

# Nepal's Experiment With Democracy

**Bhola Chatterji**

With a foreword by B. P. Koirala



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NEPAL'S EXPERIMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

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**To my daughter Angana  
and nephew Arun**



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# Introduction

IF HISTORY is "an unending dialogue between the present and the past," an understanding of the Nepalese political scene today would call for an assessment of what it was yesterday. Nepal's journey into the 20th century commenced some two and a half decades ago. Until the revolution of 1950-51 it was a closed feudal society under the absolute sway of the land barons, locally known as Ranas. For nearly a century the Ranas not only held the people to ransom but also usurped the powers of the monarchy. They converted Nepal into "one family's property."

In that traditional society life was harsh. Almost excruciatingly so for the majority of the people. Extremes of poverty and affluence were evident all over. What with a punishing economy and despotic rule, the people had been at the wrong end of the stick for about a century. The otherwise patient and stolid Nepalese asked for change, change that would be meaningful and purposive. It was this longing for change which impelled them to raise the standard of revolt. The revolution, led by the Nepali Congress and enjoying the support of King Tribhuvan (then a fugitive in India), liberated the people as much as the monarchy.

The task that confronted the Himalayan kingdom on the morrow of the revolution was formidable. The struggle against feudalism awaited pursuit to its logical conclusion, for the revolution had ended on a note of compromise between the contending forces—the people as represented by the Nepali Congress, the King, and the Ranas. Small wonder therefore that in the compromise which marked the end of the 1950-51 struggle remained embedded the seeds of contradiction and conflict, and they did not take long to befuddle the emerging political process.

History and circumstances called upon Nepal to work a Westminster-type of democracy. But the country lacked both the political and economic premises for evolving a

viable democracy. To the abysmally pauperised Nepalese, who were not a nation in the real, as opposed to the legal, sense of the term, such expressions as democracy, elections, people's representatives and parliament were indeed meaningless. They were suddenly required to respond to the exacting challenge of nation-building and democracy in this state of ignorance.

For eight long years after the revolution the country had to suffer about as many "popular" governments nominated by the Palace. The major concern of these governments was nothing more enlightened than mere survival. And the people had to remain content with just a promise—that tomorrow would take care of all their problems. Nothing done at the administrative and political level suggested that this promise was meant to be acted upon. All that the nominated governments left behind was a depressing account of neglect, mismanagement, corruption and wasted opportunities.

The course of Nepalese politics however changed when the first ever elected government of Prime Minister Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala was inducted into office. Of course, to be the pacemaker of one of the world's poorest countries, and that not at the best of times, was a forbidding responsibility. Modernising an authority-bound society called for no mean endeavour. This was precisely what the Koirala government had to take on. The problems which stared the ancient kingdom in the face were too numerous to be enumerated. Unbounded poverty, primitive agriculture, widespread unemployment and pervasive corruption were just a few of the evils which demanded to be tackled forthwith. The economy had slid into a rut, and political conditions were anything but comforting. Between this and the promised good life in the distance lay a yawning gap.

The kingdom's experiment with democracy started seriously with the formation of the Koirala government in May 1959. Things began to move in Kathmandu. Both King Mahendra and the Prime Minister seemed to appreciate that they needed each other's help to catch up with the present. The essence of the Nepalese equation was that B. P. Koirala, the Nepali Congress and the people's urge for de-



mocracy were factors which could not be wished away. Nor could the other most important factor—the King—be ignored. For a while it appeared that the King and his Prime Minister were not unaware of this. But there was a great deal of difference between appearance and reality, and before long the chief actors in the drama were on a collision course. In the pages that follow an attempt has been made to explain why this happened.

This study has grown out of a research project on contemporary Nepalese politics I undertook as a member of the scientific staff of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. It draws heavily on the extensive taped interviews I had with B. P. Koirala between October 1973 and May 1975 (the original tapes and their transcription signed by him are in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit). Part of the material used has been taken from articles and essays I published at different times in various periodicals and daily newspapers, particularly *Young Indian*, New Delhi, and the *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta.

My thanks are due to Dr Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Research Professor and Head, Sociological Research Unit, who facilitated my entry into the unit. I express my appreciation to Mr Trevor Driberg, author and journalist, for editing the manuscript. I owe a debt of gratitude to Mr Indra Sen, Assistant Editor of the *Business Standard*, with whom I have had the benefit of almost interminable discussions about the study. I also thank Mr Bidhyut Raj Chalisey, former Nepalese Consul in Calcutta, for his kind assistance.

To Dr B.P. Adhikari, Research Professor of the Indian Statistical Institute, I am obliged for the trouble he took to go through the manuscript. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the cooperation I received from the staff, both scientific and administrative, particularly Mr Pradyot Mohalanobish, of the Sociological Research Unit and of the institute's library. To my wife Anubha I say thank you for bearing with me so patiently.

None of the individuals or institutions mentioned here bear any responsibility for the opinions expressed and the

errors in this book. For these I alone am responsible.

One more point. The publication of this work has been held up more than a year and a half by the Emergency imposed in June 1975. Still, this by no means detracts from its value as an authentic document relating to a very important period in the history of present-day Nepal.

A postscript would be in order. Since the preface had been written much water has flowed down the Ganga. While the Emergency was on here the censor refused to pass the book for publication. Even as late as 28 January 1977 the Ministry of External Affairs informed me that "it is not considered advisable to recommend the publication of the book for the time being."

The scenario has changed and the all-powerful censor is no longer there to prevent me from recalling that the story of post-Second World War Nepal is essentially that of a feudal aristocrat, Mohan Shumsher, and three kings, Tribhuvan, Mahendra and Birendra. Birendra, a suave, soft-spoken man with an Eton-Harvard-Tokyo educational background, is at the helm and the people and Koirala are very much there. But Koirala is denied once again what even nature's meanest creature enjoys—freedom to spend the hard day's night at a place it might call its own.

Former Prime Minister Koirala had to waste eight long years of his life in prison after Mahendra's takeover on 15 December 1960. Self-exile in India awaited his release from prison in 1969, the experience of which was nothing if not agonising. It would have been less than human if Koirala had reconciled himself to the idea of spending the sundown of his life as an emigre, away from the land and people he belonged to.

The yearning for a sight of the old familiar faces, of the country he could call his own, was too strong to allow him to be at peace with himself. Having lived an exile for nearly eight years in India, he decided eventfully to return to Nepal and face whatever the future had in store for him.

On 30 December 1976 Koirala landed at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan airport and was immediately taken into custody by Authority. He was arraigned before a specially constituted one-man tribunal on charges ranging from "anti-national

activities and acts of violence" to stirring the people to revolt with the "aim of overthrowing the existing system."

Be that as it may, an impression seems to linger that Koirala is determined not only to subvert the present regime but also to abolish the institution of monarchy. This is far from true. None other than Koirala himself would bear this out. In the course of my extensive taped interviews with him (mentioned earlier) I had ample opportunity to find out the truth of the matter. He told me that in the given context the institution of monarchy constituted a symbol of the Nepalese nation, of the unity of Nepal. He also admitted that "the Palace has a role to play in the modernisation of Nepal." All that he wanted was that the basic political rights of the people should be recognised. He emphasised that "there must be total understanding between the king and the democratic forces. That is why... there must be an unconditional dialogue with the King."

An outsider cannot afford to be too free with his pen in discussing a subject that is essentially within the purview of Nepal's internal politics. That being so, I would venture to say only that there is apparently scope for a meaningful dialogue between the powers that be and those who doubt whether the system of polity in its present form is best equipped to facilitate the country's onward march.

In this connexion the most important name that comes to mind is B.P. Koirala. Tallest of the architects of the 1950-51 revolution, he has suffered persecution almost interminably because he refused to stifle the "still small voice" within him, because he would not barter away his right to dissent. Must his life continue to move in a circle of struggle-prison-wilderness?

Bhola Chatterji

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April 1977



# Foreword

LATTERLY THERE has been a spate of publications on Nepal. The hitherto neglected and closed country has suddenly started attracting considerable interest among academicians, journalists, politicians and seekers of the exotic. Nepal is clearly on the agenda. Sandwiched between two giants of Asia, India and China, which have emerged in the post-second world war period as focal points with divergent ideologies, both with historical memories going back thousands of years into the past—a situation which has made the border where they meet a live area—Nepal has naturally acquired a vicarious importance. Moreover, the revolution of 1950-51 which terminated the Shogunate of the Rana autocracy and ushered the country into the modern world is itself a subject of serious interest for academicians and active men in politics interested in the study of the problems of nation-building and economic development.

The problems of Nepal have the peculiar characteristics of the problems of most of the emergent states of the Third World which became independent as an aftermath of World War II. Nepal acquired statehood before it became a nation. The task of nation-building remains to be accomplished. The second problem concerns the appalling economic backwardness which can only be surmounted by national efforts on a massive scale. But Nepal is not yet welded into such a fully conscious nation as can demand and secure from the people such a supreme effort commensurate with the task of the eradication of poverty. Nepal is thus in the grip of a vicious circle made by poverty and want of full national consciousness.

It is a sad commentary on most of the books which have recently appeared on Nepal that they have missed this central point. By not being cognisant of this basic issue of the Nepalese situation, the authors have also missed the essence of the struggle for democracy there and the ideologi-

cal thrust of the Nepalese democrats. When democrats speak of the people they do not use the term in a vague sense or to score a theoretical point against the adherents of autocracy and dictatorship. Their conviction is that the people can be mobilised and thrown into the twin tasks of eradicating poverty and building the nation by involving them through appropriate political institutions. After all, nation-building as well as eradication of poverty, that is modernisation, are political tasks inasmuch as they involve the management of men and resources.

Mr Bhola Chatterji was our colleague in the revolutionary struggle of 1950-51, one of the high-spirited Indians who volunteered to serve the cause of democracy in Nepal. Before he took up a pen to write about the current history of Nepal he donned the khaki uniform of the Mukti Sena of the Nepali Congress and participated in the creation of this history. It is natural that he should be interested in the denouement of the insurrectionary struggle of 1950-51.

The present book is the product of a study prompted by his personal interest in the political development consequent upon the revolution. Hence the value of this book. He has been careful about his facts, but has taken pains not to overburden the book with too many of them. One may not agree with his interpretation—I for myself have certain reservation about it in some places—but I am sure the reader will find the book extremely readable and worth a serious study.

I would join issue with him on a major point when he discusses the causes of the so-called failure of the democratic movement spearheaded by the Nepali Congress, leading to the royal coup of 1960. This is not the occasion as I write this foreword to expound at length my point of view as opposed to the writer's. I should just like to point out that the democratic movement of the Nepali Congress did not fail, and neither did the democratically elected government. As a matter of fact, they succeeded, dangerously so, in the eyes of King Mahendra. The Nepali Congress is a political organisation and not a war machine. Our preparations were political and not military. We were prepared for every political situation or eventuality. But we were not prepared

for war. A valid charge that could be laid at the door of the Nepali Congress is that it did not prepare for the war which the King thrust on the people when he used the palace guards to effect his coup. The coup was a reconquest of Nepal by the successor of Prithivi Narayan Shah, the first conqueror of Nepal.

I also do not agree with Mr Chatterji's contention that the King's action on 15 December 1960 was within his constitutional competence. If we were to accept the writer's argument in this regard, then almost all the military coups in the world would be termed strictly constitutional steps, albeit a little too drastic.

With this reservation I have no hesitation in recommending the book to the serious student of Nepal's politics.

B. P. Koirala

September 14, 1975





## Mutual Indictments

WHO WOULD have imagined, even as late as an autumn day in 1950, when the late King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Deva, the eighth ruler of the Shah dynasty and a living incarnate of Vishnu, the benevolent and ever-watchful preserver in the Hindu pantheon, was whisked out of the Kathmandu Valley in an Indian Air Force Dakota, that some two decades later a Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation Boeing 727 would be ferrying men, goods and ideas there? Not many, presumably. But this is now an everyday affair. Nestled in the high Himalayas there is Tribhuvan Biman Ghat, formerly a shabby airstrip called Gauchar. It is now one of South Asia's modern and busy air traffic centres.

This is but one of the facets of change Nepal has witnessed in recent times. Gone past recall are the days when the peasant, unmindful of the aircraft hovering overhead, would continue to cultivate his patch of land in the vicinity of the Gauchar strip, the cowherd tend his cattle, and the valley loll in blissful ignorance of the world outside. The drive from the airport to the heart of the city also confirms the atmosphere of change. The wide, hard-topped road that snakes past crowded bazaars and smart shops full of sophisticated industrial products, newly built offices and houses, the exhibition ground with permanent structures, the sprawling Tundikhel maidan and its large built-up dias, Ratna Park and the elegant City Hall China has built, would do justice to any modern city anywhere. Yet Kathmandu would have been way behind others if it claimed the visitor's attention on the strength alone of modernity.

Much more was this so in 1960. For the Himalayan kingdom's essay in modernisation had commenced only some

nine years ago. Until the middle of this century Nepal was a cloistered country where even the King enjoyed less freedom than his palace guards. It was the 1950-51 armed uprising against the feudal Rana autocracy that opened up the country. The struggle liberated the people as much as the institution of monarchy from the clutches of the Ranas, who had for a century held the country to ransom.

The valley, which contains the three cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon (formerly known as Kantipur, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur respectively) and which is home to some 500,000 people, exists half in history and half in modern times. To a discerning visitor the valley is an etching in contrasts. It seems to contain "as many temples as there are houses and as many idols as there are men." It also bears the cultural imprint of the many ethnic groups, languages and dialects in the kingdom.

The country is a huge ethnic conglomeration. The Brahmins, Chetries, Newars, Rais, Limbus, Gurungs, Magars, Bhotias, Sherpas and the Tamangs are some of the major ethnic groups which compose this variegated fabric. Each community is different from the other. Each has its own social, religious and cultural mores and motifs. The kingdom's 11.5 million people speak between themselves "thirty dialects and five regional groups of local dialects." It has indeed "a diversity of cultures and social situations" ranging "from culturally underdeveloped subgroups with their primitive styles and simple artifacts to highly developed innovative and enterprising communities."<sup>1</sup>

The Newars are the country's most gifted craftsmen, while the Sherpas, Buddhists by religion, are the world's most famous mountaineers and guides. The Gurungs, Rais and the Limbus, usually given to the peaceable occupation of farming, have traditionally supplied some of the world's toughest soldiers. Who has not heard of the *kukri* and the intrepid Gurkha, his valour, grit, devotion to duty and, above all, his unfailing sense of chivalry.

<sup>1</sup>*The Panchayat Democracy*, Department of Information, Ministry of Communications, His Majesty's Government, Kathmandu, 1972, pp 4-5.

Equally varied are the temples which abound in the valley. Every one of them has a story to tell, at once fascinating and different from the others. Historically, architecturally and otherwise each temple projects an image that *is as much an entity by itself as a part of the whole*. The almost 2000-year-old Swayambhunath, one of the world's oldest Buddhist stupas, attracts both Buddhists and Hindus. So does Boudhnath, said to be the largest extent stupa in the world. The Pashupatinath temple complex on the banks of the Bagmati on the other hand has an eternal appeal to Nepalese Hindus, who form about 75 percent of the country's total population.

The people of Nepal seem to carry this heritage of antiquity, tradition and history effortlessly. They do not force on you the fact that they are a great people, that they have never been colonised, and that they have a rich heritage. More, theirs is a history that is not devoid of its moments of glory, grandeur, of nobility. This is the beauty of the land and its people.

The challenge which confronted Nepal in 1951 was that of lifting an authority-bound and traditional society from the abyss of poverty and despotism to the high road of democracy and modernisation. But this was no mean challenge. Despite the changes Nepal has experienced in the years since the revolution it had, not unlike many other Asian and African countries, miles to go before it could claim to have arrived. And arriving was what mattered to the hewers of wood and drawers of water who could scarcely continue to enjoy being mocked with false hopes.

The refrain that everything was all right in the land and the "throne of Nepal is a fort," as the first Shah ruler Prithvi Narayan put it, "built by God himself" had an element of unreality which was matched by the refusal of the colour blind to admit the existence of any colour other than that he perceives. Notwithstanding that nine years had passed since Nepal was freed from absolutist Rana rule, it would be fatuous to say that the people had seen the last of their troubles.

A substantial segment of the population lived below the Plimsoll line of poverty. The problem of hunger, be it

Nepalese or otherwise, knew no waiting. Other things, bridges, dams, television, five-star hotels, sports stadiums and what have you, could wait. But as for hunger, no law nor any weapon could make it behave the way society would wish. And hunger was writ large on the face of the multitude that lived, worked, reproduced and died in this part of the world.

Economically, Kathmandu operated from a situation of extreme weakness. Even for funds for quite modest on-going development activities it had to depend entirely on foreign assistance, the largest chunk of which India siphoned off from its own scarce resources. Land ruled the economy, and land was cultivated in an antediluvian manner. Although minor agrarian reforms had been initiated and the tax-free *birta* system of holdings had been abolished, traditional land relations continued to hold sway. Very little had been done for industrialisation, as the regime did not have the financial or technological resources for this. Whichever way one looked at it, Nepal continued to be one of the world's most backward and poor countries.

In that traditional society nothing seemed to matter more to the man who struggled to make an honest livelihood from his rugged corn patch than that tomorrow would not differ greatly from today. This was the assurance that the country's first ever elected government was said to provide. Apparently the political scene did not betray what might be interpreted as an indication of instability.

Even the most perceptive observer would suggest that 15 December 1960 was not just another day in the picturesque valley of Kathmandu. Bathed in the soft morning sun, the valley looked idyllic and life flowed as unhurriedly as might be desired. Everything looked exactly as it had the day before. The Nepali Congress was still the ruling party and Prime Minister B. P. Koirala its undisputed leader. A sentry was on routine duty at his residence. The people of the city were peacefully occupied that morning with their usual chores. The cool, crisp December morning did not seem to suggest anything out of the ordinary was about to happen.

But in the guarded seclusion of his royal retreat King Mahendra kept his own counsel. He was an unhappy man,

even though he had given his country a parliament and an elected government, and enjoyed in ample measure the loyalty and affection at once of his people and of the Prime Minister. For all this still fell far short of what might have encouraged him to conclude that all was well with Nepal. A suspicion gnawed his heart, that some men somewhere did not mean well towards him, that they had ideas which conflicted with his own on the role of the institution of monarchy. He could not escape the feeling that these men did not unquestionably accept what he considered his inalienable right to be master in his own house.

Notwithstanding the firm declaration of the ruling Nepali Congress that the monarchy had an assured place in the nation's life, there was something in its method and approach which did not fully inspire confidence in him. Particularly perplexing were the ways of Prime Minister Koirala. He would at one time call the King "the most loyal member of the Nepali Congress," and denounce him at another as "the most obstinate impediment in the path of progress." There had never been an unequivocal pledge that the King was above everything else, that the monarchy and Nepal constituted an inseparable whole.

Other details were there too which did not conform to the King's image of the Nepalese polity. The Prime Minister talked about socialism and the people listened to him. He would go to Peking and the red carpet would be unrolled for him. He would visit Delhi and get a hero's welcome, as if he was Delhi's man on the spot in Kathmandu. Then, there was mismanagement in every sphere of the administration, and corruption was mounting. In all this the man who seemed to remain unscathed, indeed whose stature and charisma increased every day, was his own Prime Minister.

To any other royal head of state, whose understanding of the rights and obligations of a reigning monarch did not run counter to the concept of constitutional monarchy, the situation might not have appeared frustrating. But King Mahendra was a different man. He had fixed notions of a king's functions and prerogatives. Not that he had been particularly careful not to give expression to his

views. He rarely missed an occasion to demonstrate that he was not the man to be sold by any idea that was not to his own liking. Whether as the representative of his father or as the reigning monarch he had been keen on not being misunderstood.

Yet when he made the fatal move which unhinged the political system a decade's experiment had pieced together, both Nepal and the world outside were greatly surprised. The King's action seemed to defy any rational explanation. Against the backdrop of an apparently unruffled political scene, the spectacle of the country's most popular leader and its first ever elected Prime Minister being carried off from a public meeting to prison, dissolution of Parliament and dismantling of the entire structure of representative government was too weird to be comprehended logically. The scenario was almost Kafkaesque. If some believed these were the acts of a man not in complete control of his senses, others were of the opinion that they were the impulsive decisions of a man in a hurry.

For instance, the *Economist* thought that the King's action "may have been constitutionally within his powers, but was it really, as he believes, in the country's longterm interests? Not only is it a sad setback to Nepal's hopes of establishing a system of stable constitutional politics; one may also fear that if land reform is halted now because of the immediate trouble it stirs up the result will only be a more serious explosion later."<sup>2</sup>

The *New Statesman* did not doubt that "the King has now, for the time at least, squashed the new democracy. He has not told anyone why—nor is this in itself surprising: he gives people who meet him the impression of being an able secretive man with an autocratic temperament. . . . All anyone can say now is that the King has presumably taken alarm at a democratic trend which he probably never liked, and has decided to act autocratically."<sup>3</sup>

*Time* was of the opinion that "Koirala began pushing through land and tax reforms, soon had gathered the reins

<sup>2</sup>*The Economist*, London, 24 December 1960.

<sup>3</sup>*The New Statesman*, London, 24 December 1960.

of government to himself. King Mahendra... was left little beyond his religious duties. Apparently King Mahendra decided Koirala had gone too far."<sup>4</sup>

The *Guardian* believed that relations between the King and Koirala "have been at least as uneasy as those of Queen Victoria and Gladstone... even if all that the King says is true—that the administration has been paralysed and group and personal interests fostered—there was surely no need to despair of the constitution until its safeguards proved ineffective."<sup>5</sup>

Nearer home, *the Hindusthan Standard* said that "the King has so far failed to adduce sufficient evidence that a serious political crisis had overtaken Nepal—or was about to overtake it.... The only excuse he has trotted out in defence of his unmistakably undemocratic action is scarcely convincing."<sup>6</sup>

*Link* was convinced that "the charges the King has made against the Koirala government are vague.... No one in Kathmandu attached any importance to these charges.... The King does not want to part with power. He was afraid ever since the last elections that democracy might become a habit with the people. He did not lose any time after the last elections and began a propaganda campaign against the government as soon as he realised that it was fairly stable."<sup>7</sup>

The *Times of India* observed that the "world is still in the dark about the precise reason which has made King Mahendra dismiss the first popularly elected ministry.... Its sense of shock has been all the greater because all this has come at a time when, after many wasted years, the country seemed firmly set on the road to progress.... To dismiss a government which has an absolute majority in an elected legislature is in fact calculated to undermine both stability and democracy."<sup>8</sup>

Last but not least, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of

<sup>4</sup>*Time*, New York, 26 December 1960.

<sup>5</sup>*The Guardian*, Manchester, 17 December 1960.

<sup>6</sup>*Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 28 December, 1960.

<sup>7</sup>*Link*, New Delhi, 25 December 1960.

<sup>8</sup>*The Times of India*, Bombay, 17 December 1960.

India, candidly expressed his inability to accept the King's arguments in support of his action. In the course of a speech in the Rajya Sabha on 20 December 1960, Nehru unequivocally asserted that the royal takeover "has been a matter of great concern to us." He did not stop there. Referring to the charges the King had levelled against the Koirala government, he observed that "these are vague charges and it is difficult to say anything about vague charges. Nobody can call any government an ideal government, more especially a government in Nepal which has been fighting very difficult conditions in the last ten years when various governments came in. . . . In the elections, the Nepali Congress Party got a very big majority and they have functioned since then. . . . They had a tremendous task and, I believe, the impression we had generally was that for the first time Nepal had some orderly government which was trying to do its best to improve things. . . . Anyhow, the basic fact remains that this is not a question of pushing out a government which has a big majority. This is a complete reversal of the democratic process, and it is not clear to me that there can be a going back to the democratic process in the foreseeable future. Naturally, one views such a development with considerable regret."<sup>9</sup>

There is no point in lengthening the list of quotations. It would be enough to say that the press, in India and abroad, failed almost without exception to detect anything that might justify the royal takeover.

The world has now of course come to know that the King did not act in a huff. Nor did he abruptly strike without carefully weighing the pros and cons of his move. His mental faculties had not become inert either. These charges could not, severally or collectively, be levelled against him. King Mahendra acted in the full knowledge of the fact that he was rejecting the ideas, objectives and the philosophy of the struggle that had liberated the monarchy, endowed him with the power he was exercising to remould the

<sup>9</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946-April 1961*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi, August 1961, pp 441-443.



nation's policy, and had hastened the entry of this once "forbidden" land into the 20th century. He was determined to ensure that the monarchy must emerge as the exclusive power centre in the realm.

In fine, he had decided to be not only the reigning monarch of the kingdom but also its ruler. "George, be a king" was what the mother of the future George III of Britain unceasingly dinned into his ears as a child. In Mahendra's case it was not his mother but his conscious self that goaded him to act as he thought a king should. This is probably the easiest way to explain his apparently abrupt decision to end the country's experiment in parliamentary democracy. The suddenness of the King's *démarche* was indeed astonishing, and it was given various interpretations. If "lust for power" was alleged to have been the cause of the exercise, it was also conjectured that his increasing fear of the growth of a rival power centre had prompted him to undertake what virtually boiled down to a preemptive operation. The takeover was also sought to be explained in terms of his innate intolerance of parliamentary democracy.

On the other hand, analysts like Wayne Mineau thought the King's action was essentially an attempt to avenge the century-old captivity the monarchy had suffered at the hand of the Ranas. In Mineau's words, "there is the intriguing and unknowable factor of the psychological element that may have had its place in King Mahendra's revenge—revenge for more than a hundred years of royalty being dominated and confined by premiers? Was the arrest of Koirala partly an act, conscious or subconscious, by which all the kings of Nepal, dead or alive, could get a bit of their own back on the wily Jung Bahadur and all the prime ministers who came after him?"<sup>10</sup>

It is not quite correct to say that the royal takeover was planned and executed with the utmost secrecy, that the Koirala government had no inkling of what was up the King's sleeve. On the contrary. Well before the fateful step

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in D. K. Sahi, "A Chapter from Recent History", *Nepal Today*, Vol 5, Nos 23 & 24, 15 November 1966, Calcutta, p. 934.

was taken, rumour had it that the King was intent on forcing a showdown. Any intelligent political observer in Kathmandu could see that the relations between the ruler and his chief executive were not as smooth as was generally believed. Even surface impressions did not suggest that the two were moving in the same direction, or that they had set their minds on identical objectives. And what was visible was but the tip of the iceberg.

Enough evidence is now available to confirm that King Mahendra did not particularly bother to hide his intentions. He took a lot of people into his confidence. On a visit to Europe sometime before the takeover he discussed it with Subarna Shumsher, Deputy Prime Minister and one of the top leaders of the Nepali Congress, who accompanied him as Minister-in-waiting. The King urged Subarna Shumsher to lend himself to his plans. He inquired whether Subarna Shumsher would agree to serve the successor regime. Others who were in the know of the King's move included Viswabandhu Thapa<sup>11</sup> and Tulsi Giri.<sup>12</sup> In the course of an interview with the present author in June 1973, Giri admitted that he had played a role in Koirala's ouster. He also said that he had cautioned the party's senior leaders, including Koirala himself, about the King's intended course of action.

If some Nepali Congress leaders had direct knowledge of the King's intentions, others were not altogether ignorant of them. To get the point we might refer to B. P. Koirala. According to him, "when the Kathmandu air became thick with rumour of the impending coup, I discussed the matter informally with my colleagues in the Cabinet...a few weeks before the coup. The issue was raised by Ram Narayan Mishra. He initiated the discussion and said: 'What is it that we hear that the King is contemplating a coup?' I said that I had also heard about it. If the King decides on a coup with the help of the army I do not think we can take any pre-

<sup>11</sup>One of the Nepali Congress brains trust, he became the chief whip of its parliamentary wing after the general election in 1959.

<sup>12</sup>Tulsi Giri held various important political offices, including Chairman of the Council of Ministers in 1961 and adviser to King Mahendra, and was finally made Prime Minister in 1976.

caution, for there is no precaution against the army. We can run away and then the King will have an alibi. So I think if it comes to that we must put ourselves to the test. We shall have to bear up against that.

"There is no alternative to it because we cannot build up an army to fight the Nepalese army. It would only aggravate the situation and he would get another excuse. He would strike on the plea that we had been raising a parallel army. If we run away, he will have another alibi. We have therefore got to be where we are and face the consequences. If I had run away—I could have done that—then the King would have said that the country was without a government and the Prime Minister had run away."<sup>13</sup>

To the author's query whether Subarna Shumsher or Tulsi Giri and Viswabandhu Thapa had any knowledge of the impending takeover, Koirala replied: "It is said that Tulsi Giri and Viswabandhu were in the know of it... I had been warned against them by a person who enjoyed the King's confidence. He told me that...I should be very careful about them." About the Deputy Prime Minister's prior knowledge of the King's move Koirala said that he did "not want to be unfair" to him. But he had reasons to believe that "the King had discussed the issue with him when he was abroad. He (Subarna Shumsher) told the King: 'If you took action against the government and Parliament, it would be a great disaster.' Then the King said: 'Will you support me?' Subarna said: 'I would advise you not to do that.... It would be a bad day for Nepal if the King decided to stage a coup. If you have differences with the Prime Minister, you call for the Prime Minister and reprimand him. But in no case would I advise you to stage a coup.'

"That much he said and the King was disappointed. But Subarna did not tell me anything about this afterwards. He kept it to himself. I did discuss this [the rumour of a royal takeover] with him. He said he thought the King would do

<sup>13</sup>This is what B. P. Koirala told the author in the course of several extensive interviews between October 1973 and March 1975, the tapes of which, as also the transcript signed by Koirala, are in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute. Hereafter cited as author—Koirala interview.

it, but not now because Queen Elizabeth of England was scheduled to visit Nepal and he would not do anything to upset that arrangement before the Queen's visit. He would do it after she returned. And he said: 'So I am going for a week [Subarna Shumsher came to Calcutta a day before the takeover] and after I return we shall discuss what we should do in the matter. That was the last thing he said before he went away...and the next day the King struck.'

Koirala may be allowed to add that "there was a rule under which a minister was required to obtain the King's permission before he could leave the country, and I had to get the King's permission for him [Subarna] to leave the country."<sup>14</sup>

Rishikesh Shaha also might be referred to for indirect confirmation of Koirala's observation that Subarna Shumsher had been taken into the confidence of the King. Confronted with the author's inquiry whether King Mahendra discussed on his state visit to Britain in 1960 the impending takeover with him (he was at that time concurrently Nepal's Ambassador to the UN and the US) and, if so, what his advice to the King was, Shaha did not reply in the negative. Rather, what he said would appear not to contradict B. P. Koirala's statement in regard to Subarna Shumsher's role.

This is what Shaha said: "I met His Majesty in Paris and in London at the time of His Majesty's state visit (to Britain) in the fall of 1960. He was accompanied by Subarna Shumsher, Deputy Prime Minister. We had important meetings with the King at that time, but I don't think it will reflect credit on me to disclose to you what actually passed between His Majesty and me on this question. I have answered that question in my autobiography, the publication of which I have myself withheld till after I am dead... I was called to Paris in the fall of 1960 by a special telegram signed Rex Mahendra. Of course Subarna Shumsher was Minister-in-attendance. We had talks on that crucial event. Beyond that I don't think it would be fair on my part to tell you at this point, especially because King Mahendra is no more,

<sup>14</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.

what I actually told him.... But from my role during the post-takeover period it must have been clear to you who are conversant with the affairs of Nepal what advice, if any, I offered to His Majesty at that time."<sup>15</sup>

This was not all. Answering the author's query why Subarna Shumsher was allowed to leave the country on the eve of the King's action instead of being arrested, B. P. Koirala said: "My feeling about why he was spared is that it was a calculated move on the King's part. The King discussed it with Subarna, also with Tulsi Giri. And Tulsi Giri told the King that Subarna would not go against B.P. directly. So if no action is taken against him and if he is spared, then some pressure could be brought upon him...he could be made to serve Nepal and submit to the King. This was a very shrewd calculation...keep the hope of revival burning in the heart of Subarna.... He could be told that he would become Prime Minister and then he could think of his colleagues and all that.

"He is a very loyal colleague, so he will not do anything so long as B. P. is in prison. But if you put him in prison, then there would be nothing left.' That must have been Tulsi Giri's argument with the King. And then the feeling was that India also would be happy. That was their reading. So the King took action. But his calculations went wrong. Subarna did not respond. They thought that India would react favourably. That also went wrong. Jawaharlal Nehru made the strongest statement on the coup in Parliament.... That quite upset the King's apple-cart. And Subarna Shumsher was also not there to come to his aid. If Prime Minister Nehru had fumbled or hesitated, then I do not think Subarna would have played the role that he subsequently did."<sup>16</sup>

Koirala's observations would suggest that the takeover did not come as a bolt from the blue. Nor did King Mahendra act impulsively or out of spite. Each move he made and every step he took was calculated. None could accuse him of acting without weighing the consequences of his actions.

<sup>15</sup>Author's tape-recorded interview with Rishikesh Shaha, Calcutta, 25 April 1975.

<sup>16</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.

He must have brooded over the question and gone into every aspect of it. The issues involved and the challenge posed were essentially political, and he was sufficiently well-versed in politics to appreciate it. The Nepali Congress, particularly its leader B. P. Koirala, symbolised that challenge. What came as a response to it shook the kingdom severely. Before an attempt is made to answer the why of it or assess its consequences we might briefly run over the relations between the King and the Prime Minister when the going apparently was not so tough.

Ambivalent would probably be the right word to qualify these relations. Mahendra at once appreciated and suspected him. If he liked Koirala for his integrity and honesty and guts, he envied him for being the one Nepali who had a place in the select international community of distinguished men, politically and otherwise. The King felt uneasy because he lacked what Koirala had over the years acquired, an element of charisma. Fear lurked in his mind that Koirala was ambitious, much more than was good for the throne.

To get a close view of a certain facet of the Mahendra-Koirala relationship we might travel to Pokhara on a May day in 1960. The King had a summer retreat in this valley enclosed in a frame of serenity and not very far from Kathmandu. He invited Koirala, who was then Prime Minister, to holiday there as his guest. The invitation was accepted and the two men spent a few quiet days together. Koirala's stay was not quite uneventful, not at least from the viewpoint of getting a glimpse of the man King Mahendra was.

Koirala said, even as late as the summer of 1960, that the King did not give him the slightest indication that he had any cause for not having complete understanding with his Prime Minister. Rather, at Pokhara, the King had demonstratively emphasised that he had only warmth and affection for him. What else can one make of the fact that the Queen herself cooked for the Prime Minister and the King had him as a one-man audience for a music recital. More, King Mahendra told Koirala about the tragedy of his life, of being deprived of the care and love of his father, of the denial of a formal education and of living under

surveillance. Koirala, the King recalled, had on the other hand the advantage of a reasonably good education, of meeting people, of travel abroad and of so many other good things of life. In view of this Koirala should be patient with him, Mahendra said. His occasional irritability notwithstanding, the Prime Minister must bear with him.

As Koirala put it: "He [King Mahendra] had been suggesting to me that I should visit Pokhara. It was summer, 1960 . . . . He had invited me and my wife. But my wife could not come, so I went there. He and his wife, the Queen, and some of his very intimate relatives accompanied him...he was very courteous to me. So was the Queen. She took pains to herself prepare special dishes for me. Once I walked into the kitchen and found the Queen sitting like any ordinary housewife, her saree stained with spices, busy preparing *achar* [pickles]. It was indeed a very nice picture of family life that I had.

"She said: 'Why do you come to the woman's domain? This is not the place where menfolk should come.' And the King also was extremely affable. He inquired if I played cards. He said: 'Look here, B.P., I had a very deprived childhood. You know, we were virtually kept prisoners. I did not receive any proper education...' Then I said: 'Your Majesty, you might engage yourself in some work that would interest you.' He said: 'I have not read any serious book so far. I have read some novels in Hindi and a few other such titles. And I have been a lonely man.'

Then he said that he loved music and that was his recreation. I said: 'Why do you not practise it?' He said that he did it sometimes but did not find enough time for regular practice. . . . He took me to an inner room where he had an assortment of musical instruments. And he said: 'Would you like to hear me play the instruments?' I said yes. It was a very nice gesture. That was the human side of the whole thing... He did not have a very broad canvas. But he was clearheaded so far as affairs of state were concerned. He never dabbled in things he did not understand. He was a man of details. He had kept locked in his memory a doss-

ier of every important person his father had any contact with or he had met.”<sup>17</sup>

Still, Koirala could not persuade himself to believe that King Mahendra was reconciled to being what both he and the Nepali Congress wanted—a strictly constitutional figurehead. Koirala had reasons not to. Ever since he had come in contact with Mahendra—that was in the early 1950s when King Tribhuvan was on the throne and he was the Crown Prince—he had been keeping close track of him. In those days Mahendra appeared shy, emotional and rather withdrawn. But he was an extremely resolute person, a striking instance of which was an incident in his personal life. He wanted to marry for the second time—his first wife had died—a Rana girl he loved. King Tribhuvan did not approve of the marriage. Instead, he wanted him to marry a non-Rana girl for obvious reasons. The resultant clash of wills unmistakably revealed that pliability was not one of the Crown Prince’s virtues.

“In the famly,” to quote Koirala, “even though he was the Crown Prince the second son was preferred to him. On one occasion, I distinctly remember, he came to see me in the evening...that I think was in 1951...I had instructed my people not to disturb me. [His daughter had died but he did not tell anybody about it. For he did not want others to share his grief.] The Crown Prince told my people that he wanted to meet me. When he was told about my instruction he said he was very sorry to have come without a prior appointment. I was informed later and I went downstairs to meet him.

“He expressed his regrets for having disturbed me. He looked sad and...said he wanted to abdicate. I asked why. ‘I want to marry the girl I love,’ he said. ‘But my father will not allow that. So I must choose between the girl and the throne.’ Then I said: ‘Why can’t you wait for some time? Your father may change his mind.’ He said: ‘I am prepared to wait, but my father wants me to marry the girl that he has selected for me.... As a matter of fact, I was not interested in marriage. But when he insists on my

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



marrying the girl that he has selected I have no alternative but to abdicate and marry the girl I love.' I told him not to precipitate matters, to have patience and that I would speak to his father. He agreed.

"I spoke to King Tribhuvan. He said: 'Ask him to submit his resignation and I would accept it.' I said that if you accept it there would be a crisis. He told me that it was his command. I said that so far as Your Majesty is concerned this is a domestic trouble between father and son. Then he said: 'You don't know my son. He is a thorough reactionary. He is a diehard Rana supporter. He wants to marry a Rana girl and his reactionary attitude will be strengthened by the girl he wants to marry. The people will also not like that the King should find a bride for his son from the much-hated Rana family. So it is in the interest of democracy, in the interest of my dynasty, that he should marry another girl, a non-Rana girl.'

"I said this would be very cruel. How could a girl influence the King even if she comes from the Rana family? He said: 'You don't know my son. He will make Nepal, he will make all of you, weep.' Afterwards he said I should ask him not to insist on marrying this particular girl, and he would not also for another six months insist on his marrying another girl. . . . Subsequently, he married the girl he loved and when the marriage was solemnised the King did not attend. . . . He left Kathmandu."<sup>18</sup>

This sharply contrasted with Crown Prince Mahendra's public statements, contradicting widely circulated rumours of his conflict with King Tribhuvan and his liaison with certain anti-government political factions. Koirala could hardly fail to notice this. Since he was well aware of the King's trend of thought, he did not regard the Pokhara meet as indicative of any significant change in the ruler's political orientation. Koirala could not avoid feeling that an area of darkness stood between him and the monarch.

It must be said to King Mahendra's credit that by the time he had decided to give short shrift to the country's parliamentary system of polity he had taken a firm grip

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

on the levers of power. He could not be said to have resorted to a temporary expedient aimed at clearing the deck for a man of his choice, as not a few people, not excluding a section of the Nepali Congress, seemed to believe at that time. The scope and scale of his manoeuvres were evidently not restricted to getting rid of a given form and not the substance of parliamentary democracy. No crystal-gazing was necessary to say that nothing short of a basic change in the system of polity would meet his requirements. Although in the changed context the term "democracy" was not taboo—the royal declarations and proclamations continued to refer to the country's "indissoluble" links with democracy—the King's impatience with any system of politics that derived its sanction from the people was all too palpable. It was not hard to notice that the orientation and direction of Nepalese politics had not been changed merely as an exercise in brinkmanship.

The King's decision was irrevocable. The change had come to stay. The takeover was not a corrective measure. Nor was it a tactical move to shake off a certain obstinate individual, nor a stopgap arrangement for the period during which parliamentary democracy would be kept in suspended animation. To all intents and purposes the King had in mind something far more serious than just that. If Koirala is not being extravagantly subjective, his removal from the scene was incidental to the goal the King had set himself. According to Koirala, "the coup in 1960... was not against me.... There has been this confusion spread all over the world that it was a fight between the Prime Minister and the King, and the King got the better of it. It was not that. The King's enemy was the parliamentary system, democracy. He wanted to finish that. Because I was the representative of the democratic system, the most important person since I was the Prime Minister, he decided to hit me. He also dissolved Parliament. He arrested all the members of Parliament. He dissolved all the political parties. Whoever had anything to do with politics was arrested.... If it were a question of his antipathy towards me or his enmity towards me, he could have taken action against

me.”<sup>19</sup>

King Mahendra drew up a sweeping chargesheet against the government, particularly its chief steward. His language was succinct and harsh. There was no effort to obfuscate his argument. He tried resolutely to drive the point home that the Prime Minister had not only made a mess of his responsibility but had also betrayed the trust the nation had reposed in him. If the frills are overlooked, it would be evident that the King was convinced that his Prime Minister had committed no less a heinous crime than treason.

Koirala was indicted for a series of acts, both misfeasant and malfeasant. The axe fell on him because the government he presided over, “taking shelter behind the democratic system, set aside the interests of the country and the people, and wielded authority in a manner designed to fulfil individual and party interests only.” It also came down on him for the reason that the economic measures he had initiated were “undertaken on the basis not of scientific analysis and factual study but in pursuance of purely theoretical principles,” which in turn “produced among the people a disturbed and vitiated atmosphere instead of producing changes in the whole setup.”<sup>20</sup>

Other charges were there as well, ranging from “bribery and corruption” through “misuse of power” to clandestine collection of arms from foreign sources. But all these were inconsequential details compared with one particular charge the King thought fit to make. In no uncertain terms he accused him of having not only denigrated “the Crown and the constitution” but also of disloyalty to the state. He found the government guilty of indulging in what was “a direct threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation.”<sup>21</sup> It was transparently clear to him that as a result of the Prime Minister’s activities “the very existence

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Proclamations, Speeches and Messages, H. M. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, Vol. II, (December 1960-65), Department of Publicity, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, His Majesty’s Government, Kathmandu, 11 June 1967, pp 1-2.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p 6.

of the country was endangered and the omens of a fratricidal civil war among the Nepalese people became visible on the horizon." In the circumstances King Mahendra had no doubt that he "was in duty bound to take the step I took on December 15, 1960."<sup>22</sup>

Of course B. P. Koirala has an entirely different account to render. He resolutely countered the charges framed against him. To every one of the accusations he was impaled for he had an answer. He argued his case briefly but cogently. He trained his guns on one point, that the King had acted *mala fide*. And what the King had subsequently said to justify his action was a case of *suppressio veri suggestio falsi*. In Koirala's own words: "It was bruited about that there was corruption. I was his prisoner. He could have brought me before a court of law and framed the charge of corruption against me. The allegation that I secured arms from Israel clandestinely—that could have been a very, very effective charge against me, and then he could have given the punishment he chose. No charge against me could be levelled, and even if it could be levelled it would not have served his purpose. Because he had to demolish the parliamentary system."<sup>23</sup>

It may be interesting to note that Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the two Indian socialist leaders—the other being Dr Rammanohar Lohia—who played a significant role in the Nepalese revolution, agreed with Koirala's contention regarding the charge of corruption. In a tape-recorded interview with the author in December 1973, he made it clear that the charge of corruption would not hold water against B. P. Koirala. J. P. visited Kathmandu in the early 1960s to look up Koirala, who was reported to be keeping indifferent health. According to him: "I have a fairly good recollection of my talk with King Mahendra when I visited Kathmandu. I think there were rumours about B. P. being unwell and I had requested an interview with him which he [King Mahendra] had been good enough to grant.... I was a guest of the Indian Ambassador and when I went to

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*, p 134.

<sup>23</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 7-10 December 1973.

see the King, only Mr Tulsi Giri, who I think was the Prime Minister then, was present.... The substance of what he told me about B. P. was that he was convinced, that is King Mahendra was convinced and he had evidence to the effect, that B. P. was personally corrupt and he was engaged in activities which were anti-Nepal, which would harm the country. I said to him: 'If you have these facts, if you have evidence, why don't you try him in a court of law—the courts are there—and produce evidence and let him be punished by the court?'

"He said, I don't remember exactly what he said but I believe he said that was not necessary because he was quite sure of B. P.'s role. He would not elaborate further. His two charges I remember—of his being corrupt, of his using the prime ministership for personal gain. I think he mentioned some of his brothers or one of his brothers who had made some money out of some transaction involving timber or lease of forest, something like that, and about [B. P. Koirala] being anti-Nepal, I mean, doing things which were inimical to Nepal or harmful to Nepal. So far as I remember he didn't produce any cogent argument."<sup>24</sup>

To return to the point. Continuing in the same vein, B. P. Koirala wondered "how people got this impression that it was a fight between the Prime Minister and the King. On that day [the day of the takeover] every individual who had anything to do with politics was arrested. M. P. Koirala [his half-brother and a former prime minister] was arrested. He was not with me. Tanka Prasad [a former prime minister] was arrested. He was opposed to me. His party celebrated my arrest by lighting candles and all that. The Leader of the Opposition, Bharat Shumsher, along with his party members were arrested. So was K. I. Singh [a former prime minister]. Dilli Raman Regmi [a former minister] was arrested. His party members were arrested.... Everybody who had anything to do with politics was arrested on that day. They got out of prison by writing prayer letters, by making abject submission to the Palace. They had to

<sup>24</sup>Based on author's interview with Jayaprakash Narayan at Calcutta on 29 December 1973, the tapes of which are in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute.

give an undertaking that they would not indulge in politics. It was a strike against people's politics. He [King Mahendra] wanted to be the sole, the only man, who could do politics in Nepal. It is very clear that [the takeover] was not against me."<sup>25</sup>

Both King Mahendra and Prime Minister Koirala have their respective whys and wherefores for the developments that culminated in the December 1960 happening. Each preferred to scan the horizon from a given angle. Small wonder that they sharply contradicted one another in their assessments of the situation. That the King's action in a way resulted in jettisoning much that had been achieved at considerable cost in the past decade is indisputable. There is general agreement about this, in Nepal as well as outside.

The important point is: Why did the King do this? What convinced him that the democratic experiment was not worth continuing, that the parliamentary system was incapable of serving the country's needs? What was it that prevailed upon him to conclude that the kingdom would be unable to come to grips with the problem of nation-building unless its polity was restructured root and branch? Of course these issues arise only if it is assumed that the King did not act out of spite. Or that the operation was determined by something more enlightened than a personal equation and love of power. These questions are evidently involved. They are also interrelated. An answer to one would beget answers to the rest.

<sup>25</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 7-10 December 1973.

## A Look Back

THE POLITICAL scene in Nepal looked rather forbidding in December 1960. It was singularly different from what it had ever been in the country's recent history. If 1950-51 was the great divide in contemporary Nepalese history, 1959 was the focal point in the kingdom's journey into the 20th century. The armed struggle was waged essentially to catapult the country into the age of reason. But it was only after the first general election in 1959 that Nepal's essay in modernisation really commenced. It was not however allowed to run its course. Two weeks before 1960 was out the sovereign of the Himalayan kingdom had diverted it into a channel that was seemingly antipodal to the 1950-51 revolution.

Before the revolution Nepal had frozen in its tracks, so to speak. The country's social, political and economic system rudely challenged the fact that elsewhere in the world men had succeeded in splitting the atom. For nearly a hundred years a system of government had prevailed which hardly had any parallel. Nepal was formally a monarchy. The ruling dynasty could trace its unbroken lineage to the mid-18th century, when the chief of the principality of Gorkha had by force of arms integrated a number of small principalities into a kingdom.

The emergence of Nepal as a sovereign polity did not date back more than two centuries. It fell to the Gorkhalis, the inhabitants of the small principality of Gorkha, to forge autonomous political entities into an integrated state. The narrative starts with Prithvi Narayan Shah, who was formally crowned the ruler of Gorkha in 1742. He founded the Shah dynasty which still continues to rule in Kathmandu. In expanding the frontiers of his kingdom Prithvi Narayan came into collision with the British, who had by

then gained a firm foothold in the Indian subcontinent.

The war of expansion Prithvi Narayan had embarked upon found him making a bid in 1767 to conquer Kathmandu, one of the three Malla principalities in central Nepal. He had set his sights high. Other considerations apart, the Gorkha ruler was quite keen on "the reestablishment of Kathmandu as the principal entrepot in the trans-Himalayan trade structure, but on quite different terms than those the Mallas had engaged. The Gorkha raja was determined to gain a virtual monopoly on the trade between India and Tibet."<sup>1</sup>

Unable to meet the Gorkha thrust, primarily because of the interminable conflict between the three Malla principalities of Kathmandu, Bhadgaon and Patan, the chief of Kathmandu, Jayaprakash Malla, implored the British East India Company to help him out. The British did not disappoint him. That was barely a decade after the battle of Plassey.

The East India Company had its own calculations, both political and economic. It was necessary to thwart Prithvi Narayan's plan to extend his hegemony over the Kathmandu Valley not only in the interest of the company's trade and commerce in Nepal but also in Tibet and further beyond. On the one hand, "the trade with Tibet had been a valuable one and was believed susceptible of considerable expansion" and on the other "it was hoped that trade could develop with western China through Tibet."<sup>2</sup> But the Gorkha ruler proved a hard nut to crack. He compelled the company's expeditionary force under Major George Kinloch to retreat and subsequently added a sizable tract of territory, including the valley, to his domain.

Prithvi Narayan's death did not end his policy simultaneously of internal consolidation and external expansion. In the process the Himalayan kingdom was twice embroiled in conflict with Tibet, thereby inviting China's intervention on behalf of Tibet. This was a signal for the Gorkhalis to seek the company's military aid to deal with the Chinese but they drew a blank.

<sup>1</sup>Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, Berkeley, 1971, p 25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p 28.



Though the conflict with China was eventually resolved, the settlement did not initiate an era of peace in the kingdom. After the Kinloch expedition the Gorkhals looked askance at the fast-expanding colonial regime to the south. Mutual distrust and contrary interests soon had the British and the Gorkhals locked in a war which ended with the treaty of Sugauli in December 1815. This treaty marked the beginning of a rather warped dialogue between the British and the Gorkhals.

Prithvi Narayan occupies a relatively important place in Nepal's history. In 1769, 27 years after coming to power in Gorkha, he made Kathmandu the seat of administration, having meanwhile extended the frontiers of his realm over a large tract of territory. He became the first Gorkha King of Nepal, for before he consolidated his regime Nepal, not unlike pre-Bismarkian Germany, has been cut up into a number of principalities, more often than not hostile to each other. The country had all along remained, as Metternich said of Italy, a "geographical expression," though politically independent of the system of polity obtaining beyond its southern or northern frontiers.

From historical times this landmass had provided refuge to immigrants from both north and south of the Himalayas. Diverse ethnic groups had drifted into this area from Tibet and still beyond. From the plains down south also came waves of uprooted men. To escape from expanding Muslim rule, knots of Indians trekked from time to time to Nepal. From across the northern Himalayas also came various ethnic groups in search of a haven. But the socio-cultural links with India were relatively close, and the descendants of the immigrants from the south dominated the scene. Between India and the Himalayan kingdom Hinduism formed a hyphen of sorts.

Mention may be made of the fact that "the major dynastic lines throughout Nepal since at least the 11th century—and for the Kathmandu Valley and the far western hill areas several centuries earlier—have been of high-caste Indian origin, proudly proclaiming their descent from prestigious ruling and warrior (Kshatriya) families of

India."<sup>3</sup> Ethnically, there was a wide gap between Prithvi Narayan and those who served him in his wars of conquest. While he was a Rajput of Indian origin, the people of Gorkha and the other principalities in central Nepal belonged to racial stock with a large Mongolian element. Prithvi Narayan was as much a Gorkhali as Shah Alam, his counterpart then in Delhi, was an Indian. In neither case was the question of nation-building involved.

The Nepalese were clearly not a nation. The emergence of national feeling had to wait for many decades to come. The unification of the various principalities Prithvi Narayan had achieved was based on conquest and coercion. There was little of what could be called a "blending of interests" that might give it a "real measure of coherence and integration."<sup>4</sup> The concept of nationhood was yet unknown in this part of the world. Both the Mughal emperor and Prithvi Narayan were intruders who had forced themselves on others. In a sense both of them were aliens who derived their sanction from force.

The people of Nepal, not unlike those of Italy, thought of themselves before unification not as Nepalese but as Gorkhalis, Bhaktapuris, Newars, Madeshis (midlanders), Biratnagaris and so on. In the given context, Prithvi Narayan's was essentially an adventure in expanding his authority over diverse ethnic groups he had subjugated. The claim that he had achieved what Bismark later did in Germany in the fourth decade of the 18th century would only be true in parts. Like Bismark, he found a host of feuding principalities and gathered enough power, by his wars of conquest, to leave them united under one political authority. There the similarity ends. Much socio-political engineering remained to be done before the Himalayan kingdom could embark upon any serious experiment in nation-building.

The rulers who followed Prithvi Narayan were also ambitious. They made every attempt to emulate his example.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation*, Indian edition, Calcutta 1970, p. 93.

They tried to pursue his policy of expansionism, but hardly with any success. None of his successors, with the possible exception of his son Pratap Singh Shah, had even a modicum of his drive and dynamism. Sylvain Levi is not being rhetorical when he says that following the death of Pratap Singh "a cruel fatality has affected the throne; the kings have been either children of young age, or princes emasculated by precocious debauchery . . . rigorously isolated from real life and public affairs."<sup>5</sup>

Let us get back to Sugauli. It appears Prithvi Narayan's carefully contrived exercise in moulding diverse ethnic groups simultaneously into a distinct shape and state formation had been halted at Sugauli. Politically or otherwise, the Treaty of Sugauli could not be read as a compact between two equals. It consigned Nepal to a position that could scarcely pass for unalloyed sovereignty. Not without justification has it been said that "by the treaty of 1816 [Sugauli] the Government of Nepal relinquished its rights enjoyed by every independent state to choose its service personnel from any country it likes. The same treaty deprived Nepal of all 'claim to or connexion with the countries lying to the west of River Kali' and imposed on her the acceptance of British arbitration in the event of any dispute with Sikkim."<sup>6</sup>

The Treaty of Sugauli hastened the process of destabilisation of monarchical authority which had started with the end of Prithvi Narayan's brief period of rule. With the passage of time every lever of power in the realm passed from the ruling Shah family into the hands of the Rana clan which came to monopolise the office of prime minister. It all started with Jung Bahadur Kunwar. He was the architect of the Rana system which hinged on the concept of hereditary prime ministership and eventually established its primacy over the monarchy. For almost a century the Rana system practically held the monarch its prisoner.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Satish Kumar, *Rana Polity in Nepal*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1967, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Rishikesh Shaha, *Nepal and the World*, published by the author on behalf of the Khoj Parishad, Nepali Congress (National Congress Associated), Kathmandu, 1955, p. 33.

Sylvain Levi suggests no less when he observes that "the King is only a sort of entity today, a nominal fiction, the only representative of the country recognised by the foreign powers."<sup>7</sup>

On 15 September 1846 Jung Bahadur became, by the grace of a psychopathic queen, the Prime Minister and army chief. Through bloodshed and intrigue he had before long got the message across that there was not to be any other source of power in the country. The basic characteristic of the system Jung Bahadur imposed was that the office of prime minister became the monopoly of his family. The oldest male in the family became prime minister, and he was succeeded not by his son but by the eldest surviving member of the family. What the Ranas introduced developed over time into a very intricate and ramified institution that tolerated no questioning. The monarchy was relegated to the background, and the prime minister was the *de facto* source of all power and privilege in the land. In the course of a hundred years the Rana system acquired every ugly feature of absolutism and none of its saving graces. The monarchy became an appendage of this system and the people its serfs.

Jung Bahadur was clever enough to appreciate that in the given situation he could not possibly consolidate his position without allies, both within and outside the frontiers of the country. Internally, he had his actual as well as potential rivals eliminated, dispersed or, where necessary, forced into submission. He saw to it that the royal family, which could provide a rallying point to his challengers, was rendered harmless to the extent of being dependent on his charity. He left nothing to chance. The King became a mere rubber-stamp whom the Prime Minister used as and when necessary.

The search for external allies inevitably landed Jung Bahadur in the ken of his forward-pushing neighbour to the south. Scanning the horizon for allies, the shrewd Prime Minister did not fail to read the signs of the times. He could see for himself that the country's "potential allies

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Satish Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

in India had come under British dominance." He was also "well aware of the rapid decline of Chinese power and recognised that distant Peking was neither willing nor able to challenge the British in the Himalayan area." The compulsions of the situation left him with few options to choose from except "to have British goodwill if Nepal were to avoid the fate that had recently overtaken the last of the major Indian states, the Sikh kingdom in the Punjab."<sup>8</sup>

To him it was Hobson's choice. Necessity knows no law, and that would largely explain the reframing of the country's hitherto pursued foreign policy of playing one neighbour against the other, depending on who could serve best Kathmandu's interests at a given point of time.

Rana rule was virtually an imposition of the dominant ethnic group's leadership over the others. The Ranas were the descendants of the Rajputs who, being pressed by the Mughals, had taken shelter in Nepal. So had the Shahs of the ruling dynasty. Between the Shahs and the Ranas an intra-ethnic group conflict existed. But Nepal was not the home only of the Shahs and the Ranas. Yet everything would be done in the name of the Gurkhas, as if it was their exclusive land. Other ethnic groups had to submit to the dominant position of the Gurkhas who lived in and around the valley of Kathmandu.

Administratively and otherwise, Nepal was parcelled into two distinct entities, the Gurkha heartland and the plains. The Terai plains adjacent to the Indian border were part of the country and yet away from it. No less different was the case of other areas in the plains. Nepalese who wanted to enter the Kathmandu Valley had to obtain special permission. The Terai region was called Madesh (midland), that is the land between Nepal and a foreign country. The army was Gorkhali; the land was Gurkha land; a citizen of Nepal was called a Gurkha outside its frontiers. Nothing existed that did not carry the label Gurkha. In every respect the Gurkha was more equal than others. The question of any national identity did not arise, for it would have

<sup>8</sup>Rose, *op cit*, pp 102-106.

been to the detriment of the Ranas and their exclusive enjoyment of the fruits of the land.

What B. P. Koirala has to say in the matter is relevant since he is one of the few Nepalese who have contributed largely to the shaping of his country's contemporary history, and to ignore it would be only disadvantageous to the student of that history. Following is the transcript of the tape-recorded interview the author had with him on 14 February 1974 at Banaras :

Q: B. P., if I were to ask whether we could look at this period of Nepalese history, say, the termination of the second world war to 1960—this is a rather arbitrarily fixed period apparently but not so really, for 1960 is a watershed in contemporary Nepalese history—essentially as the story of a people's effort at nation-building and state formation, more concretely an attempt at establishing a clear Nepalese identity, how would you explain it?

A.: If I understand your question, then I will have to go into some detail to answer it. You see, the present-day Nepal came into existence as a result of the military conquests of Raja Prithvi Narayan Shah, chieftain of the small principality of Gurkha, whose troops made successful assaults on various principalities and kingdoms of the mid-Himalayan region. His conquest of Kathmandu, in particular, laid the foundation of present-day Nepal. A state was thus created, but it lacked national cohesion. Because Nepal's career as a state began solely with military conquests, it was held together by the military force of the Gorkha rulers. The basis of unity was an imposed administrative system, manned, operated and sustained by the army. For administrative convenience the rulers imposed their own language on the newly created state. In the course of time the Nepali language acquired a national identity through the efforts of some very competent writers and poets. In this connexion the first name that occurs to my mind is that of the great poet Bhanubhakt, whose Ramayana was one factor in creating initially what is termed a Nepalese national identity.

To my mind however the real achievement in this regard was registered by the great events of 1950-51, when the

Nepalese people as a single unit rose in revolt to participate in the insurrectionary struggle for democratic rights against the Rana autocracy. Those stirring events have been very rightly termed the Great Revolution. They not only removed the Ranas from the seat of power and introduced many basic reforms in the economic, political, social and administrative fields, they also gave national content to these reforms. . . . What I want to impress is that it was the democratic movement which gave the emotional content of nationalism to what was merely an administrative arrangement. In other words, the state of Nepal, which depended on the Gurkha troops as the administrative organisation for its unity, received a stable cohesive emotional basis of nationalism as a result of the ideas of democracy for which the people had been waging an unending struggle in Nepal. The idea of democracy created a nation out of a mere administrative arrangement. . . . The real efforts at nation-building started with the revolution of 1950-51. . . .

The Gurkha myth was also sedulously nursed by the British in their own interest. The Ranas had in the British a dependable ally to help them to keep state affairs static at that level. The Ranas were allowed by the British to run the show, within limits. Insofar as the country's internal administration was concerned, the British did not interfere. They gave the Ranas free rein and encouraged them to keep the country isolated not only from the outside world but also from segments of their own people. Any growth of national sentiment in Nepal would hurt the Ranas who were the allies of the British; it would also be a source of encouragement to the Indian nationalists, so ran the argument. Like the Rana palaces, the valley of Kathmandu must therefore remain walled in.

Externally, the Ranas had Prithvi Narayan's foreign policy largely compromised and that in favour of the British. Prithvi Narayan's dictum that Nepal must, being a "yam between two stones," avoid any involvement in the affairs of either of its neighbours was not as rigorously practised as it ought to have been. Jawaharlal Nehru might be quoted in support of this. As he understood it, "Nepalese

independence was strictly limited by the previous British government. They were independent internally, but in the real sense of the word independence is not internal autonomy. It relates to relationships with other countries, and that was very strictly limited in those days. As soon as we came into the picture we accepted immediately without any debate or controversy the fullest independence, that is, real independence."<sup>9</sup>

The economy was no exception to the elementary rule that a country's politics also determines its economy. The economic life of the country was based on serfdom. The kingpin of the economy was the *birta* system. Every economic activity in the realm was yoked to the land. Land held under this system was tax free. A handful of Ranas owned most of the *birta* lands. The tiller of the soil was bound to the landlord in eternal servitude. Socially, every care was taken to keep the division intact, and no violation of the ethnic frontiers was tolerated. Political, economic and social institutions were so framed, guided and nurtured as to negate any thinking along national lines. In a manner Nepal was a fiefdom under the British, but evidence of this was not too overt.

It would not be wide of the mark to say that "ever since the rise of Jung Bahadur to power, the relations of the hereditary Rana prime ministers with the British grew increasingly friendly. They had become more or less British agents in Nepal for the supply of raw recruits to the Indian Army."<sup>10</sup> The emigre Nepalese in India first thought in terms of nationalism, of one Nepalese identity. As Rishikesh Shaha put it, "the Nepali freedom movement in the real sense had its origin in the Indian soil, and to a large extent the Indian nationalist movement served as a model and inspiration to the Nepalese. . . . The Nepalese can never be too grateful to India for the support she lent them in their struggle for democratic rights and freedom."<sup>11</sup> The fact is, in the period between Jung Bahadur's assumption

<sup>9</sup>*Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 19 January, 1961.

<sup>10</sup>Shaha, *op cit*, p 33.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, p 38.



of prime ministership in 1846 and Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur's in 1948 Nepal remained a country oblivious to the changes that had taken place outside its hermetically sealed frontiers. The 1950-51 struggle was waged as much to throw open the closed frontiers as to liberate the monarchy and ensure the people's right to a place in the sun.



## Change and Continuity

THE DRAMA that the Himalayan kingdom witnessed on 15 December 1960 had not been written overnight. Silently and with infinite patience, the making of it had been spread over almost a decade. It might well be said that its writing started with the proclamation King Tribhuvan issued on his return to the kingdom. A grateful and joyous people acclaimed the King as their liberator, and the King thanked the people for their splendid endeavour to liberate as much the land as its sovereign. King Tribhuvan declared that "it is now our desire and our resolve that our people should henceforth be governed according to the provisions of a democratic constitution as framed by a constituent assembly elected by them. Until such a constitution is framed there should be a Council of Ministers, including representatives enjoying the confidence of our people, to aid and advise us in the exercise of our frontiers (with) our trusted and well-beloved Maharaja Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana as our Prime Minister."<sup>1</sup>

Every Nepalese man, woman and child was given to understand that a big change had taken place in the country in the months that had elapsed between the King's flight under duress to India and his triumphal return. The old order had crumbled in this short time, giving way to what promised to transform the country from being a mere object of history into its subject. The promise was the upland of peace, progress and prosperity, which was for the people to fulfil. Nothing stood between them and a smiling future but their own determination and judgment. Nepal belonged to its people and there was no going back on this, the men who had ridden the storm reassured them.

<sup>1</sup>*Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 19 February 1951.

But there was a wide gulf between the world of appearance and that of reality.

The most important aspect of the 1950-51 struggle was that it ended on a note of complete victory for one of the three parties to it, the monarchy. As for the other two—the people, as represented by the Nepali Congress, and the Ranas—it ended on a note of neither total triumph nor total defeat. The Nepali Congress gained partly what it had fought for, and the Ranas retained a share of the power they had enjoyed for about a century. For them the 1950-51 revolution ended on a note of compromise. The “Delhi formula” which eventually brought peace to all concerned was not a revolutionary document. It was not a written compact between the three parties to the struggle either. The author’s interview with B.P. Koirala, reproduced here, throws light on the matter.

Q: You will perhaps agree with me that the 1950-51 revolution seemed to have been prevented from following its own logic by what has come to be known as the 1951 Delhi agreement, the three parties to which were the Nepali Congress, King Tribhuvan and the Ranas. What is your opinion about that, keeping in view the fact that not a few of your friends, particularly Rammanohar Lohia, the Indian Socialist leader, were strongly against your acceptance of the Delhi agreement at a time when the Nepali Congress was almost within sight of total success? In other words, when the Nepali Congress, if it had not been restrained by the Delhi agreement, was posed for making a clean sweep of every impediment that stood in the way of transforming Nepal into a republic.

A: Bhola, there appears to be a general misconception about the compromise talks the three parties, namely the Nepali Congress, the King and the Rana, had in Delhi in 1951. In the first place, there was no regular agreement in the sense that the talks did not produce any document nor any papers signed on behalf of the three parties concerned. As a matter of fact, there was not even a regular conference. We did not sit together in any conference. The talks were conducted indirectly through the Government of India, whose good offices had been utilised to conduct the

negotiations for the conference. I did not like this indirect method of conducting an important negotiation. But others, including my colleagues in the Nepali Congress, had different ideas. Ultimately, an understanding was reached basically on the following lines:

(i) King Tribhuvan would return to Kathmandu as King of Nepal.

(ii) His first act on his return would be to issue a royal proclamation pledging his word for a democratic constitution which would be framed by a constituent assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise. So far as I was concerned, I considered this point in the understanding as the most important achievement of the negotiation.

(iii) An interim government would be installed immediately after the King's return to Nepal. The interim government would be a coalition government of two equal blocs, that is, the Rana bloc and the Congress bloc. Mohan Shumsher Rana would continue to be Prime Minister. There was an understanding on the allocation of the portfolios in the Cabinet, which would have a strength of ten.

The second part of your question is: Whether or not it was possible for us to reject these terms and continue to fight as advised by Lohia. I personally was in favour of continuing the armed struggle; but I was in a minority in my party. The question that was discussed in the conference of the regional leaders of our fighting force along with the members of our Working Committee, which met at Patna prior to our participation in the Delhi talks, was whether it would be possible for us to continue the struggle when the King and the Ranas and the Government of India were in favour of a compromise. In the event of our rejection of the proposal for a conference we would have to extend our struggle. It would have meant that we should even be prepared to fight the King and India. This was considered a suicidal policy, however heroic it might have appeared to the people."<sup>2</sup>

When the 1950-51 struggle was launched, the Nepali Congress had declared its objective was the establishment

<sup>2</sup>Author-Koirala interview, New Delhi, March 1974.

of a democratic socialist society in Nepal. But the struggle ended in a compromise, thus denying the Congress the condition precedent to fulfilling its pledge to the people. The very minimum the party had asked for was a place from where it could put its ideals into practice, but the way the struggle ended made it clear that it was not to be allowed to control the commanding heights of the polity. In the given context, the Nepali Congress had perforce to agree to function under a system that was farthest from what the armed struggle had apparently been waged to achieve. The struggle ended rather tamely and the leaders of yesterday's revolution had perforce to make the best of a bad bargain.

History, circumstances and the party's own failings had as it were conspired to reduce the men who raised the standard of revolt to mere onlookers of a play that was staged far away from the sequestered valley of Kathmandu. It was New Delhi which alone could determine what should or should not happen in Nepal. And New Delhi had ideas that were materially different from the Nepali Congress thinking on the kind of policy the kingdom should have. Prime Minister Nehru had outlined this before the Nepali Congress embarked on the struggle: "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 towards democracy in Nepal. We have searched for a way which would, at the same time, avoid the total uprooting of the ancient order."<sup>3</sup>

Of course it would not do to accuse New Delhi of having acted in bad faith. The Government of India, it ought to be recalled, was not a party to the goings-on in Nepal after freedom came to a partitioned subcontinent. Britain's withdrawal from the scene initiated its search for a "Himalayan policy," which for a number of reasons remained rather perfunctory. The critics of the government had harsh words to say and they charged it with neglect of one

<sup>3</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy (Selected Speeches September 1946-April 1961)*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi, 1961, p 436.

of the country's most vital aspects of security. Especially since China's emergence as a communist state had qualitatively altered the power in the region. The general drift of opinion was that the Himalayas had ceased to be the "traditional sentinel" which kept watch on the frozen northern heights which stood between the Ganga and the Yangtse Kiang. As Lohia, one of the most trenchant and consistent critic of the government's internal and external policies, put it, "neither the snows nor the unscalable heights of the Himalayas can now do sentry duty for India. Contentment to the body and anchor to the mind of these 800 million people [who dwelt on either side of the southern Himalayan region] alone can provide security to India. Old concepts of foreign and defence policies must change.... India, her people as well as her government, must evolve a Himalayan policy, which is both strategic and moral.... The Indian Government has no policies."<sup>4</sup> That criticism became much sharper after China's occupation of Tibet.

The appearance of Chinese troops on the Tibetan borders adjoining Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim was not without its impact on New Delhi, however. Even prior to this the Government of India, as the successor state to the former British regime in the subcontinent, had concluded with Nepal two treaties of peace and friendship and of trade and commerce respectively in 1950. The peace and friendship treaty was not a mere exercise in polite diplomacy. Apart from what it publicly stipulated, the letters of exchange appended to the treaty—these were made public in 1959—enjoined: "Neither government shall tolerate any threat to the security of the other by a foreign aggressor. To deal with any such threat the two governments shall consult with each other and devise counter-measures."<sup>5</sup>

New Delhi felt that the situation in Nepal could not be allowed to drift, aware as it was of the character of the

<sup>4</sup>Rammanohar Lohia, *Fragments of a World Mind*, Calcutta, 1951, pp 165-69.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Nehru, *op cit*, p 374. Also see Appendix A for text of the treaty.

Rana regime and the prevailing state of political uncertainties that only accentuated the growing discontent of the people. The distance between this and the argument for doing something positive, and without delay, to ensure that the Chinese presence remained restricted to the other side of the Himalayas was short. A friendly and reasonably stable democratic political system in Nepal was imperative if the Chinese influence, other things apart, was to be contained. The scenario up north was too arresting to be made light of.

Conceivably, this argument, besides ideological considerations, weighed with the Government of India in making things relatively easy for the Nepali Congress to operate from Indian soil. Circumstantial evidence would at the same time suggest that New Delhi limited the volume of assistance to the Nepali Congress to the extent that it would be obliged to stay moored to the concept of the "middle way." The guiding motivation of New Delhi was to have Nepalese politics restructured in a manner that would not thwart the eventual emergence of Nepal as a democratic polity. But nothing should be done which might at that point basically alter the relation of forces in the Himalayan kingdom.

Lohia's analysis and assessment of the policy New Delhi pursued was well within the bounds of logic. The developments immediately before and after the Nepalese revolution would not substantially invalidate his argument that the Indian government did not commit itself to a system of polity in Nepal that would enable the Nepali Congress to achieve the goal it had publicly pledged itself to. It is just that Lohia raised a very pertinent question but did not go into the reasons that determined the issue. If Nehru had been prepared to make B.P. Koirala his Douglas MacArthur in Nepal, he could decide in favour of a complete break with the past. The focus would necessarily have been on agrarian revolution. That was not to be. For India itself did not have its agrarian revolution, the bedrock of a democratic superstructure. To expect that India, which also did not make a "sudden break" with the past when it attained freedom, would work for a revolutionary solution



for the problem of Nepalese politics would be asking for the impossible.

Nehru had left none in any doubt about the Indian government's thinking on the issue. All along he had emphasised that there must be no instant snapping of every link with the past. Time and again it was given out that the problem of Nepalese polity would have to be solved on the basis of compromise and understanding between the contending forces. The stress was on a middle way, between the old order and the ideal the Nepal Congress had inscribed on its banner — the demolition of the very basis of that society that had sustained the Rana regime for about a century. This was its *raison d'etre*. It was this that had prompted the party to take to armed struggle. That being the general belief, it shocked and surprised both friends and foes when the Nepali Congress agreed to work the Delhi compromise. But the apparent would not fully explain the Nepali Congress stand.

New Delhi had made a more or less objective appraisal of the Congress. There is no reason to believe that it was not aware of the Congress efforts to strive for a compromise with Mohan Shumsher before the struggle. This B.P. Koirala might be relied upon to vouch for. Along with Krishna Prasad Upadhyay, a Nepali Congress leader who became Speaker of the country's first elected Parliament, Koirala went to Kathmandu with the idea of negotiating a compromise with Mohan Shumsher. The mission failed without any dialogue between the Nepali Congress and the Ranas.

On this point let B.P. Koirala speak: "Perhaps I project the image of a violent man. But, essentially, I am a peaceful person. Even when we were preparing to start an armed insurrection movement in Nepal, in 1948, I wanted to come to some kind of a settlement with... Maharaja Mohan Shumsher, so that an armed conflict might be avoided.... I then went incognito to Kathmandu, and I wanted to contact him. I did not have any direct source. I thought the Indian Ambassador, Majithia... a great friend of the Rana family... might be of some help. I contacted the Indian Ambassador and told him what I wanted to do, that is, contact the Maharaja.... He said that it was not possible

for him to be the *via media* because that was not a job to be diplomatically performed. Then I approached a friend of mine who happened to be a tutor of Bijay Shumsher's sons, the grandsons of Mohan Shumsher, to contact Bijay Shumsher and tell him that we were preparing for an armed insurrection, that before the armed insurrection was launched I wanted to meet the Prime Minister and that our demands were very modest in that we should be permitted to organise political parties. The Ranas might rule the country but we must be free to organise political parties. My friend undertook the job and contacted Bijay Shumsher... and he communicated it to his father. But Mohan Shumsher was adamant. He said: 'No compromise. If he wants to meet me he should apply for an interview and write a *binti patra*, a prayer letter....' When I decided to meet him it was not as a supplicant, I wanted to talk to him on equal terms. I was going to negotiate with him. I could not meet him on his dishonourable terms. I was living in Nepal incognito, and after a few days I was arrested."<sup>7</sup>

This does not suggest that the Nepali Congress leader was agreeable to meet Mohan Shumsher on his terms and sign on the dotted line. At the same time the Nepali Congress leader had not even to the last day slammed the door to an agreement with Mohan Shumsher. It is a safe guess that such an agreement would not at any rate have been an improvement on the Delhi agreement.

Not much inside knowledge is necessary to appreciate that the Delhi agreement left the Nepali Congress high and dry. The party had, for one thing, set off a revolution of rising aspirations. For another, confronted as it was by other political forces, including the Communists, it had perforce to maintain an image of militant radicalism and change. It also had to live up to its heritage of having led the revolution and its commitment to a reasonably change-oriented policy and programme. But that was far from the impression, which for one reason or another gained currency, that it was uncompromisingly committed to an

<sup>7</sup> Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, October 1973.

immediate and radical change of the socio-economic fabric of society. It was not. Even some of its Socialist friends, for instance Jayaprakash Narayan, did not discourage it from accepting the Delhi agreement.

The formation of the post-revolution Cabinet with former Rana chief Mohan Shumsher as Prime Minister and B.P. Koirala as Home Minister, though a contradiction in terms to not a few, sharply outlined the emerging regime's political and class character. Koirala, whatever his public posture, which at any rate was not intemperate and which did not reflect any of the concern that some of his more obstreperous friends and colleagues had expressed, was not at all chary of working the compromise. He did not accuse Nehru of double standards or double talk. Instead, he granted that the Indian Prime Minister was one of the most straightforward and courageous men in politics. The most persuasive argument with Nehru, so far as his approach to Nepalese politics was concerned, was that any drastic surgery on Nepalese society would create problems far too complicated for the Nepali Congress to handle. At another level it would inevitably involve India more directly and deeply in Nepal's internal affairs.

In the given context this would do good neither to India nor to the Nepali Congress. It would cramp the style of the Nepali Congress, apart from getting it branded as an echo of India's voice. The situation was one that did not enable the Nepali Congress to start from scratch. Then there was the King, who might not agree with the Nepali Congress scheme of things and might resent intensely his transformation from being a prisoner of the Ranas into a tool of the Nepali Congress.

Therefore, Nehru suggested, the Nepali Congress must have patience. It must work from within to get rid of the feudal setup and in this battle, as in the armed struggle, they must enlist the support of the King. What Nehru told J.P. later may be recalled. As J.P. put it: "I remember Jawaharlal Nehru saying to me that ... both are necessary for Nepal to exist and to prosper, both the monarchy and democracy as represented by the Nepali Congress today. It may be some other party tomorrow. But the people and

the King both are essential and there must be a balance between them.”<sup>8</sup> This might sound paradoxical to the purist, but the realities on the ground being what they were the Nepali Congress had scarcely any alternative to this approach.

Whatever else it might or might not have achieved, the revolution forced the kingdom to drop its veil. From the half-light of feudalism Nepal was suddenly exposed to the blazing light of democracy. The country was not prepared for such a sudden encounter. Though it had technically remained free all along, it was one of Asia's most backward countries, socially, politically and economically. Nepalese society was in no shape, not even remotely, to work democratic institutions. Indeed, when the country was called upon to experiment with the most sophisticated and rational system of polity that man has yet been able to devise it just did not know which way to turn.

How difficult the situation was may well be imagined if it is remembered that such expressions as vote, election, people's representative and parliament were totally unknown to the idiom of the land. The bewilderment of the Nepalese only increased when they were told that every man was his own master, that it was their inherent right to determine how the country should be governed and by whom. There was the challenge of integrating 10 million people of diverse races, religions, languages and cultures into one nation. They were, legally speaking, the emphasis being on the word "legally." By legalistic definition Nepal was a nation. It had the three major attributes of nationhood—territory, a central political authority to which all the citizens owed allegiance, and sovereignty. Still, as a random collection of musical instruments cannot produce a symphony, the voice of the Nepalese nation could not conceal a recurring strain of dissonance and disharmony. Nepalese society did not think, much less act, in a manner that any integrated society elsewhere did. There was an absence of a feeling of oneness, of a sense of belonging, of

<sup>8</sup>Author's taped interview with Jayaprakash Narayan, Calcutta, 29 December 1973.

total commitment. This was much too real to be wished away.

The mental horizon of Nepal society did not extend to encompass the nation as a whole. It narrowed only to accommodate a given group or community. In other words, not every Nepalese felt he was as much an integral part of the nation as any other Nepalese, that the nation would be poorer to the extent that he would disengage himself from the mainstream of life. That was not particularly a Nepalese problem. Most transitional societies suffered more or less from this malaise. But, for reasons rooted in history, the nature of the problem had a complex dimension added to it in Nepal that was not evident in most other areas of the third world. Innumerable contradictory strands had been introduced into the national matrix.

The problem, then, was to transform Nepalese society, with its limited horizontal mobility, into a society with unlimited vertical mobility. There were two diametrically opposite paths to the solution of the problem: the classic path of coercion, that is application of force at all levels, social, political and economic; and the path of consent and persuasion. The Nepali Congress opted for the second path in order to reconstruct the national society. But there was more to it than just that. Implicit in it was the task of nation-building and the establishment of a clear Nepalese identity to which the men who had made the revolution pledged themselves.

The magnitude of the undertaking could be appreciated if it is remembered that "nation-building itself involves more than just the establishment of the most complex of modern organisations, the machinery of state; it also entails the creation of a host of organisations within the society. In the political sphere these would range from organisations capable of articulating the various interests of society to those capable of aggregating these interests in the form of public policies which can become in turn directives for guiding the organisation of the state. In the economic sphere, modernisation involves the formation of a multitude of other type of organisations: firms and factories, systems of communication and transportation, and above

all, the sensitive market. Socially, modernisation entails the development of an array of organisations that can provide the individual with the necessary range of choice for association, so that whenever he steps beyond the family he can find opportunities to test his talents and to find his full identity as a social<sup>1</sup> and a psychological being.”<sup>9</sup> If the revolution hastened the process of breaking up the structure of the traditional society, it also posed the problem of constructing a modern society. This was the complex and demanding problem the Nepali Congress faced.

But the party was obliged to accept the “middle way” to change instead of going in for the total liquidation of the Rana regime, which might have left it relatively unfettered to pursue its objective. Though shaken, the power base of the Ranas had not crumbled. The Congress understandably had a hard row to hoe when it entered into partnership with Mohan Shumsher in February 1951 to work the coalition government. The situation could be summed up thus :

- a) King Tribhuvan emerged as the key factor internally.
- b) Mohan Shumsher, though ruffled, still calculated in terms of retrieving as much of his lost powers and privileges as possible.
- c) The Nepali Congress was in a considerably disillusioned mood, with swelling ranks of critics within the party and outside.
- d) India found itself in a rather comfortable position from where it could pull strings so that Nepal might not disagree to adapt its policy to the broad framework of India's northern frontier policy in particular and foreign policy in general.

Amid cheers of welcome from a vast multitude of people, not excluding Mohan Shumsher, King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu on 15 February 1951. The Rana patriarch's presence at Gauchar airfield to receive the ruler whom he

<sup>9</sup>Lucian W. Pye, *Politics, Personality and Nation Building: Burma's Search for Identity*, Yale University Press, New York, 1962, p 39.

had forced to flee his kingdom only some months earlier sharply focused the changes that had meanwhile taken place in Nepal. The tone, temper and orientation of the new political order was set by the proclamation the King issued on 18 February 1951. A ten-member coalition government, consisting of five representatives each of the Nepali Congress and the Rana group, was formed with Mohan Shumsher and B.P. Koirala as Prime Minister and Home Minister respectively.

The experiment commenced only to fail. Though the Ranas had lost much of their power, they made every attempt to salvage as much of it as they could. Koirala on the other hand made no particular effort not to put his cards on the table. His words and deeds made it clear that he had not joined the government only to earn his right to a pension. The party had given him a mandate, and he would do whatever was necessary to execute it. While King Tribhuvan, the most important factor in the equation, succinctly emphasised the fact that he constituted the one indivisible source of power in the state.

From the very outset the King made it plain that there was no love lost between him and his Prime Minister. He did not say this in so many words, but that was what he meant. His emphasis seemed to mean two points: King Tribhuvan had no desire to be anybody's tool; and Mohan Shumsher would be suffered not a day longer than absolutely necessary. Much earlier than many had anticipated, the King indicated that he would like to be unburdened of his Prime Minister. And he sought to persuade the Home Minister to support this move. In the words of B. P. Koirala, the King "wanted to get rid of Mohan Shumsher and he wanted me to assist him in this regard."

But Koirala would not lend himself to the scheme. He had his own reasons for not doing so. For one thing, he "found Mohan Shumsher was not hindering me. He was some kind of a scapegoat. Whenever there would be trouble, the blame could be laid on him." For another, Koirala did not summarily dismiss Mohan Shumsher's warning that "ultimately my trouble would be with the King .... According to him [Mohan Shumsher], the power

that would be taken away from him would not be handed over to the people. This would go to the King ... he suggested that it would be in our interest to have him as Prime Minister, because in that case we would have greater manoeuvrability."

That the logic of the argument was not lost upon Koirala was borne out by his observation that he "was not particularly inclined to take action against Mohan Shumsher." And that because, every other reason besides, Koirala "did not want the King to step into the Rana's shoes ... I felt that we should make him from the very start a constitutional head. He should not be permitted to interfere with the day-to-day administration of the country." Not that he wanted to do away with the institution of monarchy. Far from it. Much to the ire of some of his colleagues, he was "dead opposed to the idea of the abolition of the institution of monarchy. Because I thought the monarch was the symbol of national unity and the symbol of continuity of the state ... I did not do anything to harm him or the high status that he had."<sup>10</sup>

For our purpose it is not necessary to give a very detailed account of the political developments between 1951, when the Rana-Nepali Congress coalition government was formed, and 1959, when the country got its first truly representative government. Suffice it to say that in the years between the termination of the struggle and King Mahendra's assumption of power the democratic process was worked as if to prove that it was unworkable. The parties to the democratic game, with the exception of Koirala and some of his close associates such as Ganesh Man Singh and Subarna Shumsher, vied with each other to establish that there was no substitute for democracy but that the wrong set of men had been entrusted with the task of operating it.

Apart from the Rana group every other opposition party—a sizable number of opposition political outfits had in the meantime mushroomed—made sustained efforts to throw a spanner into the works. The main force of the

<sup>10</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.



opposition attack was however directed against the Nepali Congress, particularly B. P. Koirala. Of the opposition parties the newly rigged-up Gurkha Dal, a past-regarding Rana outfit, was relatively powerful. The fact that the party's general secretary was Bharat Shumsher, a grandson of Babar Shumsher, Defence Minister in the Rana-Congress coalition Cabinet and brother of Mohan Shumsher, would give a sufficiently broad hint about its political orientation. Among the other opposition parties mention may be made of D. R. Regmi's Nepali Rashtriya Congress, Tanka Prasad Acharya's Praja Parishad and the Communist Party.

As for King Tribhuvan, he was not quite cut out for the role history and circumstances had forced on him. It is said that he even toyed at one stage with the idea of getting Nepal a place within the framework of the Indian polity. Be that as it may, he had established a certain understanding with the Nepali Congress and was not averse to giving B. P. Koirala an edge over the others. But that was about all. The King had no intention of permitting any politician to emerge as a balancing factor. Also, the emerging pattern of development only strengthened his opinion that the Rana group would have to be kept in its place. But it was another matter so far as Mohan Shumsher was concerned. There were indications, and that too quite early, that the King was in no mood to put up with Mohan Shumsher as his Prime Minister. This was one of the important issues in the initial stages which found the King and Koirala on opposite sides of the spectrum.

Koirala's major problem was neither the opposition parties nor his not very encouraging relations with the King. Although the main thrust of the opposition parties was directed against the Nepali Congress and not the other partner, the Rana group, in the coalition government, this did not worry him overmuch. He was well aware that the opposition parties were neither individually or unitedly in any shape to offer him serious opposition. As regards King Tribhuvan things had not, at least yet, reached the point of no return. The differences between the King and Koirala at this stage were more on the question of moda-

lities and less on any basic issue. And Koirala could easily ignore the opposition parties with their almost notional existence and dependence on totally unprincipled politics.

But he could ill afford to ignore the growing volume and extent of interparty conflict. It was no secret that M. P. Koirala, president of the Nepali Congress, heartily disagreed with the Home Minister on almost every major issue. The area of disagreement between the formal steward of the party and its chief spokesman in the ruling coalition was too extensive not to affect the political situation adversely. That the party president's exclusion from the coalition government also had its impact on the whole setup would be hard to contradict. To the consternation of B. P. Koirala and his colleagues a campaign soon started to the effect that the party representatives in the Cabinet were not serious about removing the Rana group from power. It was evidently inspired by M. P. Koirala and his friends. It was a campaign about that, unless Mohan Shumsher and his men were obliged to bow out of the geopolitically, it was very much in India's interest to redeem its pledges to the people. A conflict situation developed so fast that even the usually alert B. P. Koirala could not control it in time.

A scrutiny of India's policy towards the kingdom would be in order at this point. Ideologically, economically and geopolitically, it was very much in India's interest to ensure that the democratic experiment in Nepal did not founder. The fast-changing political scenario up north after China's annexation of Tibet did not fail to convey its import to the formulators of India's policy towards the Himalayan region. Nehru could not be accused of not having viewed these developments in a wider historical perspective. The "middle way" approach had not yet been abandoned, it is true. Still, whenever an opportunity came his way, he made it clear that one of the three factors—the Rana group, to be precise—in the Nepalese equation would have to be eliminated sooner than later.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>This is what the author gathered from B. P. Koirala, then Home Minister, in Kathmandu in 1951.

Subsequent developments in Nepal substantiated this view. Thinking on the institution of monarchy was that it had not outlived its utility, and must therefore have a reasonable place within the total framework of the Nepalese polity. New Delhi agreed with B. P. Koirala's assessment that the monarchy, much as it constituted an integrating agency in the given context, must be persuaded to reign and not rule. That is, the country must make every effort to get the parties concerned to accept the concept of constitutional, and not absolute, monarchy.

Underlying all this was the fact that India's "interest in the internal conditions of Nepal", as Nehru candidly admitted, "has become still more acute and personal in view of the developments across our borders in China and Tibet." Nehru did not leave it at that. For the benefit of those who might still doubt the basic considerations which influenced India's policy towards Nepal, he stated that, besides "our sympathetic interest in Nepal, we are also interested in the security of our own country . . . Much as we stand for the independence of Nepal, we cannot allow anything to go wrong in Nepal or permit that barrier [the Himalayas] to be crossed or wrecked, because that would be a risk to our own security."<sup>12</sup>

The Indian government candidly admitted that altruism was not the motivating factor of its Nepal policy. If it saw fit to accommodate itself to the changed circumstances it also was firmly of the opinion that no extraneous consideration should override India's security requirements. This aspect of Indian policy was not a secret. But to spell out this policy was one thing, to implement it another. There was a great deal of difference between what New Delhi desired and what its man on the scene did.

India's ambassador in Kathmandu at that time was C.P.N. Singh, a member of the landed aristocracy. Singh earned a knighthood for his faithful service to the British, particularly as a leader of the so-called national war front (which all genuine nationalists heartily despised) in the second world war. He was ill fitted for such a complex and

<sup>12</sup>Nehru, *op cit*, p 436.

demanding assignment. He tended to take the Nepalese, from the Prime Minister down, for granted, and his imperious manner often complicated matters for both the Nepali Congress and India. Others apart, Home Minister Koirala bitterly complained that "the Indian Ambassador never visited the Secretariat. Whenever he had to meet a minister, he would send for him."<sup>13</sup>

A plausible explanation of the fact that Singh got away with his style of diplomacy could be that the conduct of India's foreign affairs at that time lacked the necessary systematisation. It is rightly said that "India inherited a full-fledged secretariat structure for internal administration from the British but had to create an External Affairs Ministry after 1947. Some of the early Indian ambassadors, such as Sardar K. M. Panikkar in China and C.P.N. Singh in Nepal, were allowed considerable latitude in the implementation of foreign policy because of the inadequate institutionalisation of their roles."<sup>14</sup> It needs to be added that this "latitude" did not prove counter-productive in certain cases.

In theory India's policy towards Nepal had little to take exception to. Between the two countries, that is between the ruling Indian National Congress and the Nepali Congress, there was a certain identity of views so far as the emerging pattern of politics in the north was concerned. Not only India's ruling party but also most of the opposition parties firmly believed that Nepal was a basic factor in India's security. The views of the Nepali Congress on matters concerning the security of Nepal's northern frontier did not at that point run counter to India's stance on the defence of the Himalayan region. The other aspect of India-Nepal relations was the kingdom's experiment with democracy. The two countries shared broadly one another's views also on this issue.

Still, not long after the Rana-Nepali Congress partnership had got off to a not quite flying start, things seemed to go wrong. Despite New Delhi's seemingly best efforts not

<sup>13</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.

<sup>14</sup>Rose, *op cit*, p 197n.

to put its wrong foot forward the image it projected in Kathmandu was not exactly what it wanted. An active and fairly extensive anti-Indian lobby emerged in Kathmandu through a combination of factors, among them over-eagerness to be helpful, a growing tendency to strike a self-righteous posture and, above all, the unimaginative and assertive functioning of the Indian Embassy. For whatever went wrong, and much did go wrong in those days, India was held responsible.

Motives were imputed to almost every step New Delhi took to ensure that the embryonic democratic experiment got a fair chance of survival. The diverse and often mutually quarrelling political parties and groups used India as a whipping-boy, each for its own calculations, when it suited their purpose. Even the Nepali Congress was no exception, if not for any other reason at least to escape the opprobrium of being an echo of New Delhi. For instance, the party's Working Committee adopted in March 1953 a resolution to the effect that "in the interest of a healthy relationship between India and Nepal and with a view to thwarting attempts at fostering misunderstanding between the peoples of the two countries, we feel that the remaining part of the army reorganisation and training programme can be handled by our officers and men, and we resolve that the Nepali government should now request the Government of India to withdraw its military mission."<sup>15</sup>

Mention might also be made of the statement B. P. Koirala made after the turbulent demonstration which greeted the arrival of an Indian parliamentary goodwill mission in Kathmandu: "I agree that the incident was unfortunate, but we must not be jittery about it...and refuse to see reality. The Kosi agreement, the presence of an Indian military mission, a large contingent of Indian advisers and technicians, and the India-Nepal trade agreement have been irritating the national sentiments of the Nepalese people.... The incident at the airport was not an organised event but an outburst of pentup feeling."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>*The Statesman*, Calcutta, 15 March 1953.

<sup>16</sup>*The Statesman*, Calcutta, 2 June 1954.

This attempt to explain away the situation implied that the anti-Indian syndrome in Kathmandu was too real to be ignored and that the Nepali Congress intended to exploit it if necessary. A fallout of anti-Indian sentiment was that it came to serve as a foil after a sort to the country's unfolding sense of nationalism. It is not wide of the mark to say that "because the kingdom had never been colonised there had previously been no focus for nationalism. Now India, resented by those who foresaw the failure of their hopes for the country—and in the case of politicians who did not get into office for themselves—provided the required focus."<sup>17</sup>

The Nepali Congress leadership, as represented by B. P. Koirala, Subarna Shumsher and Ganesh Man Singh, did not have much ground for believing that the disorganised and divergent opposition groups could damage the party if its sense of historical realism was not warped. Internal dissension, resulting as much from ideological incompatibility as from the struggle for power, split the party ranks. The party president, M. P. Koirala, had not been included in the first coalition Cabinet, and he neither forgot nor forgave this slight. It was insinuated that B. P. Koirala and some other Nepali Congress ministers did not mean to carry out the party's objective of dislodging the Ranas from power, thus jeopardising the prospect of a full-fledged Congress government. The dissidents explained this was why Mohan Shumsher continued throwing a spanner in the works. The failure of the Congress leaders to implement expeditiously its political and economic programme added grist to the opposition mill. To forestall this they argued it was necessary for B. P. Koirala to make room for a more dynamic personality, and his opponents in the party soon fastened themselves to M. P. Koirala.

At another level, such mutually exclusive political elements as the Gurkha Dal, K. I. Singh (a Nepali Congress leader who opposed the 1951 Delhi agreement) and his men, D. R. Regmi's Nepali Rashtriya Congress, and the Commu-

<sup>17</sup>Eugene Bramer Mihaly, *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal*, Oxford University Press, London, 1965, p 22.

nist Party worked overtime to keep up the pressure on the segment of the Nepali Congress which owed allegiance to B. P. Koirala. What added fuel to the fire was his repeated emphasis on the concept of constitutional monarchy and the assertion that "the motive force of the recent revolution in Nepal was the demand for a just solution of land problems whereby feudal exploitation of the peasantry would end."<sup>18</sup> The King became perturbed, even though he wanted the democratic experiment to survive, lest B. P. Koirala do something that might again fetter the monarchy. And the feudal elements, still the country's most organised pressure group, got panicky.

The resultant situation saw the King and B. P. Koirala, the two men who should have come very much closer to each other in the country's interests, walking rapidly in opposite directions. Their relations became strained, much to Koirala's disadvantage. M. P. Koirala threw himself into the breach. But B. P. Koirala appeared determined to stick to the party's pledges to the people even at the risk of closing all his options. By and large, he had the party's rank and file with him. He also enjoyed the unqualified support of Ganesh Man Singh, the second most powerful man in the party. The advantages were however far outweighed by the disadvantages. For Home Minister Koirala "took on more than I could manage. I took on the King. I said no power to the King. I took on India and said no interference from India. And then I took on the Ranas and the feudal landlords. There was a difference of opinion between M.P. Koirala—he was president of the party—and myself over all these issues.

"He had a very strong point of view.... We differed on three questions. He said: 'Because of the revolution there is already a law and order problem. On top of this if you introduce land reforms, you will turn the situation worse....' My argument was that law and order would be restored only when we went along with our commitment to the people regarding land reforms.... This was therefore the

<sup>18</sup>See *Report of the First Asian Socialist Conference*, Rangoon, 1953, p 24.

time when we should introduce drastic land reforms. . . . Another point on which we disagreed was the role of the Ranas and the King. I said the King must function as a constitutional monarch. Once you give him the role to act arbitrarily, then another revolution will be necessary for saving democracy. Then he said: 'No. You are functioning by virtue of authority vested in you by the King, you have derived the constitutional right from him. He is the constitution, he is the lawgiver and you are there as his nominee.' I said: 'This is too legalistic a point of view. I am here because of the revolution, my legitimacy does not depend on the King.' Vaguely the difference was also on the role of India. I said that India must not permit a situation to be created where we are dubbed anti-national brokers of India, as the Ranas were saying."<sup>19</sup>

The Westminster variety of parliamentary democracy had to be worked in a country that was just not prepared for it. The kingdom was without a common focus except the monarchy, and it totally lacked the political and economic premises for democracy. In this sharply uneven struggle it was imperative that B.P. Koirala should have allies. Who could be his allies other than the party, the people and the King, in that order? But the party was ideologically confused and strife-torn, the people were apathetic, and the King was in a sullen mood. Events overtook the Home Minister. In spite of his intention not to cross swords with Mohan Shumsher merely for effect, the inherent contradictions of the Rana-Nepali Congress coalition compelled him before long to precipitate matters. The situation took a menacing turn when the Gurkha Dal rebelled in the Kathmandu Valley and K.I. Singh resorted to terrorism. Unable to cope with his group's widespread terrorist activities in the western region adjoining the India-Nepal border, Kathmandu sought New Delhi's assistance not only to get over the immediate problem but also to train the Nepalese Army. And the appearance in Kathmandu of an Indian military mission in 1952 provided a tangible object on which to focus the not as yet strong

<sup>19</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.



anti-Indian feeling.

It might well be said that the disturbances the Gurkha Dal engineered in April 1951 were the starting point of the process of elimination of the country's alternative power centre—the monarchy. The Dal militant not only raided the residence of Home Minister Koirala, compelling him thereby to order the shooting of one of them. They also demonstrated in front of the royal palace, demanding restoration of the Rana regime. This alarmed King Tribhuvan. He relieved Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher of control of the army and took over himself the office of Commander-in-Chief that had been the Rana family's exclusive preserve for over a century. Other changes in the army establishment, the King's public condemnation of the Gurkha Dal agitation, and his upholding the Home Minister's action resulting in the death of a raider—all this indicated that the Palace did not intend to have its writ restricted to its compound.

King Tribhuvan was now determined to get rid of his Prime Minister. Shrewd as he was, Mohan Shumsher could not be said to be unaware of this. This partly explains his subsequent attempts to curry favour with the Nepali Congress. It was not without a purpose that the Rana group made it possible for the coalition Cabinet to accept un-animously the principle that *birta* lands should be abolished, notwithstanding that they stood to lose most thereby. But that did not prevent events from taking their course. As promised earlier, the King announced on 2 October the constitution of a 35-member advisory assembly, consisting mostly of Nepali Congress activists and some non-party men. Mohan Shumsher was kept in the dark about this move, and his group was not allowed any representation in the proposed assembly. He openly expressed his resentment, and this was his swansong.

Another 40 days and the curtain fell on the man who symbolised all that the revolution had been waged against. The irony of circumstances was however that the incident which ultimately forced him into oblivion also obliged the man who made the revolution to quit the scene. This incident deserves to be recapitulated in some detail. In view

of the deterioration in law and order the Home Minister had decreed that no public meeting should be held in the valley without obtaining at least a prior sanction of 24 hours from the police. The opposition groups resented the order, and their chief target of attack was the Home Minister. Encouraged by them, a group of students held a meeting on 6 November in violation of the order and the police arrested some of their leaders. A crowd collected at the police station and demanded the release of the arrested persons. One thing led to another and the police opened fire without the Home Minister's authorisation, resulting in the death of one student and injury to two others.

How did Koirala explain his conduct? He said: "I learnt of that incident about half an hour after it had occurred. There was a prohibitory order against public demonstrations, against holding meetings. In the morning the students had come to me and told me that they were going to violate that prohibitory order by holding a meeting. I told them that they could inform the police and hold the meeting.... I told them that, for students, it was enough if they informed the police that they would be holding a public meeting. Or if they did not want to do that, they could tell me formally that they would be holding a meeting. There was no difficulty about that. They said no, they were going to break the law...the prohibitory order. I said that in that case they would have to bear the consequences. But I instructed the police to the effect that they should not interfere because I wanted the students to give vent to their pentup feeling. The prohibitory order was specifically meant for the political parties and not for the students. I told the police authorities that they should not interfere with the students' programme. In the afternoon they held a meeting at Tundikhel. There was no disturbance and the police did not do anything. They went to the police station, where they tried to snatch a rifle from a police guard, and then the police opened fire. But, I did not know that there had been police firing till a PTI (Press Trust of India) man or some other Indian journalist who had been covering the incident came running to me to inquire whether I knew of the firing. I said that I did not know. I categorically told

him that there was no firing. Then he said that he had seen the firing. As a matter of fact, he saw some of the boys being hit. I telephoned the police headquarters and they confirmed that there had been a firing. So there was no question of my ordering the police firing on the students."<sup>20</sup>

The valley echoed as Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher condemned the police firing in good, round terms. Evidently, he made an attempt to make a public issue of the police firing, which Koirala took as a personal attack on himself. In the course of a press interview on 10 November, Koirala made no bones about the fact that there would be "no peace or democracy in Nepal until the present Prime Minister, Maharaja Mohan Shumsher, goes out of the Cabinet. We have told King Tribhuvan that the Prime Minister's exist is imperative. I have a strong suspicion that reactionary forces are trying to stage an autocratic comeback by creating chaos and taking advantage of the recurrent emotional disturbances."<sup>21</sup>

The Home Minister's press statement did not contain anything that might conflict with the King's scheme of things. What however grated on the King was Koirala's broadcast to the people. Having owned responsibility for the police firing, Koirala observed, in a broadcast on 10 November, that the party had compromised with the Ranas in the hope that this might ensure a less-tormented period of transition. But that hope had been "dashed to the ground." He also urged the people to be prepared for a larger struggle to realise the as yet unfulfilled objectives of the revolution. The King understandably had no reason to appreciate this, much less so Koirala's refusal to appear in sackcloth and ashes and mollify the agitating students, who were determined to continue their fight against the "dictatorship of the Rana-Koirala axis."<sup>22</sup> That was enough to confirm the King's growing doubts about the malleability of the Home Minister.

In the circumstances, both the Prime Minister and the

<sup>20</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 22 May 1975.

<sup>21</sup>*The Statesman*, Calcutta, 12 November 1951.

<sup>22</sup>*The Statesman*, Calcutta, 12 November 1951.

Home Minister followed the only course open to them. They resigned. On 16 November, King Tribhuvan appointed M.P. Koirala Prime Minister, ignoring the intense resentment and not a little opposition this engendered in the ranks of the Nepali Congress. Thus the president of the Nepali Congress became the Himalayan kingdom's first commoner to hold the office of Prime Minister, albeit on the sufferance of the Palace. The process of concentration of power in the Crown that had started with the Delhi agreement also came full circle. As to why he was unacceptable to the King as first Minister, B.P. Koirala observed: "In the beginning King Tribhuvan and myself pulled on very well.... But on the question of power the King did not want to relent. In fact, he wanted to get more power for himself, for the Crown, for the King. Whereas I wanted that the King should start functioning as a constitutional monarch right from the outset.... He (the King) thought that if I was made Prime Minister the King would be just a constitutional head. India also perhaps did not like my being Prime Minister. On the question of India also, M.P. Koirala was more amenable, more soft I should say. These were the two important considerations why the King did not choose me as a Prime Minister."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 23 May 1975.

## A State of Flux

PRIME MINISTER M.P. Koirala, who had by now developed considerable difference of opinion with B.P. Koirala, formed a composite government of sorts which included eight Nepali Congressmen and six non-party men with as many divergent political views. From the very outset the new Prime Minister had to face heavy weather, what with his deepening conflict with the party, particularly B.P. Koirala, and his timid approach to the crisis in the country. This did not allow any significant advance to be made in respect of badly needed reforms, social, political or economic. He refused to abide by the party Working Committee's decision requiring him to reconstitute the Cabinet on the basis of a list of seven it had prepared. The upshot was that the rift between the Prime Minister and the party widened. Eventually, M.P. Koirala and two other ministers, Mahabir Shumsher<sup>1</sup> and Mahendra Bikram Shah, were expelled from the party on 25 July 1952.

A meeting of the Prime Minister's followers in Kathmandu on 26 July condemned the expulsion most vehemently, accusing the Nepali Congress Working Committee of usurping power through "conspiracy, intrigue and party clique."<sup>2</sup> This prompted Tanka Prasad Acharya and D.R. Regmi, whose opposition to the Nepali Congress was total and who had meanwhile rigged up the National Democratic United Front, which included the Communist Party and some Nepali Congress dissidents, to observe that the Congress "was torn by factional and family fights and

<sup>1</sup>One of M.P. Koirala's supporters, Mahabir Shumsher, along with his cousin Subarna Shumsher financed the Nepali Congress during the 1950-51 struggle.

<sup>2</sup>*Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 28 July 1952.

had ceased to represent anyone except a coterie."<sup>3</sup> To fight his case at the ensuing session of the Mahasamiti, or Nepali Congress Committee, as a "common soldier of the Congress and not as Prime Minister,"<sup>4</sup> M.P. Koirala resigned from the prime ministership on 10 August. But that was of no avail, for only six out of the Mahasamiti's 108 members supported him. Some months later, in May 1953, he formed a new party, the National Democratic Party, with himself and Mahendra Bikram Shah as president and secretary respectively.

Between M.P. Koirala's exit from office in August 1952 and his reappointment as Prime Minister in June 1953 the King personally assumed power. On 14 August 1952, he announced the appointment of a six-man committee of Royal Councillors to assist him in the business of government, particularly "eradication of bribery, corruption, and nepotism in the government, establishment of an independent judiciary, and an unambiguous definition of the people's fundamental rights."<sup>5</sup> The line of action King Tribhuvan opted for would clearly indicate that, besides other things, he would not entrust the Nepal Congress, apparently the largest national party, with power. Of course it did not follow that the King had despaired of the country's experiment with democracy. None other than E.P. Koirala confirmed that King Tribhuvan 'used to give all authority to the one he appointed Prime Minister. He did not want to rule directly although he did not want to give up any constitutional rights. But in the exercise of those rights he used to trust others who commanded his confidence. He had democratic inclinations."<sup>6</sup>

The Councillors' regime did not last longer than ten months. On 15 June 1953, M.P. Koirala, leader of the 45-day-old National Democratic Party, was once again summoned to form a government. His performance this time

<sup>3</sup>*Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 31 July 1952.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 11 August 1952.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966, p 103.

<sup>6</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.

was as indifferent as it had been on the last occasion. Totally devoid of any popular support and lacking a sense of direction and purpose, the government temporised when it ought to have acted. Hardly eight months passed when the King had the National Democratic Party government replaced by a four-party "national coalition" comprising the National Democratic Party, the Nepali Rashtriya Congress, the Praja Parishad, and the All-Nepal Jana Congress led by Bhadrakali Mishra, a former Nepali Congress activist, with M.P. Koirala as Prime Minister.

This was installed in office on 18 February, the kingdom's National Day. In a no-nonsense message King Tribhuvan reminded the new government that "the atmosphere of political instability and uncertainty that has arisen in the country today can benefit neither the country nor the people. If this uncertainty continues for long, it will prove fatal ... the existing situation in the country has filled the people with a sense of frustration and apathy."<sup>7</sup> The King still hoped that the parties and politicians would recover their sense of perspective, that they would stop the rot before it was too late.

His admonition fell on deaf ears. Unable to face the realities of the situation, the government employed all its energies merely to keep itself afloat. In the process it got sucked deeper into the quagmire of confusion and mindless pursuit of power. The economy stagnated; unemployment increased sickeningly; the administrative machinery was at the nadir of its efficiency; and the tentacles of corruption held society in a vicelike grip. The coalition partners, at feud with one another from the very beginning, created the impression that they were committed to a policy of scuttle. Prime Minister M.P. Koirala surely did not contradict this when he said in the course of a press interview, on 12 December 1954, that "the purpose for which the present government was formed has been completely defeated."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Nepal Gazette, Vol. III, Extraordinary Issue, 10 Falgun 201 (20 February 1954).

<sup>8</sup>*The Statesman*, Calcutta, 15 December 1954.

To cap it all, the opposition parties, mainly the Nepali Congress, went at the coalition hammer and tongs. They accused it of every conceivable kind of misconduct. As if to lend credence to this, Tanka Prasad Acharya and Bhadrakali Mishra, who had been forced to quit the Cabinet, said: "The independence of the judiciary is lost. All over the country anarchy, famine, corruption, bribery, unemployment and inflation are rampant.... The peasants are exploited more than ever. Facilities for communication, irrigation, education and public health are almost non-existent. The lawful rights of students, labour, women and merchants have been ruthlessly suppressed. Reactionary elements are receiving full encouragement.... Big landlords and capitalists are having a field day in exploiting the people."<sup>9</sup> On 2 March 1955, M.P. Koirala's second term of office formally ended as dismally as his first. Since failing health had obliged King Tribhuvan to go abroad for medical treatment, it was Crown Prince Mahendra who, duly authorised to act on behalf of the King, accepted the resignation of the government.

At this point we might pause to observe the pattern of relations between the political parties and the Palace. Some of these parties, not excluding the Nepali Congress, seemed to have made it a point to focus their critical attention on the Palace almost from the outset. They accused the Palace of various acts of omission and commission, ranging from power lust to graft. The critics of the Palace had a method in all they did. They made a careful distinction between King Tribhuvan and Crown Prince Mahendra. So far as the King was concerned, criticism was in a low key. Almost always the critics avoided being personal. Not so with the Crown Prince. Deliberately or otherwise, he was made the target of criticism that was often personal, and a severe hurt to his pride to boot. All the gossip, rumours and whispers of scandal that went round the valley could not possibly have any objective besides driving a wedge between the King and the heir-apparent and throwing a lurid light on the Crown Prince.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Joshi and Rose, *op cit*, p 147.



Every day that passed seemed to add to the list of misdemeanours the Prince was allegedly guilty of. One day it would be said that King Tribhuvan wanted to disinherit him because he was impatient to succeed his father and hence had engineered a conspiracy against him. At another hints would be dropped that he was given to graft, corruption and what have you. Mahendra chose not to take this campaign lying down. Five months had barely passed since when he decided to take the field. In a statement on 28 July the formation of the Rana-Congress coalition government 1951 he said: "Nepal, our motherland, was groaning under the boots of autocratic rulers for quite a long time. In a situation like this people could not attain happiness or prosperity ... it was imperative that something had to be done to elevate the political, social and economic standard of the people.... In this 20th century it has become an irrefutable fact that unless the governance of a country is placed on sound democratic lines the country and its people cannot hope to prosper.... In Nepal, a democratic system of government was brought into being. Democracy in its true sense could be possible only when people would doff their sectional interests; when they would stop going about shouting slogans and vitiating the political climate; when they would awaken their latent national feelings and divert their energies to nation-building activities. But I have found that some people have identified democracy with licence, to make disturbances and go about spreading wild rumours. In some quarters, I am aware, rumours are being spread that my august father and myself are at cross-purposes ... that I am aligning myself with the Gurkha Dal. To hear such rumours saddens me, and sometimes even nauseates me."<sup>10</sup>

This indicates that the Crown Prince has been forming quite at an early stage in the country's democratic experiment his opinion of the parties and politicians. He main-

<sup>10</sup>*Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, H.M. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, Vol 1 (July 1951-December 1960), Department of Publicity, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, September 1967, p 1.

tained a keen vigil lest he should be caught on the wrong foot. On 18 September 1951, he issued a statement saying that "my attention has been invited... to a wild rumour being screeched by the Nepali Rashtriya Congress (D.R. Regmi's party) to the effect that His Royal Highness the Crown Prince is participating in the anti-government demonstration being staged by it.... I would categorically say that this is a malicious lie.... In Nepal today, parties are having a mushroom growth. It has become a commonplace here for one party to be organised this day and be split up the very next. From the third day such parties would forget all about their aims and objectives and would be busy flinging mud at one another."<sup>11</sup>

Only a few months had elapsed after the political changes in the country. Yet Mahendra found enough justification to condemn the political parties and their method of operation. The campaign against him went on unabated, obliging him thereby to defend himself publicly. In a surprisingly rancorous message to the nation on 18 February 1952, the first National Democracy Day, he said: "It is under the leadership, and only under the leadership, of our King that the people and the country can hope to thrive and prosper. Let us not hearken to the lies screeched by the rumour-mongers; let us be loyal to the King... untold number of political factions have come up... factions led by a handful of selfish opportunists... corruption is rife.... Freedom of speech is there, but grievances go unheard.... Rules and regulations are being raped in the name of democracy.... For all this, can we ever hold our King responsible? I would not do so even if injustice has been done to me.... To tell the truth, it was the saboteurs and the anti-nationals who have tarnished the fair name of liberty by their perfidies.... I have this to say, that our one-year-old democracy is willy nilly lying on its deathbed."<sup>12</sup>

The balance-sheet of the 12-month-old democratic experiment, as drawn up by the Crown Prince, made gloomy reading. He considered the political parties the root of all

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, pp 1-2.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, pp 2-5.

evil and he directed his attack at them. The brief for King Tribhuvan was essentially a defence of the institution of monarchy. Once again Mahendra felt constrained to say that his "attention has been drawn to the propagation of fabricated propaganda in respect of my relations with my august father both by self-motivated groups and individuals. Such propaganda does not have any basis or reality."<sup>13</sup> But for him there was no respite from this campaign. The growing criticism, at times scurrilous, of the monarchy was something that almost every political party indulged in. They had their reasons. To the extent that their inability to act and to determine the course of politics increased, the monarchy gained. The parties resented this intensely, but there was little they could do about it. And their attempt to hold the Palace responsible for whatever went wrong in the country angered the Crown Prince much more than the King himself. It also aroused his suspicion that the parties wanted to pull down the institution of monarchy itself.

This was reflected in a statement he issued on 31 August 1953: "I hear that the cinema hall being opened recently in Pakanajol is rumoured to belong to me. But should anybody stoop to convert our true democracy and democratic freedoms through their own corrupt practices into corruption or alienocracy, should anybody in the shelter of a party platform forget the Nepalihood among the Nepali people and start vilifying one another, I would not make any comment at all. The thing of which everybody has already has more than they can stomach can never play any vital role. As the saying goes, the dogs may ... bark, the caravan marches on."<sup>14</sup>

As one effete government succeeded another, as the kingdom's problems multiplied in almost geometrical progression, and as the King's failing health stood between him and the business of state, Crown Prince Mahendra came to occupy an increasingly pivotal position in the life of the nation. Over the years from February 1951 he had closely

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, p 12.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p 13.

watched the working of the democratic system. He also made some efforts to adjust himself to the changing relations among the political forces in the country. But it appeared to him that there was between him and the ongoing democratic experiment an absolutely irreconcilable point—the role of the monarchy. The emphasis at the people's level of politics, as reflected by the Nepali Congress, was on the fact that the monarchy should be bridled to the extent that it became no more than a figurehead, a decoration merely to be tolerated.

On the other hand, the functioning of the party system made it gradually clear that the monarchy provided the only basis of stability in the country. The democratic system was being operated as if with the sole intention of enabling the monarchy to emerge as the country's only source of effective power. Not unoften it seemed that the politicians, except B.P. Koirala and a couple of his most trusted colleagues, vied with each other in aiding the monarchy to become the one constant factor in Nepalese politics. In this they did not have to go it alone. Others elsewhere also contributed their mite to strengthening the throne. They had various motives, one of the most dominant of which was the desire not to be confronted with a situation that might jeopardise the growth of a multipolarised power structure.

The Crown Prince's view of the Nepalese situation was straight, clear and nearly unidimensional. He had no romantic notions that the kingdom had a message to deliver or a messianic part to play on the world stage. There was nothing to suggest that he was not aware that his was a poor, backward and illiterate country which depended not a little on foreign aid and the earnings of its citizens as mercenaries in foreign armies. But he was a proud man and Nepal was his obsession. Mahendra was also an embittered man, thanks not a little to his not very happy relationship with his father and the spiteful campaign the political parties were systematically conducting against him.

In the course of his Vijaya Dashami (the day of triumph over injustice and darkness) message on 7 October 1954, Crown Prince Mahendra observed: "The mud and slime of

the rains have dried up; the clouds and gloom have been swept away from the skies; the autumnal blue is overhead; and the greenery of the earth and the waves over the golden ricefields give us new hopes and new aspirations.... There is some restlessness, some suffocation in the country. The failure of the political revolution to deliver the goods is casting its shadow on us. That is by no means a happy augury.... Instead of shouting empty slogans regarding foreign intervention we should all be united and forge ahead. Only then will others not make capital out of our weaknesses. The question of foreign intervention or non-intervention is also a question of our responsibility.... From our friendly countries we have been receiving not only assurances but tangible assistance in resources for the development of our country. It is we who should make good use of this assistance and cooperation."<sup>15</sup>

The message was delivered at a time the political scene looked disconcertingly twisted. A number of experiments to give the country a reasonably stable and work-oriented government had gone bad. Political bickerings were increasing, and the party system seemed to be disintegrating. There was widespread anti-Indian agitation in the country and M.P. Koirala's "national coalition" government, which as a matter of policy excluded the Nepali Congress, the country's largest political party, was impotently in office although King Tribhuvan had entrusted the Prime Minister with sweeping power.

The Crown Prince, as the representative of the King, took a dim view of this state of affairs. If he was not particularly enamoured of M.P. Koirala's lame-duck show, he had not yet changed his opinion on India's role in Nepal. That would explain his pointed reference to those who had raised the bogey of external interference, which at that point obviously meant India, with the kingdom's domestic affairs. The message also revealed that he had made his own assessment of the working of the Nepalese polity since the 1950-51 struggle. The categorical reference to the "failure of the political revolution" was not meant

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 16-17.

just for effect. To him this concerned what he emphasised was a fact of life, and he emphasised it not without a purpose. He was building up a case against the party system. He was also establishing a direct dialogue with the people.

So far as that went, he was not inconsistent. He had been at it since the introduction of parliamentary democracy in Nepal. The other points he sought to underline could be thus summed up: the institution of monarchy stood for democracy, nationalism, Nepalihood or Nepali consciousness, a clean society and economic development, while the political parties were the very antithesis of these. As if to drive the message home the Crown Prince, who had already been vested with full "royal authority," observed on 10 February 1955: "It has been almost four years since the inception of democracy in our country. But we have to search and research to find even four achievements to our credit in the meanwhile. It is really a matter of great pity. Should we say that democracy is in a state of infancy, evil propensities like selfishness, greed and envy are very much noticeable in it, which are unnatural for an infant? Should we say that it has already grown up? It is rather unfortunate that symptoms of growth are noticeable nowhere, a fact which is not at all hidden from my countrymen."<sup>16</sup>

A review of the style and operation of the political parties in the period between 18 February 1951, when the Rana-Congress coalition government was formed, and 13 March 1955, when King Tribhuvan died, would show that they failed to comprehend that the social, political and economic conditions in the country militated against the establishment of a viable democracy. They also failed to realise that these conditions could not be changed through the politics of expediency and unprincipled compromise. From the conservative Gurkha Dal to the Communist Party, the political parties and groups did everything best calculated to erode their credibility. Most of what they did, severally or collectively, contributed to stifling the growth

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, pp 31-32.

of a relatively principled and forward-looking party system. This part could on the one hand strive for a climate reasonably congenial for the people to cultivate a sense of purpose, direction and belonging, and on the other check and balance the country's single power centre, the monarchy.

To a certain extent the Nepali Congress was an exception. Not that it did not at times allow itself to be a victim of its own radical idiom and militant posture. Not infrequently it was confused in its immediate reactions, misread the signs of the time and failed to take its bearings properly. It was not daring enough to opt for the kind of revolutionary politics that might have resolved the deepening crisis. It was also not realist enough to face the fact that "a party is marked by its conditions of birth, its development, the class or alliance of classes that it represents and the social milieu in which it has developed."<sup>17</sup> It was therefore imperative for the party not to miss out on its opportunities to accommodate itself, without compromising the core of its political platform, to the Palace, which was one of the most vital factors in Nepalese politics.

This the Nepali Congress was found wanting in, and the responsibility for it could to a certain degree be traced to B. P. Koirala. An element of overconfidence, impetuosity, arrogance, cynicism and contempt for *realpolitik* marked his attitude toward men and events. In this connexion reference might be made to a letter he wrote the author on 27 November 1952: "I never suffer from frustration; I, on the other hand, suffer from overabundance of frivolity. I believe in taking things easy, almost in a jocose mood. Between success and failure the margin is so thin that one slips from one to the other unwittingly and unceasingly."<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the Nepali Congress, though deliberately kept out of power except for the two brief periods of Rana-Congress coalition and the

<sup>17</sup>Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution*, Penguin Books, London, 1968, p 97.

<sup>18</sup>See Appendix B for a photocopy of the letter.

nominated M.P. Koirala government, did not wither on the vine. Nor did it succumb to the politics of dispersal and disorientation. The leaders of the party, particularly B. P. Koirala, did not plump for the easiest road to power. Whatever his shortcomings, he did not agree to substitute pragmatism—often another name for opportunism—for idealism. If he had agreed to be on the right side of the Palace, the Nepali Congress would not have been denied a place in the power structure. A letter B. P. Koirala wrote the author on 14 October 1954 illustrates this point: "Our King is going to Switzerland. He is already in Calcutta en route. This time again he tried his best to include me in his Cabinet in my individual capacity. I refused because the very basis was wrong and calculated to promote dissension and heterogeneity."<sup>19</sup>

The Nepali Congress turned to its own reconstruction. B. P. Koirala was alive to the fact that ideology was a potent tool that the party must develop from a national platform of sorts into a well-knit organisation with a distinct visage and political philosophy. The search for an ideology brought the party nearer the stream of democratic socialism. It participated in the first and subsequent meets of the Asian Socialist Conference, an organisation of Asian socialist parties, and established close rapport with the Praja Socialist Party of India. Addressing the first Asian Socialist Conference at Rangoon in January 1953, Koirala, as the leader of a four-man Nepalese delegation, observed that the Nepali Congress "objectives are democracy and social justice, in other words, socialism and democracy."<sup>20</sup> Along with this the party embarked on a course of agitational politics and nonviolent mass struggle. It petitioned, agitated and struggled for the realisation of the King's promise to convene a constituent assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage, to frame a democratic constitution and to hold elections. Because of this a sizable number of party activists, not excluding B. P. Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh, suffered incarceration from time to

<sup>19</sup>See Appendix C for a photostat of the letter.

<sup>20</sup>*Report of the first Asian Socialist Conference*, op cit, p 24.



time. In the process the party gained in volume and acquired a seemingly coherent form. It also earned the hostility of powerfully entrenched vested interests, particularly the landowning classes. More, the party alienated the Palace, although the party's continuing struggle against feudalism, of which the monarchy had been a prisoner and against which the Congress had staged a revolution, provided a basis of understanding between the two, theoretically at any rate.

Away from his kingdom, with which he seemed to have a love-hate relationship, away from his people, for whom history had ordained that he should become the liberator, away from all the worries, tribulations and conflicts, all the meanness, pettifoggery and small interests, courtiers, sycophants and irresponsible politicians, King Tribhuvan breathed his last in Switzerland. The King is dead, long live the King, the Nepalese exclaimed on 13 March 1955. Nepal had severed its ties with the past. Or so it seemed.

By every account the man who ascended the throne was different from his predecessor. King Mahendra was no ordinary ruler. He had very definite ideas about men and things. Yet he did not seem impervious to the opinions of others, within limits. He had still to make up his mind about the ongoing experiment with democracy. But he was fiercely proud, committed to a rigid personal framework of values, and uncompromisingly determined to hammer into shape what he loved to characterise as Nepalism, an ideology that could not be mistaken for what obtained in the valley down south.

On 14 March 1955 Mahendra, father of two sons, took an oath to serve Nepal as its King. He was frugal of his time and money, not expansive like his father. He was rather reserved and taciturn of speech. He had a taste for literature, also a good ear for music. He did not have a formal education like his father. But the people of Nepal knew him to be gifted with a strong will, and not a little intelligence and sophistication. His subsequent management of the affairs of his realm amply substantiated this. He had strong likes and dislikes, but he was by nature a forgiving

man.<sup>21</sup> He kept his own counsel, and his attitude to India lacked the warmth his father had in abundance.

King Mahendra's first major political move was to convene a conference of the country's various political parties and social organisations, the guiding motivation of which was "to bring my countrymen together around a conference table in an effort to shape the destiny of Nepal." Addressing the conference on 8 May 1955, he said: "Before this conference I would repeat a remark that I have often made . . . . Four round years have passed since (democracy was brought in . . . . During this period the government has been run by several cabinets of ministers from several political parties turn by turn and the number of such ministers are now about 30 . . . . When every new cabinet was formed, for the first two or three months of bickerings and in the following two or three months deliberations for the dissolution of the cabinet would go on . . . . Concrete achievements could not ensue from such a state of affairs. Contrarily, people began laughing in their sleeves."<sup>22</sup>

The state of affairs in the kingdom was indeed murky at that time. Organised political life appeared to be disintegrating and the party system stood much discredited. There was no active politician except B. P. Koirala, who did not seem to hold his reputation cheap. Corruption in political life was not an exception and almost every political party had been smeared by it. It is no figment of imagination that, in the closing days of King Tribhuvan, "corruption and nepotism had acquired a magnitude never known before in the history of Nepal. . . . the reputation of no government servant up to the Prime Minister himself was unsullied."<sup>23</sup>

Having pinpointed the affliction that he believed ailed Nepal, the King declared that "under no circumstances

<sup>21</sup>Both B. P. Koirala and Subarna Shumsher confirmed this to the author in the course of conversation.

<sup>22</sup>*Proclamations, etc, Vol 1 (Part II), p 9.*

<sup>23</sup>Girilal Jain, *India Meets China in Nepal*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1959, p 41.

whatsoever am I prepared to lose the democratic gains already achieved... At the same time I am very eager to unload the burden of administration that has fallen so directly upon my shoulders at a suitable quarter to be found by your unanimous or majority opinion and recommendations. I am emphatic that I am quite unable to be a pensive onlooker of the ruination of the country in the name of democracy." King Mahendra of course did not end his peroration on a negative note. In the given context, he was convinced that a "general election is the crying need of the hour. Without such an election, assessment could not at all be made regarding the magnitude of popularity of any political party. I am much effortful in this regard and have announced that the date for the general election could be fixed in a matter of three months' time."<sup>24</sup>

A careful reading of the King's message would indicate that: he had not, despite his severe indictment of the political parties and their patently dismal performance, closed his mind so far as the parliamentary system of government was concerned; he was determined not to concede the Nepali Congress claim—until a general election bore this out—that it was the largest political party and should therefore be allowed to form a government. Subsequent developments corroborated this. Between his assumption of power and the first general election four years had slipped away, and this was not a very short period. In it the King tried a number of experiments in forming governments apart from the spells of direct Palace rule. But he saw to it that the Nepali Congress was kept out of the corridors of power.

One of the most fateful periods of recent Nepalese history started with a brief spell of the King's personal rule. When he ascended the throne the country did not have a "popular" government, M. P. Koirala having been obliged to relinquish office earlier. Between then and May 1959 Nepal had three nominated governments and two spells of direct rule. King Mahendra's choices as prime minister had a limited brief. For instance, it would be preposterous to

<sup>24</sup>*Proclamations, etc, Vol 1 (Part II) op cit, pp 9-12.*

suggest that Tanka Prasad was nominated to this post because of his intrinsic worth or because of the strength of the party he shepherded. Neither Tanka Prasad nor his Praja Parishad had any better claim to office than any other of the multitude of parties and politicians that crowded Nepal's political mart. What distinguished Tanka Prasad from others however was his pliability. He was ready to plough the sands should the King desire him to do so. Nothing also can explain how his government lasted 18 months, the longest period any government, except the elected B. P. Koirala government, survived between February 1951 and December 1960. That the period of the Tanka Prasad regime was not exactly uneventful is quite another story. Essentially it was that of the King.

King Mahendra seemed to have persuaded himself by now that the Palace constituted the bulwark against all that stood in the path of the country's development in the "great tradition of nation-community, crossing the boundaries of castes, creeds and ethnocentrism."<sup>25</sup> It was imperative in the given context that the Palace should transform itself into an active agent of the country's social, political and economic development. The King exhorted the people "to rise superior to individual or sectional interests and engage ourselves heart and soul in the conquest of hunger and want."<sup>26</sup> And he never tired of using such expressions as "our national destiny," "pride in being a Nepali" and "our national genius."

Nepalese politics took an entirely different turn with the King Mahendra's ascension of the throne. Convinced that "a king... can maintain his power if he is astute in internal politics and successful externally,"<sup>27</sup> he gave his attention to restructuring the economy, a matter which had received little or no attention in the preceding years. Secondly, King Mahendra had his own plans so far as domestic politics was concerned. They had two aspects: one

<sup>25</sup>*The Panchayat Democracy, op cit, p 11.*

<sup>26</sup>*Proclamations etc, Vol I (Part II), op cit, p 53.*

<sup>27</sup>Bertrand Russell, *Power: a new social analysis*, (Fourth impression), London, 1939, p 192.

was to strike a populist stance and open channels of communication with the people. The motivation in this case was a search for allies in his struggle to mould an identifiable Nepalese image out of diverse ethnic groups and cultures. Secondly, his sustained efforts to establish a dialogue with the people, his repeated emphasis on Nepalism, his constant endeavour to be accepted by the people as the symbol of their hopes and aspirations, his unceasing attempts to prevent the political parties from consolidating their position and the refrain on his frequent meet-the-people-tours that his "mission" was to "acquaint myself with the grievances and difficulties confronting my people in the different zones and districts under existing conditions"<sup>28</sup>—all this was of a piece with his strategy of ensuring that the monarchy retained its control of the commanding heights of the Nepalese polity. Thirdly, he initiated a well-planned move to expand the scope and content of the country's hitherto limited contact with the world outside. One of the major considerations which determined his policy, to open as many windows on the world as possible, apparently was to lessen Nepal's dependence on India.

To take the last first. For an understanding of King Mahendra's approach to international politics it might be helpful to recall once again that, until the advent of Prithvi Narayan, Nepal did not have to bother overmuch about the problem of having formal state-level contacts abroad. The people in the Terai lowlands and in the Kathmandu Valley, the firstnamed particularly, had their social, religious and economic traffic with India. With Prithvi Narayan started Nepal's serious exercise in foreign policy. The basic premise of this was that the country could not afford a foreign policy which ignored the geopolitical reality of its location between two giant neighbours, China in the north and India in the south.

There was a deviation from this when the Ranas came to rule the roast. As Major-General Padma Bahadur Khat-

<sup>28</sup>*Proclamations etc*, Vol I (Part II), *op cit*, p 38.

ri,<sup>29</sup> Nepal's Foreign Secretary, put it, "for over a hundred years Nepal's foreign policy was to serve the British interest in the subcontinent." After the exit of the British this "client-state relationship" came to an end and independent India recognised Nepal's sovereignty. At the same time it was given out that India-Nepal ties fell within the purview of what was described as a "special relationship." It was this "special relationship theory," according to Padma Bahadur Khatri, "that created unnecessary bitterness between India and Nepal in the early fifties."<sup>30</sup>

The arrival of King Mahendra on the scene "marks the beginning of a new era in the foreign relations of Nepal," according to Foreign Secretary Khatri. The determinants of the kingdom's foreign policy orientation could easily be identified if it is remembered that "the British were no longer in the subcontinent of India. China in the north was emerging as a power to be reckoned with."<sup>31</sup> King Mahendra did not delay in entering into negotiations for diplomatic ties between China and Nepal, the spadework for which had been started sometime before the death of King Tribhuvan. On 1 August 1955 the two countries agreed on this issue. In September 1956 an agreement on Tibet was formalised and Nepal gave up the privileged status it had so long enjoyed in Tibet.

There was nothing very surprising about this. The climate for it had been generated by the post-Bandung spread of amity and fraternity, and the King's shrewd sense of statecraft and predilection for Nepalism. In June 1954, India and China reached an agreement recognising "Tibet as an integral part of China." Less than a year later the Asian-African conference at Bandung produced the Pancha Sheel document, embodying the lofty principles meant to guide relations between nations which participated in the confer-

<sup>29</sup>A topranking army officer, Padma Bahadur Khatri was Nepal's Ambassador to the US (1964-69); also its Permanent Representative to the UN (1964-72).

<sup>30</sup>Padma Bahadur Khatri, *Nepal's Foreign Policy*, His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Communication, Department of Information, Kathmandu, 1972, pp 2-3.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid* p 4.

ence. As a result, the attitude of many non-communist Asian governments to China underwent a radical change. It was thus in the fitness of things that Nepal and China should not stay apart diplomatically.

The argument had another side too. Other considerations apart, the King wanted to have as many strings to his diplomatic bow as possible. Nepal's overwhelming dependence on India, both economic and political, the compulsion of referring even inconsequential internal political matters to New Delhi and the evident Indian influence on the life of the country were galling to not a few Nepalese, not excluding King Mahendra. It was not quite comforting to be reminded on and off by Nehru that India was "intensely interested in the stability of Nepal from the point of view of our own security, quite apart from Nepal's," and that "where the question of India's security is concerned, we consider the Himalayan mountains as our border."<sup>32</sup> The Indian Prime Minister apparently could not be faulted for this. After all, Article II of the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 27 July 1950 provided for India's "special relationship" with Nepal. The only way to counteract this was to take full advantage of the country's strategic location, and this is precisely what Kathmandu did when it elected to establish diplomatic ties with Peking.

This was not a peculiar phenomenon. King Mahendra's diplomatic exercise resembled what some of his predecessors had done, especially when they thought that Nepal was getting uncomfortably close to either of its big neighbours. Historical memory dies hard, and the King had only to hark back to what had happened in the recent past. It did not take long for him to appreciate the need to correct the imbalance that had crept into the country's foreign policy, albeit without any change in its fundamental direction of nonalignment and friendly relations with all. The King did not have to travel far back in history to recall that before the Ranas took over "whenever relations with the British reached a critical stage, the Nepalis did

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Deva Narayan Mullik, *The Development of Nonalignment in India's Foreign Policy*, Allahabad, 1967, p 111.

their utmost to dramatise their relationship with China to the British."<sup>33</sup>

The succession of events seemed to convince the King that he was not following a wrong line of action. In October 1956, Prime Minister Tanka Prasad went to Peking to be rewarded with an aid and assistance agreement. The promised aid amounted to Rs 60 million, not a small sum considering the disquieting state of the Nepalese economy. As if to counterweigh this Chinese diplomatic thrust, the President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, paid a state visit to Nepal in the second half of October. The Indian President emphasised the point that "any threat to the peace and security of Nepal is as much a threat to the peace and security of India. Your friends are our friends and our friends yours."<sup>34</sup> That conceivably was not a very endearing statement to King Mahendra. Peking of course did not let things drift. Towards the end of January 1957, Chou En-lai made his way to Kathmandu. The Chinese Prime Minister reassured the Nepalese that "Nepal and China are blood brothers and nothing can poison this relationship."<sup>35</sup> Not much inside knowledge was called for to decipher the meaning of this statement.

It would be unwarranted to conclude that India took exception to Nepal's having formal diplomatic ties with China. Or that China was bent upon queering India's pitch in Nepal, at any rate at this point. There is no lack of evidence to support this. Others besides B.P. Koirala might be quoted to bear this out. To the author's query whether New Delhi had reservations regarding Nepal-China diplomatic relations, B.P. Koirala said: "No. I discussed it with Nehru and he said that Nepal could not afford either to antagonise or to remain isolated from any contact with China."<sup>36</sup> As for the Chinese, Koirala said: "I met Chou En-lai...when he visited Nepal in 1957.... I was with Chou En-lai for three hours and two things he said: first,

<sup>33</sup>Rose, *op cit*, p 73.

<sup>34</sup>*The Hindu*, 23 October 1956.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Jain, *op cit*, p 124.

<sup>36</sup>Author-Koirala interview, Banaras, 6-10 October 1973.



they were not going to do anything that would harm the interest of India. Second, they did not want to disturb the special relationship that existed between India and Nepal."<sup>37</sup>

The King's concern over the nation's economic life was quite consonant with his total scheme of things. After the revolution national politics had been in a flux, and the impact of this on the economy was all too evident. Pre-occupied with ensuring its mere survival, no government in Kathmandu could get a scheme to reorganise the economy even started. Whether by way of planning or otherwise, no fresh ground had been broken by those who wielded power in the years between 1951 and King Mahendra's accession. In fact, during this period "the economic conditions of the country persisted more or less in the same state of stagnation... though the problems of economic planning and development had all along been a popular subject of discussion both within and outside the government."<sup>38</sup>

To get an idea how colossal the problem of economic reconstruction was, it should be recalled that the economy revolved round agriculture, and its system of farming was probably among the world's most inefficient. The *birta* holders owned about two-thirds of all land, reducing the tiller of the soil to the status of a bonded labourer. Organised industry did not exist. The country's total capacity to generate power amounted to about 4250 kilowatts and was restricted to Kathmandu and Biratnagar. It imported practically all its requirements of manufactured consumer goods—from baby food to safety pins—from India. No more than 2 percent of the population was literate, and there was one doctor for every 170,000 inhabitants.

This state of affairs apparently mocked at the proud King's desire "to make Nepal occupy its rightful place in the comity of nations."<sup>39</sup> Determined to change objective

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>B.P. Shreshtha, *The Economy of Nepal*, Vora Publishers, Bombay, 1961, p 16.

<sup>39</sup>*Proclamations*, (Vol 1, Part II), *op. cit.*, p 6.

conditions to attain his aims, Mahendra inducted Nepal into the age of planned development. The first five-year plan (1956-61), which had been taking shape for some time, was formally announced. Subarna Shumsher was not being merely polite when he observed, in his capacity as Deputy Premier and Finance Minister, that "with the accession of His Majesty King Mahendra to the throne the period of development was also ushered in."<sup>40</sup> It was indeed a great moment when the King announced that, since he was "eager to see my (8.4 million) people well-housed, well-fed and well-clad, endowed with good education, health and other needed facilities to the maximum extent and within the minimum time limit, a five-year development plan is being formulated... it is hoped that the plan will clearly reflect the endeavours being made for the general welfare of the people and the all-round development of the country."<sup>41</sup>

The first plan aimed at an outlay of Rs 330 million on the part of the government. Of this amount, government was expected to provide Rs 170 million, while India and the US would provide Rs 100 million and Rs 25 million respectively as aid. There also was the promise of Rs 60 million of Chinese aid after the conclusion of the agreement of October 1956. Thus it was expected that nearly 75 percent of the total plan outlay would be taken care of by foreign aid and assistance.

Aid from abroad has played a not insignificant role in Nepal's economic development. Though its own needs are great, India has all along topped the list of donor countries. Between Nehru's observation on his June 1951 visit to Kathmandu that if Nepal requested "our help in, say, technical or other spheres, we will do our utmost to be useful to you, but we never want to interfere"<sup>42</sup> and the commencement of the uninterrupted flow of Indian aid in 1953 some two years elapsed. The Americans also arrived

<sup>40</sup>Subarna Shumsher, *A Report to the Nation*, Department of Publicity and Broadcasting, His Majesty's Government, Kathmandu, 1960, p 1.

<sup>41</sup>Proclamations, etc, Vol 1, (Part II), *op cit*, p 18.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Mihalay, *op cit*, p 44.

on the scene quite early and established the US Technical Cooperation Mission in January 1952. After King Mahendra's visit to Moscow in June 1958, the Soviet Union concluded an aid agreement with Nepal, promising thereby some 7.5 million dollars by way of assistance. Some other countries, as well as the United Nations, also extended a helping hand to the kingdom.

The country's crying need was revamping its agrarian system. It was readily acknowledged by the formulators of official economic policy that the "present generation in Nepal, as in many other countries, has inherited an agrarian system which fails in important respects to protect the rights and interests of those who work in land."<sup>43</sup> The hard logic of the Nepalese economy required that land reforms should get priority over everything else. No meaningful reforms in the land system could however be effected without the abolition of the *birta* system. But there was a wide gap between the desires of the planners and reality. The plan did "not envisage any tangible reform proposals"<sup>44</sup> so far as the land system was concerned. It gave scant attention to industrial development, the allocation for this being a meagre 7.8 percent of the total outlay. Considering the resource constraints on the government, this was probably unavoidable.

Along with his efforts to resuscitate the economy, King Mahendra strove hard to direct the course of the kingdom's politics according to his own plan. Whether on the issue of convening a constituent assembly to frame a constitution or on that of allowing the Nepali Congress to form a government until the promised general election, he held his ground firmly. He held frequent conferences with the political parties, maintaining an almost interminable dialogue with the country's leading politicians, not excluding B.P. Koirala. But he took care not to concede anything that might contradict his scheme of political strategy. He saw to it that the political parties were kept on tenterhooks,

<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Y.P. Pant, *Planning for Prosperity in Nepal*, Nepal Cultural Association, Kathmandu, 1957, p 47.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p 48.

and at the same time did not stray too far from the centre of power, the monarchy. In fine, the political parties and their leaders were obliged to depend on his charity.

The Nepali Congress had all along been claiming the right to form a government on the ground that it was the largest political party. But King Mahendra would not agree. Sometime before K.I. Singh was appointed Prime Minister, the King told B.P. Koirala, who in turn told the writer, that the Congress would be asked to "form a government.... I said: 'If you want to include the Nepali Congress, if you want the Nepali Congress to form a government, you should call Subarna Shumsher to do it.' He said that he would like to discuss with me the names of ministers to be included in the cabinet. I told him that it would be better to discuss such matters with Subarna Shumsher because he would be the Prime Minister-designate. He said: 'All right. But I would like to instruct your men not to harm the interest of the monarchy or cause disaffection against it.' Subarna Shumsher was invited for a talk by the King and we were expecting that Subarna Shumsher would be authorised to form a government. Instead he, the King, sent me a personal letter saying: 'My dear B.P., I am sorry to tell you that I have decided to make some other arrangement. Since you said that your party is the largest party, I thought it would be more honourable for you and for me also to call upon your party, after it comes out victorious in the election, to form a government. I hope the decision would not be resented by you or be inconvenient to you.' And immediately K.I. Singh was asked to form a government. All through the three or four days programmes, policies and such things were discussed and came to naught. That is how he functioned. He always kept us at arm's length and at the same time he kept a carrot dangling before us."<sup>45</sup>

When it came to the ticklish issue of framing the kingdom's constitution, King Mahendra won hands down. That was one of his biggest triumphs. Apprehending that a constituent assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise

<sup>45</sup>Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.

might not frame the type of constitution he would prefer, the King had things so manoeuvred that the political parties, not excluding the Nepali Congress, were obliged to approve his actions. Much to their chagrin, they had to accept the constitution as a gift from the Palace.

The King outwitted everybody, his source of strength being the traditional loyalty of the army, the people's attachment to the monarchy, and the immaturity, expediency and opportunism of the personality-centred political parties. Even the Nepali Congress, despite its hard core of idealism, failed to checkmate his move. He had plenty of friends in the kingdom's political parties, the Nepali Congress not excluded.

On 16 March 1958 King Mahendra appointed a Constitution Drafting Commission enjoining it to prepare a "constitution suitable to the genius of our country."<sup>46</sup> Besides its chairman, Bhagwati Prasad Singh, it consisted of two Nepali Congress leaders, Hora Prasad Joshi and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, Gurkha Parishad (formerly Gurkha Dal) president Randhir Subba and the Law College principal Ram Raj Pant. The commission also engaged a British constitutional law expert, Sir Ivor Jennings, to advise it. The draft it prepared was approved by the Council of Ministers which the King had appointed on 15 May 1958 and which included a representative each of the Nepali Congress, Gurkha Parishad, Rashtriya Congress and Praja Parishad, and two independents. The Nepali Congress leader Subarna Shumsher was chairman of the Council of Ministers.

While presenting the Constitution to his people, on 12 February 1959, the King emphasised that it was "designed to promote the welfare of this generation and also of those to come and deemed suitable for this ancient land of ours."<sup>47</sup> King Mahendra had every reason to stand foursquare by it, for it was framed along lines he had drawn up and made the monarchy the keystone of the power structure. The 77-article Constitution ensured certain jus-

<sup>46</sup>*Proclamations etc.*, Vol I (Part II), *op cit*, p 136.

<sup>47</sup>*Proclamations, etc.*, *ibid*, p 136.

ticial fundamental rights, a bicameral legislature and an independent judiciary. At the same time it unequivocally guaranteed that "sovereignty continues to reside in the King and not in the people or Parliament."<sup>48</sup>

This evidently was contrary to what King Tribhuvan had promised and what the Nepali Congress had clamoured for all these years. King Tribhuvan had solemnly pledged that the nation would give itself a constitution through its elected representatives. The Nepali Congress had unequivocally declared that it would not rest content with anything short of a constitution framed by a properly elected constituent assembly. Yet when it came to the crunch the Nepali Congress, not to speak of the other political parties and groups, failed to stay the course. The Nepali Congress accepted the Constitution. So did the others. Why the Congress chose not to make a stand against the King was sought to be explained years later by D.K. Sahi, a junior minister in the B.P. Koirala Cabinet, in the columns of *Nepal Today*, a mouthpiece of the emigre Nepali Congress activists. According to Sahi, "there was strong resentment against the Constitution which came as an award from the King. They thought that it would be a derogatory step on the part of the Congress to step down from its original demand of a constituent assembly, but accepted it on the ground that a congenial...atmosphere in the long run would definitely promote democracy rather than provoking the King to use his discretionary power for uprooting democracy."<sup>49</sup>

At long last King Mahendra decided that his people should get what they had staged a revolution for and what they had since been asking for. On 18 February 1959 the Nepalese woke up to participate in an event the like of which their history had never before recorded. Commanded by their sovereign, the people trooped to the polls to give themselves a parliament of their choice.

<sup>48</sup>*The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal*, Nepal Trading Corporation, New Delhi, 1959, p IV.

<sup>49</sup>D.K. Sahi, "Constitutional Development in Nepal", *Nepal Today*, Vol 4, Nos 22 & 23, November 1965, Calcutta, pp 685-86.

Starting on 18 February, the first general election ended on 3 April. Voting was staggered for administrative and other reasons. Ten political parties and groups participated in the election, and of them the Nepali Congress, Gurkha Parishad and the Communist Party were relatively important. A total of 518 candidates contested the election under one party banner or another, while 268 took the field as independents. The table below is self-explanatory.

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	Percentage of total votes
Nepali Congress	108	74	38
Gurkha Parishad	86	19	17
United Democratic Party (K.I. Singh group)	86	5	10
Communist Party	47	4	7
Praja Parishad (Tanka Prasad group)	46	2	3
Praja Parishad (Bhadrakali Mishra group)	36	1	3
Independents	268	4	16

(Source: Election Commission Reports)

In its election programme the Nepali Congress emphasised "change in the rural relationship.... We said that there should be land redistribution ... land should belong to the tiller and none should be allowed to own more than 25 bighas (about eight acres) ... since land was the most important item of national wealth the government should take great interest in its proper utilisation." B.P. Koirala said that the party did not have much of an industrial policy. "What we wanted to do was to set up small-scale industries with the help of local capitalists and, wherever necessary, with foreign capital—preferably from India." On inquiry whether the party's programme was socialist, he replied that it was "not, because the conditions in the country were not at all suitable for that. We did not have any economic base for a socialist programme.... I should

say that what we wanted was that the state should provide direction but must not get directly involved in any execution of economic policy ... the state should also build up an infrastructure ... and I wanted the government to impose restrictions on what might be called non-productive production."<sup>50</sup>

By an overwhelming majority, the people of Nepal authorised the Nepali Congress to act on their behalf. The party's past record of struggle and its pledge to carry through a modestly forward-looking programme were convincing enough for the people to give it an unqualified mandate to rule the country for five years. This probably was not very surprising. What was however surprising was the fact that the conservative Gurkha Parishad emerged as the largest opposition group with 19 seats in Parliament, while the Communist Party got as few as four. Another surprising aspect of the election was the defeat of the leaders of various parties except the Nepali Congress. Of the 36 members of the Upper House of Parliament, 18 were elected and the King nominated the rest. Of the elected members the Nepali Congress got 14, the Gurkha Parishad two and the United Democratic Party and the Communist Party one each.

With the 1959 elections Nepal entered the select fraternity of nations which could claim the privilege of a pluralist polity. The political uncertainties which had engulfed the kingdom seemed to have disappeared and the future looked hopeful. True, there were reasons to believe that King Mahendra did not feel happy about this outcome. The election result had created a situation he had not bargained for. His calculations were that no single party would get an absolute majority, and consequently there would be no scope for a one-party government.

Confronted with this unforeseen development, the King paused to take breath. He neither asked the Nepali Congress to form a government nor indicated the line of action he proposed to follow. Clearly he had never before had to face a situation where he did not have the initiative. As B.P.

<sup>50</sup>Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.



Koirala put it, King Mahendra "was a man who used to brood over plans, think over and mentally execute a plan before it could be actually put in operation. But he had never been in a situation where all his calculations went wrong. So for three months he sat tight. He did not budge an inch. It was as if there had been no election."

That was not the whole story. In the interval between the announcement of the election results and the formation of the Nepali Congress government B.P. Koirala went to the Palace to tell the King that those who were in the know of things had told him that the King feared him as Prime Minister and that explained why he could not make up his mind. "In order to clear that apprehension," Koirala told the author, "I met him and told him that if he wanted he could make Subarna Shumsher Prime Minister. In the present context, when we are faced with the challenge of modernising our society ... any difference between the monarch and the Prime Minister ... would be calamitous for the country. I will certainly support any man that he would want as Prime Minister.... Then he said: 'Who told you that I am against you? Subarna Shumsher is not very active and energetic. I want an energetic person. I am also young.' He further said: 'Subarna Shumsher is slow; he takes time to decide. The country wants dynamic leadership, so I want you as Prime Minister. And that would also give the lie to the prevalent impression that we had differences between ourselves. I shall be happy if you become Prime Minister.'<sup>51</sup>

Disappointment notwithstanding, King Mahendra did not strike a false note. He allowed the political process to run its course. On 27 May he proclaimed: "Whereas, it has been found expedient to found democracy on a more solid basis and to raise the standard of living of the masses and to develop the country within the framework of the laws enacted; I have, therefore, by these presents designated Shri Bishweswar Prasad Koirala as the Prime Minister and with his advice have formed a cabinet under him."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.

<sup>52</sup> *Proclamations* etc, Vol 1, *op cit*, p 143.



## Election Brings Stability

WITH THE appointment of B.P. Koirala as Prime Minister of Nepal's first ever elected government the country came of age. Its experiment with democracy started in earnest. There was a constitution which guaranteed a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary and certain justiciable fundamental rights which promised a relatively rational polity. The Nepalese Parliament was not sovereign in the sense this word is generally understood in a democratic society. For the Constitution allowed every lever of power to remain in the safe-keeping of the Palace. Despite this, Prime Minister Koirala did not lack the courage of conviction when it came to pursuing the course of action he had promised the people. In office the Nepali Congress made considerable efforts, within the framework of the ongoing first five-year plan, to attend to the exacting problem of reconstructing the country's traditional economy. The government gave top priority to the three most defiant problems of land, communication, and education. It was readily acknowledged that unless the land tenure system, the most patent cause of economic backwardness, was thoroughly reformed all efforts to revitalise the economy would be an exercise in futility. Few seemed to doubt the fact that revamping the economy hinged on a reasonable solution of the land problem.

Pursuant to its election pledge to the people, the ruling party took a sizable step forward when it announced its decision to abolish the tax-free *birta* system without any compensation. The regime also promised to establish rights for the tiller of the soil. Economic expansion was sought in other directions. An integrated system of education, including technical and medical, was put into operation. Efforts were made to expedite development projects such

as river training, irrigation and power generation which had been included in the first five-year plan, scheduled to be completed in 1961. Taking one thing with another, the regime appeared to be inching its way forward towards its declared goals in domestic affairs.

In international affairs, the government's achievements were not to be made light of. Particularly significant was its approach to men and events in India. The manner in which Koirala handled Nepal's relations with India, considering his close ties with New Delhi, had much to commend itself. There is no gainsaying that not a few Nepalese looked upon him as India's man on the spot. Rightly or not, he was considered to be much too closely identified with the subcontinental milieu to follow an independent path of development. His performance however gave the lie to this.

His close personal relations with Nehru helped him appreciably to strike a good bargain not unoften. To quote one instance would suffice. Koirala was dead set on getting the India-Nepal trade and transit treaty concluded on as favourable terms as possible. According to him: "I got the message across to Mr Nehru that what I wanted was an arrangement by which our goods should have an unlimited access to the Indian market. There should be no restriction, no duty. They mustn't levy import duty on our goods. But so far as Indian goods were concerned we should have the right to impose levy on them. I told Nehru that it was no doubt an unequal treaty, but if he was interested in Nepal's economic development he should agree to this.

"But the officers opposed this. They were very much opposed to this idea. On my visit to Delhi I discussed the issues with him. It was in 1960. He said: 'I am sorry, there was a hitch because they did not want this unlimited right of Nepalese goods into the Indian market.' But I said that that was the bulwark, that was the basis of our industrial policy, because we did not have a big enough home market for Nepalese goods at present. Of course it would not be always so. At least for some time we shall have to depend upon India for the marketing of the goods. Nehru said that 'as long as you are in the government—our friends in the government—there will be no difficulty.' I told him that

you may be losing a few crores of rupees by this arrangement, (but) even if you do so because of this arrangement you will be strengthening our position, your friend's position in Nepal. Considering all these, it was a small price to pay. 'As long as you are Prime Minister and our friends are at the helm of affairs there would be no difficulties,' he reassured me. 'A few crores of rupees would not matter. But if some hardline party assumes power then they could disturb our economy.'

"I told him this is unlikely to happen. We are likely to win the next three elections or more. Then I said that I don't want to go back with empty hands to Nepal. He said, 'I would send for Jha [L. K. Jha was looking after India's foreign trade] and you discuss with him.' I said it would be of no use unless he made up his mind and accepted my proposition. He said that 'you also try to convince Jha about it and I will not agree to anything that will disappoint you.' He sent for Jha and I discussed the matter with him. Before I left he came to see me at the airport early in the morning and told me, 'I hope you have got what you wanted.'"<sup>1</sup> On the basis of the understanding he had reached with Prime Minister Nehru on his January 1960 visit to Delhi, Nepal got a new and relatively favourable trade and transit treaty with India in September.

This did not inhibit Koirala from judging issues pertaining to India-Nepal relations on their merits. His past political association with India or his personal preferences did not warp his sense of perspective. To illustrate the point, reference might be made to his reaction to a statement Nehru made on 27 November 1959 in a foreign affairs debate in the Indian Parliament. Nehru told Parliament that "any aggression on Bhutan or Nepal will be considered by us as aggression on India."<sup>2</sup> Forthwith Koirala asserted that "Nepal is a fully sovereign independent nation. It decides its external and home policy according to its own judgment and its own liking without ever referring to any outside authorities. Our Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India

<sup>1</sup> Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.

<sup>2</sup> *Asian Recorder*, Vol 5, No 51, 19-25 December 1959, p 3060.

affirms this. I take Mr Nehru's statement as an expression of friendship that in case of aggression against Nepal, India, would send help if such help is ever sought. It could never be taken as suggesting that India could take unilateral action. Is there any apprehension of danger from any quarter? The answer is definitely no. We are at peace with everybody and we do not apprehend any danger from any quarter."<sup>3</sup>

Referring to this in the course of his statement in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Indian Parliament) on 8 December 1959, Nehru said: "If I mentioned Nepal on the last occasion, it was because over nine years ago there was a clear understanding between the Governments of Nepal and India on this point. It was no military alliance.... I want to make it perfectly clear that this understanding has nothing to do with any kind of unilateral action on our part. We cannot do it, we will not do it.... The Prime Minister of Nepal said something the other day on this subject, and may I say that I entirely agree with his interpretation of this question."<sup>4</sup>

Koirala achieved a breakthrough in his dealings with China. Admittedly, China's interest at that point required that Nepal should be cultivated in view of the widening fissures in India-China relations. Still, he must be given his due for the imagination and initiative he displayed in approaching the task of putting China-Nepal relations on an even keel. At the earliest opportunity, in March 1960, he visited Peking to get the kingdom's border dispute with China out of the way, and that without meeting the Chinese request for a nonaggression pact and a road connecting Kathmandu with Lhasa. As Koirala told this author: "When I visited China... I said to Chou En-lai, it would be helpful if he could match their aid with that of India. Chou En-lai said: 'No, we do not want to compete with India.' He further said: 'It would not be good for you also. So our aid would be slightly less not because we cannot help you but because we do not want to appear to be competing with India.'"

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p 3061.

<sup>4</sup>Nehru, *op cit*, pp 373-74.

When the author asked Koirala to elaborate on the non-aggression pact and the Kathmandu-Lhasa road the Chinese proposed to build, he said: "I told them that the road had no economic justification because it would not open up the valley to be developed economically. And that the trade between China and Nepal was not so heavy that it would justify the construction of the road. So I turned down that suggestion and said that the money...for the construction of the road could be utilised economically for a better purpose."

The issue cropped up again at Koirala's meeting with Mao Tse-tung. But the proposition was dropped when the Chinese found that the Nepalese were in no mood for it. As to why the Chinese mooted a nonaggression pact with Nepal, Koirala's "impression was that they wanted at that time to isolate India. India-China relations were not good at that time. They wanted to create an impression that, in the border dispute between India and China, India was in the wrong; China could settle its border disputes with Burma and all other countries. It was only with India—because of India's intransigence—that they could not come to an understanding. I think it was their purpose to diplomatically isolate India. They did not try to put undue pressure on me about the road construction (the Kathmandu-Kodari road) or the nonaggression pact. And they understood my resistance and my difficulties."<sup>5</sup> Eventually he agreed to a Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which was formalised in April 1960.

But the regime's modest gains on the economic front were woefully inadequate to meet the rising aspirations of the people. Promises alone, no matter how radical, could not satisfy a people who had waited far too long for a break in the monotony of their wretched existence. They demanded some tangible evidence of the fact that the Nepali Congress meant business, that it was materially different from the other political parties that had been in power before. At another level, the opposition groups and parties were for a variety of reasons up in arms against the government. For

<sup>5</sup>Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.

one thing, being weak and divided, the opposition was ineffective. This made it irresponsible and abandon itself to the politics of expediency. For another, the ruling party's overwhelming majority in the legislature increasingly encouraged it to take things for granted, to assume a mien of arrogance and self-righteousness. This contributed to the growth of a climate in which the opposition seemed to care little for form, procedure, law or for policy as distinct from the politics of expediency.

Except the minuscule Communist Party, the other opposition parties denounced the government's land reform policy as one of "expropriation." The reforms measures also drew the wrath of not a few Nepali Congress members with a big-farmer background. The opposition groups and parties also had no reason to be pleased with Koirala's growing stature both at home and abroad. An additional arrow to their quiver was provided by the not quite negligible volume of corruption and administrative mismanagement. Reference might be made to what a not unfriendly critic of the Nepali Congress said a week after the King's takeover: "The popular government was not effective and the administrative system did not make as much progress as required.... Some of the Nepali Congress followers indulged in objectionable activities.... Some of the ministers, especially the junior ones, were extremely indiscreet in accepting presents showered on them by the Russian Embassy. These included small cars, scooters and watches, and some senior civil servants also helped themselves, as they often do, regardless of the source."<sup>6</sup>

The opposition was determined to exploit the situation not only to the disadvantage of the ruling party but also to its own eventual extinction. Deliberately ignoring objective conditions, the opposition groups and parties, including the Communist Party, declared a war on the government with no holds barred. It was not they alone who "clamoured for the resignation of the popular ministry. A section of the Nepali Congress led by M. P. Koirala joined

<sup>6</sup>Mahesh Chandra, "King's Coup d'etat in Nepal", *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 22 December 1960.



the opposition and demanded that King should save the country from the Congress 'dictatorship.'<sup>7</sup> Nepalese society doubtless could well do with purposive changes in every sphere of life. The multitude that lived, worked, reproduced and died in the hamlets, villages and towns were scraps of humanity which only evoked pity. They had yet to reach the stage when they would assert their right and refuse to take no for an answer.

With the opposition parties however it was an either—or issue, with nothing between. That is why they raised only one slogan—total opposition to the ruling party. Their theme song<sup>1</sup> had only one bar: B. P. Koirala must quit the scene. If the chaff is winnowed from the grain, it would be seen that the opposition was firmly sold on the idea that political consistency was the virtue of lesser mortals but that personal equations were all that mattered in politics. Not that the opposition parties would not fight for democracy. It was just that they would do so according to their own rules, even if these were guided by nothing more ennobling than crass expediency. They could not "conceive of an opposition to the government which is less than total," failing to appreciate that "total opposition means revolutionary opposition, and revolutionary opposition, has to be prosecuted by conspiratorial and violent means."<sup>8</sup> The opposition parties ultimately got what they had asked for—dismissal of the B. P. Koirala government. But they lost on the swings what they had made on the roundabouts.

Since King Mahendra was one of the two most important factors in Nepalese politics, his attitude to the functioning of the government needs study. In the initial stage the King extended considerable support to the government and the policies it pursued, including land reforms. Addressing the second session of both Houses of Parliament on 31 March 1960, he observed that "the administrative machinery of the country should be geared up to the need of a democra-

<sup>7</sup>Shriman Narayan, *India and Nepal*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1970, p 26.

<sup>8</sup>John Strachey, "The Challenge of Democracy", *An Encounter Pamphlet* (No 10), *Encounter*, London, (second impression) January 1964, p 38.

tic government, and to this end different service cadres have to be organised. My government has been very effortful in this direction.... The state being the ultimate owner of all land, my government has decided to bring to an end all feudal system, and the birta land.... Being convinced that the success of true democracy can be measured only by the yardstick of the popular support available, my government has given higher priorities to local development activities and development boards on the district level are being formed.... My government has been particularly attentive to convert our feudal society into an industrial society."<sup>9</sup>

Koirala corroborated the fact that King Mahendra apparently chose to abide by the ground rules of the political game. He unreservedly admitted that the King stood by the government and the policies it pursued, not excluding land reforms. It was no miserly compliment to the King when Koirala recalled that "whenever I discussed any point with the King he never disagreed. Never, not even once.... When I inquired of him if he had any suggestion to make regarding the members of the Cabinet he said: 'Well, you are the Prime Minister, it is for you to advise me. Whatever you suggest is all right for me.'" Among the many instances of the King's unequalled support to the government Koirala referred to his attitude to its "proposal to nationalise forest lands. The most affected persons were the King's family members. We said that we would make an evaluation of the land in terms of current price. Some difficulties arose over the quantum of compensation demanded by the princes, which was, according to us, unjustifiably high. Over this question also the King appeared to agree with us.... Then there was the question of abolition of the feudal rajas. In Nepal there were large numbers of small principalities.... The King did not object to that."<sup>10</sup>

Time and circumstances seemed on the side of the Nepali Congress, notwithstanding the opposition's insistence on not playing the game. But the party was unable to make

<sup>9</sup>*Proclamations etc*, Vol 1, *op cit*, pp 171-175.

<sup>10</sup>Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.

the best use of its opportunities. Intraparty feuds, corruption, jobbery and administrative inefficiency fast eroded the party's credibility. Allowing for the existing constraints, material and otherwise, it was not possible for the government to achieve spectacular success. That this would bring grist to the mill of the government's critics and contribute to the emergence of pockets of discontent was in a way inevitable. But this was not half as significant as the party's refusal to face problems boldly instead of trying to dodge them.

Even eight years in the wilderness did not seem to have woken up the Congress leaders to the distressing fact that the Nepalese situation was farthest from what might sustain a democratic movement rooted in the soil, and the party had little that deserved to be called an organised mass following. As an admirer of the Congress observed in the correspondence column of a newspaper, "after coming to power as a result of the victory in the first general election the Nepali Congress government was without any mass movement to back up its agrarian reforms and reforms in the sphere of administration."<sup>11</sup> The leadership of the party failed to transform it into an ideologically sharp instrument that could have grappled with the task it had set itself at a meeting of its General Council in November 1958, "achievement of socialism through parliamentary democratic socialism under constitutional monarchy."<sup>12</sup>

To expect King Mahendra to fail to take note of this would have been asking for the impossible. Rather he kept a close watch on developments and nothing of any import went unobserved. The general drift of affairs seemed to convey to him, as it did to many others, the impression that the Nepali Congress was caught in a cleft stick. In a public address at Banke-Bardia on 30 January 1960, King Mahendra rather sternly observed: "The fair name of democracy should never be permitted to be exploited to do

<sup>11</sup>Ganeshlal Subba, "Turn of Events in Nepal", *Hindusthan Standard*, 13 January 1961.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Bhola Chatterji, "Kathmandu Revisited", *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 13 November 1960.

evil rather than good to the people. It should never be allowed to create a climate where industries languish, rights and justice are difficult of access, bribery and other forms of corruption rife, unemployment increase, the people in the saddle should have all the loaves and fishes, and anti-national elements reap the harvest. The responsibility for all this has in a manner of speaking devolved on the entire Nepalese people too with their attainment of freedom."

The King cautioned his listeners not to relax their watch, not to take things for granted. Should the people of Nepal take no heed of what they were told, he said he might "be constrained to invite other actions in discharge of my duties and responsibilities." For he could not ignore the fact that he also had "certain duties by my country and these are to maintain the sovereignty of the country; to maintain national integrity; to improve our relations with other countries; to initiate actions oriented to the public good." He emphatically declared that if he found "any real let or hindrance along the path of my performance of these duties I would not hesitate to take whatever step that may be necessary and at whatever cost.... Let there be no misunderstanding on this score."<sup>13</sup>

To give King Mahendra his due, he spoke his mind without any hesitancy. His message was precise. It was much too so for any intelligent Nepali, not to speak of the Prime Minister, to miss its import. He made it clear that the goings-on in the realm did not particularly impress him but filled him with anxiety on the contrary. There was also the hint that unless things changed in the desired direction he would act up to his reputation. But the King did not appear to have slammed the door shut on the democratic experiment as yet. If public pronouncements are any guide to one's thoughts it would be difficult to call him anything but a democrat even as late as April 1960.

On the 29th day of that month the King was more than eloquent in his defence of democracy in addressing the National Press Club in Washington. He did not equivocate; he spoke with much feeling, and logically too. He observed that

<sup>13</sup>*Proclamations etc*, Vol 1, *op cit*, pp 163-164.

"in Nepal, as elsewhere in Asia, industrial revolution did not precede the political revolution. Nor could she have the direct advantages of the liberalisation of thought and humanisation of behaviour consequent upon change of outlook in matters concerning art, literature, thought and religion that could happen only in the course of what is called 'renaissance.'

"The other serious roadblock in the progress of democracy in countries like Nepal is that the age-old social and religious practices do not at all conform to the norms and standards of a modern democracy.... Even such basic safeguards for a democracy as an independent judiciary, an independent audit and accounts department, free administrative cadres, a public service commission...even such basic safeguards for a democracy have to be built from scratch in Nepal.... In my view, the yardstick for the success or otherwise of the democratic experiment in Nepal should be the measure of success or failure of the democratic institutions in doing away with the social and economic inequalities and encompassing the all-round development of the country.... In the event of our failure to improve through the democratic institutions the living condition of the general public, who have such deep faith in the efficacy of democracy and who would spare no pains for the advancement of the cause of democracy, [we] shall have to face a barrage of questions to be raised by those who subscribe to the alternative theories—I mean the communist theories—and shall have to undergo the misfortune of the possible ascendancy of such thinking...a democracy should mean a process to advance the social, political and economic situation along the line of the majority opinion."<sup>14</sup>

But Prime Minister Koirala had a different interpretation. In his judgment the King's protestation of faith in democracy was a smokescreen, no more. The fact was that he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds, Koirala emphasised. He cited one instance to illustrate the point. According to him, although the King did not publicly oppose the abolition of the feudal principalities, he privately

<sup>14</sup>*Proclamations etc, Vol 1, op cit, pp 185-86.*

encouraged them to defy the government. This of course did not pose much of a challenge to the regime, the Gorkha incident excepted. On 25 October 1960 an "uprising" took place in the Gorkha district of West Nepal which, a government press note claimed, was engineered by men "masquerading as yogis under the leadership of Yogi Naraharinath."<sup>15</sup> The yogi claimed that he was "the King's man, and what I am doing is that which the King wishes."<sup>16</sup>

Referring to the incident Koirala said: "The King was not then in Nepal [he had gone to England on a state-cum-private visit] and Yogi Naraharinath, the agent of the King ...was duly arrested.... I was in India in connection with a student conference the All-India Nepali Student's Association had organised in Bombay.... The yogi claimed that he had been asked by the King to do this and he showed some papers to say that he had been financed by the King.... Now, he [the King] read in the London papers about my statement [regarding the incident] and was furious because I had involved him. Subarna was with him and the King told him: 'Look, Subarna, this is what your Prime Minister has said. And why should I be involved?'"

"When he came back to Kathmandu there was an exchange of very hot words and he said: 'Why did you involve me?' I said: 'I did not involve you. I only said what the yogi exactly had been saying and had been brandishing some papers purported to have been sent by the Palace. We were thinking of prosecuting him for levelling this charge against the Palace and for instigating the revolt. To this the King said: 'But still I got involved.' Then I got a bit worked up and said: 'Your Majesty, you have been involved.'"

Answering the author's question whether the King was really a party to this incident, Koirala said: "Yes, I had proof of that—a letter written by his Military Secretary Malla to the yogi saying that in accordance with Maharajadhiraja's command he was sending some money for his work, that he had been doing good work and Maharaja-

<sup>15</sup>*The Statesman*, Calcutta, 28 October 1960.

<sup>16</sup>*Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 28 October 1960.

dhiraja appreciated it and that whenever he needed money he might ask for it.... He was arrested and the letter was found in his *jhola* (bag).... I went to the King and showed him the letter. He told me that he had given some money in charity. He also said: 'Can I not give some money in charity?' I said: 'Of course you can. But you must make sure what charity you are subscribing to. If by your charity an impression is created that you are being hostile to the administration, then you cannot do it. And it is not a simple charity, he is not a yogi doing some spiritual work. He was engaged in anti-state activity, everybody knew about it, and you were financing him. Your intention may be very good, but what would the people think about it?'

"He kept quite for a while and then said: 'Look, it appears both of us cannot be contained in the same place.' '...That was two days before the coup. He said: 'Either permit me to fade out and you run the show as you like. Or you get out and let me rule as I think best. Both of us cannot be at the same place together.' Then I said: 'Your Majesty, this is a terrible statement you have made. I represent the people, you represent continuity, an institution; and you have certain political influence.... It is in the interest of the country that both of us combine like two joined hands. And because the task of modernisation is beset with great difficulties I may humbly suggest, Your Majesty, even you should not be too confident. It would be a frightful boast on the part of Your Majesty that you can run it singlehanded, without the cooperation of the people, and modernise Nepal. Of course I cannot make that claim because it is a gigantic task, a national task which the nation as a whole has to fulfil.'

"And then he got up and said: 'Look, if you have any charge against me, do not give vent to that in public. You come here, see me and take off your shoes and beat me....' I told him that the same thing applied to me. 'If I do anything that you consider harmful, you can send for me and do whatever you like. But as the King you should not criticise your government in public.' Then he got up, shook hands with me and sat down. And he sent for Malla, his Military Secretary. When Malla came he said: 'Malla, I

have brought some gifts for B. P. from England, and also for his wife. Bring them. "There were many gifts—a tape recorder, record player, bangles for my wife—and then he said: 'All right, put all these in his car.' That was the last meeting we had."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.



## End of an Experiment

BETWEEN THAT encounter and the royal takeover barely 48 hours intervened. Did the Prime Minister take leave of his sovereign believing that all was right and that he had been able to mend the broken fences? Or did he leave the palace with two loads, presents from the King and worries about the time he would strike? Koirala was aware of the King's growing displeasure with the way the government was functioning. On his own admission, the Cabinet had earlier discussed the possibility of a royal takeover. Koirala had also been warned of the danger by more sources than one.

According to Koirala, "once Jawaharlalji told me, as the American industrialist Henry Ford had told me earlier, that there were reports that the King had another kind of thinking.... He said: 'In the interests of Nepal both of you should combine.... We want to see that no difference crops up between the King and you.'" Even the US President, General Dwight Eisenhower, whom "I met... in September or October 1960... said that 'if there was any difference between you and the King, you should try to make that up because Nepal needs both of you.'"<sup>1</sup>

The present author also felt, on a visit to Kathmandu about a month before the takeover, that "parliamentary democracy is a very latecomer on the political stage of Asia. In Nepal it arrived only yesterday and, candidly speaking, its roots lie rather...exposed on the surface.... The institution of monarchy constitutes a very influential factor in Nepal's political life...the King is not nonpartisan in the sense it is understood in, say, Great Britain. The Palace wields an amount of direct influence that cannot fail to

<sup>1</sup>Author-Koirala interview, 6-10 October 1973, Banaras.

affect the functioning of the government...parliamentary democracy rests on a rather delicate mechanism in Nepal."<sup>2</sup>

Still Prime Minister B. P. Koirala seems to have left the palace more or less assured that the King's gesture was not unfriendly. There could be two plausible explanations of his conduct: either he had become overconfident and started believing his charisma would enable him to emerge victor in any confrontation with the King. Or he had become a fatalist, concluding that it would be pointless to make any efforts to reverse the process. The impending tragedy could not be averted because, the Prime Minister reasoned, he did not have a grassroot, ideologically oriented and disciplined organisation to do it. He did not seem to have been alive always to the fact that "the success of the [democratic] experiment depended on cooperation between the King, who derived his position of leadership and authority from the time-honoured institution of monarchy," and himself, "who symbolised popular hopes and aspirations but had yet to create popular tradition and institutions to sustain his democratic passion and ideas."<sup>3</sup>

Here was the problem. The leadership of the Nepali Congress was unable to rise to the occasion. Although Koirala was aware of the inherent weakness of his position and the strength of the King's, he failed to see his way to grasp the nettle. Inconsequential details of everyday administration claimed his time and energy, much to the detriment of the party. The inability to reorganise the party, and build such voluntary institutions as would have a stake in pluralist democracy increasingly inclined Koirala "to take the easy way out by giving in to charisma to cut the Gordian knot of difficulties."<sup>4</sup> The point appeared to have been missed that charisma and rationality stood poles apart. Also, because of historical reasons and in the given context, the King stood an immensely better chance of outplaying him in this game of charisma.

<sup>2</sup>Bhola Chatterji, "Kathmandu Revisited", *Hindusthan Standard*, Calcutta, 13 November 1960.

<sup>3</sup>Shaha, *Nepali Politics*, *op cit*, p 120.

<sup>4</sup>George John, "Against Charisma", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 14 June 1975, p 5.

One of the major shortcomings of the Nepali Congress was its failure to realise that the "problems of nation-building and social development" required it "to direct human motivations from old forms of activity to newer ones,"<sup>5</sup> which only an ideologically revamped party could have engineered. This was not to be. Koirala sought to make up for this by his one-man campaign to give a socialist facade to the party. Also, to preserve his revolutionary ideology and integration. It is another matter that this did not arrest the process of destabilisation of the party. To the extent that intraparty conflict intensified, some of his trusted colleagues became articulate in questioning his difficulties in the opposition outside grew louder, and the difficulties in solving the basic problems of food, shelter and clothes multiplied, Koirala's reliance on charisma increased. So did his appeal to socialism.

In point of fact, even as the palace guards were on their way to arrest him he was discoursing on democratic socialism to a gathering of the valley's students and youth. On the morning of 15 December 1960 Koirala went as scheduled to inaugurate the first general conference of the Nepal Tarun Dal (Nepalese Youth Organisation).

His message to the assembly of people was that the country would never be theirs until they could free it from the curse of feudalism. He urged them to work for the cause of democratic socialism. For this alone could ensure a society where man would cease to be the object of exploitation by man, a society that the earth's wretched and the poor could call their own. He reminded his audience that democracy and socialism were inseparable, and he promised to ensure that democracy would not be strangled in the name of socialism. Nor would he permit exploitation to continue in the name of democracy. He emphatically declared that the Nepali Congress stood resolutely committed

<sup>5</sup>Pye, *op cit*, pp 49-50.

to democratic socialism.<sup>6</sup> That was the last that the people of Nepal heard from their first elected Prime Minister before the King's men took him prisoner.

King Mahendra is dead. He is no longer around to argue his case. And not many, Nepalese or others, would be willing to do that if for no other reason than at least to avoid being identified as defenders of the wrong cause. It is not intended here either to hold a brief for him. Still, to set the record straight, it would be necessary to understand, if that is at all possible, the reasons that might have ultimately prevailed upon the King to take the plunge. Of them three stand out: (a) a feeling of uncertainty; (b) a desire for total political power; and (c) an obsession with destiny.

The King was not a relaxed person. A feeling of insecurity took a fast hold of him. That fear was of an individual and not of the multitude. Nor of the political parties, including the Nepali Congress. True, he did not have much patience with the party system, but that was more because he had empirically observed that the parties had neither the grit and stamina nor the courage of conviction to act according to their instructed judgment. He could well perceive that the parties had not outgrown their juvenile state of amorality and unreason. Their approach to the problem of democracy was essentially conditioned by empiricism of the worst sort. Devoid of a sense of perspective, empiricism in their case was seemingly a passport to accepting expediency as the guiding principle in politics. The tone and temper of Nepalese politics was far from what could meet the total requirements of the given task—democratically developing Nepal's underdeveloped society in the shortest possible time.

King Mahendra was not afraid of the politicians, except one. He knew he could get most of them to bend to his will. But B.P. Koirala made him uneasy. The Prime Minister's utterances and doings were a constant reminder to him that the sovereign was one of the factors, and not

<sup>6</sup>See the Nepali language brochure *Udghatan Bhasan* (inaugural address) by Prime Minister B. P. Koirala at the first conference of Nepal Tarun Dal, Kathmandu, Paus 2017 (Nepali year), 15 December 1960, Gorkhapatra Press.

the only factor, in Nepal's power equation. Koirala also reminded him of Jung Bahadur, and of Mohammed Mossadegh before his ouster. The King could not with equanimity watch Koirala's growing charisma, his nonchalance, his increasing predilection for referring to himself in the third person singular. It was not Koirala's increasing reference to socialism that unnerved him but the fear of losing his own political initiative. In Koirala's repeated emphasis on the concept of constitutional monarchy the King detected the threat of being denuded of the substance of power. There was the fear of the monarchy being relegated to the position it had occupied between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries, and of its becoming a prisoner of a commoner prime minister instead of hereditary Ranas.

At no point after the end of Rana rule had King Mahendra, either as Crown Prince or sovereign, indicated that he was not irrevocably reconciled to the concept of "the system of power...as a moving balance of many competing interests."<sup>7</sup> Rather, he had not infrequently given the impression that in his "conception of Nepal's political future," as J. P. Narayan told the author, "the sovereign is the ultimate repository of power, and that must remain so. Whatever freedom, whatever constitution, whatever steps toward freedom are to be taken are all gifts by the sovereign to the people."<sup>8</sup>

Reduced to its essentials, the King's concept of the power structure was a pyramid. Whatever his political rhetoric, he had consistently sought a system of polity that would not question the fact that the Palace constituted the nodal point in the kingdom's power structure. Those who occupied prime ministerial office before the first general election did not dispute this attitude. They came and went just as he would have them do. But B. P. Koirala, the first Prime Minister to enter Singha Durbar with a mandate from the people, fell into heresy. He raised questions, a few too many

<sup>7</sup>C. Wright Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society" in Louis Horowitz (ed), *Power, Politics and People: the Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1963, p 30.

<sup>8</sup>Author-Jayaprakash interview, Calcutta, 29 December 1973.

for the King's liking. Worse still, he refused to recognise the monarch as the keystone of the power arch.

King Mahendra had a heightened sense of destiny. That was the lesson of history he had learnt only too well. While myths told him that the King of Nepal was an incarnation of Vishnu, history revealed that the institution of monarchy possessed a certain element of indestructibility. In its journey across time it had weathered many internecine feuds and conflicts. Also rebellions and wars. It survived all this because destiny had so ordained. To King Mahendra, Nepal was an idea, and none but he could realise what it was destined to be.

History strengthened his belief. No less so did the prevailing conditions of life within and outside the country. Even a cursory glance at a map of Asia or Africa seemed to feed him on his mystique. Over the wide horizon that stretched from the Sea of Marmora to Manila Bay, encompassing a multitude of peoples and cultures, he noticed the lengthening shadow of a political way of life that did not conform to the system of life and ideals parliamentary democracy symbolised. In that segment of the world, where more than one half of its total population lived, the democratic system of politics had been tried and found wanting. Or so it seemed to him. Of course there were exceptions. For example, India, Malaysia, Japan and Israel. But they only proved the rule.

More relevant to his line of thinking were the experiments with political system building in two very populous and problem-ridden countries of Asia. The concept of "basic democracy" and that of "guided democracy" which Presidents Ayub Khan and Sukarno had introduced in Pakistan and Indonesia respectively appeared to him to be the right answer to the political problems the developing countries faced. They gave him his cue. If Nepal was to be rescued from the spreading tentacles of poverty, bad government, corruption and social dissension, if it was to be saved from disintegration, more, if it was to have a place in the sun, it needs must have a rallying point, a catalytic agent. And what could constitute this but the monarchy, King Mahendra concluded his argument.

The two clashed, and the King triumphed. The royal takeover was a solution of sorts to the kingdom's political problems which had been building up over the years and which had acquired a complex dimension because B. P. Koirala was apparently found either moving too fast for, or lagging too far behind, the people. Mahendra's action was not a *coup d'état* in the semantic sense of the term. It was a takeover effected within the bounds of the kingdom's Constitution. In exercise of the powers enumerated under Article 55 of the Constitution,<sup>9</sup> the King acted, and he had the support of a sizable number of politicians of diverse persuasions, including some leading members of the Nepali Congress.

Apparently the Congress had all along been skating on thin ice. The absence of any spontaneous and immediate reaction to the takeover was indicative of this. It might be suggested that the King's solution for these problems of politics were not future-regarding. But, then, every problem, as Lenin put it, has two solutions—a progressive and a reactionary. If revolutionary forces fail to accomplish a given task and find a revolutionary solution, history will not wait. It would see to it that the problem finds a solution, progressive or otherwise.

One thing is plain. The solution largely reflected the King's belief, not unlike that of the crowned heads in 18th century Europe, that "progress came from above, reaction from below, and that kings and queens were as liberal as their diets were conservative."<sup>10</sup> It seemed nothing could shake his conviction that the monarchy provided a national focus, that it alone was in a position to break the stranglehold feudalism had put on Nepalese society. That is, the institution of monarchy was exclusively privileged, historically and otherwise, to steer the ship of state clear of the disintegrating forces of obscurantism, casteism, regionalism and linguism. The institution of monarchy was "the chief constructive principle of the state,"<sup>11</sup> and it would

<sup>9</sup>See Appendix D for the text of the relevant article.

<sup>10</sup>H.A.L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, Vol 11, The Fontana Library, (third impression) 1963, p 881.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, Vol 1, p 312.

have to ensure Nepal's emergence as an integrated polity much in the same way as the Bourbon rulers of France waged their fight against provincial particularism. So far, so good. But there is no knowing whether King Mahendra pondered over the contingency that history might not repeat itself all along the line. It might not allow Nepal the time it given the Bourbons before the storming of the Bastille.



## Appendix A

### TEXT OF THE TREATY OF PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL, 1950

The Government of India and the Government of Nepal recognising the ancient ties which have happily existed between the countries for centuries;

Desiring still further to strengthen and develop these ties and to perpetuate peace between the two countries;

Have resolved therefore to enter into a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with each other, and have, for this purpose, appointed as their plenipotentiaries the following persons, namely,

The Government of India :

His Excellency Shri Chandreshwar Prasad Narain Singh, Ambassador of India in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal :

Mohan Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana, Maharaja, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal.

Who having examined each other's credentials and found them good and in due form have agreed as follows :

Article 1: There shall be everlasting peace and friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal. The two Governments agree mutually to acknowledge and respect the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other.

Article 2: The two Governments hereby undertake to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding with any neighbouring state likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two Governments.

Article 3: In order to establish and maintain the relations referred to in Article 1: The two Governments agree to continue diplomatic relations with each other by means of representatives with such staff as is necessary for the due performance of their functions.

The representatives and such of their staff as may be agreed upon shall enjoy such diplomatic privileges and immunities as are customarily granted by international law on reciprocal basis, provided that in no case shall these be less than those granted to persons of a similar status of any other state having diplomatic relations with either Government.

Article 4: The two Governments agree to appoint Consuls-General, Consuls, Vice-Consuls and such consular agents, who shall

reside in towns, ports and other places in each other's territory as may be agreed to. Consuls-General, Consuls, Vice-Consuls and other consular agents shall be provided with exequaturs or other valid authorisation of their appointment. Such exequatur of authorisation is liable to be withdrawn by the country which issued it, if considered necessary. The reasons for the withdrawal shall be indicated wherever possible.

The persons mentioned above shall enjoy on a reciprocal basis all the rights, privileges, exemptions, and immunities that are accorded to persons of corresponding status of any other state.

Article 5: The Government of Nepal shall be free to import, from or through the territory of India, arms, ammunition or war-like material and equipment necessary for the security of Nepal. The procedure for giving effect to this arrangement shall be worked out by the two Governments acting in consultation.

Article 6: Each Government undertakes, in token of the neighbourly friendship between India and Nepal, to give to the nationals of the other, in its territory, national treatment with regard to participation in industrial and economic development of such territory and to the grant of concessions and contracts relating to such development.

Article 7: The Governments of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in the trade and commerce and other privileges of a similar nature.

Article 8: So far as matters dealt with herein are concerned, this treaty cancels all previous treaties, agreements and engagements entered into on behalf of India by the British Government and the Government of Nepal.

Article 9: This treaty shall come into force from the date of signature by both Governments.

Article 10: This treaty shall remain in force until it is terminated by either party by giving one year's notice.

Done in duplicate at Kathmandu this 31st day of July 1950

(Sd) Chandreshwar Prasad Narain Singh,  
For the Government of India.

(Sd) Mohan Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana,  
For the Government of Nepal.

Appendix B

नेपासी  कांग्रेस

संस्थापक अध्यक्ष  
नेपाली कांग्रेस काठमाडौं

संस्थापक अध्यक्ष  
नेपाली कांग्रेस काठमाडौं

27/11/62

My dear Bida,

I have your letter of last month. Why have you started dabbling in philosophy, and its brain-racking questions? Is it not enough that we take care of the day and leave musing about the morrow to dreamers and poets? J.P.'s "vicarious to poorness" is full of flaws and I don't understand the need of discarding materialism in favour of spiritualism in order to achieve good existence.

You don't try to read between my lines. I never suffer from frustration. I, on the other hand, suffer from over-abundance of vitality. I believe in taking things easy, almost in a jocular mood. Between success and failure the margin is so thin that one slips from one to the other unwittingly and incessantly. So there is no frustration for me. Do you understand?

When is Margant coming to India? I will write to her in the meantime.

With regards  
B.P. Chatterjee  
18, Jayanagar T.P. House  
Calcutta-11

Kind re.  
From Suresh  
Bishwakarma

Photocopy of B.P. Koirala's letter





# Appendix C

7.  
no end of trouble.

with her.

B.P.

Ps.

I have just received invitation  
for Tokyo - the meeting there  
will be held between days  
16th + 21st Oct. have feeling  
for Tokyo. Have in my mind  
I will write after a week.  
Takeshi is here.

2  
Thank you for pressing letter is  
awaited. You will have to fix up  
my programme with as little expense  
as possible. I would like to bring  
Kishida with me - hence arranging  
because the greater consideration  
for King is going to Switzerland. He  
is already in Calcutta on work. His  
you had to best to <sup>include</sup> ~~include~~ one  
in his Cabinet in my individual capacity.  
Imposed because the way discuss was wrong  
& calculated to promote discussion & dialogue.  
reg. MIPs colleagues are giving him



Cosy room,  
Bank Road, Patna  
14. 10. 54

Bhola,

I have your letter of 24th last. Was glad  
to write to you & reply & advise when I was not  
doing anything - about you, your voyage, and  
even your next address. I hope this letter will  
reach you; I hope however I have a few  
chances that you will have moved out of  
England before this reaches you under address.

I am very keen on going to Europe at  
the earliest. Earliest that I can do will not be  
later than Nov. Perhaps Dec. I have a certain  
T-ways Conference with the European Tour -  
Combridge in the sense that I move out of Nepal  
simultaneously both for Europe & T-ways. You  
tell me that Europe will do us good. I also  
think so.

I have written to Robert. I am anxious  
in his reply. I cannot tell you in this letter.  
Therefore, if Robert I can leave for Europe.  
Most probably in my next I will be able  
to do it. But before that I must have your  
reply to this.

Bhola sends you his love. B.P. is  
not in Patna, but if he were he would certainly  
have you his best wishes.

I am definitely leaving Nepal soon  
for our own tour. But I must be sure  
that it will be worth while.

## Appendix D

### TEXT OF ARTICLE 55 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM OF NEPAL, 1959

55. (1) If His Majesty in his discretion is satisfied that a grave emergency exists whereby the security or economic life of Nepal, or any part thereof, is threatened by war or external aggression, or by internal disturbance, he may by proclamation in his discretion:

(a) declare that his functions shall, to such extent as may be specified in the proclamation, be exercised by him in his discretion;

(b) assume to himself all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by Parliament or any other governmental body or authority;

and any such proclamation may contain such incidental and consequential provisions as may appear to him to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the proclamation, including provisions for suspending in whole or in part the operation or any provision of this Constitution:

Provided that nothing in this clause shall authorise His Majesty to assume to himself any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the Supreme Court or to suspend, either in whole or in part, the provisions of Part VI of this Constitution.

- (2) Any such proclamation may be revoked or varied by a consequent proclamation.
- (3) A proclamation under this article, other than a proclamation revoking a previous proclamation, shall cease to operate at the expiration of twelve months, but may be renewed by a further proclamation, and so forth until His Majesty is satisfied that grave emergency no longer exists.
- (4) Any law made by His Majesty under powers assumed by him under this article shall, unless sooner repealed or re-enacted by him, cease to operate at the expiration of six months after a proclamation under this Article has ceased to operate.
- (5) In exercising his powers under this article, His Majesty shall so far as may be practicable act after consultation with the Council of State.





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<i>The Amrita Bazar Patrika</i>	<i>Asian Recorder : A Weekly Digest of Asian Events</i>
<i>The Hindu</i>	
<i>Hindusthan Standard</i>	<i>Link</i>
<i>The Indian Express</i>	<i>Nepal Today</i> (organ of the Nepali Congress published first from Calcutta, from Kathmandu after 1951, and back again from Calcutta after the 1960 royal takeover)
<i>The Statesman</i>	
<i>The Times of India</i>	

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<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Economist</i>
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