing foreign to a feudal set-up, certainly not to Nepalese history. He decided to depose Tribhuvan and install someone on the throne, who would be a creature utterly dependent on his

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<sup>45</sup> Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind*, p. 172.

moods and caprices. On 7 November the Council of Elders (Bharadari) was summoned which proclaimed Tribhuvan's deposition. Also, the Council of Elders, formally enthroned a three-year-old boy, the Crown Prince's second son Gyanendra, as King of Nepal.

The latest developments caused jubilation in the ranks of the Nepali Congress. The King's flight was welcome to them for more reasons than one. It was no secret to anybody that, in the context of Nepal's prevalent structure of society, the institution of monarchy constituted the focal point of loyalty in the country. It was more so because the King was held in the general belief that he was the live "incarnation" of Vishnu. This placed the Nepalese monarchy in a unique position. It was further strengthened by the fact that caste, superstition and obscurantist religious practices held the poverty-stricken mass of humanity in a vice-like grip. That Mohan Shumsher tried to prevent a rupture with King Tribhuvan was because he wanted to deprive his enemies from exploiting the average Nepalese' deep sentimental attachment to the monarchy.

Precisely this was what the Nepali Congress had so long been looking forward to. Not only they welcomed the King's flight but also made it a point to use this as a worthy cause for appeal to the people. On 7 November Bisweswar Prasad Koirala, in a message to the people, said : "By this great act the King has placed himself on the side of the forces of freedom and denounced the present Government of Nepal as usurpers." He also appealed to the people for abiding loyalty to King Tribhuvan, cautioning them that any wavering in their allegiance to him would only invite trouble. In the course of the same statement, he said : "Let no man or woman in Nepal offer his or her obedience to the present administration. Whoever raises his hand in defence of the existing tyranny violates his oath of loyalty to the Maharajadhiraja [Tribhuvan], imperils his status as a citizen of Nepal and puts in grave jeopardy the foundation of human duties and rights. The end of the regime of the Prime Minister is now a matter of days."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 8 November, 1950.



Doubtless all this was somewhat intriguing. The Spanish civil war would offer no analogy; nor for that matter the twentieth century history of man would have on record many such instances, when the pioneers of the forces against feudalism openly came out in defence of its most important symbol, the monarchy. Here was a revolutionary organization, some prominent leaders of which were ardent socialists, determined to destroy a feudal society and, in its place, construct a social order that would restore man's essential humanity. Feudal institutions certainly were not expected to have any place in the society the Nepali Congress envisaged. Yet it made no bones about the fact that the institution of monarchy enjoyed all its support.

Ethical questions apart, certain other important political issues were involved in it, too. After all, the monarchy formed the centre-piece of the society against which the Nepali Congress had pitted itself. Certainly a part of this institution could not be severed without destroying the whole—this was the simple logic of the Nepalese conundrum. Still the Nepali Congress decided to hitch itself to the royal band-wagon. Its declared policy to uphold the institution of monarchy and the moralizing note on the issue of Royal rights and privileges were something that just did not augur well, to be sure.

There was nothing new in this in so far as the Nepali Congress' policy was concerned, however. The resolution to use the institution of monarchy as the rallying point was quite in keeping with the logic of what the party had so long been working for. We will do well to remember in this connexion that the Nepali Congress, despite certain socialist elements in its ranks, was primarily an organization of men whose major concern had been the liquidation of the Rana regime. These men could be said to have been motivated by some sort of liberal-democratic ideas. But, in the ultimate analysis, they were more pragmatic—and pragmatism in politics can be a cover for a million and one things—than idealistic.

Nor the Indian Government's policy in the matter left

much room for doubt: it was firm in its decision not to allow any revolutionary change, in the real sense of the term, in Nepalese society. The "middle way" policy of the Indian Government left no choice other than the acceptance of the institution of monarchy as a catalytic agent. This plus the character and composition of the Nepali Congress propelled the leadership to turn Nelson's blind eye on the contradictions inherent in the acceptance of a part of the system, the total rejection of which had been stated as the moving spirit behind the struggle.

Observed from another angle, this dependence on the King was in itself an admission that the Nepali Congress could not go it alone; and that it had to defend a feudal institution for drawing popular support for a revolutionary struggle against feudalism itself. No doubt this in turn took away much of the substance from its concept of "revolutionary radicalism". In a way this also pre-determined the magnitude and scope of the struggle. In other words, Delhi's role as the final arbiter of Nepal's destiny was no longer a point at issue.

To a certain extent, Delhi was a party to the scheme of things which resulted in Tribhuvan's flight to the Indian Embassy. India's Ambassador in Nepal, Mr. C. P. N. Singh, had been in communication with the Palace before the King sought asylum in the Indian Embassy. Naturally the Indian Government did not lose a minute's time to inform Kathmandu that it was pretty well concerned about the King's well-being, and that nothing untoward should happen to him. More, the Indian Government made it clear that nothing should stand between the King and the fulfilment of his desire to come to India.

Following the King's escape to the Indian Embassy, it became evident that it was just a matter of days before Nepal would be caught in the maelstrom of a political upheaval. Also, there was no longer much speculation in any quarter about India's role in Nepal's politics. The appreciation of Nepal's strategic importance, particularly in the context of China's occupation of Tibet and the Korean imbroglio, left little doubt about the course of action Delhi

was expected to follow. Without any ambiguity the daily Press all over India gave expression to it. As a Calcutta newspaper observed: "For obvious reason, India can hardly afford to be an indifferent spectator to the present happenings in Nepal. The recent developments in Tibet have underlined the urgent need for her intervention in the affairs of that country. Diplomatic pressure should, therefore, be brought to bear on the administration of Nepal to scrap the hereditary rulership embodied in the successive Prime Ministers and promptly to democratize it. Only that can make the country a bulwark against communist onrush in it and render it secure frontier for India."<sup>47</sup>

All the same, Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher made certain frantic manoeuvres, the purpose of which was to frighten Tribhuvan into submission. Besides the trumped up deposition of Tribhuvan and the installation of an infant on the throne, Mohan Shumsher had the recently inaugurated Calcutta-Kathmandu weekly air service—this was Nepal's only air link with the outside world—suspended as from 9 November. The expectation was that this would compel Tribhuvan to realize that, since the India-Nepal air link was cut off, he could no longer escape to India. Which was what should eventually pressurize him to give up—at any rate that was how the whole thing seemed to have been figured out.

This was not to be. The Indian Government was determined to see that no harm was done to Tribhuvan and that his exit from Nepal was not impeded. With calculated defiance, the Indian Government ordered two Indian Air Force Dakotas to be flown to Kathmandu to bring the Royal family to Delhi. Its firm stand in the matter was enough to make Mohan Shumsher realize the futility of any further resistance to Tribhuvan's passage to India. Certainly Mohan Shumsher did not consider the King's exit as good riddance, for he knew that this would only mark the beginning of the end of the ancient regime.

King Tribhuvan, accompanied by a sizable entourage,

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<sup>47</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 9 November, 1950.

arrived in Delhi on 11 November. He was received at the airport by Prime Minister Nehru and other members of the Indian Government with the honours due to the head of a sovereign State. The Royal family was accommodated as the guest of the Government. But Mohan Shumsher was in no mood to call it quits ; and this was demonstrated by the absence of any official representative of the Nepalese Government at the reception. It was, however, plain enough for all concerned to appreciate that the Government of India recognized Tribhuvan, and not the infant Gyanendra, as King of Nepal.

## PASSAGE AT ARMS

It is a terrible, an inexorable, law of history that tyranny, however ruthlessly organized, cannot perpetuate itself. Man's past does not lack examples when tyranny that pervaded every aspect of a nation's life and that seemed to have come to stay for all eternity, ultimately went to the dung-heap of history. The long line that runs from Attila through Gengis Khan to Hitler only points to the fact that the tyrant also must go down the way of all flesh, so that man is not forever denied his humanity by man. History saw no reason why Mohan Shumsher should be exempted from the operation of this law. And he was not.

The dykes were now breached and the flood water rushed from all directions into the forbidden land of Mohan Shumsher. All along Nepal's southern frontier between Birganj and Biratnagar, the armed volunteers of the Nepali Congress poured their wrath out on the Rana centres of power. The major attack, of course, was directed against Birganj. Operating from Raxaul (approximately 5 miles south of Birganj), about 200 armed volunteers led by Thirbhom Malla and Tej Bahadur fanned out in two directions during the night of 10-11 November, converging on a point near the garrison headquarters. After a short encounter with the State forces in which, besides others, Thirbhom was killed, the insurgents occupied Birganj. Tej Bahadur was given the mandate to look after the emergency administration of the town.

The insurgents struck at Biratnagar on 11 November.

In view of the limited number of men and arms at their disposal, they followed the tactics of mobile action directed at the destruction of the strategically important enemy centres of power. As had been earlier decided, the rebel forces were divided into two columns. Girija and Biswa-bandhu were deputed to march the first column, whose objective was to seize the armoury, police station and the residences of three important local officials.

Tarini and I were directed to march the second column, which was to have occupied the army headquarters, prison and the treasury.

Both the columns were instructed to launch the attack simultaneously. On completion of the specified tasks, the volunteers were ordered to assemble in front of the fortified residence of Colonel Uttam Vikram, the Governor of Biratnagar. The next objective was to force into the Governor's residence and capture him, if possible, alive. The total number of the volunteers mobilised were about 150, but the number of weapons were not as numerous. It was assumed that arms would be captured from the State armoury, which later on could be given to those who had not got any.

Finally, the entire operation was required to be completed in minimum time. Any delay in its execution, it was apprehended, might alert troops in the nearby encampments, who would be expected then to rush to the defence of the Governor's residence. Should that happen it would be difficult, if not impossible, to capture Uttam Vikram alive. Sufficient importance was attached to this man ; for the presumption was that he would, as a captive, be a useful medium in exhorting the State army, at least a part of it, to surrender.

To guard against all eventualities, directions were issued that, in case of any absolutely unavoidable situation arising, the volunteers were to beat a retreat to Rangeli, a wooded village some distance from Biratnagar.

The operation was largely carried out as planned. Some State officials were taken prisoners ; a good number of rifles and a considerable quantity of ammunition were

seized. But a difficult situation arose when sheer panic drove some of the volunteers to open fire at imaginary targets. Small wonder, this jerked Biratnagar out of its slumber and alerted the Governor's palace guards as also the State troops, stationed in the surrounding area.

There was quite a stretch of open field around the palace of Uttam Vikram. The two columns, a few stragglers apart, reassembled at a point on the outskirts of the field, the purpose of which was to surround the palace. But, as a result of the commotion already created, the time available for the execution of the job was extremely short.

The only barrier that now stood between the rebel forces and success was the open field. But that piece of flat land turned out to be the most obstinate hurdle that night. The entire area was flood-lit with high power search lights of the palace. There was nothing that could shelter a man from the cruel gaze of the State troops.

Within minutes the situation took an ugly turn, immobilizing the volunteers of the Nepali Congress. They could not move forward nor stage a retreat, for if they stood up the enemy would get them as sure targets.

Tense seconds passed and then they were ordered to crawl forward. They advanced a few yards and yet nothing happened; nor any enemy movement could be observed except the blazing search lights. Hopes ran high and it seemed that they would perhaps be able to reach the target.

But no, destiny had something else in store for them. Suddenly the enemy opened a terrific barrage of fire, it came from up front as well as from the rear. Rapidly the tempo of the firing increased, so much so that the rebel forces were unable even to return fire in a disciplined manner.

The engagement continued thus for about a couple of hours. By then a few insurgents were killed including Kuldeep Jha, a prominent socialist of Bihar, and a number of them had been wounded. As the night wore out the situation further worsened. It was feared that the enemy might make a frontal charge at dawn, compelling the rebel

forces to engage in a hand to hand combat. In that eventuality, the insurgents, left without any escape route, would become victims of a general massacre. Therefore, in order to avoid this dreadful possibility, an immediate withdrawal from the engagement was ordered. While retreating, considerable disorder broke loose in the ranks of the rebel forces. There was no scope for ascertaining the casualties suffered by the enemy.

As planned, we made a dash for Rangeli, a village with an approximate population of four thousand. Late in the morning we reached the village, exhausted and in a state of infinite dejection. Not unexpectedly, the failure of the first organized effort raised doubts about the ultimate success of the struggle. Angry opinions were expressed and loud grumblings heard against the hasty retreat. But the inevitable had to be accepted, for there was little that anybody could do from this end to alter the situation then. All that they could do now was to wait until men elsewhere decided upon the next course of action.

Soon after the struggle had been launched, the Nepali Congress issued a manifesto declaring the objectives it was determined to achieve. The manifesto said: "We are opposed to the present system of Government in which one man, the hereditary Prime Minister, assumes the supreme authority, civil and military, of the State." Continuing, the manifesto solemnly announced: "We contemplate calling a Constituent Assembly to frame our democratic Constitution immediately after the Nepali Congress succeeds in removing the Ranas from our country. We have received assurances of cooperation from all the sections and classes of people of Nepal," the manifesto now conveyed a rather astonishing piece of information, "except the communists who, spurning our general appeal for cooperation or at least a political truce, have launched a vile propaganda against the Congress and are trying to confuse the people of Nepal by advocating an anti-struggle policy."

This information about the Nepali Congress' parleys with the communists for their support took many of its friends by surprise, particularly in the context of the poli-



tical situation then obtaining in South and South-East Asia. As we have already observed, the Burmese socialists were chiefly motivated, in giving aid to the Nepali Congress, by their strong conviction against both feudalism and communism. Themselves confronted with a communist-inspired civil war, the Burmese socialists did not have much illusion about communism.

More, China's occupation of Tibet and its participation in the Korean conflict only heightened the Burma Socialist Party's perception of the menacing role of Asia's neo-imperialists—the Chinese communists. In view of this, the Burmese socialists could hardly be expected to sympathize with any move for enlisting communist support for united political action, however laudable its purpose might be.

In so far as communism was concerned, the Indian socialists were equally adamant. Indeed their recent experience was galling, when the Indian Communist Party, having declared that "though the bourgeois leadership parade the story that independence has been won, the fact is that the freedom struggle has been betrayed,"<sup>1</sup> sought to win "real freedom" for the people by indulging in country-wide campaigns of murder, loot and arson. This was not all. The socialists were condemned for preaching "the illusion that socialism may be achieved by constitutional means"; and they were selected as special targets for the wrath of the Indian Communist Party. It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that the socialists should resent any move for an understanding with the communists. One of their major considerations for support to the Nepali Congress was the conviction that its struggle for democracy was also a struggle against the forces of totalitarian communism. As such, the Nepali Congress' move for cooperation with the communists was a bitter pill for them to swallow.

The Nepalese leaders, in their eagerness to present a united front to inspire the people's confidence, lost sight of the basic contradictions in their policy of

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<sup>1</sup> See the thesis adopted at the second Congress of the Indian Communist Party held in February, 1948.

wooing the communists. Occasions in the past had not been few and far between when they openly declared that communism posed a serious menace to Nepal. The close association that some of them had with the anti-communist forces in India was also considered to be sufficient indication of their attitude to communism.

Even from a practical point of view their solicitation of communist support was highly impractical. For the Nepalese Communist Party was yet in its infancy—it was established as recently as September, 1949. Under the stewardship of Monmohan Adhikari, a distant relation of Bisweswar Prasad, the incipient Party, fashioned in the image of the Chinese Communist Party, just could not break any ground in Nepal. Nor for that matter did it gain any foothold among the Nepalese residing in India. In the circumstances, the Nepali Congress' move for a united front with the communists—which, by the way, did not go unopposed even in its own ranks—was indeed an involuntary admission of its muddled thinking and a lack of perspective.

The price of cooperation demanded by the communists was that the Nepali Congress must, to quote the Nepali Communist Party's manifesto, "adopt anti-India Government policy". In a sense there was nothing surprising in this, for not long before the struggle broke out in Nepal international communism had rated India as "Public Enemy Number Three, next only to the USA and Britain. The Indian Government was described as the main agent of Anglo-American imperialism in South-East Asia and the Socialist Party as agent of the reactionary bourgeoisie."<sup>2</sup>

Although by the end of 1949 international communism's attitude toward India had undergone certain changes, the Indian Communist Party did not fall into line with it. And the fact that the Nepalese communists drew their inspiration from the Indian communists, naturally prompted them to insist on the Nepali Congress to snap its connexion with its allies in India. China being Asian communism's guiding light at that point, the Nepalese communists could not but

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<sup>2</sup> Masani, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

follow this line in view of what was considered the first phase in the Chinese bid for the leadership of Asia, China's occupation of Tibet and its involvement in Korea. India's opposition to this, however tempered, was damnable enough to merit the wrath of the communists, not excluding the Nepalese. Therefore, the Nepali Congress, in order to qualify for communist support, must not have any truck with India, no matter what its purpose might be.

For obvious reasons the Nepali Congress just could not afford to oblige the communists. But this the communists would not let go with impunity. As the Congress would not dissociate itself from India, its struggle against feudalism, which otherwise would have been a perfect "people's liberation movement", was called a "bourgeois manoeuvre" by the communists. Thenceforth the communists started a campaign of slander and vituperation against the Nepali Congress, only to be followed by pitiable efforts to sabotage the struggle. Whatever support they could gather—it was very limited and mostly confined to the Biratnagar area—was pitted against the struggle. Not that this was effective in any way. But the utter nuisance of it was such as subsequently compelled the insurgents to arrest a number of them including Monmohan Adhikari. And, for the duration of the struggle, they had to be kept out of harm's way.

But the communists were not alone in their nefarious game. They enjoyed powerful support—not as a result of direct collaboration, though—from the extreme reactionaries within and beyond the frontiers of Nepal. In India, Hindu communalists led the campaign for support to the Rana regime. Unlike the communists, they used no language of sophistication while denouncing the struggle against feudalism. Their case was by far simpler than that of communism's. To them Nepal was the sole surviving Hindu kingdom with a live Hindu King, hence nothing should be done to disturb the *status quo* there. The fear was that, in the event of any revolutionary change in Nepalese society, the last sanctum of orthodox Hindu polity would be no more. That certainly would not, accord-

ing to these prophets of caste and communal wisdom, make Nepal a better or a happier place to live in.

This attitude of the Hindu communalist was not very difficult to understand, however. The parochial communal mind that roamed about the buried ruins of ancient India had got so accustomed to primeval darkness that the blazing light of the mid-twentieth century only blinded his eyes. Feudalism found its very loud defender in caste-ridden Hindu communalism.<sup>3</sup>

There was nothing too deep for comprehension about the common cause Hindu obscurantism and Marxist communism made against Nepal's struggle for democracy. Communism no doubt had its own case, to serve which it did not mind living cheek by jowl with the forces of reaction. The point, however, is that this was no isolated instance of such co-existence in the career of communism.

Spain is a sad case in point. During the civil war, when a fast vanishing thin line of resistance kept death away from the life of Spain, communism chose to strengthen the hordes of fascism. The communists sabotaged the struggle, they coolly murdered those that manned the barricades against the thugs of Franco. Thus they helped the Spanish fascists to wade their way through blood to the seat of power.

Consider again what communism did to West Europe, when it was caught in the twilight before the worst holocaust in man's history. Communism gave Hitler a free ticket to hold civilization to ransom. Not only that. When the darkness of despair was deepening in Poland;

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<sup>3</sup> The extent to which the politics of caste and communalism could warp man's mind and force him to look backward is astonishing. One significant instance would highlight the point. One of the members of the team of constitutional experts that went to Kathmandu, at Padma Shumsher's request, to assist in the drafting of a Constitution was a Rajput by caste. It is said that this man opposed the rather liberal draft Constitution prepared by Sri Prakasha, the leader of the team. His reason for the opposition was that the Ranas of Nepal being of Rajput extraction, the draft Constitution must not contain such provisions as might jeopardize their vested interests.

when life was ebbing out of Poland ; and when Polish humanity cried for mercy, Russian communism chose that moment to exact its pound of flesh from Poland. That is the image of communism, chameleon-like unsteady and ever-changing. Nor for that matter was it any different in Nepal.

While the uprising, like a forest fire, engulfed the entire stretch of the Terai lowlands between Birganj and Biratnagar, Mohan Shumsher made what endeavour he could to meet the crisis. To resist the insurgents he whipped up his army that was drilled and equipped according to the early twentieth century western standards while the personal life of every individual soldier was governed by the caste and communal rites and rituals, old as the earth itself. His army did what it could to stem the tide of the insurrection. But it had little success. The reason for this was not that the insurgents were better trained or armed. Rather their training and arms were both qualitatively and quantitatively inferior to those of the Rana army.

The reason lay elsewhere ; it was in the spirit of the men ordered to defend the ramparts of feudalism. The spirit of rebellion that stirred the civil population certainly did not leave the army untouched. The Nepalese soldiers could well realize that the men they were ordered to shoot were no ordinary fellows nor enemies of the State. The intensive campaign of the Nepali Congress had also told them that the insurgents were fighting for a cause with which the King himself sympathized. No doubt this affected the morale of Nepal's intrepid Gurkhas, resulting in the weakening of their determination on the field. What is more, it was not an uncommon sight when the State soldiers surrendered to the insurgents.

Mohan Shumsher's other move was at the diplomatic level. He made frantic efforts to get the infant King recognized by the Governments with whom Nepal had diplomatic relations, particularly Great Britain and the U.S.A. Their diplomatic approval of his act of dispossessing Tribhuvan was an immediate necessity. First, this would deprive the Nepali Congress of one of the major weapons

in its armoury. If the foreign Governments recognized Gyanendra as the *de jure* sovereign, the Nepali Congress' contention that it was fighting also for the restoration of the rightful King would lose all meaning. And, to that extent, it would forfeit the support of the people.

Second, this would enable Mohan Shumsher to demonstrate to his countrymen—and very effectively too—that he enjoyed the support of powerful foreign Governments. In a feudal State like Nepal, that would go a long way toward bolstering the cracking morale of the regime. Third—and this was no less important—Gyanendra's recognition by Great Britain and the U.S.A. would present a *fait accompli* to India. In the context of the ruffled Asian political scene, the recognition itself would stampede India into forsaking the cause of the fugitive King. These were the weighty considerations that prompted Mohan Shumsher to pursue his aim at the diplomatic level as determinedly as he was capable of.

While men were killing and getting killed in that land of the Himalayas, Delhi became almost uncommunicative. Having accorded a very cordial reception to Tribhuvan, the Indian Government chose to remain silent over the events that subsequently shook Nepal out of its age-old slumber. There were reasons, valid reasons for the Indian Government to maintain a facade of impartiality in the matter. The predominant idea was that any direct involvement in the struggle at that stage should be avoided, so that it could retain the initiative to act the mediator when the occasion would arise. The Indian Government's policy now was to watch the course of the struggle without getting itself committed by deed or word.

Accordingly, it did not encourage the idea that the King should actively associate himself with the struggle. He was, in fact, prevented from issuing any formal statement conveying his sympathy for the struggle, although the Nepali Congress was very keen on having it. The Indian Government preferred also to keep silent over Mohan Shumsher's act of dispossessing the King.

This silence was broken only when the insurgents ran

into heavy weather. As the Rana resistance stiffened, the insurgents were forced to withdraw from a number of points which they had occupied earlier. Apprehending that its silence might be misunderstood, the Indian Government gave vent to its feeling for the first time since the fighting broke out. On 7 November Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's Education Minister and one of the top policy-makers, observed while addressing a meeting in Delhi: "It is amazing that in the middle of the twentieth century naked autocracy should reign supreme in any part of the world. There is not one Indian who today does not sympathize with the cause of the Nepalese people. Theirs is a just fight and we in India were fighting the same battle not long ago. Our sympathy is naturally, therefore, with the Nepalese people, many of whom sacrificed in the cause of Indian freedom."<sup>4</sup>

But this statement alone was not enough to meet the expectation of concrete help from Delhi the Nepali Congress and many of its supporters harboured. It was now clear as day-light that the Indian Government would not deviate from its "middle way" policy regarding Nepal. The idea of total, revolutionary change in Nepalese society was not what Delhi had in mind. If there had been any lack of understanding of this before, surely no scope was left for it toward the end of the third week of November.

After the occupation of Birganj, a force of insurgents advanced up to Amlekhganj (25 miles north on the road to Kathmandu) on 13 November, but subsequently had to withdraw when the Government rushed heavy reinforcements from the capital. The insurgents were then compelled to give more ground when shortage of ammunition became more or less the deciding factor. Efforts were made to replenish their ammunition supplies but to no avail. The position fast became untenable when, on 20 November, the Nepali Congress was forced to abandon Birganj.

Obviously the withdrawal from Birganj dealt a sledge-

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<sup>4</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 18 November, 1950.

hammer blow to the Nepali Congress. The feeling ran high among the Nepalese leaders that Delhi had failed them. For it would neither allow them a free run of the situation nor render the material assistance necessary to get across the hurdle. It was strongly felt now that Tribhuvan's expression of positive sympathy for the struggle would encourage the people to take a more determined stand against the Ranas. And the general demand was that he should be allowed the liberty to do so. This was firmly expressed by Narendra Deva, the socialist leader, in a statement issued on 21 November: "Let the Government of India give the Maharaja, whom they consider the rightful owner of the Nepalese throne, an opportunity to issue a proclamation to the people of Nepal to openly range themselves on the side of the progressive forces."<sup>5</sup>

If Narendra Deva's language was somewhat moderate, that of Jayaprakash was an open indictment of the Indian Government. Accusing the Indian Prime Minister of his failure to do what was rightful in the matter, Jayaprakash observed on 27 November: "Before assuming office Sri Nehru was always very keen to help the democratic forces in their fight for freedom in every nook and corner of the world. How was it that now when he was the Prime Minister of India, he did not even extend a fair treatment to the democratic forces in Nepal." Jayaprakash did not stop here. He had a far more serious charge against the Government that in a way echoed the general feeling prevalent in Nepali Congress circles. He said: "It was a very puzzling state of affairs that the King of Nepal, instead of being a prisoner in Kathmandu, was now a virtual prisoner in New Delhi."<sup>6</sup> No less emphatic was another socialist leader, Asoka Mehta, in his denunciation of the Indian Government's apparently ambivalent attitude.

Still the Indian Government did not see any reason why it should change its Nepal policy. Since its objective was not the total liquidation of the Rana regime, the accusations

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 November, 1950.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 November, 1950.



or the Congress reverses on the field did not move it. From its point of view, the solution of Nepal's problem required that a certain amount of pressure be maintained until Mohan Shumsher was obliged to sue for compromise. Therefore, all that was necessary was to enable the Nepali Congress to keep the tempo of resistance up to the required pitch. The question of any change in this policy could only then come up for consideration, when the Nepali Congress would fail to perform even this limited task.

The Government of India did not, however, fail to appreciate the implications of Mohan Shumsher's grand strategy in the field of diplomacy, the object of which was to get his infant nominee, Gyanendra, recognized as King of Nepal. Every effort was made to frustrate this move of the Nepalese Prime Minister. The Indian Government made it plain to both Great Britain and the U.S.A. its stand on recognition. Although it had not yet announced its own decision openly, no room for any doubt was left.

But both Great Britain and the U.S.A. refused to commit themselves on the question. This caused resentment as much in Delhi as in Kathmandu. The American attitude at any rate did not irritate the two Governments so much as that of Great Britain, the reasons for which, of course, were not at all identical. From Delhi's point of view, Great Britain's hesitation in formally reaffirming its recognition of Tribhuvan amounted to bad faith, particularly because of the fact that the Labour Party was in power then. For a socialist Government not to denounce the overtures of a feudal overlord was indeed a thing immoral, a thing that utterly lacked any ethical justification. It was even suspected that Great Britain was in favour of the *status quo* in Nepal. The reason advanced was that Great Britain was apprehensive that a democratic Government in Nepal probably would not allow it to recruit Gurkha mercenaries, the practice of which had been in vogue since the treaty of Sagauli. This suspicion was the more strengthened because of Matrika Prasad's statement, reported in *Hindusthan Standard* of 16 November, to the effect that the Nepali Congress was opposed to Gurkhas being employed

“as mercenary soldiers by foreigners for imperialist purposes.”<sup>7</sup>

The situation had by now further deteriorated, particularly because of the reverses suffered by the Nepali Congress. The reverses were apparently so severe as would encourage very few to anticipate any Rana move at this stage for the resolution of the crisis. As such, it was generally believed that the time was not yet when Mohan Shumsher might send peace-feelers abroad.

The apparent in this case was not the real. Although the Nepali Congress had to give ground to the State forces at a number of points, this was no dependable yardstick with which to measure the real state of affairs in the country. Temporary reverses on the field doubtless spoke of certain military advantages the successful had over the loser. But nothing more. Only when Mohan Shumsher announced his decision to send his representatives to Delhi for negotiation did the world outside get some idea about how wrong things had gone in the State of Nepal.

The fact of the matter was that the Rana Government found it increasingly difficult to contain the spirit of rebellion in the country. Like rivers to the sea, the boiling resentment of every section of the people, not excluding certain powerful elements in the army as well as among the Ranas themselves, merged into the main stream of rebellion. Nothing that he could do, considering the circumstances, would throttle the spirit of rebellion—this Mohan Shumsher probably realized by then. Besides, the compulsions of the nation's chaotic economy were too pressing to be ignored. Blockaded by India, Nepal's trade and commerce had virtually come to a standstill. The economic effects of this only accentuated the political consequences of the struggle. No amount of repressive measures could hide this harsh fact of economics.

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, Matrika Prasad made it a point to be explicit about the fact that his statement bore no reference to India. In the course of the same statement, he explained: “India's defence is our defence and we have no objection to India employing Nepalese soldiers for defence purposes.”

Hence to Delhi came once again on 27 November two representatives of the Nepalese Government, Bijay Shumsher, Director-General of Foreign Affairs, and the Defence Minister, Kaiser Shumsher. They came for discussions with the Indian Government, the ostensible purpose of which was to find a way out of the impasse. They had several meetings with Prime Minister Nehru and the Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, but these did not prove very helpful. If Kathmandu was amenable to the question of limited liberalization of the regime, it was adamant about Tribhuvan's removal—this was obvious from the trend of the discussions between the Nepalese representatives and the Indian Government. Although the talks between the two Governments continued, the parties concerned were more or less resigned to their failure.

Elsewhere another significant event occurred in the meantime. Neither Great Britain nor the U.S.A. had yet taken any decision regarding the issue of the King's recognition. As it was, this caused enough irritation to Delhi. This was further increased as a result of a British diplomatic team's official visit to Kathmandu. On 3 December the British Ambassador-at-Large in the East, Sir Esler Dening, had a meeting with the Nepalese representatives in Delhi for an exchange of views. Later the same day, Sir Esler accompanied by Frank Roberts, the British Deputy High Commissioner in India, left by air for a two-day visit to Kathmandu. Though the purpose of the visit was stated to be an on-the-spot study of the Nepalese situation, the general feeling of the people concerned was very much against it.

Contrary to their expectations, the British diplomats met with a hostile reception on landing at Gauchar airport, situated some distance away from the city. Defying December's biting cold and the Government's draconian measures, some fifteen to twenty thousand men and women had collected at the airport to protest against what they suspected to be a visit for negotiating the recognition of Gyanendra. The demonstration did not end peacefully,

the Government had to use indiscriminate force in order to break it.

All this added up to create a situation compelling the Indian Government to readjust its Nepal policy. The crumbling resistance of the Nepali Congress, Kathmandu's adamant attitude and the foreign diplomatic manoeuvres caused no little concern to those that held the levers of power in Delhi. The gravity of the situation, the complexities of which would be endless should there be further prolongation of the struggle, finally persuaded Delhi to relent to a measured extent. The scope of the Nepali Congress' limited freedom of action was extended, so that it could collect a few hundred pieces of badly needed Lee-Enfield rifles and the necessary quantity of ammunition. These were procured from a number of places including Kahhmir where Sheikh Abdullah then ruled.

While the odds were still heavy against the Nepalese Government in the Biratnagar region, Prime Minister Nehru stated the Indian Government's policy toward Nepal. His unusually emphatic statement implied that Nepal must remain within India's sphere of influence. And, in order to guarantee this, there should be a government in Nepal that must be friendly and sympathetic to India. Nehru also made it a point to sound a note of warning to such foreigners as were getting unduly interested in Nepal. But the Indian Prime Minister's reference to the realities of Nepal's internal political situation was not half as candid.

On the contrary, it was a rare instance of a diplomatic understatement made by a person whom the world had come to identify as the chief protagonist of the anti-Rana struggle. In the course of his foreign affairs speech in Parliament on 6 December, 1950, Nehru said: "Coming to Nepal, I must say that it has been the scene of strange developments during the last fortnight. Frankly, we do not like and shall not brook any foreign interference in Nepal. We recognize Nepal as an independent country and wish her well. But even a child knows that one cannot go to Nepal without passing through India. Therefore, no other country can have as intimate a relationship with Nepal as

ours has. We would like every other country to appreciate the intimate geographical and cultural relationship that exists between India and Nepal."

Having uttered the note of caution, India's Prime Minister bluntly stated what concerned his Government most in the matter: "Our interest in the internal conditions of Nepal has become still more acute and personal, because of the developments across our borders, to be frank, especially those in China and Tibet. Besides our sympathetic interest in Nepal, we are also interested in the security of our country. From time immemorial, the Himalayas have provided us with a magnificent frontier. Of course, they are no longer as impassable as they used to be but are still fairly effective. The Himalayas lie mostly on the northern border of Nepal. We cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India. Therefore, much as we appreciate the independence of Nepal we cannot allow anything to go wrong in Nepal or permit that barrier to be crossed or weakened, because that would be a risk to our own security. The recent developments have made us ponder more deeply over the Nepal situation than we had done previously. All this time, however, we had functioned in our own patient way, advising in a friendly way and pointing out the difficulties inherent in the situation in a spirit of cooperation."

Continuing in the same vein, Nehru stated in no uncertain terms the type of polity that should obtain in Nepal as much for its own enlightened interests as for those of its neighbour to the south: "We desire a strong, progressive and independent Nepal. In fact, our chief need—not only our need but also that of the whole world—is peace and stability. Having said that, I should also like to add that we are convinced that a return to the old order will not bring peace and stability to Nepal."

Finally, India's Prime Minister peremptorily asked Nepal to set its house in order, failure to comply with which certainly would not bring God's blessings down on the country's rulers: "We shall continue to recognize the King and I see no reason why we should do anything else.

We are a patient Government. Perhaps, we are too patient sometimes. I feel, however, that if this matter drags on, it will not be good for Nepal and it might even make it more difficult to find the middle way we have been advocating.”<sup>8</sup>

The Indian Prime Minister’s declaration left little room for conjectures regarding the scope of freedom the Nepali Congress enjoyed to carry forward the struggle in order to achieve its declared objective: the total liquidation of the Rana regime to be followed by the formation of a democratic Government on the basis of a Constitution framed by an elected Constituent Assembly. For the Government of India, as Jawaharlal Nehru elaborated, did not see any reason why it should deviate from its “middle way policy” of compromise with the Ranas on the basis of a gradual liberalization of the regime.

The Nepalese representatives who had come to Delhi for talks with the Indian Government did not yet consider it unwise to continue playing truant. Notwithstanding the Indian Government’s formal declaration that it continued to recognize King Tribhuvan, Mohan Shumsher’s emissaries resisted the acceptance of Delhi’s compromise formula so forcefully put forward by both Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel. The information that the talks for compromise did not progress as desired by the Indian Government was conveyed to Parliament by the Prime Minister. In the course of the debate on foreign affairs in Parliament on 6 December, 1950, he said: “As the House knows, the King of Nepal is, at the present moment, in Delhi along with two other members of the Nepalese Government. The talks we have had with them have yielded no results thus far...”<sup>9</sup>

The fact that the Nepalese delegation did not yield to Delhi’s pressure appeared rather surprising. But a careful examination of the Nepalese problem readily offered at least a partial explanation as to why Kathmandu had not yet

<sup>8</sup> *Nehru’s speeches (1949-1953)*, pp. 174-177.

<sup>9</sup> *Nehru’s speeches (1949-1953)*, p. 176.

made up its mind to come to terms with Delhi. Like the lingering twilight of a tropical sun-down, Kathmandu still nursed the fond hope that the West, particularly Great Britain, might not leave it all alone to face the music. To the rulers of Nepal, the British Empire they had served with such unreserved loyalty was still a thing very much real, a safe harbour where anchorage was provided for whoever would resolutely turn his face against the harsh realities of the mid-twentieth century.

Besides innumerable meetings with the Indian leaders, the Nepalese representatives concluded their 13 days' stay in Delhi with an informal audience with Tribhuvan. Prior to their departure for Kathmandu, they had been given a formal memorandum by the Indian Government, elaborating the terms of the compromise formula. Briefly, Delhi's compromise formula stated: "The Government of India's primary objective is that Nepal should be independent, progressive and strong. For this purpose, they regard immediate constitutional changes, which will satisfy popular opinion and be acceptable to important non-official organizations of Nepalese nationals, as urgent. In their view, it is necessary :

(1) That a Constituent Assembly composed entirely of properly elected members should be brought into being as soon as possible to draw up a Constitution for Nepal.

(2) Pending the meeting of the Constituent Assembly mentioned in (1) an interim Government, which will include persons, representative of popular opinion and enjoying public confidence, should be established. Apart from an adequate number of popular representatives this interim Government should include members of the Rana family, one of whom should be Prime Minister. Members of the interim Government should be formally appointed by the King on proposals submitted by the Prime Minister. The Government should function as a Cabinet, on the principle of joint responsibility and should frame its own rules of business.

(3) In the interests of peace as well as stability, His Majesty King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah should continue

to be King of Nepal. During the King's absence, he may appoint a regent to act on his behalf during that period."<sup>10</sup>

It does not require any oracular insight to say that the Nepalese rulers had not bargained for a compromise on such terms. Their mood of injured innocence failed to appreciate the compromising spirit behind the proposal. Rather it was construed as an ultimatum demanding outright capitulation, which, candidly speaking, was far from what Delhi wanted. The compromise formula in fact promised to save for the Ranas what a successful revolution would certainly have taken away.

It did not, it is true, guarantee the perpetuation of the feudal set-up the Ranas had so long been accustomed to. It also demanded that power must be shared with the out-castes of yesterday. In effect, however, it assured the Ranas that they would not be called to the bar of justice and that the essentials of power would continue to be theirs to enjoy. In all these there were no hedging qualifications save for one, the Ranas must never fail to see reason not to question Delhi's geo-political interests south of the Himalayas.

Even so, Kathmandu preferred to stick to its line of no-compromise with the Nepali Congress. Strengthened by an infantile appreciation of the current political situation, the fond belief persisted that the resolution of the crisis would finally turn out as the Ranas desired. Being the last Victorians left this side of Suez, their categories of thought could comprehend nothing that had even remotely to do anything with the complex pattern of socio-political life in the mid-twentieth century. To them time had got frozen in the track ; and no reality was real that did not confirm what they considered inviolate, their right to rule Nepal as they thought best. If Delhi's compromise formula did not measure up to this, let it be damned. And so it was, at least for the time being.

But, like Desraeli, Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher also was of opinion that finality should not be the language of

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<sup>10</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 22 December, 1950.



politics. Quite in tune with this was his reply (13 December, 1950) to the Indian Government's memorandum on the proposed Constitution: "Our representatives who had been to New Delhi have brought with them the memorandum containing friendly suggestions and advice offered by your Excellency and the Government of India with the sole object of ensuring the independence, stability and progress of Nepal... My Cabinet has been actively considering the matter but, as momentous changes are envisaged, they are naturally taking some more time to consider the matter than was originally anticipated."<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the risk of repetition, mention must be made of one dominant factor behind this manoeuvring for time. As it became evident at a later stage, the Ranas had not ceased counting on the anticipated intervention of the West in their behalf. Objective conditions were more than inviting, so ran the Rana line of reasoning, for the West to engineer a reprieve for the ancient regime. What with the Chinese occupation of Tibet and what with the political flux in the Indian sub-continent, the West could ill afford to let Nepal move away from its sphere of direct influence.

The *New Statesman and Nation*, among others, was quite candid about it. Not only this, the *New Statesman* also defended, for whatever it was worth, Delhi's approach to the Nepalese problem: "Nepal's independence, in fact, depends entirely upon Indian goodwill, but certain foreign powers have been flirting with the Rana regime, giving it an exaggerated estimate of its powers. If it demands reforms or, as many of its supporters demand, goes to the aid of the rebels, it will find itself accused, probably at Lake Success, of interference in the domestic affairs of an independent State and even perhaps of 'territorial ambitions'...the Nepalese Premier still basks in the sunshine of American flattery. The American Ambassador to India is also U.S. plenipotentiary in Nepal, and silence is not his strong point. Further, His Majesty's Government has also taken a hand; its envoy, Sir Esler Dening, by a happy

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<sup>11</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 22 December, 1950.

coincidence, was taking stock of affairs in Asia and made a trip to Kathmandu, after talks in New Delhi. Experience in other parts of Asia should be a warning to the British Government of the disastrous results which follow from Britain's failure to respect the foresight of our most important ally in Asia. India's interests in an enlightened Nepalese regime are ours too."<sup>12</sup>

The Government of India's memorandum was not made public at that time, but this did not guarantee its secrecy. Soon the whisper got around that the leaders of the Nepali Congress had agreed to adjust their line, to cooperate with Delhi's endeavour for a peaceful solution to the Nepalese problem. It was also common knowledge that, Delhi's best wishes notwithstanding, the nature of the solution would be a far cry from the objectives the armed struggle had set itself.

This had its effect on the ranks of the Nepali Congress and that certainly not very benign. Doubts were raised and disquieting questions asked. By and large the party rank and file were in a bellicose mood; the struggle to end feudalism should be compromised into the acceptance of the Ranas as partners in power was something few had looked forward to. It was, of course, an essay in impotent anger. However resentful most Nepalese might have been, whatever might have been their ire against the forces that stood between them and the desired goal, there was precious little they could do about it. It was a pity they did not know that they were not the men who could alter the course of Nepal's history, and that people elsewhere were doing it for them.

To give the facts in historical sequence, it is now necessary to have a glimpse of the Biratnagar scene immediately before the latest dialogue between Kathmandu and Delhi had commended. With the not-too-considerable consignment of arms procured from Kashmir and elsewhere, the Nepali Congress made a renewed effort for a showdown in the eastern sector. Other things apart, the most important

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<sup>12</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, Vol. XL, 30 December, 1950.

objective was the capture of Biratnagar. This was reckoned as an absolute must, no matter what the nature of the ultimate political solution might be. The possession of Biratnagar, it was reasoned, would offer them two great advantages. First, this would act as a grand morale-booster ; second, this would give them a sizable base, both strategic and financial. One more point was that, in the alternative of peace through compromise, this would handsomely add to their bargaining position. With all these considerations to strengthen their wilting zeal, the Nepali Congress made a determined bid for the capture of Biratnagar.

To Biratnagar, let us then proceed.

One December night in 1950, about 400 volunteers (mostly Gurkha ex-servicemen) of the Nepali Congress collected at the Indo-Nepal frontier town of Jogbani. Equipped with Lee-Enfield rifles, sten guns and bren guns, these men waited for the final word to march. As the gathering dawn was softly breaking upon the somnolent earth, the rebels advanced in two columns. Hardly had they proceeded some distance when a heavy exchange of fire took place, and Biratnagar could sleep no more. Fighting continued for some time before the State forces withdrew, leaving unchallenged the occupation of a large part of the town by the rebels. After some more fighting, the State forces made a general withdrawal inside the walled compound of the Governor's palace. Capturing the abandoned enemy positions, the rebels swiftly arrived at a point whence no further advance could be made. The open stretch of land between them and the fortified palace stood like a hostile sentinel. This compelled the rebels to dig in for a positional engagement, resulting in a stalemate.

We may now review in passing the Nepali Congress' attempt at organizing a sort of emergency administration in the occupied sector of Biratnagar. Not that this was a very important aspect of what was going on in Nepal at that moment. But this would in a general way serve another purpose—this would allow us a glimpse of the state of affairs in the Nepali Congress. It cannot be gainsaid

that the party was called, for the first time since the insurrection started, to give an account of itself, to demonstrate publicly its ability to shoulder constructive responsibility. That is, here in Biratnagar the party was summoned to face the stark realities of the revolutionary method to change a given socio-political complex—at once to construct the basis of a new society while the old is in the process of liquidation. And what was the Nepali Congress' response to this challenge ?

With Keshav Koirala (a younger brother of B. P. Koirala) as the chief, makeshift arrangements were made to run the general administration of the occupied areas. Keshav's primary qualification was, of course, the accident of his birth in the Koirala family, the secondary being his period of service in an indifferent position in one of the Rana Government establishments. Otherwise he was innocent of politics, being drafted into the service of the party by the force of circumstances.

Surely it was not his fault that the whole situation got miserably messed up ; the responsibility lay elsewhere. Without questioning anybody's motive, it may be said unreservedly that the leadership of the party failed to measure up to the needs of the situation. A shallow understanding of the situation, an immature appreciation of the basic political issues at stake, and domestic conflicts got the administration or what passed for it enmeshed in a vicious circle. Purposelessness and drift escalated in a reverse direction, from the top down to the lowest echelon of the party.

The failure to project an image of what the party, when given the people's mandate, would do was symptomatic of the lack of ideological clarity. It was a sharp reminder that the Nepali Congress, if anything, was certainly not a party with an integrated political, social and economic philosophy. The point is : other than the immediate issue the leadership had given little thought to what should be the nature of the larger socio-political tasks it would address itself to. The Nepalese leaders lived in the flux of the moment, hoping that the future would take care of itself.

Moulded in this image, the rank and file of the party were swept away in the general drift.

Pursuant to Delhi's policy of continuous pressure and with its covert assistance, the Nepali Congress expanded its efforts. While attempts were made to resolve the Biratnagar stalemate, the rebels captured Jhapa, another town in eastern Nepal, on 13 December. And by 18 December they had captured Bhojpur, Chainpur, Bingla and Khotang. It would be no exaggeration to say that, by the third week of December, the Nepali Congress had quite an extensive stretch of territory, almost about 30,000 square miles, under its armed control.

As one day succeeded another, it became quite clear that the Rana morale had started crumbling. The situation in Kathmandu also grew worse. A good number of the Ranas had second thoughts ; and they wanted to salvage what they possibly could. Certainly they were no Duc de Orleans ; they only wanted to save what they could for themselves. And they realized that nothing would help them better than the acceptance of Delhi's compromise formula. This would preserve for them the substance, if not the form also, of power. Their hands were strengthened when, on 23 December, Government resistance finally crumbled in Biratnagar.

Two days before the rebels captured this important centre of power and pelf in eastern Nepal, Prime Minister Nehru formally announced the details of the Indian Government's memorandum. What had so long been supposedly "hush hush" between the arbiters of Nepal's destiny was now ceremoniously heralded to the world. On 21 December, 1950, Nehru stated in Indian Parliament : "It was on [the] basis of respect for Nepal's independence, combined with an urgent interest in political reforms there, that we carried on our conversations with the representatives of the Government of Nepal who were recently in Delhi. We explained our position fully to these representatives and at their request we gave them, on the 8th of this month, a memorandum defining our aims and proposals." Having read out the proposals (already mentioned), Nehru con-

cluded with this observation : "The proposals contained in this memorandum aimed at a peaceful settlement in Nepal and, therefore, provided for substantial reform which, at the same time, would preserve continuity and involve no sudden break."

No "sudden break" with the past was the focal point in Delhi's policy. This admirably served a number of purposes at once : (i) it allowed Delhi to retain the role of the arbiter ; (ii) subject to the condition that Mohan Shumsher agreed to Delhi's assumption of Britain's "advisory role" in the region, it permitted the Ranas to continue to exercise power within the country ; (iii) it ensured an effective ally in the shape of the Nepali Congress.

Another aspect of this—some of the Nepalese leaders were not slow to grasp it, maintaining a discreet silence at the same time—was the Indian Prime Minister's democratic but underdeveloped, and, therefore, weak, attempt at the simultaneous existence at two somewhat incompatible levels, principle and real politics ; principle, because it was meant to reach succour to apparently progressive forces against feudalism ; real politics, because it aimed at containing Peking's spill over from the Tibetan adventure.

Still another significant point was the reaffirmation of the fact that India's geo-political interests were to override the Nepalese revolution's declared objectives. On no condition these interests were to be jeopardized. Also, Nehru's speech spelled out in no uncertain terms the line to be followed by the parties concerned in the Nepalese issue—be that the Nepali Congress, the Ranas or the West, or, for that matter, Peking.

Commenting on Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher's reply of 19 December, Nehru once again elaborated the Indian Government's views. The Government of India, he said, had no desire to hustle Kathmandu into any decision without due deliberation. While this was the Indian Government's general line of approach to the Nepalese problem, it could at the same time hardly afford to ignore the fact that the international situation was fast deteriorating. Therefore, "it is our firm conviction," he hastened to add, "that

the longer political reforms and a satisfactory settlement are delayed in Nepal, the greater the danger to Nepal's security and internal tranquillity." Having said all this, probably he had second thoughts—his devastatingly candid statement might compromise India's declared policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of any sovereign State. In haste he declared for the world to hear that India was determined to observe "the strictest neutrality in the internal struggle in Nepal."<sup>13</sup>

With meticulous care, Delhi had prepared the ground for the working out of the compromise formula. First, the policy of maintaining steady pressure at a certain level had started yielding dividends—the Nepali Congress was now in firm control of quite a few strategic points in the country. Second, the compromise formula had by now been sold to the Nepalese leaders—whatever might have been their initial resistance to it—that had the authority to take decision in policy matters. Third—and this certainly was not of secondary importance—King Tribhuvan's unqualified support to it had also been ensured. All this admirably combined to enable Delhi to speak from a position of strength, so absolutely necessary in a situation like this.

Following Prime Minister Nehru's announcement of the text of the memorandum in Indian Parliament, King Tribhuvan issued, for the first time since his arrival in India over five weeks ago, a public statement on 22 December, 1950. The idea that underlied his statement was the endorsement of the Indian Government's proposals for constitutional reforms. In the course of this he said: "It is my earnest wish that there should be peace in Nepal, and that my people should move with the times socially, politically and economically. This beneficent aim can be achieved to the general satisfaction of the people only by the association in the government of the country of their elected representatives."<sup>14</sup> The King said what he was desired to. The question of his exercising any independent initiative in

<sup>13</sup> *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 22 December, 1950.

<sup>14</sup> *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 23 December, 1950.

the matter just did not arise. For he was a passive agent in the whole thing and Delhi had him on tap.

The situation turned out to be extremely delicate for the Nepali Congress. Other things apart, Tribhuvan's statement messed up whatever little chance was there for it to turn a presentable face to the people. Any tactical move that it might have desired to make in defence of its ideological premises was now completely forestalled. Though an utter impossibility in practice, it could have, in theory, disowned Delhi. But what about the King? Certainly he could not be disowned, for he was the peg on which it had hung its story. To disown him would, in effect, amount to disowning itself. The Indian Government's proposals, above all the King's statement, pre-determined the Nepali Congress' stand in the matter and to that extent, needless to say, damaged its cause.

At the Rana end of the spectrum the situation had been warming up at a breezy pace. The fall of Biratnagar was a portent the real significance of which was not lost. Besides, the West's inability to oversee a salvage operation made the situation unendurable. To this was added the continuing pressure a section of the Ranas had been mounting on Mohan Shumsher for the acceptance, in principle if not in details, of Delhi's compromise formula. It dawned on them that there was no escape from the inevitable, that things would no longer be what they so long had been. But if a break with the past was inescapable, it should be in a manner most advantageous to their interests. Therefore, listen to what Delhi had to say.

In Kathmandu, the stage was now set for the finale to a tragi-comedy, the hero of which nearly repeated what Louis XIV had said after the battle of Malplaquet: *Dieu, a-t-il donc oublie ce que j, ai fait pour lui?*<sup>15</sup> Indeed his was an exacting god to satisfy, for he left no alternative for Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher but to eat the humble pie.

On 24 December, he summoned his clansmen, euphemistically called legislators. With what solemnity the occasion called for, he placed before the so-called legislature his pro-

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<sup>15</sup> "Has god then forgotten what I have done for him?"



posals for constitutional reforms. The proposals contained provisions for the convening, within the next three years, of a Constituent Assembly based on adult suffrage; the reshaping of the Government as a Cabinet of nine members, not less than three of whom would be commoners. Also, he proposed the introduction of a State budget, hitherto a thing non-existent, which would be scrutinized by an Auditor-General and published after approval by the Government.

The proposals did not contain any mention of the position of King Tribhuvan. It was deliberately omitted because the Prime Minister was still opposed to his return. The point at issue was clear : Tribhuvan's restoration would force the House of Ranas to return to the Crown what Jang Bahadur had, way back in the mid-nineteenth century, snatched from it. Mohan Shumsher was yet in no mood to requit the century-old debts his family owed the House of Shah. Be that as it may, the Nepalese Embassy in New Delhi issued a communique on 26 December, confirming that Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher's proposals had been approved by the legislators.

The top leaders of the Nepali Congress had by now resigned themselves to the inevitable. Imprisoned in their own scheme of things, they were left without any initiative to alter what history and circumstances had confronted them with. Even at their finest hour in the course of the struggle—if the fall of Biratnagar could be so described—they were compelled to travel the road back to ignominy and disillusionment.

Understandably enough, the announcement of the proposed reforms evoked not the passionate reaction the party's rank and file expected. In a flat, cautious tone, the president of the Nepali Congress, Mr. Matrika Prasad Koirala, said to a Press reporter at Biratnagar : "I am now proceeding to Patna where I hope to study facts and then alone I shall be able to express my view about the announcement. I have no comments to make just now."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 23 December, 1951.

Not quite so obliging was Bisweswar Prasad Koirala. Of all the Nepalese leaders, he was probably the only exception that resisted Delhi's continuing monologue over the problem of Nepal. Not infrequently, he insisted on a two-way traffic in the matter of policy between Delhi and the Nepali Congress. Aware of the fact that Delhi's sweet reasonableness would not help the party to achieve the objective it had set itself, he was to an extent critical of the Indian Government's handling of the Nepalese situation. His comments on Kathmandu's proposed reforms were indicative of this as well as of what the immediate future had in store for Nepal. He said: "I have no comment to make about the proposed constitutional change in Nepal by the present Kathmandu Government and I am not very hopeful of a Government which will still have Maharaja Mohan Shumsher as its Prime Minister and will include members of the Rana family in the Cabinet."<sup>17</sup>

The Nepalese Prime Minister once again sent his envoys to Delhi. On 25 December, Nepal's Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Major-General Bijay Shumsher, and Sardar Narendramani Dixit, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, arrived in Delhi for further discussions. They met Prime Minister Nehru the following day, and conveyed to him the reaction of the Nepalese Government to the Indian memorandum on constitutional reforms. The Nepalese proposals were to an extent in tune with what the Indian Government had suggested. An interim Government composed of both the Rana and popular representatives was provided for, as it was felt that it would take time to give effect to the proposed reforms. Also, other interim measures regarding certain pressing issues were promised.

But Kathmandu was still adamant on one major issue, the position of the King. This was kept an open question on the plea that Tribhuvan's return was undesirable. Another discordant note was struck by the manoeuvrers over such questions as the personnel of the interim Govern-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

ment, and the proportion of the popular representatives in the Cabinet to members of the Rana clan.

Although the compromise talks progressed at a pace not quite to Delhi's liking, Nepal's internal situation deteriorated fast enough to satisfy whoever had an axe to grind against the Ranas. The people's wrath broke all restraints in the Rana sanctuary itself, the valley of Kathmandu. As if to sustain it, the insurgents pressed from all directions toward the valley. In the circumstances, it was obvious that the Indian Government would have nothing to do with the counter-proposals the Nepalese envoys presented. And it did not.

On the contrary, its attitude stiffened in view of (1) the increasing resistance the Nepalese Government was confronted with, and (2) the possibility that the Nepali Congress might even refuse to oblige, if forced to concede more than what the bearable limit would permit. Consequently, the Nepalese envoys were pressed for a substantial change in their draft, making room for the accommodation of the Indian Government's point of view.

Elsewhere in the mean time there had been other significant developments. The Delhi talks were under heavy fire; and it came from a number of directions. As has been already noted, the very suggestion of Delhi's compromise formula had put a section of the Nepali Congress into a petulant mood. The opposition to it had been expressed in whispers, and in small group talks; but nothing yet came into the open.

The situation, however, was entirely different by the time most of the doubts about the final outcome of the struggle had been dispelled. Internal party cleavages became sharper and mutual hostility more intense. A combination of personal factors and a manifest consideration for puerile idealism produced the climate necessary to sustain faction feuds in the party.

Of those who demanded that the fight against Ranarchy be fought to its logical conclusion, K. I. Singh stands

foremost.<sup>18</sup> An important member of the Nepali Congress, he had been entrusted with the task of general supervision of the insurgents in a part of Southern Nepal adjacent to the Indo-Nepal frontier. His contention was that any compromise with the Ranas would be a "betrayal of the revolutionary movement." The Delhi formula, therefore, should be rejected and the struggle continued until final victory was won. In this he was supported by a number of others, mostly party members, who more or less subscribed to his point of view.

In India the reactions were diverse and, at times, mutually conflicting. The Indian National Congress, not unsurprisingly, supported what Delhi desired. It simply could not do otherwise in the matter. The communists, on the other hand, stuck to their line; they denounced it in the same manner as they had done about the struggle itself. Their hands were tied, for they had to follow—it may sound a repetition of clichés—the lead that came from places far and away; from the confines of the sanctum where the mortal gods determined how and what should happen to whom and where and at what time.

More relevant to the Nepalese question, however, was the Indian Socialist Party's point of view. We have observed the close relations it had with the Nepali Congress. Also, the active role it played in each succeeding phase of the Nepalese struggle automatically gave it an amount of importance that just could not be underestimated. In keeping with its advocacy for total change in Nepal's socio-political structure, the Socialist Party initially reacted rather sharply to the Delhi talks. The idea of a compromise with the Ranas was an anathema to the socialists, for it robbed the struggle of its very ideological basis. They argued and argued with vehemence that any

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<sup>18</sup> By profession a homoeopath of sorts, K. I. Singh had little background of any formal education. Since his love for the dramatic was immense, his opposition to the official Nepali Congress line ultimately drove him to a course of adventure. This, in turn, culminated in his flight to China in 1952. After a not-too-short sojourn there, he came back to Nepal to be its nominated Prime Minister for a brief period of time.

rapprochement with the Ranas would, in effect, leave the Nepali Congress without any rationale for its existence. Therefore, insisted they, the Nepali Congress should set its face resolutely against any insidious attempt to talk it into the booby-trap of compromise.

It may not be irrelevant at this stage if we examine a little closely the Socialist Party's point of view. Truth to say, other things apart, the Party's internal conflicts influenced to a considerable extent its attitude toward the whole question. The Nepalese problem also had a continuing reflection, whatever its magnitude might have been, on the Party's pattern of politics. It may also be noted that the Party's failure to evolve a collective approach to the Nepalese issue was one of the factors that had their bearing on the first major split the Indian socialist movement suffered in 1954.

There was a marked difference in the approaches of the two top socialist leaders, Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia, to the Nepalese issue. Jayaprakash was quite clear about the point that the struggle would not pave the way for any meaningful change in Nepalese society unless it disencumbered the country of Ranarchy. His statement, issued from New Delhi on 27 December, 1950, accused the Indian Government of having shown "undue softness for the reactionary Rana Government" in its parleys over the introduction of constitutional reforms in the State. Elaborating the point, he continued: "It appears to me highly inconsistent that the Government should, on the one hand, recognize King Tribhuvan and, on the other, deal with Rana Mohan Shumsher as if his was the legally constituted Government in Nepal."<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, Jayaprakash was capable of keeping his mind open on such questions as were no mere concern of partisan politics. The resilience in his attitude toward matters affecting the nation as a whole was in direct proportion to his understanding attitude to Nehru. So far as he was concerned, the Indian Prime Minister was by no

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<sup>19</sup> *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 28 December, 1950.

means the symbol of all evils in this part of the world. In the circumstances, his point of view regarding the Nepalese issue could be amended, if the need arose, to accommodate what others might have had to say in the matter. More than anything else, he was not wanted to see Nehru through the prism Lohia usually did.

Not so was the case with Lohia. Everything that had anything to do with Nehru was evil, pure and simple. And he was categorically opposed to the Delhi formula. He maintained that the acceptance of it would inevitably lead to a frustrating situation; it would only grant a further lease of life to feudalism in a different garb. If the Nepali Congress was sincere about its declared objectives, said he emphatically, there would then be no alternative to carrying forward the struggle to remove every vestige of Rana power in the country. Alone on the ruins of the ancient regime could the Nepalese hope to lay the foundation of a democratic socialist society. Otherwise it would be a sell-out, a betrayal of trust the people had reposed in the Nepali Congress. Therefore, Lohia would not touch any compromise formula with a barge pole; he would be no witness to a "revolution betrayed".

Theoretically, his position was unassailable. In practice, however, it was as irrelevant to the Nepalese situation as it could be. For few were willing to go the Haldighat way; most plumped for the Man Singh path.

It may as well be said in passing that the utter failure of the Indian socialists to even remotely influence the final course of the Nepalese struggle—and this in spite of their very active participation in it—only added a poignant touch to the irrelevance of Indian socialism. And what made it irrelevant was its aversion, more often than not, to repeat Lohia, "to take risks, to see in itself the expression both of national unity and of change and to act irrespective of immediate and apparent consequences."

Between Delhi's "middle way" policy and the Socialist Party's politics of radicalism, traditionalist Hindu opinion in India preferred a further lease of life for the ancient regime. It did so for reasons it considered quite com-

elling. For Nepal was the only "Hindu Kingdom" in the world, hence nothing should be done that might question the traditional values of Hindu life and society it symbolized. Orthodox Hindu opinion also accused the Indian Government of partisan involvement in the Nepalese issue.

The point was highlighted at the 29th annual conference of the Akhil Bharat (All-India) Hindu Mahasabha held at Poona in the fourth week of December, 1950. In the course of his speech, the conference president, *inter alia*, observed: "The coincidence of the invasion of Tibet and the rising in Nepal is highly suggestive. Although India proclaimed her neutrality, there were reasons to believe that, in the initial stages at least, certain officers of the Government of India failed to observe that neutrality and non-interference which India's friendly relations with Nepal demanded in mutual interest. There is no doubt that Nepal's administration should be liberalized. But this should come as an internal development and not engineered from outside."<sup>20</sup>

By now Kathmandu's disillusionment was complete. The Indian Government had made it plain that it would not go a step further. Considering its present position, the Nepalese Government could, under no circumstances, hope for any better bargain than what the Delhi formula offered. Rather any dilatoriness on its part to accept the proposals would only complicate matters. For the pace of events left not much doubt about the fact that it was living on borrowed time, and that further intransigence would land it in a worse bargain. This was hammered home to the Nepalese envoys in the course of the many meetings held, in New Delhi, between them and the Indian Government, represented by Prime Minister Nehru, Sir Girija Sankar Bajpai (Secretary-General of the External Affairs Department) and Mr. C. P. N. Sinha (Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu).

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<sup>20</sup> *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 25 December, 1950.

## PASSOVER

It must be said to the credit of Mohan Shumsher that, by the time the Nepalese drama had reached its climax, he showed, however unwittingly, a remarkable sense of history. With supreme indifference to, and unmindful of, man's entry into the nuclear age, he fought and fought hard for that senseless, soulless system of feudal society he was a product of. Surely in that he was not guided by logic and rationality. He ruled imperiously and battled for a lost cause. But when he was forced to realize that he was up against the blind forces of history and that he must choose between reprieve with compromise and liquidation with honour, he opted for the former. Maharaja Mohan Shumsher, the great descendant of Maharaja Jung Bahadur who had, exactly one hundred and four years ago, usurped all powers and prerogatives of the King, relented; and he promised to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's.

On 8 January, 1951, the Nepalese Prime Minister issued a declaration accepting, in effect, Delhi's proposals for political reforms in Nepal. For a number of reasons the declaration makes interesting reading. Other things apart, it faithfully carried the imprint of a vain man's naive attempt to rationalize a command performance as an act of his own volition. Even while presiding over the liquidation of all that had made meaning to him and to his kind, he stuck steadfast to the grandeur of an illusion, a mighty illusion that had inspired him to ignore



the remorseless logic of the situation the end of the second world war brought about in this part of the world.

The last in the hundred-year-old line of the great Ranas, Maharaja Mohan Shumsher bowed out of history with a longing, lingering look toward the past and said: "People of Nepal, one hundred and four years ago Maharaja [the Prime Minister] and the people of Nepal, accepted on behalf of himself and his successors in office full powers for the future administration of the State... Even if no mention is made of the other achievements during the past century, it can be said without fear of contradiction that Maharaja Jung Bahadur and his successors have not only maintained but strengthened Nepal's priceless jewel of independence and given her people security, progress and a stable government..."<sup>1</sup>

Displaying a variety of contradictory moods and feelings in the course of the lengthy declaration, Mohan Shumsher decided to be as ungraceful as he could when it came to the question of King Tribhuvan's restoration to the throne. With calculated affront and with an unprecedented exhibition of naivete and hurt feeling, he let the world know that he was not willingly returning to the King what was rightfully his. He was giving the throne back to him because he had been let down by his patrons; because "no friendly country having diplomatic relations with her [Nepal] has recognized the New King."<sup>2</sup> This apart, the Indian Government's "friendly suggestion" that Tribhuvan should continue to be King of Nepal, he observed, was the other compelling factor in the matter.

In sum, the major points the Nepalese Prime Minister's declaration conceded could be stated thus: (1) Tribhuvan would continue to be King of Nepal who would be free to appoint a Regent if he decided not to return to Nepal immediately. (2) A Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage would determine the future Cons-

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<sup>1</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 9 January, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to Tribhuvan's infant grandson, Gyanendra, who had been, following his grandfather's flight to Delhi, placed on the throne by Mohan Shumsher.

titution of Nepal. The Constituent Assembly would be summoned not later than 1952. (3) The immediate formation of an interim Cabinet consisting of 14 members. Of these, seven will be popular and seven Rana representatives. (4) Full amnesty to be granted to all political prisoners.

To all outward appearances, now commenced the play of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. This side of the hill, the scene was dominated not by those that had set the ball rolling in Nepal. Nor from them did come the final seal of approval to the measures of political reforms Mohan Shumsher offered to the Nepalese. The leaders of the people were confronted with a situation that demanded so much to be done and yet at the same time granted them so little freedom to act.

The time was trying indeed for the Nepali Congress leaders. They knew Delhi's views; they also knew the party's temper. They realized that the Indian Government would not press the bargain with Kathmandu any further; and that it would not secure for them the saving grace of forcing Mohan Shumsher's agreement to quit the scene. Circumstanced as they were, they attempted to say many things while, in fact, they said nothing.

Their passion and fury had been spent; and they were left as mere spectators, albeit interested, to what went on in high place. Even in their reaction to the Nepalese Prime Minister's declaration, they dared not speak out their mind. Thus, in a guarded statement issued from Patna on 10 January, 1951, Matrika Prasad Koirala observed: "The reaction to the so-called proclamation of Maharaja Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister of Nepal, in Nepali Congress circles may be summed up in one word, disillusionment. The present struggle is aimed at the liquidation of the feudal regime and the establishment of full democracy in Nepal... The so-called proclamation does not contemplate... a transfer of real authority into the hands of the people."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 11 January, 1951.

A weak attempt no doubt to absorb the shock, to ease the process of a change-over to the politics of sharing power with the Ranas. But, even in this, they were not to be granted a respectable period of time. To stampede them into acceptance, King Tribhuvan issued a statement from New Delhi on 10 January, 1951, extending his unequivocal support to his Prime Minister's declaration. He said: "I welcome the announcement of constitutional reforms made by my Government at Kathmandu [on 8 January]. This is the first and important step in the reconstitution of the Government of our dear and sacred land on democratic lines... I now appeal to my people to do everything that is necessary to restore order and peace at once and to give the fullest cooperation to all the steps to be taken in giving effect to the constitutional reforms now announced."<sup>4</sup>

This should have been enough to write off as bad debts whatever the Ranas might have had owed anybody anywhere. Should there even be a trace of any lingering doubt in any mind still, the Prime Minister of India confirmed that Kathmandu had not acted in bad faith. In fact, it only announced what Delhi had desired it to.

Presumably to forestall any attempt that might be made in the wrong direction, Nehru, who was away in London attending the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, lent what was the most meaningful support to the return of a negotiated peace to Nepal. His message, released by the External Affairs Ministry, distinctly carried the point home to everybody concerned. He said: "I am happy to learn that an announcement has been made about certain changes and reforms in Nepal. The future Constitution of Nepal will be decided by the people of Nepal themselves... I earnestly trust that full advantage will be taken of these changes and all those who have struggled and suffered for the freedom of Nepal will now cooperate in this great undertaking of changing a century-old autocracy to an independent democratic State. In particular I hope that all attempts at violent change will cease, and I appeal to all

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<sup>4</sup> *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 11 January, 1951.

concerned to direct their efforts towards peaceful cooperation and progress.”

The language was unambiguous and the direction firm. To clear any misconception that might be there, let it be repeated that the Indian Government had been singularly consistent, at least on one point, regarding the Nepalese question: the desire for the reconstruction of Nepalese society, without any “sudden break with the past”, on the basis of social change and economic reform and with firm adherence to the positive aspirations of the Indian democracy. And more. The pattern and scope of politics in the emergent Nepalese society should be such as would effectively strengthen India’s scheme for containing China north of the Himalayas.

And the Government of India made no attempt to hide this particular aspect of the whole thing. It placed its cards on the table for whoever would care to see ; it let the whole world know all about its vital interests involved in the Nepalese issue. The leaders of the Nepali Congress were as much in the know of it as the Indian leaders themselves.

Indeed the Nepalese leaders were left without any valid reason to accuse the Indian Government of double-talk or of bad faith. They could not still readily afford to resign themselves to the *fait accompli* Delhi presented them with. Confronted with the increasing resentment of the party rank and file and the open opposition from a not quite small group led by K. I. Singh, they had to play for time and search for a suitable explanation that would spare further distortion of the party’s image.

This task was stupendous and the hurdles evidently insurmountable. Even so, to present at least a semblance of independent decision, a top level meeting of the party was held on 12 January, 1951, in the Indo-Nepal border town of Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. The leaders assembled there in order to formulate future policy with reference to the Nepalese Prime Minister’s declaration. The meeting, not unexpectedly, was no smooth sailing. A good many of the men who had been drilled into taking at their face value

the oft-repeated and inflated promises of the leaders, refused to be talked back into the dispassionate world of logic. And more. Those that had trust in K. I. Singh clamoured for the resumption of the struggle, for the "revolutionary resolution of the crisis."

The assignment to explain the compromise in terms conceivable to the average Nepalese proved difficult indeed. Unable to carry their followers with them, the party leaders hit upon a different stratagem: to procrastinate matters in a manner that would eventually shift elsewhere the onus of the final decision. They did not make an outright announcement of their endorsement of the proposals. Instead they expressed themselves in a way that unmistakably spoke of the purpose in view, while at the same time obliging Delhi to provide them with a suitable alibi, agreement under duress.

This would be readily corroborated by what Matrika Prasad Koirala, while summing up the "meeting's consensus", observed: "The conditions for an interim Government and Constituent Assembly as laid down in the announcement are not such as would bring democracy to Nepal."<sup>5</sup> Clearly this was not the language of disagreement, much less of uncompromising opposition.

There was no mistaking the apparent for the real, however. No longer was it any secret that the path of the struggle would not terminate into the sun-lit valley of redeemed promises; and that the end of the hard day's night would get the Nepalese less peace and more conflict. The dissentient voice in the Nepali Congress was harshly eloquent about this; and so were others who had in their own way championed the cause of the Nepalese.

The waiting was not long before the Nepalese leaders received the desired summons from Delhi. Ostensibly to discuss with the Indian Government the issues arising out of Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher's declaration, the three top Nepalese leaders, Bisweswar Prasad Koirala, Subarna Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana and Matrika Prasad Koirala,

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<sup>5</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 14 January, 1951.

arrived in Delhi on 14 January, 1951. A day of discussions followed and these men were sharply reminded that it was time to close account with the Ranas, however dreadful their guilt might still be thought.

More hours than forty-eight were not necessary to shepherd them into signing along the dotted line. They did it in full awareness of the fact that theirs was the most important role in the Nepalese drama; but more than the most important was that of Delhi. Therefore, in acknowledgement of this indisputable condition of reality, the president of the Nepali Congress, Matrika Prasad Koirala, ordered his men to lay down their arms, to creep out of the subterranean channel of conflict onto the highway of peace. And said he, on 16 January, 1951: "After a full consultation with the Government of India about the situation arising out of the declaration of the Prime Minister of Nepal and the statement issued thereupon by His Majesty the King of Nepal and in response to the appeal made by the Prime Minister of India, we have decided that in order to create suitable conditions for negotiation there should be a cessation of all operations at once... We are grateful to the Government of India for all that they have done in the cause of reform and progress in Nepal. We accept the advice given by the Prime Minister of India at this juncture...<sup>6</sup>

The end came not determined by the barricades in the city streets, nor the hideouts in the rugged hills. It came crawling. So contrary was it to the expectation the Nepalese leaders had carefully nursed over the years that a mood of despondence suddenly gripped the party. For a while hushed silence descended upon the scene. A sense of resignation prevailed where supreme confidence had, not so very long ago, been all-pervasive. Gone was the people's faith in the leadership and with it the myth that the Nepalese were free to determine the course of their politics. The delicate line of communication that had been painstakingly established between the people and their leaders got snapped with a jerk.

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<sup>6</sup> *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 17 January, 1951.

The important participants in the drama were as bitter about the compromise as those that opposed it outright. Not that they had much ideological reservation about it. Their resentment was in direct proportion to their apprehension that Mohan Shumsher's continuance as Prime Minister would make a mockery of their own position. Not only that, it would deny them what as a matter of course should have been theirs, the essentials of power in the changed context of Nepalese politics. Nor was this all. They also realized that, in the future pattern of Nepalese politics, the Delhi-King combine would be the most dominating factor. And they were convinced that it would be beyond their power, at least for sometime to come, to alter the situation to any appreciable extent.

All this notwithstanding, they accepted it. Any alternative to it was out of the question ; for that would, in one form or another, force them into confrontation with Delhi. That being so, the top leaders of the party made the only move they possibly could in the circumstances. Eschewing the high-falutin ideological slogans of yesterday, they now did all they could to defend the compromise in the name of pragmatism. All the stock arguments were advanced and the familiar postures struck to defend what, until recently, had been considered indefensible, at least by some of them.

Parenthetically speaking, of those that controlled the party apparatus, Bisweswar Prasad Koirala and, to an extent, Subarna Shumsher were not quite happy with Delhi's handling of the situation. It needs must be recorded that, at times, they had even been critical of the Indian Government's policy in the matter. Unlike Matrika Prasad Koirala and Surya Prasad Upadhyay, they even tried to resist the terms of the compromise up to a point. But only up to a point did they pursue it. For the fear was there that their refusal to rubber-stamp the compromise formula would only ensure their fall from grace. Between that and political oblivion the distance would be despairingly short. Surely this was something they were not ready to bargain for. The safe course for them would be to conform and to turn the blind eye to posterity.

The sudden transition from the uncompromising logic of revolution to the vague reasonableness of pragmatism was so patently a political expedient that few would agree to accept it at its face value. This essay in pragmatism turned out to be as successful as the leopard's effort to change its spots. For pragmatism in this case at any rate was a convenient cover to hide the leaders' utter lack of faith in the ultimate native source of power—the people of Nepal. This in turn also revealed another significant aspect of the whole thing, the absence of any philosophy of struggle.

What they said in defence of the compromise highlighted this. It also brought into sharp relief the predominant features of the party. More than anything else, it was once again clearly demonstrated that the Nepali Congress, notwithstanding its talks of revolution and socialism, was a pale image of the Indian National Congress anterior to 1947. It was a bourgeois national organization committed to end feudalism, so that the national bourgeoisie could take over.

And take over they did. If in the process the promise to the people went neck and crop out the window into the January mist of the valley, they could not afford to be sensitive. They were in a hurry, lest they should miss the bus. At the moment of the apparent termination of the politics of wilderness, they were in no mood to worry about rendering their own account before the people, let alone the bench of Time.

Not long after Matrika Prasad Koirala had urged his men to say their farewell to arms, King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah commanded the erstwhile revolutionaries to serve him under the guidance and leadership of Maharaja Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. In loyal obedience to the Royal master, the leaders of the people returned to the land of their ancestors. Pledging themselves to uphold the King's divine right to rule as he wished, the Nepalese leaders trooped in to share equally with the Ranas the responsibility of building a "democratic welfare society" in Nepal. The irony of the situation was not lost, not at least



on those that had no immediate stake in it, and on those that did not use their thoughts only to justify their wrongdoing.

Not without reason has it been said that from the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step. Nothing seemed more true than this when, on 18 February, 1951, a Royal proclamation summoned the representatives of two different worlds to usher in democracy in this land of the Himalayas. Amid the feudal pomp and grandeur of Kathmandu, they gathered, the plebians and the patricians, to form a 10-man interim Government with equal representation from the Nepali Congress and the Rana group. Piloted by Bisweswar Prasad Koirala, the five nominees of the Nepali Congress agreed, along with the Rana representatives, to serve the King and country under the stewardship of the one most controversial Nepalese in recent times, Mohan Shumsher. Thus, not with a bang but a whimper, came to a close one troubled chapter of Nepalese history, only to mark the beginning of yet another.

## POSTSCRIPT

Even in the rigid sense of the term, the period during which Nepal rediscovered itself was revolutionary. The world before the fated bomb fell at Hiroshima was no more. Gone was its conception of basic values ; its way of life—social, political and economic—bore little trace of what it had been not so long ago. The second industrial revolution was well on its way, changing the whole pattern of man's relation to man. The countries of Asia and Africa—once the colonial preserves of the West—were on the road to freedom. Life was astir in this part of the world. There was jostling for a place in the sun.

Into such a world was Nepal ushered by history. And instantly was the country confronted with problems, many and complex. The fact that the first industrial revolution had left it untouched only added edges to them. Feudalism had, so to speak, congealed in the peculiar Nepalese conditions ; society remained static and its material resources unutilized.

Suddenly the country had to come to grips with the immeasurably complex problems of a great revolutionary age. It was utterly unprepared for this, to be sure. Without any political and administrative organization and with a society petrified by the deposits of the ages bygone, it kept searching for the right response.

That search, right from the outset, went astray. Instead of unleashing the total energy of the community to deal with the country's number one problem of transition into

the modern age, the architects of Nepal's destiny busied themselves with things trivial and transitory. Like time-servers, they only indulged in one futile action after another. It seemed history had summoned the men that were not quite prepared to face the challenge of time.

There is an element of truth in Voltaire's observation that history is just the portrayal of crimes and misfortunes. A dispassionate reading of what followed the termination of the armed struggle in Nepal would, in a way, substantiate it. Following the Royal proclamation of 18 February, 1951, hardly a day passed that did not witness the re-enactment, in one form or another, of the follies and the malfeasance that crowd the pages of the pre-1951 history of Nepal. If those that had persevered to preserve Nepal as a museum piece were ignorant of the demand of the mid-twentieth century, the men who opposed them were astonishingly lacking in response to this demand. Between them there existed, as it were, an unwritten agreement condemning the people of Nepal to a Sisyphean fate.

To get a working idea of contemporary Nepalese politics, it is necessary to start rather brusquely from the fact that the happenings of 1950 did not at any rate add up to a revolution. What came on the heels of these was a dictated political change-over, permitting the transfer of limited political power to a new ruling elite. However insistent the claims to the contrary might be, the unpleasant reality is that it was no revolution that brought to an end the century-old rule of the Ranas.

It cannot be controverted that a revolution is motivated by ideas, first and last. And a revolution founders as soon as the source of ideas dries up, instances of which man's history does not lack. In Nepal, certain powerful ideas, at least among a section of the Nepali Congress, worked and supplied the motive force to the struggle against the feudal regime. But half-way down the path of the struggle revolutionary ideas were jettisoned. This was done, it is not difficult to comprehend, to harmonize the contradictory and immediate aims the diverse groups of politicians harboured.

Not that the men who rode the storm—not at least some

among them—had not had an awareness of this. But this did not materially affect the course of politics that finally decided the complex question of Nepal's entry into the nuclear age. Inaction, misguided policy, faction feuds in the party and, above all, the crippling fear of Delhi—all this combined to create a situation which left little scope for any positive action. And those who had the awareness allowed themselves to drift from one crisis to another. The result was, confusion got worse confounded.

It would not be imprecise if we said that, technically, Nepal's exercise in modernization commenced with the Royal proclamation appointing a coalition Cabinet with Rana Mohan Shumsher and Bisweswar Prasad Koirala as Prime Minister and Home Minister respectively. In the course of the proclamation, Tribhuvan declared that, until a democratic Constitution was framed by a Constituent Assembly, it would function as an interim arrangement, its sole purpose being to "assist and advise" him in the business of administration. To make his position unambiguous, he also said that the Cabinet would be required to remain collectively responsible to him.

Hardly had the Royal voice faded amidst the serried rock-walls that surround the valley when it became evident that the coalition Ministry was not meant to last. For none of the parties to it wanted it that way, and each for its set of reasons. In no uncertain language they made it known that they had no mind to work the compromise, no matter what the stakes were. And they were not a day too late to render infructuous the Government they had been voluntary partners to.

Even though we are pretty close to the disarray of events that overtook Nepal's first attempt at democratic politics, we may safely say that the Nepali Congress was not half as purposive in its approach to the problem of peace as it had been to that of war. For one thing, the party was in a sullen mood and licked the wound it considered Delhi had inflicted by compelling it to forego the fruits of its labours. For another, it never for a moment believed in any joint

experiment with the Ranas in democratic politics. To this was added its own interminable infighting.

The Ranas, on the other hand, did not refrain from what they thought the right thing to do: they only did what would have a bearing on their efforts to wreck the interim Government. They were determined to recover as much of the lost power and privilege as would be possible in the circumstances. Therefore, there was little desire and no incentive for them to work the experiment in democracy.

The clash of interests between the Nepali Congress and the Ranas only helped to strengthen the position of the King. The Nepali Congress, unable to resolve its conflicts with the Ranas, looked to the King for such assistance as he might render. For identical reason, the Ranas also did the same. In the process the effective levers of power quickly passed into the King's hands, enabling him to play the arbiter's role between the cantankerous partners in power.

To this complicated situation another disturbing factor was added by K. I. Singh and his followers. They indulged in extensive terrorist activities along a considerable stretch of the southern frontier. So severe were the disturbances that the Government was compelled to seek India's help. It was decided that Nepalese and Indian troops would undertake combined military operations to restore order in the troubled areas on the southern frontier.

Indirect were the methods Mohan Shumsher employed to achieve his aims. He extended help to those that opposed the Government, particularly the Gurkha Dal, a conservative communal organization of the Ranas. With Bharat Shumsher<sup>1</sup> taking the lead, this Rana ramification launched a widespread agitation demanding suitable Gurkha representation in the Government. One of its main charges against the Government was that the Nepali Congress leaders were "adventurers" inspired from abroad, *i.e.*, India.

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<sup>1</sup> Bharat Shumsher, General Secretary of the Gurkha Dal, was a grandson of General Babar Shumsher, Defence Minister and a brother of the Prime Minister, who left for India, ostensibly for health reasons, immediately after the formation of the new Government.

This, it may be noted, was the beginning of the "hate India" campaign which, with the passage of time, gained in intensity and depth. This has since been intermittently used as a handy weapon by all the political parties and groups in Nepal.

The resultant state of affairs was, by any count, nothing if not intriguing. Confronted with Mohan Shumsher's crafty scheme of things, the Nepali Congress sank deeper into the morass of its politics of drift and dissolution. It failed to act when action was needed most. Instead what it did was to shift aimlessly from one expediency to another, which in turn only helped to add teeth to the people's increasing resentment against it.

To aggravate the situation still more, the have-nots in the party—in terms of office in the Government, to be precise—did no mean best to discredit their colleagues in office. The foremost among them was Matrika Prasad Koirala, who had not been included in the Government. He was the last man to reconcile himself to this, so keen on power was he. A clever campaign was started against the party nominees in the Government, the major charge being that they were acting in contravention of the party's basic policy. This was, they pointed out, what kept the Ranas in office, which further damaged the prospect of an all-Nepali Congress Government.

The King also was a party to this, entirely for personal reasons though. For him it was but natural to desire the removal of Mohan Shumsher, whose captive he had once been and who forced him to flee the country. This he could never forgive, much less forget. Naturally he wanted a pliable man as Prime Minister, who would leave him unhindered in the pursuit of his own scheme of things. Not by any chance was Bisweswar Prasad such a man, whatever else he might be. Therefore, thought the King, let his support—it was worth quite something—be extended to Matrika Prasad. For Tribhuvan knew he would not fail to oblige him the way he desired.

The Indian Government's role in this was not motivated by any long-term question of policy. A variety of factors,

mostly ephemeral and short-term, decided its attitude toward this. First, Bisweswar Prasad was no longer in the good books of the policy-makers in Delhi. For his close association with the Indian socialists and for his temerity to argue with Delhi at times, he was not adjudged a dependable choice at this juncture. Second, the King was looked upon as the sole unifying factor in the bewildering condition of Nepalese politics. Third, Tribhuvan's line-up with Matrika Prasad, it was generally believed, would eventually result in a team of two weak men. In all probability, this was likely to provide the Indian Government with what was considered an essential adjunct to its overall Himalayan policy, the "structural guarantee" of friendship with Nepal.

With each succeeding day tension increased between the Rana and Congress groups in the Cabinet, which once again made Delhi's intervention inevitable. At the suggestion of Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher, it was finally agreed that the issues involved should be referred to the Indian Prime Minister for mediation. Accordingly, in the second week of May, 1951, the top men of the Nepalese Government journeyed to Delhi to meet Prime Minister Nehru. At the conclusion of the meeting with him on 16 May,<sup>2</sup> a statement was issued that duly announced the participants' desire to "work in a cooperative and progressive spirit for the political development and economic prosperity of Nepal."

The desire notwithstanding, the situation could not be improved. It deteriorated and that fast enough to force a dissolution of the Cabinet. Following this the King decided, with Delhi's evident approval, to drop Mohan Shumsher and go in for a Congress-dominated Cabinet. But he was careful in his choice of the Prime Minister. Much against the wishes of the Nepali Congress, Tribhuvan appointed Matrika Prasad leader of the new Government that did not include Bisweswar Prasad.

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<sup>2</sup> At this meeting the Ranas were represented by Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher and Major Nrip Jung Rana, Education Minister. The Nepali Congress sent Bisweswar Prasad, Subarna Shumsher and Bhadrakali Misra (Minister for Home Affairs, Finance, and Commerce and Transport respectively) as its representatives.

Matrika Prasad's tenure of office as the first commoner Prime Minister was not without certain major developments. On the one hand, his party non-cooperated with him altogether ; on the other, K. I. Singh and his men gave his Government quite a serious jolt. During the night of 22-23 January, 1952, K. I. Singh broke jail for a second time and, along with his men, staged an abortive *coup d'etat*. The rebels proclaimed a rival Government, and made an unsuccessful attempt to seize the members of the Cabinet, who meanwhile had taken refuge in the Royal palace.

Outlining the basic objective of the revolt, K. I. Singh said *inter alia* in a statement on 23 January that it aimed at the establishment of an "all-party Government, including communists but excluding reactionary parties like the Gurkha Dal." Another major demand of the rebels, said he, was the reshaping of the country's relations with foreign powers "on a basis of equality and not on a footing of special friendship with any country." (This was a clear allusion to Nepal's close relations with India). State troops, however, soon restored order, when a large number of rebels were taken prisoner. But K. I. Singh, together with a number of his men, fled across the frontier into Tibet *en route* to China.

Prime Minister Koirala bought his peace, no doubt. But he did so only to survive a not-too-long indifferent existence in power. Unable to come to terms with the party, he quit it only to form a new party. And his efforts to continue in office proved as frustrating. No sooner had his new caucus, Rashtriya Praja Party, been formed than it was pushed into a corner by the combined opposition of the other parties, ranging from the Nepali Congress to the outlawed Communist Party.

Nor for that matter was it able to make any headway among the people. It failed to obtain even a single seat in the first-ever elections to the Kathmandu Municipality held in September, 1952. It may be interesting to note that, of the total 19 seats, the communists secured 5, while the Nepali Congress and Tanka Prasad's Praja Parishad got 4



each, the rest except the one that went to the Gurkha Parishad,<sup>3</sup> going to men without any formal party affiliation.

Not one redeeming feature could be observed anywhere in the working of the Rashtriya Praja Party Government. The process of fragmentation of Nepal's political life offered Tribhuvan splendid opportunities for further concentration of power in his own hands. The Interim Government of Nepal Act of 1951 was changed for the third time in a manner that only helped the emergence of the institution of monarchy as the most potent political force in the country. Not long afterwards, the Government was reconstituted, for the ostensible purpose of broadening its base, to include an assortment of mutually antagonistic politicians from a number of splinter groups.

Though grandiosely called the National Cabinet, it remained just as ineffective as its immediate predecessor. Apart from what the seven members of the Cabinet did to pull it in as many directions, the main opposition to it came from the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party. Nor the situation improved even after the formation of an enlarged Advisory Assembly of 106 members.<sup>4</sup> Outlawed, the Communist Party was not given any representation on it; and the Nepali Congress was allocated a mere 11 out of the 82 seats offered to six different parties and groups. Characterizing it as "a covert design...to delay elections as long as possible," the Congress refused to participate in it.

The Assembly was soon transformed into an arena for a majority of the members of the ruling parties to turn their wrath against the Government. This was reinforced by public accusations the Ministers levelled against one another. To make matters worse, the Nepali Congress took to the path of civil disobedience in January, 1955. The writing on the wall was clear: it was time for Matrika

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<sup>3</sup> Formerly known as Gurkha Dal, it was reconstituted in early 1952 as the Gurkha Parishad.

<sup>4</sup> First formed in October, 1951, with 35 nominated members, the Advisory Assembly was intended "to advise and assist the Government" by providing a restricted debating forum until an elected Parliament was summoned. In 1952, it was reconstituted to increase its strength to 56.

Prasad to quit. And quit he did on 31 January, 1955, making room for the Crown's direct rule.

By the time Matrika Prasad went into retirement, a plethora of parties and groups had emerged to further complicate the already confusing pattern of Nepalese politics. Of these the Nepali Congress was still the largest party, followed by the Gurkha Parishad and the Communist Party. Out of office, the Nepali Congress was never tired of talking the language of idealism, of radical politics, of democracy and all that went with it. Time and again, it reaffirmed its faith in socialism. Also, it stirred itself to establish connexion with the international fraternity of socialists. That did not mean any basic change in the character and composition of the party, however. At best, it only spoke of a few individuals' desire to be identified with the democratic stream of radical thinking in the world.

One such individual was Bisweswar Prasad. In a theoretical sense, he still remained anchored to the ideas of democratic socialism. Surely it was no double-talk when, addressing the first Asian Socialist Conference<sup>5</sup> at Rangoon, he said: "The Nepali Congress...alone of all parties and groups in the country has succeeded in keeping its objectives clear before itself amidst the general confusion. The objectives are democracy and social justice; in other words, socialism and democracy...History has cast upon the socialists who still possess moral consciousness and scientific attitude to undertake tasks of democracy and social justice."<sup>6</sup>

To say that he did not mean it would not be quite fair. He wished every word he spoke had come true. That is

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<sup>5</sup> Mainly as a result of the persistent efforts of the Socialist Parties of Burma, Indonesia and India, the first Asian Socialist Conference met in January, 1953, at Rangoon. The idea behind the venture was to re-orientate the nascent socialist movement in Asia to the special problems of this region, so that it should be able to respond effectively to the twin challenges of underdevelopment and communism. The Nepali Congress participated at this Conference, its delegation of four being led by Bisweswar Prasad.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference*, Rangoon, 1953.

about all. Beyond this what he said was only symptomatic of the semantic chaos man is facing today. For nothing concrete got done that could bring the party into a purposive shape to face the logic of what Bisweswar Prasad had stated at Rangoon. The gap between the ideal and the real remained ever as wide. Collectively, the party remained stuck to expediency and slogan-mongering, refusing to integrate itself into a meaningful framework of rational politics. It continued to alternate between demonstrative action by the direct method and summit politics of pressure for a share in office.

Whatever might be its assertion to the contrary, the Gurkha Parishad was nothing if not an organization of unbridled reaction. Though claimed to be a "party of nationalists", its real concern was to recover the position the Ranas had occupied prior to 1951, albeit with such changes as were absolutely necessary. Its complete lack of awareness of social responsibilities and its Victorian conception of economics, combined to make it the ideal refuge for all who looked at the future in terms of the past.

Any support the Communist Party might have gained since its inception in 1949 was forfeited as a result of its opposition to the anti-Rana struggle. The termination of the Rana regime left it in the doldrums. Still it stuck to the path of infantile violence to the extent that, at one point, the Government had to outlaw it. Accusing the Nepali Congress of collusion with the Ranas, the communists did everything to strike a sort of united front with other splinter groups. In a way this paid them a dividend. But it did so, more because intra-party conflicts had rendered the Nepali Congress too ineffective to do anything by way of constructive politics.

Initially the communists gained some ground, particularly in and around the valley. This was reflected in the 1952 municipal elections in Kathmandu. The communists also directed their attention toward the hitherto politically unaffected peasantry; and it was not long before they started receiving rather favourable response from that quarter.

Around 1954, a change took place in the political line of

the Communist Party. This initiated its period of sweet reasonableness, when it also tried to woo the Nepali Congress. This change in its tactical line, it may not be irrelevant to say, was directly determined by the shift in international communism's policy toward the uncommitted nations.

On 28 June, 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou En-lai issued a joint statement setting forth the "Five Principles" which should guide relations between the two countries. Less than a year later, the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung produced the "Panch Shila", the supposedly sheet-anchor of the lofty principles meant to guide relations among the participating nations. Also, the myth gained currency that China had no expansionist ambition in Asia. And many non-communist Asian countries' attitude toward China underwent a sea-change, that almost amounted to adulation of everything Chinese.

The Nepalese communists were not slow to take their cue from this. Acting upon it, they made short shrift of yesterday's politics and stopped talking in terms of the necessity of another revolution. And they hastened to declare their faith in parliamentary democracy. The current slogan was for a united front of democrats, that should primarily devote its energy to working for an early general election.

To assuage hurt feelings, the communists recanted their earlier interpretation of the 1950-51 struggle. The draft programme the polit-bureau of the Party prepared for the second party congress stated: "...the Party did not give any importance to the issue of the revolution [1950-51] and gave more weight to the possibilities of people's revolution in the near future, directly by interpreting the meaning of the revolution wrongly."

Also, it announced its new interpretation of the anti-Rana struggle: "All elements of the country are unanimous that the revolution of 1950 has a great and important role in the history of the movement of the Nepalese people... on this issue the Nepali Communist Party has entertained much misunderstanding within its ranks."

Therefore, in the given context, the duty of the Party was clear, it must disown its past, remembering that "to transform the arbitrary set-up of today into a democratic set-up (even if it is a parliamentary set-up of the capitalist type) is to effect change in the interest of a people's revolution in Nepal."

Elaborating the policy and programme the Party should follow, it stated: "It is quite clear that in the absence of industrial labourers at present, the development of our nation depends upon the revolutionary role of the majority of the peasants... Therefore, we have to take both questions into consideration: the class struggle of the peasants and the formation of a broad-based joint front for the achievement of democracy... The joint front should include the intellectuals, the commercial classes and the reformist small landholders...the peasants."

In keeping with this re-orientation, the communists also discarded their anti-Indian stance. It would be interesting to note that, at about the same time, the Indian communists were also busy burying the remnants of the erstwhile "Ranadive line"<sup>7</sup> of sterile violence, so that they could strive for a united national front to fight the impending second general elections in the country.

The backdrop was thus provided to Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah's accession to his father's throne in March, 1955. Right from the outset, he did not mince matters to let his people know that he meant to reign as well as rule. In no time his doings made it apparent that the process of political polarization was complete; and that he alone was the source of all power in the country.

King Mahendra started his Royal career with three sharply defined attitudes: (i) contempt for democratic politics; (ii) animosity toward the Nepali Congress; (iii) dislike of India. One of the first things he did was to look

---

<sup>7</sup> Secretary of the Indian Communist Party, B. T. Ranadive was foremost among those who, following the Party's 1948 conference at Calcutta, indulged in the politics of murder, arson and loot—euphemistically called insurrection—to capture power.

for an alternative opening for his landlocked country, that had only one window on the outside world, Delhi. He looked up north toward his neighbour across the Himalayas for such succour as it might render him in securing a new opening for Nepal. He was admirably assisted in this, in an indirect manner though, by the sub-continent's currently prevailing pattern of politics the dominant feature of which was intensive fraternization with China. And Peking was then more than willing to oblige him. Barely five months of his reign had elapsed when, on 1 August, 1955, formal diplomatic relations were established between China and Nepal. Even if Delhi disliked this, it could hardly afford, in the prevailing "spirit of Bandung", to take umbrage.

This was a considerable break-through in Nepal's foreign politics which, until recently, had been restricted to diplomatic relations with the United States, Great Britain and India. Besides, the King got Nepal admitted to the United Nations Organization in December, 1955.

To act as his man in public he picked up Tanka Prasad, the Praja Parishad chief. He asked him to form a Government in January, 1956. Obliging and submissive, Tanka Prasad was a sort of woolly leftist with a pro-China bias. He carried forward the King's policy of adding warmth to the just initiated dialogue with China. On 20 September, 1956, a Sino-Nepalese treaty of friendship was concluded confirming, among other things, Nepal's formal acceptance of Peking's sovereignty over Tibet.

As a corollary to his external policy, Prime Minister Tanka Prasad courted the native communists by setting them free in April, 1956. The reasons for this action were, first, to give his Government a radical face-lift to suit the mood of the friends just found up north. Secondly, to set them up as a counter-weight against other opposition parties, particularly the Nepali Congress.

Despite all this, Tanka Prasad did not survive long in office. His own Party rebelled against him, and the King's support grew increasingly lukewarm. Caught in the midst of this, he was in a way forced to resign. This left the door

open for K. I. Singh to have a taste of the forbidden fruit of power for about four months.

If King Mahendra was capable of having a place in his scheme of politics for just two persons, one of them certainly was K. I. Singh, at least at this point of time. This was manifested to the chagrin of many when, some time earlier, K. I. Singh had been granted pardon to return from his exile in China. Not only that, he was given a hero's welcome, presumably with Mahendra's covert approval, on his return to Kathmandu.

K. I. Singh's appointment as the King's First Minister in July, 1957, was uneventfully short-lived. For he failed to live up to what he had been expected to. Other things apart, his apparently pro-Indian attitude and his determination to be his own master were points that went against him. To precipitate matters, a "democratic front" to oppose him was formed with a bewildering melange of alliances that received the support of the communists as well. The inevitable result was that the intrepid though impetuous K. I. Singh got the sack.

From now until the first general elections in February, 1959, the King ruled his country with the help of an indifferent assortment of politicians, entirely dependent on him and drawn from a variety of opposing parties, including the Nepali Congress and the Gurkha Parishad. During this period the country was also saddled with a new Constitution. Contrary to the provision of the Delhi agreement of 1951—this provided for a Constitution to be drafted by a Constituent Assembly—the King made a gift of it to the people.

Much of what then happened in Nepal, it may safely be stated, was not quite to the Indian Government's liking. But it could ill afford to resist Mahendra's political line, much less alter it. For Peking's role in the politics of this region had by now, the platitudes of the "Panch Shila" notwithstanding, been demonstrably made clear. And it was becoming increasingly assertive, too.

The resultant shift in the balance of power in this region left the Indian Government with one alternative and that

was not very effective. Perforce it had to join the rat-race, which the global powers had started for reasons of big-time politics, of proffering economic aid to the underdeveloped countries. Itself recipient of charity, the Government of India re-routed a bit of its scarce resources across the humid marshes of the Terai. The hope was that this would keep a wealthy King and his pauperized subjects in good humour. But what followed turned that hope sour. That, however, is another story.

The long awaited first general elections on the basis of adult franchise were held in February, 1959. As much as 46 per cent of the electorate voted, of which 38 per cent were cast for the Nepali Congress giving it 78 seats in a Parliament of 109. The Gurkha Parishad took 21 seats and the Communist Party 4, leaving the rest for distribution among a number of splinter groups and non-party individuals.

The Nepali Congress formed the country's first elected Government with Bisweswar Prasad as Prime Minister. In a way this marked Nepal's real beginning of the experiment in parliamentary democracy. The beginning surely was difficult, for hastily was Prime Minister Koirala summoned to face the most exacting challenge of recent Nepalese history. The challenge was: if democracy were to survive, if peace and progress were to be achieved, Nepal needs must construct a socio-economic order that would rule out extremes of wealth and of poverty.

By any standard, it was a formidable challenge. As if to add a new dimension to it, the people were not a day too late to clamour for their rightful place in society. The condition precedent for the survival of the newly elected Government was to show itself capable of, to quote John Strachey, "leading the country forward, industrializing it and developing it generally."<sup>8</sup> In other words, it was confronted with the challenge of transforming Nepal's ancient moribund society into a modern industrial State.

---

<sup>8</sup> John Strachey, *Great Awakening, Encounter Pamphlet No. 5, 1961.*



The response to the challenge was perfunctory, if anything. The total commitment which alone could lift the country from the feudal cesspool was absent. The Government temporized when immediate action was imperative; it compromised where defiance was necessary. Whether in the sphere of economic development or in that of foreign relations, it was eager only to go by the rule book. If conformism could buy a drab existence today, it certainly saw no reason to go non-conformist for a purposive creative living tomorrow.

Even though it loudly re-affirmed its faith in socialism, the leadership of the party demonstrated a woeful want of integrated thinking. The manifest inclination was there to treat ideological questions as important only in the larger context of the development of man's humanity. The immediate problems were all of an administrative nature and nothing more. Oblivious of the fact that the immediate would defy solution if the distant was lost sight of, it made pragmatism its sole virtue. And pragmatism in this case was but another facet of opportunism.

This does not, however, imply that the Koirala Government was merely a carbon copy of the numerous nominated Governments that, during the years since the struggle, had come and disappeared like the proverbial Indian summer. In more ways than one it was different and that in a tangible manner. Where inaction had been the major virtue of his predecessors, Prime Minister Koirala pinned his faith in action. And, in terms of physical achievements, his Government far outpaced its forerunners.

Encumbered with the legacy of poverty, illiteracy and primitive agriculture, the Government started its career with apparent determination to rise to the occasion. To begin with, it accepted the principle of planned economic development of the country. As the first step in this direction, it pledged itself to execute, with aid chiefly from the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and India, a moderate five-year plan the previous administration had drawn up. Secondly, work on the blue-print of a more ambitious second five-year plan was undertaken. Along with this, it set about reorganizing

the army and the corrupt administrative apparatus. It is well to remember that, between themselves, these two institutions had been accounting for full two-thirds of the country's total annual expenditure.

Prime Minister Koirala also made commendable attempts to steer the country clear of the whirlpool of cold war politics. The overbearing Chinese did not waste time to confront him with a border problem. The quest for a solution to this took him to Peking. It certainly spoke of quiet courage and determination when he successfully resisted, while securing Peking's assurance not to precipitate the border question, the pressure for a bilateral non-aggression pact.

Even so, all this only touched the fringe of the many problems that stared Nepal in the face. Not that the Government was expected to get all problems solved at once. Far from it. But the one important thing was to convince the people of its bona fides. It was also necessary, and not in a Pickwickian sense, to make the Nepalese peasants feel that their representatives meant to travel the hard way along with them to a brighter and happier and more meaningful future. In short, the situation demanded of the Government to establish a continuing and intimate dialogue with the people, so that they could feel assured of being equal partners in the task of catapulting Nepal into the space age.

Here it failed. The daring, dynamic and principled action that alone, while mobilizing the total energy of the people, could lift the country out of the stagnation of centuries was found wanting. It was so because the Nepalese leaders were victims of more or less the same kind of intellectual crisis as, according to I. R. Sinai, has overtaken most emerging nations of Asia and Africa. What Sinai observed while explaining the Afro-Asian countries' failure to respond to the challenge of modernization is harsh, no doubt. But it is true, at least true enough to pinpoint the debilitating dilemma the Nepalese leaders faced. Sinai said: "Faced with the need to choose between the relentlessly demanding modern world and the simple, primitive and

lethargic native traditional world, they flounder in hesitation and indecision. They are agitated by various and hostile intentions. Because they have not made this fundamental choice they continue to speak about the ideas and techniques of the modern world while in fact continuing to live and breathe within the crumbling walls of their effete, traditional societies.”<sup>9</sup>

The inevitable happened. The Nepali Congress Government, during its 19 months of office, failed to satisfy any but displeased all. It alienated the people fast enough for a crisis of confidence to develop. And to the extent it got estranged from the people, opposition both from the Gurkha Parishad and the Communist Party stiffened. To this was added the King’s increasing intolerance of parliamentary democracy.

Yet in a wave of self-delusion they allowed themselves to be carried away, the Government as well as the party. The crisis deepened. But the persons concerned remained blissfully ignorant of this. They did remain so even when King Mahendra decided he had had enough of democracy. What added poignancy to the tragic situation was that when the King, on 15 December, 1960, had the Parliament dissolved, Government dismissed and the leaders of the people, including the Prime Minister, arrested, the people preferred not to betray any concern. Nowhere in this land of the Himayalas, not at least for some time to come, was a voice raised in protest or even a challenging whisper heard. Quietly Nepal got back into the chrysalis of King Mahendra’s direct rule.

---

<sup>9</sup> I. R. Sinai, *Challenge of Modernization*, pp. 85-86.



## APPENDICES



My dear Mr. Chatterjee  
 — (R. 228)

The bearer is Comrade  
 Lu Aye Secretary of Rangoon  
 District Party.

He will be pleased  
 to conduct ~~the~~ your party  
 along with the whole programme

Yours sincerely  
 Chit Mg  
 10/8/50  
 Deputy General Secy  
 Party (HQ)

My Dear Mr. Chatterjee,

—(R. 228)

The bearer is Comrade Lu Aye, Secretary of Rangoon District Party.

He will be pleased to conduct your party along with the whole programme.

Yours sincerely,

Chit Mg

10.8.50.

Deputy General Secy.  
 Party (HQ).

Phone. N 240.



ဗမာပြည် ဆိုရှယ်လစ် ပါတီ ရွာနဂါး

အမှတ် ၄-အလောင်းကင်း ခုတ်မိ

The Burma Socialist Party No. 2

4, Wingaba Road, Rangoon.

အမှတ်

ရက်

10/8/50

My dear Mr. Chaudhary

I am extremely sorry that I am <sup>still</sup> unable to give you ~~the~~ reply for your offering of dinner.

We are all fully engaged with such business that mainly concerns with your mission. We have to do it in two days.

So I do apologise you that your offering of dinner be cancelled to-night.

But the members of the recent delegation to India will receive you at a dinner to-night. Chetty



APPENDIX—B

Phone. N 240

The Burma Socialist Party HQ.  
4, Wingaba Road, Rangoon.

15.8.50.

My dear Mr. Chatterjee,

I am extremely sorry that I am still unable to give you the reply for your offering of dinner.

We are all fully engaged with such business that mainly concerns with your mission. We have to do it in two days.

So I do apologize you that your offering of dinner be cancelled to-night.

But the members of the recent delegation to India will receive you at a dinner to-night.

Chit Mg

My Dear Mr. Chatterjee

Mr. Prady is very sorry that he could not contact ~~his~~ all of his friends for your dinner, as all of them are busy for your mission.

Pl: Excuse us.

Mrs. Aung San has been intimated that you will see her tomorrow at 5 p.m.

Room No. 228

Lu Aye  
12/8  
(Lu Aye)

APPENDIX--B

My dear Mr. Chatterjee,

Mr. Maung is very sorry that he could not contact all of his friends for your Dinner, as all of them are busy for your mission.

Pl. Excuse us.

Mrs. Aung San has been intimated that you will see her tomorrow at 5 p.m.

Lu Aye

14.8

Room No. 228

000367



*ms*

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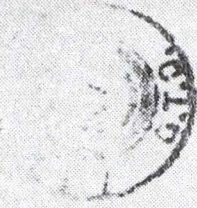
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APPENDIX—E

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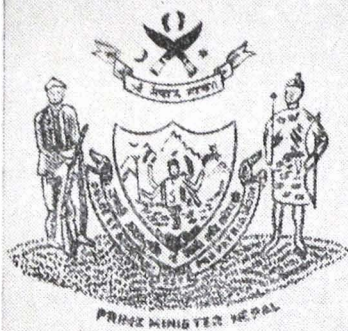
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KATHMANDU,  
NEPAL

April 16, 1954.

My dear Bhola,

I was in receipt of your telegram dated April 9, 1954 as well as a letter. In the meantime, you have been awarded a decoration by His Majesty the King of which I hope you are both glad and proud.

I am all right here. Hope you are keeping fit.

Yours sincerely,

*M. P. Koirala*

(M.P. Koirala)  
Prime Minister, Nepal.

Sri Bhola Chatterji,  
Calcutta.

APPENDIX—F

PRIME MINISTER NEPAL

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M. P. Koirala  
Prime Minister, Nepal.

Sri Bhola Chatterji,  
Calcutta.

## APPENDIX—G

PRIME MINISTER'S RESIDENCE  
KATHMANDU, NEPAL

No authentic version of the happenings that took place during 1950 - 51 , the glorious days of the Revolution , has been presented to the world. The present volume written by my friend , Sri Bhola Chatterji , will assuredly remove this deficiency . What makes this book interesting is that Bhola was himself an important participant in the Revolution , which had received enthusiastic support and sympathy from revolutionaries from all over what are known as the South East Asian countries . Bhola was our valuable link .

The Revolution terminated an age - old autocratic rule of the Ranas and paved the way for democratic transformation of the feudal society into a modern socialist one . The intimate history of the events of 1950 - 51 that is leading to the political and social unfolding of today will be , I am confident , of interest to the readers .

With regard to the author's interpretation of events subsequent to the Revolution, it is possible that I may not be in complete agreement with it . But on the whole he has tried to be objective in his approach to and analysis of the developing situation in Nepal .

*B. P. Koirala*  
(B. P. Koirala) 7/1/51  
Prime Minister .

## APPENDIX—G\*

### PRIME MINISTER'S RESIDENCE KATHMANDU, NEPAL.

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B. P. Koirala  
Prime Minister.  
7.9.59.

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\* Bisweswar Prasad Koirala's foreword to the author's book (in Bengali) on Nepal.



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