

# Palace People and Politics

**Nepal in Perspective**

**Bhola Chatterji**



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# PALACE PEOPLE AND POLITICS

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**To my daughter Angana**





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# Foreword

by

B. P. KOIRALA

BHOLA CHATTERJI'S credentials are sound. He has actually participated in the revolutionary struggle of 1950-51 in Nepal, with a rifle slung over his shoulder, like one of us. This experience has made him what he is today — from a raw abrasive young man in search of an ideal to a purposeful writer with a mission. He writes on current history not with a pen dipped in cold ink, not as an outsider watching the scene from a hilltop with an emotionless eye. You can't do that if you have participated even momentarily in a great noble enterprise, which pushes forward the chariot known as History. Bhola has written copiously on the current history of Nepal; and he has become some kind of an expert on the subject.

What I have appreciated in his writings are his loyalties, one to his own country, India, and the other to Nepal, his adopted one, to both of which he doesn't want to be unfair. The historical relationship between India and Nepal is being subjected to the stress and strain of the modern times and its foundation is being deepened and broadened; the relationship is being newly assessed in terms of the modern needs and future aspirations. It needs a great commitment in an Indian writer to a transcending ideal for him to be able to write with patience on Nepal and its people, who are struggling to build a new society on the ashes of the feudal, authoritarian, stagnant society. Bhola's is an attempt to do it.

In preparing the book, he has drawn greatly from his interviews with me. He has made me speak of myself as one of the innumerable people on the stage of Nepal's politics. I walked down memory lane with him during

those interviews. I reminisced, and produced some kind of an autobiography. I don't know if reminiscences could be the material for a history book. But these have given his book an unusual flavour which the readers of Bholā's books have always savoured.

9.9.79

B. P. KOIRALA

# Preface

Even as the twentieth century passed its fiftieth year Nepal presented the picture of a hermetically sealed land that had lost count of time. The country was the preserve of a handful of land barons, otherwise called Ranas. The people of Nepal were denied even elementary freedoms although the UN Charter had ceased to be just a statement of pious wishes. All power, political as well as economic, had been usurped by the hereditary Rana Prime Ministers, who reduced the people to the status of serfs and the institution of monarchy to a more ceremonial appendage. The Himalayan kingdom then stood transfixed with fear and despair. Came 1950 and a revolution spearheaded by the Nepali Congress, of which Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala—to his friends, BP—was the undisputed leader, pulverized the petrified society.

Among the men who have moulded Nepal's destiny over the past three decades Koirala is indeed the tallest. History would set him apart from his contemporaries for reasons too obvious to be gone into here. I have known him for long and intimately; I have seen him through thick and thin. But never since I came to know him some three decades ago did I have occasion to say that this man was not the stuff makers of history are made of. This is not to suggest that he has no shortcomings—he has, which man has not his?—but this is neither important nor relevant, at any rate not here. The important point is that he cannot be arraigned on a charge of making a virtue of necessity, of being less than true to his commitment to democracy and to uphold man's right to dissent and to protest.

This study is the product of a series of taped interviews I had with Koirala over a nearly six-year period between

October 1973 and July 1977. The interviews, which were taken in Banaras, New Delhi, Calcutta and Patna and which form the staple of this book, are wide-ranging and reveal not only the man that Koirala is but also many facets of the complex story of Nepal since the late 1940s. The questions asked are candid and the answers given more so. That the answers also have an autobiographical flavour is unlikely to be missed.<sup>1</sup> This volume contains six parts, of which part 1 attempts to get a glimpse of contemporary Nepalese politics and the rest comprise excerpts from the interviews arranged according to the nature of the topics discussed.

The book is the second part, which is complete in itself, of a study on contemporary Nepalese politics that I undertook as a member of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. I am grateful to *Hindustan Standard*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and *Sunday* for their kind permission to liberally use material from articles and essays I wrote for them at different times. I am most in debt to Mr. M.J. Akbar, Editor of *Sunday*, for serializing bulk of the interviews. My thanks to Mr. Indra Sen, Assistant Editor, *Business Standard*, for being patient of my many demands on his time for advice; to Dr. B.P. Adhikari, Director, Indian Statistical Institute, who gave freely of his time to discuss men and events with me; to Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Koirala Zakki for valuable suggestions; to Mr. Devendra Prasad Singh, former Vice-Chancellor of Bhagalpur University, for his advice and making available to me Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letters to him; and to Mr. Asish K. Basu and Mr. Narayan Chandra Saha of the Sociological Research Unit for typing the manuscript. I take great pleasure in acknowledging my debt of gratitude to Mrs. Seema Mukerjee, but for whose abundant generosity the book should not have seen the light of day. Lastly, it is not a mere formality when I say that my wife remains the

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<sup>1</sup> The tapes of the interviews and the transcription thereof, every page of which is corrected and initialled by B.P. Koirala, are in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute. The National Archives of India, New Delhi, has a gift copy of the microfilm of the transcription.

abiding source of encouragement, sympathy and support. For the opinions expressed and the errors in the book the responsibility is exclusively mine.

**Bhola Chatterji**

Sociological Research Unit  
Indian Statistical Institute  
203 B.T. Road, Calcutta 700035.  
12 September 1979





# Part - 1

The *dramatis personae* of the story of Nepal since the termination of the Second World War are a feudal aristocrat, Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana; three Kings, Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Dev, Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev; an indigent commoner, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala; and, of course, the hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Mohan Shumsher has gone the way of all flesh. So have King Tribhuvan and King Mahendra. The 65-year-old former Prime Minister, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala (b. 1914), though not in fine fettle, is still staying on the course. And, the 34-year-old King Birendra, tenth in the line of the Shah dynasty founded by Prithvi Narayan Shah<sup>1</sup>, is in the saddle.

Casabianca-like, Mohan Shumsher, the last standard-bearer of the century-old Rana system of polity<sup>2</sup>, resolutely stood on the bridge and crusaded for a dead cause. With supreme indifference to his surroundings, the last hereditary Prime Minister, Mohan Shumsher, refused to acknowledge the fact that the people of Nepal were not his bond-slaves, that the folding up of the British Empire had rung down the curtain on the past in this part of the world.

King Tribhuvan, virtually a prisoner in the hands of Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher, was denied the benefit of any formal education. But he did not lack a certain sense

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<sup>1</sup> The ruler of Gorkha, one of the several principalities into which Nepal was divided till about the mid-eighteenth century, Prithvi Narayan waged several wars of conquest to create the kingdom of Nepal.

<sup>2</sup> Contrived by Jung Bahadur Rana, who rode his way to the office of the Prime Minister in 1846 through conspiracy and blood spilling, the Rana system of polity not only turned the Prime Ministership into a hereditary affair but also reduced the institution of monarchy to a nonentity.

of history. When it came to the crunch, he identified himself in a way with the people in their struggle against the despotic rule of the Ranas. King Mahendra also did not have a formal education. He had, however, a strong will, abundant self-confidence and a mind of great capacity. He showed not a little finesse in dealing with the people as much as in practising the art of statecraft. King Birendra is cast in different mould. A suave, soft-spoken man with an Eton-Harvard-Tokyo educational background he appears to have, unlike his grand-father Tribhuvan and father Mahendra, his feet planted in the late twentieth century. His approach to men and events considerably differs from that of his predecessors. There is nothing to suggest that he is unaware of the fact that time has not yet been frozen in its track in the ruggedly beautiful Himalayan kingdom.

Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala—son of a poor Brahmin, Krishna Prasad Koirala, who died in prison in 1945 because of his unyielding opposition to Rana tyranny—had his education at the Calcutta University and the Banaras Hindu University. During his college days in India he came in close contact with Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia and got inducted into the Congress Socialist Party as a full-time worker. His participation in India's freedom struggle, including the 1942 Quit India movement, twice led him suffer imprisonment. That was how he made his debut in the arena of politics. That done he never paused to muse over the memories, almost invariably bitter, of the past. Or prepare a profit-and-loss account.

To get a glimpse of this man, an idea of the stuff he is made of, you might join me for a walk down memory lane. Let us skip over to the backwoods of Nepal, one late November day some 28 years ago.<sup>3</sup> Twilight had merged into darkness. A cold wind howled through the forests stretching for miles and miles. Up front near the east bank of the Kosi, local leaders of the Nepali Congress Mukti Sena

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the Nepali Congress-led 1950-51 revolution, of which the undisputed leader was Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, that freed at once Nepal and its institution of monarchy from the century-old-Rana bondage. See Author's *A Recent Study of Nepalese Politics* for a detailed account.

(liberation army) had assembled in a hideout. One could notice that a feeling of despair came to the men as they suggested that their boys quit the river front. The argument was that they would be running great risks, encircled as they were by the government security forces, if they insisted on standing their ground. They were not unaware, of course, that the withdrawal might jeopardize the security of the entire area the insurgents had occupied on the east bank of the river. Indeed they were in a dilemma.

The timepiece ticked away the minutes. The lamp flickered. And the insurgent leaders looked quiet and grave. They were evidently waiting for the man who had so long kept silent to have the last word. They knew only too well that when the chips were down he was the one who could make the decision. He ran his eyes over the assemblage; his handsome, almost chiselled, face appeared severe. Finally, he had his say—the river front must be defended at all costs. Though it was a hazardous stand, there was no getting away from it should they want the revolution to succeed. As the evening wore off the insurgent leaders departed in hushed silence.

That might have been a rash decision, but that was how Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala operated. His attitude all along has been that once the journey commenced there must be no turning back, come what might. A man of singular determination, the chief characteristic that distinguishes him from others has been the refusal to see virtue in conformism even when non-conformism would inevitably bring a hornet's nest about his ears. This in fact had been the legacy with which this man started his life. Since then it has been a long and agonizing struggle to liberate his land and its people from the shackles of feudal oligarchy, of dehumanizing poverty that turned them into scraps of humanity, so to speak. There have been times when hostile forces conspired; colleagues faltered; and even the body failed. But all this could not wear out his will to say "no" when that could be the only thing any rational man would have said.

For Bishweshwar Prasad, the 1950-51 revolution had one definite message—the feudal land that had been languishing

in a state of stasis must enter the twentieth century. And it must enjoy the irreducible benefit of a system of polity that would derive its sanction from the people and not from any arbitrary source of power. The 1950-51 struggle for democracy did not end with a whimper. The people rallied under the banner of the Nepali Congress to pick up the gauntlet. The outburst of the people's pent-up fury swept the country, pulling down almost every barrier that feudal despotism had erected. It seemed Bishweshwar Prasad's dream would come true—Nepal's wretched and the disadvantaged would not have to continue living a life that held out little hope and no promise.

Hopes went by the board. Before long, Koirala had to make his exit from the corridors of power, because he contested King Tribhuvan's right to rule as he liked. Once again his life moved in the familiar circle of struggle, imprisonment and exile. It took eight wearisome years since the dissolution of the Rana-Nepali Congress coalition government<sup>4</sup> before the people got a chance to decide freely how and by whom their life should be governed. Nepal's first general election, held on the basis of universal adult suffrage in 1959, gave Koirala an impressive mandate to build a democratic society wherein man will cease to be an object of exploitation by man.

That was not to be. Scarcely had Nepal's first elected Prime Minister, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, started out to do the spade-work for his ideas to take shape in action when he was obliged to cross swords with King Mahendra over wide-ranging issues not excluding policy and programme of the government, role of monarchy and attitude

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<sup>4</sup> Following the termination of the 1950-51 struggle on a note of compromise, thanks largely due to the Indian government's interference, a Rana-Nepali Congress coalition government was installed in office with the Rana patriarch, Mohan Shumsher, and the Nepali Congress leader, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, as the Prime Minister and the Home Minister respectively. Various forces including King Tribhuvan, otherwise at logger-heads with each other, cooperated to unseat the coalition government. For a detailed account of which see the Author's *Nepal's Experiment with Democracy*.

toward India. Personal factors were also involved in this. Koirala lost the battle. In a surprise move King Mahendra dismissed the government on December 15, 1960 disbanded Parliament, put Prime Minister Koirala, along with a large number of his colleagues and party workers, under detention and imposed direct rule on the people.

Another eight years of his life Koirala had to waste in prison. Release from prison in 1968 was followed by exile, technically self-exile, in India for nearly eight years. On December 30, 1976 he returned to Nepal of his own volition only to be taken into custody and made to stand trial on charges of treason and sedition which carried the extreme penalty of death upon conviction. A one-man tribunal was set up to sit in judgement on this man who was accused of raising the standard of revolt "with the intention of replacing the panchayat system by democratic socialism"<sup>5</sup>.

When Koirala's health deteriorated alarmingly he was temporarily released in early June, 1977 to go "anywhere in the world"<sup>6</sup> for medical treatment at State expense. On his return from the US, where he had gone for a surgical operation in November, 1977 he was placed under house arrest to be released on parole some months later for a second visit to the US for medical check-up in March, 1978. He returned to have his freedom of movement subsequently restricted to the Kathmandu Vally in March, 1979. A month later the regime, unnerved by the widespread agitation for the restoration of democratic rights, orderd him to be home interned. Not long afterwards King Birendra was obliged to set him at liberty when he realized—just as his grandfather King Tribhuvan had nearly three decades ago—that he could depend on none but this man to help him save the crown. More about that later.

This brings us to the political crisis that stares Nepal in the face now. Of course, there would be no dearth of Nepalese who would declare with force and confidence that the projected picture of the Himalayan kingdom's problem of

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<sup>5</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), February 5, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), June 9, 1977.

politics is nothing but a blowup. The contention is that the partyless system of panchayat democracy, which King Mahendra introduced after giving short (shriffs to Nepal's young but promising experiment with democracy in December, 1960, is indeed a unique institution. To a country like Nepal with its myriad problems, economic, political, social and ethnic, the partyless panchayat system, its protagonists maintain, is a great blessing. The system contains all the virtues of parliamentary democracy and none of its vices. It is further argued that even if the panchayat system does not conform to the conventional concept of democracy it should not disturb other's peace of mind. For the system, no matter what the critics might say, "is in fact a democratic system capable of achieving practical results"<sup>7</sup>, as King Birendra put it. More, it suits the genius of the Nepalese and every nation, it is condescendingly pointed out, has its own genius, the Nepalese not excluded.

To maintain a "hear-see-speak-no-evil" attitude toward Nepal might well be to the liking of those who still prefer to croon that "with the King on the throne and god in his heaven, all's right with the world." But then the world is not quite the place it was when Pippa gazed at it, in silent wonder more than a century ago. Heaven may, of course, continue to be the abode of god, assuming that god is not dead, yet. As for the remnants of royalty, a distasteful anachronism, they had best be seen not in the corridors of power but at Ascot or the casinos of Southern France. It is ludicrous that someone should, because of the accident of his birth, be divinely ordained to rule, making nonsense of all that man has done so far to liberate himself and his fellowman.

Yet, in the land of the chivalrous Gurkha, royalty is very much in the limelight. The crowned head sets the tone one temper of life; he determines how and for whom the Himalayan kingdom should be governed. That the King of Nepal not only reigns but also rules is a fact, notwithstanding the ballyhoo about panchayat democracy and all that goes with it. The Nepalese Government of the day holds office at the pleasure of the king and not with the confidence of the

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<sup>7</sup> *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), December 17, 1976.

people. This is the most significant aspect of the country's system of polity. It is not (repeat, *not*) the people's will that regulates the government's tenure of life.

To those that are *plus royaliste que le roi* (more royalist than the king) it is sheer profanity to be told that everything is not all right in the State of Nepal. But the harsh reality is that the Himalayan kingdom has a man-size problem of politics—royalty is not exactly a pleasant calling today. Especially, if the incumbent happens to be at once an incarnation of Vishnu, which the King of Nepal supposedly is, and the pace-maker of one of the world's poorest countries. If to this is added the fact that the person concerned must unfailingly watch his step in order to avoid being caught on the wrong side of either of his two giant neighbours, you would get an idea of the tightropewalking the Nepalese monarchy has been doing since quite some-time past. More precisely, since King Mahendra concluded that sovereignty did not reside in the people but vested in the Crown. That marked the beginning of consumptive ailment Nepal has not yet been able to recover from.

Though King Mahendra did not have formal schooling he understood well the mechanics of politics; he also knew what he wanted and how to get it. Following the take-over all the king's energies were devoted to devising a system of polity that would simultaneously produce a viable economy and secure the institution of monarchy against every challenge. The focus of Nepalese politics has since been the partyless democracy the panchayat system is supposed to symbolize.

Having done away with what the 1950-51 struggle had been waged for, King Mahendra pause. He seemed to have been in two minds to the system of polity the country should have. Apparently, he could not decide whether to keep parliament in suspended animation and restore it after ensuring that it would not question the pivotal role of the monarchy or replace it by a client institution. What he said, among other things, in his proclamation of December 26, 1960 would in a way confirm it: "The task before us being to foil or counteract the various mischiefs stalking the country today and to ensure the democratic system for

tomorrow, we have under the circumstances formed a Council of Ministers under our chairmanship ...”<sup>9</sup>

The interregnum was brief. King Mahendra got over his initial hesitation and decided to supplant parliamentary democracy by a system that would live so long as it recognized the Palace as the only source of power in the country. On January 5, 1961, a little less than 13 months after parliamentary democracy had been put to death, King Mahendra forbade his subjects to look back. For the country's democratic experiment had been found to be an exercise in utter futility, he declared. The people of Nepal, therefore, must take thought for the morrow remembering that “the call to the Nepalese nation today is for sacrifice and discipline.” In the course of his “message” defining the government's policy and programme and “announcing the Panchayat System as a substitute for the Parliamentary system of Democracy,” King Mahendra urged the people to “nourish to maturity and fruitfulness the tree of democracy rooted in our soil and suited to our conditions.”

By way of clarifying the nature of the indigenous democracy that should function in Nepal the King said: “Since Panchayats are the basis of democracy and a democratic system imposed from above has proved unsuitable ... we have now to build democracy layer and layer from the bottom upwards.” He did not stop with that. As if to assure the people that they were not being taken for a ride, King Mahendra emphasized that the panchayat system would not be another name for arbitrary rule. He stressed the point that the “aim” was “to associate the people in the administration at all levels and to develop village, district and town panchayats, with a view to enabling them to take active interest in the problems and progress of the country.”

King Mahendra answered in the negative the anticipated question whether the system would have a place

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<sup>9</sup> H.M. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, *Proclamations, speeches and Messages* (Vol. II), December 1960-65, published by Department of Publicity. Ministry of Informations and Broadcasting HMG, Nepal June 11, 1967, p. 4.



for political parties, which the people had become accustomed to and which, their many shortcomings notwithstanding, acted as watch-dogs. But he was cautious enough not to announce immediately the demise of the political parties. After all, his audience was not unaware that a partyless political system in the given context could be anything but a democracy. This, plus the lack of a clear-cut idea of the form and substance the panchayat system was intended to have, perhaps explains the King's statement: "As political parties may prove obstacles to this task of creating a favourable climate for this new movement for national reconstruction, we have by this Proclamation declared for the present illegal and banned all the existing political parties and class organizations affiliated with such parties."<sup>10</sup>

The focus may now be turned on the other side of the picture—the men who were expected to undo the horrendous wrong the King had done. Naturally the name that would first occur to any observer of the Nepalese scene is that of Subarna Shumsher, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister in the ousted Koirala Cabinet. Subarna Shumsher came to Calcutta on December 14, 1960 just a day before the royal take-over. His departure from Kathmandu on the eve of that tragic event surprised all except the King, Koirala and possibly a few others. It was no secret to Prime Minister Koirala that the Deputy Prime Minister was not exactly unaware of the King's impending strike.<sup>11</sup> Though Subarna Shumsher's presence in Calcutta at that juncture was extremely astonishing, I met him on December 18 at his Camac Street residence.

*Here, if I am allowed a personal recollection of the not so distant past, I would like to reproduce a couple of pages of the diary I used to keep in those days :*

"December 18, 1960 : Subarna seemed nervous didn't know what should be done. I told him that the only course open before him was to urge the people to rise. He kind of agreed.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 5, 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of this, see Author's *Nepal's Experiment with Democracy*, Ankur Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977.

"December 20 : I met Devendra Prasad Singh (Praja Socialist Member of the Rajya Sabha), one of Koirala's close associates, and Keshav (Koirala's brother) at the residence of Gunada Mazumdar (a longtime friend of Koirala's). Though a hartal (general stoppage of all work) had been declared on that day to make a protest against the proposed transfer of Beru Bari (a small area of land in North Bengal) to Pakistan, I met Subarna in the morning and was told that he had already met Jayaprakash Narayan on December 19. Devendra Prasad, Gunda, Keshav and myself met Subarna again in the afternoon. He still appeared nervous and said that the King was vicious and vindictive. Subarna wanted a movement but it must be a sort of *satyagraha* in the beginning which later on should developed into an all out mass insurrection. He said that Jayaprakash had also suggested a people's movement in Nepal. I could not ascertain Jayaprakash's views as he had left for Madras early in the morning of December 20. We were a bit disappointed. He talked about issuing a statement; and in the same breath he also said that he wanted to go back to Kathmandu as he thought that he would not be of much help by remaining outside. Devendra Prasad left for Patna. Keshav stayed back to leave for Biratnagar the following day—a disappointed man.

"December 21 : Keshav came to my place and had lunch with me. Sushil Koirala (a relation of B.P. Koirala's) and Krishna Kumar Sharma (Kathmandu correspondent of the *Hindusthan Standard*) arrived from Kathmandu and met me at the Hindusthan Standard Office. They said that nothing so far had been done in Kathmandu. The people were simply demoralized. Sushil said that Tulsi Giri (one-time Foreign Minister in the Koirala Cabinet), who had, following his resignation from the Cabinet, developed strained relations with Koirala and the Nepali Congress, was arrested and confined in the same Billiard Room where Koirala had been lodged in the Army Offices' Club at Singha Durbar and subsequently released on December

19. The idea was that he would be able to get information from Koirala. Tulsi Giri, they suspected, was the King's man.

*"December 22:* Keshav left for Biratnagar in the evening in a relatively buoyant mood. He met Subarna once again and found him to be more determined than before to launch a struggle against the King. Keshav thought that the reason for this change was the fact that Jagjivan Ram an important member of the Jawaharlal Nehru Government, who came to Calcutta and stayed as Subarna's guest, must have given him some assurance regarding the Indian government's attitude toward the Nepalese situation. But Subarna did not give Keshav any financial help.

*"December 23 :* I met Subarna and found him rather nervous and not very keen about launching any movement immediately. He said that he would like to watch developments for some time more. Meanwhile, he was expecting Parsunarayan Choudhury, a Koirala Cabinet Minister, who had been abroad at the time of the take-over, in Calcutta by December 20, so that he could talk things over with him and arrive at some decision. Subarna refused to meet Sushil Koirala and Krishna Kumar Sharma, who had accompanied me to his residence. I dropped hints regarding financial help to them, but Subarna did not pay any heed to that. Sushil and Krishna Kumar were advised by me to go back immediately to Biratnagar. I met Debū Bose and Ashis De at the PSP (Praja Socialist Party) office and they gave Rs. 50 each to Sushil and Krishna Kumar.

*December 23, 1960—January, 1961 :* Devendra Prasad came twice to Calcutta. He showed me Nehru's confidential letter saying that he (Nehru) did not think there was any outside influence behind King Mahendra's action. The King did not require any stimulant as he was bent in a particular direction. Devendra said that Asoka Mehta (Chairman of the PSP) had met Nehru who told him that the PSP should take up Nepal's cause as, being in the Opposition, it would be easy for them to do so. Which, however, was not the case with

the Congress. Subarna was still suffering from a leukaemia of the will. He would not do a thing until Nehru gave the green signal. Asoka Mehta and Jayaprakash met Subarna and the latter promised to issue a statement to be published from Delhi. Asoka Mehta said that he would fix an interview for Subarna with Nehru. And if that interview bore any result then only Subarna was to issue the statement Devendra Prasad had already drafted.

*“January 7-15, 1961 : Asoka Mehta met Nehru in Delhi and Nehru expressed himself vehemently against King Mahendra. Subarna had a two-and a-half-hours interview with Nehru between January 11 and January 14. Nehru gave his support for the movement in Nepal but he said that he would not in any way like to be brought into the picture. He said that India was exercising diplomatic pressure on Kathmandu and would increase it as the movement gathered momentum. Also, he said that President Kennedy’s assumption of office might make matters somewhat easy for the Nepali Congress.*

Subarna’s interview with Nehru was to be kept strictly secret as also another piece of news. Nona, Keshav’s wife, arrived at Patna a couple of days ago. She told Devendra Prasad that a link, though tenuous, had been established with B.P. Koirala through books that were being sent to him in prison. Koirala dotted a number of letters in those books which, after being deciphered, revealed a message to the effect that he would like Subarna to take the initiative as to what was to be done in Nepal. Since he was under detention it was not possible for him to give any instructions. However, Koirala wanted Subarna to contact Delhi and certain other persons. But, Devendra Prasad said that had not yet been deciphered.”

To return to Kathmandu. King Mahendra’s argument was that partyless panchayat democracy was not only in conformity with the conditions of life in the country but was a qualitative improvement on the conventional concept of

parliamentary democracy. In the Nepalese context of underdevelopment, it was emphasized, parliamentary democratic institutions had been tried and found wanting; they were not capable of responding to the challenge of change. On the other hand, the new pattern of democracy based on the ideology of partyless panchayat democracy was meant to cater for the people's needs, for the kind of socio-political engineering that could enable them to reconstruct their society along desired lines. The claim was that panchayat democracy was in fact "participatory democracy" that allowed for the people's direct participation at all levels of the decision-making process. It was stoutly maintained that the system derived its sanction from the people. The absence of formal opposition or direct election would not automatically suggest, it was emphasized, that panchayat democracy was not a representative form of polity.

Though the course of Nepalese politics was suddenly diverted into an entirely different channel, the King continuously harped on the note that he was just carrying forward the message of the 1950-51 revolution, which, as B.P. Koirala put it, "in one stroke, gave King his throne, people their Fundamental Rights and, through the Royal Proclamation, committed the King to democratic political system."<sup>12</sup> Nor did the King deny the need for concerted endeavour to speed up the process of nation-building and modernization. Parliamentary democracy had been discarded but not the idiom of democratic politics. He seemed to bend over backwards to establish that his action was not directed against democracy. In fact he appropriated the heritage and idiom of the 1950-51 revolution. The partyless system of panchayat democracy, the King asserted, was not only tailored to the conditions of life in the country but also ensured all the virtues of parliamentary democracy except its shortcomings.

King Mahendra had compelling reasons not to disown the 1950-51 revolution. Everything else apart, the legitimacy of his occupancy of the throne itself flowed from it. The language of the revolution had to be mouthed to establish the credibility of the regime as much as to dupe the people

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<sup>12</sup> *Koirala's Trial*, Tarun Publication, Varanasi; 1978, p. 6.

into believing that the democratic process was being continued without the bad men and their sinful ways. That explains why the regime, which had snuffed out democracy, continued to observe with not a little fanfare the "National Democracy Day" every year. Such were the compulsions of the situation that, on the occasion of "National Democracy Day", King Mahendra could be heard to repeat every year that "this great occasion reminds all of us Nepalese of the courage, sacrifice and endeavours put forth by our late revered father and other brave Nepalese during those days in 1950-51 in order to usher in a new era into our country."<sup>13</sup>

But few were taken in by this ritualistic exercise, the credulous and the time-server apart. The panchayat system, which promised all things to all men, was nothing but a convenient tool, the perceptive observer did not take long to detect. It enabled the Palace to maintain a good grip on every effective lever of power. In fact, the system was just another form of authoritarianism draped with a specious argument.

To get the point one has only to recall some of King Mahendra's post-take-over observations. Defending the liquidation of parliamentary democracy King Mahendra said that Nepal's "quest for the system best suited to our national genius and necessities led us through the depressing experience of the democratic experiment of the last ten years. It is, of course, true that every organization and ideology has progress as its motivating force. But it is our common experience that absence of probity and integrity makes the some organization or ideology a stumbling block in the advancement of the country." He would also have the people believe that "this experience is not peculiar to us. This has, in fact, been the experienced of several countries of South-East Asia."

That was as good a hint about what had influenced the

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<sup>13</sup> H.M. King Mahendra, *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, Vol. III, 1976, Department of Information, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, 1969, p.9.

King's decision as anybody might expect. What he further stated was a rationalization of sorts of his scheme of things. As he put it, the basic problem that confronted Nepal was that "of national development, not the question of the superiority or inferiority of any 'ism' or ideology based on pure theories ... We are all fed up with the devastation wrought in our national life by blindly copied 'isms'." Therefore, he seemed to suggest, the people should not unnecessarily bother about the system of polity that the country should have. It would be enough if they put their trust in him and did his bidding.

On second thoughts, the King perhaps realized that his peroration might be given an interpretation that he did not bargain for. He hastened to add that, all this notwithstanding, "some sort of a system is absolutely necessary for the progress of the country. That is why we have evolved a new system based on the bedrock of popular feelings and aspirations and having for its sole aim the establishment of a democracy suited to our national genius."<sup>14</sup> It may be conceded that the King's innovative traits helped him to retain the throne. If that is true, equally so is the fact that "the King's will reigns supreme and unchallenged under the panchayat system ... the basic premise of the 1962 constitutional system<sup>15</sup> ... assumes that the interests of the King, the government, and the people are indivisible and identical"<sup>16</sup>.

It was quite another matter when it came to the question of grappling with the problems of politics or of poverty. With each passing day the challenge, internal and externally-based, to the regime gathered momentum and the bread problem became still more acute. New Delhi was very much concerned about the fast deteriorating situation in Kathmandu. In his reply to Devendra Prasad's letter of March

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<sup>14</sup> King Mahendra, *Proclamations* etc., Vol. 11, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> The Panchayat Constitution which King Mahendra promulgated following the December, 1960 take-over and which came into force on December 16, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, p. 515.

1, 1961 Prime Minister Nehru said : "I am deeply grieved to learn of the brutalities indulged in Kathmandu."<sup>17</sup>

The resistance movement, which the Nepali Congress (Koirala was then in prison) had launched both inside the country and in the Terai plains from its base in India, was neither non-violent nor limited in its scope and extent. Assured of New Delhi's tacit consent, Subarna Shumsher had another meeting with Nehru on April 7, 1961.<sup>18</sup> The Nepali Congress militants accelerated their activities along a sizable segment of the India-Nepal border region and they made frequent raids deep into the Nepalese countryside. This not only created a difficult situation for the Nepalese regime; it adversely affected India-Nepal relations.

King Mahendra was not a day too late in registering his protest to India. In an interview to two Nepalese news-agencies in February, 1962 the King said : "Although I cannot say that the anti-national elements, (*Nepali Congress activists—B.C.*), who are stationed in India and are taking undue advantage of the open-border system, enjoy the cent per cent support of the Indian government, I notice a growing apprehension among the Nepalese that these elements themselves might jeopardise the traditional relations with India."<sup>19</sup>

But neither New Delhi nor the Nepali Congress swerved from its settled course. It must, however, be clearly understood that New Delhi's assistance to the Nepali Congress was essentially political. The Indian government allowed the Nepali Congress activists the use of its territory; also it did not place any impediment in the way of their collection of material resources for the struggle, not excluding low calibre weapons.

At the same time, New Delhi ensured itself against the Nepali Congress' resort to any precipitate action. There were several occasions when Subarna Shumsher, who had

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix A for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter of March 1, 1961 to Devendra Prasad Singh.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix B for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter of March 29, 1961 to Devendra Prasad Singh.

<sup>19</sup> King Mahendra, *Proclamations etc.*, Vol. 11, *op. cit.*; p. 100.



assumed formal leadership of the resistance movement overcoming his initial hesitance on being assured of New Delhi's helpful attitude, would cool his heels in Delhi for the promised green signal from the Indian government, which, however, never came. It bears repetition that, much as the Nepali Congress did strain at the least, the Indian government did not give it such aid and assistance as could have allowed it to expand and intensify the scale of operations to the desired extent.

King Mahendra did not let the matter rest there. In keeping with the traditional Nepalese policy of "tacking with the wind" the King looked northwards to countervail the pressure from the south. Not only that, he also made approaches to Islamabad. And "Pakistan, which sought common ground with Nepal in their respective difficulties with India, accepted the overture at its face value."<sup>20</sup> Peking's almost generous response to the King's solicitation for its friendship was not at all unexpected, considering the strained relations between India and China at that time.

It may be recalled that mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's point of view was the hallmark of India-Nepal relations in the early 'fifties. Kathmandu and New Delhi seemed to agree that the subcontinent's peace and security was an indivisible thing, and that neither could have it independently of the other. And, above all, India enjoyed a position of preference in its relations with Nepal. This underwent a visible change following King Mahendra's accession to the throne.

Over the years the distance between Kathmandu and Peking appreciably narrowed to facilitate more direct and intimate contact between the two. Hardly a decade passed after the conclusion of the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship when the China-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in Kathmandu on April 28, 1960. (Koirala was then the Prime Minister.) A little later, the two States concluded a boundary treaty on October 5, 1961. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Ch'en-yi, surely knew what he

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<sup>20</sup> Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 237.

the pot boiling. More important, so the argument seemed to run, Kathmandu could put to good use its warm relations with Peking.

The assessment was much too facile to suit the King's book, though. King Mahendra did not lack the political acumen to appreciate that the disturbed balance in the Himalayan region could not possibly be an unmixed blessing. As the *Sunday Times*, of London, observed in its issue of November 4, 1962: "As long as there was cold war between India and China, the Himalayan kingdoms were tempted to play one against another to get advantages and favours from both sides. But now that the war has become hot, a realization has grown among them that their own security and territorial integrity are gravely threatened by China."<sup>25</sup> For that matter, King Mahendra could ill afford to deceive himself by wishing away either the discontent of the people or the popular support that the Nepali Congress enjoyed.

Contrary to the regime's expectation, the resistance movement did not fizzle out. Kathmandu was wrong in its assessment for the simple reason that New Delhi's sympathetic attitude toward the Nepali Congress was one of the factors, and not *the only* factor, that sustained the Nepali Congress to defy the King's writ. Essentially it derived its strength from the people. That largely explains how the Nepali Congress activists, not long after the India-China conflict, could be at it again, albeit on a much reduced scale. Also, New Delhi took up at the diplomatic level the question of Koirala's release. The Indian government started to bring pressure to bear upon Kathmandu, within limits.

Meanwhile, Koirala had on his own initiated a dialogue with the Palace for a reapprochement that could eventually lead to a reasonable solution of the political crisis. King Mahendra's initial reaction to Koirala's gesture was quite favourable.<sup>26</sup> Several considerations influenced King

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Nepal Today* (the Nepali Congress journal published from Calcutta in the 'sixties) Vol. 6 No. 17, August 1, 1967, p. 1119.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed account see Chapter 4.

Mahendra in coming to the decision to respond to Koirala's request for a dialogue. The King had almost no reason not to take a dim view of men and events, his brave words for public consumption notwithstanding. All his political manipulations to give the kingdom a relatively stable, efficient and corruption-free government had so far gone to waste. He could do precious little to redeem his pledge to get the Nepalese out of the age-old miasma of poverty that petrified the body and brutalized the mind. Such being the state of affairs it was perhaps not unexpected that he should ask himself what went wrong with his plan and why.

The most unpleasant fact was that, since his take-over in December, 1960, a little more than half a decade had passed in which the people were obliged to put up with as many as 15 different governments without the benefit of rule by consent. King Mahendra could appreciate that this confirmed, other things besides, that the kingdom's political situation was in confusion. The economic horizon looked no less depressing. In spite of the rather liberal foreign aid—the largest chunk of which was forked out by India—the economy refused to look up. The promise of land reforms appeared to be a big hoax and agriculture continued to languish as pitably as ever.

At another level, relations between China and Nepal had since the commencement of the Chinese Cultural Revolution become a little too acrimonious to give comfort to the King. There had been more occasions than one when Kathmandu was exposed to a blast of Chinese bullying and superciliousness, for an idea of which reference might be made to China's "protest note" to Nepal in connection with the July, 1967 anti-Chinese demonstration in Kathmandu.

Among other things, the Chinese note said: "In its note of July 10, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of His Majesty's Government of Nepal made no mention of the truth of the recent anti-Chinese outrages in Nepal in an attempt to evade its responsibility and deny that the Nepalese Government has approved and supported this anti-Chinese incident ... For a long time the Nepalese Government has allowed US imperialism, Soviet revisionism and Indian reaction to indulge in wilful anti-Chinese activities on Nepalese soil ... The Nepalese

was talking about when he stated "on October 5, 1962, simultaneously with the crisis in Indo-Nepali relations, ... that in case any foreign army makes a foolhardy attempt to attack Nepal ... China will side with the Nepalese people." <sup>21</sup>

The resistance movement, however, continued unabated. In fact, it developed a certain intensity that began to tell on Kathmandu. King Mahendra could no longer maintain an unruffled posture. What he said in this connection amply revealed his anger and anxiety. In a message to the nation on the occasion of *Vijaya Dashami* (festival of the Triumph of Good over Evil) on October 8, 1962, King Mahendra said that "it is a matter for regret that even on this day of our great religious festival, I have to draw your attention repeatedly to the possibility of our age-old friendly relations with friendly country, India, being spoiled ... by the activities of elements engaged in obstructing the peaceful flow of Nepalese life on the strength of their having a safe haven in India."

Worse still, the King complained, "not satisfied with getting shelter and encouragement from India, those anti-national elements have gone so far as to hate the happy relations subsisting between the peoples of the two countries." That being so, he wanted all concerned to appreciate "that this is sheer meanness ... India too should understand this because this has become as clear as crystal before the world... This is not a thing to be done by one friend to another. Facts demand that India should revise her thinking on this matter from the standpoint of the welfare of both the countries." <sup>22</sup>

The regime did not scruple to do whatever might quash the resistance movement. Still the movement caused big cracks in the kingdom's internal security arrangement, compelling the administration to stretch its resources to the utmost. At one point, the scope and intensity of the resistance movement alarmed King Mahendra so much that he told some of the more trusted members of his Council of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>22</sup> King Mahendra, *Proclamations, etc.*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

Ministers<sup>23</sup>, particularly the panchayat theoreticians Tulsi Giri and Viswabandhu Thapa, that he would release Koirala and start a dialogue with him for the resolution of the crisis.

At any rate that is what Viswabandhu told me in the course of a long conversation I had with him on June 7, 1973 during my one-week visit to Kathmandu.<sup>24</sup> He also told me that the two of them (Tulsi Giri and himself) persuaded the King to defer his move for a fortnight and give them an opportunity to set things right. The India-China border war in the latter half of October, 1962 came to their rescue, said Viswabandhu. The upshot was, New Delhi got the acting Nepali Congress president Subarna Shumsher to call off the resistance movement. When I asked what encouraged him to believe that the resistance movement could be suppressed within a fortnight, Viswabandhu was candid enough to admit that it was just a gamble. He did not want to concede victory to Koirala. Viswabandhu, however, did not give any credence to Tulsi Giri's claim that the latter had foreknowledge of the Chinese aggression.

India's discomfiture at the hands of the Chinese in the fall of 1962 was generally believed to have given Kathmandu an additional leverage in dealing with the insurgency. The reckoning was that a humbled India would be too busy putting its own affairs straight to be of any help to the Nepali Congress. Not a few Kathmandu watchers seemed to infer that the aftermath of the Chinese aggression had invalidated most of the old equations.

The area of agreement between Peking and Kathmandu widened considerably. Along with this, the volume of China's actual and promised aid and trade increased. All this indicated a shift in Nepal's post-Second World War policy of one window on the world outside—New Delhi. The expectation was that in the given circumstances India-based Nepali Congress activists would no longer be able to keep

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<sup>23</sup> King Mahendra and Tulsi Giri were Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the Council of Ministers, while Vishwabandhu Thapa held the Home Panchayats and National Guidance portfolio.

<sup>24</sup> This is recorded in my Diary.

the pot boiling. More important, so the argument seemed to run, Kathmandu could put to good use its warm relations with Peking.

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The most unpleasant fact was that, since his take-over in December, 1960, a little more than half a decade had passed in which the people were obliged to put up with as many as 15 different governments without the benefit of rule by consent. King Mahendra could appreciate that this confirmed, other things besides, that the kingdom's political situation was in confusion. The economic horizon looked no less depressing. In spite of the rather liberal foreign aid—the largest chunk of which was forked out by India—the economy refused to look up. The promise of land reforms appeared to be a big hoax and agriculture continued to languish as pitably as ever.

At another level, relations between China and Nepal had since the commencement of the Chinese Cultural Revolution become a little too acrimonious to give comfort to the King. There had been more occasions than one when Kathmandu was exposed to a blast of Chinese bullying and superciliousness, for an idea of which reference might be made to China's "protest note" to Nepal in connection with the July, 1967 anti-Chinese demonstration in Kathmandu.

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press has also carried a large number of anti-Chinese articles viciously attacking China's great Cultural Revolution and even brazenly insulting Chairman Mao... If the Nepalese side does not care for the friendship, which has taken long time to build between China and Nepal but allows imperialism, revisionism and reaction to indulge in their evil ways in Nepal or even tails after them in opposing China, then the Nepalese Government must bear full responsibility for all the serious consequences arising there from.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, the phase of Chinese diplomacy which helped Kathmandu in its dealings with New Delhi was over, in any case for the time being. To clothe itself suitably to face the blizzard from across the northern heights of the Himalayas, Kathmandu realized that it was necessary to mend its fences with New Delhi. The compulsions of both geopolitics and economics—nearly 95 per cent of Nepal's economic activities were connected with India—were too real to be ignored. It was no secret to King Mahendra that New Delhi was not an uninterested observer so far as Koirala's release was concerned. Evidently, Koirala's indefinite detention without any charge or trial was proving to be a political embarrassment. Every other consideration apart, the Nepali Congress found in an incarcerated Koirala the biggest incentive to stoke up the resistance movement. Then there was the growing volume of external intercession, India apart, for Koirala's release.

But the dialogue that had commenced between King Mahendra and Koirala was suddenly broken off by the former. Of the many reasons three may be mentioned: (a) the King took a pique against Girija Prasad, who was acting as the go-between suspecting that the latter had gone back on his word not to divulge anything about the dialogue; (b) Subarna Shumsher's apparent double-dealing, which eventually compelled Koirala to disoblige the King; and (c) New Delhi's meddlesomeness. To set the record straight, it needs to be mentioned that King Mahendra had told

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Tribhuvan Nath, *The Nepalese Dilemma 1960-74*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 513-516.



Girija that the Nepali Congress should adopt a conciliatory resolution that would save the face of both the king and Koirala and that it must also rescind its May, 1967 resolution demanding the election of a Constituent Assembly to determine the country's system of polity.

But the resolution, the draft of which had been approved by the King, which the Nepali Congress adopted at the instance of its acting president Subarna Shumsher was nothing if not a complete sell-out. At a meeting in Calcutta on May 15, 1978 the Nepali Congress passed a resolution saying, among other things, that the party "in supersession of its political resolution of May, 1967, and reasserting its faith in the democratic ideal under the leadership of the King, hereby resolves to offer its fullest and loyal cooperation to His Majesty the King ... further resolves to extend its cooperation in the working of the present Constitution of Nepal."<sup>28</sup> Shorn of verbiage, Subarna Shumsher announced the legitimization of all that the King had done since December 15, 1960.

The King no doubt was happy at the turn of events—he got more than what he had not even dreamed of. But the Nepali Congress activists felt that they had been let down; and Koirala surely had no reason to hail the resolution as a triumphant achievement. There was another side to this. New Delhi, which took achieve interest in the matter of Koirala's release, took its cue from that resolution.

On September 27, 1968 India's Ambassador to Nepal, Raj Bahadur, wrote a clandestine letter<sup>29</sup> to Koirala in prison. A careful reading of the letter would indicate that the Indian Ambassador was expecting Koirala's support to Subarna Shumsher's resolution which Koirala refused to do, saying that being in bondage he was in no position to exercise his independent judgement. Koirala's refusal to endorse the resolution made the King furious and he told Girija that his brother would be left to rot in prison indefinitely.

It is another matter that after his release from prison

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix C for a full text of the resolution.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix D for the letter.

Koirala chose not to desert his friend and colleague Subarna Shumsher. In fact Koirala is on record with the statement, which he made to journalists immediately after his release on October 30, 1968, that Subarna Shumsher's statement "was for national consolidation, and in the interest of the nation. According to the objective conditions obtaining today, I have no doubt that Subarna did the right thing. As a democrat and as a loyal colleague, I do support Subarna's statement."<sup>30</sup>

Inscrutable are the ways of Providence's still more so were those of King Mahendra. Although Koirala declined to sign the surrender deed and thus implicitly admit that the Nepali Congress had been wrong in its attitude toward the regime, the King ordered his unconditional release on October 30, 1968.

It is a safe guess that Koirala and his close associate Ganesh Man Singh were not released because the King had grown tired of their continuing incarceration. They were freed because he had other ideas. Having tried and found wanting various methods and almost every available politician to make the panchayat system work, the King felt the need to give the people something to look forward to. Enough evidence, circumstantial and otherwise, was there to suggest that the release was meant to be interpreted as a small beginning in the direction of political liberalization. An impression gained currency that the people's men and the King would start a real dialogue with a view to preventing the nation from dissipating its energy in debating whether panchayat system was the best that the country deserved.

The euphoria did not last long. Instead of a dialogue a spate of harsh recriminations ensued largely from the King's studied refusal to see things in their right perspective. Koirala had no sooner come out of prison than he made it quite clear that he would pick up the threads. None were left in doubt about the fact that he was not an extinct volcano, that he meant to hold the field. His words and actions spoke volumes for his determination to continue the struggle for democracy. At the same time, he made use of every

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Tribhuvan Nath *op. cit.*, p. 510.

possible channel, both private and public, to communicate his desire for a just and principled understanding with the Palace. His stand was that both the King and the people must cooperate to bring about the desired socio-economic changes in order that Nepal might catch up with the times, that it might get a chance to live. And, if Nepal lived neither the people nor the King would die.

The former Prime Minister also made repeated efforts to meet the King and talk things over with him, but to no avail. Those that had lived on the fat of the land since the introduction of the panchayat system took fright. Vested interests, political and economic, saw red; and they made the place too hot for Koirala. What with the hostility of the Palace and the threat of re-arrest hanging over him, Koirala fled the country and took refuge in India. He did not, of course, abandon the line of reconciliation with the Palace on the basis of restoration of the people's fundamental rights. The pity is that the King spurned all his offers of cooperation, being convinced that the latter acted from ulterior motives. This left Koirala with no alternative but to rekindle the fire of insurgency. Even as he did it, he kept the door open for a rapprochement with the Palace.

The Himalayan kingdom completed a decade's existence under the partyless panchayat system on December, 16 1970. This marked the beginning of another decade which the Nepalese were exhorted to turn into a "decade of economic prosperity." While drawing a balance-sheet of the performance of the panchayat polity since December, 1969 King Mahendra cautioned the people not to expect plain sailing in the days to come, particularly because the economy had not yet picked up. He did not say that in so many words, but that was what he meant.

King Mahendra, of course, had a different picture to paint when it came to the question of politics. Without any equivocation, he told the Nepalese with all the exphasis at his command that the panchayat system was not the next best substitute for something better still. The system was there in its own right; it was there because it alone could help the people to break into the sunlit valley of peace, progress and plenty.

The significant aspect of the King's assessment of the "panchayat decade" was not the confidence that it exuded in regard to the political scene. Rather, the important point was its note of diffidence concerning the economy. It did not require an insider's knowledge to grasp the import of King Mahendra's reference to the economic conditions. The economy was beset with pernicious problems that were many and not one to get an idea of which it is not necessary to hark back to the days when the Ranas had the run of the land. The scope of inquiry may be restricted to the period between the royal take-over and the date. And what do we find? A depressing account of neglect, mismanagement and wasted opportunities.

Not that no efforts were made to get Nepal into the swing of planned economic development. Economic planning had been introduced in the late fifties. But it was woefully inadequate to meet even moderately the demands of modernizing a feudal economy. In the period between the completion of the first Five-Year Plan in 1961 (King Mahendra stifled the democratic experiment in 1960) and the termination of the fourth Five-Year Plan in 1970 the growth rate did not register any noticeable increase. The economic policy formulators were aware that this would not change appreciably during the five years of the Rs. 354-crore fourth Plan, which commenced in July, 1970. That the problem of politics, which had been building up over the years since 1960, was one of the major factors that inhibited the process of development was beyond dispute. It was easy to dismiss as misfits all those who disagreed with the philosophy of panchayat politics. It was also easy in the given context to establish that the partyless panchayat system was a unique experiment in participatory democracy. But that would not negate the fact that Nepal lay prostrate in a state of political stasis.

A power-drunk monarch was taking the country along a path that led nowhere. Koirala believed. He also believed that nothing but force could bring the King to reason. The liberation struggle in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) seemed to have strengthened his belief. Reference might be made in this connection to a personal letter he wrote me on

August 13, 1971. In his own words, "the situation in Nepal continues to be as usual ... the King is still dictating there and we have yet not acquired means to cut him down to size—which you know, is really very small. Political situation is favourable to us, but it is of no consequence against military dictatorship, which has to be met not politically but militarily. Bangladesh situation is analogous ... in a situation that is developing you can't survive unless you know how to wield arms collectively for your ideal or individually for your honour."<sup>31</sup>

The decade-long experiment with the panchayat system brought the country nowhere near economic salvation or political stability. If rule by coercion at all levels is the characteristic feature of authoritarianism and justiciable Fundamental Rights, the rule of Law and constitutional government are the distinctive features of democracy, King Mahendra's regime provided a glaring instance of the former. No amount of dialectical exercise could alter the fact that the partyless panchayat democracy was no answer to Nepal's search for a stable, dynamic and representative system of polity. Devised as a mechanism to fortify the Palace as the exclusive source of all power it could not possibly be an effective tool of socio-economic engineering that the country required.

What Jayaprakash Narayan said in this regard would illustrate the point. Jayaprakash went to Kathmandu in the latter half of the 'sixties to intercede with King Mahendra for the release of Koirala, who had been taken ill seriously in prison. He discussed with King the question of Koirala's release and related political issue.

In the course of a conversation with me in Calcutta on December 29, 1973 Jayaprakash said :

"I tried to argue with the King about the lack of powers, absence of powers that the panchayat institutions had in the State. Earlier I had met Giri (Tulsi Giri, the then Prime Minister,) and he said that the monarchy was just like the Presidentship of the US.

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix E for the text of the letter.

I was shocked at that coming from the Prime Minister of Nepal. I said that the President of the US is elected by the people, whereas the King is a hereditary ruler. How can you compare the two? He had not thought of that, obviously. I tried to tell the King that monarchy is essential but monarchy must divest itself, gradually as the situation matures, of all the powers as it has. All powers must go to the people. I said my understanding is that the people are sovereign whatever the Nepalese monarchical tradition might say. As a matter of fact, I said that this is what, even before the French revolution, used to be said about the Divine Rights of the kings, etc. He would not budge from his point of view and it seemed that he had made up his mind to keep B.P. in prison indefinitely. As a matter of fact, when B.P. was released it came as a surprise to me.

“During that period when B.P. was in jail King Mahendra visited India several times. Even after my talks with him (this refers to the Kathmandu talks) I used to meet him, discuss with him and suggest a few things to him. I believe in my talks with him in Kathmandu as well as here, I did point to the glaring defects of the Rashtriya Panchayat (Nepal’s supreme legislature) and the panchayati system. He said—which Giri also had told me—that the system ‘we are practising is what you have been preaching. This is what you have written about and you should be happy that we are following you.’ I said no, I am not happy, because this is just the outward shell. The substance is not there, unless you have some powers given, some rights given to the people. Why should the Prime Minister be dismissed by the King. The Prime Minister has to be the man, who commands a majority and as long as he commands a majority he can’t be dismissed. But this is what you have in the Constitution. May be in language even the British Constitution which is unwritten might say something like this, but in practice it is not so.

“Whenever I raised this question he was very non-committal and very unhelpful. And I came to the

conclusion, here was a man who lived in the seventeenth century, perhaps, and failed to understand the world, and nothing could be done about it.”<sup>32</sup>

As the Bangladesh liberation struggle fast approached a denouement, Koirala sought to draw the world's attention to the problem of Nepal. With Chandra Shekhar<sup>33</sup> as a co-convenor, Koirala proposed to hold a seminar on Nepal in the third week of December 1971, in Delhi. Explaining the purpose of the seminar in a personal letter to me on October 15, 1971 he said that the people of Nepal “to say the least, live in a veritable hell of tyranny, exploitation and misery.”<sup>34</sup>

The letter went on to say: “Nepal holds at the same time a very strategic position in the sub-continent of South Asia and if such a state of affairs continues ... it will spell ruin for the whole area. On the revival of democracy and socialism, as I have come to believe, depends peace and prosperity in Asia ... I am listing below some of the issues which we think could be discussed at the seminar :

1. Legitimacy of Panchayat Democracy (the political system in vogue in Nepal).
2. Profile of the political process.
3. Profile of exploitation.
4. Methodology of Change.
5. International forces and status of the Nepalese polity.

“The plan is to invite leaders of all national political parties and eminent academicians. We are also thinking of inviting some selected leaders from different countries of the world to participate in the seminar.”

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<sup>32</sup> Author-Jayaprakash Narayan taped conversation, December 29 1973, Calcutta. The tape of conversation is in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute Calcutta.

<sup>33</sup> Then a Congress member of the Rajya Sabha, Chandra Shekhar later became the President of the Janata Party.

In the course of the letter Koirala also touched on the tactical line that I had suggested to him as well propounded in my writings. The proposition was that in the given context the Nepali Congress should give up the path of insurgency and strive for a rapprochement with the Palace on the basis of certain well-defined principles. This might enable the Nepali Congress to come out of the blind alley it had been forced into. Referring to this, Koirala said: "A compromise between the King and the democratic forces, however desirable, seems unattainable due to the intransigence of the former. Therefore, your thesis would be irrelevant in the present context."

Koirala inquired whether I could attend the proposed seminar. He also inquired if I had any suggestion to offer regarding the issues the seminar proposed to discuss and also whether it would be judicious in the given conditions to hold the seminar at all.

In my reply, on October 30, 1971, to his letter I said :

"I will jot down a few suggestions that occur to me readily, but they must not in any way influence your decision in the matter. Before I proceed further, let me record in no uncertain terms that I am in complete agreement with your proposed line of action.

"It appears that there are three (two major and one minor) issues of South Asian politics which have their temporary locale in India but which are rooted in three neighbouring States—Tibet, Bangladesh and Nepal. Of these, Nepal, for historical and other reasons, stands in a class by itself. Also, on each of these issues the government of India has its policy or, if you like, non-policy. The issues you have suggested for discussion at the seminar I do not find much to disagree with. Of course these could be suitably defined and, if necessary, reformulated to emphasize on put in a low key the point or points that might be thought advisable.

"That brings me to something about which a sudden doubt came to my mind. I wonder if it would not be convenient to wait until the Bangladesh situation gets a



little less fuzzy. The apprehension just cannot be wished away that the massive anti-India lobby in the West as well as in China would not exploit the seminar as just another example of India's interfering policy toward its neighbours. Of course, it would be another matter for Delhi, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi does not feel particularly embarrassed by the proposed seminar. Therefore, may I take the liberty of suggesting that Delhi be sounded before a firm decision is arrived at? I hope I have been able to convey my thoughts to you. Having said all this I would hasten to repeat that if the seminar is held I should most gladly like to participate."

In his reply, of November 11, 1971, Koirala said: "I entirely agree with your suggestion about the dates of the seminar. I am, therefore, postponing it till the end of February. I shall write to you again when the dates are finally decided. I hope you will keep yourself free for the seminar."<sup>35</sup>

King Mahendra could not possibly have any earthly reason to feel elated by the successful culmination of the Bangladesh liberation struggle. It was crystal-clear that the people's triumph in Bangladesh would be a great fillip to the Nepali Congress insurgents in Nepal. Koirala did not mask his feelings while speaking at the International Conference on Bangladesh, the moving spirit behind which was Jayaprakash Narayan, held in New Delhi in the third week of September 1971. In unambiguous language he said: "If the people of Bangladesh go down fighting and if the light is extinguished there, our light in Nepal will also go out. We in Nepal know that if Bangladesh people win, half of our struggle will have been won already."<sup>36</sup> And what was the Nepalese regime's reaction to the Bangladesh liberation struggle? If the *Rising Nepal*, a Nepalese government-owned English daily, knew what it was talking about, the Pakistan government's handling of the Bangladesh freedom

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<sup>35</sup> See Appendix G for the letter.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1977, p. 187.

movement deserved to be defended. As the *Rising Nepal* put it, Pakistan's approach to the problem only confirmed the historical fact that "anywhere and at any time the States have treated secessionist cases with heavy laws."<sup>37</sup>

No mistaking, Kathmandu was somewhat apprehensive that the Bangladesh people's victory would encourage, on the one hand, the Nepali Congress to intensify the struggle and, on the other, the Indian government to pursue more vigorously the question of the release of Koirala and his associates. Circumstantial evidence would suggest that King Mahendra could feel the impact of the birth of Bangladesh which had renewed hopes of the Nepali Congress. Other instances apart, his last Constitution Day (which commemorates the introduction of the partyless panchayat system message on December 16, 1971 gave the people a hint of it. In the course of his message the King admitted that "our system has room for reforms."<sup>38</sup>

The import of this could be easily appreciated if we recalled his earlier assertion that the panchayat system was the kingdom's irrevocable response to the challenge of the times and that it had no place for the man who questioned this. Of course, the King's Constitution Day communication also carried a note of warning that the "fundamentals" of the panchayat system admitted of no change. Now what was this panchayat system that the Palace and its unquestioning defenders claimed as the quintessence of all that was wise, virtuous and just? Did it meet the people's urge for representative government. For that matter, did it enable the regime to come even within a measurable distance of getting to grips with the awesome problem of poverty.

For an answer, one had only to take a hard look at the realities of Nepalese life. There was no getting away from the fact that the system had been an unmixed evil, without either the saving grade of benevolent authoritarianism, though otherwise despicable, or the minimal virtue of government by consent. It would be an exercise in sophistry

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Bhola Chatterji, Nepalese Panchayats have room for reforms," *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta); 15 January 1972.

to suggest that the survival itself of the panchayat system amply proved its utility. The system had survived not because it was equipped to find a solution to the basic socio-economic problems that confronted Nepal. It existed because it was answerable to none but the King and he had a use for it. As one of Nepal's leading academics, who was by no means an unsympathetic critic of the regime, put it, "the strength of the system was much in evidence not in its proclaimed fundamentals or capabilities, but in the identification of the King's personality with the system. Nor does it seem that the system, which was organizationally dysfunctional and ideologically insipid, could make a headway in economic and political fields."<sup>39</sup>

At the time partyless panchayat system was foisted on the people, King Mahendra's primary concern was to forge a political structure that would guarantee his remaining the absolute source of power in the land. The concept of a democratic polity with constitutional monarchy that conditioned the political thinking of the Nepali Congress was something that he just would not countenance. Admittedly, King Mahendra did not fail in his mission. It was just that the success had been only to the extent of saving his throne. None would be so insensate as to suggest that he also succeeded in the process in ensuring the integrity and onward march of the Nepalese society. Ever since the King took over, the thought uppermost in his mind was that the one factor which must remain constant, even when every other factor in the equation would change with time, was his continuance as the ultimate source of power. A decade after democracy was laid to rest and about three weeks before King Mahendra's premature death the assessment of his endeavours to venture into a new political path for his kingdom was that the "partyless panchayat system—basically constitutional window-dressing for a royal dictatorship—is modelled in part on the tiered democracy which failed to work in Pakistan during the region of Ayub Khan."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Baral, *op.cit.*, p. 217

<sup>40</sup> T.D. Allman, "Nepal's Options Reduced by India's Victory," *The Guardian* (Manchester), January, 5, 1972.

King Mahendra quit the stage on January 31, 1972 and an aggrieved Kathmandu hastened to repeat: "Long live the King." Few grudged Kathmandu its wishes, but none could assure the institution of monarchy its survival as well as the freedom to continue working the scheme of politics it had pursued until yesterday. Most Nepalese only hoped that the new man at the helm, King Birendra, unlike the Bourbons, had learnt from experience that the monarchy could not be insulated against the winds of change.

The Establishment in Kathmandu, however, seemed to have its head in the clouds. The refrain that everything was all right in the land had an element of unreality that was matched only by the colour-blind refusal to admit the existence of any colour other than what was perceived. That things had gone grievously wrong in Nepal was too patent to be wished away. Notwithstanding that they were won't to go at it hammer and tongs to prove that the panchayat system was the Alladdin's Lamp that would get the Nepalese all the good things of life and heaven too, the Himalayan kingdom's political life showed no end of disquieting symptoms.

The system of politics without political parties, the *sine qua non* of the late King Mahendra's concept of the perfect society the Nepalese deserved, had bred partisan politics of a more corrosive nature than what it sought to replace. Other things besides, the Nepalese economy was no exception to the elementary rule that a country's politics also dominates its economics. Only the irrationally committed would deny that the Nepalese economy was afflicted with a consumptive malady. At every level of society, the people's discontent was much deeper than what the Establishment would admit. Abundant evidence of which reached the outside world in spite of the regime's suffocating control over news media and other channels of information. The state of the country's development activity could be gleaned from the simple but essential fact that there were hardly two engineers and three doctors for every hundred thousand Nepalese.

If this is not sufficiently illustrative, we might turn to a knowledgeable Nepalese economist like Prakash C. Lohani.

According to Lohani, "it does not take one to be a serious economist to note that in almost all areas of governmental activity in Nepal, there is a wide gap between policy and action ... Indeed, one is even tempted to say that, in Nepal, there is no goal-oriented national organization functioning at the present. To expect economic growth, then, is not a promising possibility."<sup>41</sup>

That was the state of affairs, notwithstanding that Nepal had already gone through a decade of political experimentation under King Mahendra's absolutely direct superintendence. And, a decade is not a measly period of time for one not to be excused if one were to scrutinize the results the panchayat system produced. But before that a more important question (which was perfectly relevant even at that distance of time because the country's malaise was directly traceable to it) would have to be answered: Why did King Mahendra put the clock back in December 1960? Did the Koirala government endanger the security of the State as the Palace complained. Was Prime Minister Koirala guilty of such outrageous conduct that it left the King with no alternative to the course he decided to follow? An emphatic one-word answer would be: "No". Even the Establishment would no longer repeat the accusations that had been levelled against Koirala. For King Mahendra himself gave a lie to that some eight years later when he unconditionally released Koirala and his colleagues, withdrew all prohibitory injunctions on a number of Nepali Congress activists, who had escaped arrest and, above all, initiated a dialogue with the former Prime Minister.

This does not mean that Koirala had no faults. His basic faults were two: First, he was determined to carry out the pledges his party had given to the people and which it reaffirmed at its seventh National Conference in May, 1960. Secondly, Koirala got the word across that the institution of monarchy must adjust itself to the needs of the times. In other words, the Palace would have to, as the 1959 Constitution stipulated, conform to the principles of constitutional monarchy. The Crown must not stand between the people

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted By Baral, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

and their elected representatives. That the people had to be robbed of their right to government by consent, which they had earned for themselves through decades of struggle, suffering and sacrifice and that Koirala and his numerous colleagues had to suffer imprisonment and brutalities was because of King Mahendra's lust for unbridled power. On the day King Birendra succeeded to the throne, Kathmandu appeared to have forgotten that an injustice did not acquire the right to perpetuate itself just because it had been suffered for a period of time.

The eldest son of the late King Mahendra, the 26-year-old Birendra, succeeded to the throne on January 31, 1972. Almost the entire nation wished him good luck, not excluding Koirala, the man whom the young King's deceased father envied most and feared not a little. Former Prime Minister Koirala, who had raised the banner of revolt against King Mahendra, resolved to bury the hatchet and not without reason. The expectation was that the new monarch would do justice to the people's long-felt need for change. King Birendra's background of modern education that he had acquired at Eton, Harvard and Tokyo and his apparent preference for liberal political ideas induced Koirala to believe that he might not follow in his predecessor's footsteps. Koirala extended his hand of cooperation to King Birendra in the hope that past deposits of political oppression and economic neglect, which had almost choked up the nation's arteries, would now be removed and a process of political liberalization initiated.

There was a pinpoint of light in the otherwise gloomy political environment. Or so it seemed. Those who had suffered most all these years thought that the days of political unrest, economic uncertainty and of arbitrary rule would be over sooner than some might imagine. Their belief was that King Birendra would not be shy of changing the direction and orientation of the panchayat system and that the Nepalese society would no longer stay framed in immobility. The conclusion was not drawn with nothing more substantial to go on than plain wishful thinking. Early indications seemed to suggest that King Birendra's style of politics was not quite a carbon copy of his father's.

Addressing the nation on February 19, 1972, the occasion being the "National Democracy Day" which commemorated the Nepali Congress-led 1950-51 revolution, King Birendra briefly spelt out for the first time since his assumption of power the policy he intended to follow and it had bearing on the country's internal as well as external affairs. He asked the people not to indulge in "romanticized daydreams". Instead they should get down to brass-tacks and address themselves to the task of building a better and prosperous Nepal. The emphasis, the King made it clear, must be on "cohesion rather than dissension, diligence and productive employment rather than cliches and platitudes".

But this was neither the beginning nor the most significant aspect of the royal speech. The pag on which King Birendra had decided to hang his story on that occasion was something different. He touched on Non-alignment and the necessity of relations between nations being governed by the philosophy of "live and let live". Not many Nepalese disputed the relevance of Non-alignment to their country. They did realize that the Himalayan kingdom, sandwiched as it was between two giant neighbours, had few options to chose from so far as its international policy was concerned. The country's geopolitical realities precluded it from exercising any freedom of choice, if one was talking about its relations with the outside world. Indeed, it was all for the best that Nepal should continue to hinge its foreign policy on Non-alignment. No Nepalese would have differed with King Birendra on that count.

The real import of the King's address could be located elsewhere. The focus of his pronouncement was the stress on the panchayat system. What he wanted to drive home to the Nepalese was that the system had not outlived its utility. Rather it was a "dynamic system capable of evolutionary growth and development". This explained why, according to King Birendra, the need of the hour was to consolidate the gains the panchayat polity had already achieved and to strengthen the foundation on which it stood. At this point, it perhaps occurred to him that the people of Nepal, by and large, were in no mood to acquiesce in the claim that the panchayat system was the ideal

substitute for what "National Democracy Day" truly signified. After all, it only recalled the suffering and sacrifice of the men who gave their best to rid the country of Rana autocracy, which cleared the decks for the Nepalese to have the government of their choice. And King Birendra hinted that he did not exclude the possibility that every Nepalese might not see eye to eye with him on all counts. For them he held out a hope that the panchayat "system will respond to changing times through suitable improvements".<sup>42</sup> The people set great store by this, for they just dreaded to be out in their calculations. Most Nepalese persuaded themselves not to believe that the King, had spoken the word Humpty Dumpty fashion, to mean what he chose and not what it really ought to.

The impression that King Birendra was not uncompromisingly committed to the arbitrary political system did not linger long, however. Lest he should be misunderstood he took the earliest opportunity to nip in the bud the speculation that he had wide-ranging political reforms in mind. So far as he was concerned, he did not think that the panchayat system was not good enough to meet the challenge of change. This was the essential part of his understanding of the situation, notwithstanding the occasional liberal note that he continued to strike. The King's utterances and actions soon nullified his earlier stance, conveying the message that the partyless panchayat system was immutable, that the sweet reasonableness of his mien should not be taken to mean that he would deflect from the course of politics his father had charted out. He was, in fact, very much a chip of the old block.

The mood of expectancy soon gave way to despondency — and anger. Committed supporters of the panchayat system became its open critics. For instance, Surya Bahadur Thapa, who had once faithfully served in the cause of the panchayat system as King Mahendra's Prime Minister (and who became Prime Minister later under King Birendra too)

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<sup>42</sup> His Majesty King Birendra, *Speeches, Proclamations and Messages*, Department of Information, Ministry of Communications, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, 1975, p. 55.



railed at the regime with unprecedented vehemence. In May, 1972 he issued a statement accusing the government of Prime Minister Kirtinidhi Bista of malfeasance and misfeasance. His contention was that the government had allowed itself to be held captive by a "coterie of Palace secretaries". It was also alleged that the effective control of the levers of power was monopolized between the Palace secretaries and Singha Durbar (government secretariat), there being a sort of "diarchical rule" in Nepal. According to Thapa, the country faced the man-size problem of politics, which could be solved only on the basis of thorough reconstruction of the panchayat system, leading to a widening of the base of power. This was the irreducible minimum, said Thapa, that might give Nepal a "responsible government."<sup>43</sup>

A little later K.I. Singh, another former Prime Minister, went on record with this statement: "I had tried to root out corruption. When I began chasing corruption I arrived at the gates of the Royal Palace and suddenly I was sacked."<sup>44</sup> And Rishikesh Shaha, who was a former Minister and Ambassador to the US and also credited with having drafted the panchayat constitution, observed that the partyless panchayat system should be replaced by a multi-party system of government and that the constitution of the country must be worked "in accordance with the wishes of the people as expressed through the representative elected by them on the basis of adult suffrage."<sup>45</sup>

Even before King Birendra had a couple of weeks to go to completed his first one hundred days on the throne, disquieting news from the cool heights of Kathmandu started reaching the outside world. Reports of police firing on peasants agitating for land percolated through from Morang district. This, of course, was the tip of the iceberg nine-tenths of which remained submerged. Also, the students of Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University (which is the only seat of higher education in Nepal) went on the war-path. It all started with the students confronting the authorities

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<sup>43</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), May 14, 1972.

<sup>44</sup> *The Hindu* (Madras), October 5, 1975.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

with demands which included the right to participate in politics, restructuring of the country's "new education plan", "release of political prisoners and restoration of freedom of the Press." The students acted in unison, having sponsored a joint "Action Committee" that represented the Nepali Congress, as well as the pro-Moscow and Pro-Peking Communist Parties.

As was to be expected, the government reacted vigorously. Not only did it summarily reject the Action Committee's demands, it also rusticated a large number of students. When the striking students (Tribhuvan University students had never before been on strike) refused to dismantle the barricade, the police briskly intervened to make the students "behave". The incident provoked even Surya Prasad Upadhyay (one-time Nepali Congress leader and former Home Minister of the deposed B.P. Koirala Cabinet), who was not particularly known for radical views, to join hands with the Secretary of the banned pro-Moscow Communist Party, K.J. Raymajhi, to issue a statement regretting the "repressive measures taken to suppress the peaceful agitation of students."<sup>46</sup>

It was clear as daylight that the critics of the regime, whether former Prime Ministers, Rastriya Panchayat (supreme legislature) members or students, had not been tilting at windmills. Their action reflected a conscious urge of the people for an escape from the stifling political atmosphere. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain all that happened, particularly the unity, even though it was time-bound and restricted to a limited purpose that had been achieved by the political elements known for their mutually conflicting ideologies. Even at the risk of repeating the obvious, the yearning for change in the panchayat system had been building up over the years. But there was little chance of its fulfilment so long as King Mahendra remained at the helm. The situation took a different turn when King Birendra assumed the reins of government, assuring the

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<sup>46</sup> Bhola Chatterji, "Nepal on the Drift", *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), September 3, 1972.

people that they could count on him to initiate a process of liberalization of the regime.

But Man cannot live by promise alone and the Nepalese was no exception. Nothing that the King did indicated that his promise was intended to be acted upon, that the authoritarian system would be reconstituted to accommodate the people's desire for broadening of the power base, so that the humble and the lowly might hear an echo of their voice in the nation's highest political forum, where decisions were made.

Replying to a public reception at Pokhara on October 28, 1972 (this was his first public speech outside Kathmandu) King Birendra stated that "the challenge of our times in the context of this country verges on two basic exigencies. They are survival of the nation and speedy economic advancement. Partisanship in Nepal is bound to erode national cohesion, that is why partylessness becomes, in the political arena ... a *sine qua non* for us ... It is my conviction that ... this polity has proved its worth both in safeguarding our national identity as well as in bringing about peaceful social and economic change."<sup>47</sup>

This was precisely what Koirala and countless other Nepalese strongly disputed. They held that Nepal's problems, political as well as economic, could be traced to nowhere but the partyless panchayat system, which did not derive its sanction from the people. The essence of their argument was that, unless the people could be encouraged to identify themselves with the system of polity, there would be no escape from the confusion and conflict that had played the devil with the country's political and economic life over the years. The Disappointing performance of the economy and almost total neglect of the question of land reforms (nearly 90 per cent of the people depended on land), had added a cutting edge to the acute problem of poverty. The country had already gone through three Five-Year Plans and still the economy refused to look up. It was pointed out that the on-going Rs. 260-crore (Nepali) Fourth Plan, granting its successful implementation, would

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<sup>47</sup> King Birendra, *Speeches, Proclamations etc., op. cit.*, p. 47.

not bring about any appreciable change. Koirala emphasized that Nepal's problem of economic development had also a political aspect. If the necessity of the people's participation in the process of development was recognized, it would then become imperative to generate such a political climate as might enthrall them not to hold back their hands.

This was not to be. Koirala's eagerness for a negotiated resolution of the problem notwithstanding, the compulsions of the prevalent situation left him with no alternative but to resort once again to direct confrontation with the Palace. What with King Birendra's refusal to listen to reason and the Nepali Congress radicals' insistence on direct action, Koirala had to allow his men to take up arms. But he could not, being in exile, which imposed severe restrictions on his movement and resources, enlarge the scope of the insurgency to the extent it might have turned the scales in his favour. Unlike Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which enjoyed the open sympathy and material support of a number of sovereign States, Koirala was in an immensely disadvantageous position. He enjoyed no sovereign State's, not even India's patronage, political or otherwise.

True, he had the sympathy and support of men like Jayaprakash Narayan and Chandra Shekhar as well as of the Socialists. But the Indian government's attitude was far from permissive. This sharply contrasted with New Delhi's policy at the time of the 1950-51 resolution, needless to say. Anybody could see for himself that the Indian government did not allow the Nepali Congress activists to do anything that might endanger the Kingdom's security. Koirala's movements were no secret to the authorities, for government security men were posted at his Varanasi residence and they kept him company round the clock. Wherever he went, even within Varanasi itself, security men accompanied him. New Delhi also had interdicted any political activity by the Nepali Congress within 500 miles from the India-Nepal border. Nevertheless, the Nepali Congress insurgents created a rather difficult situation in eastern Nepal, particularly in the Terai region that runs almost parallel to the India-Nepal border between Darjeeling in

West Bengal and Joghani in Bihar. As the tempo of guerilla activity increased Kathmandu made a noise about it.

More, to counterbalance New Delhi's alleged support and succour to the Nepali Congress, the regime played on the China factor in the India-Nepal-China equation. That evidently was not to the dislike of China. For instance, at a Peking banquet given in honour of the visiting Nepalese Prime Minister, Kirtinidhi Bista, on November 16, 1972, Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai (now respelt as Zhou Enlai) admired the Himalayan Kingdom for "holding firm in the face of external pressure and depending the country's national independence and dignity." What he said later was, however, the keynote of the message he sought to get across. In a bristly language the Chinese Prime Minister said: "We resolutely support the people of Nepal and the other people of the world in their just struggle against foreign interference and in defence of their independence and sovereignty."<sup>48</sup>

Viewed against the background of India's role in the Bangladesh liberation struggle, disturbed India-China relations, New Delhi-Moscow understanding and Koirala's presence in India, Chou En-lai's abrasive statement could not possibly be given more than one interpretation—it was directed to India. Not unexpectedly, New Delhi elected not to remain indifferent to that either. In all likelihood its argument could be that in the changed international context it should avoid being drawn into Nepal's internal conflict indications of which New Delhi had given on and off since King Birendra's succession to the throne. It was not for nothing that, during her official visit to Kathmandu in February, 1973, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made a rather feeling reference to the Nepalese monarch saying that "we have watched with respect the dedication and energy with which King Birendra has borne the responsibilities and led his people along the path of progress and prosperity."<sup>49</sup>

But that did not seem to carry much conviction. This

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<sup>48</sup> *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), November 17, 1972.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted by Bhola Chatterji, "Between Two Giant Neighbours," *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), December 26, 1973.

was considered plain double-talk and the Nepalese regime continued to grumble about New Delhi's patronage to the Nepali Congress. Much as the realities on the ground gave a different account, Kathmandu apparently stuck to the refrain that "India cannot expect Nepal to take its professions of friendly intentions seriously so long it does not ruthlessly put down the activities of Koirala."<sup>50</sup> The Nepalese regime monotonously harped on the note that the India-based Nepali Congress rebels were really and potentially more damaging than anything else to a balanced and mutually productive relationship between two close neighbours. It was generally felt that Koirala's presence in India was more than an "irritant" in India-Nepal relations.

From Koirala's point of view the most discouraging aspect of the scenario was that the renewed spurt of guerrilla operations, handicapped as they were by a combination of adverse factors, appeared rather unlikely to resolve the crisis within a reasonable period of time. What made things still more intractable was that Subarna Shumsher had, meanwhile, started a dialogue of sorts with the Palace. The former Deputy Prime Minister, who was opposed to Koirala's line, made more or less a supplication, for a face-saving formula might impart a semblance of normality to the situation. Though very small, a section of the party sided with Subarna Shumsher, who had so long been one of the party's major financiers.

Thinking of all the events, circumstances and possibilities, it appeared that the situation had entered a cul-de-sac. In the vastly changed context the gun seemed to promise no answer to Nepal's problem of politics.

When I met Koirala during one of his brief visits to Calcutta in January, 1973, I told him that without substantial external help and New Delhi's concurrence, neither of which in the given situation could be had, the Nepali Congress would be in no shape to stage the kind of armed uprising that could unseat the regime. The party, therefore, would have to fall back on terrorism and terrorism was not

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<sup>50</sup> V.V. Gopalakrishnan, "Nepal's Complexes About India", *The Hindu* (Madras), October 13, 1973.

an effective political tool in terms of either theory of pragmatism.

At best, terrorism provided a passport to martyrdom, at worst an escape-hatch, depending on whether or not its user had a troubled conscience. That apart, terrorism had rarely failed to provoke the powers that be to take reprisal and reprisal was hardly ever tempered with mercy. No doubt, the terrorist risked a lot, not unoften his neck. But he did that without ever being able to society reconstructed the way he desired.

Two alternatives were then suggested to Koirala : (a) should apply all his energies to open a dialogue with King Birendra to explore the possibility of a conference-room resolution of the crisis; (b) Whatever the consequence might be, he should go back to Nepal and start a non-violent mass movement against the authoritarian regime.

It would not be presumptuous to say that reapitulation of the conversation I had with Koirala on that in January day in 1973 might facilitate in some measure an understanding of subsequent developments. Though it would involve a certain amount of going backward and forward, the conversation, which was taped in New Delhi on March 10, 1975 to set the record straight is reproduced below :

*Author* : BP, you will recall that in January, 1973, the exact date I do not recollect, I met you at Srestha's (a former Nepalese government official) residence in Calcutta and told you that in the given context an armed confrontation with the Palace, King Birendra that, is would be a futile exercise. For one thing, it would not succeed, the objective conditions being what they were; for another, even if it succeeded, it would not pave the way for the realization of your dream—that of establishing Democratic Socialism in the country. In view of this, I suggested that you should initiate a dialogue with the Palace. To which your answer was that you had no objection to having a dialogue with the Palace if that would help the normalization of of Nepalese politics. But you had none in view, who could act as a go-between and, if I agreed, you would

have no objection to my making an attempt in that direction. All that I have done since, including my June, 1973 visit to Kathmandu, you are well aware of. I shall be glad if you kindly have the entire story recorded for posterity.

*Koirala* : As a matter of fact, there are rather two questions involved in your question. First, whether I would prefer an agreement with the King to an armed confrontation with him. I do not agree that an armed conflict is a hopeless proposition. Although the objective situation did not seem to be propitious then, I do not consider that the situation in this part of the world will remain frozen for ever in its present form. The situation has been changing fast. Even if we do not do anything and wait for things to happen, as Lenin did till 1917, I do not think we would have waited in vain provided we have not lost credibility with the people when the opportunity comes for us to take the field. Granting all this I agree that compromise is a better solution but there must be some indication from the other side that they too are prepared for it. When you suggested that you can go to Kathmandu and explore the possibility, I said that you can go ahead. At that time even, when I agreed to your trying your hand at this, I was not very hopeful. But I did not want to be misunderstood by anybody, least of all by you, who has been my colleague in the armed struggle in 1950-51, that I am a blood-thirsty rebel, that I am not aware of the hardship of an armed conflict. Bhole, you know the situation that obtains in Nepal you have very actively participated in the 1950-51 struggle of our country not to see the situation as it is.<sup>51</sup>

Incidentally, Jayaprakash Narayan's opinion on the Nepalese question, which he expressed in a taped interview with me on December 29, 1973, largely confirmed what I

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<sup>51</sup> Author-Koirala taped interview, March 10, 1975. The tape of the interview is in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.



had told Koirala some 11 months earlier. In reply to my question what he thought might resolve Nepal's problem of politics, assuming that it had one Jayaprakash said :

I must frankly admit that King Birendra in some ways seems to be more reactionary than his father. He apparently thinks that by economic development, by technological development by modernization he would solve the question of power which is posed by not only the Nepali Congress but other political parties also. I do not think that the King can continue to hold all power in his hands, as he is doing today. He does say that there are defects, as his father said, in the panchayat system, but does not seem to be doing anything about removing those defects.

I had written to him a letter, sometime after he was crowned, on the strength of my having met him at Cambridge, Harvard, where he was staying as a student. I met him at a dinner. Then an appointment was fixed up and he came over to the guest-house where I was staying. I was guest of the University and I had a long talk with him ... On the strength of that meeting and that talk, which I think was non-committal, I gathered the impression that he was more broad-minded than his father and might be more liberal in making political reforms.

I wrote to him congratulating him on his elevation to the throne and suggesting to him that, as a young man, who has travelled around the world and has seen the trend of history toward democracy, he should scrap the panchayat system, which is a hoax. I didn't use the word hoax but I think I said it has failed. I will send you a copy of that letter.

I recommended to him to bring back parliamentary democracy with such safeguards as he would consider necessary. But elections should be held; every adult should be allowed to vote; the parties should be allowed to function and so on. Probably I did mention that I do still think that the panchayat system perhaps suits the Asian communities better than the parliamentary

democratic system, but it has been very badly conceived in Nepal as it was in Pakistan. There was no intention of democratizing anything, the primary panchayats, the *gram* panchayats.

The village panchayats really were not self-governing institutions as Mahatma Gandhi would have wanted them to be. It was not as if the structure was built on them; it was the official candidates set up by the government who won and they won because of fear. The people voted because of that. Even those who were elected had no power. After all, the bureaucracy and the King, that is, the government had all the power in its hands. So I wrote to him about this.

I got a reply from him which surprised me, which was very categorical. He said there was no question at all of bringing parliamentary democracy but he admitted there were faults in the existing panchayat system and he would try to remove them. So far, I have not received, any evidence of that. I believe that the political question certainly exists today and as time passes it will become the most important question, more important perhaps than economic development or anything else.

I would have liked Nepal to develop a peaceful movement, a people's movement against autocracy. But BP (Koirala) and other people I have talked with tell me that it is not possible. Everybody will be put in jail and the movement just would not get off the ground. There is no tradition of that. Well, I don't know, not being a Nepalese I can't say, but I would like this experiment to be tried, this method to be tried. But there is no one to try it .

Therefore, I do not know if under the changed international situation, the rise of China and the relations of China with India ... the role that the Chinese are playing in Nepal—in view of all this whether an armed struggle like the one that the Nepali Congress had waged earlier would be feasible. The Nepali army is much stronger than before and the presence of these powers, I am sure, would very much complicate the

situation. I am sure the Russians would not like the Chinese influence to grow but they will not do anything actively to support any kind of a movement to overthrow the present regime by violence.

I don't know what India will do. It may be that the Indian Government feels that it is none of its business what sort of a government exists in Nepal or does not exist in Nepal, the relations between the two countries should be on the basis of mutual national interests just as our relations with Russia or the countries of Eastern Europe or our relations with the African countries, Arab countries, which have one kind or another of dictatorship—party or military or whatever it may be—our relations with them are based on mutual interests. So India, I think, could take the view of not wanting to be drawn into any kind of civil war. If there was a peaceful movement, a freedom movement in Nepal, I suppose India would be very happy and would express its sympathy, though as a government, again I feel, it would not be possible for it to do very much ...

I am quite sure the Nepalese people would aspire to have a real part in the management of their own affairs, in their own government. This is something which can't be wished away, can't be eliminated by any kind of technological development or modernization. As a matter of fact, I don't think without political development, without the involvement of the people, Nepal can go very far.

And, as long as the people are kept as subjects the way in which they are, I don't know what their involvement would mean. It would be merely carrying out the orders of the officers or the government; it would not come from within. If the people know that they have the freedom to do what they want, then the involvement of the people in development projects would be much better and it would take Nepal forward much quicker."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Author-Jayaprakash taped interview, December 29, 1973. The tape of the interview is in the custody of the the Sociological Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.

Let us get back to where we had wandered away from the main point. Before leaving for Kathmandu on a mission of exploration, I got in touch with the Nepalese Consul-General in Calcutta, Rom Bahadur Thapa. Since I had no reason to presume that Kathmandu would be particularly happy to receive me, let alone make it easy for me to meet the King, considering my close association with Koirala and my rather critical writings on Nepalese politics, I approached Thapa, in early February 1973, with two requests : (a) To ascertain whether I would be allowed to meet people without let or hindrance in order to collect materials for a book I was writing on Nepal; (b) Whether he could use his good offices to fix up for me an appointment with the King as I had an important message to convey to him. Both Consul-General Thapa and Consul Bidhyut Raj Chalisey said that they would contact the authorities in Kathmandu and let me know their reaction at the earliest opportunity.

About a fortnight later, Thapa informed me that I was welcome to visit Kathmandu as a guest of the Nepalese Government. As for an interview with King Birendra, he said that it could not be arranged from this end, but he saw no reason why it should prove difficult if I approached the right people during my stay in Kathmandu. The offer of invitation naturally took me by surprise and I suspected a catch in it somewhere. That did put me on the horns of a dilemma. If I accepted the invitation I would compromise myself; if I visited Kathmandu on my own, spurning the invitation, the authorities would not hesitate to throw a spanner into the works, assuming that there was an ulterior motive behind it. To avoid getting caught on the wrong foot, I requested for time to think things over. In the third week of March, I went to Varanasi, which was Koirala's headquarters in India, to seek his advice. On March 22, we had a long discussion before it was decided that I should accept the invitation. Also, Koirala suggested certain points which should be conveyed to the King if I got an opportunity to meet him :

- (1) Democratic elements and the Palace should cooperate with each other so that the basis of national

independence as well as the monarchy would be strengthened. This was necessary for an effective response to the challenge of modernization that Nepal faced.

(2) With this end in view, Koirala had tried for a rapprochement with King Mahendra, but to no avail. On King Birendra's succession to the throne Koirala sent him a letter of congratulation, for which he was reproached by his friends in the party's radical wing;

(3) Like the Nepali Congress if the King believed that the forces of nationalism, democracy and progress should be strengthened, then only he should open a dialogue with Koirala. The basic requirement was an understanding between the King and the Nepali Congress on certain essential points of principle, which could ensure the irreducible minimum necessary for democratic forces to operate—a climate of democratic functioning, civil liberties and basic human rights. Democratic forces must not be driven into a position where they would be compelled to take to the methods and operational tactics of insurgency;

(4) It should be clearly understood that Koirala was not operating from a position of weakness. The fact that he desired a reconciliation with the Palace was because the future, regarding democratic nationalist forces could not be strengthened otherwise; and

(5) The King might, if he so desired, communicate with Koirala either through his wife Sushila (she had carried some two or three months ago his letters to the King, which as yet remained unreplyed) who was then at Biratnagar or through me.

Once again, I went to Kathmandu on June 3, 1973 for a week's visit, after an interval of about 12 years, as a guest of the Nepalese government. The sprawling city seemed to have changed much. The lazy fairyland of the past had become busy world of the present. Yesterday's "forbidden" valley had been transformed into a mart where many nations and cultures met. There in the sprightly city of Kathmandu you might rub shoulders with men from as

disparate and distant countries as China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Israel, Egypt, North and South Korea, Soviet Russia and the United States, to name a few. As you sauntered along, say, Judha Sadak, now called New Road, amidst shocking poverty and seemingly ageless relics of ancient times, glittering shops and smart trade centres would beckon you. If you had the funds you could buy almost anything you wanted, be it a Toyota car, an Omega electronic watch or an exquisite piece of Sevres porcelain and that too without having to fork out precious foreign exchange. To a foreign exchange starved Indian, this doubtless would be an experience.

There was, however, nothing mysterious about it, as Prime Minister Kirtinidhi Bista told me. Shift the wheat from the chaff and it would be seen that exporters were allowed to invest part of their foreign exchange earnings on imports, not necessarily foodstuff or meant particularly for an indigenous clientele. Yet imports of non-essential commodities were allowed because it could be used as a bait to entice foreigners, particularly Indians. But you would be sorely disappointed if you expected even a fraction of such sophistication in the realm of politics. There was discontent and resentment in every strata of society, the depth of which could not be gauged from the glittering shop-windows of Kathmandu.

It was hard to shake off the feeling that the King, despite his participation in the day-to-day affairs of the state and extensive tours in the country, did not have the means of learning what was happening or what the people really thought of the regime. The King's informants, be they his aides, ministers or bureaucrats, certainly could not be expected to convey to him information which was not pleasant or which might get them indicted. Nor did the Rastriya Panchayat facilitate, because of the absence of opposition. There was no communication between the King and the people. It did not take me long to discover that the King could be kept blissfully ignorant of any message that did not have the approval of those who controlled his channels of communication. Much as the authorities, from the Prime Minister down, were extremely courteous and generous to me, my

efforts to meet the King drew a blank. For the men who could help me in the matter refused to believe that I was not in cahoots with Koirala.

On being informed of the failure of my mission to Kathmandu, Koirala looked at me meaningfully. His terse comment on my account of events was that regime did not think that the situation had become critical enough for it to respond to his constructive gesture. Therefore, it was necessary that the situation must be brought to the boil so that the Palace might see what was sensible. And, Koirala was as good as his word.

The frequency and severity of the guerrilla strikes sharply increased in various parts of the country. The rebels were particularly active in the Terai plains, in Okhaldoonga, Diktel and Soloo districts in the central region and, of course, at the seat of power — the valley of Kathmandu. Biratnagar, the home town of Koirala and the eastern region's most important industrial centre, appeared to have attracted their special attention.

A daring attempt was made on the life of King Birendra during his visit to Biratnagar in early 1974. The huge magnificent Singha Durbar, one of the valley's most famous landmarks, was burnt down; armed operations ruffled life in the remote mountainous region where the terrain was difficult for counter-insurgency measure; a Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation plane was hijacked on its way from Biratnagar to the capital, relieving it of about Rs. 32 lakhs of government money — these are but random samples of what the regime had to encounter. Needless to say, rebel activities were met with official violence that gave none any quarter.

Apart from counter-terror, the regime made certain apparently political moves to neutralize the resistance movement. As a supposed token of the government's earnestness a small number of Nepali Congress activists were released from prison; a few of its former members got inducted into the various ramifications of the panchayat set-up; and gesture of support pro-Moscow communists made for their own set of reasons did not go unreciprocated. A not-too-subtle drive was made to splinter the Nepali Congress. For

understandable reason, the focus was turned on Subarna Shumsher. The regime had not forgotten that, in his capacity as the Nepali Congress president at the time of King Birendra's assumption of power, Subarna Shumsher had offered unreserved cooperation to the new monarch, rejecting armed struggle as counterproductive.

In October, 1974 the King and Subarna Shumsher met for the second time. Their first meeting had taken place in May 1973.) The remarkable thing about it was that *The Rising Nepal* (the Kingdom's official English daily), which would touch no man nor any news item with a barge-pole without clearance from the Establishment gave two columns of its front page to a statement Subarna Shumsher had issued before he was received in audience by the King. Some of the points the one-time second most important Nepali Congress leader emphasized were: (a) Undisputed supremacy of the institution of monarchy; (b) The panchayat system, its basic premises remaining what they were, admitted of change; and (c) Rejection of violence as a tool for achieving political change. Subarna Shumsher urged his "friends", who were "democrats" but who might differ with him in his understanding of the situation, to let bygones by bygones. Finally, he appealed to the King, assuring him of his unqualified support to whatever the King might do for the "progressive democratization" of the panchayat system, "to take some solid measures" so that the people might unitedly respond to the knotty problems the kingdom faced.<sup>53</sup>

Conceivably, the King's 40-minute interview to Subarna Shumsher indicated the former's desire to keep all his options open. It might also be construed that the Palace felt in the given context the necessity of a certain policy reorientation at the political level leading to a change in the direction of liberalization of the regime. About that time, the King also asked six former Prime Minister, his younger brother, Prince Gyanendra, and the then Prime Minister, Nagendra Prasad Rijal, to dinner; and, accordance to the *London Times*, "invited the veteran leaders suggestions about

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<sup>53</sup> See *The Rising Nepal* (Kathmandu), October 13, 1974.



any possible reforms in the country's political and administrative system."<sup>54</sup>

The Palace's multi-pronged move to contain the Nepali Congress activists did not yield the expected result, for the innovations made or the changes proposed had little substance. Koirala gave every indication that he was in no mood to chase shadows. It is plausible that the King might have, left to himself, initiated a process of meaningful change in the political system, within limits. But vested political and economic interests, within and outside the Palace, would not have put up with it. Whatever that maybe, the King had to take notice of the fact that there was unrest in the country and force was not the best way of dealing with it. Also, there was the implied admission that the partyless panchayat system was not really the complete political tool that the genius of the people of Nepal could devise. For instance, while inaugurating the 24th session of the Rastriya Panchayat on June 24, 1974 the King observed: "We have been stating from time to time that, in the light of progress achieved by the panchayat system to date, timely reforms will be introduced in it gradually."<sup>55</sup>

And, which Asian in his right senses could refuse to notice of the hard reality that post-Vietnam Asia was not quite the place it was until that traumatic event occurred? The one most significant lesson Vietnam taught was that a people's urge for change could not for long be ignored. Probably it would not be a hasty assumption that this had not gone unnoticed in most Asian countries, others besides, including Nepal. The King also had another cause of anxiety—his coronation which was scheduled be held on February 24, 1975. Presumably, he felt that some concrete steps would have to be taken well in advance so that a relatively relaxed climate might obtain in the country which might help reduce the credibility gap and thereby persuade the rebels to allow the coronation to go off peacefully.

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Bhola Chatterji, "Mood of Expectancy", *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta) September 4, 1974.

<sup>55</sup> King Birendra, *Speeches, etc., op. cit.*, p. 105.

The Palace did make an apparently agreeable gesture. In the course of his speech on December 16, 1974, which was observed as "King Mahendra Memorial and Constitution Day", King Birendra stated: "We have on different occasions pointed out that timely reforms can be made in the system ... I have, therefore, decided to set up a commission soon to discuss and recommend appropriate constitutional reforms keeping in view the fundamental principles and the dynamic character of the panchayat system".

The King also dropped hints that those who had stood so long in opposition to the system were also free to come over. As he put it, "the panchayat system offers equal opportunity to all to participate in national development. If any one shows faith in the system, reforms his outlook, and changes his ideology judgement will not be passed solely on the basis of what he did or where he was yesterday."<sup>56</sup>

Primarily, the King's message was addressed to none other than Koirala, who had set up the standard of revolt. The former Prime Minister did not summarily reject it as a mere gimmick. According to him, the "language" of the King's declaration, "vague" though, "is a little different this time, liable to be favourably construed." To put the picture straight, however, he stated categorically that the panchayat system in its given form was "dictatorial", that the Palace had "so long not only refused to listen to the people and concede their demands, but has also continued the policy of suppression and oppression of the people." Koirala also observed that there was a state of "armed confrontation between the people and the Palace."<sup>57</sup>

With the former Chief Justice Aniruddha Prasad Singh as the Chairman a Constitutional Reforms Commission, comprising seven members with different political backgrounds, was appointed on February 9, 1975. The Commission was enjoined to submit its report within six

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted By Bhola Chatterji, "Reforming the Panchayat system", *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), December 31, 1974.

months suggesting "appropriate political reforms."<sup>58</sup> This confirmed once again, if it was at all necessary, that the compulsion of the unobliging political developments could no longer be resisted. It was also a tacit admission on the part of the regime that the kingdom's problem of politics did not exist only in the imagination of some ageing, malcontent politicians. Eighteen members of the Rastriya Panchayat, including its Vice-Chairman Dambar Bahadur Basnet, preferred to run the risk of being more forthright about it. In a statement issued in May, 1975 the legislators said: "If, on the one hand, the spectre of an economic crisis is haunting us, on the other, we are undergoing a blurred political situation. It is high time to realize that the manifold problems facing the country cannot be solved by limiting the scope of political activity,"<sup>59</sup> Former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa (Prime Minister at the moment) was not the only person to say that a thorough reconstruction of the political system was necessary before any worthwhile reforms could be effected.

The Constitutional Reforms Commission submitted its report in late 1975. By then the subcontinental political scene had undergone a sea-change. A state internal emergency was declared in India and assassins killed the liberator of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and members of his family on August 15 1975. In the changed context Kathmandu felt that it could afford to take things easy. The constitutional reforms King Birendra announced on December 12, 1976 cast a damp over the people's increasingly expectant mood witnessed since the setting up of the Constitutional Reform Commission. It was not at all surprising that the proposed reforms were interpreted as a not very ingenious exercise to add an extra string to the monarch's bow. The general feeling was that the concessions promised would be neutralized by the sizable addition to the King's powers and prerogatives.

The second amendment to the Nepalese Constitution, which

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted by Bhola Chatterji "Nepal at Crossroads", *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), February 24, 1975.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted by Bhola Chatterji, "Time to be Practical", *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), June 28, 1975.

the King proclaimed on December 12, 1975, provided for 55 or so constitutional changes. The few concessions the amended Constitution granted were negated by transforming the Back-to-Village National Campaign Committee (BVNCC). Originally constituted in 1967, it was "revamped by His Majesty King Birendra in 1973 as a political mechanism for mobilizing and evaluating the workers of the system."<sup>60</sup> It became a constitutional body with sweeping powers under the King's direct supervision. That the BVNCC was intended to become the king-pin of the Nepalese political system, future events did bear out. The amended Constitution made the institution of monarchy the exclusive source of power in the country. The King could exercise his enormous powers without any restraints whatsoever. While men like Surya Bahadur Thapa, Subarna Shumsher and Surya Prasad Upadhyay spoke strongly in support of the amended Constitution, the critics, within and outside the country, were of the opinion that it only added more power to the King's elbow.

The political development consequent upon the declaration of emergency in India had its effect on the Nepali Congress activists. To meet the exigencies of the difficult times, they decided to go slow. What added a complicating dimension to the state of affairs was that New Delhi did not exactly take a benign view of the close rapport Koirala had all along maintained with some prominent opposition leaders, particularly Jayaprakash Narayan and Chandra Shekhar. It is not a mere conjecture that the Indian government had also on occasions made it known to Koirala. But the Nepali Congress leader, much as he appreciated that circumstances alter cases, would not concede that his friendship, which was personal and which stood at an entirely non-partisan political level, with some Indian leaders could not be construed as an offence against the proprieties. He stood his ground, the argument being that friendly personal relationship was something which could not be forsaken, no matter what the consequences might be.

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<sup>60</sup> M.P. Lohani, *The Monarchy in Nepal*, Ministry of Communications, Kathmandu, 1976, p. 7.

An exacting situation soon arose. Koirala had enough men under arms to stay the course. At the same time, he was aware that New Delhi's rigid attitude would inevitably queer the pitch.<sup>61</sup> Neither was he unaware that he must act before being overtaken by events. Considering the various circumstances, not excluding King Birendra's latest instalment of grant of amnesty to Nepali Congress activists residing in self-exile in India, in early December, 1976, Koirala elected at great personal risk to grasp the nettle. He returned to Nepal a few hours before 1976 was out and to the centre of the political stage there.

The rebel in chains turned out to be a more powerful antagonist than he was at the time of waging an armed struggle from outside the country, particularly when the people learnt that he had come back to Nepal of his own volition, when his words and deeds indicated that he no longer contemplated in terms of a violent all-or-nothing solution to the kingdom's political crisis. Koirala's declaration that he was determined to pursue the "line of national reconciliation" made the men in high places sit up. Gradually it dawned on the regime that Koirala, caged, free or dead, would let it have no sleep until the kingdom's problem of politics could be got out of the way.

There was no blinking the fact that the longer Koirala was left to rot in prison the more stubborn would the problem become. But the regime seemed to have concluded that it could indefinitely avoid facing its moment of truth if it turned a blind eye to the Koirala question. A whole crowd of small men who passed for hard-liners — they could be found in the Palace as well as at other levels of the political and administrative set-up — were apprehensive that a reconciliation between the King and Koirala would be detrimental to their interests. No wonder that they should be bent on mischief.

But they were out in their reckoning. When Koirala took seriously ill in prison, it did not go unnoticed, in Nepal or in other countries. An ailing Koirala raised a commotion,

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<sup>61</sup> Since we are too near the event a detailed account of it must necessarily await a more relaxed time.

so to speak. Leaders from different parts of the world expressed their concern; and they interceded with King Birendra for Koirala's release.

In a statement issued on April 11, 1977, from the Jaslok Hospital, Bombay, Jayaprakash Narayan said that he had

"no intention to interfere in the internal affairs of any country. But what is happening in Nepal has saddened my heart deeply. The people of Nepal have been fighting for human rights and freedom for the last three decades against the autocratic rule of the King. Any one who has some knowledge about Nepal knows well that the people ... have been denied even their elementary human rights. Hundreds of political workers are detained in prison, some of them were executed without fair trial. To plead for the restoration of these rights should not be construed as an interference in the internal matters of another country ... A stage has been reached in world history when all institutions like monarchy or colonial rule or any other form of totalitarianism) have to give place to a rule which represents, and meets the aspirations of, the people ... I would urge upon His Majesty King Birendra with all humility that he should immediately initiate the process of democratisation in his country. Before he does so, he should immediately release Mr. B. P. Koirala and his friends ... Mr. Koirala symbolises today the democratic forces in the country."<sup>62</sup>

Kathmandu's immediate response to Jayaprakash's appeal did not suggest that things had started thawing. The King's message to the nation on the occasion of the Nepali New Year (April 13, 1973) struck a rather confident note. He assured the people that "in no circumstances would anything be permitted to threaten the national unity from any quarter." The King's attitude, however, was not so nonchalant when he touched on the functioning of the government. One could easily detect a note of disappointment in

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<sup>62</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), April 12, 1977.

his admission that "problems of administrative corruption and indiscipline with the system in which some elements even sought to create an atmosphere of strife and contention"<sup>63</sup> were some of the factors responsible for the not so happy state of affairs in the country. As regards Jayaprakash's statement, King Birendra observed, indirectly though, that he considered it an act interference in the kingdom's internal affairs. In an interview to the special correspondent of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* the King said: "We base our conviction on the application of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of others and it is but fair that we expect reciprocity."<sup>64</sup>

That the establishment men should take their cue from the King was not at all unexpected. But, carried away by their enthusiasm, some of them were bent on out-Heroding Herod. Asserting that the people of Nepal "enjoyed constitutional rights in the panchayat system", former Prime Minister Kirtinidhi Bista complained that "friends in India have been trying to influence the judgement of the tribunal assigned to look into the case"<sup>65</sup> against Koirala. The harshness of what the then Prime Minister, Tulsī Giri, said surpassed all others. In a blistering statement issued on May 24, 1977 Giri alleged that the installation of the Janata Party government marked the beginning of a series of planned Nepal-baiting activities in India. He was particularly indignant with, Jayaprakash, Janata Party President, Chandra Shekhar, and some (former Socialist) Janata Members of Parliament.

As Prime Minister Giri put it, "there seems to be an unmistakable indication of full speed hate-Nepal campaign in responsible circles in India today." Continuing the harangue, he said that the "campaign" was a "challenge to our ingenuity, a challenge to our system and a challenge to our capability to conduct our affairs in domestic and external fields... We have been facing this challenge since 1960, since the inception of the panchayat democracy." Not

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<sup>63</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), April 15, 1977.

<sup>64</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), April 21, 1977.

<sup>65</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutt), April, 18, 1977.

content with this, Giri complained that "in the course of their reporting on Nepal, the Indian Press and other means of mass communications" had "taken recourse to outright lies, and even gone so far as to malign the most sacred institution of this country—the monarchy." And the King's First Minister felt especially sore about the Delhi Television Centre's telecast of the Press statement of Koirala — "a man against whom there were criminal charges in the country," which, Giri emphasized, was "not only an attitude of bias and prejudice against Nepal but of active support for its enemies."<sup>66</sup>

Prime Minister Giri's statement struck a false note. It soon became evident that the way he had blown the blast on his horn went much beyond his brief. New Delhi did not at all feel humoured and it lost no time to make that known to Kathmandu. In a statement officially released on May 25 the Ministry of External Affairs said :

"It is particularly unfortunate that the Prime Minister of a country, with whom we are linked by tradition, culture, religion and the closest possible social and economic ties, should deem it appropriate to so misunderstand the policies of the new Government of India and indeed the democratic freedom within our system. The statements of Dr. Giri at his Press conference have certain ingredients which could lead to avoidable misunderstandings ... It ... came to us a surprise that the Prime Minister of Nepal should characterize expressions of anxiety expressed by the free Press in India as a kind of deliberate hate-Nepal campaign ... Just as we respect other countries and their government, we hope our country and policies will be objectively understood."<sup>67</sup>

The reaction at home was not very encouraging either. Even a section of the controlled Press did not respond favourably to Prime Minister Giri's outburst of anger. For instance, the *Motherland*, one of Kathmandu's English

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<sup>66</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), May 25, 1977.

<sup>67</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), May 26, 1977.



dailies, thought fit to observe that "we feel that at this stage, taking into consideration the complex nature of our relations with India, strong words alone are likely to be counter-productive and create more problems in the future than solving the present ones."<sup>68</sup>

The fact of the matter is that it was a rearguard action of sorts on the part of Giri. A die-hard supporter of the partyless panchayat system, he strove hard to arrest the pace of unfavourable political developments consequent upon Koirala's return to Nepal. This eventually proved to be his undoing. To the embarrassment of the King, the Prime Minister's bellicose stance on the Koirala question only aggravated the situation. The continued detention of Koirala, whose illness had meanwhile taken a turn for the worse, aroused strong feelings at home and abroad. Taking exception to Prime Minister Giri's vitriolic outpourings, *The Times of India* editorially remarked that "if there is a great deal of concern in this country over the present detention and eventual fate of Mr. Koirala, a former Nepalese premier and leader of the banned Nepali Congress Party, that is because he is considered by many influential sections of public opinion to be the symbol of the democratic aspirations of the Nepalese people ... The Nepalese government might not like this, but it can't wish it away."<sup>69</sup> At another level, the Socialist International made a unique gesture of fraternity by adopting a resolution, at its meeting in London on April, 29 and 30, "seeking Mr. Koirala's release and expressing solidarity with the democratic aspirations of the people of Nepal."<sup>70</sup>

That Koirala's sufferings and tribulations did not go unnoticed was quite understandable. Could it be denied that that the human psyche has in it something that would not allow any civilized man to be indifferent to whoever bears his cross? Even, if it is for the wrong set of reasons! How infinitely more emotive would be the case of a man who

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted by Bhola Chatterji, "India-Nepal Relations", *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), June 14, 1977.

<sup>69</sup> *Times of India* (New Delhi), May 27, 1977.

<sup>70</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), June 10, 1977.

suffers persecution almost interminably just because he would not barter away his right to dissent? Or stifle the still small voice within him? Particularly when no society at any given point of time could claim to have an abundance of such men. And Koirala is a man who eminently answers to this description, a man whose life has been an unending tale of rebellion, prison, exile and the same over again.

Kathmandu was caught in a cleft stick. It was clear to all but the myopic that Koirala might be left to sink into oblivion but that would not save the regime from being overtaken by events. King Birendra knew he was riding a tiger; he also knew that riding a tiger could be great fun provided one knew how and when to dismount. The Palace eventually beat a retreat — Koirala was set free on June 9, 1977, to go abroad for medical treatment and that too at State expense.

What followed seemed to hold out not a little hope of a reversal of the regime's policy of drift. The replacement of Prime Minister Giri by Kirtinidhi Bista, a relatively circumspect person, the grant of amnesty to a number of dissidents and the release of some of the prominent members of the banned Nepali Congress, including Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, former Speaker of the Kingdom's first elected Parliament, and Shailaja Acharya, a prominent Nepali Congress activist, strengthened the belief that things would not be quite the same again. The King's message to the four-day second national convention of panchayat ministers, office-bearers and activists, held in the third week of September, 1977, appeared to be somewhat encouraging. "Our polity", the King observed, "is dynamic and as such we have frequently said that the process of introducing timely changes will continue in future provided the changes do not affect the basic principles."<sup>71</sup> There were also other indications that the political climate had become rather relaxed. Otherwise men like former (nominated) Prime Minister Tanka Prasad Acharya, former Nepali Congress leader Surya Prasad Upadhyay (he was the Home Minister

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<sup>71</sup> *Times of India* (New Delhi) September 24, 1977.

in the B.P. Koirala Cabinet), former (nominated) Minister Dilli Raman Regmi and pro-Moscow Communist leader Kaiser Jung Raimhaji would not have ventured to issue a statement emphasizing their "faith in multi-party, parliamentary system of democracy." More, taking a dim view of the internal situation they remarked: "Today we are on the brink of a precipice, both politically and economically. The administration has almost foundered. Whether it is bribery or nepotism or favouritism, it is seen everywhere at its worst and this is unparalleled in our history."<sup>72</sup> To say this and yet remain unscathed surely would not have been possible before Koirala took the plunge.

The outlook for tomorrow seemed not at all gloomy. At any rate there was a clear hint to that effect in what Koirala told an Indian Press correspondent, on October 20, 1977, during his stopover at Delhi en route from the US to Nepal. Replying to a question whether changes were expected in the kingdom, Koirala said: "The King has released me and there have been other releases as well." He hastened to add that he did "not believe it is a two-act play — beginning with my release and departure for the States and ending with my return. It is part of a process. I hope things will be all right."<sup>73</sup> Subsequent developments proved that appearances indeed are deceptive. The people of Nepal soon found that the regime had played them false. On his return to Kathmandu, in November 1977, after medical treatment in the US Koirala was re-arrested.

The sudden change in the policy that this indicated appeared inexplicable to not a few. The apparent was not the real, if turned out to be. The King was in two minds. In the first place, he was egged on to take a firm line by certain influential members of the royal family, a section of army officers and the panchayat hardliners, who were opposed to any understanding with the democratic forces. Secondly, although the King took Koirala at his word he had his doubts about the militants in the Nepali Congress.

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<sup>72</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), September 24, 1977.

<sup>73</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), October 22, 1977.

The Janata Party President, Chandra Shekhar, who met King Birendra when Koirala had been taken critically ill, told me in the course of a conversation, on October 3, 1979, that his impression was that the King desired reconciliation with the democratic forces and he had trust in Kairala's sincerity. But the King did not feel sure about the future course of action the Nepali Congress militants might adopt. The King did not say it in so many words, but that was the meaning of what he said, Chandra Shekhar told me.

Last but not the least, the regime seemed to have interpreted Koirala's plea for rational politics as a sign of his weakness. It was believed that, having said his farewell to the politics of confrontation, Koirala had closed all his options. That being so, the regime thought that an aggressive facade would enable it to get the better of the Koirala problem.

Once again, Koirala's health suffered a set-back. There was much concern over it and pressure, internal as well as external, was being brought to bear upon the King to release him. During his visit to India in December, 1977 Willy Brandt, former Chancellor of West Germany, Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, and a leader of the Socialist International, said: "We think we shall certainly let the King of Nepal and his government know our view that Koirala should be released."<sup>74</sup> In a statement addressed to King Birendra some 93 prominent American citizens, including Nobel Laureate, Saul Bellow, novelist, James Farrell, and Democratic Congressman, Donald Fraser, said: "There is great interest in the USA in the cause of human rights in the world. Mr. Koirala is known in this country as a distinguished political leader who had demonstrated his loyalty to democratic principles. His case is being followed closely and there is considerable concern over his fate. The delicate condition of his health makes the concern even more urgent."<sup>75</sup> Jayaprakash Narayan again appealed to the King to release Koirala, saying that "I address this appeal to you as a well-wisher and friend, which

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<sup>74</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), December 21, 1977.

<sup>75</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), December 25, 1977.

I believe will not be misunderstood.”<sup>76</sup> Then again, there was the internal pressure, still in low key though, which just could not be wished away.

The Palace eventually relented, much to the resentment of the hardliners. Koirala was released on bail to proceed to the US for urgently needed medical treatment and surgery. Some four months later Ganesh Man Singh, the second most important Nepali Congress leader, was also released from prison.

Notwithstanding the regime’s penchant for blowing hot and cold and the Nepali Congress militants’ importunate demand for a showdown, Koirala refused to shift his ground. He saw to it that the Palace had no occasion to feel that he maintained double-standards when it came to conforming to the ground rules of the political exercise he was engaged in. On more occasions than one he got the word across that he wanted “an understanding between the monarchy and the democratic forces.” His only condition was that it “should take place within a democratic framework.” And in order to remove the Palace’s apprehension that given the chance he would abolish the institution of monarchy Koirala re-emphasized that he wanted ‘monarchy to be stabilized by democracy and democracy strengthened by monarchy.’<sup>77</sup> Pursuant to this line, he met the King, on October 30, 1978, for the second time since his return to Nepal in December, 1976. The hour-long discussion that he had with the King did not leave Koirala unhappy. In fact, he found the King, as he put it, “more receptive and more liberal and more prepared to act according to the changing times.”<sup>78</sup>

Koirala was no fledgling in politics not to appreciate the import of his statement. He knew that he had put his cards on the table and, should the Palace refuse to play fair, he would compromise himself badly. Presumably, the former Prime Minister reckoned that the objective conditions being what they were, the Palace would not be so imprudent as to spurn his offer of an eminently rational solution of the

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<sup>76</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), January 9, 1978.

<sup>77</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), August 11, 1978.

<sup>78</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), November 2, 1978.

problem which at once promised to restore the people to their usurped rights and ensure the continuity of the institution of monarchy. Also, the maelstrom of popular uprising that was then shaking Iran from stem to stern would make the Palace think twice before setting its face against the logic of reconciliation, Koirala reasoned out.

But that was what King Birendra did, probably against his own better judgment. Even as student demonstrators defying prohibitory orders paraded the streets of Kathmandu, this happened for the first time since the introduction of the partyless panchayat system,<sup>79</sup> in support of "human rights", "press freedom" and "no imprisonment without trial", the king decided to put a bold face on the situation. In his address to the nation on King Mahendra Memorial and Constitution Day December (16, 1978) King Birendra defended the authoritarian system of polity as the best that the genius of the people could devise. He emphasized that "the medium of partylessness has enabled us not only to preserve the sovereignty of our motherland but has also helped us all to move along a road to economic development." More significant, the King asserted, "the panchayat democracy without parties had made the Nepalese cohesive like the bees in a hive." Reiterating that "since it is a system that belongs to the people, no individual, however important, will be allowed to go against the will and the aspirations of the people."<sup>79</sup> That this part of the statement, its sheer absurdity apart, implicitly referred to Koirala did not escape anybody's notice.

The King's subsequent moves appeared to suggest that he was determined to force the Nepali Congress to abandon the path of reason. What else could one make of his decision to order the execution, on February 9, 1979, of the two Nepali Congress leaders, former Army Captain Yagya Bahadur Thapa and Bhim Narayan Shrestha. The two men had been sentenced to death penalty in early March, 1977 on charges of "armed rebellion and attempt to kill King Birendra."<sup>80</sup> It was generally believed that they would be

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<sup>79</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), December 17, 1978.

<sup>80</sup> *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta) March 5, 1977.

given the royal pardon in the altered situation. This was not to be. After being kept waiting on death row for such a long time, the two men were put to death when no sensible Nepalese had even remotely anticipated it.

That caused a feeling of horror throughout the Kingdom and beyond. Koirala condemned the mindless violence done to his two political colleagues Thapa and Shrestha as a plunge back into the dark days of the not so distant past. In his own language the executions "were very shocking, unexpected and incomprehensible. If these have hurt anybody, these have hurt the monarchy most." Still he did not propose to abandon "the line of national reconciliation" that he had been pursuing these past two years. His understanding of the situation was that the King had been led down the garden path. The King had in fact played into the hands of the anti-reconciliation forces that were determined to sabotage any attempt to peacefully resolve the crisis. The former Prime Minister made it clear that, however great the provocation might be, he "will not start any movement and will resume the dialogue and meet the King ... to reach some kind of agreement with the monarch. And he would persist in doing this, for he hoped "to avoid the kind of situation which developed in Iran, with the understanding on the part of the monarch and wisdom which we are showing."<sup>81</sup>

But his appeal to the regime to come to its senses brought the most dreadful response—it settled down to flexing its muscles. The regime made a dash for the brink. That pretty well put the tin lid on things. The students took to the streets, so did others and each group for its own set of reasons. If some battled in the cause of democracy, others made every effort to block up the path to an understanding between the King and the democratic forces. As the situation worsened Koirala, who had been interned in the Kathmandu valley in early April, 1979, was put under house arrest on April 28, while some of his most trusted associates, including Ganesh Man Singh, acting Nepali Congress president Bhattarai and former editor of the official Nepalese daily "Gorkhapatra".

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<sup>81</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), March 7, 1979.

Gopal Prasad Bhattarai, were taken into custody. The magnitude and sweep of which unnerved the hardliners and, conceivably, gave the harried King a chance to re-assert his authority. Koirala, Ganesh Man and Bhattarai were released only ten days after the thoughtless orders for their internment had been rushed through.

Sounding a note of warning Koirala said that King Birendra should not delude himself into believing that the throne could be saved by "sheer armed force ... powerful armies have been swept off their thrones." The former Prime Minister had no doubt that "if the present situation is allowed to drift, the danger is that the next phase will be more radical in which even the King might not be spared." Of course the Nepali Congress, Koirala emphasized, had "been trying to avoid having such a situation develop. We do not want a miniature Iran to be enacted in Nepal. This is why we have been urging upon the King to get courage and take steps toward the speedy restoration of the democratic rights of the people." Once again he stated categorically that a rapprochement between the King and democratic forces "can alone solve our political and economic problems, in the absence of which the stability and the prosperity of the country would be in jeopardy."<sup>82</sup> It took hardly two weeks before the warning sank into the King's mind.

As darkness enveloped the sequestered valley of Kathmandu on May 23, the leaping tongues of flame lent a macabre touch to the scene. In the eerie light of the burning buildings one could see a mass of defiant humanity on the move. Violence and arson convulsed the city, its 700-man police force, out-numbered and out-manoevred, helplessly looked on. There was no trace of authority anywhere. The situation seemed to have gone completely out of the administration's control.

The battle lines had been drawn. There was apparently nothing that could stop the advancing hordes of angry men from setting the Bagmati on fire. Between them and His Majesty's government every protective barrier had suddenly

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<sup>82</sup> *Times of India* (New Delhi), May 10, 1979.



crumbled, exposing the latter to the fury of the former. It was indeed touch and go whether the throne would survive the ordeal. The King looked about himself, made some quick calculations and called out the army to ensure that Kathmandu was not for burning.

On that evening Nepal stood at the crossroads. Never since the 1950-51 revolution the ruggedly beautiful Himalayan Kingdom had faced such a trying situation. It was no secret that one erring step on the part of the young monarch would have been enough to cost him his throne plus something more. Away in his secluded study, the shaken King took hurried counsel with a few select advisers (one of whom presumably was his young sharp-witted, but elusive, Press secretary Chiran Shumsher Thapa), had a proclamation finalized and gave his assent to it.

The train of events that followed took almost every Nepalese's breath away. Over the country-wide network of Radio Nepal came the distinct voice of the King on the morning of May 24, 1979. In a level tone, King Birendra announced that a national referendum would be held to ascertain the people's views on the most vexed issue of the day—what should be the future shape of the country's system of polity: He went on to assure the people that on the basis of universal adult franchise every Nepalese would be entitled to say whether, as the King put it "we should set up a multi-party system of government."<sup>83</sup>

Few Nepalese had imagined that the situation could take such a dramatic turn. For nearly 18 years, the partyless panchayat democracy had ruled the roost. In spite of the now concerted, at times sporadic internal opposition, violent as well as non-violent, and much external criticism of the partyless panchayat system, the Palace had all along sang its praises. Even as late as December, 1978 King Birendra waxed eloquent on the virtues the partyless panchayat system. Between the King's Constitution Day address on December 16, 1978 and his announcement of a referendum it was not a great gap in terms of time. Most Nepalese were astounded to be suddenly told that the panchayat system

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<sup>83</sup> *The Statesman* (Calcutta), May 25, 1979.

was not quite as sacrosanct as they had all these years been enjoined to believe. What made them sit up, however, was the royal declaration that they could if they so desired replace it by a multi-party system, notwithstanding the fact that until the other day it stood condemned as the source of all evil.

Others apart, even a hard-boiled politician like Ganesh Man Singh came poste-haste to Koirala only to tell him that he found it difficult to persuade himself of the truth of the royal proclamation. He confessed that he little dreamt that the King would give up even before the overture had been played. Of course he was not the only Nepalese, who looked askance at the royal proclamation, who thought that it was no more than a clever ploy. The common belief was that the King badly needed breathing-time, so that the partyless panchayat system could be shored up, the faithfuls marshalled and a stage-managed referendum held to produce the desired verdict.

That was more or less the point the present author had mooted in the course of his long conversation with Koirala on July 4, 1979 at Varanasi.<sup>84</sup> In reply to a question whether King Birendra was sincere about the referendum proclamation, Koirala emphatically said "Yes". The long and the short of Koirala's argument was that a combination of factors, internal and external had remorselessly driven King Birendra into a position that had a resemblance with what his grandfather, the late King Tribhuvan, had to encounter some three decades ago.

It may be recalled that the last Rana Prime Minister, Mohun Shumsher, in his bid to perpetuate his family's monopoly of power, not only compelled King Tribhuvan to seek refuge in India in 1950 but illegally enthroned his infant grandson Gyanendra, younger brother of King Birendra. To get out of the blind alley, King Tribhuvan had only one course open before him—extend support to the Nepali Congress-led 1950-51 revolution. This was precisely what he did and not to his regret. Though King Birendra's case was not similar in every detail, he also faced nothing short

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter 6 for the entire text of the conversation.

of a challenge to his throne. This closed all his options except that of casting in his lot with the people, as Koirala would like to put it:

Opinions may differ regarding Koirala's assessment of the Nepalese situation. The casual observer might be inclined to suggest that the former Prime Minister's imagination ran away with him. Far from it. Koirala did not spin a yarn to rationalize his current political line of reconciliation with the King. A close look at the Nepalese scene would indeed reaffirm that truth often is stranger than fiction. Recollect for a moment, the sequence of events that brought about the eruption on the evening of May 23. Not in recent memory had the otherwise placid Kathmandu valley witnessed such a challenging demonstration of organized violence that did not enjoy the support of the Nepali Congress.

At any rate, not since December 16, 1960. Large crowds of rebellious men roamed the streets of Kathmandu determined to give the regime hell. Any perceptible observer could see that events had overtaken King Birendra, leaving him with no alternative but to call the army. That was a step which he hated most to take and not without reason.

If the threads of the story are gathered up, it would be evident that the whole thing started with an almost inconspicuous protest against the police lathi charge on a students' march to the Pakistani Embassy, on April 6 1979, to condemn the execution of former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The period between that date and the outburst of May 23 saw more turbulent student demonstrations, protest marches and workers' strikes in various parts of the country than any time before. This resulted in the only response that is to be expected from any authoritarian regime anywhere in the world—the increasing use of the stick and the gun which only added fuel to the flames, lengthening the casualty list.

The ring dance of terror and counter-terror precipitated a crisis that closed all the king's options except ordering the army to step in. But it did not take him long to get an idea of the forces and factors he was up against. He could well appreciate that by throwing the army into the breach

he would not be able to resolve the problem. On the contrary, the logic of the first step would have to be followed by the successive steps that would eventually require him to cashier the government, directly assume the reins of power and allow the army to run the show.

This King Birendra was determined to avoid. For he was aware that this was precisely what the forces of destabilization were awaiting in order to get their own way. The hardliners and anti-King Birendra forces, which had their allies in the royal family and which enjoyed external support and patronage, would in collusion with the disaffected elements in the higher echelon of the army command call for a showdown. The apprehension was that these forces would make determined bid to oust King Birendra and place on the throne a man of their choice. And, the referendum proclamation was meant to pre-empt this well-orchestrated move.

The King had barely 12 hours, between the calling out of the army and his morning broadcast of May 24, without prior announcement (which was contrary to the norm followed in the case of royal broadcasts) to decide his course of action. The question was : Should he take on the forces arrayed against him at the risk to the throne or retain it by returning to the people what was theirs. Shorn of verbiage, King Birendra had to choose between the crown and the panchayat system, and he chose to sacrifice the latter. Kathmandu's knowledgeable sources confirmed that the referendum proposal had no taker in the royal family except its author and his spouse.

Incontrovertible evidence to prove this may not at the moment be easy to come by. But if the public utterances and the asides of the principal actors (defenders as well as antagonists of the panchayat system) in the current drama are sifted, the pieces of the puzzle would fall into place. Suffice it to say that Koirala, much as his traducers might accuse him of having compromised his position, would not without reason repeatedly emphasize that the referendum proclamation was not a hoax, that the King had none but the people to fall back on. The former Prime Minister was not really absent-minded when he told the present author as

recently as on July 4 that King Birendra's referendum declaration was Hobson's choice and no less.<sup>85</sup> Is there reason to suspect that the former Prime Minister does not know what he is talking about? Certainly not!

The referendum declaration is tantamount to an admission that the arrested process of the country's evolution as a democratic society must be resumed. It does not necessarily follow that democracy in the Nepalese context should be coterminous with the Westminster concept of it. Rather Nepal should have freedom to evolve and shape its own democratic institutions. There is, however, this common denominator between the Westminster variety of democracy and what the native genius of a given people might fashion—it must derive its sanction from the people. It would be in order here to restate that not even the most unsparing critic of the regime prefers a sudden and total reversal of the course of Nepalese politics leading to the abolition of the monarchy. So far as that is concerned King Birendra might rest assured.

This topic, much as some might resent, would inevitably bring former Prime Minister Koirala into the picture. For the Nepalese equation, it bears repetition, boils down to three factors—King Birendra, B.P. Koirala and the people. Any one of the three could be ignored only to the detriment of the other two. And the 64-year-old Koirala does not seem to have embarked on a journey that is destined to end nowhere. Yesterday's rebel has not mellowed to the extent of becoming a resigned onlooker of the suspenseful drama that is being enacted on the political stage of Nepal. He still has left within him plenty of guts and, above all, unshakable faith in democracy.

It is also true in the given context that the King provides a national focus of sorts and Koirala does not question this. Rather he wants the King to be in the vanguard of those that want a democratic Nepal, not in the warped sense of the term, to ensure its children a place in the sun. Under the present circumstances, Koirala believes that the institution of monarchy has a role to play in fusing the country's

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<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 6.

diverse ethnic groups, interests and ties into an integrated whole. The emphasis, of course, is on the fact that this could be done fruitfully only when the people are really free to participate in politics, when the decision-making process would cease to be an individual's exclusive privilege.

It may be restated that no institution, whether protected by divinity or by arbitrary power, can indefinitely withstand the tide of times. If Non-alignment, which is not loaded in favour of my particular country, is the best answer to the exigencies of Nepal's geopolitical situation, a democratic system of polity provides the safest guarantee for its freedom, progress and security.

*Parts 2 to 6 contain excerpts from the transcripts of taped interviews which the Author had with B.P. Koirala between 1973 and 1979 at Varanasi, Calcutta and other places. The tapes are now in the collection of the Sociological Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.*





## Part - 2

### CHAINED IN A DUNGEON

Q: Shall we begin at the beginning? In your youth you had started a revolution—I mean the 1950-51 struggle, that liberated the people, as well as the institution of monarchy. Before the struggle was launched, you paid a clandestine visit to Kathmandu with a view to persuading the last Rana Prime Minister, Mohan Shumsher, to agree to a principled settlement. This did not succeed and you were arrested in 1948. Is that correct?

A: Yes, 1948. And they put me in a small black-hole.

Q: Would you call it a dungeon?

A: Literally, truly it was a dungeon. I was chained all the 24 hours. I did not see a human face for six months. And, I was not permitted to go out of my room.

Q: How come you were arrested? Did anybody betray you?

A: That I can't say. In any case, I was arrested. I think it was sometime in November or early December. It was very cold. For 21 days they did not give any bed to sleep in and I had to sleep on the cement floor in the December cold of Kathmandu. I used to think that ultimately I must fast unto death—otherwise there would be no end to this. So, I went on a hunger strike. It lasted for 29 days.

Q: Which year was it?

A: I think it was 1949—May or June. I was released because there was pressure from Jawaharlal Nehru. After my release we decided that we must take the plunge. With 19 members who came out with me in 1949 we contacted other political leaders, Subarna Shumsher, Mahabir Shumsher and others. They were already in a party which was openly dedicated to violent revolution. I contacted them and we formed a single party. Their party was called Demo-

cratic Congress and our party was Nepali National Congress. We took off "Democratic" from their party and "National" from ours and the name of the new party became Nepali Congress. That was formed in April, 1950 at a joint conference of the two parties.

Q: What was Dr. Lohia's role in that?

A: Lohia was a great help, particularly in shaping the Nepali National Congress that was formed in 1947. He was a friend of mine. It was he who put me in touch with the leaders of the Indian national movement as well as with the international leaders.

Q: But then, the Indian leaders — you also knew them personally?

A: Yes. For instance, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was with me in jail during the Quit India movement, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, G.B. Pant, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Jayaprakash Narayan. Still, because of his [Lohia's] role in the Goa movement he had a certain influence in certain sections of the political leadership. Particularly, he had a very affectionate relationship with Gandhiji. As a matter of fact, I met Gandhiji through him. He took me to Gandhiji and in 1948 I was with Gandhiji for a whole day. And I found there was a guru-and-disciple relationship between Gandhiji and Lohia.

Q: What was Gandhiji's opinion about Nepal?

A: When Lohia introduced me to Gandhiji he said, 'Look Koirala, I can't be of any help to you. When my people in India do not listen to me, how can you expect that your people, the Ranas will listen to me!' That was two days before he was shot. I met him on the 28th of January, 1948. I said, 'I do not want any material help from you. I want your blessings.' Gandhiji said, 'I always support and my blessings are always with those people who fight for a righteous cause. Your cause is one such. So I bless you. But I can be of no help to you'.

#### CONTACT WITH JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Q: What about Jawaharlal Nehru? Did you have any contact with him?

A: Nehru, yes! I met Nehru not through Lohia. I met him independently. I think it was in December, 1946, at the Meerut Congress.

Q: Was it the first time that you met Nehru?

A: Yes, as a political being I met him for the first time at the Meerut Congress. I told him about the state of affairs in Nepal and that we were organising a political party to fight for democratic rights. Then he said, 'It was quite alright and that much help can be rendered to Nepal if people like you should organise. After all, these small states, these feudal societies, their days are numbered' ... I found Nehru friendly, very warm. During my hunger-strike, when my condition became critical, my people contacted him through Jayaprakash Narayan. Jayaprakash telephoned him from the hospital — he was in hospital with broken bones due to a car accident. My wife met Jayaprakash and from the hospital he contacted Nehru and Nehru contacted Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher through his Ambassador, suggesting that I should be released. Then as a gesture he suggested that my wife be permitted to see me in prison since he was arranging for a plane to take my wife to Kathmandu and that landing facility be given to it. That was a great moral assistance. And the impact of my wife travelling by an Indian government plane would have been very great. Knowing the political implication of such a dramatic dash to Kathmandu, Bijay Shumsher<sup>1</sup> suggested that my wife would be taking a great risk by travelling in an Indian government plane.

MOHAN SHUMSHER

Q: What was Mohan Shumsher like?

A: Mohan Shumsher was a person with a stiff upper lip and he was always conscious of his feudal heritage. Once, when he was Prime Minister and I was Home Minister, he was in trouble and he called me and took me to his garden and we sat on a bench. He said, 'I was born in an autocratic

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<sup>1</sup> Eldest son of Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher, Bijay Shumsher was Nepal's Ambassador to India at that time.

family, my father was Prime Minister of Nepal; and then whoever was Prime Minister later on I was second in command. I do not know what democracy is. My mind fails to understand the modern trend, and you are a man of the modern times. But you are rash; you have no experience. Why can't experience and energy combine? You have energy and I have experience'.

Q: Was he conscious of the historical fact that the institution of monarchy had been a prisoner in their hands for a full century. Did he visualize a situation wherein the Ranas and the commoners could join hands against the institution of monarchy?

A: Mohan Shumsher? No. The fact was that King Tribhuvan used to be thoroughly demoralized before Mohan Shumsher. He was uncomfortable in Mohan Shumsher's presence. All along he [Mohan Shumsher] had been a sort of father to him; Mohan Shumsher had always dominated him; the King's personality remained bent under the Rana rulers ... the King wanted to remove him.

Q: You never wanted the abolition of the institution of monarchy?

A: Not at all ... particularly at that point of time ... Because, I thought the monarch was the symbol of national unity and the symbol of continuity of the State, I did not want to remove him.

Q: Was there any difference of opinion in your party regarding this?

A: Definitely.

Q: Who were they?

A: I do not want to name them. But there was a strong feeling that I was a staunch supporter of the monarchy. My second difficulty was India.

## HOME MINISTRY IN NEPAL

Our country had witnessed a revolution, a total revolution in the sense that the Rana system was uprooted and the people for the first time in Nepal's history had started organising different political parties, holding political meetings and all that. And the administration was being

organized on modern lines. There was a Ministry functioning in the country. It was all very interesting.

I will give you an example to show how drastic had been the change. When I became Home Minister I sent for the Home Secretary and also I wanted to sit in the Home office. There was no Home Office. Nobody had heard of the Home Ministry or such a person known as Home Secretary. Then I enquired : 'Is there somebody managing the Home Ministry or Home Affairs? Or responsible for files pertaining to Home Affairs?' There was nobody. The Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief used to look after the entire country. I sought for one man who could assist me, who could be my Secretary. I went to the Prime Minister and asked him to suggest to me a person whom I could put in the chair as Home Secretary. He said, 'I can't give you any name. You go to my brother'.

Q: What was his name?

A: Babar Shumsher. He was during the Rana regime Commander-in-Chief require. 'He may be able to give you a name because I have given him the job of looking after internal matters,' Mohan Shumsher said. I went to General Babar who said 'There is a man, educated, who could be of some use. He has worked under me.' He was the first Nepali M.A. I suggested his name to the Cabinet and the Cabinet appointed him Home Secretary. But there was no chair, no room where I could put him. Then I said, don't worry. I have got my house; I would clear the ground floor so that the Home Ministry may start functioning there. A chair was found for him, but he refused to take it. He said, 'I am not going to take this chair because I don't know my job'. I said: 'I am also a new man. As a representative of the revolution I am here and you are in this chair because of me! So both of us would make a job of it.' He said; 'No, you take the responsibility on your shoulder. I am not going to take any responsibility. I don't know anything about Home Affairs unless the job is merely to read out petitions to the Commander-in-Chief.' That was the time of petrol rationing. As there was nobody to sign petrol coupons, I used to sign them for quite a few days. There was a police force, but only confined to the capital and

hardly a few dozen police men at that. I said, alright, I must have it reorganized. In the Rana period the police duty used to be performed by the army.

Q: That was an advantage in a way, wasn't it, that you could start with a clean slate.'

INDIAN AMBASSADOR SINHA

A: Yes, that was an advantage. That is what I am going to tell you why there was difficulty with India's diplomatic representative. Such was the situation. A totally, new order was being created. At that juncture, the man who represented India had a very narrow outlook with a feudal background, a non-revolutionary background. Even in the Indian context, he was considered a reactionary. He had never participated in India's struggle for freedom. He was the leader of the enlightened feudal class. He was Vice-Chancellor of Patna University before he became India Ambassador. He had supported the British in their war efforts—he was the leader of the national war front in India. He did not have the temperament, though he was a very educated man, for a revolutionary situation.

Q: What was his name?

A: Sir C.P.N. Sinha. He had done good service to British India. He was the man who represented India, but he did not have the background, inclination, temperament or conviction for the revolutionary change. So all through, we started hitting each other. I advocated a change of attitude. At that time, India had considerable influence in our country. I told him once that he didn't function as the representative of India, but as a representative the Muzaffarpur District Board. [he was the chairman of the Muzaffarpur District Board once].

Q: Didn't you contact Prime Minister Nehru and tell him about this?

A: Yes I did. But Prime Minister Nehru had a weakness for beaurocrats. His practice was put a man to a job and so long as he was there he did not interfere. That is my experience. Although he controlled the beaurocrats, senior beaurocrats used to control him also. In matters of

policy formulation, he depended on the top beaurocrats in Delhi more than on his own colleagues. I think he was Foreign Minister at that time and he did not brook any suggestion from any quarter. Of the man who guided him most in foreign matters was Bajpai [the late Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai]<sup>2</sup> and there was another person—I forget his name—who later on became the Foreign Minister or a Minister in the cabinet. He depended on them. I used to meet Nehru frequently but an impression had been created in Delhi that I was very mercurial in politics.

Q: Who created that impression.

A: I can't tell. During the revolution, I was for a total revolution but the leadership of my party was not for a total revolution. They were for a controlled sort of change. But, I wanted to invest all our resources in a total struggle. It was not in Delhi's interest that there should be a total revolution then. When it came to the question of negotiation (the tripartite negotiation between the Congress, Ranas and the King—I was a party to this) the issue of the venue was raised. Where should the meeting be held? I thought it should be held at Biratnagar because that was the headquarters of the revolutionary movement. Others objected to the suggestion. Then I said it should be in Kathmandu because it was the capital of Nepal. C.P.N. Sinha was also there. He had come to see me. He said that the party delegation would consist of Subarna Shumsher, M.P. Koirala and myself, the three most important persons in the party. He suggested Delhi as the venue. I said no to his suggestion and insisted on Kathmandu. Subarna Shumsher and C.P.N. Sinha said that the King would not go there because Kathmandu was not under our control. The Ranas were there. I said, 'So what!' The Ranas would have to take the responsibility for our safety. M.P. Koirala said: 'Oh, you don't know the Ranas, their chicanery. They might the King. They might kill all of us. What then would be the value of their guarantee. You don't know these Ranas'. Then C.P.N. Sinha said: 'The elder Koirala is a very wise man, and the younger Koirala is very

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<sup>2</sup> He was the Foreign Secretary at that time.

rash. His verdict carried weight in New Delhi for a long time!

Again I suggested Biratnagar. It would be a safe place. They said that in Biratnagar there would be no proper accommodation, and that it could not provide appropriate accommodation suitable for the high status of the King. I said, "You can't say that! He is one of the leaders of a revolutionary movement. He is not an ordinary King! We could put up a very good tent for him." But C.P.N. Sinha said : 'Mr. Koirala, you are a brave soldier and such arrangement would do for you but not for the King.' Ultimately it was decided that Delhi should be the venue, which I opposed till the last.

### NEHRU'S ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE

Q: What precisely was Nehru's role in the 1950-51 struggle. Was he aware of the fact that I had gone to Burma to procure arms, that Burma gave the arms.

A: Nehru was a tower of strength for our movement. He rendered us all moral support. Short of material help, he gave us all support. For that matter, the entire Indian nation supported our cause. But the Government of India did not give us one single piece of arms. It gave no material support.

So far as Burma's aid is concerned, I will give you the history. I had gone there in March 1947 because the Indian Socialist Party was thinking—under Lohia's inspiration—of calling an Asian Socialist Conference. They wanted the Burmese Socialist Party to be involved; They wanted the Socialist Party of Burma which was in power there to play the host for that conference. I went to Lohia and Jayaprakash for arms. Even at that time I was thinking in terms of an armed insurrection because I knew that an armed insurrection in Nepal was inevitable, although my discussion with the Indian leaders at that point was not about a violent struggle, I knew that in the 1942 movement in India Lohia and Jayaprakash had raised some armed bands and I thought that they had some caches of arms hidden somewhere. I wanted to procure those arms from them. I went to them



and they gave me some contacts in Hyderabad, Assam and Bihar.

#### JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN AND DR. LOHIA

Q: Who gave you the Hyderabad contact?

A: Lohia.

Q: Who gave you the Assam contact?

A: Jayaprakash Narayan. He gave me some addresses in Bihar also, but those were of no avail. Then Lohia suggested that the idea of an Asian Socialist Conference was being discussed among the Socialist circles in India. So, it would be worthwhile for me to go to Burma as an emissary, because I was not an Indian, I was a Nepali and that fact would give added weight to the suggestion. Lohia suggested that I should go and discuss this conference question with them, so that it would be possible for the Burmese Socialists to play host. Then he suggested that I could discuss my arms problem also with them on the sideline. He rang up the Burmese Ambassador in New Delhi, U Win, who later on became the Minister for Religious Affairs.

I met U Win and told him that I would be seeing him soon in connection with the proposed Socialist Conference. He gave me necessary papers and a letter to the Chairman of the Burmese Socialist Party. He also telephoned the Burmese Consulate in Calcutta to issue a temporary visa to me. He also said that it would be helpful if I could get Lohia's letter and Jayaprakash Narayan's letter too, because they were held in high esteem by the leaders of the Socialist movement in Burma, particularly JP. Lohia was in Delhi. I got a letter from him that very evening and I took the train to Calcutta. I knew Jayaprakash was in Calcutta and I got his letter there.

#### BURMESE SOCIALIST LEADERS

Q: To whom did JP write?

A: U Ko Kogi. I think Lohia also wrote to U Ko Kogi. In Burma I met U Ko Kogi and he invited me to dinner

at his place. At the dinner party, I met the Defence Minister, U Ba Swe, U Tin Mongi, who later on became Ambassador to London, U Hla Aung, who at that time was organising the Foreign Ministry and some other important persons in the Socialist movement. Next day, U Ba Swe invited me to lunch where only Ne Win, Commander-in-Chief at that time, was present.

Q: You mean Prime Minister Ne Win [now President]?

A: Yes, Prime Minister Ne Win. We became friends at first sight, so to speak. Particularly because his manners, his outspokenness, and my forthright manner suited one another. They took me to a basement in the Defence Ministry where models of every weapons used by the Burmese army were kept, and they wanted me to spell out what types of arms I wanted. I said, I did not know anything about the arms. Then they said, 'You must send a man who knows the business.' I told them that I came because I wanted to know whether it would be possible for them, when the occasion arose, to help us, so that I could depend on them for support. They said, 'We will give you all support. But you must send a man who knows the job—a military man, preferably.' That was how I established the first contact with them. In 1950 when ...

Q: Before that, let us talk about the Asian Socialist Conference. What happened to that.

A: They said that a situation of civil war had developed in Burma. Therefore, they said, the time was not appropriate for holding the conference in Burma. When the situation would ease they said certainly they would be prepared to hold the conference there. They supported this idea wholeheartedly and said that they were already in correspondence with Lohia—Lohia was the man in the foreign department of the Socialist Party at the time. But, they said, they were in difficulties now and it would not be possible for them to hold the conference for the next one or two years.

In 1950, when the Nepali Democratic Congress of Subarna Shumsher and Mahabir Shumsher, and our Nepali National Congress coalesced to form the Nepali Congress, Subarna Shumsher took me aside and said that they had no arms. They had spent lakhs of rupees for arms but they had

not been successful. You know Subarna's Democratic Congress was from its birth committed to armed struggle, whereas our party adhered to non-violent struggle. Our argument was that without arms in hand, to talk of armed struggle was just idle talk. I said: 'I would get you arms provided you are prepared to spend some money.' They said that they had money. The question arose as to who should go there [Burma]. We had to select a man who had got the credentials from the Socialist Party, who enjoyed the confidence of Dr. Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan and who was an expert also. Myself and Subarna thought of you and we discussed it with Lohia—Lohia was then in Calcutta. He, in fact, jumped at this idea. We selected Thirbom Malla, he had lately passed from Dehra Dun Military Academy, as our military expert and we sent you and Malla. This is how you came into the picture and you took letters from Lohia and Jayaprakash.

Q: I took a letter from Lohia to U Win and a letter from Jayaprakash to U Ba Swe. I may tell you something about my experience there. I had to meet the entire National Executive of the Burma Socialist Party and they kind of grilled me.

#### AIRLIFTING ARMS

A: You sent a message saying that they were prepared to give us some arms free, as a gift to the revolution in Nepal and for subsequent consignments, we would have to pay the price which the Burma Government paid for the arms—nominal price. You also said that they would load the arms in Rangoon at the airport or the dock but it would be our responsibility to get it to India. Mahabir Shumsher now came into the picture. He was the owner of the Himalayan Aviation<sup>3</sup> and he had daredevil pilot, a pole, who had to his credit very daring exploits during the Second World War.

We discussed the problem together—Mahabir Shumsher that pilot, and myself. Perhaps, Brojowski was his name.

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<sup>3</sup> A privately owned airlines company.

The pilot agreed to do the job. He calculated that it would take about three hours from Rangoon to Calcutta or thereabouts and said that he would do it. The question arose, where to land the arms. I suggested Bihta. It was a big airport (near Patna) during the Second World War but it had been abandoned. There were some chowkidars, who were all Nepalese ex-service men. I contacted them and the plane landed there.

Q: The Rangoon part of the job I can tell you. Tomsett was the manager of the Himalayan Aviation: His brother-in-law, a Burma government official, was in charge of the log-book and all that at Rangoon airport. He had the log-book manipulated in a manner so that the plane could land at Bihta and then get back to Calcutta and yet maintain the scheduled time.

A: Subarna Shumsher and myself were at Bihta airport to receive the arms consignment. We loaded it in a trailer and brought it to my place. I had the small house 'Cosy Nook,' in Patna and dumped it in the ground floor room.

Q: Where you also had established a transmitter?

A: Yes. I went to meet the Bihar Chief Minister, Sreekrishna Sinha. We had been together in prison during the Quit India movement, we spent two and a half years in Hazaribagh Jail. I was quite intimate with him and he was very kind to me. He had told me that whatever assistance I wanted he would give it to me. I telephoned him and told him that there was something that I wanted to discuss with him. He said, 'Come along.' I told him that I had some arms which I wanted to transfer to the border areas and I wanted his help. He was shocked and immediately called the IGP (Inspector-General of Police). He said, 'Do you have any information about illegal arms that have been brought to Patna?' The IGP said, 'No, Sir.' He [Chief Minister] said: 'B.P. has arms'. The IGP was flabbergasted. He [Chief Minister] helped me on that occasion. He told me that the arms must be removed within 24 hours and that he would give me 24 hours' time for clearing the arms. We removed the arms to Biratnagar and to Birganj and that is how we started our movement.

Q: Before the second attack on Biratnagar, 300 rifles

arrived in the late hours of the night. Isn't that so?

A: Yes.

#### ARMED STRUGGLE

Q: We had the rifles unloaded and early in the morning, the second attack on Biratnagar was launched. From where did you procure those rifles?

A: Those were from Birganj. When Birganj was captured, we had about 400 rifles, and we captured about 400 rifles, perhaps even more, and a huge quantity of ammunition.

Q: And money?

A: About 35 or 40 lakhs rupees. We sent about, so far as I could remember, 250 rifles to Biratnagar. We had our headquarters deep in the jungle, Thori jungle, near Birganj and the arms were sent from Birganj to Biratnagar. The first attack on Biratnagar failed. You also participated in that attack. We had to run for your lives and some of our people were killed.

Q: We also took some lives.

A: Yes, and you also captured some arms but not in sufficient number.

Q: Which gave the struggle a big impetus!

A: If there is any misconception in anybody's mind that arms had been given to us by India, it is wrong. We had not received one single piece of arms from India.

Q: Who financed the struggle?

A: The two brothers, Subarna and Mahabir Shumsher.

Q: Whose contribution was most.

A: In the beginning, Mahabir Shumsher contacted me. He told me about the arrangement. He said that between the two brothers, they would contribute equal shares. If Mahabir Shumsher contributed two lakhs—the two brothers were in agreement—an equivalent amount would be contributed by Subarna Shumsher also.

#### NEPALESE COMMUNISTS

Q: What was the role of the Communist Party in the 1950-51 revolution. Did it support you? Did it oppose you?

If so, why? Was it the consequence of the 1948 Calcutta meet of the Asian Communists where an insurrectionary role was chalked out for the Asian Communists. What was the Communist Party's attitude toward the struggle the Nepali Congress launched after your arrest and the dissolution of Parliament in December, 1960. When did the Nepali Communist Party split, following the Sino-Soviet conflict? How many Communist Parties are there in Nepal today and what are their respective roles. Have you any truck with any of them—the pro-Moscow or the pro-Beijing factions?

A: The role of the Communist Party was one of opposition to the insurrectionary movement launched by the Nepali Congress against the Rana tyranny in 1950-51. They [Communists] tried to sabotage it by interfering with our recruitment campaign, by raising issues that were irrelevant to the main task of fighting against the army of the Rana rulers, by trying to demoralize the fighting forces of the Nepali Congress, by raising sectarian slogans or putting forward demands that could not be met at the time of the insurrection. To them, the great revolution which was taking place was irrelevant and the armed fight between the democratic and the autocratic forces was of little interest to the toiling masses.

In the light of the present-day predicament, the Party had landed in, I should say along with other parties, its role at that time was incomprehensible. My impression is that they [Communists] have never analysed the national situation except through the interpretative lense of some international authority. And this prevented them, on the one hand, from seeing things in their right perspective and, on the other, from formulating a realistic policy.

In the subsequent struggle launched by the Nepali Congress against the imposition of a totalitarian regime by the King in 1961-62 their role had been equally disappointing. But their stand against the struggle and in support of the royal regime created friction in the rank and file, a section of which under Pushpalal broke away from the main party. The disintegration of the Communist Party as a united party began with the short-sighted policy of backing up

the totalitarian regime of the King. It was also about this time that the great split in the international Communist movement occurred—the great schism between Moscow and Peking.

The Communist movement in Nepal thereafter split into three factions: the first clearly pro-Russia; the second, pro-China but in favour of monarchical despotism and against the democratic struggle; and the third, pro-China but at the same time anti-King. The anti-King attitude of this faction put it nearest to the democratic forces. The process of disintegration did not stop with this. There were further splits like the Patan group, the Bhatgaon group, the Pathan group etc., each under separate leadership. As I told you, the pro-Peking faction, which is against the present system, is nearest to us among all the factions of the Communist movement. This is all that I can say about it. There has also been some change in other factions as a result of the detente between Peking and Washington and the events of 1970-71 in this part of the world, that is, the emergence of Bangladesh, the break up of Pakistan and China's incapability to give shape of direction to those events.

Q: I should like you to explain one more point. The Communist Party, which totally opposed the 1950-51 revolution spearheaded by the Nepali Congress, had in its conference some time in the 1950s, it could be 1955 or 56, and it changed its line. It admitted that its approach to the struggle the Nepali Congress had launched was wrong. In fact they [Communists] said that it was a mistake on their part to have opposed the struggle, which was a national people's struggle. What do you say about that, I mean, about this change of line on the part of the Communist Party.

A: I have not heard of it. But similar reappraisal of their policy is now under consideration. It seems the Communist Party all the three factions—have started reappraising their old policy of opposition to the democratic forces and support for the King. I have currently been meeting the leaders of all these factions and I detect in them an attitude of change. Some of them also told me that they had made a mistake by treating the King as the national leader of a

resurgent Nepal. Therefore, if they had changed their line in the 1950s, a similar change is likely to occur in the 1970s also. Because, as I have told you, I found an attitude of change in their talks with me.



## Part - 3

### INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS

Q: Did you ever talk to Nehru about India-China relations?

A: Yes, I did. India and China must compose their differences in the interest of all the underdeveloped countries and also for the solidarity of the exploited humanity. Whenever I had an occasion, I used to suggest to him that some kind of an agreement should be reached between India and China. And Nehru used to say, 'After all the boundary dispute was not of such nature that it couldn't be solved amicably.'

Q: In which year?

A: That was even before I became Prime Minister, and also during the period I was Prime Minister. And then he added: 'We have been discussing the problem recently.' I think a few months before my talks with Nehru, Chou En-lai had met Nehru and they discussed many things. But both parties didn't seem to place forward their own proposals. Each party was wanting that the other should initiate—place its cards first.

I remember an occasion in October, 1960. I was in Teheran. T.N. Kaul was the Indian Ambassador there. He was a friend of mine. When I told him about my talks with Nehru and the border question he said: 'That is what we wanted. The problem was that we did not know the mind of China. What is it that China wants? What are the specific demands of China? What are the issues that are vitally important to China? If we knew all that there would be no difficulty of adjustment.' He added: 'It would be a great service if you could find that out, so that we would also be prepared for it, how far we could concede. We have been discussing generalities, not specific issues. What is of vital interest to China? What is of vital interest to India. You

know our mind as you have been meeting our leaders, and if you could know the mind of Chinese leaders perhaps something might emerge!

I was also thinking of taking it up with Chou En-Lai (now Zhou Enlai) since I had established a rapport with him. I had a personal relationship apart from official relationship and I could discuss anything with him. There was no harm because India was not involved. And, if anything went wrong, I would be held responsible. The two parties would not come into the picture at all. I think it was toward the end of October 1960.

Q: Did you at any time get this impression from your talks with Nehru that India might agree to the Chinese position in Aksai Chin?

A: No, I didn't. Not specifically, that is. But I got this impression that he [Nehru] also felt that the issues were not such as could not be solved amicably. There were differences, but the differences could be settled on a give-and-take basis.

Q: Did anybody ever all tell you—anybody, of course, means men in power—that there must be some firm guarantee from China regarding India's position in the North-eastern area?

A: Well, it might have been in their mind.

Q: What was your impression when Nehru said in Parliament that 'not a blade of grass grows in Aksai Chin'?

A: I think that shows that his mind was resilient on that issue. Which means that he was preparing the country should any compromise be arrived at. And not to insist on a territory where not a blade of grass grows. I had a discussion with the Indian Ambassador, [in Nepal] Bhagawan Sahay. He also agreed with me that some arrangement could be arrived at to secure the frontiers of China in that region, Aksai Chin. The whole trouble arose out of the road that was constructed in what was claimed to be India's territory—which was claimed by both the parties. There were also many alternatives that could be considered one of which was China could make use of the road in whichever way it wanted, but, theoretically, it had to pass through Indian territory. That was the position. Like that there were many alter-

natives, and I felt that Delhi was prepared to make some compromise.

Q: Was it ever suggested to you by Nehru to take up matters on behalf of India with China?

A: No. As a matter of fact they frowned upon that idea. They didn't like it. They wanted to do that directly. But they felt that I should try to know the minds of these people, so that serious attempts at a compromise could be made. Unless you know the mind of the other party you only talk generalities.

#### MEETING CHINESE LEADERS

Q: What was your experience in China when you visited that country?

A: I met Zhou Enlai—I think it was in 1954 or 55 when he visited Nepal. I had a long talk with him. He categorically told me that 'so far as Nepal is concerned we shall not do anything that would hurt the interest of India.' And, he let me understand that they had recognized India's special relationship with Nepal.

Q: When did you visit China?

A: In 1960.

Q: As the Prime Minister?

A: Yes, as the Prime Minister. My main purpose was to establish personal contact with the leaders there and to get from them as much economic assistance as was possible.

Q: What about the non-aggression pact that they proposed. Did they insist on it? And also about the Kathmandu-Kodari-Lhasa road?

A: No, they didn't insist. They only tried once at that time and when they knew that I didn't like it, I didn't like the proposal, they didn't insist. When he [Zhou Enlai] later on visited Nepal, at my invitation, he again referred to the proposition and I said that economically it was not viable.

Q: Why did you oppose the construction of the road?

A: My point was economic.

Q: Was there no political consideration?

A: No, there was none. We, the Cabinet, had decided

that honest endeavours should be made to fulfil our commitments to our people. We wanted to do some economic development which was tangible so that we could face the next general election with confidence. Therefore, whatever aid we got should be economically and efficiently utilized. That was my purpose.

Q: Could you tell me something about the massive military parade that had been organized in your honour in Beijing.

A: No, not quite that. There were some parachute demonstrations. I had a General of the Nepalese army along with me and I asked him to visit the army establishments. It was then suggested that there would be an air force display—particularly with the participation of the women parachutists, march past, etc. I said that I was not impressed. I told them that they were a big power and we were a very small power. Even if we had very big military might, if they wanted they could conquer us with relative ease. Other big military powers were there in the world whom they could impress.

My impressions of Mao and Zhou Enlai are very pleasant. As a matter of fact, two more polished gentlemen (specially Chou En-lai,) than these two persons it is difficult to come across. They never raised their voice and their talks were always controlled. Even if they were angry they didn't give expression to that.

## ENCOUNTER WITH MAO

So far as Mao was concerned it was a very interesting meeting that I had with him. They didn't tell us that I was going to meet Mao. We were in Hanchow, a very beautiful city. We saw a caravan of cars near the portico at the far end of our hotel. Somebody suggested that a very big man had come to the hotel. We also had occupied a portion of that hotel. In the evening, we had our dinner—the dinner was given by the Mayor of Hanchow. There were speeches and all that. It was late and we were tired and I had gone to bed.

I was woken up by, probably, the Minister in-charge of

our party. He said that Mao Tse-tung wanted to meet me. I said, 'Now?'—and I started dressing. He said, 'You don't have to dress up. Just put an overcoat on your pajamas.' Even then, he didn't tell me that Mao was waiting in the next lounge of that big hotel. But he said that it was not necessary to be formally dressed. When I was coming out he said: 'Wouldn't madam Koirala like to meet Mr. Mao Tse-dung.' I said: 'Most certainly, but I thought the appointment was only for me. Then I woke her up and she also dressed up.

We were taken to the place and ushered into the room where Mao was waiting with five or six of his important colleagues. He did give the impression of a very tender, suave person. He was in his usual loose clothes—too big for his body—and baggy pants. The whole gesture was very courteous, very affectionate. He looked like a fatherly man. In the discussion that followed I told him that there were some border disputes, specifically the question of Mount Everest. We suggested that Mount Everest was in our land. He asked: 'You have a name?' Fortunately we have a name Sagarmatha. He said, 'No, it is Chomolingam and it's in the territory of China.' Then he said, 'Let us not call it Chamolingam, let us not call it Sagarmatha either. Let us call it Friendship Peak.' I said if it did not involve giving up our right to the peak then I could call it by that name. Like that we started the discussion. Ultimately it was settled that it should be left to be decided later on, on the basis of the recommendations of a commission; and again both the Prime Minister should meet and then decide. In that context I told him that his was a big country and ours was a small country. 'We have always a mortal apprehension that you might create trouble for us.' He said, 'Because you are a small country the whole world will think, if you create enough noise, that we have been aggressive and you are the victim of our aggression. Even if you create trouble for us, nobody will believe that a small country like Nepal could create trouble for us. So you have an advantage over us.' I think it was said partly in joke and partly in seriousness.

Q: What about the non-aggression pact.

A: Non-aggression pact? Of course, there was some mention of it. I said, 'It is not necessary because I don't think we are going to attack you, and you are not going to attack us. Therefore a non-aggression pact is not necessary.' Then I said; 'If you ever decide, against your culture, to invade us, the pact will not stand in the way, It will only create problems unnecessarily in my relations with the other countries.'

Q: Did he insist on it?

A: No.

Q: Did he appreciate your position?

A: Yes.

Q: Was India ever mentioned in your talks with the Chinese leaders?

A: No. They were particular about this and only once they mentioned India and it was that they did not want to appear to be competing with India to secure our goodwill.

#### AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Q: Shall we now switch over to the United Nations and have some information about your meeting with Khrushchev and other important men there.

A: It was in 1960, at the time of that important session when all the Heads of States had congregated there-- Khrushchev was there, so were Nehru and Sukarno and all the other big Heads of States. There was Lester Pearson, also Fidel Castro. When Castro came to the dais Khrushchev rushed up and hugged him. Nehru went up to the dais to shake hands with him. Khrushchev was followed by all the leaders of the Eastern European countries. Nehru told me, 'I admire his courage for putting up a fight against the biggest power in the world. I admire that man.'

From another point of view a situation was fast developing when Nepal was assuming a greater importance than its size would suggest. It was because of its geographical location, tension with China, and strained India-China relations. That was the beginning of the whole world taking interest in Nepal. That was also the time when I thought we should establish rapport with the leaders of the world.

This was my purpose of attending the UN meet.

Khrushchev, particularly, was a big surprise. I invited him to a party I had given, a customary thing to do. Khrushchev made it a point to come. But the most remarkable thing was that he came very early and he was about the last person to leave. As a matter of fact, I had a small supper engagement with a beautiful girl, whom I had met in Kent. When she read in the papers about my presence in New York, she invited me. But, because of Khrushchev, I could not keep that engagement I again met him a few days after.

Q: Did he invite you?

A: Yes, and we were together for a few hours.

Q: What was it that you talked about.

A: We talked about various things, the political situation in Nepal, the international political scene and all kinds of topics.

Q: What was Khrushchev's point in inviting you? Could it be that he wanted also to discuss Sino-Soviet relations.

A: I do not exactly know why. Maybe it was because strategically, Nepal had in the given context acquired great importance. Whatever that might be, he found time, some three hours, for me. Among the issues we discussed was the role of the UN Secretary-General. He had suggested that instead of one Secretary-General, there should be a Secretariat consisting of three Secretaries, the Troika, one representing the Non-aligned countries, one from the Communist countries and the third from the West. According to him, 'UN was monopolised by America. In order to dilute this monopoly, it was necessary that you of the Third World should be represented. Your bloc should also be represented by one Secretary. And, of course, our part of the world must be represented by one Secretary.' That was the main issue that we discussed. He was very friendly and deeply sympathetic.

Q: Did you invite him to visit Nepal?

A: Yes, I did. He said that he had, in fact, been wanting very much to visit Nepal. He also said, 'I do not have to wait for your invitation, I can come to you any time as a friend.' He pointed at a map and said, 'Here is Moscow and there is Kathmandu. That is not a very great distance,

a few hours' journey and I shall be there. I will certainly come to Kathmandu!

Q: What was your impression of that man?

A: Very practical, very natural, very lovable and, at once very tenacious. I do not think he would give up his stand, however loquacious, however pleasant he might otherwise be.

Q: What about your meeting with President Eisenhower.

A: I met Eisenhower, I think it was in September or October, 1960.

Q: What was that you discussed with him?

A: In general, about aid.

#### RELATIONS WITH KING TRIBHUVAN

Q: What were your relations with King Tribhuvan?

A: I had a very unhappy experience of the relationship with King Tribhuvan. Although temperamentally both of us suited each other, he was an extrovert, man, gay and happy-go-lucky. On one issue we differed—on the issue of power. He initiated the grab for power, which was completed by his son, Mahendra, when he came to the throne. Even before Mahendra became King I had occasion to meet him once or twice. He was a non-entity at that time, neglected by his father, and he was scheming for his ouster. Though he was the Crown Prince, he was kept at arms length by the King in state matters.

On one occasion he was [Mahendra] organizing some sort of a conspiracy against the King, that is, against his father, in which his father-in-law Hari Shumsher was playing a very important role. Hari Shumsher called on me once and asked me if I could be of help to the Crown Prince. He said that his people would like to take action against the government and that they had contacted some army officers. Hari Shumsher also used to visit me from time to time and take me to his bungalow at Sundari Jal. It was a very quiet place, there was no electric light, and he would talk about the plan of operation against the government. Ultimately, I made it clear that I was not interested in the plan and the Crown Prince also backed out. Later on the Crown Prince totally denied this.



On another occasion when he became King, we had a long discussion together. I told him, 'All your approaches are totalitarian.' He said, 'I am a nationalist.' I said, 'Yes, you may be a nationalist, but your father was more democratic.'

On yet another occasion he told me, 'if I have to reign and not to rule directly, why should I stick like a leach to the throne. I will give up the throne.' I told him, 'No, you won't be permitted to give up the throne; You are not a person—you are an institution. The throne is not your private property. You are not there by virtue of your proprietary right over the kingdom. You are there as the symbol of the Crown. You are the Crown. Even if you want to go, you won't be allowed to go. You won't be permitted to go.' Then he said: 'My father brought democracy, and I will bring republican form of government.' I told him that the King of England does not rule, he only reigns. He said, 'If I am only to become a symbol I would put an end to the whole thing.' That was that.

#### THE KING'S POLITICAL IDEAS

Q: What were his political ideas?

A: About his political ideas—this is my impression once again—he was strongly affected psychologically so far as India was concerned. He was anti-India, temperamentally and also by conviction. There is no reasonable explanation why it was so. It was a pathological condition. My feeling is that he was very much repelled by his father and whatever the latter did was anathema to him. It was a 'father-hate' reaction. Since his father was instrumental in bringing about the tripartite agreement—Delhi agreement that is—he hated it like anything. Since his father was friendly to India, he hated India.

Q: By that token, he was also against the Nepali Congress—Isn't that true?

A: Of course. He hated the Nepali Congress from the bottom of his heart. There was another reason why he hated the Nepali Congress. My party was the only effective popular instrument that could check his progress to dictator-

ship—to absolute Monarchy. You know once he called a conference to which were invited political parties, student groups, and all that. I think all told 108 associations, including a tailors' association, had been invited. He called the conference ostensibly to formulate policies, programmes or a kind of guidelines to the King.

When I asked him, 'How is that you have invited all and sundry?' He replied 'Look, I am the King; I have to be neutral. To me all the parties are of equal importance. When I invite you, I must invite Tanka Prasad's party<sup>1</sup>; and when I invite Tanka Prasad's party, I must invite others also. He wanted to put the political parties to ridicule in the eye of the people.

Q: What was his attitude toward you before and after you became Prime Minister.

A: I think it was ambivalent. He respected me and he feared me. He hated me also because we were looking at things from divergent angles. He wanted to reintroduce the conspiratorial politics of the previous rulers. But I wanted to lift Nepalese politics from the palace and bring it to the people. That was the difference. Secondly, by my stand, my socialistic views, and also because of my education, experience and all that, I started to acquire a special position among the democratic forces. I represented the people's force and he represented the Palace. But I always took care, that because my relationship with his father had not been happy I would not give him any cause for annoyance I promised to myself that I would do everything to avoid any friction with him.

Q: Did he consider you a rival source of power?

A: No, I don't think. But the Nepali Congress and the leadership of the Nepali Congress had that potential. It could be an alternative to the monarchy. People could think of the Nepali Congress as an alternative force, it could be a rallying point for opposition. He wanted to break up that opposition, but the Nepali Congress could not be broken.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1940, Tanka Prasad Acharya was elected the President of the Praja Parishad that actively opposed the Rana rule. King Mahendra appointed him the Prime Minister in January, 1956.

It had the potentiality. That was what he was afraid of. He also wanted that I should help him to build up a system that he had in mind.

Q: What was the system that he had in mind? Was he for parliamentary democracy?

A: Not at all.

Q: When did you come to realize that he was not for parliamentary democracy?

A: Every time I met him—and he used to call us quite often.

Q: Did he spell out his attitude toward parliamentary democracy?

A: No, he did not. But his actions always did.

#### KING MAHENDRA'S FATHER-IN-LAW

Q: What were Mahendra's relations with K.I. Singh?<sup>2</sup>

A: I have no idea. I do not know why he was asked to form a government and why he was dismissed even before he completed the proverbial 100 days in office.

Q: Did his [Mahendra's] father-in-law have a role to play in K.I. Singh's jail-break?

A: Yes. There used to be one T.B. Malla, a very important man in the spying system of Rana Mohan Shumsher. Malla, a very sharp, intelligent person, was the kingpin in the conspiracy to help K.I. Singh to escape from Bhairawa jail. That was in 1951. Ultimately he [Singh] was arrested and brought to prison in Kathmandu. Mohan Shumsher, his [Mahendra's] father-in-law and Malla were in the conspiracy. After his return from China, K.I. Singh was a guest of his [Mahendra's] father-in-law.

Q: You mean the King's father-in-law.

A: Yes, the King's father-in-law Hari Shumsher. He made all arrangements for his stay. He saw to it that a proper reception was organised. He asked him to stay overnight

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<sup>2</sup> One of the regional leaders of the Nepali Congress at the time of the 1950-51 revolution, K.I. Singh opposed the party's cease-fire decision, staged an abortive coup in January, 1952 and subsequently fled to China. He briefly held the office of Prime Minister in July, 1957 at the behest of King Mahendra.

at his bungalow at Sundarijal. The next day he made a triusphal entry into Kathmandu.

Q: Could it be that the idea behind the whole thing was to set him up as another leader?

A: Yes, that was the idea—to build him up as the rival of the Nepali Congress. But it was difficult immediately to give him the Premiership. That would have been improper because he was a rebel till recently and because of all that he had been associated with. With the help of the Palace, his party was built up. He was the only leader who was provided with an armed escort. That created an impression in the countryside that he had the support of the King. He used to address meetings saying, 'I will redress your grievances and forward your petitions to the King.' That is how he went all over the place, as if he enjoyed the King's confidence. He was treated as a VIP by the Palace.

Q: Could it be that his subsequent political statements, which were rather pro-India, got him the sack from the King?

A: No, I have no idea. But one thing that he was very consistent with was that he had never been pro-China in his statements. Never. So much so, once and he said that all the industries should be located near the India-Nepal border and as far away from the China-Nepal border as possible. Anyway, I have not yet been able to figure out why he was called to assume power and why he was summarily dismissed.

Q: What was the real bone of contention between you and the King?

A: Look, this is something I have not been able to understand myself, except in terms of the King's ambition to rule dictatorally and autocratically. One instance I can give you and that will give you an idea of this. Once, he told me that he would rather introduce republicanism than be the titular Head of State. 'What is the fun in being a King when I can't rule?' He also told me, 'I must give a fitting reply to what India has been doing all along. For that purpose also I have to achieve power. You can't do it. When it comes to a fight with India, you can't do it. I will have to take the responsibility.'

Q: What were his relations with Matrika Prasad Koirala?

A: Very bad. When King Tribhuvan went abroad for medical treatment, Matrika Babu was the Prime Minister. The King sent for his son, Mahendra, and gave him authority to rule without his prior sanction. Mahendra became virtually the King. The first thing that he [Mahendra] did was to take away certain portfolios from Matrika Babu. Some of his departments were taken over directly by the Palace. Secondly, he started creating trouble for him in the Advisory Assembly, of which Balchand Sharma<sup>3</sup> was the Chairman. Balchand Sharma had been hand in glove with Mahendra to bring about differences in the ranks of the political parties. Whenever he [King] wanted a situation to be created that would demand his intervention, Balchand Sharma as Chairman of the Advisory Assembly could play a role in creating such differences and then the King could step in.

#### THE DIALOGUE WITH CHINA

Q: After Mahendra became the King, his first international move was to initiate a dialogue with China and establish diplomatic relations with China. How did it come all about?

A: No, not after he took over. As a matter of fact he formalised the whole thing. For, at that time, it was not possible to do much because China was not interested in creating difficulties in Nepal against India. As I have already told you Chou En-lai gave me hints that so far as Nepal's special relations with India were concerned, China accepted them.

Ultimately when India-China relations had come under strain, this idea could take shape ... At that time Jawaharlal Nehru said, and it is in my knowledge, because I discussed this with Jawaharlal Nehru, that it would be worthwhile for us—since Nepal was a small country and China

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<sup>3</sup> Balchandra Sharma was General Secretary of the National Democratic Party in 1954 and subsequently joined the Praja Parishad.

was a big country—to give up the special rights in Tibet. My position was not to unilaterally give up our special rights—not that we could continue to stick to these special rights—because I wanted to use these as some kind of a bargaining counter in our efforts at settling the border disputes with China. But Nehru said, 'No, you must give up these special rights in order to create better relations with China.'

Q: What was Delhi's relationship with King Mahendra?

A: In the beginning, as long as King Mahendra had not made things difficult and he was trying to build up his strength, India supported him.

Q: Could it be that India was trying to ride two horses at the same time? I mean alternately supporting you and the King?

A: No, India did not support us at that time. India supported Tanka Prasad. When Tanka Prasad became Prime Minister or even before that, he was very highly eulogized by Bhagwan Sahay, India's Ambassador. India's policy at that time was to win over individuals ... even upto the last days when the King took over through a coup, India stood by the King. At the same time India was interested in the elections, and it brought some kind of pressure on the King to hold the elections. The King thought, and India also felt, at least that was the impression created in the mind of the King, that no single political party would get an absolute majority in Parliament. So, it would be easier for him to handle Parliament. 'You will have given them a Parliament' I think such was India's argument with the King—'You will also have established your bonafides before the eyes of the world. At the same time, you will help yourself. Because you will be playing one party against the other it would be a coalition government.'

That was the impression that had been created in the King's mind. He met us quite often. His sole purpose was to gauge the mood of the people, so that if the elections took place what would be the position. When he was assured internally and by his foreign friends that no single party would sweep the polls and that as a result there would be a weak government, he agreed to the elections. He used to

ask me, 'How would your party fare in the elections. I was in a dilemma. If I said that my party would win, he would again hesitate and, perhaps, delay the elections. If I said, No, we are not likely to win, then my claim to represent the people would be compromised. To overcome the dilemma I said, 'If I could mobilize the necessary resources, we would win an absolute majority. Otherwise, it would be difficult.'

Q: Did the King give you any indication at this point that he was unhappy with you?

A: No. Ultimately a coalition government was formed with the mandate by the King to hold the elections as soon as possible; and Subarna Shumsher was made Chairman of the Council of Ministers consisting of different political parties. That was the only real coalition government in our history after the Rana-Congress coalition of 1951. Because we had earlier launched a movement—non-violent struggle—with a demand for early elections, the King called a conference of the political parties to advise him on the question of elections. I attended the conference at the directive of the party and I said that the elections must be held immediately without delay. Otherwise, there would be uncertainty if governments came and went and nothing constructive got done in the country. And the country stagnated. The King said, 'You are dismayed, BPji. The elections can not be held so early.' I said that the elections could be held within six months time. He [King] called the Election Commissioner. He asked him if it was possible to hold the elections. He was non-committal, although he [Election Commissioner] had told me privately: 'If you give me authority I can hold the election within six months.' He was a friend of mine. But in the Palace, he was non-committal. The conference was adjourned. The King said that those who are interested can meet the Election Commissioner and hold consultations with him. I said that it certainly could be held if a war-like urgency was introduced into the whole thing.

#### PARTY COLLEAGUES

Q: What about the differences within your own party,

for instance, with Biswabandhu Thapa<sup>4</sup> and Matrika Koirala. Was Matrika Babu a member of the Nepali Congress then?

A: Matrika Babu had been expelled from the party earlier. He had formed his own party subsequently which once again had been wound up. He was, at point, more or less an unattached individual. Since he had no party and nowhere to go, he was hobnobbing with Nepali Congress.

Q: Did Biswabandhu Thapa insist on getting nomination for a particular parliamentary constituency?

A: Yes, he wanted to contest from a constituency where we had a very dependable, honest candidate who had participated in the 1950-51 revolution, when one of his sons was killed and again, and after the royal coup in 1960, he sacrificed another son in the struggle. He was a respected man—I think the most respected man in that area. He was an old man and since Biswabandhu wanted to contest and since he wanted a safe constituency, he wanted to contest from that constituency.

Biswabandhu sought an interview with the King. He was related to a Minister in the then Coalition Ministry. His name was Bhupal Man Singh, who was in the confidence of the King. He went to Bhupal Man Singh and told him that he wanted an interview with the King. He [Bhupal Man Singh] said; 'Come to the Palace and the King would be happy to meet you and would also help you if you want him to.' Then an appointment was fixed. He [Biswabandhu] didn't tell me anything about this. I came to know of it from other sources.

The day he had an audience with the King, he said to me that he must have the constituency. Otherwise he would meet King. It was a very delicate situation for two reasons: One was my personal relationship and he was also devoted to the party at the time of the struggle. The other was that on the eve of the election, I did not want to create any situation—after all he was an important member of the party. It would be bad if he went over to the King. The

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<sup>4</sup> A Nepali Congress freedom fighter at the time of the 1950-51 revolution, Bishwabandhu Thapa deserted the party at the time of its worst crisis in December, 1960. He occupied many high offices under both King Mahendra and King Birendra.



King had already created enough troubles for us and he wanted to create a credibility gap. I did not want that credibility gap to be widened.

I sent for the old gentleman who had been selected as our candidate from the particular constituency and told him that he would be given a seat in the upper house. He said, 'You are my leader and whatever you say, I will abide by that.' I said that if you step down it would be your responsibility to see that Biswabandhu wins. He agreed and got up and said once again, 'You are my leader and whatever you say would be carried out faithfully and honestly.'

Q: Did Tulsi Giri<sup>5</sup> create any trouble at that time?

A: No, it was Tulsi Giri, who told me that Biswabandhu had sought an interview with the King. He also told me that Biswabandhu was up to some mischief.

#### THE ELECTIONS

Q: Did you expect that the Nepali Congress would have a land-slide victory in the election?

A: Yes, that was my feeling, my hunch. Two people at that time were known all over Nepal and counted most in Nepal at that time.

Q: The King and Koirala?

A: Yes, myself and the King. Because I had a party, which had a network of active workers all over the country, whereas most of the parties had paper organisations mostly.

Q: How did you finance the network of the organisation?

A: You see, there were two methods. The local expenses of the party—not much though—were met by the local people. And the central office expenses were met primarily and mainly by Subarna Shumsher.

Q: How much money did you spend in the elections?

A: I think, something between seven to eight lakhs of rupees. I think we were more expensive than we should have been.

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<sup>5</sup> A Nepali Congress activist, Tulsi Giri, deserted the party in 1960 to hold twice the office of the Prime Minister under King Mahendra and King Birendra.

Q: You think some more economy could have been effected.

A: Two to three lakhs of rupees yes. That was due to inexperience. Then again, we started working long ahead of the election.

Q: May I put it in this way—that you just could not afford to take any chance.

A: That's it.

Q: To return to the point of your setting up the election organisation.

A: I had a feeling that in the building up of resources, we might not be able to do as much or as well as we imagined. I had to take very crucial decision in the matter of giving tickets to party members. We claimed to be a national party—the only party that had an organisation all over the country, and ability.

Q: More or less like the Indian National Congress here?

A: Yes. Not only that. It was the only party which had abjured sectionalism and regionalism. Our entire approach was national. Caste and group interests, linguism, we had eschewed all that. Other parties used to inject the ethnic bias into their programmes. For instance, the Terai Congress. Its emphasis was on Hindi and the appeal was to the Terai people. There were other parties also whose emphasis was on such things. To all these we said: No. We wanted to go to the voters and ask them to vote on the basis of our national programme.

Q: The emphasis was on a Nepali identity?

A: Yes. In the Mahattari area there was a strong anti-Pahari base, a Terai base. Some of our party men from the Terai area insisted that party ticket should not given to a Pahari [hillman] in that area. Because in that case, the Terai sentiment would go against him. To which I said that if that is the case I would suggest that the party should not fight any election at all in that area. Because in that case we have no *raison d'etre* there, no basis for any rational existence of the party.

I held a party workers' meeting at my residence. A number of young, bright, intelligent young men were present I explained the whole position to them and told them

that there should be no differentiation between a Pahari and a plainsman because we are all Nepalese after all. There were also other occasions, when regional and sectional interests would try to assert their identity in the party. But my answer to all these was that if that be the case then, I should say that all our efforts at building up a national party had been wasted. I can tell you that this line of approach was well accepted by the party rank and file and the party did not select a candidate in any constituency on the basis of caste, regional language, ethnic or any such sectional interests.

Q: Did the Indian Socialist Party be of any assistance during the election?

A: No, because I did not want that any Socialist friend from India should be in anyway associated with our political activities and thereby create an unwanted situation for us. And Indian Socialists were not in a position to help us either in matters that count in election.

#### ELECTORAL VICTORY

Q: How comes that you managed to win the election hands down?

A: I will tell you. There was the feeling that Nepal was a backward country, that the people were not sophisticated and that the Ranas had superior resources and they would be able to influence the people's pattern of voting. On that basis, the King, and also a large number of foreign observers, thought that no single party would be able to come to power. The assumption was that the individuals [independents] would be able to secure more votes than the parties because of the local influence which largely explains why some 900 candidates were in the field and most of them were independents. There was a joke going round the country that the independents were a party, and it was the largest party because it alone could field the largest number of candidates. The King also had set up a party. He thought that if he could pump enough money, then everything would be all right.

Q: What was the name of the King's party?

A: I forget the name. Pandit Rangnath was the President of the that party. And it had set up the largest number of candidates. The idea was that the more money you put in, the more number of seats you can win. But they lost all the seats and the deposits too.

Q: Why did you not contest all the seats?

A: Two seats we did not contest. One of the seats I deliberately kept vacant. It so happened that we wanted to accommodate Matrika Babu.

Q: Did he approach you?

A: Yes. I wanted to accommodate him. My party did not want that but I wanted that he should be given representation in Parliament. I thought he would be some kind of an asset there. Another constituency that I kept vacant was in a hill village from where we migrated to Biratnagar.

Q: So, you are originally a hillman?

A: Yes. We came from East Number Two Dumja. My father came to Biratnagar and Biratnagar was built by my father. I thought that I should contest from that hill constituency and Matrika Babu should contest from Biratnagar. But the party thought that since I worked in Biratnagar, lived in Biratnagar, if I do not fight from Biratnagar an impression would be created that I was apprehensive of losing the election. So, the party insisted that I must fight from Biratnagar and I suggested to Matrika Babu that he should contest from the contiguous constituency of Saptari. He said no to that and that he would only contest from Biratnagar. But the party turned it down and insisted that I must contest from Biratnagar because I was the target of all—the King, the Gurkha Parisad, the Terai Congress, the Communist Party. The party said that I must fight from my home town. I can tell you that wherever we had our base, wherever we had put in steady work, we won the seats. Where we had not built our base, we lost. Which would clearly indicate that the people decided their mind politically and they voted politically. Otherwise, they would have voted at random. They didn't vote at random. Surprisingly, only two or three independents had won the election and from those areas where the party could not put up any candidate.

Q: That was an improvement on the Indian situation?

A: That is why I say if we get an opportunity, it is my conviction, we will leave India far behind both economically and politically. Because our people were very receptive to new ideas.

I will tell you why our traditional roots are not very deep. We have only one community that is deeply tradition-bound, the Newar. They [Newars] are not so eagerly receptive to change and they are comparatively immobile. But the Paharis, they are very mobile, they are very adaptable people. Secondly, and fortunately, there are large number of men who are with an army background. One who has been in the army is always exposed to new ideas. Besides, he also acquires certain social qualities, discipline, aptitude for work and a collective attitude. These are some of the qualities that are certainly of inestimable value in building up a nation. We can build up very strong democratic institutions in Nepal and very fast too.

Q: Did the King have any contact with you at the point?

A: He didn't see me. For that matter, I did not seek an interview with him either. I thought that will again be interpreted wrongly. I thought that I had antagonized his father. So, no ground should be given to antagonize him. Then after three months, ultimately I formed the government.

#### LEADER OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY

Q: What was your party's opinion about your being elected the leader of the party?

A: The party was unanimous in electing me the leader. Subarna would also have been equally acceptable but there was some difference. Some people did not approve of the idea. In my case, there was a unanimity of opinion.

Q: What was Tulsi Giri's opinion?

A: Tulsi Giri's opinion was that Subarna should become the Prime Minister. He used to tell me that the King felt that if I became the Prime Minister, I would prove difficult. In order to allay his apprehension I should not become Prime Minister.

Q: Was Biswabandhu opposed to you?

A: No, he was not. He was for me.

Q: And your wife?

A: Oh, she was dead opposed to my becoming the Prime Minister. She was adamant. She said: 'Your role should be like that of Gandhi. You should not be directly involved in the governance of the country. You will have influence over everything.' She said there must be one or two people who should not be directly associated with the office.

Q: What was your reaction to that?

A: My feeling was that as the parliamentary system was experimental—a very new thing in our country—and the whole conception of democracy rested on the successful working of that institution. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary that the person who could effectively control the House and guide its decisions should be in the government.

Q: To return to the point. The government was formed; isn't it?

A: Yes.

#### AS THE PRIME MINISTER

Q: You were Prime Minister: Then what happened? when did the difference between you and the King crop up?

A: That is the mystery of the whole thing. Whenever I discussed any point with the King he never disagreed. Never. Not even once.

Q: Didn't it ever occur to you that for a man like the King of Nepal—I mean the man that he was, very ambitious and all that—to agree all along the line with you, there must be something, some calculation, something up his sleeve?

A: No, it didn't occur to me. It was not like that. There were two conceptions—contradictory ones. One was that everybody thought that the King was reactionary, strong-headed and obstinate and all that. This image was imprinted in my mind by his demeanour and also by his activities. But ...when I wanted to make some adjustment in the Cabinet

and I went to the King and asked him about his opinion. he said, 'Well, any Minister about whom you have any objection, I accept your views' you being the Prime Minister. But then his behaviour and his yielding to every issue, at every point, notwithstanding, he gave expression of his hostility to the government in public. Then I said to him, 'If you have anything to say, you should take it up with me. Otherwise, an impression would gain currency that you are opposed to Parliament, and that will be very unfortunate.' He expressed surprise that his speeches created such mischief and if that were so he would make amends at an opportune moment. I said: 'You have not only criticized the government you have spoken against the people also.'

'I can tell you that before any bill was taken up by Parliament I used to go to the King, discuss the proposed bill with him and when he approved of it only then we would introduce the bill in Parliament. I took care to do this to allay any apprehension in his mind and to soften his opposition to reforms we were contemplating to introduce.'

Q: Let us pick up the threads. On the whole you give India a clean bill during your Prime Ministership and what followed immediately.

A: Yes, notwithstanding that there was some irritating experience at times.

#### ASSESSMENT OF NEHRU

Q: What is your assessment of Jawaharlal Nehru. What kind of a man was he?

A: My feeling is that he did not have, temperamentally, the ruthlessness that is required of a statesman confronted with the overwhelming job of modernization of a complex country like India. His greatest defect was that he did not have the temperament to take strong action. He was too aristocratic to do lowly things. Another impression of him that remains in my mind was that he did not believe in solving every problem. He thought, like the Britishers, that you do not have to try to cope with every problem, you must adjust yourself to a given situation at a time. Not solve a problem neatly but muddle through it.

Q: A typical Harrow-Cambridge product?

A: Yes, typical.

Q: As a friend, what was he like? He was your friend also, wasn't he? And he was instrumental in saving your life also at a certain point.

A: On two occasions. Once, when I was on hunger-strike unto death in 1948. I had been on hunger-strike for 29 days. It was his moral pressure that saved my life on that occasion. Secondly, in 1960, when I was arrested. I do not know what would have happened to me if he had not spoken so strongly in Parliament. That boosted our faith, that gave a notice to the powers that be not to transcend the limit. When my sister Vijaylakshmi, met him and she used to meet him often, I was on hunger-strike.

You see, after my arrest, I was Prime Minister. Yet, I was kept incommunicado; I was not permitted to read books, I didn't get any newspaper. nor any paper on which I could write down my ideas. For three long months, I was kept incommunicado. My wife did not know where I was kept. Nobody know where I was kept. I had to fight for basic human facilities. It was a terrible situation. All through the night, high-power lights were kept burning in the room. It was a big room, though. Six persons used to keep watch—constant watch. At the door of the room, two sentries were posted. All the windows were closed. Every two hours, they used to wake us up. The greatest torture was that I could not get any news. The sentries were not permitted to talk with me. When the doctor came, a General came along with him, and a Major came with the General, a Lieutenant with the Major and like this. So they could not discuss anything with me. One was sent to watch over the other.

Q: You were kept alone or was there anybody else with you?

A: Yes, we were four altogether—Food Minister Anghambe, Forest Minister Pant and Ganesh Man Singh.

Q: You used to go on hunger-strike from time to time?

A: I went on hunger-strike for 13 days.

Q: Thirteen days during this period and the world did not know anything about it.

A: It was Nehru, who first gave the news in Parliament



of my breaking the fast and there was great rejoicing in the House at the news. Bunu, my sister (Vijayalakshmi) was present there. Nehru was making a statement and some one went up to him and gave him a small chit. Nehru read it and then said, 'I am very happy to tell you that B.P. Koirala has broken his fast.'

Q: What were your demands when you went on hunger-strike.

A: All the political prisoners should be kept together. We should be permitted to meet our relations, have the privilege of writing letters, and get books and writing materials.

Q: Were all the demands met?

A: Yes, not immediately though, but we knew that our demands had been accepted. The first person to see me was Bunu, who came along with a General of the army.

Q: Do you think that this was possible because of Nehru's intervention?

A: When I was on hunger-strike, my sister met Nehru. She told him that my life was in danger. It was about that time that Lumumba<sup>6</sup> had been killed and Bunu told him that a similar fate might be awaiting me also. Nehru said, 'I don't think the Nepalese are that barbarous; I don't think they would do that to your brother.' But it was the personal interest that Nehru took in my affair which cautioned the King, if at all he had any drastic intensions.

Q: Do you think that the King really would have gone to that length?

A: At that time, we were apprehensive that he might do anything. Because on the fifth or sixth day after our arrest, it was a very cold day, a General came, smartly dressed, impersonal, and saluted and said, 'I have an important communication to make. You will have to go out.' Instantly, it struck me that it might be an order for execution.

Immediately people started moving about. There was movement in the guards' tents. Four chairs were placed at four corners of the tennis court. He stood in the middle, showed an envelope and said, 'Here is the *lal mohur* [the

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<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister of the Congs, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated.

red seal of the Palace] and the envelope is sealed. I have not broken it, I am breaking the seal in your presence.'

There was a long pile of Bren Guns. Army officers were all over. It was a cold, sunless morning. Nobody smiled. There was no expression of any friendliness on their faces. We exchanged glances, thinking that the final moment had arrived. Then, he took out a piece of paper, it was an order from the Palace requiring that a questionnaire be given to us for our written answers and that we should write out the answer in the presence of that officer. That was that. As I was telling you, an atmosphere had been created.

#### ARRESTED AT A MEETING

Again, when I was arrested, I was then addressing the youths, Tarun Dal. It was a youth conference and I had been asked to inaugurate it. It was about 12 noon. I made a small speech and sat down. Somebody was speaking after me, when walked in the Brigadier of the Palace Guards and with him was the Deputy C-in-C, a friend of mine. He was crestfallen, with dried lips and a dishevelled appearance. The Brigadier gave the order. Till then, I was not anticipating that they would arrest us. I thought, perhaps, they would take us to the Palace and the King would say that we had been dismissed. But then, we saw that there were truckloads of soldiers, all heavily armed. It was my cool-headedness that saved the situation. The instruction must have been to kill us if there was any resistance. And, Surya Prasad Upadhyay<sup>7</sup> was coaxing those people, the youths, 'Why don't you do something, why don't you shout.' I said, no, nothing doing. For that would only give them the occasion they were waiting for.

Q: What was India's role in all that happened since you became Prime Minister.

A: My feeling is that India was very helpful. The Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu then was Bhagwan Sahay. I

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<sup>7</sup> One of the important Nepali Congress leaders, Surya Prasad Upadhyay was the Home Minister in Nepal's first elected government of Prime Minister B.P. Koirala.

suggested to the Indian Prime Minister that his term might be extended for another period. Nehru said that he also wanted efficient men in Delhi and that is why he took him back. I told him that we were on friendly terms and it would be quite useful if he continued for some more time, so that preliminary work for aid and new trade arrangements could be initiated by him. Most reluctantly, Nehru said that he would extend his term for six months. So far as I am concerned, so far as I could see, India had been very liberal in its attitude toward Nepal.

Q: Did it by any chance occur to you that India was trying to use the King against you and vice versa.

A: No, I did not get that feeling. Once Jawaharlalji told me, as the American industrialist, John Ford, had told me earlier, that there were reports that the King had another kind of thinking. He [Nehru] said, 'In the interests of Nepal, both of you should combine.' He also added:, 'You know, you are very much appreciated in India. So, we want to see that no differences crop up between the King and you.'

Q: You do not think that New Delhi let you down?

A: No, I do not think so.

#### SURRENDER OF ARMS

Q: When I visited Kathmandu in June, 1973 I had a discussion about the 1960 royal take-over with a fairly well placed government official. According to this gentleman, who had sometime been a Nepali Congress activist, the lack of an indoctrinated Nepali Congress private army was one of the major reasons why the party failed to respond instantly to the King's challenge. I was also told that you surrendered to the Nepalese Government, sometime in 1956 or '57, a sizable stock of weapons that had been with the party since the 1950-'51 revolution. Would you please elaborate on this point?

A: There are two points raised in your question. One is about the indoctrination of the military section of the party. On that count, the charge is valid in so far as we had not sufficient time to give them ideological training. Everything was done so quickly. We formed the party and we

went into action. We recruited ex-service men, enlisted them as members of our party and sent them into action. So, there was no time to give them any ideological training.

As to the second question, whether we surrendered arms that belonged to the party, the arms that were surrendered actually did not belong to the party. It was like this. After the Delhi agreement (this marked the termination of the 1950-'51 struggle) we could not maintain the private army of the party. According to the Delhi understanding, the stipulation was that the private arms should be handed over to the government and that was done. But, I had given secret instruction to the 'Commander' of the eastern region to keep some arms hidden and not to surrender them to the Government. Later on, he rose to occupy the highest position in the police department and he had on my instruction secreted sizable quantity of arms and ammunition—about one thousand rifles and one hundred thousand rounds of ammunition. These were distributed throughout the eastern region.

But, all of a sudden, King Mahendra decided to remove him from the high office that he had occupied in the police department. He came to me and said that he had been summarily asked to hand over charge. He did not know what to do with the unaccounted for arms he had kept in the police headquarters and police stations all over the eastern region, particularly Biratnagar. Our party was atuned then—it was 1956 or '57—to what called for some kind of military action. He gave me seven days' time to make necessary arrangements, so that he could hand over the arms to us. I discussed with some of the important members of the party as to what should be done with those arms. It was not a question of one or two rifles, it was a question of one thousand rifles which had to be kept in a secret place. We found that it was not feasible. Then I suggested to him that he should hand over the arms to the man who would take charge from him.

That was how the arms that should have belonged to the party was handed over. I have always felt that in Nepal's context, where we had to contend with the force that relies for its political existence on the army, the Nepali Congress

must have vigilant, active, armed guards also. So that in a situation similar to what happened in 1960 we could go into action. The party was not prepared for that kind of work. I discussed the matter with some of the important young activists of the party.

Q: When did you discuss that?

A: That was on the eve of the general elections in 1958. I wanted that some of the important members of the party should keep themselves out of the election fray and concentrate on organizing the underground section of the party. I had undertaken a tour of the country long before the election dates were announced to select proper cadres for recruitment to the underground section of the party. I was relying a great deal on Biswabandhu Thapa, who was at that time the General Secretary of the party. And, to some extent, on Tulsi Giri also. In 1958, I asked Biswabandhu, G.P. Koirala and two or three young cadres of the party not to seek election. I told them that they should address themselves to organizing the party militia. But I drew a blank from them, excepting G.P. Koirala.

Others wanted to fight the elections. I felt that the party had lost its militant elan. Biswabandhu started arguing that our fight won't be on military line and that it would be constitutional. The most sinister role of Biswabandhu Thapa and Tulsi Giri, let alone their stand in support of the King as against the Nepali Congress after the 1960 coup, was that they had secretly joined hands with the King and were passing on information to the King about our military strength.

The King knew where our strength was, particularly after the elections, but he did not know whether we had an armed wing of the party. As the King was a very calculating person, he never took risks. It might appear that the 1960 coup was a great gamble, but it was not really so. For he knew that we did not have a single piece of weapon. It was on this question or whether we had arms, whether we had secret organization, that the King was very nervous. He wanted to get reliable information on this matter. And these people, Biswabandhu Thapa and Tulsi Giri, conveyed to him that we did not have a militia or any arms. That

was the most sinister part of the betrayal. Otherwise, if they had just walked over to the King's side, as so many people did, it would not have mattered much. But they encouraged the King to go into action by supplying information which suited the objectives of the King. The King wanted to go into action but he was apprehensive that we might also retaliate. I am perfectly certain that if we had even two to three hundred armed men the King would have refrained from going into action.

## Part - 4

### DIALOGUE WITH KING MAHENDRA

Q: When you were arrested in 1960, What attempts did you make from prison, to open a dialogue with King Mahendra? Who took the initiative and why was the initiative taken?

A: After I was arrested, I had a feeling that the King had made a tremendous mistake, a great blunder that he would repent after his action. If there were any differences between the King and the Prime Minister, the differences could not be of such magnitude that these could not have been solved, amicably, through discussion and on the basis of give and take. When the King took that drastic action I felt that he had committed a grievous mistake. And he would have realize it, after the euphoria of the coup was over, because the problems of development and the problems of administration would baffle him. I waited for three or four years and then decided to write to him. I also felt that he too might be wanting an opening. In such cases the question of prestige also comes in, particularly in the case of a king. I thought that I should make an opening.

Q: What was the reaction of your colleagues to that.

A: My colleagues were very much opposed to the idea; They were, as a matter of fact, very angry. They said; 'No,. But I said that this was not a supplication, but a political gesture. I wrote him a letter, asking for an interview with him and nothing more. Just one sentence. There was no response from the Palace. I kept quite. After a year and a half, I again wrote to him and there was a response this time. A Brigadier came one morning and said there was 'a communication from the Palace', from the King. 'But the communication is not to be handed over

to you, it has to be read out to you.' That was the reply that the King gave to me. The reply was read out to me. There were two or three sentences.

'I received your letter. I have no objection to meeting you and I don't have to ask anybody's permission, or some such thing.

'But I will have to consider the political implications of such meeting before I can meet you. So, after having considered them I will meet you.

'You know the situation in the country and the country belongs to everyone—you, me and all.'

Q: That was what he said?

A: Yes. And you are a patriot.

Q: He said that? Please repeat it.

A: He said that 'the country belongs to everyone of us—you, me and all. I know that you have the interest of the country at heart, you are a patriot. I am keeping you, I am preserving you'. 'Preserving' is in English but the letter was in Nepali. But the word means so in English I am preserving you so that when the opportunity arises your country may make use of your services. I have been hearing about your ill health. Please let me know the actual state of your health.'

Q: That is a surprising thing. Incidentally, have you got the original letter with you?

A: No, they didn't give me that. The Brigadier said that they had instruction to read the letter. I saw that it was on the royal note paper. He permitted me to make a copy of it.

#### RAPPROCHEMENT MOVES

Q: Subsequently, what happened?

A: Then, one day ...

Q: Which year was it?

A: I think, 1965 or '66, about that time the Editor of *Naya Sandesh* ...

Q: Is he Ramesh Pandey by any chance?

A: Yes.



Q: I met Ramesh Pandey when I was in Kathmandu last year as a guest of the Government of Nepal. Ramesh Pandey told me that he acted as liaison between the Palace and you in prison.

A: He came one day, in the evening. This was very surprising because I was kept partially incommunicado. Nobody could see me except some of my very intimate relatives. He came one evening and said that he had an interview with the King the previous night. That was about two years before Girija<sup>1</sup> started the negotiation. He said; 'The King would meet you if you write to the King.' I asked him many questions about the background and this and that.

Then I wrote to the King. I wrote a complicated letter complicated in the sense that 'in order to end the deadlock and create a situation in which an understanding between the Palace and the democratic forces could be arrived at, I would like to have an interview with His Majesty.' But the King did not like this preamble. That is what he said. I wrote to the King on the advice of Ramesh Pandey and there was no reply. That was the first letter, perhaps, I wrote to the King. I can tell you the dates by consulting my diary. In 1962—was it June, July or August, I must consult my diary—the British Ambassador came to me. It was very surprising. The British Ambassador was a friend of mine.

Q: What was his name?

A: Spokes. He said that as he was leaving Nepal, he thought of meeting me. The previous evening he had an interview with the King and he asked permission for an interview with me. The King was gracious enough to grant permission, 'So I am here,' that was what he said. He told me that the King would like to come to an understanding with me. I said that I had to get certain democratic ideals. Would he agree to incorporate in the Constitution the Fundamental Rights that could be made available to the people. Then he said, 'I think the King would do anything you like, but you will have to accept the Panchayat, the name

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<sup>1</sup> Girija Prasad Koirala, youngest brother of B.P. Koirala, is currently General Secretary of the Nepali Congress.

of the Panchayat. You will have the Constitution. The title will belong to the King. If you agree I will put it like this: You write the book but the title will be suggested by the King.}

At that time Subarna Shumsher was leading an armed conflict. I told Spokes: 'If that is so, there should be no difficulty. He should call Subarna Shumsher and discuss it with him. It is he who matters now. He has taken up arms. I can be an instrument in bringing about this rapprochement between Subarna Shumsher and the Palace. Otherwise any agreement with me would be between me as an individual and the Palace. I am in prison and the movement is led by Subarna Shumsher. So politically it would be worthwhile to start negotiations with him. If the King feels that I can be of some use, then I will certainly play my role to bring about a reconciliation. He replied: 'Perhaps, the King would not like to open any dialogue with Subarna Shumsher. He will only discuss things with you.

Q: That is, only with his equal?

A: No, not only that. But I was not agreeable to that proposal because that could create a rift in the movement. I did not want to do something behind Subarna's back. If there was any agreement it should be an agreement between the leadership of the movement that had been started and the King. I would certainly help. That was my line. Then he said if I was 'agreeable' he would postpone his departure by a day or two.

Q: The Ambassador told you that—the British Ambassador.

A: Yes. I said, in that case, you see to it that I am put in touch with Subarna Shumsher because he is the man who can consider the proposal and there is no reason why Subarna Shumsher would not agree to it. I did not hear anything further about it. That was in 1962 before the Chinese attack.

Q: May I tell you something about the background of this. I have a hunch. A few months back, when I was in Kathmandu I met Biswabandhu Thapa. And Biswabandhu told me that, in 1962, the armed struggle, which the Nepali Congress started has unnerved the Palace to such an extent

that the King was all prepared for a compromise with the Nepali Congress. The King had told them that he was going to come to a compromise with the Nepali Congress. There were signs of troubles in the army also. The administration was cracking up. And armed insurrection of the Nepali Congress had put such tremendous pressure on the King that he was prepared to come to an understanding almost at any cost. At that point, Biswabandhu told me, it was Biswabandhu and Tulsi Giri who prevailed upon the King not to give up but to continue and something would happen. Fortunately for the King and unfortunately for the Nepali Congress and the people of Nepal, the Chinese aggression took place.

A: I will tell you that happened. The Commander-in-Chief went to the Palace and he said the army was spread paper-thin. Now, if they [Nepali Congress insurgents] opened any other front the army would not be able to cope with the new situation. So the problem should be politically solved. Militarily it would not be possible to solve it. This is what the Commander-in-Chief said. Then the King called a Cabinet meeting and he said that he would release me from prison and start negotiating with me. These two people—Biswabandhu Thapa and Tulsi Giri—said: 'He is in our hands, we can take him out any day. So, as long as we can let us carry on. Ultimately, if we have to come to terms with B.P. Koirala, we will do that.'

That is what happened during those days. He [King] was under terrible pressure to come to some understanding with us. That was the strategy, I discussed it with Subarna Shumsher later, after my release. I asked 'Why didn't you capture a district. He said, 'Our strategy was to bring the King to the conference table. We didn't want to do more harm to the system because in that case there would be a fight to the finish. What we did was to make it impossible for him to run the administration. It was pressure tactics and it worked.'

NEPAL, INDIA AND CHINA

Q: I must say that Biswabandhu at least was truthful

enough to admit all that—his role and its implications.

A: People feel that, perhaps, Tulsi Giri had an inkling or the Chinese had given some hints that they were on the threshold of big action against India. But my feeling is that they were not taken into confidence. But Tulsi Giri wanted the credit also that he was in the know of what the Chinese were going to do. That is why he suggested to prolong the struggle for a few weeks more and, ultimately, in September or in October the Chinese attacked India.

Q: It is just coincidence and chance that saved the Nepalese regime?

A: No, not only that. It was pussilanimity of Delhi.

Q: How do you explain that.

A: They [the Government of India] were so unnerved. The struggle that was going on in Nepal was our struggle. We had enough arms. We had three thousand men under arms and we had put the administration to severe strain. The Palace was panicky. It was not necessary for us to suspend our struggle. If there was some difficulty for India, there was no difficulty for us. They [Indian Government] advised Subarna Shumsher to withdraw the struggle and Subarna Shumsher meekly did it. If I were in his place, I would not have accepted it.

Q: Just a little more pressure and the job would have been done. The Nepalese army had been spread all along the frontier almost for three years.

A: That is what the Commander-in-Chief told the King.

Q: I think that provides the background to the British Ambassador's visit to you in prison.

A: That is my feeling in retrospect. At that time I did not know that. But in retrospect I see that it was so. The next day, because I had the means of communicating with Subarna, I communicated to Subarna that the British Ambassador had come to see me and what had transpired between us. In 1967 or early 1968, my brother Girija Prasad was released. Before he was released, he wrote to me from prison that some understanding with the Palace was possible. His feeling was that the Palace, too, wanted to start an opening with us, particularly me.

Q: Will you speak a little louder, please.

A: My brother Girija Prasad Koirala was in a different prison, He was arrested on the same day as I was arrested. He wrote to me 'We have already completed seven years and it would be politically advisable that we start some kind of an opening with the Palace. It is no use vegetating, rotting in a prison like this.' That was when he was in prison. When we had completed seven years in prison, he was suddenly released. After his release, he started in right earnest to get a dialogue between the King and myself started. He interviewed the King. He got the impression why impression, he got it straight the King that he too wanted to start an opening. Girija's line with the King was that the democratic forces and the monarchy should combine because they belong to the same camp. There may be differences but monarchy and democracy can co-exist, helping one another.

#### GIRIJA PRASAD KOIRALA

Q: That also had been your party line all along.

A: There had been some misunderstanding which could be cleared by open talks between the King and myself. When he [Girija Prasad] met the King, he found that the King was also amenable to the suggestion. He said he would like to meet me.

Q: You mean the King said that he would like to meet you?

A: Yes. Girija Prasad said that BP would meet the King unconditionally. 'He would meet you unconditionally and if there is an agreement, so far so good. Otherwise, he can be sent back to prison.' The King said that this was a very fine arrangement. Then Girija came to see me. He took some suggestions from the King about land reform, constitutional changes and all that, and I gave him my reaction to them also. The King said, at the second interview [with Girija] : 'It is not necessary to have a dialogue through indirect means. I will now discuss all the problems with your brother [that is, me] directly.'

Q: Which year was it.

A: That was in 1968, I have noted the date in my

diary. I think it was toward the end of September, because it took three or four weeks for Girija to meet me and then meet the King. Three interviews he had with me and with the King. But, later on, the King had asked Girija to keep this negotiation strictly secret. Everybody would know that he was meeting the King but what passed between him and me should be kept totally secret. What Girija used to do was that he would meet the King, meet me and then go to Biratnagar so that nobody would bother him about what had happened. But it was very difficult for him—he was a party member—to maintain a secret without his reporting what happened at the Palace to the party headquarters, that is, Subarna Shumsher. Still he kept faith with the King.

But, one day, the King said that Girija had betrayed him 'You have told everything to the Indian Ambassador.' Girija replied 'I have not even met the Indian Ambassador. The King said that he [Girija] had gone to Raxaul to meet the Indian Ambassador. What had happened was that Vinobha Bhave was on a *padayatra* [walking tour] to some parts of the Terai. My friends and relations also had suggested that he should be told of what was happening in Nepal, which meant that large number of people were in prison and all that, because Vinobha had some influence with the Indian leadership. So, Girija was to contact him. He [Girija] had gone to contact him and the Indian Ambassador had also gone to Raxaul to meet Vinobha Bhave. Girija had met the Indian Ambassador there but had no political talks. They just said 'Hello' to one another.

#### INDIAN AMBASSADOR RAJ BAHADUR

Q: Who was the Indian Ambassador then?

A: Raj Bahadur. He is very friendly with me and with Girija also.

Q: Is he still very friendly with you?

A: Yes, but I have not met him recently. I met him two years ago at the time of the Bangladesh war and that, too for a few minutes. I have not met him thereafter. But I felt that he was openly supporting us, and the democratic cause.

He was not functioning as a very secretive diplomat. He used to say whatever he felt was right. And, then, he came from the political ranks—not from the services. He was not trained for the diplomatic job. My feeling is, GP [Girija Prasad] had cleared with the King whether he could take the Prime Minister into confidence. The King said that the Prime Minister could be taken into confidence.

Q: Who was the Prime Minister then?

A: Surya Bahadur Thapa.

Q: You mean the man who underwent fasting and all that recently.

A: Yes. He was in prison recently and also went on hunger-strike for twenty days.

Q: He was, I believe, released before King Birendra came to India, along with the pro-Peking Communist Party leader, Manmohan Adhikari.

A: Yes, both of them. They say that one was released to please New Delhi and the other to please Peking — even-handed relationship between New Delhi and Peking. Anyway, he was the Prime Minister. Girija used to come and tell me whatever the King wanted to be conveyed to me. Another man, the third man, who knew about it was Prime Minister Thapa. There was no fourth man who knew it. I was in prison and I could not possibly communicate anything to anything to anybody. Girija was keeping the negotiation very secret. Because on the basis of the trust—the trust that the King had reposed in him—he could establish his credibility. It was in his interest to keep faith with the King. So he could not have disclosed anything to anybody. It is possible that the Prime Minister might have become a little undiplomatic somewhere, some time. I don't know.

Anyway, the King got the impression that every thing had been revealed to India. Then, after having mildly taken GP to task, he asked for S.P. Upadhyay's inclusion in the negotiations.

Q: That is, Surja Prasad Upadhyay, one of the Nepali Congress leaders?

A: Yes. One day when Girija Prasad came to see me he was accompanied by Surya Prasad Upadhyay, which came as surprise to me. And the King had said: 'Since you

have not kept faith with me, the negotiation stops.' In the meantime, Subarna Shumsher had issued a statement that messed up matters. The King had told Girija Prasad that in order to create a favourable atmosphere, a statement from Subarna Shumsher should come. Girija had said that no statement which is dishonourable to him or to the party could be issued by him. The King had said; 'No, I do not want to dishonour him. When I want is the cooperation of the democrats I do not want to dishonour them and have cooperation because it will be defeating the purpose.' That was what the King said. Then Girija procured a draft in which there was no surrender. It was a very honourable statement. He showed that statement to the King and he approved of it. He said, 'If you issue this statement, I am satisfied, My part will be clear.' Girija Prasad took the statement to Subarna Shumsher. After a few days. Subarna Shumsher issued another statement which was, from Girija's point of view, not as honourable as the statement which he had drafted and which the King had approved of.

#### SUBARNA SHUMSHER'S STATEMENT

Q: That spoiled the whole thing?

A: Subarna Shumsher issued a statement<sup>2</sup> which was some kind of an abject surrender. There was no question of surrender in the other statement, it was an appeal for cooperation. The King said that it was enough that the initiative should be taken by Subarna because it was he who had taken up arms. But he insisted on one thing. 'The Nepali Congress had recently passed a resolution demanding a Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of adult franchise. He insisted that this should be withdrawn. The only demand the King made was that he should withdraw this demand for a Constituent Assembly. So, it was a very honourable statement. But the statement which Subarna actually issued was a great climb down. It was a surrender. Girija was taken aback.

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<sup>2</sup> Already mentioned, see Appendix C.



Q: Nobody asked for that kind of a statement. It was uncalled for. Then how do you explain this?

A: The King felt very happy. The bargain was for better terms as far as we were concerned. But the King got still better terms from the new statement. The King was more pleased. The question arose what would be my attitude toward that statement. I was in a very awkward position. I did not want to create difficulties for Subarna Shumsher because he was already beset with difficulties. There was a great commotion in the party. The activists in the party had created a situation, which was making Subarna's position very difficult in the party. All the activists ganged up. And then, it was a defeated army that he was leading.

I felt I should not forsake him at this hard hour—that was my line. Besides, I also felt that if he had won, he was within an ace of success, I would have been released—and become perhaps the Prime Minister. I should be with him even when he has lost the battle. If he had won, I would have been the Prime Minister, and if he has lost, even then I should be with him. That was the point. But I did not want to issue a statement supporting his statement. So Ganesh Man and I—only the two of us were there in that prison—consulted and we came to the conclusion that we must not forsake Subarna. But that question will arise only after we are released, not before that. Otherwise, any statement that we may make will be under duress. Or will be some kind of a statement of frustration. We did not want that and we made it clear. The last time when Girija came and told us that the King wanted the statement [Subarna Shumsher's] to be supported, I said: 'But what about our meeting the King.' He informed us that the King had said that now that does not stand—that is, my meeting with him. So, I told him that we are not going to support Subarna's statement. He went back to the King, the King said; 'All right, he will remain in prison. He is already eight years in prison, I will keep him there for eighty years.'

Q: Is that what he said?

A: Yes, 'I can keep him for another eighty years.' About a week or ten days later, Girija sent the information that

I won't be released, You see there were such great ups and downs within a period of three or four weeks. My sister Vijaylakshmi had then come to Kathmandu. She could not go over to India because of visa troubles. She wanted to meet my wife Sushila, who was in Banaras. She asked Sushila to come so that she could meet her. Then Sushila could meet me and she [Vijaylakshmi] could get news of me through her. Vijaylakshmi asked her to come to Kathmandu.

My wife came to Kathmandu. Now, Surya Prasad went to the Palace. He came and informed my wife as Girija had already left for Biratnagar and then he went to JP [Jayaprakash Narayan] and told him that "now BP won't be released." Then he [Surya Prasad Upadhyay] went to the Palace. The King said, [and this is Surya Prasad's version]: 'I believe Sushila Koirala. If BP does not issue a statement supporting Subarna's statement from prison, even then I will release him provided he does not betray Subarna Shumsher after his release. So, let his wife meet me.' Then, Sushila came and stayed with me for three hours.

## THE RELEASE

Q: Which year was it?

A: That was two days before my release, that was towards the end of October, I think. I was released on October 28. She came on 26th October, 1968. I told her that our stand is that we will not do anything from prison. But when we are outside as free individuals, we will not forsake a valued comrade like Subarna Shumsher. That is understood. I think everybody should understand it. From prison nothing, As free individuals, we will do everything. After two days, we were released.

Q: So there was no question of your giving any undertaking whatsoever. But then, how do you explain this climb-down by the King. Only some days earlier he said that he could keep you imprisoned for 80 years and then again he released you almost immediately after. How do you explain that?

A: The King wanted to release us. It was already too

many years that we had been in prison. He found that instead of our influence having diminished, we had become some kind of martyrs. Then, I had developed very serious trouble in the intestine—there was some growth. A Commission of doctors had examined me, presided over by the royal Physician, General Haldar, and they found that there was a growth which needed operation. The growth may be cancerous may be non-malignant but it was a serious matter. General Halder even suggested that the operation should not be done in India but U.K. or USA.

Q: Who is this General Halder? Is he a Bengali by any chance.

A: Yes. He is a Bengali, but he is a Nepali citizen. He has been there in the military service for a long time. He was the personal physician of the King and he held the rank of a General. When the medical commission sat to examine me, he was the president of the commission. He said, after having examined me, that 'we advise you a thorough biopsy and then operation, not here, not even in India, but outside.' I said that I was a prisoner. 'You should advise me taking into consideration the fact that I am a prisoner.' He said, 'I do not know that. You are a patient and I am a doctor. I will give you the advice what we consider to be the best for the patient.'

It was also a factor that if I died in prison it would be still more embarrassing for the King. Besides, he, perhaps, really wanted some kind of a dialogue with me. Even if there had been some bungling, he thought that after my release this could be taken up with me directly and not through Girija Prasad. Or his meeting a prisoner from the prison directly at his parlour, but as a free man. I think that was his motive, that is what I feel. There was the pressure also. There was pressure from India, there was pressure from the Labour Party of England. I know the fact that Wilson [Harold Wilson] had also written to the King about my release. There was international anxiety, about my health. That might also have been one of the reasons for my release. Anyway, after my release ...

Q: Before that I would like to ask you one question. Why did the King not want India to know anything about the

negotiation that was going on between you and the Palace through Girija Prasad. And what was India's role in all that? Is it a fact that India did not want a rapprochement between you and the King.

A: The King did not specifically mention India. He said that nobody should know what was passing between him and myself. But later on, he said: 'You have disclosed everything to Raj Bahadur, India's Ambassador.' That is how India came into the picture, not in the beginning.

Q: Did India want a rapprochement between you and the Palace. Do you have any information about that. I mean, what was it that India wanted?

A: That I am not sure of. One day—I think that was the last meeting between Girija and the King before my release—Surya Prasad was with him, Girija Prasad brought a letter from the Indian Ambassador. Actually, I did not receive this letter. It was not proper for the representative of India to meddle in our affairs. Our struggle is between ourselves, between the democrats and the King. We are thankful for whatever help or good wishes India has for us. But we don't want any interference in this. So I said: 'I will not take his letter.'

Then Surya Prasad Upadhyay said: 'By accepting the letter you will not be committing yourself to anything and you don't know what he has written. And it is not incumbent on you to write a reply.' Then I received the letter and he the Ambassador had written to me: 'The negotiation for your release and for political settlement is being hindered because of your attitude, because it is reported that you do not subscribe to Subarna's point of view. You do not subscribe to his statement. This is hindering the progress of negotiation. If I could know your attitude towards Subarna's statement, then the negotiation might be facilitated and it would be helpful to your friends, who are trying to be helpful in the matter.' I said to Girija that I was not going to reply to him: 'Give him my thanks for the pains he has taken, really from the bottom of my heart. But it is better that this thing should be left to us to sort out between ourselves. I am not going to write to him.'

Q: Do you by any chance have that letter with you still.

A: I think I have.

Q: In that case, I would like to have that letter and have it microfilmed. That would be good source material for me.

A: Yes, I have got the letter. But I do not know whether it would be proper for me—because it is only after ten years to make that letter public. Whatever I am telling you is recent history it is not yet a matter of the archives. I don't know whether it would be diplomatically correct on my part to have told you all this and also to give you concrete evidence of the letter. But I have got it, I can show you that letter. And if it is not to be made public, you can microfilm it also.

Q: Yes, most certainly. I appreciate your point of view. Until it really becomes a think of the past it will not be published.

A: Then you microfilm the letter and return that to me.<sup>3</sup>

#### AFTER THE RELEASE

Q: Let us get back to what happened after your release.

A: Two days after my wife interviewed me, the General-in-Charge of our camp came diffidently. I was laying out the table for dinner, for me and Ganesh Man Singh. It was about 7 or 7.30 in the evening and it was a cold evening. The General came and said that we would have to go out. He did not tell us where he was taking us to. I was ready because it was very cold and I had put on my overcoat. Ganesh Man took about five minutes to get ready. There was a jeep waiting outside. He took us to my brother's house (Tarini Prasad's) I had not seen that house before. I did not even know that he had built a house.

The General took us to that house and said; 'You get

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<sup>3</sup> Already mentioned, see Appendix D Now that more than a decade has elapsed, King Mahendra is dead and past equations are no longer relevant, it would not presumably be a breach of promise to let the world into the truth.

down here, please. My sister was there and there were about 80 Press correspondents, including the representative of Tass and, I think, the Chinese too. All the foreign correspondents were there, waiting. They had information that I would be released and that I would be brought straight there. It so happened that the General did not tell us that we were released. He simply said; 'You get down here, please. I asked, 'Have we been released?'

Then the woman Correspondent of the *Time* magazine—I used to know her before—came running, when she saw the jeep was standing and we were not getting out. And she started asking questions. I said. 'No, I will answer your questions only as a free man. I am a prisoner. They did not say that I am released.' Then the General telephoned and I don't know what else he did. But he said: 'I have no instruction to tell you that you are released. I have instruction to leave you.' That is what he said. I said: 'No, you must tell us. As a matter of fact, you must give us written papers of discharge.' He replied 'That I can't do.' He then contacted his headquarters again and, perhaps, they contacted the Prime Minister, the Palace and all that. About 45 minutes we stayed in the jeep as he was busy telephoning and then he ultimately said: 'I have instructions to tell you that you have been released.'

There was then a Press Conference. I said I was not prepared to make a statement. 'If you wait I may.' Surya Prasad Upadhyaya was also there and he had already prepared a statement, a general kind of a statement. He said, 'You can give this statement.' I said I would study it first. We went to an inner room that was prepared for me. My wife was also there. Ganesh Man said 'No, no statement, because it would be construed that we had been released on certain previous understanding.' I said that when we are released we can make any statement. 'I could have made a statement outside the prison gate. Whatever interpretations the outside world may give, the fact is that we have been released and I can make any statement I like.'

So a statement was drafted and redrafted and, ultimately. I think the Press people had waited for about two hours. They were waiting in the drawing room. Then I issued the

statement. In the statement I thanked the prison staff, doctors and others for the good care they had taken of me. So far as Subarna's statement was concerned, I supported it. I am a democrat. So what the party democratically decided, even if some may not like it personally, I adhered to the decision of the party. He made the statement on behalf of the party. I did not want to forsake him—I did not use that word—a valued colleague. Therefore, I supported his statement. Ganesh Man said : 'No, no statement from me. I will make a statement after forty-eight hours. Then I will meet the Press if you come to me. I will make a statement but not before that.' So, there was no previous understanding or anything. If there had been any previous understanding there would not have been so many hours' confabulations and all that.

Q: The General did not even know whether you were a free man or not. He only had orders to dump you at Tarini's place?

A: Yes, to leave us at that place.

Q: I believe the King did it in this manner because he wanted to avoid jail-gate reception and all that.

A: Yes, I think so. Everything was so surreptitious done that I was not even told in the prison that I was being taken to Tarini's place.

Q: What happened, after your released? What was the fly in the ointment? What soured your relations with the King?

A: That I don't know. After my release, my first concern was to consult my doctor in Bombay. That was everybody's advice. But before I did that, I wanted to meet the King. So, I contacted the Prime Minister on the 29th of October. The Prime Minister said that the King was too busy and that the King had no time. The King was leaving the next day for England for medical check-up. And, I was leaving on the 3rd of November. He said that the King would be too busy and would also be going away for treatment.' So, the King had said that we could meet later on.' He did not meet me.

I felt it was some kind of an affront. I did not approach further the King for an interview. There were large number

of demonstrations in my favour and procession after procession. From each college, from each school, the students used to come in procession and meet me. For three days it was like that. I had to see my friends, fellow workers and colleagues in prison—there was a large number of them in different jails of Kathmandu. It took me one day to write for special permission to meet. Then, but I did not go to see the King off at the airport. That day I was going round seeing political prisoners and I made it a point not to see the King off. When the King did not feel like meeting me, I thought he would be embarrassed if I went to see him off. That was my argument. I felt a little cut up by his refusal to meet me. The argument was that he busy packing.

#### A MEETING WITH KING IN BOMBAY

When he returned from England I was in Bombay—I was under observation. The tumour in my intestine had been taken out, but I was kept under observation. Nothing much, but every seven days I had to go to the doctor. The King came back from England. He also came to Bombay and stayed there for ten days. I went to the airport to receive him along with Sushila, my wife. I met him at the airport and we exchanged, what you call, 'How do you do?' He enquired about my health. He said: 'I read about your operation in the papers. How are you.' I said I was all right. I asked about his health. He said: 'I am also all right, I have had a thorough check-up by the doctors.' That was all. The Governor was there, as also the Chief Minister and others. Then from my hotel I telephoned his Military Secretary for fixing an appointment for me with the King. He said he would inform me later on. He informed me after two hours. He said that the King was taking a holiday and that since I was also undergoing treatment, so it was not the time and place to meet. He [the King] said: 'Let BP take care of his health first. He did not want to meet me just then.

I again felt very much upset. By way of a grand gesture, I went to the airport to receive him and that was at 4 a.m.



in the morning. I thought it was a gesture which should have been reciprocated. He did not do that. Thereafter, I went to Nepal toward the end of January or the beginning of February, 1969. In the meantime, I met some of the workers who had not been amnestied—they were in Gorakhpur, Darbhanga and Varanasi. I went to Gorakhpur and I made a statement, which was not critical of the King.

Then, I went to Biratnagar. There was a tremendous reception and I don't think anybody had received such a reception in Biratnagar. Rishikesh Shaha<sup>4</sup> also travelled with me. He said that it was an eye-opener to him. And I made a statement. Now, I will tell you this because it is very crucial, because I did not want to create a situation in which a rapprochement would be difficult. At the same time, I did not want to create a sense of frustration in the minds of young men. That was a very difficult task. I had supported Subarna's statement after my release which was an anthem to the young men. 'Why, after having fought like that and having remained in prison, for eight years why did you support him?' That was their question. 'Why couldn't you live in prison and die in prison, you could have become a martyr. At least for future generations, you could be a beacon.' That was their line. But I did not want to say or do anything that would jeopardize the prospect of a rapprochement with the King.

At the public meeting, I said that I supported Subarna's statement because the problem of modernisation was a national problem. The nation was confronted with a gigantic task and the problem has to be tackled nationally, unitedly. It was a national problem, so it must be tackled by the people as a nation unitedly. So, we want to come to some understanding with the King. I urged. 'We know that the King alone cannot solve it. We know that we alone cannot solve it. We want to create a situation in which we and the King could stand on the same platform and face whatever challenge the nation is confronted with.' That was my line. I don't think it was anti-King.

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<sup>4</sup> Rishikesh Shaha had held many important offices, both diplomatic and ministerial, before, as well as, after the royal take-over.

Q: Not at all.

A: The land problem, the development problem, the modernization problem—all these has to be tackled unitedly. That was the burden of my speech and other public statements. In the evening—there is an elite club in Biratnagar—I gave a talk at that the club and there were questions and answers also. I said, a compromise would be taking the first serious step toward tackling the problem of modernization.

Then there were questions: 'Are you satisfied with the Panchayat Constitution? Do you accept the Constitution?' I replied 'Don't ask this question to me. The Former Foreign Minister, the man who had drafted this Constitution is with you—Rishikesh Shaha. He thinks that the Constitution is not being implemented in the spirit in which it was framed. The spirit is gone. And the worst interpretation of this Constitution is being given in practice. That is what he has been saying in his recent statements. Ask this question to him. So far as I am concerned, I don't care for the Constitution. I care for an understanding with the King. You know the most autocratic Constitution is the British Constitution. The King is the dictator there, autocrat there. There is no power to curb him by law. He is sovereign. But in practice, it is Parliament which is more powerful. And the most democratic Constitution was Stalin's Constitution, which did not prevent Stalin from emerging as the most cruel dictator in the world. I don't care for the Constitution. I care for the spirit. I want to meet the King and come to some understanding—in spirit, so that I can make this Constitution work in a democratic manner if the King is agreeable. I do not want to make one single change or change one single word. But the Constitution is being practised in the most autocratic manner. This is what my friend Rishikesh Shaha will tell you.'

After I came away, they asked Rishikesh Shaha to address

the gathering. He said, 'Yes, I support BP Koirala's statement cent per cent.' That was my statement, Bhola, there was nothing wrong in it. Next day, there was a youth rally, it was a very difficult thing for me. They put me questions like 'What about your revolution and all that, when you are in for a compromise.' I said, 'My reading of the situation is: Nepal needs a revolution. I want the King on the side of the revolution and not opposed to the revolution. The people are expecting big things. The nation has to transform itself from a feudal stagnant society to a developing progressive society. That is the kind of a revolution I want.'

#### REVOLUTION BY CONSENT

Q: That is, the challenge was that of modernization.

A: Yes that is the revolution. I want the King with me in that socio-economic revolution. I also know that if that revolution is throttled by whatever force, there would be bloodshed. I want to avoid bloodshed. That is why we want the King to be on the side of progress, to be on the side of democracy, to be on the side of revolution. So that the transformation may take place, the revolution may take place without bloodbath.

Q: It would be a revolution by consent in that case.

A: Yes. If there is no revolution by consent, there will be a revolution by bloodshed. These were my three formulations. I don't think there was any contradiction between any of these three statements. What happened was there was a hue and cry in Kathmandu. Then I made a statement about nationalism: Nationalism means that the whole people must be motivated. The whole nation must be motivated. I am for building institutions in which the people have vital interests. But for eight years such institutions had not been created and the people's rights had been taken away. This was not a national move. If you don't take care of the people as such, you have no right to talk of nationalism. Because the nation is not earth, the nation is the people. There was a hue and cry! 'BP Koirala had challenged the King.' The Prime Minister made a statement; Surya Prasad [Upadhyay] made a statement. The

Prime Minister said that 'he [B.P.] is threatening violence; he [B.P.] said that if the King does not agree there will be a revolution?' That was not what I said. I said that I wanted to bring the King on the side of revolution. I wanted bloodless revolution, change; the country demands change, a revolution—but revolution with the King. That was what we wanted. I also said that this was the demand of history. Whether I am with the revolution or against the revolution, there will be a revolution. When the nation as a whole takes a big step toward modernization, the King and the democratic forces as the representative of the people and the people, they all combine. They stand on the same platform. Or, alternatively, there will be a civil war, split and this and that. That was what I said. He said that I was threatening bloodshed.

Q: Who said that?

A: The Prime Minister, Surya Prasad also said that this was a mischievous statement and that he would answer me from a public platform.

#### NATION IS THE PEOPLE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

At Kathmandu, Surya Prasad organised a public meeting—I think that was the only time he organized a public meeting in his life—and that was organized to reply to my statement at Biratnagar. He was taken to task by the youth of Kathmandu, when he stood up to speak and he had to be rescued physically by our people. There was such an opposition to his stand against me. The Prime Minister said, contradicting my observation that the nation is the people. 'Why, the nation is the earth, this our sacred earth, where the Pashupatinath temple stands, Sita was born, where the Buddha was born. Everything is nation—where the Bagmati and this river and that river flow.'

Surya Prasad said that the country's geography was not the nation. I had said that geography was not the nation but the nation was the people. If all on a sudden the Nepalese decide to quit this territory, this geography, then this geographical factor will cease to be a nation. That was what I said. Whatever is conducive to the peo-

ple's welfare and interest that would be serving the national cause. What is not conducive to their welfare or goes against their interest, that is anti-national activity—that was what I said. And I said that we want to create a platform, a national platform on which we, the King and everyone stand together and meet the challenge of the times. To this appeal of mine he said, 'Here is a man who wants to equate himself with the King.'

Q: Who said this?

A: The Prime Minister. In a public statement he said this. And Surya Prasad also.

Q: Don't you think that there was a gap in communication between you and the Palace. And some men, who had vested interests stood between you and the Palace and they misinterpreted all your statements and observations.

#### THE KING'S REBUFF

A: That is so. I wanted to meet the King but he would not meet me. I wrote to the King from Kathmandu, and also from Biratnagar. I said that I would like to meet him. He wrote to me. Rather his secretary wrote to me saying that 'the King in reply to your letter has commanded me to write that he has no time to meet you as he would be going on a hunting expedition!' I was flabbergasted. I made three or four attempts to meet him—once in Bombay, a very serious effort; once, before I went to Bombay, in Kathmandu immediately after my release; and then, after my return to Nepal, from Biratnagar I wrote to him. I sent the letter through Girija. Instead of responding to my gestures this hue and cry was being raised. A kind of confusion was being created and also a rift between me and the Palace, so that no compromise could be arrived at. The King did not—that is my grievance against the King—play his part well. If he had the interest of the nation at heart he should not have played into mischievous people's hands. I did my level best to meet him. He could have simply said: 'all right come and see me.'

Q: You mean, there was an abdication of leadership on the part of the King?

A: Certainly, but I don't know why he did that.

Q: Was it deliberate? Or was it just a misunderstanding of what you were trying to get across?

A: I don't know. I sent Girija to find out. There was a rumour, a very strong rumour that I would be arrested. I did not want to be arrested, to be frank with you, because eight years in prison already was enough. That apart, I wanted to organize the party and lead the people. Without doing some positive political work, I did not want to go back to prison again. So, I sent Girija. I said: 'Go and meet the King, failing which, meet the Prime Minister. Find out from them, either the King or the Prime Minister, whether they are thinking of arresting me.' Girija went and he was there for three or four days. He could not see the King but he met the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister said, 'The Palace is in rage. He may be arrested any time.' Girija came back hurriedly from Kathmandu. He said that this was the position and that I must quit Nepal at once.

Q: Which year was it.

A: That was 1969, toward the end of February.

Q: Don't you think that Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa drew a herring across the path and wanted you to get out of the country?

A: That is one interpretation, I think. That may be a very correct interpretation. But how am I to know what the King was contemplating since all my efforts to contact the King came to naught.

Q: You were in a fix?

A: Yes, I was in a fix. Within two hours, I decided to move. I left Biratnagar hurriedly. Since then we have been drifting apart. Even after that, I have been contacting the King through letters. I used to send my wife with letters to him seeking an interview with him. No reply! No reply to any of my letters. Even Girija met him twice or thrice but there was no response. What interpretation could I give. I have a feeling that, perhaps, if he had lived, particularly after the Bangladesh event, he would have changed the line. But he died.

Q: How was it that the King behaved in that manner after having released you? What is your explanation?

A: I don't know. I can't understand. I have been telling you that I always felt that some serious misunderstanding had developed between him and me and that some meetings, some thrashing out of issues may clear that misunderstanding. That is why I have been wanting to meet him since I was arrested. My difficulty has been that I did not want to lose the confidence of the coming generation. At the same time, I did not want to scare the Palace. That has been my problem. If I have got any utility in Nepal's politics or I have any role to play in the modernization of Nepal, I must carry the people with me. Otherwise, as an individual, I am of no consequence. That is why my political image should not be eroded for me to be of any help to the country. That is one consideration. I also want to convince the King that common agreement about his understanding with the democratic forces would stabilize the institution of monarchy and also help toward general stability and stable government, which can take care of the progress of the country. That is why I am a revolutionary and also a supporter of constitutional monarchy. This is a role which my younger colleagues don't understand.

Q: They think that this are antithetical?

A: Yes. They say that I am trying to be too clever. And they feel that I am contradicting myself. But I don't see any contradiction between these two roles of mine, which I had given myself.

#### FROZEN RELATIONS WITH THE KING

Q: After you left Biratnagar, what happened? When did you realize that the break had been complete between you and the King and that things could not be repaired any more? I would also like to know something about your observation, which many people call unfortunate, that there must be a revolution in Nepal if King Mahendra does not mend his ways within two years.

A: What I have been saying is that the situation in Nepal cannot be frozen at a particular point. Although the people get the ...

Q: We are talking about King Mahendra's period now.

A: Yes. After my release and after I came back to India from Biratnagar, I contacted the King through my wife and through Girija also. At that time Girija was living there. He used to visit the King and also meet the Prime Minister. I made too much effort, so much so that I came to be misunderstood by my colleagues. And, in my anxiety to come to some kind of an understanding with King, I showed impatience also. I thought that time was against us. If we did not do anything to create a favourable situation, then the elements, which were hostile to any rapprochement between the King and the democratic forces, would get the upper hand. That is why I felt that I had a role to play in this and that too quickly. I was misunderstood by my colleagues. Subarna felt that I was by-passing him, trying to contact the King directly and I felt that Subarna was not energetic enough and the situation demanded energy and dynamism. So, I used to do the job myself, which he felt was his job exclusively. I was misunderstood by him. I am misunderstood by my friends also that I wanted to compromise my revolutionary image and my revolutionary stand. This was my difficulty and it is so even now.

Q: When did things get absolutely frozen in the track between you and King Mahendra and about that statement of yours. (This refers to BP's Delhi observation after his release from prison that there would have to be a revolution if King Mahendra did not mend his ways.)

A: I felt that I must prepare for a struggle also.

Q: Why did you feel that way.

A: Because there was no response. On the contrary, there were insults. For any communication that I would write to the King, there was no response. And I was being ridiculed. In the Palace, they ridiculed me. My colleagues used to ridicule me. I felt that either I should do nothing and permit the younger generation to be handled by the extremists or by anti-national forces. Or I should do something. I started organizing, particularly the student, so that they might be recruited and also the Nepali Congress people. That was my idea. Then my people, large number of them, were arrested and they were beaten. Yet there was no response from the King.



## VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE

In 1970 or about that time, I thought that no individual, no system would abdicate his or its absolute authority unless he or the system is forced to do that. That was my idea. I felt that perhaps that was what was needed. Even now I have not given up that position, but I want to have another string to my bow. I gave expression to what I was thinking. I started thinking aloud. Around that time, I gave a lecture on Gandhism at the Gandhian Institute of Studies at Banaras. I said that perhaps in a situation that obtained in Nepal a violent revolution was inevitable. Even in India, I felt, if violence had not stepped in, that is, the Second World War had not intervened, India would not have become independent. A large number of people were killed in the war. They sacrificed their lives for India to become independent. And the war weakened the British Empire and the British eventually had to go. When I talked of violent revolution it was purely my theoretical proposition.

In 1970 I went out of India and from outside I got a clear perspective of the whole situation. I became more and more convinced that a violent struggle perhaps had become inevitable. If I did not organize a movement or the party for that struggle, then I would have to wait indefinitely for the King to make a gesture. This is the line even now. Not that I have given up the original line of compromise. I don't think there is a contradiction here.

In 1971, when the Bangladesh struggle started I was in Delhi in that connection. A journalist came to me and asked my opinion about the situation in Nepal. I told him that there would be a shake-up, whether I liked it or not, within two years and it would be violent this time. It was given bold headlines in that journalists' paper—it was Indian Express. It was a simple statement. I said that a revolutionary situation was being created and the boiling point might reach within two years and there would be struggle—there would be what might be called a point of no return. Even in that statement I said that I would like to come to an understanding with the King. But if that was not

possible, then a revolution would have to be made.

#### THE PALACE AND MODERNIZATION PROCESS

Q: The position could be summed up like this. If change is possible by consent, it is welcome. If not, then by other means if it is necessary. The focal point is that things must change, things must move, things must keep going ahead. Am I correct?

A: Yes, very correct. My preference would be that things must move with the consent, with understanding of the Palace. Because I still feel that the Palace has a role to play in the modernization of the Nepalese society. But the Palace cannot play that role in isolation. It must get the willing support of the people through its democratic administration. That is what I want. I think that is the best arrangement that Nepal can have—democratic institutions through the people's elected representatives and the King. The King isolated from the people, the King dependent only on the army and the bureaucracy will not be able to play the historical role, which we want to assign to him.

Q: Why did you leave Nepal and decide to settle in India after you were released from prison?

A: I told you that after my release, I felt that the King too was trying to reach some kind of an agreement with us. I had all along been trying to contact the King, so that some settlement could be reached with him. I was under the impression that there was a great misunderstanding between him and us, which could be cleared and a way could be found for an amicable settlement, so that Nepal could make progress peacefully with the King and the people working together, hand in hand. Afterwards, I thought that the time had come when a determined attempt should be made toward the solution of the political impasse. I made repeated efforts to meet the King but I was frustrated. On the last occasion when I wrote to him, the reply was not only discouraging but it was really insulting.

In the meantime, an atmosphere had been created in Kathmandu which was very unfavourable to me. The Prime Minister was giving hints that I would be arrested. But,

you see, I did not want to be arrested immediately after release having served eight years of imprisonment. I thought that I could, if it became necessary, organize a fight also. Or I could make efforts for reconciliation. So, I sent my brother Girija to Kathmandu to find out from the King, failing which from the Prime Minister, what the intention of the government was. He came back with the report that he could not see the King. The King refused to see him. He met the Prime Minister; and the Prime Minister said that he could not assure that I would not be arrested. I had to take a very quick decision. After consultation with Girija Prasad I decided to leave Nepal.

#### BACK AGAIN TO INDIA

I have not come to India to settle down here but to avoid being arrested. So that I may be able to do a little bit either by way of reconciliation with the King or by way of fight. That is why I am here. And, after coming over here I have been writing to the King. I sent special emissaries with my letter and yet response. On many occasions, I sent my wife with letters but that too brought no response.

When King Birendra came to the throne, I welcomed his accession to the throne. I also said in a public statement that, in this hour of crisis, our differences ceased, for which I was taken to task by my colleague. That is why I had to come here. I decided not to get arrested because in that case my role as a political being would be over. I did not want to do that.

Q: May I ask you, what was India's role in all this, if at all it had any role to play?

A: So far as my decision to come to India was concerned, India did not have any role at all. I made that decision after having heard that the Palace was totally unresponsive and the men in the Palace hostile. When I found that the Prime Minister was hinting of my arrest, I did not feel safe to be in Nepal. India did not have any role to play in the decision that I took.

Q: India must have had reacted to your decision to come

to India and operate politically from here. Did New Delhi, by any chance, let you know its mind whether it appreciated your stay here, however temporary the stay might be, and operate politically.

A: After I came to India, I met the Indian Prime Minister.

Q: Indira Gandhi?

A: Yes. And that was just a courtesy call and I had no serious political talk with her. Thereafter, I have not met her at all. I have been meeting people like Foreign Minister Swaran Singh, Dinesh Singh and some other leaders also. Since I felt that they were not the people who could deliver the goods, my talks with them were inconsequential.

Q: Has the Government of India ever given you any indication whether your stay here jeopardizes India's relations with Nepal.

A: No, it has not given any indication either this way or that to me. It has not communicated its mind to me. Although I have been reading that Nepal is discussed from time to time in Parliament, the Government has not communicated anything to me.

Q: Why did you decide to come to India and not go to any other country and operate politically from there.

A: The reason for this is that in any other country I would be very far away from Nepal and to come to India a Nepalese does not require any visa. One can just walk into India. Also, I felt that the democratic Constitution of India would provide some kind of protection which I could not get, say, at Islamabad in Pakistan or at Lhasa in Tibet. In India I have a large number of friends and the democratic climate suits me. There is a parliament. And, there is great amount of goodwill for us, the Nepali Congress, that is, the democrates of Nepal. So, this was the most convenient place where I could come to.

Q: What would you say if I suggested that you and the Nepali Congress have always been equated by certain forces in Nepal with what is essentially part of the sub-continental socio-cultural milieu and, therefore, a sort of impediment in the way of striving for the achievement of a clear Nepalese identity.

A: I consider that the responsibility of modern times

imposes an additional task, additional to the national task, on the national leadership of Nepal—for that matter, on any State in the world. No State today is an isolated nation that exists in a vacuum. The conception of a sovereign State, as defined by political thinkers of eighteenth century Europe, is inapplicable to modern times. If anybody thinks in terms of those thinkers now, he is out of date by two centuries. The notion of nation State had been an ideal during a specific historical period but it had never been practically realized in the ideal form in history. Not even in that specific period.

By the time we began belatedly to take both these steps for the emotional integration of all the ethnic groups in Nepal to make out of them it a nation, other factors had overtaken us. In the present world context there are many problems, even though impinging upon the individual national life, that have acquired global importance and they have got to be tackled on a global scale. Moreover, the demands of modern development, particularly in the field of economy and for efficient utilization of diminishing national resources and fair and equitable distribution, call for urgent cooperative efforts on regional basis transcending geographical boundaries of neighbouring nations. Even if One World may be a distant vision—an ideal for some distant future—cooperation among States and nations on regional basis has become an urgent necessity for the present.

#### FANCHAYAT SYSTEM: ANTI-PEOPLE

If you agree with my analysis, Bhola, then you will see my point also. We, democrats, consider the present policy of the King and the panchayat system not only anti-democratic and anti-people but also anti-national. We consider that one does not promote national cohesion or help build a nation by depriving the people of the political and constitutional rights. It is exactly that what the King has been doing. Chauvinistic slogans as a garb for totalitarianism do not constitute nationalism. Being anti-Indian is not promoting nationalism. To do that, you have to adopt such

policies or practice as are not antithetical to national interests. This is my firm conviction. Only democracy will save the Nepalese nation. It alone will ensure its existence and promote its healthy growth, economically and, if you will, spiritually. The way of the King will take the nation to its doom.

Q: During the Rana period of Nepalese history Nepalese Kings, and others also, often used to take refuge as exiles in Varanasi whenever the situation demanded. From historical times, Varanasi had been a place of refuge to Nepalese escaping from tyranny and oppression inside Nepal. For you to make Varanasi your headquarters seems to have a parallel with that. Does it have any significance.

A: No, it is a coincidence. It is a fact that Nepalese fleeing from the tyranny of Nepal's government have sometimes stayed in India, particularly Varanasi. One King who was made to abicate came with his wife, settled down here and organized opposition from India. He also organized an army and went to Nepal to give a fight. He was defeated again and came back here. That has been the tradition. It was not a preconceived idea of mine to follow in their footsteps. But I have been following their tradition unwittingly, though.

Q: History repeating itself?

A: Yes. That tradition is being maintained, I should say.

Q: Incidentally, during the British days whenever royalty used to take shelter in Varanasi, fleeing from Rana tyranny, the British government in India used to maintain these exiles and sort of used them from time to time as bargaining counters in there confrontation with the powers that were in Kathmandu. Do you think that your stay also is being tolerated from that point of view?

A: No, I do not think so. For one thing, I do not belong to the royal family. So, they cannot use me as the British Government used the exiled King in Varanasi. I can compare myself with my father who came here as a political refugee in the early 1920s. He organized a party along with his colleagues. He published pamphlets, magazines, critical of the Rana system. But the British tolerated that. I am following in his footsteps—my father's footsteps. And then

the British Government—that is our experience—did not go out of their way to placate the Ranas. Otherwise, they could have handed him over to the Ranas and the Ranas had been wanting the political refugees to be driven out of their refuge, so that they could be liquidated in Nepal. The British Government did not oblige them. It did not go out of its way to placate the Ranas.

## Part - 5

### MINIMUM TERMS FOR RETURN

Q: What would be the minimum acceptable terms on which you could settle with King Birendra. And, if no settlement is possible what do you propose to do.

A: You see, the Nepali Congress has two strings to its bow. One is compromise; another is struggle. We have been pursuing this line alternately—at one time the strategy of struggle, at another the strategy of compromise, reconciliation. At present, we are pursuing both the lines simultaneously. For instance, Subarna Shumsher with his faction is conducting negotiations with the King. So far as I am concerned, I wholly back him in his efforts. But I also feel that we must have another string to our bow which means that we must not give up the preparation for struggle. In the event of the compromise not materializing we may go into action. That is the answer to one part of your question.

The second is about the minimum acceptable terms. What we want, and many others, too, is negotiation on the basis of give-and-take—there must be a fusion of spirit, there must be an understanding in spirit and not in letters. I can even work the most dictatorial constitution in a democratic manner, if the spirit is there. And if the spirit is not there, the most democratic constitution can be used for totalitarian purposes.

Q: The spirit of the whole thing and not the letter?

A: Yes. There must be total understanding between the King and the democratic forces. That is why my first term is that there must be an unconditional dialogue with the King. May be the King would be prepared to concede everything. Or we may be convinced and permit everything that the King wants. But the dialogue must start. So I am not



quoting any price. I am not going to start with any conditions. I want to start a dialogue unconditionally.

Q: That is, there is no condition attached to it. All that you want is to start with a clean state, a real dialogue, a meeting of minds. Am I correct?

A: Yes, yes. It is the question of his [King's] understanding our point of view and our understanding his point of view. Then some compromise could be arrived at which would be of lasting value. Otherwise, if we start on the basis of bargaining, there would be some thing in our mind which would remain unsatisfied. The King would feel suspicious, we would feel suspicious and then such a compromise would not last long.

#### THE KING AND THE CONSTITUTION

Q: Suppose you get your point across to the Palace and the Palace accepts it, would you be able to carry the party with you? Of course the whole world knows and so do we—that the Nepali Congress means B.P. Koirala. Even so, would you be able to carry with you the party, more particularly the angry young men in the party?

A: You see, that is the difficult task. But when I am convinced—and this has been my practice—of the correctness of a decision, then I adhere to it and I see to it that the party accepts it. Only on one occasion we had to climb down. In the 1951 declaration, the first royal declaration made by King Tribhuvan when he returned to Kathmandu, it was a very important declaration, he said that he would convene a Constituent Assembly shortly to frame a sovereign constitution for the country and that constitution would be acceptable to him. Which means he was committed to convening a Constituent Assembly for framing the constitution.

When his son [Mahendra] ascended the throne he wanted to alter this commitment. He could not do it unilaterally. So he said: 'Either I could carry on like this without convening a Constituent Assembly—I could not go back on my father's promise—or you give me the right to frame a constitution and on the basis of that constitution I would hold election.' All other parties, particularly Prime Minister

Tanka Prasad, said that the King being the sovereign, we should not arrogate to ourselves the right to frame the constitution. We should permit him to frame the constitution. I felt strategically and for political consideration we should accept this challenge of the King. We should ask him to frame the constitution and, on the basis of his constitution, if he held the election we should fight the election. Because, we must have some political legitimacy to demand what we were demanding.

The revolution had taken place in 1950-51 and the people had started forgetting it. We wanted to have a further mandate from the people and so, there must be election—that was my line. But it was a climb down for us, for it would be a constitution given by the King, not a constitution framed by an elected assembly. I met the King. The King said that he would give a democratic constitution but 'the right of giving a constitution should belong to me.' And that he would invite Sir Ivor Jennings<sup>1</sup> to frame the constitution. Then I said. 'All right! Sir Ivor Jennings is a British and I could depend upon the democratic instincts of a British constitutionalist to frame a constitution. If you invite Sir Ivor Jennings to frame a constitution, then I would accept that constitution.'

But, it was a very difficult task for me to convince my colleagues. They said, 'you have compromised' on our ideal. I said, let us have this discussed at a conference. So, there was a plenary session of our party in Birganj. Ganesh Man Singh and others were opposed to this. I moved a resolution saying that we should concede this right to the King. It was a very, very difficult job. As a matter of fact, it is even now charged that by conceding the right to the King to frame the constitution I landed the country in the present position. But I carried the party with me, although younger people under Ganesh Man, who is a great friend of mine, was opposed to this. Once I am convinced of the rightness of the cause, I adhere to it and I see to it that my party accepts it. So far as that question is concerned I am very clear in my mind.

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<sup>1</sup> The British expert on constitutional law and author.

**Q:** It seems we have come back to the point where we had began. That is, you hold that you are a man given to non-violence. In principle, you accept the fact that there is scope for compromise, reconciliation, rapprochement with the Palace. The people and the Palace can work hand in hand to give a fitting response to the challenge of modernization. And you do not have any terms, no preconditions. You do not care whether the political forum that would emerge from this would be called panchayat or by any other name. All that you want—I am repeating it is that there must be a meeting of minds. There must be an acceptance of the basic democratic spirit and the principle of the system of polity.

#### FUNCTIONING FROM FOREIGN SOIL

**A:** Yes, you have understood my point of view quite correctly.

**Q:** Don't you think that your functioning from foreign soil complicates matters. I mean an impression is created that you are not completely a free agent on your own. Particularly, the people inside Nepal might have this impression that you are not identified with the aspirations, hopes and ambitions of the people of Nepal. If we put it rather crudely, they may even think that you are acting as a foreign agent.

**A:** You see, I would not like to operate from outside. It not only complicates my position but also creates difficulties for the Government of India. No patriot would like to operate from foreign soil. But, I had to make a choice: Whether I should get back to Nepal or with whatever handicap there was, I should come to India and operate from here. The Nepalese Government had one stick to beat me with and it was propaganda—very vicious propaganda—that I was a stooge of the Government of India. Fortunately for me, it has not affected the minds of my people. It is a tragedy of revolutionaries that they have to operate from foreign soil. All big revolutionaries, as for instance, Subhas Chandra Bose, had to operate from foreign soil.

**Q:** So did Lenin.

A: Yes, Lenin. But I am giving you the example of an Indian operating from foreign soil so that it would bring the point home to you as an Indian. That is why I mentioned Subhas Chandra Bose. All the big revolutionaries had to do that except one—Mao Tse-tung. He had never left China. Even Zhou Enlai had to operate from outside. Ho Chi Minh had to operate from outside. That is unfortunate fate of a revolutionary. I do not want to operate from outside, but there is no alternative. I want to go back to Nepal if a situation is created—even if a minimum of constitutional rights are available to the people so that I can organize my people for democratic rights. If civil liberties are granted to us, if we are permitted to organize parties, hold meetings, bring out periodicals, then there is no reason why I should not be there. And the charge of my being a stooge of India could hold water only if such conditions had been available in Nepal and still I did not avail of these and came over here.

#### NON-VIOLENT STRATEGY AND NEPAL

Q: What I should like to ask you is: You are the man who had in the past undertaken a fast unto death. You have waged a non-violent struggle. Assuming that the character of the present regime is absolutely uncooperative, and it determinedly stands in the way of your functioning freely inside Nepal, nevertheless why don't you once again relive your own heritage, your own tradition and take to the path of non-violent struggle. Nobody would suggest that B.P. Koirala, of all persons, is afraid of his life. That is about the maximum that a revolutionary can give. If I may repeat Lenin, a revolutionary's first test is whether he is prepared to lay down his own life and not take an other's life. None would suggest that B.P. Koirala is afraid of giving his life for his country. You have in the past staked your life a number of times. I know personally how often it had happened in the past two decades. So, why don't you go back to Nepal, take to the path of non-violent struggle and face the consequences?

A: You have reminded me of my role in the non-violent

struggle. But you have forgotten that the strategy of non-violence failed and immediately after that, I had to take up arms against the Ranas. In 1949, I went on a hunger strike for 29 days. In 1950, I had to take up arms. That being my experience I think the non-violent struggle is a practical proposition only where there is a modicum of rule of law—where what you do as a non-violent fighter is communicated to the people, like here in India. When Gandhiji launched the non-violent struggle all the national newspapers used to publicise it. Gandhiji used to hold meetings and whenever he was arrested he used to be taken to court of law. This is not possible in Nepal at present. That was my experience with the Ranas also. The system must have some constitutional basis, some rule of law where non-violent struggle can have some relevance some political effect. This was available to Gandhiji during the British period and it is not available to the fighters for democracy in Nepal.

That is why after having gone through this experience once or twice, I feel that non-violent struggle is not possible in Nepal. If you mean struggle it must be a violent struggle, but that does not mean that you cannot think in terms of a compromise. The alternatives are compromise, meeting of minds between the King and the democratic forces, a fusion of spirit as I said. Or struggle which would inevitably be an armed struggle. Between armed struggle and compromise, non-violent struggle has no place.

Q: Is there nothing in between.

A: No. As a matter of fact, some of my colleagues suggested that we should first try non-violent struggle. I said that if a non-violent struggle could be organized I would be for it. I advised them to try it. But as far as I am concerned I feel that is not a very feasible proposition.

Q: You mean the climate is not there?

A: It is not only the climate. There is no basis for it—the people cannot be organized, the government will not permit a single meeting to be held, a single political pamphlet to be published, a single procession to be taken out. You must start meeting people and then only a procession can be taken out, but you won't be permitted to do that.

That is why I say, in order that a non-violent struggle may be mounted, you must have certain basic political rights, some constitutional rights, which were available in British India. There was rule of law, of course, not to the extent that a free democratic country had. Still there was a modicum of rule of law and the British did have a democratic tradition. So the non-violent struggle was possible in India.

Even in India, this is what I feel, if it had been a question of seizure of power, the non-violent struggle could not have achieved that. This is my conviction. Gandhi succeeded only because others, as I told you earlier, laid down their lives for India's independence. There was the Second World War, which intervened and the British Government was weakened and its will to retain India was also weakened. It was not a question of being unable to hold India indefinitely but it was the British Cabinet's decision, a political decision, to grant independence to India. So, Gandhi's technique could only bring pressure on a responsive government, not on any other government. He could not have succeeded against Hitler or, as I said in a speech, against King Mahendra.

#### NEVER CRAVED FOR POWER

Q: What is it that you want? Am I to understand that you want to get back to power, that you are working to get back the power you have lost. Or is it that your struggle, all that you are doing is for the establishment of the basic elementary democratic rights of the people.' For that matter, if a rapprochement takes place between you and the Palace, that is King Birendra, would you once again start working in order to become Prime Minister of Nepal, that is, average past history. Or would your role become something like that of Gandhi here in India after the attainment of freedom—you will devote the rest of your life to the cause of the people. Is this understanding of mine correct or not?

A: This is a personal question and I would like to answer it. You will have to believe me that I am not interested personally in power in the least. I am interested in the

restoration of political democratic rights of the people. Before I became Prime Minister in 1959, when there was some faint rumour that the King did not want me to become the Prime Minister—he was taking a long time even after the election results were out and our party had won with an overwhelming majority, but he did not invite me to form a government—I went to the King.

I told him : 'If you are hesitating because I would become Prime Minister, if you do not want me to be the Prime Minister, then I have absolutely no interest in becoming the Prime Minister.' I also told him : 'The King and the Prime Minister must be complimentary to each other. They must have a total understanding in a very critical and revolutionary situation obtaining in Nepal. Nepal is on the threshold of modernization. The King, the Prime Minister and Parliament must not look toward different directions. So, if you wanted that somebody also should be Prime Minister, I will have him elected leader of the Parliamentary Party.' The King said : 'I am a young man and you are also very dynamic. I want that both of us should work together. I want you to be the Prime Minister.' After having secured his consent I got myself elected leader of the parliamentary party.

I have absolutely never in my life craved for personal power. Incidentally, I have been enjoying power, of and on. But most of the time I have been in wilderness, prison or in a foreign country, I have absolutely no interest in going back to my old office—the Prime Minister's office. As for the role of Gandhi, Gandhi was a very great person and nobody can play that role. At least, I do not aspire to emulate him in Nepal.

But if it is said that I am manoeuvring to go back to my former office that is a wrong interpretation of my activities. I am telling you very honestly; if the political rights are restored to the people, if the people get democratic rights and if the condition is that I should get out of politics. I am prepared to go out of politics. If the King says that I must get out of politics I am prepared to resign, provided political rights are restored to the people. I have no personal ambition in politics, absolutely

none. But somehow it happens, that some historical responsibility has fallen on 'B.P. Koirala's shoulder'. Willy-nilly, through circumstances of history I should say, he has come to acquire a very important position in Nepal's politics and if his services could be utilized for Nepal's progress I think it should be done. In what capacity his services could be utilized depends on several factors. Now I am not speaking as 'B.P. Koirala.'

So far as I am concerned, I am prepared to play any role that might be assigned to me, the role which could be effective. The task of modernization of Nepal is a very, very difficult task, almost a frustrating task. Whether you become the Prime Minister or you do not become the Prime Minister, whatever role you might have to play, the task is very frustrating. I do not want to run away from Nepal whatever role is assigned to me. But if there is an insistence on the part of the King that no truck with BP, then I am prepared to fade out. I told King Mahendra many times what I am telling you now. Because the task of modernization of Nepal is very difficult even the King should not arrogate to himself all authority and feel that he alone could deliver the goods. He must carry the people with him so that the task of modernization could be undertaken. This is what I have to say in answer to your second question.

Q: I would once again like to repeat it. Let's suppose a rapprochement takes place between the Nepali Congress and King Birendra the terms of which being that basic democratic rights would be restored to the people, there would be proper constitutional guarantee, but B.P. Koirala must fade out of the scene and he should be nowhere near Nepal. Suppose you are asked to go abroad, go to Europe or elsewhere, and spend the rest of your life there, would you do that.?

A: Provided the people get their basic democratic rights, I am prepared to do that. I told you that if that is a term of the agreement, if that is a requirement, the King insists that he would grant political rights to the people provided B.P. Koirala has nothing to do with it, I am prepared to accept that.



Q: Would it be correct if I said that you are a Democratic Socialist still and, You have many contacts with the Socialist International. For that matter, has the Socialist International been of any assistance to you?

A: I am a Democratic Socialist and my contact with the Socialist International had been through the Asian Socialist Conference. My party, Nepali Congress, had been a constituent of the Asian Socialist Conference, an affiliated party of the Conference and it participated at the first conference in Rangoon. One of the Bureau Meetings of the Conference was held in Kathmandu at the invitation of our party. One observer from the Socialist International used to attend such meetings. Individually I knew the socialist leaders of the Western world. Our party did not have any constitutional link-up with them but we had very good relations with them. They had been giving us moral support—not material support but moral support. When I was in prison they were very actively organizing meetings and demonstrations. They used to pass resolutions for my release and for the restoration of democratic rights in Nepal.

After my release, I went to Europe on their invitation. I was a guest of the Socialist International primarily and also of other Socialist Parties affiliated to the Socialist International. I have not made any attempt to make them more active than they are. I am in communication with them but I have not sought any concrete assistance from them. I think I am remiss in my duty so far as that question is concerned. I should try to make more vigorous use of my contacts with the Socialist leaders of the world.

I think the time has now come when I should get in touch with them to get their political support for the struggle. You see, as I have already told you, although I am organizing for struggle I do not want to burn all the bridges of compromise. If I use my foreign influence, my foreign contacts for our purposes that would be complicating matters, that would further dim the chances of any compromise. That is why I am not doing it. But, when one is poised for a showdown then I will certainly take their help. It will

be of great assistance to me if the people in London, Paris, Vienna, Rome or Stockholm—the Socialists there, who are our very good friends—become active. I have sort of kept this in reserve, because I think that time has not yet arrived.

Q: I suppose you are aware that you might, if it comes to that, take your case to the UN. We are all aware, and the world knows it too, that you do not have any dearth of friends in international politics, who would gladly sponsor your case at the UN. Do you think that a situation might ever arise when you would have to do that, I mean have your case taken up at the UN. Have you ever given a thought to this?

A: It is not that we have not given our thought to this question. But the timing is very important. Time is of essence in this matter. We will take this question to the UN when the opportunity arises. That time was when the King had staged the coup in 1960. At that time, the attention of the world was focussed on that event and we could have very conveniently taken that case and created some sort of a situation. Now we are waiting for the next opportunity when we can take this case to the UN. In the meantime we will explore all the avenues for a rapprochement and when that fails, then we will go to the UN or contemplate fighting.

## PROBLEMS OF HEALTH

Q: How is your health? Did your ailment respond to the medical treatment in the United States?

A: You know, I was suffering from very serious trouble with an artery in the neck and it had to be operated upon urgently. It was fortunate that the trouble was detected in Kathmandu just in time, otherwise I would have got a stroke. And the doctor, a surgeon in America, told me that it was a miracle that I survived. I had an operation, the artery was set right. But I shall have to undergo another operation next year of another artery in the right side of the neck. On the whole I am quite all right; I am as well as is possible under the circumstances. But my voice is a little weak—it is a post-operational complication.

Q: The report has it that you had expressed your gratitude to King Birendra for facilitating your travel to the United States and medical treatment there. Also, you had promised the King to return to Kathmandu after your medical treatment, even if that meant risking imprisonment once again. Is that correct?

A: I am going back to Kathmandu on 4th of November (1977) about ten days from now I was released for medical reasons, for treatment, on parole. That was the understanding with the King. I shall have to go back, back to prison and face the trial.

Q: Do you think that they would once again take you into custody? Did you have any exchange of messages with King Birendra while in the United States? What are the chances of a resolution of the political issue of which you are the centre? What is your assessment of the current political situation in Nepal?

A: I do not know what will happen to me after I return to Kathmandu. My understanding with the King is that I shall have to go back to prison and face the trial. There are seven treason cases pending against me and I have already made about ten or twelve appearances before the court. The trial is suspended till I return to Nepal. My feeling is that on my return I shall have to face the trial.

So far as the political situation is concerned, I think there is a wind of change in this part of the world. I have been emphasizing the fact that a wind of change is also blowing in Nepal—may be not a wind, but a breeze is blowing. The first indication of this is that the King released me on parole to go to the United States for treatment and took the chance that I may not return to Nepal. That is an indication of a small breeze of change that is blowing in our part of the world. Then there has been the release of some political prisoners in Nepal. That is also indicative of a breeze of change.

My feeling is, I am returning in the hope and expectation, that the situation will be normal and my efforts at reconciliation will be successful. I do not think that the King, by releasing me on parole, has done so only on humani-

tarian ground, it was a great political gesture also. This is what I feel and I am acting on that feeling. I hope that after my return, things would move toward greater political liberalization, greater spirit of reconciliation. We feel that politics of confrontation will lead the country nowhere.

#### THE DESTINY OF NEPAL

Q: The logic of the current political situation in Nepal suggests that there is little scope for politics of confrontation. What is your opinion?

A: It is my conviction that we returned to Nepal last year knowing fully well that there were serious charges pending against us. We felt that South Asia would be in a turmoil and new developments were likely to take place in South Asia. If we were to play a role, as Nepal has to play a role, we must, first of all, be united as a nation. That is why we went there and placed ourselves at the disposal of the King. We took that risk in the interest of national reconciliation. I am going back again, although some of my friends have advised me not to return to Nepal, for one does not know what will happen to me. Still I am going back because the very objective for which we had in the first place returned to Nepal was that of reconciliation. I have to work for that objective.

I think if Nepal has a future, if Nepal has a destiny, if Nepal has to prosper, if Nepal is not to remain only as a museum piece tucked away in the folds of the Himalayas, then Nepal must first be united as a nation. That unity can only be achieved through development of democratic institutions in which the people have vested interest.

Q: You have been arraigned on charges some of which, if proved, carry the maximum penalty. You are now free not to go back to Nepal to stand the pending trial. Yet how is it that you are intent on returning to Nepal?

A: I have to keep faith with the King—I have told the King that I would return and face the trial. And I have to keep faith with my people. There are large number of political prisoners who are facing similar charges. I think my place is with them. I am once again placing myself at the dis-

posal of the King. He can make use of me for the purpose of reconciliation. This is an opportunity and I am taking the risk, personal risk. But when the stake is so high one should not be impeded by personal considerations.

Just as I told you, I have great faith in the future of our country. If the country has no future, then all the struggles that we have faced so long, all the sacrifices the people have made would have been in vain. But I have faith in my country, I have faith in Nepal that it can play an effective role in this part of the world. This is the time when we have got to be united. I feel that the King is also conscious of the fact that Nepal has to play a role. If I get an opportunity to meet the King, I will impress upon him that unity can be achieved through the democratic process by involving the people both in the formulation of policy and in its implementation. The people must be informed of the development processes, economic and political, and then alone Nepal would be on the motive. I think at my age if I could achieve that it would be the last service that I can render to the nation.

Q: Report has it that on your way back from the US you recently met some of West Europe's top Socialist leaders, including former German Social Democratic leader and former Chancellor, Willy Brandt. What was their reaction to your decision to return to Nepal and face the consequences? What did Willy Brandt say?

A: Of course, I met Willy Brandt, twice—once in Madrid at the Bureau meeting of the Socialist International, which he was chairing. He introduced me to the members of the Bureau and moved a resolution also. I had to make a small speech and, on my report about Nepal that I gave, they passed a resolution. In moving the resolution he said: 'We hope that B.P. Koirala's efforts will succeed, there will be a reconciliation, and Nepal, thereby will set an example to the world how political differences could be resolved.' And he hoped that the political differences would be solved and aid from all over the world would start flowing into that small country, which had shown the world how political differences could be resolved.

## 'MAN IS FREE ONLY IN PRISON'

Q: You are credited with the observation that in an authoritarian regime a man is free only in prison. Would you please elaborate?

A: I made this statement to some of the people in the United States, to some of the Senators. It is like this: Our struggle for democratic cause is not only to get into power. It is not merely a question of power. We want to live as human beings. An authoritarian regime, wherever it is, makes it clear to its people that if you want to live with dignity you have to be in prison. So, the place for a man with dignity in an authoritarian regime is in prison. There alone can he hold his head high. Outside the prison he has no dignity, no humanity. He is just a slave. He is a subject—not a citizen.

Q: What do you think could provide a basis of resolution of Nepal's problem of politics?

A: I do not want to anticipate what the King would do. I am keeping this question first to be discussed with the King. I can only say that I will try my level best to come to some understanding with the King. How and on what basis the modality of it will be, is not proper for me to discuss just at present.

Q: I think in the given context the institution of monarchy has a role to play in Nepal, whatever the system of polity might be. What is your opinion? What do you think would be a workable form of government in Nepal?

A: About monarchy, we are very clear. We want constitutional monarchy. Nepal has been a traditional monarchy, but these have been different phases of monarchy. At one time you know, Bholu, in 1950, for instance, there were two monarchs—one was living in Delhi, another was sitting on the throne. And for one hundred and four years, the monarch was virtually a prisoner, an exalted prisoner. I was a prisoner in the ordinary prison and he was a prisoner in the Palace. It is not enough to ask whether I want monarchy or not. You must be definite about what type of monarchy you want. We are very clear on that. We want monarchy, but it must be constitutional monarchy.

**Q:** What were the considerations that influenced you in coming to the decision to go back to Nepal in December, 1976, much as you apprehended that you would be arrested?

**A:** I had the feeling, I should say the animal instinct, that things were developing very fast in South Asia. We thought that unless we were united as a nation we cannot play an effective role in the new situation that was developing in South Asia. That is why we went back. Some people feel that because Indira Gandhi made it difficult for us to live in India we went back to Nepal—that is a peripheral consideration. The main consideration was, and that was the statement I made on the eve of my return to Nepal, that we must strive for national unity because Nepal has to play a role in South Asia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The taped interviews in Chapters 2 to 5 were conducted in the years between October 1973 and October 1977.

## Part - 6

Q: Your recent statements that New Delhi should in its own interest, support the Nepalese people's democratic cause and that 'if the Government of India does not support the cause, it will be failing in its duty', seem to have some teeth in them. What kind of support do you want or expect from the Government of India?

A: Bholu, some press correspondents wanted to know what the Government of India's attitude was toward democracy in Nepal. I told them that it would be failing in its duty to its own people, if it did not support the cause of democracy in our country. Of course, it must be very clearly understood that when I say support I mean moral support. I want the Government of India should give moral support not only to Nepal, it should support democratic cause all over the world.

Q: This appears to run counter to your observation, following your meeting with King Birendra on 30th October 1978, that he was 'more receptive and more liberal and more prepared to act according to the changing times.'

A: No, I don't think there is any contradiction between the statement I made immediately following my meeting with the King and my recent statement. I want to emphasize that it is in the interest of India to be on the side of democracy in Nepal.

Q: What is this conference that you are going to attend in Bonn? Are you going to the US for further surgery? Would you go back to Nepal after you return from the US?

A: Primarily, I am going to the U.S. for medical check-up. The doctors there will evaluate whether or not I need a third surgical operation. Because there is no proper equipment in Nepal to determine the nature of the damage to my artery, my doctor suggested that I must get the



evaluation done by my doctors in the U.S. In the meantime, I received an invitation to attend the Bonn Conference. You know, there is the North-South Commission whose objective is to bridge the economic gap between the developed and the developing nations. They are holding a conference in Bonn on that subject and I have been invited to attend it. I intend attending it on my way to the U.S. Of course, I would come back to Nepal because my place is among my own people. As a matter of fact, I leave Nepal most reluctantly—only for health reasons. Otherwise, I would not leave Nepal.

#### NEED FOR NATIONAL CONSENSUS

Q: What exactly did you talk with King Birendra? What do you think might be the possible course of events in Nepal in the immediately future?

A: I explained to the King the situation in Nepal according to my lights—what I think the situation is in Nepal. I told him that the primary concern of all patriotic Nepalese is to bring about a national consensus. For that, it is necessary to develop democratic institutions without which we can't bring about national unity. These are the two points that I emphasized. And the third point that I also emphasized was that development—and the King is very much interested in development—in our context is also a political job.

Without appropriate political instruments you cannot motivate the people. What is happening today is that the people are not properly motivated. Aid is pouring in from all over the world but there is no development. In fact, the development is minus, so to speak. Whatever development takes place is eaten up by the population explosion and the sum total is that it is a minus growth. So, I told him that I give him credit for his good intentions, for being very much development-minded. But if democratic institutions are not introduced, institutions in which people have vested interest, they won't be motivated towards the task of development. The people should be involved in the process of policy making as well as in the process of its implementation. This is what I told the King.

I found thinking—this is my impression once again—to be responsive. First, the atmosphere was very cordial. Secondly, we were alone and there was nobody to interfere. Thirdly, he put searching questions on certain issues to me. Fourthly, he agreed on many things that I said. I am not free to tell you what the King said. I am only free to tell you what I said. So, Bhola, you will understand my position. My impression is that the King is alert and he is aware of the country's problems, both economic and political. I feel that 1979 will be a crucial year for us. Perhaps the democratic system might be introduced in 1979.

As for the question what type of monarchy we want in Nepal, there are two points I would like to emphasize. I want that the King should take the first step toward liberalization and democratization of the administration. I know that he cannot at one go introduce full-fledged democracy, but he must take the first step toward it. I want the King to preside over a democratic system, rather than the present system which is corrupt, anti-democratic and non-progressive. He is presiding over this system, which I will repeat, is corrupt, anti-democratic and non-progressive and which is taking the country on to the path of ruin. I want the King to preside over a democratic system with a virile nation, which has a role to play in South Asia. Because I have great ambitions for my country, I want the King to preside over a nation which can play an effective role in this part of the world.

#### DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES NECESSARY

Q: Do you visualize a settlement with the Palace resulting in some form of representative government in Nepal.

A: I am very hopeful that it may take place in 1979. The kind of atmosphere that I found in the Palace, the kind of gestures the King has shown make me believe that the future is very bright so far as democracy is concerned. Again I would emphasize one thing—there is no alternative to this, much as some people might talk about it. If we fail in bringing about a national consensus, which can be built up only the basis of democratic institutions, the coun-

try would go to ruin. Unless we regenerate our nation through the democratic process, we have no future. When some of our party men complain that the pace is very slow, I tell them that there is no alternative to this or to the mandate we have given ourselves that there must be national unity. National unity cannot be achieved in a vacuum. This means that the people and the monarchy must combine, that there must be total understanding between these two elements of national life. The alternative to this is ruin. That is what I feel and, therefore, I do not contemplate any alternative to this.

Q: If reconciliation between the Palace and the democratic forces does not take place, what do you propose to do?

A: You see, Bhole, I am not a pessimist. If we have to exist as a nation, if we have some role to play in this part of the world, this is the line. There is no other line. So I don't have any alternative to the present line in my mind.

Q: You do not propose even to think of any alternative?

A: No, I do not. It is just unthinkable. Anything else would bring about disintegration of our country.

Q: Rumour has it that there is a sharp difference of opinion between King Birendra and his brother Prince Gyanendra about the political situation in Nepal. Is there any truth in it? Do you think that King Birendra desires a settlement with the Nepali Congress, particularly with a view to strengthening his own position in his confrontation with Prince Gyanendra?

A: I have absolutely no idea. So far as we are concerned, we recognize only the King and nobody else. And it is the King who has to take the decision. I don't know what internal pressure is being exercised on him. We don't care about that. Only he has to take the decision. He cannot take shelter behind the plea that he is helpless. We are not going to accept that position.

#### ONLY UNITY CAN SAVE THE NATION

Q: At the time of your return to Nepal from self-exile in India in December, 1976 you had issued a statement

saying that when 'a cruel and staggering blow was dealt at democracy in 1960. The Nepali Congress launched a resistance movement in support of democracy. And now when we find that a threat is hanging over our country, we have taken another historic decision which is in conformity with the tradition of the Nepali Congress.'<sup>1</sup> What was that 'threat' you had referred to?

A: Bholu, we felt that our part of the world was entering a phase of destabilization. The developments in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and in other neighbouring countries indicated that there would be political confusion and chaos. That was the time when we thought that if we did not set our house in order, if we failed to achieve national unity, the forces of destabilization would swamp us and we would lose our national integrity. When Sikkim got merged into India I said that it would trigger a chain reaction.

We felt that it was time we patched up our differences with the King and convince him that unity alone could save our national integrity. That unity, however, could be achieved only on the basis of a democratic constitution. The staggering blow that the late King Mahendra had dealt at us in December, 1960 was an anti-national and a treasonable act on his part. We would try to convince King Birendra that the consequences of that deed should be wiped off and the democratic process initiated in order to bring about national unity. Secondly, Nepal was a small country situated between India and China and we felt that if national unity could be achieved, perhaps, we might be able to play an effective role in the crumbling world around us. That was my purpose. The threat was that of disintegration, of destabilization, of utter confusion. Subsequent events confirmed it.

The step that we took in 1976 was very important. Of course, it was not only unpopular but also was very dangerous for us considering that we went back to Nepal of our own volition without any assurance from the government. But we thought that the risk was worth taking in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Koirala's Trial, op. cit, p. 23.*

interests of both the country and democracy. That has been amply vindicated.

Q: In your court statement recorded between April 29 and May 17, 1977, while standing trial on eight charges before a special one-man tribunal in Kathmandu, you said: 'Revolution in my opinion is that state of active opposition in which the people can put pressure on a hostile government to the extent to which they can compel it to give them democratic rights. People's revolution had become necessary to restore democracy'<sup>2</sup> following the royal take-over in December, 1960. Would you prescribe the same course of action if authority does not keep faith with the people regarding the proposed referendum?

A: I do not want to contemplate a situation where the King goes back on his commitment to referendum. When the King announced a referendum it was the total vindication of our right, of the line which we unitedly pursued with perserverance. And when we have achieved our objective, when we find that the King has accepted our line, when we have dislodged the King from his position, when we have made him say that, after all, there is an alternative to the system which his father had initiated, when the King has recognized the primacy of the people in the decision making process, I do not want to say anything that will vitiate the atmosphere.

At that time when I made the statement you have referred to, the situation was entirely different. I had to vindicate my stand. In the changed context I cannot create even remotely a suspicion that I am holding out a threat that there would be troubles unless everything is done according to our scheme of things. Since I find that I do not have any ground to suspect the King's bonafides there is no reason why I should be telling the world that if he does not do this or that, we would revert to our line of revolution. That would not be proper, particularly when I firmly believe that the King has acted in a spirit of accommodation, accepted our line and he has walked over to our side.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

Q: You mean the 'line' which you had referred to while returning to Nepal from your self-exile in India in 1976.

A: Yes, that was the culmination of our line. When we have achieved our objective, when we got the King to accept our point of view it does not look proper politically, other considerations apart, to raise a doubt about the bonafides of the King.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL COMPULSIONS OF NEPAL

Q: Starting with King Mahendra not a few Nepalese have dubbed you a "stooge of India". How do you explain that? Don't you think your Indian connections, frequent visits to this country and all that adds grist to the mill of your traducers?

A: Bhole, let me explain the position. I am very friendly with Indians. I have worked in the Socialist movement. I have participated in your national liberation struggle against the British, for which I have also courted imprisonment. This most of the present leaders had not done during British rule. I have got great love for this country. This situation is not my personal situation alone.

Then again, there is the compulsion of geography. We come to India for various reasons, such as our medical treatment, our education. We have got marriage connections, social and cultural connections. Besides, if there is a drought in India, there is also a drought in our country. If there is heavy rain in our catchment area, it causes floods in your country. Thus we are bound together and we have to sink or swim together. I consider Nepal to be part of South Asia and we belong to the community of South Asian nations. By virtue of this we are certainly very friendly with India.

If the charge against me is that I am friendly with India we are prepared to meet it. As a matter of fact, I have been doing that all along. That accusation notwithstanding, if there is an election today we would win hands down. The basic question is : Where do we belong? Where does Nepal belong? It is a buffer state or is it part of South Asia? A big debate about this is going on in our country. Personally,

I think that we are not a buffer state just as Bangladesh or Pakistan is not a buffer state. We are part of South Asia. We have got to live with the countries south of the Himalayas in amity and friendship. We may quarrel as brothers—and in fact we do quarrel—but we have to live in the same house.

This is our attitude. I am not afraid of what the people say about my connections with India. Even now I have come from Bombay, where I had gone for medical treatment, where I met Jayaprakash Narayan, a great friend of ours. In Delhi I met Indian leaders in government and outside and others who belong to various political parties. The point that must be clearly understood is that I am for Nepal, but at the same time we shall have to maintain the friendliest, most cordial and intimate relations with India. One just cannot wish away the fact of geography. With all respect to the patriotic sentiment of a Nepali, we cannot afford to be anti-India, we cannot take up the cause of those countries which are anti-India.

Therefore, I am not afraid of being called a stooge of India. Let me repeat, I am not a stooge of India, I am not a stooge of anybody. I am not pro-India or pro-China or pro-America—I am pro-Nepal. Mind you, all this propaganda against me has cut no ice with the people of Nepal. That is why I challenge the government, I challenge the King: 'Call an election, see the result and then do whatever you like.' The fact is, I take my stand on reality, geographical and other factors and that is that.

Even as I say this, I must remind my Indian friends that they do not feel that they are South Asians. But the fact is that they are the biggest South Asian nation. And if you are the biggest power in this area, you must also have the biggest heart, you must appreciate the sentiment of the neighbouring countries. That is what the Indians should do. I have been telling my Indian friends that you can't expect to be treated as the biggest country in South Asia if you have the smallest heart. In that case you can't play the role that your bigness requires you to do. So far as India-Nepal relations are concerned, we are in the same boat and if there is a leak in it, we must in our collective interests plug it.

Q: That is one side of the picture. What about the other side of it—your relations with China? If Nepal cannot wish away the presence of India, it also cannot wish away the presence of China.

A: That is why I have been telling people that it is our patriotic duty to be very friendly with Beijing. But it must be clearly understood that there are greater compulsions for being friendlier with India than with China. The fact that the Chinese are on the northern border and they are friendly with us needs must be reciprocated. Of course, there is a relationship of hostility between India and China. Indians should not demand that we must toe their line and adopt a hostile attitude towards China. We must have the friendliest relations with Beijing. But we must also remember that whatever happens in Beijing does not affect us to the extent that events in Delhi do and that is because we belong to South Asia. It is not really surprising that we are closer to India than to China. The mistake of the Mahendra regime—and this also applies to the present government also—was that it wanted to pursue a policy of playing one against the other. In the long run, such a policy does not pay.

India should understand that we cannot toe the Indian line so far as China is concerned. By and large, we support the Indian foreign policy, for instance, the line of Non-Alignment and all that. But on certain special issues we differ, particularly India's China Policy. We understand India's position, but India should also appreciate our position and not insist on our going the whole hog with it as far as China is concerned. That will leave no ground for misunderstanding if we pursue a line, which is not identical with that of India so far as China is concerned.

Q: What would be your line of action if the verdict of the referendum goes against the Nepali Congress' demand for a multi-party system of polity?

A: If the verdict goes against us, we will accept it. We will wait for another opportunity to convince the people. I cannot contemplate that the verdict will be against us, but if it does go against us we will take it in our stride. As things are, the King has accepted the challenge and put us to the



test. Now I cannot go to the people with reservations and tell them that if we do not win we will not accept the judgment.

#### REFERENDUM AND THE FUTURE

Q: In other words, you are determined to play the game. And since you want the people's sanction, you will abide by their verdict, whatever that may be. Have I got the point all right?

A: Yes, that's it.

Q: Who would be the likely choice as the Prime Minister if your party won the election that would presumably be held in case the people opted for a multiparty system of government?

A: I don't know what will be the position. Objectively speaking, perhaps my party colleagues would insist on my accepting that responsibility. Personally, that is not a great temptation to me for two or three reasons. First, the Prime Minister will have to be in best of health which I am not. Secondly, I want to play a bigger role than the cramped role of a Prime Minister. I want to play a more meaningful role on a national scale. I want to soothe the injured feelings which would be the inevitable aftermath of the elections. Also, I want to play a role that would help bring about a better and happier relationship with the King. Besides, my wife, Sushila, is dead against my becoming Prime Minister. Still, I don't know what will actually happen. My difficulty is that, except Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, there is none in our party who can shoulder this responsibility. On the other hand, the rank and file of the party may generally want me to take that responsibility.

Q: What role would you like to assign to the institution of monarchy? Don't you think that democracy is incompatible with absolute monarchy?

A: We want monarchy—not absolute but constitutional. The King should be the constitutional Head of State with some discretionary powers. But he must exercise those powers on the advice of the elected Prime Minister. He cannot exercise those powers in his personal capacity. Both

democracy and its institutions will be safer with a constitutional monarch as the Head of State rather than an elected Head of State. Because an elected Head of State will always have the propensity to think of himself as the real representative of the people. The worst of the world's big dictators were elected by the people—Hitler was elected, Mussolini was elected, and so were many others. I may tell you there is no incompatibility between Democracy, Socialism and Constitutional Monarchy.

Q: How do you propose to combat the entrenched interests that have thrived on the panchayat system?

A: The protagonists of the partyless panchayat system had their political authority by virtue of the fact that they enjoyed the support of the King. Now that the King has withdrawn his support they have collapsed like a house of cards. You met M.P. Koirala yesterday [July 2 1979] and he must have told you about the current situation in Nepal. The panchayat people are disintegrating. They are resigning from their office *en masse* in various districts. If we make efforts there will be very many more resignations. We have been asking them to stay where they are and propagate for multi-party system which would be more effective than merely resigning their office. They are no more a political force.

Of course, the faithfuls will campaign for partyless democracy at the time of the referendum, but they know that the verdict will go against them. Perhaps they will then form themselves into a kind of conservative, democratic party. So I am not afraid of them. However, there are people, who are interested in sabotaging the referendum. But the opposition to it does not come from these people who are not a political force. It comes from individuals. It comes from those people who are alarmed at the prospect of the King joining hands with us. For when the democratic process starts, they will be nowhere in the picture. In fact, they will be eliminated from it. These people might create some confusion, some difficulties. Otherwise, there is no problem.

Q: Is the King sincere about the referendum?

A: Absolutely sincere. True, in politics one should not take everything on trust alone. But you must realise that

the King did not have any alternative to what he did on [24th May] this year when he announced a referendum. He knew that if he did not take the people into confidence, involve them in a big way in the nation's political life and give them primacy in the matter of making their own judgment, then perhaps his throne too would be in danger. The recent happenings in Iran must have been a great lesson to him. Also, due to a combination of factors the recent student movement in Nepal, though small, became some kind of a national revolt. This too must have had its impact on him. Whatever decision he made on 24th May was not a stratagem on his part. He must have taken into consideration these developments as well as the national unity that we have created and come to the conclusion that a referendum was the only alternative he had to save himself and to save the country from chaos and confusion. I have absolutely no doubt about his bonafides.

#### REIGNING, BUT NOT A RULING MONARCH

Q: Would the King abide by the verdict of the people, if that went in favour of a multi-party system?

A: He will certainly be in a happier position when he will find that by relinquishing power to the people's representatives he ensures the stability of the throne. The choice before him is whether to rule for sometime and vanish from history all together or to gain the confidence of the people and stabilize his throne. He has opted for the second choice. It is in his own interest to be a reigning and not a ruling monarch. Because that will ensure the continuity of his throne. It was very wise of him to decide that the people should be taken into confidence, they should get the power, he should get the prestige, the Throne would be some kind of a respected institution and that the Crown will not become a subject matter of controversy. He will then reign not by virtue of the strength of his army but by that of the people's affection and regard for him. I think that is a better position for him than to rule the country ruthlessly and be hated by the people.

Q: Most of your opponents are your former friends and

colleagues, including your elder half-brother M.P. Koirala. How do you explain that?

A: Every living organism, even a plant, when it grows, requires that some of its limbs be chopped off. In a natural process they drop off or have to be chopped off. It is only a non-living body, which does not grow and carry the same thing all the time. There is no circulation of blood. Now, if some of the people have left the party, hundreds of new men have come. What the Nepali Congress is today is because of the fact that it has adhered to certain principles. For nineteen years it is the Nepali Congress which has been consistently opposing the present system. All that I would say about those who have fallen away from us is that they have knuckled under the King's repression. It is by virtue of the fact that we have not yielded and the young generation has infused new blood into the party that we are alive. So, I am not very much worried that some of our erstwhile friends and colleagues are not with us today. Of course, I should be happy if they returned to the fold, but if they did not do that, it would be no great loss. That does not mean that we will not try to seek their cooperation. The whole question is that we stood by certain principles which the others have not.

Q: What is the Nepali Congress' attitude toward the pro-Beijing and Pro-Moscow Communist Parties?

A: We respond to their attitude and theirs has been a fluctuating attitude toward us. We are neither hostile to nor friendly with them. The pro-Moscow groups have been sometimes very friendly with and sometimes very hostile toward us. It is more or less the same with the pro-Beijing groups. The whole problem with the pro-Beijing groups—I don't know whether they are pro-Beijing or not—but they call themselves Maoists but there are five or six groups. They fight among themselves more bitterly than what they do against others. So far as Nepal's politics is concerned they are not of much consequence at present. They may have the potentiality but that is about all. In the context of the referendum or of the election that would follow they are of no consequence.

Q: According to newspaper reports, the referendum would

be held in late April or early May, 1980. To get through the spade-work for the referendum, including updating of the electoral rolls, it should not take such a long time unless there are other considerations. What is your opinion?

A: I don't think news-item published in India regarding the time of the referendum is correct. There is no official confirmation of it. We have been insisting on holding the referendum immediately after the monsoon. Of course they have no election machinery, but it can be built up expeditiously. The political parties also would like to have some time to gear themselves up to participate in the referendum. I think October or November would be the best time to hold the referendum and there is no reason why it should be delayed beyond that.

After I return to Kathmandu, I would try to meet the King and impress upon him the desirability of going through the process of referendum as quickly as possible. So that we might go ahead with another election. The period between now and the installation of a fully elected government should not be unnecessarily long. For this will understandably be a period of uncertainty when all kinds of mischief might be done. The present government is a caretaker one and a caretaker government cannot continue in office for such a long time.

So far as the King is concerned, I have told you that he is not interested in prolonging the present state of affairs. He is interested in stabilizing the institution of monarchy. If the period of uncertainty is prolonged he will also have to face criticism. He will become the target of attack. I don't think he will like that. Secondly, the King is not interested in perpetuating the present system. If he were so interested, he would have adopted other methods. Even some of our party leaders had suggested that the present government should go, the King should take power into his own hands and invite a Round Table Conference. The King could have adopted that, saying that this was a very reasonable suggestion that the Nepali Congress leaders had made. He could have thus prolonged this process and become the main actor. In that case, my voice would have been smothered by so many other voices. He did not adopt

that stratagem because he is not interested in maintaining the present system.

Q: Don't you think that your unreserved certificate of good intentions and statesmanship to King Birendra is not warranted by the realities. For that matter, it might expose you to the risk of being out-flanked on the left. Would it be far wrong to say that the King is playing for time, that he wants to give the panchayat supporters time to organise themselves in order to oppose the democratic forces?

A: That risk has to be taken. I cannot take a step which I think to be detrimental to the cause of democracy in order to curry favour with the extremists. Then again, Bhole, I do not suffer from—I am speaking for myself as objectively as possible—a sense of political insecurity. Therefore, I do not suffer from—I am speaking for myself as objectively as possible—rare history of the Third World politics you will see that the bane of it has been that the leaders are not leaders; they just pander to the sentiments of the people and call it democratic. I don't indulge in the rhetoric of populism. After having risked my neck, I don't propose to say or do anything which I don't think to be correct, even if it is unpopular. If democracy has to be saved, we cannot afford to give in to populism. To save democracy, we may, at times, have to take unpopular decisions and make the people accept them. Of course, that will have to be done not through autocratic methods but by convincing the people. I take pride in the fact that I don't indulge in populism and I am not particularly worried about any motivated attack from the so-called left.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The taped interviews were taken in the period between December 1978 and July 1979.

*Appendix A*

Personal

No. 130-PMO/61  
New Delhi  
March 1, 1961

My Dear Shri Singh,

I have your letter of March 1st. I am deeply grieved to learn of the brutalities indulged in Kathmandu. You may certainly see me on my return from London.

yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jawaharlal Nehru', written in a cursive style.

Shri D.P. Singh, MP.  
37 Western Court  
New Delhi

*Appendix B*

No. 571-PMH/61

Prime Minister's House  
New Delhi  
March 29, 1961

My Dear Devendra Prasadji

Your letter of 28th March. I can meet Shri Subarna Shumsher on the 7th April at 7 p.m. at my house. I shall be returning to Delhi from Gujarat on the evening of the 6th. 7th, therefore, is the earliest date that I can give.

Yours sincerely



Shri D.P. Singh, MP  
37 Western Court  
New Delhi 1



### Appendix C

*The full text of the statement Subarna Shumsher, Acting President of the Nepali Congress, issued on 15 May 1968 :*

"The Nepali Congress received the news of the sudden illness of His Majesty the King of Nepal from some heart disease with great sorrow and distress. It has, however, felt relieved to know that His Majesty is making satisfactory progress towards recovery. The Nepali Congress joins the entire nation in offering its sincerest prayers for His Majesty's restoration to full health and for his long life.

"In recent months the Nepali Congress has been watching with great concern and anxiety the growing influence and menacing activities of certain forces of subversion, inside the country and in its immediate neighbourhood, that threaten the very basic fabric and the values of Nepalese national life. It has also carefully noted the royal pronouncements and the statements of the spokesmen of His Majesty's Government made recently on democracy and nationalism and on the supreme need of the hour for all nationalist and democratic Nepalese, inside and outside the country, to stand united for orderly progress and for the defence of the unity, integrity and independence of the country.

"In view of the aforesaid developments and more particularly out of their respectful concern for His Majesty's health, after his recent unfortunate illness, the Nepali Congress deems it to be its duty to reorientate its policies and programmes to suit the best interests of the country in the changed situation and circumstances.

"The Nepali Congress, therefore, in supersession of its political resolution of May, 1967 and re-asserting its faith in the democratic ideal under the leadership of the King hereby resolves to offer its fullest and loyal cooperation to His Majesty the King, as the sovereign Head of the Kingdom of

Nepal, in his endeavours to build a strong, united and prosperous Nepal, and in resisting and overcoming the forces of subversion, wherever and whenever they raise their head.

“The Nepali Congress further resolves to extend its co-operation in the working of the present Constitution of Nepal in the earnest hope of its further development under the guidance and leadership of His Majesty the King.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Source : Nepal Today (Calcutta), Vol.7, No.12, 15 May 1968.*

*Appendix D*

Personal

Ambassador of India  
Nepal  
Kathmandu  
September 27, 1968

**My dear Shri B.P. Koirala,**

You may be a little surprised by this letter, but I have been impelled to write it to you and send it through G.P. specially because there are doubts that you and Shri Ganesh Man are not in agreement with the statement made by General Subarna Shumsher. These doubts are impending further progress. I would be grateful if I could have a free and frank reply from you to this letter of mine, stating your views about General Subarna Shumsher's statement and letting me know whether you and Shri Ganesh Manji do or do not agree with that statement.

I hope you would not consider this as an intrusion or as an attempt on my part to influence your views.

With kindest regards,

yours sincerely

*Raj Bahadur*

Shri B.P. Koirala

*Appendix E*

Sarnath  
Varanasi  
13.8.71

My dear Bhola,

I received your letter of the 3rd instant about five days ago. I don't know why it took so much time to reach me. One has to be thankful however if you get your mail all-right, ultimately; because otherwise you will have to be content with not getting it altogether. You know, Sarnath is without electric supply, which means without water supply also, for the last five days. We have to be content without them; if they are restored we will be thankful, naturally.

The situation in Nepal continues to be as usual—i.e. the King is still dictating there and we have yet not acquired the means to cut him down to size—which you know, is really very small. Political situation is favourable to us—but it is of no consequence against military dictatorship, which has to be met not politically but militarily. Bangladesh situation is analogous. I don't understand the political settlement which everybody from Yahya Khan to Indira Gandhi, USA to USSR is enamoured of in the case of Bangladesh. I may be lacking in sophistication in political thought.

I couldn't read your article because it was quickly removed from my desk. I don't know by whom: Please let me know the date on which it was published. I will get a copy of it from the library. Look Bhola, in a situation that is developing you can't survive unless you know how to wield arms collectively for your ideal or individually for your honour or freedom. Again, I seem to lack sophistication.

Sushila is here. She sends you her love. We have a good house in Sarnath. Why can't you come here to spend

sometime with us? Your cynicism and simplicity in political thinking would be good combination. You can also help me to write a book. We can discuss plans also-literary and political. I am not likely to come to Calcutta in the near future. Calcutta has ceased to be a fit place for poor or middle class people to live in. It is a place where Naxalites and black-marketeers can flourish. Satyajit Ray told me when I met him last that Calcutta still has vitality. Yes, yes, it has if you can watch it from a distance of affluence arrogance, or art.

Be in good cheer.

Yours aftly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SR', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Sushila too wants that you pay us a visit.

*Appendix F*

B.P. Koirala

Camp : Sarnath  
Varanasi (India)  
October 15, 1971

My dear Bhola,

I am writing this letter about a seminar on Nepal which we propose to convene in India from December 20 to 22, 1971. Delhi will be the venue.

I am sure you have some idea about what is happening in Nepal today. The people in that helpless part of the world do not enjoy basic human rights. The gulf between their aspirations and achievements still remains as wide as ever. The people, to say the least, live in a veritable hell of tyranny, exploitation and misery. Nepal holds at the same time a very strategic position in the sub-continent of South Asia and if such a state of affairs continues—the people of Nepal have no control over their own destiny and the country remains a pawn in the hands of a ruling coterie responsible only to themselves—it will spell ruin for the whole area. On the revival of democracy and socialism, as I have come to believe, depends peace and prosperity in Asia. This is why it has been decided to hold a seminar on Nepal in the context of the emerging aspirations of the people of south Asia.

Two of my friends in India, Prof. Sugata Dasgupta, Joint Director, Gandhian Institute of Studies and Shri Chandra Shekhar, Member of Indian Parliament, have kindly agreed to join me in convening this seminar.

I am listing below some of the issues which we think could be discussed at the seminar :

1. Legitimacy of Panchayat Democracy (the political system in vogue in Nepal.)
2. Profile of the Political Process.
3. Profile of Exploitation.
4. Methodology of Change.
5. International forces and status of the Nepalese polity.

The plan is to invite leaders of all national political parties and eminent academicians. We are also thinking to invite some selected leaders from different countries of the world to participate in the seminar.

I am writing this personal letter to you and would like to know your reaction. What do you think of the endeavour? Should we hold the seminar? If so, could you be able to attend it? Do you have any suggestion about the issues to be discussed? I shall proceed with the arrangement only after I hear from you.

Kindly let me have a word in reply at your earliest convenience.

With fraternal greetings,

Yours sincerely,

*B.P. Koirala*

*P.S.* I received the press cutting of your article. A compromise between the King and the democratic forces, however desirable, seems unattainable due to the intransigence of the former. Therefore, your thesis would be irrelevant in the present context. Sushila is at Kathmandu.

*B.P.*

*Appendix G*

B.P. Koirala

Camp : Sarnath  
Varanasi  
U.P.  
11 November 1971

My dear Bhola,

Thank you for your letter of October 30, 1971. I entirely agree with your suggestion about the dates of the seminar. I am, therefore, postponing it till the end of February. I shall write to you again when the dates are finally decided. I hope you will keep yourself free for the seminar.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

*B.P. Koirala*

Shri Bhola Chatterjee  
Indian Statistical Institute  
203 Barrackpore Trunk Road  
Calcutta-35

*P.S.*

What about your proposed visit to Sarnath? I have given serious consideration to your suggestion with regard to the seminar. Hence the postponement.

*B.P.*  

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