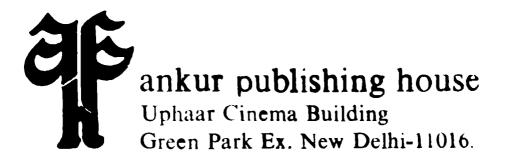
portrait of a revolutionary B. P. KOIRALA

Bhola Chatterji



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Published by : Mrs. Seema Mukherjee Ankur Publishing House Uphaar Cinema Building Green Park Extension, New Delhi-110016.

Printed by Miss Baljeet Kaur Filmahal Enterprise Uphaar Cinema Building New Delhi-110016 (INDIA).

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To my daughter Angana

Foreward

Bhola Chatterji has produced yet another book on Nepal. Ever since the early 1950s, when he actively participated in our revolutionary struggle against the Rana autocracy, he has taken a keen interest in Nepal's political development. He has his own point of view. He knows personally most of the dramatis personae of Nepal's politics. The present book appears to be an assessment of my politics. He has sat with me in long sessions and has extensively interviewed me on various subjects, and has extensively quoted me in his book. But the book is his. It is his point of view which he has presented in his book.

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B. P. Koirala 29-11-81 Kathmandu

Preface

Thirty years is not a very long period in the life of a country. By that token, modern Nepal has yet to come of age considering that it entered the 20th century some three decades ago. This Himalayan kingdom, the home of some 13 million people of diverse ethnic origins speaking a number of languages and dialects, was forcibly exposed to modernity in 1951.

Until then, it was a "closed" feudal country autocratically ruled by the Ranas. For about a century, the Ranas held the office of prime minister as a hereditary tenure. It was the 1950-51 revolution pioneered by the Nepali Congress, of which Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala (his friends call him BP) was the undisputed architect, that introduced democracy into the country and threw it open both to foreigners and to its own children who dwelt outside the charmed valley of Kathmandu.

And then started a process of political engineering, often bewildering, to catch up with the times. The kingdom's brief experiment with parliamentary democracy was followed by the Palace-imposed partyless panchayat democracy a euphemism for authoritarian rule. The Nepali Congress pioneered resistance to it, and a succession of utterly corrupt and incompetent governments, accountable only to the Palace, wasted opportunities for economic development, misconceived innovations to rig up a political system, fitful efforts, mostly counterproductive, to acquire an identity distinct from its two giant neighbours to the north and south respectively—all these are but some of the ingredients of a complex story that came to a climax on 24 May 1979.

On that not quite unpleasant morning, climatically speaking, the 36-year-old Eton-Harvard-Tokyo-educated King Birendra did an unprecedented thing. Without prior announcement, he went on the air before most Nepalese had their morning cup of tea. The King, believed to be a living incarnation of Vishnu, announced that a national referendum on the basis of universal adult suffrage would be held to ascertain the people's opinions on the kingdom's future form of government. They would be free, he assured his people to decide through the ballot box whether the partyless panchayat, suitably reformed, or the multiparty system should rule the roost.

I have attempted to explain the whys and wherefores of this in my book *Palace*, *People and Politics: Nepal in perspective*. In the years since the 1950-51 revolution, which opened up the country for the people to determine the form of their polity, I have had occasions to visit that country, watching men and affairs from close quarters.

I did not have to depend on secondary sources to reconstruct the three-decade-old account of Nepal's endeavours to knock into shape a political system capable of delivering the goods. My three previous books on contemporary Nepalese politics record this. They do not however give a blow-by-blow account of the new serious, new comical drama that has been continuing on the political stage of Nepal these past three decades.

The present study turns the focus on Koirala, so far the country's most illustrious as well as most controversial Nepali, while keeping a tab on the not unoften confusing developments which took place after King Birendra's announcement of a referendum. The book's canvas is narrow and its first part scans the Nepalese political scene after the declaration of the referendum. The second part contains a series of taped interviews (autobiographical in a manner) I have had with Koirala between October 1979 and November 1981.¹ A certain overlapping between my

¹The tapes of the interviews and the transcript thereof, every page of which is corrected and signed by BP Koirala, are in the custody of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute. Also, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, has a gift microfilm copy of the transcript. There will therefore be no further mention of this in the text. For the sake of clarity and brevity the interviews have been sparingly touched up where necessary without of course interferring with their basic structure and key words. The alterations have been seen and approved by Koirala.

other books on Nepal and this volume is not unlikely. This unavoidable flaw, though technical, may be overlooked.

A few words by way of personal explanation. This account of post-referendum Nepal is not one-dimensional. Any number of exercises could be undertaken to implant it in a so-called academically objective framework. This might be good enough to fetch a certificate of impartial scholarship, but it would not reveal even a fraction of the real story. For an understanding of which one would not regret if one were to lean on Koirala's perception of the kingdom's political scene. Whether or not this approach is sufficiently "scientific" I am not particularly concerned, even as I concede that Koirala is not infallible.

Indeed, Koirala sees men and events through his own prism. But between him and the men who fasten the supposedly objective sticker to their sermons there is this difference: while Koirala grasps the truth that underlies facts, others meander in the thicket of jargon, palming off a particular facet for the whole.

It bears repetition that Koirala, apart from the Palace, is the central figure in the evolution of Nepalese politics in the last three decades. If one is not pathologically antipathetic to Koirala one would see that whatever happened on the kingdom's political stage in this period was either caused by him or was the reaction of others to his doings.

For instance, the partyless panchayat system. This was the late King Mahendra's reaction to Koirala's sustained efforts to hammer into shape a parliamentary democratic polity in Nepal and transform its absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. For that matter, the 1980 national referendum and the subsequent general election in 1981 was but King Birendra's response to the ceaseless struggle Koirala has waged since 1960, when King Mahendra had Nepal's nascent democratic polity sent to the block, within and outside the country to restore democracy.

Come to think of it, the stalwarts of the partyless panchayat system have all along done no more than make a show of responding to the challenge Koirala poses. Their lot is only to react to the course of politics the Nepali Congress might have decided to pursue at any given point

Pre/ace

of time. The partyless panchayat faithfuls who have taken turns at the political game these past two decades have done so as satellites of the Palace, which alone called the tune.

Such men do not make history. So why should one bother about what they say or do? To get an idea of Nepalese politics since Koirala made a revolution in 1950-51 attention will have to be riveted on Koirala and the Palace.

This is why Koirala's point of view has an unrivalled significance in the present Nepalese context. Though fatally ill with cancer, he continues to inspire his men, symbolises a challenge to those who strut in the corridors of power, and continues to bear his cross for a Nepal that should be a little more livable.

The book completes the study on contemporary Nepalese politics I took upon myself as a member of the Sociological Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. I am grateful to Dr BP Adhikari, Director of the Institute, for his liberal support without which this book would not have been reckoned part of my official work. I am indebted to Mr Sankar Ghosh, Joint Editor, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and Mr MJ Akbar, Editor, *Sunday*, for their kind permission to make liberal use of the articles and essays I wrote for their respective journals. I must thank Dr Lok Řaj Baral, Professor and Chairman, Department of Political Science, Tribhuvan University, who gave me an opportunity to discuss with him the basic problems of Nepalese politics.

For the help received, my thanks to Mr Indra Sen, Assistant Editor, Business Standard, to Dr Hari Dev Sharma, Research Officer, Oral History Division, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, to Mr Bidyut Raj Chalisey, former Nepalese Consul in Calcutta, to the staff of the Indian Statistical Institute Library, and to Mr Asish K Basu, Mr Ramendra Nath Biswas and Mr Narayan Chandra Saha of the Sociological Research Unit for typing the manuscript.

And I shall be remiss in my duty if fail to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to Mr Trevor Drieberg, author and journalist, for editing the book. I am not being merely Preface

polite or conforming to a ritual when I thank Mrs Seema Mukherjee, a friend of the family, whose couldn't care-lessattitude alone could get this book out.

That my wife Anubha Chatterji is my most abiding source of sympathy and support is a fact of life. As for the opinions and the errors the book carries I remain sole ly responsible.

Sociological Research Unit Indian Statistical Institute 203 BT Road, Calcutta-700035. 1 May 1982. Bhola Chatterji

CHAPTER I

An Overview of Post-referendum Politics

There is something in the human psyche that just would not allow most men to be indifferent to whoever bears his cross. Even if it is for the wrong set of reasons. How infinitely more emotive should be the case of a man who has suffered persecution almost interminably because he would not compromise his principles, because he insisted on exercising the basic rights of man and stood on his privilege to say no when that is at once the only civilised and the most challenging word one could utter. Particularly when no society at any given point could claim to have a surfeit of men like him.

If you chance upon such a person, it is immaterial to which clime or country he might belong, you would probably find it difficult to think of him without a lump in your throat. And Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, the tallest among the century's most celebrated Nepalese, answers to this.

The Hyades must have been there in the firmament when Koirala was born some 68 years ago. Otherwise, why should he opt for endless suffering, particularly at a time when he could have easily bargained for a comfortable place in the sun. For that matter, why should he insist on the hazardous path of armed revolution when many wanted him to take the constitutional road to Nepal's emancipation. This of course does not mean that he was an adventurer for the mere love of it. Not at all. He was prepared to sail in the wind's eye only if it served his country, otherwise he would not so much as disturb the meanest life on earth.

He did not enter the school of socialism because he had nothing better to do. It was a deliberate choice when, way back in the 1930s, he decided to cast in his lot with the Congress Socialist Party in India. He came into close contact with Jayaprakash Narayan, Narendra Deva and Rammanohar Lohia, the three most important builders of the Indian socialist movement. Once his mind was made up, socialism became his passion. And what had been a passion in his salad days subsequently crystallised into a positive philosophy of life.

Firmly convinced that ideas, more than the urge for mere satisfaction of physical hunger, motivate a man to action, he prevailed upon the Nepali Congress, which had pioneered the 1950-51 armed revolt for the establishment of democracy in Nepal, to accept a programme that should aim at building a democratic socialist society in the country. All these years since a myopic King's lust for power goaded him into snuffing out the Himalayan kingdom's youthful experiment with democracy, of which Koirala was the initiator, the people have had perforce to endure an oppressive system of polity. What helped them to keep up their spirits was their conviction that he would lead them out of the blind alley. Koirala kept faith with them.

That he did not regard compromise as a virtue was evident when he made hs way to the office of prime minister, the first ever elected prime minister, of Nepal, in 1959. Because of his refusal to plump for the easiest way out of the confrontation with the Palace regarding basic principles, he fell foul of the late King Mahendra in December 1960, only to add another eight years to his already voluminous record of incarceration. Exile awaited his reelase from prison, to be followed by confinement over again. He could no doubt have his freedom as well as an exalted berth in the power structure if he had agreed to surrender his right to dissent. That of course of course he did not do.

Nepalese society, which is largely feudal but itches for the tinsels of modernism, has no dearth of men who wish Koirala were past praying for. Starting from men in high places through certain members of the royal family to the mindless panchayat faithfuls always having an eye to the main chance, there is a class of men who would any day be glad to see the last of Koirala. For these people have too many skeletons in their cupboards.

His Majesty King Birendra of Nepal however does not belong to that category. He is aware that Koirala is a safety valve, in fact the only barrier between him and extremists of every hue, within as well as outside the Nepali Congress, not excluding the anti-king elements in the partyless panchayat ranks. Take Koirala away from the scene and these forces would just as soon precipitate a crisis that surely would not leave the institution of monarchy unscathed.

In the given context of the internal and external challenges which threaten Nepal, Koirala firmly believes that the King has a significant part to play in bringing about orderly socioeconomic change. Of course, the King could play that role effectively only in conjunction with the people and within a liberal democratic framework.

Not that Koirala is under any delusion that the King will act from purely altruistic motives. His argument, as he elaborated in taped conversation with me, is: "After all, a dynastic King without a kingdom is meaningless. So he [King Birendra] will be interested in the stability of the country. That is the rock-bottom of his self-interest on which I have been harping. I told him once, 'You may not be a very generous man or a loving King. You may not have love for the people at heart. But you certainly love yourself, your throne, your dynasty. Therefore, any strategy on my part which can serve that interest of yours will serve you too.'

"This should be the starting point of his analysis—how to stabilise the country. Can he rule despotically and strengthen his throne, strengthen his dynasty? Or should he take the people into confidence, bring them into the political process and give them power, that is, give up his political power to the representatives of the people and thereby ensure the stability of the throne.

"Once I told him that my nationalism is ideological, whereas his nationalism is basically selfish consideration. For wtihout nationalism he will have no throne, he is nobody. Even if the country loses its independence and becomes part of India or part of China, I told him, 'I will have my farm. My house in Biratnagar will be there, although Biratnagar might be in India or in China. And I may be voting for some Indian member of Parliament or some Chinese legislator, but I shall be there nevertheless. But what will happen to you if there is no country? So your interest in the stability of the throne means that you are more vitally interested in the stability of the country than I.' That is why I tell him that his interest will be served by joining hands with us. I think the King knows this."¹

What kind of man is Koirala? What is it that has sustained him all through his last four-decade-long career in Nepalese politics, that has kept him steady on the strait and narrow path of principle. What is his political philosophy, his attitude to life? More, what is the essential Koirala?

For an answer, we might pore over documents, search old newspaper files, talk to his colleagues who have been with him through thick and thin, compare notes with his adversaries, sift the materials thus gathered and, finally, give rein to our imagination to do the rest of the job.

An alternative approach could be that we allow Koirala himself to answer the question. This is precisely what I did during my long taped interviews and conversations with him in Banaras and Kathmandu between March 1980 and March 1982.

Whether or not this would stand the test of logic and objectivity, let pundits determine.

For a change however I would rather join Koirala for a walk down Memory Lane. The perceptive observer would casily see that the story which the taped interviews reveal is not a medley of unconnected events and anecdotes. Nor is it an essay in unrelieved subjectivity. Since Koirala is the historian here, he takes the liberty of giving his interpretation of the facts he deals with.

That is as it should be. At any rate, I do not see any reason why exception should be taken to this. I agree with E H Carr that "the belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy," much as that

¹ Author—B P Koirala taped interview, September 1981, Kathmandu.

is a fallacy "which it is very hard to eradicate."² Before Koirala picks up the thread where it has been left in *Palace* People and Politics: Nepal in Perspective,³ I think we should have a resume of the exiting developments, though somewhat quixotic at times, which took place in the period between King Birendra's announcement of a national referendum and the doctor's ominous verdict in November 1981 that Koirala was afflicted with lung cancer, apart from his 35-year-long cancer of the throat and malignant growth in the glands since 1977.

The grim plight of the Vietnamese refugees, the bathos of Nepalese politics and the demented pranks of Ayatollah Khomeini notwithstanding, the Yuletide spirit was very much in the air. In keeping with that King Birendra told his nearly 13 million subjects on 16 December 1979, that he had finally decided to divest himself of the legacy of absolute power his father left him. The royal declaration, among other things, said: "From now on, all elections to be held to the national legislature shall take place solely on the basis of adult franchise. Similarly, the convention to appoint our prime minister on the basis of the recommendations of the national legislature shall be followed in the future. Besides, the Council of Ministers will be made responsible to the national legislature for their line of conduct"⁴

This sounded like a cloudburst after years of drought. Without mincing matters, the King said that Rastriya Panchayat (the kingdom's supreme legislature) elections would be held on the basis of universal adult franchise, and the people's elected representatives would choose the prime minister. Taken at its face value, the King's announcement tolled the demise of the captive political system through which the Palace had exercised total power until then.

4 Quoted in Salient Features of the Third Amendment of the Constitution of Nepal 1980, His Majesty's Government Press, Kathmandu, 1980.

² E H Carr, What is History, Pelican Book, London, 1964, p 12.

³ Palace People and Politics: Nepal in Perspective is the third volume of my study on contemporary Nepalese politics. The book includes my extensive taped interview with B P Koirala stretching over the years between 1972 and 1979.

Few Nepalese could belittle the import of the King's message. In the last 19 years, no news had emanated from the Palace which conveyed a firm promise that the Nepalese could look forward to a relatively meaningful future within reckonable time. Except, of course, the 24 May royal declaration that year to hold a national referendum. This declaration evidently did not require the Palace to close any of its optoins. It could indeed manipulate the whole thing in such a manner as would produce the desired result—a yes vote in favour of the partyless *panchayat* system. Not so was the case with the 16 December royal announcement which categorically nullified the foundation of the present system.

So far, so good. But then how did King Birendra propose to explain the rationale of the 16 December announcement in the context of the earlier declaration of a referendum? The question naturally arose: Did the latest pledge cancel the earlier one. Or would they both remain valid It was felt that unless the position was unequivocally stated the chances were that the people might suspect a catch in it somewhere.

The referendum announcement was made at a time when the kingdom faced the most pernicious political crisis since the subversion of the democratic system in December 1960. There is no point in recapitulating the details of the crisis which compelled the King to order a national referendum, giving the people an opportunity to decide peacefully whether or not the partyless *panchayat* system would be replaced by a democratic form of government.⁵

King Birendra's decision to allow the people to determine freely future shape of the country's polity was welcomed by most sensible Nepalese. Particularly Koirala. Ever an uncompromising crusader for democracy, he did not question the King's bonafides when Birendra issued the referendum proclamation. He refused to give credence to the insinuation of certain influential persons that the King's move

⁵ For a detailed account of which see the author's Palace People and Politics: Nepal in Perspective, Ankur Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980.

was a ruse to stave off the gathering political crisis and thus gain the time he needed badly to retrieve his position.

Koirala went on record with the observation that the referendum declaraion implied that King Birendra had lost his faith in the partyless *panchayat* system, that he had made up his mind to be on the right side of the democratic forcees. As Koirala told the writer in a taped interview on 4 July 1979 at Banaras, "The King did not have any alternative to what he did on 24 May, when he announced a referendum." And by that act "the King has recognised the primacy of the people in the decision making process" Speaking in the same vein, Koirala said he believed 'the King has acted in a spirit of accommodation, accepted our line and that he has walked over to our side."⁶

It would not do to suggest that Koirala did not realise the implications of his line of rapproachement between the Palace and the democratic forces, a line which some insensibility, and others designedly, labelled a tired warrior's essay in moderation. This is farthest from the truth.

The fact is, Koilara put his cards on the table expecting the Palace to play fair. The argument was that if democracy were to be restored without subjecting the country to a bloodbath there was no alternative to pursuing his line of "national reconciliation," that is, a responsive dialogue between King and people, to its logical conclusion. Since the King had positively responded to his gesture he would go the whole hog to ensure that none got a chance to queer the pitch.

Also, Koirala declines to entertain the suggestion made by certain quarters that the kingdom should not be forced to wade through the expensive process of a referendum. Instead the King should straightway concede the principle of a multiparty system of government and order elections to be held accordingly.

His point was that in the larger interests of the nation the process should not be short-circuited. An unequivocal verdict must be obtained from the people, so that neither Palace nor the handful of panchayat faithfuls would have occasion to complain that an organised vocal minority had contrived to clinch the issue.

The logic of this prompted Koirala to take strong exception to the King's assent to a much controversial bill in November 1979. The bill, which became an act after it obtained royal assent, enjoined that *panchayat* elections should be held on the basis of universal adult franchise. In a no-nonsense statement, Koirala said that 'it is unethical for the Government to change the present structure of the *panchayat* elections'' Explaining the reason for his opposition to it he observed that, in view of the proposed referendum to determine the very basis of the country's political system, the powers that be must refrain from doing anything to "bring about structural change in electoral procedure'.⁷

The argument was: If King Birendra's 16 December proclamation, granting universal adult franchise, and ministerial accountability to the elected legislature and not to the Palace, was not a stratagem to wriggle out of the promise to hold a national referendum, its implementation would have to be preceded by total dismantling of the prevailign political system.

The King was surely not unaware that the present constitution had firmly established the Palace as the undisputed source of all affective powers, making the partyless panchayat system a mere creature of it. Indeed it was the Palace which guaranteed the legitimacy of the panchayat system and not the freely expressed will of the people. If that was to be replaced by a democratic system—a legislature elected on the basis of unfettered adult franchise precisely means this—the present constitution must be scrapped and a new one, ensuring the people their basic democratic rights, enforced, democrats emphasised.

This called for a complete reversal of the course Nepal had been following for 19 years. If that was the message the King's 16 December announcement was intended to convey, none would have had a bone to pick with him. It was emphasised that King Birendra must clearly spell out that his latest decision was not a manoeuvre to ditch the democrats, whose political sanity had enabled him to save the throne in May 1979. The past, which indeed did not inspire confidence, would continue to cast its shadow on the future until he proved that he was as good as his word. Where would King Birendra go from there, Koirala asked.

The King did not back out. He stuck to his decision enjoining the people to troop to the polls, on 2 May 1980, to decide whether the authoritarian partyless panchayat or a multiparty system of polity should rule the country. For the first time in the history of the country, 7.2 million voters were required to participate on the basis of universal adult franchise in a national referendum.

The significance of this could hardly be overstated. If 1950 was a watershed in the life of the people, 1980 seemed destined to be a turning-point in the kingdom's contemporary history.

The battle lines had been drawn, contending passions aroused and the aspirants for the electorate's sanction grimly awaited their opportunity to make or mar things. And that in the name of King, country and welfare of the nation. A bloody revolution catapulted Nepal into the 20th century in 1950, and was set to make up for two decades lost through yet another revolution in 1980. Of course by consent, although this sounds paradoxical. There is no reason however why it should if one takes a close look at the men who were in the limelight, all the circumstances and the dumb multitude that dragged on an existence holding out little hope and no promise.

By common consent, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, tenth in the line of the Shah dynasty founded by Prithvi Narayan Shah, and 65-year-old former Prime Minister Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, were the two men who mattered most in the life of this ruggedly beautiful land of the Himalayas. On a collison course until recently, the two were then in an accommodating mood that not a few looked askance at. The easy relations between King Birendra and Koirala were at once the most puzzling and reassuring factor in the Nepalese equation, depending on which side of the fence one was.

At the time Koirala made the 1950-51 revolution, King Birendra was an infant. His grandfather, the late King Tribhuvan, was virtually a prisoner in the hands of Mohan Shumsher, the last of the hereditary Rana Prime Ministers who despotically ruled Nepal for a century. King Tribhuvan aligned himself with the Koirala-led democratic forces to free the country from the stranglehold Rana feudalism had put on it as well as to liberate the institution of monarchy. Between then and King Birendra's accession to the throne in January 1972, following the death of his father Mahendra who had sent Nepalese democracy to the block, the political situation had vastly changed. The Palace, which had assumed absolute power, got locked in a fierce struggle with Koirala, who was determined to restore democracy in Nepal.

For better or worse, developments since then had facilitated the initiation of a meaningful dialogue between King Birendra and Koirala. This encouraged them to identify the areas of agreement regarding the basic problem of Nepalese politics—restitution of democratic government. Much to the chagrin of the partyless *panchayat* faithfuls and even some of his own friends, Koirala's repeated emphasis has in recent times been on two points: (a) King Birendra's bonafides are not suspect; and (b) the need for effective cooperation between Palace and people to get the country back on the rails.

As Koirala said at a referendum rally in Bhairahwa, the kingdom would not be able to come to grips with the crisis that confronted it unless democratic rule was restablished. But then neither democracy nor monarchy would in the given context survive without mutual cooperation. So long as things remained as they were, he emphasised, "monarchy's role in nation-building is paramount." He also cautioned whoever cared to listen that since "monarchy is an institution acceptable to all... it should not be involved in any controversy."⁸

This was no music to the *panchayat* exponent's ear. The advocates of this system, a contradiction in terms, had been

continually harping on the note that it enjoyed the King's unreserved support, and that because it was the only effective answer to the kingdom's problem of politics. Through public speeches, press statements and cleverly manipulated reports in *The Rising Nepal*, the country's only governmentowned, English-language daily, broad hints were given to the gullible that, whatever might have been the developments after the King's referendum announcement on 24 May 1979, the Palace counted on them to pull it off.

With crude cunning, the *panchayat* camp exploited every available forum to sell the line that Palace and panchayat system were but two sides of the same coin. In fact, the security and safety of the Crown and the country were inseparably linked with the continuance of the *panchayat* system. As former nominated Prime Minister Tulsi Giri, one of the sharpest operators in the *panchayat* camp, put it, "threat to it [Nepal's natoinal interest], if any, would come, not from outside, but from fifth columnists such as the banned Nepali Congress"⁹

At their face value, the raucous cries of the panchayat promoters suggested that a favourable referendum verdict was a foregone conclusion. If tapped, any of the senior panchayat leaders, for instance, Matrika Prasad Koirala (elder half-brother of B P Koirala), Kirtinidhi Bista, Tulsi Giri, Nagendra Prasad Rijal (all former nominated prime ministers) and Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, would reel off a fantastic volume of statistical data to establish that the partyless panchayat system inhered in it all the virtues and none of the vices of every conceivable brand of democratic polity.

Their argument was that King Mahendra had introduced the panchayat system "because nationalism and democracy were difficult to maintain under a multiparty system." Tulsi Giri would go a step further, convinced as he was that nothing could be called unfair in war and love, and assert that "the panchayat system was peculiar to the Nepalese people and was not less democratic than the democratic system obtaining in any of the rich countries"¹⁰

9 The Rising Nepal (Kathmandu), 11 April 1980. 10 Ibid, 10 April 1980. With crude sophistry, Giri even sought to get the point across that none, not even the King, could rival his commitment to the *panchayat* "philosophy." Speaking at the *panchayat* convension held on 28 June through 30 June 1979, Giri observed that "if the reforms sought in the *panchayat* system were to determine its basic principles [active royal leadership, partylessness and indirect elections to the national legislature] it would be better for us to request His Majesty to give us the party system.' Comments are unnecessary. It is just that locating Giri's peer even among amoral *panchayat* promoters, who habitually made a virtue of political opportunism, would be a tough assignment.

Talking of Giri, one cannot help mentioning that few Nepalese politicians can match his capacity for rationalising even the most blatant act of indiscretion and infidelity. More than once he has been the country's nominated prime minister only to be given the sack for mucking up matters, internal as well as external. Until recently he was under a cloud for his alleged involvement in what had come to be known as the "carpet scandal"—a multi-million-rupee export racket that made a great stir in the country.

The former Prime Minister had maintained a low profile after the May 24 referendum declaration the previous year. Giri told some politicians that, as soon as he would be able to get himself absorved of blame for his "alleged" involvement in the carpet scandal, he would expose all the graft, corruption and misuse of public money men in high places indulged in.¹²

He would also spare no pains to unhinge the panchayat system, a "fraud" on the people, Giri babbled. Most panchayat leaders held that Giri, who cut up rough at little or no provocaiton and who reportedly enjoyed the support of the then disbanded Rastrawadi Vidyarthi Mandal, an outfit of fanatically panchayat-supporting musclemen, was in-

- 11 Lok Raj Baral, "Nepal 1979: Political System: in Crisis", Asian Survey, Vol XX No 2, February 1980, University of California Press, p 202.
- 12 A prominent opposition leader, whose name is not to be mentioned for obvious reasons, told the author this sometime before the referendum took place.

deed a thorn in their flesh. But they could do precious little about it, for Giri had too powerful patrons to be touched.

The panchayat camp was a house divided against itself. Unlike Alexandre Dumas's *Three Musketcers*, every one of the senior *panchayat* leaders stood for himself, for the Palace's patronage for personal power and all that went with it. Matrika Prasad, otherwise a suave person, was a *panchayat* campaigner not because he had convinced himself that the system was based on sound principles and guaranteed a cure for the country's ailments.

After all, he was president of the Nepali Congress at the time of the 1950-51 revolution, and he could not possibly have unlearnt all the lessons of history he had then learnt the hard way. But lack of will to undergo suffering and make sacrifice, the desire for power and the good life plus family conflict landed him in the company of men not one of whom would hesitate to consign him to limbo when it came to the crunch.

Matrika Prasad was not unaware of this. He was also alive to the fact that he could never occupy the prime minister's chair unless the Palace desired it and that his *panchayat* colleagues would oppose him tooth and nail, severally and collectively. And he was aware that Prime Minister Thapa would feel no qualms about deserting the *panchayat* camp should the referendum go in favour of the multiparty system.

In terms of resources however the panchayat camp was very firm on its legs. Knowledgeable sources confirmed that its propagandists had till then collected about Rs 15 million Nepalese (100 Indian rupees = 145 Nepalese rupees). Others apart, the panchayat camp was aided and abetted by all manner of vested interests, not excluding a sizable number of former Ranas, landed intersets, businessmen and those who had during the 19-year panchayat rule benefited by their active association with the system. It would not do to suggest that the system had no committed supporters. It had, and the bulk of them were from the officially constituted network of basic panchayat units in the rural and urban areas.

The panchayat camp also had allies in the royal family,

King Birendra excluded. Some very influential members of the sprawling royal family, who controlled between them the most sensitive and complex segments of the administrative apparatus, had a high political and economic stake in the authoritarian system. Small wonder that nothing would stop them from throwing a spanner into the works. And the ramified organisational structure the panchayat system had spawned over the years, particularly in the remote hill areas where the 20th century still has a tenuous toehold, were of substantial help to the anti-democratic forces. Intrigue and conspiratorial politics, exploitation and physical violence had generated a climate of fear and fatalism. Continuous drumming on the point that the institution of monarchy and the panchayat system were indissolubly interlinked did not draw a blank. Could it be denied that until the other day King Birendra was the most eloquent champion of the panchayat system?

There was anoher side to the picture. The *panchayat* camp no longer enjoyed the King's active patronage. Not that the King had suddenly grown tired of exercising absolute power. Rather, a combination of factors compelled him not to ignore the writing on the wall. He knew quite well that a section of the *panchayat* hardliners and externally inspired forces of destablisation had a hand in the arson and violence that rocked Kathmandu in May 1979.

Neither was he in the dark about the aspirations of some of his close relations, not excluding their extensive financial interests. Also, if Iran reminded him of the tragedy that might befall a tripping monarch, Koirala's words and deeds assured him that democrats formed a dyke between anarchy and the institution of monarchy. He was convinced that Koirala was not talking for effect when he said that Palace and people must pull together for an effective response to both internal and external challenges.

Of the numerous other factors which were likely to queer the *panchayat* camp's pitch, the blighted economy was certainly a major one. The performance of the economy in the last two decades had been generally indifferent and, at times, downright counterproductive. In spite of the steady inflow of a fairly large quantum of foreign aid and assistance, reasonable mobilisation of local resources, elaborate planning and what have you, the economy had refused to look up.

If official economic exeprts who were wont to making understatements, for instance, former Finance Secretary Y.P. Pant, called the economy "unsatisfactory" others would say that it was in downright bad shape. As Lok Raj Baral put it, "decline in agricultural productivity, the trade deficit with India, adverse weather conditions, a price hike in essential commodities, the impact of the rising price of petroleum products, and the changed political climate have affected the economy. In the 1979-80 budget, foreign loans have gone up to 63 per cent of the total budgetary expenditure of Rs 2969.6 million." The fact that Nepal, which had all along been exporting food, "seemed likely" to be converted "into a food importing country"¹³ speaks volumes for the difficult state of the economy.

The panchayat government's management of the economy was a sad account of utter inefficiency, wasted opportunities and wrong priorities, of acts of malfeasance and misfeasance. The economic policy formulators did not seem to have an understanding of the cruel problem of poverty that smote the people. The acting president of the banned Nepali Congress (political parties were banned under panchayat rule), Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, was not far from wrong when he said that the 19-year panchayat rule had only increased the already massive volume of poverty and unemployment. As he said at a Pokhara Bar Association meet recently, "the rich had become richer and the poor poorer under the panchayat system."¹⁴

To illustrate the point, five families, not of Nepalese origin, have literally climbed from rags to riches under *panchayat* rule. They are still making their pile, thanks to the highly profitable two-way graft traffic between them and some of the *panchayat* leaders. The economic stagnation was much too severe to escape even the most superficial observer's notice. Soaring prices, a shrinking employment market and a zero growth rate did not help narrow the *panchayat*

13 Baral, op cit, p 204.

14 The Rising Nepal (Kathmandu), 10 April 1980.

camp's widening credibility gap.

If cowardice is infectious, courage is perhaps more so. One could see that if one would only step into the Nepali Congress office, at Ranipokhari in Kathmandu, as the count down for the referendum began. With each day that passed an increasing number of people from almost every walk of life came there to identify themselves with the democratic forces. Streams of young men and women, their eyes sparkling with hope, arrived every day for the guidelines and material assistance the leaders might give them. Their requests were modest: campaign literature, posters and strips of blue cloth (blue was the election colour allotted to the multi-party camp).

More often than not disappointment awaited them, for the party coffers were always empty. A few words of encouragement, instructions to make do with locally collected resources were all that Krishna Prasad could give the young idealists before ordering them to remote areas. To reach some of which might require a few days' trekking.

The Nepali Congress, its long years in the widerness notwithstanding, had a large cadre of committed workers. Its organisational base however was not as strong as might be desired. To make up for this, there was the charismatic Koirala who projected a picture of quiet confidence. He had no doubt about the outcome of the referendum, and he believed that King Birendra would not break his word.

What dispelled the lingering shreds of suspicion, Koirala thought, was the King's decision to amnesty political prisoners and exiles. In a message to the nation on the Nepalese New Year (13 April 1980), the King announced the grant of amnesty which Koirala had been pleading for all along. Koirala welcomed the amnesty proclamation as the King's "best gift"¹⁵ to the people. Apparently the grant of **a** general pardon put the *panchayat* camp at a disadvantage and did the democrats a good turn.

Here we might touch on other groups and individuals that had made common cause with the democratic forces, for instance, Dilli Raman Regmi along with former Prime Ministers Tanka Prasad Acharya and K.I. Singh. That apart, there were the Communist groups, both pro-Beijing and pro-Moscow. Numerically and otherwise, the pro-Moscow Communists, led by Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, counted for little. But not so the group that functioned under Monmohan Adhikari's leadership.

Founder of the Communist movement in Nepal, Adhikari was said to be the leader of one of the pro-Beijing groups. The fact of the matter is that the Beijing-oriented Adhikari was the only Nepalese Communist leader with a certain following. Admitting his friendly attitude towards China, Adhikari told me, at a get together at the Kathmandu residence of Gopal Prasad Bhattarai, a Nepali Congress leader and former editor of the government controlled language daily Gorkhapatra, in March 1980, in no uncertain terms that he was first and last a Nepalese patriot and that the point at issue then was not communism but the restoration of democracy. The only course open to him in the given circumstances was to work for the success of the multi-party camp, of which Adhikari readily conceded Koirala was the unrivalled leader. That is why he chose to cooperate with the Nepali Congress. Along with other leading multi-party supporters of diverse political persuasions, Adhikari proposed that a "multi-party restoration" committee 'be formed under the chairmanship of B.P. Koirala.'16

It would be wrong to suggest that the Nepali Congress was all set to romp to victory in the referendum. The party was hamstrung by forces and factors that just could not be wished away. Relentless persecution and suffering over more than two decades had not left it unscathed.

Dogged almost all along by the interminable process of fission, fusion and fission, it surely was not as purposefully united then as it was when it won easily the country's first general election in 1959. Lack of resources, intra-party conflict and, above all, the large gaps in the leadership chain had their adverse effect. Could it be denied that the distance, indeed in terms of leadership qualities, between Koirala and the rest was very great?

16 Baral, op cit, p 201.

Another complicating factor was the presence of the big powers. They were, and indeed are not, disinterested onlookers. Each had, and still has, its own set of reasons to take more than merely an academic interest in the goings on in Nepal. It is just that some did, and continue to do so brazenly, while others preferred to act slily. This is something the democrats could hardly afford to ignore.

It was generally believed that things would never be the same again in Nepal, irrespective of the referendum verdict. Even if the *panchayat* group got through, the kingdom would not revert to the authoritarian system it suffered from these last two decades. For that matter, a carbon copy of the Westminster variety of parliamentary framework would not immediately become operative should the people decide in favour of the multi-party system.

But one thing was clear: post-referendum Nepal, whatever nomenclature its political system might adopt, would have no more than two alternatives to choose from. Either its political system must depend for survival on the people, ensuring their participation in the decision-making process, or it must brace itself to meet the challenge of the forces of disruption and disintegration. King Birendra know this. So did Koirala. This in a way explained why the two were talking on nearly identical wavelengths.

Outwardly, all was calm and relaxed in Kathmandu and elsewhere in Nepal. The Bagmati flowed as quickly as ever, and Narayanhiti Royal Palace looked as serene as it did before the referendum took place. Life in the metropolis apparently moved as placidly as one might expect. But the apparent was not real. The rumblings of discontent were there for those who cared to put their ears close to the ground and listen.

In Kathmandu's almost perennially sun-denied alleys, on the campus of Tribhuvan University and its affiliated institutions, in numerous towns, villages and hamlets those who had voted for the multi-party system continued to gather in knots, compare notes, sift evidence and express their discontent.

Discontent was over the results of the referendum, which went in favour of the partyless panchayat system. For they had reasons to believe that the outcome of the referendum would have gone in favour of the democrats but for the motivated men who controlled the kingdom's admiinstrative-economic apparatus. What compounded their anger was the feeling that King Birendra failed for some reason or other to get the men concerned to act upon his injunction. The King's command was that it is their bounden duty to show total fairness, integrity, impartiality and be responsible towards the Nepalese people in conducting the polling for the referendum.¹⁷

There was a widespread feeling that the referendum had been manipulated. Usually informed sources were of the opinion that men in high places had decided well before the people went to the polling booths that the *panchayat* system must receive a yes verdict from the electorate. Since fair means could not possibly achieve the desired objective, foul had to be employed. What a perceptive Kathmandubased South Asian diplomat said in this connexion neatly sums up the situation. With a bit of dry humour, he told a visitor a couple of days after the polling that 'the multiparty group has won the referendum, but the *panchayat* camp just could not afford to lose it.'¹⁸

But if the results were manipulated, what was the modus operandi? Concrete evidence was hard to come by, but as people slowly began to talk circumstantial evidence piled up. The fact is that two-decade-old parchayat rule had spawned a fraternity of vested interests whose security depended on the power structure the system had built up.

The powerfully entrenched interest groups, which included members of the royal family other than King Birendra, the higher echelons of the army officers' corps and the bureaucracy, traders and businessmen, both Nepalese and non-Nepalese, and a multitude of elected *panchayat* members, from the village to the national level, on the govern-

¹⁷ Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 1 May 1980.

¹⁸ During the author's visit to Kathmandu some months after the referendum he was told by a fair number of responsible men, opposition leaders apart, including teachers, lawyers, government officials, businessmen, and even Rastriya Panchayat members, that rigging did play a part in it.

ment payroll saw red when the referendum proclamation was issued. They opposed the referendum from the very beginning, feeling that the very idea was a challenge to the political and economic equations which had come to 1^{\prime} reckoned as immutable. If the verdict went against the *panchayat* system, so ran the argument, it would spell disaster, not to speak of jeopardisnig their political and economic interests.

They could not foil the referendum decision because the King was determined to see it through. But they did everything to make certain that the people lost on the swings what they made on the roundabouts. The astonishing thing about it is that the operation was neither conducted very secretively nor with much consideration for the King's feelings. Even a random survey of the methods employed to ensure the success of the *panchoyat* camp would reveal that nothing was left to chance. For example, the ballot papers were not serially numbered, and this is only one instance of bad faith out of many.

There was an inordinate delay between the voting and the announcement of the results—a full 11 days! In this period the districts' telecommunication links with Kathmandu were made inoperative for the declared purpose of avoiding tampering with 'the results. More, the ballot boxes were placed under the custody of the armed forces when the postal ballot results clearly showed that the forces were solidly in favour of the *panchayat* system. There was a strong belief that tampering was resorted to after the ballot boxes had been handed over to them.

The question naturally arises: How does one account for the reported statement of Bisheshwar Prasad Koirala—the man who did most to make the Palace hear reason and give the people a chance to act up to their political opinions freely—that he 'cannot say that it [the referendum] has been rigged?¹⁹

On the face of it, a more dependable good conduct certificate the *panchayat* loyalist could not possibly bargain for, considering that it came from the kingdom's most uncompromising crusader for democracy. Flashing this as an irrefutable proof of his innocence, the *panchayat* campaigner went about summarily dismissing the charge of rigging as a calumny, an exercise in character assassination.

The why of this is not too difficult to comprehend unless one is determined to turn a blind eye on the realities of the Nepalese political scene. Several considerations seem to have influenced Koirala in deciding not to add fuel to the flames. His deliberate policy not to reinforce the accusation that the result of the referendum was custom-made was, in the first place, prompted by his awareness that it would be almost impossible to produce evidence in support of this.

Secondly, any move to call the referendum verdict into question would have tantamounted to reflections on King Birendra's integrity, no less. Thirdly, Koirala could well appreciate that his rejection of the verdict would have implicitly conveyed a message that was farthest from his mind—a call to the people to take to the streets.

If the idea of putting the regime in the dock was unthinkable, the thought of insinuating that the King had let the people down was still more so. Much as he knew that powerful anti-democratic forces were working overtime to bend Birendra to their will, Koirala did not doubt his bona fides. The argument was that the monarchy should not be dragged, particularly at this critical juncture, into political controversies so that it could continue to provide a national focus. Koirala wanted the dialogue between the King and the democrats to become more productive, leading to a sorting out of the problems that stood in the way of restoring democracy to the kingdom.

Nothing should therefore be said or done that might implicate the King in the manipulation of the referendum and tarnish his image. To push the King into a deadend would wreck the chances of his undoing the wrongs his minions had committed. Since Koirala did not think in terms of an all-or-nothing solution to the problem, he set his face against what might touch off a mass upheaval.

To repeat, Koirala did not develop cold feet, as some appear to suggest. He just wanted the nation to be spared the agonising experience of going through an internecine conflict. This could be gathered from what a highly knowledgeable Nepalese scholar recently wrote to me: 'Nepal is passing through a very critical phase of history and if the popular forces lack calculation and imagination, what would be the future of this country. I understand that B.P. [Kairala] has well realised it while accepting the verdict of the referendum.'²⁰

All this notwithstanding, Koirala did not want to be misunderstood, at any rate not by the great mass of people who had at their own risk voted for the multi-party system. This presumably prompted him to say that the referendum outcome was 'unexpected and inexplicable.' In the same breath, he added: 'I accept the verdict of the people in accordance with the democratic norms.' But, he emphasised, 'people's fundamental rights are inalienable and they cannot be taken away on any excuse. My endeavour will be to continue to try expanding our democratic rights and establish a full-fledged democracy through peaceful and constitutional means.'²¹

The most consistent point in all that he said was to build a bridge of understanding between the King and the democratic forces and create conditions which would smooth away apparently formidable obstacles to the transformation of the absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. At no point did Koirala allow his immediate objective to obfuscate his distant goal.

Perhaps the King had a hunch that he was being outmanoeuvred by his relations and flunkeys. This might be one of the reasons why he chose to concede, on 16 December 1979, some of the basic democratic rights to the people months before they were to decide through the referendum the kingdom's future polity. Of course, the King observed, while granting those basic rights, that this did not 'suggest that we are trying to evade the responsibility we owe our people. In the interest of Nepal and the Nepalese people

20 See appendix A for the full text of the letter Lok Raj Baral, Professor and Chairman of the Political Science Department, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, wrote to the author. we shall as best we can, defend the ideals of democracy. We shall not shrink from the responsibilities we owe our people." And in this Koirala detected "a warning to panchayats that they cannot go back to authoritarian rule and expect him [the King] to provide active leadership."²²

The geenral feeling was that the people, aroused from their two-decade-long political hibernation, would not just sit back, waiting for a good Samaritan to come to their rescue. They were asking for basic political changes and the King did not seem impervious to that. Immediately after the referendum results were out, which gave the *panchayat group* a bare 9.5 percent lead over the multi-party supporters.

Of the total 7.1 million voters, about 4.8 million participated in the referendum. The *panchayat* camp and the democrats respectively obtained 54 percent and 46 percent of the total votes polled, he got the message across that "dissent and diversities of opinion were accepted as hallmarks of democracy and if the will of the majority is accepted as the ultimate decision to be carried out, the ideas of the minority are also treated with respect."²³ This was to an extent reassuring to the democrats who indeed had been wronged.

The royal proclamation of 21 May 1980 announcing that a constitutional reforms commission would be set up was a mix of hope and disappointment. The King assured the people that the constitution would be suitably amended to affect certain basic changes. Referring to his 16 December 1979 declartaion he said: "We had already proposed changes to be brought about in the *panchayat* polity. In addition, we propose to consider the advice we hope to receive from various segments of our society and bring about necessary amendments in our constitution in the near future."

If this was reassuring, his concluding remarks were certainly not meant to encourage the democrats to look forward to a bright future. Apparently sharing with the people his understanding of the referendum verdict, the King observed: "we consider the will of our people to be truly inviolable and, while honouring it, we accept the popular mandate to perpetuate the partyless *panchayat* system as our own verdict in the belief that the will of the people should constitute the main basis in deciding the polity for Nepal."²⁴ Even as the people greeted, though with reservations, the formation of an 11-member constitutional reforms commission, as the King promised, to suggest "necessary and useful reforms in the Nepalese constitution in the larger interests of the nation,"²⁵ they kept their fingers crossed. They were apprehensive lest there should be a row back on the ongoing process of liberalisation.

Subsequent developments seemed to challenge Koirala to prove that he was not out in his calculations, that the King's concept of change included something more tangible than mere cosmetics. The odious Freedom of Speech and Publication Ordinance the King promulgated on 29 May, 1980 came however as a rude shock to the people. While the ordinance granted freedom of speech and publication as well as freedom to assemble 'peacefully and without arms," it enjoined, among other things, that nothing be done "which can create hatred, ill feeling, misunderstanding and disrespect towards the King, the heir to the throne and other members of the royal family."

There was more to it than just that. The ordinance prohibited any activity by way of forming associations, organisations or unions that might be suggestive of party politics. It also forbade "all kinds of publicity work done in the name of any political party or organisation or in any other form; nor can speeches he made and reading material published in the name of such political groupings."²⁶

Opposition parties of every hue condemned the ordinance. The press did not pull its punches in criticising it. Even some leading *panchayat* politicians, critical of Prime Minister Thapa's unprincipled politics, reacted sharply to the ordinance. Suspecting that Thapa had a hand in it, they

²⁴ Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 15 May 1980.

²⁵ The Statesman (Calcutta), 28 May 1980.

²⁶ Hindustan Times (New Delhi), June 1980.

formed a five-member committee, with former Prime Minister (nominated) M.P. Koirala as chairman, to "conduct a study and highlight the reactions of workers of the partyless panchayat system towards the Freedom of Speech and Publication Ordinance promulgated by his Majesty the King on the recommendation of the government."²⁷

Koirala said that "any decisions concerning fundamental rights must be taken on the basis of the constitution. But here, it seems, an attempt is being made to have the nature of the constitution determined through laws and ordinances." The press, for instance the weekly *Matribhumi*. observed that the ordinance was 'shocking...and has disillusioned all those who believed that all obnoxious features of the panchayat system would end"²⁸ after the referendum. The Nepal Journalists Association stated that "it goes against the letter and spirit of all royal proclamations on the subject since 30 May 1979, and is opposed to the principles of natural justice, the rule of law and fundamental rights."²⁹

Certain other measures and manoeuvres the regime engineered seemed to confirm that it had learnt no lesson from history, and that vested interests would not disgorge so easily what they had over the years appropriated. The general drift of affairs was not towards the expected healing touch and reconciliation which could enthuse the people to respond to the severe political and economic challenges they faced.

That the state of the economy was "far from satisfactory" was admitted by none other than the Economic Commission King Birendra had appointed not long before. And the students who had spearheaded the 1979 movement against the panchayat regime were angry, the toiling masses restive and the opposition parties afraid that the constitutional reforms commission's labour would get nobody anywhere if the detestable ordinance was any pointer.

 Δ spate of demonstrations, strikes and agitations involving almost every section of the population jolted life in

- 27 Hindustan Times (New Delhi) 5 June 1980.
- 28 The Statesman (Calcutta), 14 June 1980.
- 29 The Times of India (New Delhi), 8 June 1980.

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various parts of Nepal. Government's answer, not unexpectedly, was along its wonted lines--resort to force. Where the stick failed to carry Prime Minister Thapa's tough message to the protesters, the regime employed the gun to do the job. Commenting on this situation, the weekly *Matribhumi* said that "the awakening and consciousness of the past one year can no longer be suppressed...there is nothing but disorder all around. As long as the aspirations of the people are not respected, improvement is not possible."³⁰

Economic distress was said to be the immediate cause of the popular outburst of anger. As *Nepal Post* put it, "perhaps the Nepali people have been subjected to the crudest and most barbarous form of economic exploitation for the first time in recorded history. No form of economy has been developed. However, there has been a steep rise in the horde of blackmarketers and smugglers who are seeking to liquidate the nation itself. It is not a system of economic development but that of economic exploitation and corruption which is being established in the country."

This was not all. Another weekly, *Rastra Pukar*, went to the extent of saying that the 'vested interests and their partner, the present government, are trying to push the country back to the situation before 24 May 1979."³¹ The allusion was to the critical state of affairs that obtained in the kingdom before King Birendra decided to grasp the nettle by promising to hold a national referendum to determine the country's future system of polity.

The weekly also observed that the people's agitation in the districts of Jhapa and Morang sounded a note of warning which the Thapa government could ignore at its peril. Former Prime Minister and *panchayat* leader Kirtinidhi Bista, besides others, accused the Thapa government of 'indifference to the sufferings of the people' and of its failure to combat the 'serious economic situation.'³²

The Thapa government's policy of persecution virtually throttled some 38 journals just because they had made it a

Sz The Times of India (New Delhi), 28 October 1980.

³⁰ The Statesman (Calcutta), 28 June 1980.

³¹ The Statesman (Calcutta), 21 October 1980.

point to criticise the government's acts of ammission and commission. This did not go unchallenged, Nepal Times, a daily, observed in an editorial that 'the administrative action taken together with the reported threat of removal of government staff not subscribing to the partyless panchayat and reports that the development is slower in districts which voted for the multi-party camp in the referendum would amount to seeds of serious domestic discord and political confrontation.'³³

The situation was indeed confusing. Even Prime Minister Thapa, whom few would credit with extraordinary sensibility, could not laugh it away. But he chose to hang his dismal account of malfeasance and misfeasance on the convenient peg of bureaucratic bungling. While speaking to the Planning Commission, of which he was chairman, he said that the bureaucratic apparatus was completely devoid of 'enthusiasm, coordination and perseverance.' Without which, Thapa sermonised 'there is no question of our succeeding in development.'³⁴ As if the Prime Minister had a surfeit of these things.

To dilate on the worsening economic situation without reference to the political issues involved would hide from view the harsh realities of life. The political factor in the disquieting train of events was considerably larger than some might imagine. To get to the heart of the matter, the focus must be turned on the political aspect of the developments that have taken place in recent times. Particularly since some 45 percent of the kingdom's electorate voted for the multi-party system in the May 2 national referendum. Even if one discounts the widely held belief that the referendum outcome was doctored, the partyless panchayat system just managed to scrape through.

Any intelligent observer of Nepalese politics would confirm that the choice was no longer between democracy and the *panchayat* system which depended on the Palace for its survival. Rather it was between democracy with constitutional monarchy and political turmoil. The people's

33 The Times of India (New Delhi). 8 October 1980.34 The Times of India (New Delhi), 18 October 1980.

choice was for the former as has been time and again emphasised by, among others, Koirala who towers above those that have made contemporary Nepalese history.

King Birendra had in a way encouraged the people to base their hopes upon a tomorrow without tears. He did not say that in so many words, but that is what his postreferendum proclamations and pronouncements meant. The exception was that the report of the Constitutional Reforms Commission, which he had set up after the May 2 referendum, would pave the way for the restoration of democracy that the late King Mahendra had snuffed out in December 1960.

But the outlook for the morrow did not seem very promising. Indications were that the commission's report, irrespective of when it might see the light of day, would not oblige those who had been counting on something more substantial than a token gift from the Palace. The hopes raised by King Birendra's messages to the nation in the period between the proclamation of a national referendum and the announcement of its result were unlikely to be fulfilled.

The train of events since the conclusion of the referendum apparently suggested that men, at any rate some of them, in high places were intent on wrecking what chances there were for a relatively peaceful passage to the establishment of a democratic polity. And one of the names that prominently figures in this sordid business is that of Prime Minister Thapa. He represents *panchayat* supporters incapable of seeing farther than the tips of their noses and who are determined to save their privileges and power today at the cost of the nation's tomorrow.

Thapa's manoeuvrings had not only made a mess of the business of government but also impaired the credibility of none other than the King. Small wonder that it was often asked why he was being tolerated if the Palace were serious about the reconstruction of the political system. Particularly when the Auditor-General's latest report flayed his government, saying that 'economic principles and rules are completely ignored in the expenditure of government money, be it at government office or at ministry level, and budgetary control is weak.³⁵ It is no great surprise that men from every walk of life, including three former prime ministers and a sizable number of *panchayat* adherents, clamoured for the dismissal of the Thapa government.

This once again takes us back to Narayanhiti Palace. King Birendra gave no indication that Thapa had ceased to enjoy his trust or that he did not approve of all that his Prime Minister said or did. This indeed made people apprehensive about the shape of things to come. On one hand, there was the King's commitment, independent of what the Constitutional Reforms Commission might suggest, to the principle that members of the kingdom's supreme legislature would in future be elected on the basis of universal adult franchise, that the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues would remain accountable to the elected legislative assembly and not to the Palace, as was the practice then.

On the other, there were the corrupt, autocratic Thapa government, the growing intolerance of the process of liberalisation, which had been initiated soon after the referendum proclamation, to wit, curtailment of the freedom of the press, sacking of government officials suspected of antipathy to the Thapa regime and 'administrative repression'. The scenario stood out in strong relief against the King's declared objectives.

Thapa unfailingly invoked the King no matter how distasteful might be the affair he indulged in. Even as he reduced the system of government almost to a mafia operation, he did it in the name of the King. With crude cunning, Thapa exploited every available opportunity to create an impression that the interests of the King and that of the *panchayat* system were identical, that anything done against the panchayat system would inevitably harm the crown. The multi-party supporters, the press and the people in general, including a good many senior *panchayat* leaders, were alarmed. In an editorial, *Motherland*, an English daily, commented: 'It is entirely the business of the *panchayat*

35 Quoted in The Statesman (Calcutta), 12 October 1980.

leaders to see that the interests of the system are safeguarded without trying to involve the Crown in the game meant for them'.³⁶

Samaj, another daily, took strong exception to 'the manner in which ... the Crown is being appropriated for one segment of the people and allegations are made against other segments is low-level politics'. Much as it went against his grain to rebut what Thapa usually said, Koirala chose not to remain silent obout the former's post-referendum schemings and persistent efforts to make a convenience of the Palace. While speaking at a conference in Biratnagar, Koirala said the Thapa 'government seeks to foment instability, crisis and disturbance'³⁷ in the country.

Meanwhile, the Constitutional Reforms Commission got down to its job with a certain alacrity. Pursuant to the King's injunction the commission invited leading politicians, both panchayat and multi-party, to give their suggestions regarding the proposed reforms. The point Koirala, apart from others, put forward for consideration was that "the new constitution should be silent on the issue of partylessness in Nepal and it would not be proper for the constitution to frame any regulations on the matter".³⁸

He told the commission his understanding was that, 'if the constitutional aspects of the royal message of December 16, 1979, are sincerely implemented in political life, partylessness would then appear to be an unnatural hurdle', Therefore, Koirala implored, the proposed reforms should not be encumbered with such provisions as might help the forces of disunity and disintegration. His suggestion was that the commission would do well not to "entertain any prejudices regarding partylessness ... it [the commission] should remain silent on partylessness''³⁹ At the same time, he made it simply clear that he would keep all his options open. He told his party colleagues that the reformed constitution would be rejected if it 'continues to offer "old wine

36 Motherland (Kathmandu), 5 November 1980.
37 The Times of India (New Delhi), 6 November 1980.
38 The Statesman (Calcutta), 23 June 1980.
39 The Statesman (Calcutta), 3 July 1980

in new bottles"⁴⁰ His suggestion was eminently rational, no doubt, only there was no taker.

With due ceremony, and not without astrological sanction, King Birendra told his subjects on 15 December 1980 that theirs had not been a vain wait. And they had been patiently biding their time for years for the day when their usurped right to determine who should rule them and how would be restored. Twenty years before, on 15 December 1960, the late King Mahendra abruptly terminated the country's experiment with democracy, and since then Nepalese history had been a story of continual struggle of the people to retrieve the basic right to be masters in their own house.

At an impressive public rally at the army pavilion on 15 December—the day is annually observed as the King Mahendra Memorial and Constitution Day—the King announced the gift of a package of constitutional reforms to the people. This he did to fulfil a year-old promise he had made to them in 1979. He said: 'Following the recommendations made by this commission [Constitutional Reforms Commission] on the basis of the suggestions put forward by our countrymen and in consultation with the Special Committee formed under clause 82 of the Constitution of Nepal, we by this proclamation hereby bring into force the 1980 Third Amendment of the Constitution of Nepal'.

The proclaimed reforms, the King was confident, would clear the decks for the resolution of the kingdom's nagging problem not only of politics but also of economics. 'It is our conviction', he emphasised, 'that our existence as a sovereign independent nation warrants a steady economic growth in the country for which a firm political structure seems no less important than a resolute will to progress. Times therefore demand that, in keeping with the expectations as reflected in the referendum, we rouse the people to be active to be disciplined, and to be united above all so that they can really contribute to shape our national economy'.

Recalling that the system of politics without party, which

King Mahendra had introduced, was best suited to the Nepalese genius, he said that it alone could equip them to safeguard the kingdom's sovereignty and grapple with the challenge of national unity and economic development. He would therefore urge all sections of the people to 'shed their artificial differences and participate, as usual, in the successful implementation of the reforms now enunciated'.⁴¹

Narayanhiti Palace appeared to have convinced itself that the process the referendum proclamation had set in motion came to its logical end with the announcement of reforms in the partyless *panchayat* constitution. It would have the people believe that they were not being taken for a ride, that the reforms, which became operative immediately, were not a mere eyewash.

The reformed constitution has a liberal look of sorts, holding out some hope of a less agonising tomorrow. The optimist might even say it is a watershed in the troubled political life of the country since 1960. The amended constitution, if sincercly worked, would take Nepal a long way towards restoring democratic rule as it is understood in civilised parlance, it may be argued. The reforms apparently meet some of the basic demands of the men who have these past two decades suffered and sacrificed much for the cause of democracy.

For one thing, the kingdom's supreme legislature, unlike the then prevailing system, will be elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. For another, the existing system of the prime minister being a nominee of the Palace will be replaced by that of the legislature electing, from among its members a prime minister responsible to it. The Council of Ministers will be answerable to the elected legislature and not to the Palace as has been the practice so long. The legislature will also have the power to unseat ministers, including the prime minister, 'for reasons of failure to fulfil the responsibility of their office by a majority of the 60 percent of the total membership of the Rastriya Panchayat'.

41 Proclamation to the Nation by His Majesty King Birendra Shah Dev., 15 December, 1980, HMG Press. Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, p 3. If the curtain is now drawn over this it would most probably be to the liking of all who discover in the reformed constitution a cure for the ailments afflicting the Himalayan kingdom. That is not to be, even though it might cause a flutter in the political dovecotes. The seemingly generous reforms have a catch somewhere. What it is could be easily identified if a close look is taken at the amended constitution.

The stipulations with which the announced reforms are hedged in are unlikely to move the multi-party supporters to enthusiasm. The amended constitution makes it clear that the partyless *panchayat* stays as the kingpin of the country's political life, party politics remaining taboo as before. How else could one explain the 'provision ... for the constitution of a committee on *panchayat* policy and investigation in the Rastriya *Panchayat*. The functions of this committee shall be to undertake all necessary work for the promotion of the partyless democratic *panchayat* system and to ensure implementation of the decisions taken in regard to the annual reports of the constitutional bodies".

The amended constitution stipulates that 'membership of any one of the six class organisations is mandatory for becoming a candidate for election to all tiers of the *panchayat*'.⁴³ This means that none could seek election without being a member of one of the "class organisations" and, in order to enrol oneself a member, one would have to take an oath of loyalty to the *panchayat* principle. Understandable, no conscientious democrat could possibly be expected to do that.

The reforms provide for a legislature of 140 members, of whom 28 would be nominated by the King and the rest 112 elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. That is, a solid bloc of lawmakers, a good one-fifth of the legislature, will remain beholden to the Palace. As for the elected legislators, they are likely to split more or less into two recognisable groups committed to the multi-party system

⁴² Salient Features of the Third Amendment of the Constitution of Nepal 1980. His Majesty's Government Press, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, pp 2-4.

and the partyless *panchayat* concept respectively. The nominated legislators would as a matter of course follow the dictates of the Palace, while the *panchayat* group, honourable exceptions apart, would be eager not to disoblige it. The reasons for this are too obvious to be elaborated.

The procedure for the election of a prime minister is the most ingenious part of the scheme. This has been so devised as to ensure that the Palace has the final say. To be elected prime minister, a legislator must secure a majority of 60 percent of the votes in the 140-member legislature. If no candidate for the post is able to secure this percentage, the amended constitution provides for a run-off between the two obtaining the largest number of votes. Should this fail to resolve the issue the legislature will forward the names of three of its members to the King, who will appoint one of them prime minister. Further, to acquire eligibility to contest a candidate will at once have to affirm his loyalty to the amended *panchayat* constitution and be a member of one of the six approved class or professional organisations.

The long and the short of the exercise was that the Palace would continue to be the focus of Nepalese politics. It is virtually a heads-I-win-tails-you-lose kind of arrangement that allows the King to come out always on top. The key to this is not far to seek. Of the 140 members of the legislature, the Palace nominated 28 will understandably act as a compact group, faithfully voting only for the prime ministerial candidate enjoying the King's confidence. This means that, denied the support of the Palace, any candidate for prime ministerial office will have to secure a majority of 60 percent, that is, 84 votes, from among the 112 elected members of the legislature. Can it be doubted that in the given Nepalese context this will turn out a sisyphean undertaking for any non-loyalist candidate?

Evidently, the reforms fell far short of what the King's public declarations and private utterances had encouraged the democrats—or if you like multi-party supporters—to expect. It is not surprising that the amended constitution did not get an unqualified reception from democrats. In fact, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, acting president of the banned Nepali Congress, which is by far the most important factor in the kingdom's political equation, went on record with the observation that the democrats could not 'welcome the amendments because we consider them undemocratic and not enough to meet the aspirations of the people today.'⁴³

He was only one among many who felt that they had been mocked with false hopes. Even a very timid *panchayat* critic like Surya Prasad Upadhyay former home minister in the B. P. Koirala government, said the reforms were 'restrictive' and might be called somewhat 'humiliating' so far as the obligatory class organisatoin membership and the like were concerned.⁴⁴

Koirala, even as he admitted that the amended constitution contained 'some positive features.' was constrained to say that 'this document cannot help forge national unity and reconciliation which is the most pressing priority for us.'⁴⁵ Still, he made it clear that he would not use this to wriggle out of his 'line of no surrender to, no confrontation with the King.'

It may not be out of context to vrefer to what one of India's leading English language dailies said editorially while commenting on the constitutional reforms: 'Indeed... the vote for multi-party democracy represented the voice of the forward-looking sections of the Himalayan kingdom, while the votaries of the *panchayat* system have been the unabashed apologists of absolute monarchy.... The "partyless" *panchayat* is a misnomer. In effect, Nepal has a single party owing allegiance to the court. What King Birendra has done now is only to provide a few trappings of democracy. He will not find it easy to stifle that urge for genuine reform.'⁴⁶

Events seemed to have overtaken the most enlightened man ever to occupy Narayanhiti Palace. There were indications that King Birendra had been led up the gardenpath by

- 43 The Statesman (Calcutta), 18 December 1980.
- 44 Surya Prasad Upadhyay told this to the author during the latter's meeting with him in Kathmandu on 30 March 1981.
- 45 The Times of India (New Delhi), 4 February 1981.
- 46 The Times of India (New Delhi), 22 December 1981

some of the scheming political operators who had so long enjoyed his favour. It was widely believed that Prime Minister Thapa had so manipulated and managed in advance the general election, which was scheduled to be held on 9 May 1981, under the amended constitution that none looked forward to it any more. The day, instead of becoming one of deliverance for most Nepalese, was expected to be one of the saddest in their living memory.

The clever *panchayat* poliicians, who had been using the Palace as a peg to hang their story upon, did not leave things to chance. They had a crucial economic stake in the parpetuation of the partyless *panchayat* system that gave them effective control over affairs of state. Their behindthe-scene manoeuvrs eventually succeeded in rendering the omnipotent Palace peculiarly impotent. Vested interests had created a great gulf between King and people.

The Himalayan kingdom's first ever general election on the basis of adult franchise was held in 1959. The issue was not that the Nepalese had to wait 22 years for another such election but the difference between the two exercises. The 1959 election raised popular hopes. It was a promise that none would be denied a place in the sun. But the 9 May poll made no promise and held out precious little hope of a relatively meaningful life. There was little doubt that the election would only make matters worse, let alone find a way out of the impasse the country was in. If Koirala's decision to counsel his comrades, coworkers and the people not to participate in the election reduced it to an absurdity, Prime Minister Thapa's manoeuvres to stage manage it portended an unprecedented political and economic crisis.

The people of Nepal have been getting the worst of both worlds these last two decades, but they have refused to despair. And when King Birendra allowed the people to determine through the ballot box the kingdom's future polity it seemed that the Nepalese had not suffered in vain. For the first time in its history, and probably in that of most other Asian and African countries, a national referendum on the basis of universal adult franchise was held, allowing the people to choose between a reformed *panchayat* system and a multi-party system of government. The exponents of the multi-pary system lost the referendum, thanks to clever manipulation by Prime Minister Thapa's government. But again they did not give up hope. With their sizable share of the total votes polled, the King's promise of a constitution incorporating the principles of universal adult franchise, direct election, a government answerable not to the Palace but to the legislature and the unflinching leadership of Koirala, they knew a better day would come

In the brief period since then, the situation has changed. The anti-democratic forces, which were in disarray, have rallied. They made the election a foregone conclusion. The contestants mostly belonged to different, mutally hostile, groups of *panchayat* supporters.

The reaction that the mention of Prime Minister Thapa's name provoked in the usually well-spoken average Nepalese was a revelation. Even most of the panchayat leaders felt the same way. As a matter of fact, what I gathered on a visit to Kathmandu in March 1980 from my talks with former Prime Mnisters Kirtinidhi Bista, Tulsi Giri and Matrika Prasad Koirala, all acknowledged panchayat leaders, confirmed the suspicion that the Thapa government had pulled strings to create such a situation that multi-party supporters might be forced to keep themselves out of the election.

It is common knowledge that despite the process of liberalisation being painfully slow and the scope and content of the constitutional reforms extremely limited, Koirala did not dispute that the King's exercise was not entirely regressive. He also wanted the multi-party supporters to participate in the general election that was held under the amended constitution.

But the idea had to be given up because he could not compromise his commitment to democracy by accepting the stipulation that a candidate must enrol himself as a member of one of the six *panchayat*-controlled class organisations and be under pledge to subscribe to the principles of partyless *panchayat*. This indeed was a negation of what might have to an extent made the constitutional reforms meaningful to the people.

Koirala had laid his cards on the table much before the

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constitutional reforms became a reality. In his memorandum of suggestions to the Constitutional Reforms Commission, he had insisted that the proposed reforms should not impose "any restrictions or preconditions" on prospective candidates for election under the amended constitution, if and when it became effective.

Explaining his stand, he said his decision "means my freedom, and there is no question of my participating in the elections if my rights are snatched away from me. If I do not have a right to put across my point of view through expression and through organisation, then my contesting an election or getting elected has no meaning."⁴⁷

The matter was not left to rest here. Well before the amended constitution was enforced, Koirala tried to meet the King so that the question could be thoroughly discussed. The King had earlier told Koirala that whenever he wanted to meet him he should contact his secretary, Ranjan Raj Khanal, for an appointment.

Sometime later Koirala telephoned Khanal for an appoint ment, but he was told that, in the words of Koirala, 'I should write an application seeking a meeting." This of course he did not do, as "I did not have enough time for that kind of correspondence." After the reforms were promulgated Koirala tried again without avail, to meet the King with a view to persuading him of the utterly harmful nature of the condition stipulating the organisation of membership along class lines and loyalty to the principles of partyless *panchayat*.

As he put it in a press interview, "I made a second request. I was again told to make an application without any guarantee that the King would meet mc. So I refused to do that."⁴⁸ There is no knowing whether Khanal did so in his personal capacity or was directed to act in the manner he did.

There was a feeling that the real spirit of the amended constitution had not been explained to the King. If that had been done, if the situation had been placed in its right perspective, the "irritants" that stood in the way of the democrats, in any case of the Nepali Congress, participation in the elections might have been removed.

But that was not to be because Thapa and other vested interests were bent upon queering the pitch. In the circumstances, "we are forced", Koirala said, to boycott the forthcoming general election. But boycott, he reminded the people, did not suggest the politics of confrontation. Lest there should be any misunderstanding, he emphasised that the politics of "extremism of either the left or the right is **a** hurdle to the democratic development of the country."⁴⁹

Most Nepalese would have been greatly satisfied if the supporters of the multi-party system, particularly the Nepali Congress, had agreed to participate in the general election. This would have made King Birendra happy and reassured the people. Also, it would have caused the detractors of Koirala to appreciate that his line of "national reconciliation" was in the given context the only rational approach to the kingdom's problem of politics.

That, regrettably, did not come about. The boycott decision of course did not receive unqualified support even of men who were otherwise known for their commitment to democracy and trust in Koirala. For example, Lok Raj Baral, and his was only one instance out of many. He was of the opinion that the general election was an important landmark and therefore the Nepali Congress, which was committed to the principle of representative democracy, should have participated in it and not price itself out of circulation by boycotting it.⁵⁰

The opposition parties of every conceivable political pursuasion, including the pro-Beijing Communist Party led by Monmohan Adhikari, boycatted the election. The only exception was Keshar Jung Raymajhi's faction of the Moscowdependent Communist Party which counts for nothing. Raymajhi's criticism of the boycott move as a "mistake"⁵¹

51 The Times of India (New Delhi), 23 April 1981.

⁴⁹ The Times of India (New Delhi), 12 April 1981.

⁵⁰ Lok Raj Baral said this in course of a conversation with the author on 29 March 1981 in Kathmandu.

and his decision to participate were but a command performance and had little relevance to the people's struggle for democracy. Raymajhi and his handful of camp followers newed this line as it suited Moscow's book at that time. All things considered, Koirala's decision to boycott the election, notwithstanding that the constitutional reforms were a departure from the past, was the only option he could exercise to save the Nepali Congress from compromising its position, perhaps irretrievably.

The outcome of the second general election, which was foregone in that Thapa and his men had the entire field for themselves, did not seem to promise the people easy days ahead. It also did not appear to have pleased King Birendra. For the verdict of the 9 May 1981 poll came nowhere near answering the basic questions that have been a fixture in the life of the country these last two decades. The confused post-election scene did not promise a democratic government that would work, other things apart. Rather, the long-awaited second general election only complicated matters. As it is, it is hard to believe that there is a good side to this unhappy situation, mainly brought about by those claiming to be the King's men.

It had been bandied about that the 9 May poll would set the seal of the people's freely expressed approval on the partyless panchayat, and this would provide the basis for a firm, representative government to assume the reins of power. In exuberant spirits, Prime Minister Thapa declared some ten days before the elections that it would give the country a "stable government for the next five years."⁵² Little did he realise then that he had been tried and found wanting by both King and people, that all his schemes to block the communication channels between the Palace and the people's representatives were no longer a secret.

At any rate, that is what well-meaning Nepalese, not excluding some members of the Royal Palace Secretariat, would din into one's ears. Thapa and his associates had done King Birendra, let alone the people, precious little good but much damage, willfully or not. But for their wirepullnig—this is only one instance out of many the democrats would not have boycotted the 9 May election, thus defeating its very purpose.

Reports have it that Thapa and his collaborators were eminently successful—if that is the right phrase—in spiking the King's guns, at least for the present. They seem to have outwitted Birendra, leading him into a blind alley, and the way out of this does not promise to be as easy as some might imagine. Not even the otherwise all-powerful Palace could now afford to take things for granted. The people of course are the worst sufferers, for they will have to bear the brunt of the mischief that is afoot. If the present situation makes them apprehensive, the thought of what is likely to follow accentuates it.

This is not to detract from the significance of the second general election. In contemporary Nepalese history, 9 May 1981 will go down as a memorable day. The Nepalese will have reason to remember the day for what some men in high places did to palm off the shadow for the substance. Also, they will have ground for feeling somewhat relieved now that a pinpoint of light is visible in the dark tunnel they have been groping in longer than two decades. A paradoxical statement? Not at all, provided one does not ignore the realities of life in Nepal.

The second election confirms that Birendra is not irrevocably sold on the idea that democracy does not suit the genius of the Nepalese. This is vouched for by none other than Koirala. At another level, the results of the election validated the argument that the political system, which ruled the roast since December 1960, has outlived its utility. The election verdict sustained the point that the emphasis on the partyless character of the national polity has become redundant, if not counter productive.

Others besides the *panchayat* members were divided into several groups, easily identifiable among them being four owing allegiance respectively to the caretaker and the former Prime Ministers Surya Bahadur Thapa, Kirtinidhi Bista, Tulsi Giri and Matrika Prasad Koirala. Giri went to the extent of saying that the philosophical concept of the partyless *panchayat* had become superfluous and the third amendment of the constitution had in a way paved the way for the gradual introduction of the multi-party system.

Many "dissident" panchayat members, who successfully contested the election against the "official candidates", were sponsored directly or indirectly by the panchayat factions opposing the ruling Thapa group. Also, 20 known exponents, maybe more, of the multi-party system got themselves elected to the national legislature. Among the newly eleced members of the Rastriya Panchayat there are five relatively distinct groups.

The manner in which the 9 May exercise had been conducted obliged the Palace to stand in its own light. The forces and factors which ensured that the democrats, the Nepali Congress in particular, had no alternative to boycotting the election seemed to have reckoned without their host. Few Nepalese in their right senses would dispute that the multi-party supporters' participation in the second general election would have been a fitting close to the interminable politics of conflict and violence that had dominated Nepalese politics since 15 December 1960.

This was not possible because of those that have a stake in the country's retrogressive political system and not because of Koirala's alleged intransigence. Koirala was pragmatic enough to realise that, in the given situation, the democrats could not afford to refuse to see the difference between their immediate and distant goals. He did not expect the King to grant a fully democratic constitution at one stroke. He and other democrats expected the process of liberalisation to be transformed into that of democratisation with the enforcement of the amended constitution.

King Birendra had almost promised as much. But contrary to his word and the people's expectations, the second election opened the sluice gates of political instability and all that goes with it. What with the absence of legitimately organised political parties with clearcut programmes and the complex constitutional provisions regarding the election of a prime minister, the kingdom's political problems would inevitably become still more complicated.

Those who prefer stories with a happy ending would probably crow over the election of Thapa as Prime Minister after the election. Citing this as the logical conclusion of the process of liberalisation King Birendra had initiated in 1979, they asserted that the curtain had been drawn over the kingdom's two-decade-old political problems.

So the people who had "mistakenly" boycotted the election, particularly the banned Nepali Congress (political parties continue to be taboo even in the "reconstructed" variety of Nepalese democracy), should return to the fold, the defenders of the new dispensation suggested.

That is a matter of opinion, of course. Developments in the period between King Birendra's announcement of a national referendum and the 9 May election would confirm that Thapa's assumption of the reins of government did not mean that the kingdom's polity was now on the right course, or that the powers that be had turned over a new leaf. Empirically observable facts rather indicated that the kingdom had not seen the last of its political problems. Much indeed has still to be done before the fundamental principles and norms of democracy could become a reality in the life of the people.

The scenario would apparentlysuggest that Prime Minister Thapa enjoys the King's support. That he was elected unopposed, receiving 121 votes in the 140-members Rastriya Panchayat (of which 28 are nominated by the Palace) should confirm that the King's nominees voted for him *en bloc*. Of the 19 legislators who did not vote for him, some are professed multi-party supporters, and others oppose his approach to politics an principle.

If myth is more relevant than reality, Thapa could have got himself elected prime minister even without the support of the Palace-nominated legislators. The third amendment of the constitution stipulates that a candidate for election as prime minister must get the support of at least 84 legislators or 60 percent of the legislature's total membership. Thapa got the support of 93 elected members besides that of the King's 28 nominees.

But it would be stupid to imagine that these 93 were all non-loyalists and supported him because he was adjudged the right man for the job. He was elected because the Palace wanted it that way. There is one intriguing point in this. No knowledgeable Nepalese is unaware that the relations between the King and Thapa are not exactly at their best. True, Thapa has other patrons in the Palace, but the King would not have been unhappy if he could have done without giving Thapa the top job. Could it be that he was inducted into the highest political office only to give him an opportunity to buy a one-way ticket to perdition?

I do not intend to underestimate the fact that the process of liberalisation initiated with the referendum declaration, though much too circumscribed and slow, was a positive move. In fact, this was the first positive political step taken in the kingdom since the 1960 royal takeover. All the innovations and improvisations introduced in between have been a negative exercise. If this is true, it is also true that authority calculatingly declined to play the game when it came to the crunch. That is, when multi-party advocates, including Koirala, pleaded for the removal of two of the amended constitution's most anti-democratic provisions so that they could participate in the general election.

Between them, the provisions obliged every candidate for election to take out membership of one of six officially controlled class organisations and sign a pledge of eternal loyalty to the principle of partylessness of the polity. The Palace's refusal to concede the point left the democrats with nothing short of Hobson's choice—boycott of the general election. This shook the belief of even the most credulous Nepalese that the 9 May poll was meant to be the first major step towards the reintroduction of democracy in the country after a gap of 20 long years.

The regime's manoeuvres evidently succeeded in keeping the multi-party supporters out of the political process. But that was a Pyrrhic success, if at all. What authority managed to get entered on the credit side was far outweighed by the entries on the debit side. A dispassionate look at the political scene would confirm this. It has ceased to be news that the position of the Palace is no longer as unassailable as it was before the national referendum in May 1980. For nearly two decades it had been emphasised day in, day out that the partyless *panchayat* system was immutable, and alone equipped to answer all their problems. With much ballyhoo, the partyless *panchayat* was sought to be projected as a near-perfect product of political engineering which faithfully reflected the will of the people.

The entire fabric of the argument in support of this was torn to shreds on 24 May 1979 when King Birendra declared that a national referendum would settle the question of the kingdom's polity. Little did the regime realise that the Rubicon had been crossed and there was no going back to the days when the monarch's word was law, when in fact he was the state.

Between then and Thapa's installation as Prime Minister after the general election, remnants of feudalism, entrenched compradors, indigenous and alien vested interests and, it is suspected, external political operators clubbed together to abort the whole process. The results of the referendum were widely believed to have been manipulated by this fraternity of interests, yet 45 percent of the total votes polled in the referendum favoured the multi-party system.

But the King's promise that the wishes of such a great minority would not be ignored found no positive expression in the subsequently introduced third amendment of the constitution. The reforms were hedged in with restrictions calculated to frustrate the multi-party supporters' efforts not to get nicely left.

This has done immense harm both to the nation's basic interests and to the monarchy's enlightened long-term interests. The people of Nepal need no pundits, native or foreign, to tell them that democracy and the post-9 May general election political system are polar opposites. They are disillusioned, for they know that ever since Plato roamed the streets of Athens the concept of the ideal state is equated with a system of polity where justice determines relations between man and man. Judged by this standard, Nepal or any other state would fail miserably. It is however conceivable that a democratic state approximates to the concept of the ideal state. Democracy assures political equality, but can every Nepalese enjoy it as a matter of course? Surely not.

The valley of Kathmandu appears as quiet and relaxed as it did before the general election, under the reformed constitution. But if one refuses to be carried away by surface impressions and the double-talk of some men in the corridors of power, one would get to know a Kathmandu not really at peace with itself. Life in the valley does not flow quite as smoothly as some dyed-in-the-wool partyless *panchayat* faithfuls claim. Notwithstanding the recent political engineering, an undertone of despondency runs through the kingdom's polity. Yesterday's brave words do not find many takers today, fewer still care for the promises made the day before.

Right below the seemingly unruffled surface there is the rumbling of discontent, and not a little either. In Kathmandu's almost perenially sun-deprived alleys, on the campuses of Tribhuvan University and its affiliated institutions, in numerous towns, villages and hamlets, be they located in the Terai plains or the far reaches of the northern Himalayas, people gather in knots, compare notes, sift available evidence and express indignation against those who continue to mete out a raw deal to them.

Few adult Nepalese outside the blessed circle of the beneficiaries of *panchayat* rule would not admit that there is no perceptible difference, politically speaking, between what is and what was before the country went to the polls in May 1981. Rather, the situation has taken a turn for the worse, they would assert. According to a knowledgeable official, there is no government worth the name functioning in Nepal today. The economy is in a bad plight, and none seems to bother. Apart from the curse of acute poverty, the problems of increasing corruption and the growing volume of foreign-power manipulations to influence the kingdom's affairs are na figments of the imagination.

This is corroborated by the opposition members of the Rastriya Panchayat, critical *panchas*, supporters of the multi-party system of polity and non-partisan academics. As Pashupati Shumsher, a leading opposition member of Rastriya Panchayat, put it, "in the last two and a half years the quantity and dimension of corruption has come to such an extent that there is a qualitative change. Corruption is now so pervasive that it has been institutionalised and become a culture,⁵³ King Birendra of Nepal is not quite relaxed today. Those who keep tabs on the goings-on in the Palace told me on my visit to Kathmandu early in March 1982—I do not claim to know King Birendra personally except that I met him briefly on his overnight stay in Calcutta in 1977⁵⁴—that the King has of late been adopting a somewhat cynical attitude towards men and events. This indeed is to be wondered at, particularly because it has not been his way so far.

A plausible reason why the King has become cynical is, perhaps that he feels he has been let down, and badly too, by some men who have enjoyed his confidence all along. For instance, Prime Minister Thapa. Since Birendra assumed power no other prime minister except Tulsi Giri has caused him so much embarrassment. His wheeling-dealing has done no small damage to the Palace's idea of a workable scheme of politics in the present context.

At any rate, the rapport between the King and his Prime Minister is reportedly a bad memory. Take. for instance, the four-day national *panchayat* convention in March 1982 in which about 1200 "delegates" from various parts of the kingdom participated. The convention was supposed to rivet attention on finding ways to motivate the partyless *panchayat* faithfuls to close their ranks and, more important, put the sinking economy on an even keel. Both Thapa and his critics agree that the economy has gone out of gear and unless positive steps are taken to revive it the country would be in trouble. What however the convention actually did was to accelerate the internal bickerings and power struggles rocking the partyless panchayat boat. Panchayat devotees did this even as they stridently reaffirmed their faith in the "active leadership of the Crown".

How deeply the rival groups are involved in mutual recriminations could be gleaned from the statement 18 prominent panchayat politicians, including Rastriya Panchayat

⁵³ Pashupati Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana said this in the course of conversation with the author in September 1981 in Kathmandu.

⁵⁴ For a full account see Bhola Chatterji "A Dialogue with King Birendra", Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), 31 March 1977.

members Lokendra Bahadur Chanda, Padma Sunder Laoti, Prakash Chandra Lohani and Pashupti Shumsher issued in January 1982, demanding that a national *panchayat* convention should be held forthwith to thrash out the problems they faced.

Accusing the Thapa government of all manner of misconduct and impropriety, the statement said, among other things, that it was "actually discouraging" every move to restore "unity among the *panchayat* members." More, it was "deliberately pursuing a policy that contributed to making the partyless *panchayat* system uppopular." The signatories to the statement alleged that "foreign smugglers" were tightening their stranglehold on the nation's economy and corruption pervaded every level of society.

The charge was that "the regime's policymaking apparatus and the ministers were more corrupt than the lower echelons of the administration." The upshot of it all was that "youths, students and intellectuals have lost faith in the *panchayat* system and they are opting out of it."⁵⁵ In reality, the statement laid subversion of the *panchayat* system to Prime Minister Thapa's charge. This was followed by an almost equally critical statement which three former prime ministers. Matrika Prasad Koirala, Tulsi Giri and Kirtinidhi Bista, issued. Although they did not say it in so many words, the meaning of what they said confirmed this.

Others who are not associated with any of these groups also speak no less disparagingly of the present government. All this seems to suggest that Thapa is the villain of the piece. But that would be a rather simplistic view of a situation in which a complication of influences is at work. To understand the forces and factors affecting the Nepalese situation we might turn to Koirala. In a statement issued on 9 March 1982, he said developments concerning the national *panchayat* convention confirmed that the rival groups in the system were engaged in a bitter struggle for power. The convention, in his opinion, "shows how strong is the influence of those who believe in one-party totalitarianism over the partyless concept of the *panchayat* system." Koirala also went on record as saying that "one foreign power engaged in imperialist expansion of its one-party totalitarianism" was adding fuel to the flames in order to stamp out the forces of nationalism and democracy in Nepal.⁵⁶

That the foreign power he referred to without naming it is Soviet Russia most knowledgeable Nepalese readily agree. The significant point is that Moscaw-leaning men, but not necessarily those bound to the Russia-debendent Nepalese Communist Party, were the most articulate among those who asked for the convention. Their idea was to make a bid to convert the *panchayat* forum into a rigidly controlled apparatus, confront non-Moscow-oriented anti-Thapa men like Pashupati Shumsher with a *fait accompli*, and then engineer a campaign for the Prime Minister's ouster.

But Thapa, who had at first opposed holding a *panchayat* convention but subsequently agreed to it only to steel his opponents' thunder, proved too wily. He is known to maintain a little more than diplomatically correct relations with Russia. It is said that the inordinately ambitious. Thapa is his own agent. Anything that he does is calculated to enable him to have two strings to his bow. In his lexicon "fidelity" is an obnoxious word.

That worries the King, no doubt. But much more does the interplay of external forces in Nepalese politics. Speaking at a press conference in Paris on 4 September 1981, King Birendra touched on certain basic aspects of foreign policy. He referred to Nepal's commitment to nonalignment. He dwelt on his concept of the kingdom's constituting a zone of peace. But this was not the core of the message he wanted to get across. He came to that while restating Nepal's policy on Afghanistan. Its essence was emphasis on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from that country. Without larding his language with diplomatic double-talk, he stressed that Nepal wanted "to see Afghanistan have its own government chosen by the people and living as a non-aligned country."

This was absolutely necessary because, he said, "the ramifications of not being able to be in a position like this is na-

⁵⁶ See appendix B for the full text of B. P. Koirala's signed statement (in Nepali) issued to the press on 8 March 1982.

turally of concern for all countries in the region." Lest he should be misunderstood, he added that "we do not agree with foreign troops in anyone else's country" and that "it is not only Soviet troops."

This parallels Nepal's approach to the Kampuchean problem. Kathmandu has not recognised the Heng Samrin regime because it considers the regime a product of external armed intervention. Not only that, Nepal seldom misses a chance to underscore the point that the South Asian countries are seriously concerned over the Kampuchean issue, which calls for a political, not a military, solution. What is needed, according to Kathmandu, is withdrawal of foreign troops from Kampuchea leaving its people to "decide their destiny by themselves without external interference."⁵⁷

King Birendra's pointed reference to the Afghanistan problem made not a few people sit up both at home and abroad. Most Nepalese could appreciate that the King's statement had deeper implications than met the eye and that it was for both international and domestic consumption. The excessive interest certain foreign powers are now taking in Nepal's internal affairs is not an expression of their benignity. If Koirala is any guide, "interantional tension and rivalries have cast their shadows on Nepalese politics." In a taped interview on 14 September, he told me that "the whole region is being destabilised" as a result of "the development in Afghanistan."

According to him, India, China and the two big powers, Soviet Russia and the United States, are interested in Nepal, and "one of the two big powers wants to destabilise the country." In the same vein, Koirala said that disquieting part of it is "the unholy alliance between the forces of destabilisation and their agents in Nepal."⁵⁸ There are reports that some men in positions of power and influence are on the same wavelength as those who would like Nepal to enter the orbit of Soviet influence. That was why the King's no-nonsense statement at the Paris news conference was,

⁵⁷ LDC (Least Developed Country)—Nepalese by Aun Duncan (AFP) Paris, 4 September 1981.

⁵⁸ See Chapter IX for complete text of the taped interview.

it is claimed, not only addressed to the Soviet Union but also its allies in Nepal.

For those who care to place their ears close to the ground, the Soviet Union and USA, besides India and China, are the two most active foreign powers in Nepal. The kingdom's relations with India and China are determined by history as well as geopolitics. India's options, Kathmandu's New Delhi watchers think, are two: it could opt for either a friendly, stable and nonaligned Nepal or hegemonistic relations. An overview of India—Nepal relations since the 1950-51 revolution would suggest that New Delhi has no reason to worry about Kathmandu's friendship and commitment to nonalignment. The question of the other option does not therefore, arise. The truth is that neither India nor Nepal has very many options to choose from so far as their bilateral relations are concerned.

This is not to suggest that the relations between the two countries have all along been an etching in perfection. Far from it. There has been more than one occasion when New Delhi and Kathmandu were found to be at cross-purposes, when they appeared to have succumbed to the temptation of achieving a transient success at the cost of their respective overriding objectives. At the moment, a discordant note in the otherwise mature India-Nepal dialogue could be traced to what has recently come to be known as the "peace zone" issue, Kathmandu's desire to be "declared a zone of peace" in order that it might "institutionalise peace."

It may be recalled that King Birendra first mooted the idea at the 1973 nonaligned summit in Algiers: "Nepal, situated between two of the most populous countries in the world, wishes within her frontiers to be declared a zone of peace." Explaining why this was necessary, the King said that "in the absence of clearly demarcated peace zones accepted as such by every country in the world, countries with smaller size and population are bound to feel insecure."⁵⁹ Since then he has returned to the theme off and on. Significantly, the third amendment of the constitution,

⁵⁹ Bhola Chatterji, "India-Nepal Relations: case for better understanding", *Hindusthan Standard* (Calcutta), 25 March 1975.

which includes the kingdom's 'foreign policy objective in the Directive Principles of the *panchayat* system," says that "the objective of the *panchayat* system will be to work towards making Nepal a zone of peace."⁶⁰

Addressing the first elected Rastriya Panchayat under the amended constitution on 24 June 1981, King Birendra again referred to the peace zone concept. He said "development remains the greatest challenge of our time. Considering peace essential for development, we have proposed Nepal to be declared a zone of peace in keeping with the ideals of the United Nations Charter and the principles of nonalignment."⁶¹

There is however no dearth of responsible Nepalese who consider the royal exercise an attempt to draw a red herring across the trail. A senior opposition leader told me on 10 April 1981, that the peace zone proposal is a ruse to ensure against external interference with the King's scheme of politics. He may thus be left free to resort to whatever ruthlessness would be necessary to consolidate his position and thus enable him to exercise absolute power. On the other hand, another responsible opposition spokesman gave me to understand that the peace zone concept was not a move against any country, let alone India. The basic idea was to insulate Nepal from the growing big-power rivalry in the region.

The peace zone proposal has been endorsed by 25 countries, including among others, Bangladesh, Britain, China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and USA. The Soviet Union and India are the two most notable exceptions. Moscow once agreed to support it and then backed out. It should be noted that mutually exclusive considerations have influenced Moscow and New Delhi in their decision not to endorse the proposal. The Soviet objective in Nepal runs counter to that of India as well as of China. It bears repetition that the interests of India and Russia in Nepal are not identical, nor have

⁶⁰ Salient Features of the Third Amendment of the Constitution etc, op cit, p 2.

⁶¹ Royal Address by His Majesty the King to the 32nd session of the Rastriya Panchayat 24 June 1981, His Majesty's Government Press, Kathmandu, p 2.

they ever been. Knowledgeable Nepalese admit this. While Moscow would presumably like to get the maximum political milage out of it before obliging Kathmandu, New Delhi suspects the motive behind it. New Delhi seems to believe that the peace zone proposition is primarily directed at it. That perhaps explains why it has all along avoided grasping the nettle, maintaining that it stands for getting the entire South Asia plus the Indian Ocean, and not just one country, accepted as a zone of peace.

New Delhi's argument apparently does not satisfy Kathmandu. The talk of the entire region being turned into a peace zone is interpreted as putting Kathmandu on notice that its zone of peace concept is unwelcome because New Delhi would like to keep all its options open. This is however an "irritant" that does affect overall relations between the two countries. And Koirala considers this reflective of India's inability to "understand," as he told a senior Indian journalist towards the end of 1981, "the national susceptibilities of Nepal... Nepalese nationalism can coexist with India's security interests Subservience is not necessary A friendly Nepal is a better bulwark against hostile ... acts."⁶²

Since it established diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1954, China has been quite active in the Kingdom and has a fairly busy lobby in Nepal. Indeed, Kathmandu has a place on Beijing's list of foreign policy priorities. To get the point, we might refer to what the Chinese Prime Minister, Zhao Ziyang, said on a brief visit to Nepal in 1981. Speaking at a civic reception in Kathmandu on 6 June, he made fulsome reference to the depth of understanding between Nepal and China.

More important, observed Zhao, is the fact that "neither side has ever imposed its will on the other" and that Nepal-China relations could "serve as a good example for state to state relations." Referring to the peace zone proposal, Zhao reiterated that the "Chinese Government and people resolutely support this proposal put forward by His

⁶² Quoted in Sunanda K Datta-Ray, "Peace in the Himalayas: Nepal's Seven Points for Survival", *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 1 January 1982

Majesty."63

For the present, Beijing, assured of Kathmandu's foreign policy of equidistance between India and China, and partly beause of its internal political compulsions, seems to prefer a low profile. But there is no reason to believe that China will remain idle if others succeed in enlarging their field of operation in Nepal.

The US started taking more than a merely diplomatic interest in Nepal's affairs after China's occupation of Tibet. That interest intensified as Nepal's international relations became multidimensional, and it was with US aid that the Khampas, originally inhabitants of eastern Tibet who had taken refuge in Nepal, organised armed resistance against the Chinese occupation forces.

Referring to this insurgency, then Nepalese Home Minister Hom Bahadur Shrestha said in early 1974 that the Khampas had patrons in some "powerful and rich countries which had their interest in the region." Informed sources knew that Shrestha meant the US and not India, for he had earlier dismissed summarily reports of India's alleged encouragement to the Khampa insurgents as 'nothing but heresay."⁶⁴ That is an old story.

Seen against this background, the Soviet Union is a latecomer on the Nepalese scene. Moscow and Kathmandu started with economic cooperation on a modest scale. This was discontinued in the early 1970s, the region's scenario had then changed after the Sino-American decision to bury the hatchet, only to be resumed almost a decade later. The Moscow - Kathmandu agreement officially announced in April 1981 coincided with an event of some political significance—the pro-Moscow Nepalese Communist Party's decision to participate in the May 1981 general election to the Rastriya Panchayat. It may be repeated that, except for the pro-Moscow Communist Party, the opposition parties of every shade decided to boycott the general election.

63 The Statesman (Calcutta), 7 June 1981.

64 Quoted in Bhola Chatterji, "The Riddle of the Khampas," Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), 14 August 1974. Mention may also be made of the rumpus about two truckloads of goods Soviet officials brought overland into Nepal. At the instance of the Nepalese Foreign Ministry, the customs officials at Birganj held the goods, which had been labelled "diplomatic bags." The Prime Minister subsequently told the Rastriya Panchayat that the 84-crate consignment was "released on good faith."⁶⁵

It is another matter that a Nepalese weekly suspected that the "crates may have contained sophisticated electronic equipment." And Baral $_{99}$ should know what he is talking about when he notes, while surveying Nepal's international relations, that there has been "a futher cooling of relations with the Soviet Union. There was a widespread rumour that four officials of the Soviet embassy in Kathmandu were asked to leave Nepal because their activities were objectionable to the Nepali Government."⁶⁷

The Soviet Union's keen interest in the Himalayan kingdom is understandable, particularly in view of Nepal's strategic location, its policy towards Kampuchea and Afghanistan and, last but not least, the bitter Moscow-Peking conflict. If the Soviet Union has no reason to be enamoured of King Birendra's firm commitment to his government's Kampuchea and Afghanistan policy, which more or less corresponds to that of China, it has every reason for an effective presence in Nepal. Among other things, Nepal can be an excellent listening post to monitor China, not unlike what the US had, and may still be having, in China to eavesdrop on Soviet Russia.

As a leading English daily, published from Calcutta, editorially observed, "it is not adequately appreciated in this country that the cold war directly impinges on Nepal's security, and the Soviet embassy in Kathmandu reportedly monitors Chinese nuclear and missile developments in Tibet."⁶⁸ Moreover, Tibet is China's soft underbelly, where certain sections of the people have still to be pacified, and

65 The Times of India (New Delhi), 25 July 1981.

66 The Statesman (Calcutta), 1 July 1981.

67 Baral, "Nepal 1979" etc. op cit, p 203.

68 The Statesman (Calcutta), 5 December 1981.

might be encouraged to continue challenging Beijing.

This is not to suggest that the US and China, or for that matter India, are just passive onlookers content with playing the good Samaritan's role in Nepal. The US, like the Soviet Union, has global aspirations. It would be naive to think that the US is not engaged in what might at once serve its strategic interest in the region stretching from Islamabad through New Delhi to Dacca and spike the Soviet Union's guns. America's decision about this time last year to raise substantially the volume of aid to Nepal could be taken as a straw in the wind.

It would not be surprising if, in the context of changed Beijing-Washington relations, the US and China agreed to play complementary roles, within limits, to contain Soviet influence. If in the process Nepal is forced deeper into the whirlpool of international power struggle they could not care less, except of course India. For if Nepal's foreign policy equations are badly disturbed, this would not leave India unaffected.

All these are but facts relating to political problems confronting Nepal. One need not look into a crystal ball to say that, having got over their two-decade-old political amnesia, the Nepalese are unlikely to turn their toes in depending on the benevolence of their rulers to do them a good turn. In fact, they are demanding a solution of the problem and asking for changes which would not be merely cosmetic.

The Palace is not unaware of this, nor is Koirala. But the question is: How to do it? King Birendra of course can answer effectively, but he has not yet spoken his mind except to say that he does not propose further changes in the kingdom's already amended constitution.

As for Koirala, he admits that the problems of politics can neither be resolved at the barricades nor by any crude manoeuvres the partyless *panchayat* government might resort to. He is convinced that the King and the democratic forces, acting in unison, alone can find a way out of the crisis that threatens the country. As he explained in a press interview on 12 December 1981, "I am very hopeful although I am stricken with a fatal disease." Alluding to his ailment, "cancer of the lungs," he said it was "something like a death sentence" that remained to be carried out. But it was no small consolation that "Nepal has made a stride towards liberalisation and democracy, although we are not satisfied with the hesitant steps that the King has been taking." The most significant point, he thinks, is that "it was very difficult when I came here to convince the people of the validity of my line—the line of national reconciliation which means understanding between the people and the King. Now that line is generally being accepted by the masses."⁶⁹ He is hopeful that the people will not have to take to the path of struggle again to recover fully what they lost in 1960, a democratic polity.

The focus may now be turned on the other side of the picture. Koirala's critics accuse him of having developed cold feet, particularly when the emphasis should be on total opposition to the King, involving if necessary the liquidation of the monarchy itself. Their contention is that the King is the most stubborn obstacle to democracy. It is alleged that the only conclusion that can be drawn from Koirala's "line of national reconciliation" is that he has become a collaborator, that he is a classic instance of a revolutionary degenerating into a reformist in the evening of his life. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The man who had on a massive scale made preparations for waging war against the King has said farewell to arms not for the

fun of it. Not for a mess of pottage. Not because he was in a funk. It is because he is convinced that violence could not in the changed context usher in the democratic millennium.

He realises that the politics of total confrontation with the King today would be an invitation to anarchy and eventual disintegration of the country. That may be welcome to the lunatic fringe of Nepalese politics but certainly not to those who would prefer a rational response to the challenge of nation-building. If this remarkably sensible approach is not to suffer shipwreck, the King must appreciate that his post-referndum innovations and restructuring are much too inadequate to meet the rising expectations of the people.

Could it be denied that no state can allow internal discontent and dissension, without endangering its stability and security, to remain unrelieved beyond a certain limit? The Palace should see that the limit is not crossed. The Nepalese may not yet question King Birendra's bona fides, they may even agree to bear with him for some more time. But they do not have the patience of job. And this is what Koirala has long been trying to get across to the Palace.

CHAPTER II

Down Memory Lane

Q: When were you born? Who was your father? How many brothers and sisters did you have? Did your father marry twice? What was his financial position? Where did you have your education? And law studies? Did you try for a job after finishing your studies or did you practise law? How did you enter Indian politics? Who influenced you? When did you come to know Devendra Prasad Singh? When exactly did Nepalese politics drawn you into its fold? Was it an act of deliberate choice? What attracted you to the Congress Socialist Party? Were you an office-bearer of the Congress Socialist Party or any of its front organisatoins? What was it that got you arrested in India in its freedom struggle? How long were you detained in Indian prisons? Now tell me all about your initiation into Nepalese politics and what was the state of opposition politics in Nepal at that time? When were you first taken into custody in Nepal? When did you organise the Nepali National Congress? Did any Indian political leader help vou in this?

A: I was born on 8 September 1914. My father was initially a small landholder. He was the youngest son of a clerk in His Majesty's Government.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Banaras. My grandmother was living there. She was doing her *kashibas* [retirement from all worldly activities to spend the rest of one's life in Kashi or Banaras, one of the holy place in India, where a pious Hindu would desire most to spend his or her retirement till death].

Q: What was your grandfather's name?

A: Nandikeshwar Upadhyay. He died when my father was very young.

Q: What was your father's name?

A: Krishna Prasad Koirała. My father married twice. From both his wives, he had five sons and four daughters— Matrika Prasad Koirala, myself,Keshab Prasad Koirala, Tarini Prasad Koirala and Girija Prasad Koirala, there was one son in between who died very young. And four daughters—Nalini Upadhyay, Indira, Soubhagya and Vijaylakshmi.

Q: Which part of Nepal did your family hail from?

A: We belong to the eastern hill region of Nepal, about 36 miles due east from Kathmandu. But my father migrated from there.

Q: What is the name of that place?

A: Dumja. That is our ancestral homeland. But my father left that place to seek his fortune in Biratnagar. As a matter of fact, he established the township of Biratnagar. It was a small hamlet where he had Kali [a Hindu goddess] temple built and he went into business. That is how the Koirala family started living in Biratnagar.

Subsequently, father acquired extensive landed property and built up a large business establishment. In those days my grandmother was living in Banaras. My mother went there to look after her, and that is how I was born in Banaras.

When my father had amassed some wealth a change took place. I will relate an incident to explain it. My father was very self-satisfied, he had two wives, a flourishing business and all the worldly things he could ask for. He thought he had more wealth than any Brahman from the hills had earned and he prided himself on it.

On one occasion, when returning home from a tour of inspection of his trading posts in the border region, he was riding a Tibetan pony. He felt very satisfied and said to himself that he was indeed a successful man who had every reason to be happy. Then suddenly he seemed to hear God's voice which said: "Krishna Prasad, you have made some property, built a house. raised a family, but you have not given a thought to those who are less fortunately placed."

Next morning my father called his friends and told

them of his divine message that some social work would have to be done. But they dissuaded him by saying that he would thereby incur the wrath of the Ranas, because it was the Government's prerogative to build hospitals and open schools. If he started doing this, they would construe it as usurpation of their right.

Q: Who was the King at that time? And the Prime Minister?

A: Chandra Shumsher was Prime Minister. I don't remember the King's name. Anyway, nobody cared much for the King in those days. However, my father told his friends that he would go ahead with his scheme all the same. He immediately went to Calcutta. advertised for a doctor and employed one who had an LMF degree.

Q: Was the doctor a Bengali?

A: Yes, a Bengali. My father also engaged a teacher for his proposed school. He too was a Bengali. Incidentally, that Bengali teacher was a terrorist. I forget his name, but M P Koirala would be able to tell you that. He wanted to come to Nepal because he wanted to escape from India and take refuge here. So he came very willingly with my father to set up a school in Biratnagar.

Both the doctor and the teacher, according to father, were very good persons. The doctor ultimately became a high official in the Nepalese Government. Afterwards, he became Health Officer in the Bihar Government. In fact, he attained the highest medical officer's post in Bihar.

As desired by my father, the teacher set up a school in Biratnagar, but he stayed there only a year or so. He had two sons, one of whom was sent to the gallows in India for a political offence. I met him in Banaras about eight or nine years after he left Biratnagar. He was living in a ramshackle house in rather straitened circumtances and the day I met him news came that his son had been hanged.

His other son, I think his name was Manmatha Nath Gupta, was sentenced to transportation to the Andamans. This Bengali teacher inspired in my father a feeling for social service. Whenever my father went to Calcutta, he would contact some of his friends—in those days he was a fop in the sense that he used to get his clothes tailored at Rankines, then one of Cacutta's exclusive tailoring establishments, and he would get his shoes custom-made.

Q: Your father was a dandy, I should say.

A: Yes, that is right. On his visits to Calcutta he used to ride in a landau. But that Bengali teacher brought about a change in him, he started using ordinary clothes, subscribed to ...

Q: You mean his life style changed?

A: Not abruptly, but gradually it did change. He took to writing articles in Nepali, published and distributed them at his own cost. This brought him to the notice of Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher. My father had also set up a women's organization with my aunt and mother as chairwoman and secretary respectively. My mother wrote a letter to Chandra Shumsher's wife requesting her to be a patron of the organisation. She readily agreed, but Chandra Shumsher was not happy.

Meantime, father started taking a keen interest in the economic condition of the poor. As I have already told you, the collection of customs used to be offered those days to the highest bidder. My father had a monopoly of the customs services, which meant that from the India-Nepal border in Darjeeling in the west the entire network of field customs checkposts were under the control of my father.

He also had a monopoly of import of cigarettes into Nepal. He had his offices at some of the customs checkposts. Once I happened to be present in one of those offices, otherwise known as *kacharis*, and I still remember, though very young, not the particular incident that took place but the situation that obtained.

It was winter and large number of his men, very poor and in rags, were migrating to India in search of employment. He asked one of them for his clothes and himself fished the rags out of the man's bag. And he had them sent to the Prime Minister with a covering letter saying that this was the usual clothing that "your subject wears in winter and compare this with what you are wearing. I hope it will not be interpreted as disrespect on my part to have sent these dirty rags to Your Highness. "I am afraid that when this parcel is opened it may create some consternation in the Durbar. But I want Your Highness to understand in what condition your subjects live."

That was the last straw on the camel's back. Having sent the parcel Father came back to Biratnagar. The parcel took about a month to reach the Prime Minister. Immediately, a warrant of arrest was issued against Father on the ostensible ground that he had not paid some dues he owed the government.

The Bada Hakim [goveror] of Biratnagar, Jit Bahadur, who had received the orders for his arrest, was a friend of father's. He sent for him and hinted he should go to Calcutta to look after his business there. My father told him he would go to Calcutta after the Dussehra festival.

By the way, Father was also dealing in silver—those were the First World War days—and had business interests in Calcutta. However, the Bada Hakim said that "Dusshera comes every year, so why wait until it is over? You could celebrate your Dusshera next year."

Father got the hint, took leave of him and prepared to go back home before leaving for India, But the Bada Hakim told him that he should go straight to Jogbani railway station [the last Indian railhead in Bihar adjoining the Nepal border] and catch the first available train to India. He also suggested that Father could take a horse from the Bada Hakim's stable. Father did so and went to his gola farm business establishment and office in Biratnagar, collected some money and left for the railway station. When father was safely out of Nepal the Bada Hakim gave orders for his arrest.

After he had left Nepal, another order came that all the members of his family should be arrested. So we had to flee home the entire family. I was then about three years old. I remember how we reached Banaras in a hurry. We travelled second class, [in those days the Indian railways had four classes, first, second, intermediate and third], and I distinctly remember that we had to change train twice, once at Katihar and again a Chhapra, before we finally got on the train to Banaras. Subsequently, orders were issued for the constitution of all our property. Our debtors were asked not to repay their debts, which were cancelled, and all Father's employees at his various establishments and checkposts were also arrested. Dirghiraj Koirala's father, Bishnu Prasad Koirala, who was at one of the checkposts near Darjeeling, was among the arrested.

Q: Who was Dirghiraj Koirala?

A: A cousin of mine, he was sometime Education Secretary in the Nepalese Government. His father was arrested, put in fetters and transferred from Ilam [near Darjeeling] to Kathmandu. On his way, at Dhankuta, he entertained his guards with drinks and escaped. He swam a swollen river, Tamor, with fetters on, managed to reach Dharan, where he had his fetters cut, walked all the way to Jogbani, and eventually came to Banaras to join my father.

We had 45 persons with us at Banaras. The father of Monmohan Adhikari [Monmohan is the leader of one faction of the Nepalese Communist Party] was also one of our employees. He had to flee the country and was with us in Banaras.

That is how Father became a rebel. He was a social reformer and not a rebel at the beginning. He just wanted government to be aware of the miserable economic condition of the people and it was farthest from his mind to go against the government. Like other refugees in Banaras, though most of them had not fled the country for any ostensible political reason, they were generally hostile to government. Father set up a press and started publishing a magazine.

Q: Was it a periodical?

A: Yes, it was a periodical. Father also used to address meetings of Nepalese in different parts of Banaras. I remember one of those meetings where father was profusely garlanded, and that is how I became aware of the political situation. I was only four or five years old. About that time Gandhi's non-cooperation movement—boycott of British goods—had just started. I was admitted to a municipal school in Banaras.

One day, when I was about seven years old, Gandhi and

Jawaharlal Nehru came to Banaras. Gandhi appealed for boycott of government schools, and I was the first boy in my class to stand up and say I would leave school. You know, my class teacher was a very brutal person and I wanted to leave school in any case.

Gandhi's meeting was held in a big compound of a rich man's *haveli* and I was loudly greeted. Matrika Babu was present at the meeting and he was the second boy to declare he would leave school. He was in DAV school. I was taken to the dais where Gandhi and Jawaharlal were seated. I remember Gandhi was there, but not Jawaharlal though MP [Matrika Prasad] says he was. They garlanded me and said I was a model student.

Q: How old was Matrika Prasad Koirala?

A: I think he was about nine. I was seven and Matrika Babu is older than me by two years and ten months. My father joined the non-cooperation movement and all our foreign clothes were burnt. My mother had very expensive foreign clothes, sarees and all that, but they were also burnt.

We started using *khaddar* [home-spun]. I think ours was one of the few families in Banaras that took to *khaddar* in the early 1920s. Father set up a weaving centre where Mother used to make cloth. A Muslim weaver was employed for this purpose. Ultimately, father joined [Indian National] Congress. But we could not stay in Banaras.

Q: Why could you not stay in Banaras?

A: Because of adverse financial conditions. We had very, very difficult times. In those days, I remember, we did not have regular meals. The family had 45 persons to feed, but none of them had any employment.

In the morning, all of us would go to the terrace, where mother used to give us germinated gram with a bit of jaggery for breakfast. Till I went to college I had no shoes, no woollen clothes, for that matter no change of clothes. Whatever I wore was all I had.

Only when the shirt I had on became tattered would I buy a readymade shirt from the khadi shop; it used to cost ten annas those days, that is, 63 paise at current prices. Fortunately for us, about this time a Nepali who had be-

come a yogi and whose father or mother was related to the Ranas or the royal family, came to live with us.

The yogi, whose mother was married to an Indian in Orissa, was very learned, an authority on Bengali literature as well as in Sanskrit and Hindi. He took a liking to us. He said he had a little money and would like to buy some land which would ultimately belong to his sister. Since the sister was very young at the time, she did not require any land. She would therefore get it only after marriage. Until then we could use the land for ourselves.

We went to Saharsa district in Bihar in search of a piece of land. Biswabandhu Thapa's grandfather, who was living there, told us that land was available. That is how we bought land at that place, and lived there; we were close to the Nepal border for a few years.

Q: Did you join school there?

A: Yes, I joined the school which Father had started there, the kind of school that he had earlier established in Biratnagar. The school had about ten teachers. I might say that our life there was relatively comfortable. For the first time after we left Biratnagar, I got milk, ghee [clarified butter], in a word, proper food.

Q: Did the entire Koirala household migrate to that place?

A: Yes, 45 persons belonging to four or five joint families. But troubles followed us again. The Kosi floods caused great difficulties. For about three months every year the entire area used to be flooded, compelling us to live at that time on *machans* [hutments on stilts and poles] or in boats. Ultimately, the river started flowing through our village and we had to leave it. Again poverty struck us and we had nowhere to go. The land was gone. And we, our group and the family where disintegrating.

Q: Did the river change its course?

A: Yes. (But now after the Kosi dam the people have regained their land. We still have some land there, but I do not know who is in possession of it.) When I came to understand that we would again have to take to the road I wanted to go back to Banaras but lacked money.

I wanted to join a government school of my choice. I felt

I had enough of Gandhi-inspired schools. My sister Nalini had a small gold ring and my aunt, Mother's sister, who had come to visit us, had a bigger ring. Both of them gave me their rings saying that I could now go to Banaras and join school.

When I went to Banaras, I sold the rings and got myself admitted to Harishchandra School, now a college. I was a good student, in studies as well as in character. It was here that I came into contact with terrorist organisations.

Q: In the school itself? In which class were you then?

A: Yes, in the school itself. I was in Class IX. I passed the matriculation examination in 1930. Matrika Babu was a student of Sadaqat Ashram, in Bihar, and he had a connexion with terrorists there. I had a connexion with terrorists in Banaras. Both of us were arrested in Banaras in 1930.

Q: Do you remember the terrorists' names? What was the charge against you?

A: The case in which I was involved related to a big robbery with murder in one of the villages near Bettiah. It was the Moulania case, in which Chandraman Shukla was hanged. Yogendra Shukla was sentenced to transportation for life and sent to the Andamans. Baswan Singh later a leader of the Socialist Party was also sent to the Andamans.

Q: You were involved in that case?

A: Yes, I was very young then, about 15. There was a Bengali, a shoe merchant in Bettiah, who was involved in the case but subsequently became an approver. That was what led to the arrest of those men. He was subsequently shot dead by the terrorists at his shop in Bettiah. An identification parade was held. This was an interesting experience for me.

It was in the mid-1930 that we were arrested in Banaras. Gandhi had launched the civil disobedience movement and the prisons were filled with satyagrahis.

I was very young and the jailor said I should be sent to the juvenile ward. Matrika Babu of course was an adult. He was lodged in jail with big names like Sri Prakasa and others. But because of our terrorist connexion, both of us were in bars and fetters. There was however no place for me in the juvenile ward, so the jailor sent me to the isolation ward, which happened to be made of the condemned cells. My cell was a very small, dismal place, blocked on all sides except for an evenole for a sentry to watch the prisoner.

I was kept locked up round the clock. They gave me two earthen pots for a toilet which were replaced once every twenty four hours. I did not feel much; the whole thing was much too unbelievable to make me unhappy.

One morning about ten o'clock, the door opened and I was told to be ready, which meant I had to collect my few belongings. They said that I was being transferred to Bihar. After about three or four weeks I met Matrika Babu at Banaras Cantonment station. Both of us were under heavy escort.

There we met Sahajanand Saraswati, the peasant leader. He brought us a large quantity of fruit and other eatables and everybody during our train journey was very sympathetic to us. Thereafter, we reached Motihari under heavy escort and in bars and fetters. At Motihari we were again sent to the condemned cell. We were kept in one ward but in different cells—Matrika Babu, two or three others including Baswan Singh, and I. It was in Motihari prison that I met Baswan Singh.

The cell was quite big and clean unlike that in Banaras, and we had larger earthen vessels for toilet purposes. But the jail superintendent was a very pig-headed person. Whenever we suggested anything, he would do just the opposite. For instance, every morning they used to give us *chapati* [flat, wheaten bread] and salt for breakfast.

Q: Was the jail superintendent a European or an Indian?

A: He was a Bengali, a civil surgeon, and a friend of my father to boot. But he did not give any indication that he knew us or had even heard of us. Anyway, I suggested that we be given germinated gram instead of *chapati* for breakfast. We had *chapati* for breakfast and *chapati* and rice for lunch and dinner. I told him that my stomach could not stand *chapati*.

He said he was a doctor and knew what suited a prisoner best. Chapati was more easily digestible than germinated gram. We were taken to court and eventually released because they did not recognise us in the identification parade.

I was placed alongside students of the local school, about 300 of them. We were still in fetters, but we were all made to stand on a platform, part of which was covered with red cloth so that our legs were not visible. The witnesses could not identify Matrika Babu or me, and on that ground we were released.

Q: How long were you kept in prison?

A: I think about three or four months.

Q: Don't you think it was sheer chance that you got off so easily? Had you been identified, they surely would have kept you in prison as they did others who were arrested in connexion with that case.

A: That is true. And we would have been released only after the formation of the Congress government in postindepedence India. That was my first imprisonment. Thereafter, joined Banaras Hindu University.

Q: In which division did you pass the matriculation examination?

A: Second division, high second division. My father wanted me to join a Calcutta college, for he thought Banaras was a village.

Q: Was the Banaras matriculation examination held in those days under the authority of Calcutta University?

A: No, it was under the jurisdiction of Allahabad University. As I was telling you, my father wanted me to join Scottish Church College in Calcutta, but I thought Calcutta was too big and would feel rather lonely. Of course, I did ultimately join Scottish Church College with great difficulty. I was admitted to that institution thanks to Dharnidhar Koirala, who was then in Darjeeling.

Q: Dharanidhar Koirala is a relation of yours?

A: Yes, he is my cousin. He wrote to Urquhart, who was then principal of the college. Urquhart was a very good man, and I soon became one of his favourite students. I was also a favourite student of a Bengali professor, a very learned and articulate man who taught English.

Q: Which year was that?

A: 1930, towards the end of 1930. When I told the

Bengali professor I was feeling very lonely, he asked me not to give in. But I left Scottish Church College and went back to Banaras. I passed the intermediate of arts examination in 1932 and again father sent me to Calcutta. I rejoined Scottish, but left it again and went back to Banaras Hindu University, from where I graduated in 1934.

Q: What subjects did you study in your graduation course?

A: Economics and political science. In Banaras, meanwhile, I came into contact with the people organising the defence of the accused in the Meerut conspiracy case. I had gone to Bombay in 1932 after the intermediate examination.

Q: Why did you go to Bombay?

A: My father was in search of a business opening, and it was in this connexion that I went to Bombay. Returning from Bombay, I came in contact with some of the important members of the Communist Party.

From Victoria Terminus station in Bombay, where I boarded the train for Allahabad, where they detrained, we travelled together. Three or four of them were there

At Victoria Terminus, I was a Gandhiite, but on the way I had long discussions with these people, who were on their way to Meerut. They created doubts in my mind. One of them was arrested later, and he created doubts in my mind about Gandhism. He opened a new horizon for me, and I was very much agitated when I returned to Banaras.

I was staying in a lodge and not in the university hostel. One Barua, Santosh or Sontu was his first name, was a communist, and perhaps had been instructed to contact me. He came to me ostensibly in search of accommodation and stayed with me. He started indoctrinating me and gave me books on Marxism.

The communists had a cell in the Engineering College of the university. The engineering students had built a radio set and they used to listen to broadcasts in English from Moscow. They took me along with them, but I did not understand a word of the broadcasts. Listening to them was some kind of ritual which they devotedly performed. I was awestruck and thrilled by this clandestine experience. Afterwards, I started a socialist study circle in the university. It was a clandestine affair.

Q: Who were your colleagues in the graduation class?

A: My colleagues included Devendra Prasad Singh, Mahabir Prasad Sinha, Rajeshwar Prasad, brother of Jayaprakash Narayan, L. K. Jha, he was my senior by one year but he was rusticated for one year for a misdemeanour or I don't know what. So he appeared in the examination with me. Rajeswar Rao was there.

Q: You mean the communist leader Rajewar Rao? A: Yes. Barua, Dev Kanta Borooah, also was there.

CHAPTER III

Prison Days

Q: Shall we now pick up the threads where we left them yesterday?

A: As I told you, I was on probation in the Communist Party, but my progress was very tardy. I was not happy in that company for two or three reasons. One of which was that my natural sympathies were with Trotsky, who I thought, was more of an internationalist than Stalin, who was a nationalist.

I was not interested in a Russian nationalist, I was interested in a Russian internationalist. So my sympathies were with Trotsky. The manner in which Stalin dealt with Trotsky was very distasteful to me.

Secondly, the Communists, doctrinaire attitude towards the liberation movement of India. My sympathies were with the freedom struggle because I grew up in that atmosphere, and my father was a member of the Congress Party. Although I had matriculated from my blind adoration of Gandhism, I still retained great admiration for Gandhi and his movement. Their, that is the Communists', vulgar criticism of Gandhi's national movement and of Gandhi as a person was anathema to me.

Thirdly, I came in contact with Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia when I was a student in Banaras in 1934. One of my class fellows was Jayaprakash Narayan's brother, Rajeshwar Prasad, and we occupied the same house.

Q: Did Devendra Prasad also stay in the same house?

A: No, he was in the hostel. Rajeshwar Prasad could not stay in the hostel as he was already married. So he rented a house where he lived with his family, and part of the same house was rented by me. That apart, we were class fellows. Once Jayaprakash came to see him and stayed a night.

Q: Which year was it?

A: It was in 1934, I think immediately before the great earthquake, a day or two before. I was then in the fourth year class; I met Jayaprakash at Rajeshwar Prasad's place. He was then thinking of starting a party of his own, he told me and Rajeshwar Prasad. He was very interested in me because I started asking questions. Rajeshwar Prasad did not do that, for he was not politically inclined. But I was deeply inclined politically and I started asking him questions.

I told him about my unhappiness with the Communist Party. I think he also had the same mental attitude. He was a member of the Communist Party [while in USA] but he was not happy with what was happening in Russia and its reaction on the Indian Communists. I felt I had found the man I could work under. In those days, Lohia used to come to Banaras Hindu University and stay in the hostel with another class fellow of mine.

Q: What was his name?

A: I forget his name. He topped the list of the successful candidates, he was from Kanpur. Lohia used to go from one hostel to another on a bicycle, sometimes riding double. He was a bohemian, very boisterous, used to sleep on the floor.

JP on the other hand was very reserved, rather forbiddingly so. I came into contact with them in 1934. After I graduated I went to Calcutta because my father had always insisted that I should go to Calcutta. I joined Calcutta University for both master of arts and law courses. I was there three years. Meantime, the Congress Socialist Party had been formed and I joined it.

Q: Where did you join it? In Calcutta?

A: No, I joined the Socialist Party in Patna. But I was not very active, I just became a member. Of course I maintained regular contact with JP, Lohia and others. And Acharya Narendra Deva. In 1937 I- took my law degree, I did not do my MA. I completed my MA course, but I thought I should do law first. Meanwhile, I had started working for the Congress Socialist Party. I used to go to Patna, Banaras and do odd jobs for party members. After I took my law degree, my father wanted me to enrol as a lawyer. You have asked whether I ever thought of taking up a job. As regards that, there were two kinds of pressures on me from the family, My brother Matrika Prasad Koirala was a *subba* [in Nepal.] Not a very high post, but still it was government service. He thought I should also join government.

Q: Who suggested this? Your father or MP Koirala?

A: MP Koirala. My father was dead opposed to my joining Nepalese government service. He thought I could be independent by being a lawyer. Or I could join politics if I wanted to and the family would maintain me.

In any case, some reforms were being introduced in Nepal under Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher. A new banking system was being introduced. Since I had studied commerce up to the MA standard, they thought that I was fit for a banking job and assigned me for training with the Imperial Bank of India—in those days it performed the functions of the Reserve Bank—in Bombay.

That offer was with me. Also, a new legal system was being introduced in Nepal. Since I was a lawyer, they thought that I could be inducted into the legal system with a good job. MP Koirala sent telegrams to me in Banaras asking me to come to Nepal. I came here, but found the atmosphere was not congenial and I felt that service under the Ranas was dishonourable. I decided not to accept the offer and left. But I was here for about three months in 1937.

Q: In Nepal?

A: Yes, in Kathmandu. But I decided not to join government service. Matrika Babu was angry with me. He thought I was a waster. He complained that I was spurning a fortune like that while he had to work hard to earn for the family.

Q: Incidentally, where did you stay when you were studying law in Calcutta?

A: I stayed at different places in Calcutta. In those days, various types of basoas [lodgings] were available where

students used to stay, *basoas* were not regular hostels but messes managed by students. I stayed at a number of them, one in Beadon Street, another in Mirzapore Street and yet another in the Sealdah area, near Ripon College.

I had a very happy time in Calcutta with the Bengalis there. I learnt Bengali with them, their literature, and also mixed with their families. I was very friendly with a Burman family, the family of SK Burman, a reputed ayurvedic medicine maker.

After that, I decided to go to Darjeeling. Dharanidhar Sharma, my cousin, headmaster of the government school in Darjeeling, wanted me to come there, stay with him and start practising law in the district. I went to Darjeeling, stayed for a year and worked under one Mr Pradhan, whom I later appointed Chief Justice of Nepal when I became Home Minister in the first coalition government after the 1950-51 revolution. I had him brought from Darjeeling to head the Supreme Court which was then being estalished.

I was in Darjeeling for a year in 1938. When war broke out in 1939, I thought I would go to Patna and involve myself in the activities of the Congress Socialist Party. That was the most opportune time to do so.

From then onwards, I became very active in the socialist movement in Bihar. Ultimately, I became assistant secretary of the Bihar Socialist Party and was in charge of the Congress Socialist Party's student movement in India.

Q: Where did you stay in Patna?

A: At Cosy Nook on Bank Road. Devendra Prasad Singh had rented that house and was regularly parctising law at Patna High Court. There was an understanding between him and me. He said he would look after my family and that I should not bother myself about family problems but devote myself wholeheartedly to politics.

This understanding made me a free man and I became very active in the socialist movement. In the war years— 1939 to 1941—I was arrested many times, but not for long.

I worked among peasants for the Socialist Party's peasant organisation, among students and also among industrial labour. Since I was particularly interested in labour problems, the party sent me to work among the workers of a jute mill in Darbhanga. But I was arrested as the British government apprehended I had gone there to foment trouble.

Q: What was your father doing at that time?

A: We returned to Nepal in 1929-30 as the Prime Minister who had taken action against us was dead. His brother Bhim Shumsher became Prime Minister and asked us to return to Nepal. We came back to Nepal and Father bought some land. Again, we returned to Biratnagar and Father resumed his social work.

When Gandhi gave his call for the Quit India movement, Father was organising from inside Nepal on two fronts, one of them a base for political refugees from India who went to Nepal. Perhaps the British government thought he would pose a threat if he were left to operate freely, and so it pressed the Nepalese government to arrest him. I was arrested in 1942 at Patna, and my father was also arrested a few months later in Biratnagar by the Nepalese government. He was taken to Kathmandu and lodged in a *dharmashala* under heavy guard. He was later transferred to a prison in 1945. He died in prison a day before I was released.

Q: In which prison were you lodged?

A: Immediately after my arrest, I was sent to Bankipore jail, where Rajendra Prasad was also detained, and kept there for six months. Then I was sent to Hazaribagh jail, where many big leaders were detained. There were two categories of prisoners—A class or special class and C class or camp jail for ordinary political prisoners. I was put in the special class in Hazaribagh jail.

Q: Was Jayaprakash in Hazaribagh jail at that time?

A: He had just escaped. He escaped when I was in Bankipore jail. I was taken to Hazaribagh jail about a month after his escape. Many of the important men of Bihar had been lodged in Hazaribagh jail, for instance Sri Krishna Sinha, Anugrah Narayan Sinha and Phulan Prasad Verma. Also Jagjivan Ram, who was not a big name at that time.

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Q: Was Devendra Prasad Singh also there.

A: Yes, Devendra was also with me. As a matter of fact, we were arrested the same day.

I was released in 1945. In prison I had developed some trouble in the throat. There was pain and I used to bleed. The prison doctor thought I had suppurated tonsilitis and wanted my tonsils removed. So I was transferred to Ranchi hospital under military escort. I was operated upon and my tonsils were removed. Still, my condition did not improve. After my release in 1945 I consulted my doctors in Patna, but they also did not diagnose my ailment properly.

In the meantime, the leaders were being released. Jawaharlal Nehru was released, and so was Rajendra Prasad. The conference of the All India Congress Committee was held in Bombay in 1946. Rajendra Babu asked me to come to Bombay for a medical checkup because my throat continued to pain and there was also a swelling on the neck.

I went to Bombay and stayed with him. He called in some eminent doctors to examine me and also wrote to the director of the Tata Cancer Hospital, Duggan was its director at that time. The hospital doctors diagnosed my throat affliction as cancer. Rajendra Prasad was very, very unhappy at this.

At that time, I did not know that cancer was such a serious matter. I was in Bombay for six months undergoing treatment. It was about that time, 1946, that I thought of organising a mass democratic movement in Nepal. With this end in view, I contacted a large number of Nepalese who had been arrested in connexion with the 1942 movement in India. Their response was very encouraging.

Q: Could you name some of the persons you contacted?

A: You see, I issued a statement regarding the proposed movement which, however, was not published in the Indian press. But *Searchlight*, an English language daily appearing from Patna, published it in the form of a letter in its correspondence column. That was in October 1946, and a large number of people read it. Many of them wrote to me as I had mentioned my address in the letter. Among the important persons who reponded to my call was Surya Prasad Upadhyay.

Q: Was he also in India?

A: He was arrested in connexion with the 1942 movement and detained in Lucknow prison. That is how he came to know important political personalities, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai an others, from Uttar Pradesh [then the United Provinces] just as I knew important men from Bihar. Another important Nepalese who responded to the letter in *Searchlight* was Dilli Raman Regmi. He did not write to me as he was undergoing medical treatment in Banaras. He was suffering from intestinal tuberculosis. I went to see him in Banaras. There I got in touch with a good number of Nepalese, such as Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Q: What was Krishna Prasad Bhattari doing in Banaras?

A: He was doing his MA in political science at Banaras Hindu Uniiversity. I contacted Balchand Sharma, who had just taken his MA degree in English literature from BHU and was seeking a job as manager of an aluminium factory. Also Gopal Prasad Bhattarai, a brother of Krishna Prasad. Gopal Prasad suffered imprisonment in connexion with the 1942 movement. He was a journalist by profession—he had obtained a diploma in journalism—and he became the editor of *Gorkhapatra* [the official Nepalese language daily published from Kathmandu] later on. I went to Calcutta also. There I contacted Mahabir Shumsher.

Q: Was that in 1946 or 1947?

A: 1946. I also contacted Subarna Shumsher, Rudra Prasad Giri and some people from Darjeeling.

Q: Where was Ganesh Man Singh at that time?

A: I met Ganesh Man Singh. He was very elusive, having escaped from prison.

Q: Was he in prison in India or Nepal?

A In Nepal. He was involved in a very big conspiracy and treason case along with Tanka Prasad Acharya and others. Two of Ganesh Man's colleagues were shot by the police, and two were hanged. Tanka Prasad was sentenced to imprisonment for life. He was not hanged because he was a Brahman.

Q: When did that happen?

A: Sometime in 1940 or 1941.

Q: That means some sort of a political movement had already started in Nepal?

A: Yes. The socialist journal Janata (in Hindi) in India gave publicity to that. It used to be published from Patna. That was how I came into contact with them. But I was not in favour of clandestine terrorist organisations in league with the King. It would be some kind of a Palace coup— I was in favour of mass action.

Q: Would you say that Tanka Prasad's and Ganesh Man Singh's organisation was terrorist?

A: I do not think they would agree, but they wanted to stage some kind of palace coup with the help of the King. This was more or less sponsored by the Palace. In 1939, I came to Kathmandu once and Chura Prasad—a student in Banaras who was a member of that group and was also arrested—had a long discussion with me about its objective. But I opposed this because I thought that it would boil down to some kind of coup which on and off had happened in Nepalese politics.

But that would not usher in a new political system in Nepal, it would only amount to a transfer of power from the Ranas to the Palace. I did not subscribe to that idea, and they left me out. I think for about two years, 1940 to 1943, Ganesh Man Singh was in prison. He then escaped.

The war was on and he thought he might be arrested even in India and handed over to the Nepal government. So he was living in exile, commuting between Calcutta and Banaras. In 1946, I made desperate efforts to contact him. There was a very interesting episode connected with this. The man who acted as go between to put us in touch with each other was in a dilemma. Who should go to meet whom?

Should BP Koirala go to meet Ganesh Man Singh or Ganesh Man Singh come to meet Koirala. It was a question of protocol of sorts. I said I would go to meet Ganesh Man Singh wherever he lived. But the go between thought that it would not be proper for me to do so.

So he arranged a meeting at a ramshackle hotel on Chitpore Road, Calcutta. The appointed time was four or 4.30 in the afternoon because he had arranged some kind of tea meet. His arrangement was that both Ganesh Man and I should enter the hotel together, but I was a bit impatient and reached the place ten minutes earlier.

The host was somewhat upset because it disturbed protocol. I would have to wait for Ganesh Man Singh. Ganesh Man thought he had suffered a lot and therefore his status was higher than mine. When he came and discussed matters with me, he found that his ideas about me were entirely wrong.

Then he said that he would accept any organisation that I might set up and extend all support to me. Indeed, he was the best catch so far as I was concerned.

Q: What were Subarna Shumsher and Mahabir Shumsher doing in Calcutta? And how long had they been in Calcutta?

A: In the war period there was a palace coup. Yuddha Shumsher was then the Prime Minister. You know, Mahabir Shumsher and Subarna Shumsher were known as C class Ranas. They were not legitimate Ranas. They were the offspring of marriages into families which were not Rajputs. According to the ruling Ranas, they were not legitimate claimants to the office of Prime Minister.

Mahabir Shumsher and Subarna Shumsher were the grandsons of Bhim Shumsher. So when Bhim Shumsher became Prime Minister they were put on the roll of succession. Since they were older than some powerful legitimate Ranas, A class Ranas, there was a palace coup. Once all these C class Ranas, were called to the Prime Minister's palace, taken into custody and dispatched to different places.

Q: When did it take place?

A: I do not remember the exact year, but I think it happened in the war period, in 1939 or 1940. Mahabir's father.....

Q: What was the name of Subarna Shumsher's father?

A: Subarna Shumsher's father's name was Hiranya Shumsher. Mahabir Shumsher's father was already dead. They were cousins. That is why they were living in exile.

Q: They had been exiled by the authorities?

A: Well, they had been sent into exile in different parts of Nepal. Some of them were sent to Birganj, Palpa and other places and bada hakims [governors.] The Commanderin-Chief was also removed and sent to Palpa.

Q: Was Subarna Shumsher bada hakim of Birganj for some time? And what was Mahabir Shumsher?

A: Mahabir Shumsher was bada hakim of Ilam for some time.

Q: They were dispersed from the capital?

A: Yes. And they were living in Calcutta, having resigned their office of *bada hakim*. They had purchased huge landed properties in the war such as Kanak Building, Humayun Court.... Mahabir Shumsher contacted me and said that he would finance whatever money we needed for our organisation. He also said that he and his cousin Subarna Shumsher would contribute an equal amount of money each for that purpose. And the first instalment was Rs 25,000, which was a big amount of money at that time.

Q: Were you able to set up an organisation? Or did Mahabir Shumsher and Subarna Shumsher establish one?

A: No, they did not. We had formed two preparatory committees, one in Banaras and another in Calcutta.

Q: Where did you have your offices in Banaras and Calcutta?

A: In Calcutta, we had our office in a big building near Camac Street. You see, the building was owned by a certain Marwari gentleman who wanted protection from the Gurkhas in the troubled situation that obtained in Calcutta as a result of the pre-partition Hindu-Muslim conflict. The building had been given to a defence committee for Gurkhas which recruited Gurkhas to provide security to big offices in Calcutta. They had this building, an office there with three or four telephones and they were also paid. They said that they would be able to organise the party from Calcutta.

Q: Who said that?

A: There was one DN Pradhan, who later became secretary to MP Koirala in his Prime Ministership and who had married a Bengali doctor. He was in charge of the Calcutta office. And Mahabir Shumsher's brother-in-law, [wife's brother] was also a member of that committee.

Q: What was his name?

A: CB Singh.

Q: Who looked after your Banaras committee?

A: Gopal Bhattarai was entrusted with the responsibility of managing it. There was an elderly person, a colleague of my father, who was more or less deaf and blind through old age but we thought that he should be chairman of the committee. His name was Devi Prasad Subkota, and he died some time later. But the main figure was Gopal Bhattarai.

Q: We must now get back to your talks with Ganseh Man Singh.

A: When Ganesh Man said that he would cooperate with us wholeheartedly, we wanted to hold a conference. Of the two preparatory committees, the Calcutta people said that they would organise the conference, and they had some money also. We decided in favour of Calcutta hosting the conference in January 1947.

The conference was held at Khalsa College in Bhowanipore. Lohia wanted to attend the conference, but he could not make it. He reached Calcutta a day after our conference was over. Tanka Prasad was in prison for the last so many years. By way of a sympathetic gesture, the conference made him president and I became acting president.

Q: What was the name of your organisation?

A: Nepali National Congress. Balchand Sharma was elect ed general secretary. That was how it started towards the end of January 1947. In March, there was a big labour movement in Biratnagar.

Q: Did Subarna Shumsher and Mahabir Shumsher join your organisation?

A: Clandestinely, yes, but not openly. They financed us all right, and the first instalment of Rs 25,000 was given to us. It was with their help that we could organise, and they promised more help. And I had certain responsibilities regarding the Socialist Party. As I told you, I was in charge of the party's student wing and I had to discharge my responsibility.

In this*connection, I had to go to Patna and a few other places. Also, I had to visit Lahore as there had been a rift in the student movement. I was sent there to mend matters. In the meantime, I received a telegram from Banaras saying that there was a labour movement in Biratnagar and I must go to that place.

Q: A digression. How was your throat ailment at that time?

A: The growth in the throat had dissolved but I lost my normal voice. It became shrill. I had some trouble or other, but it was not very serious.

Q: Did you have deep X-ray treatment?

A: Yes, I had it in Bombay. I was given a total of 30 exposers. I went to Biratnagar. The Biratnagar labour movement was the first mass movement in the country. Although it was purely a trade union movement, the people in general participated in it.

Q: What was it all about? Was Biratnagar an industrial centre?

A: Yes. And it continues to be the country's most important industrial centre. At that time it had two jute mills, a cotton mill, a sugar factory, a chemical plant and the like. Q: Who owned those enterprises?

A: A majority of the jute mill shares were owned by the Chamarias of Calcutta. The chemical plant was perhaps owned by some Nepalese. I do not know who owned the other outfits.

Q: Did the Ranas have any share in those organisations?

A: Yes, the Ranas had shares in all the undertaknigs. But the commanding shares belonged to the Marwaris, the Chamarias, in those days. I do not know what is the position today. The jute mill workers went on strike. This was entirely a new thing in Nepal.

Q: Why did they strike? What was the total number of workers in the jute mill?

A: A few thousand. I don't remember their exact number. The remarkable point is that the demands were essentially economic, for instance, reasonable service conditions, fair wages, health care, supply of water in their residential quarters. Those who provided leadership to the movement included two of my brothers, Girija Prasad, Tarini Prasad, Monmohan Adhikari, a Communist activist, Yubraj Adhikari and Gehendra Raj. All of them were employees of the jute mill — white collar employees.

Q: Were Girija Prasad and Tarini Prasad also employees

of the jute mill?

A: Yes. They were white collar employees, but they participated in the strike. I also participated on behalf of the newly formed party — Nepali National Congress. So did Balchand Sharma, Gopal Prasad Bhattarai and many others. I was arrested along with a large number of workers. The situation was so serious that the government did not take any action till army reinforcements from Kathmandu reached Biratnagar.

Q: Were Tarini Prasad and Girija Prasad arrested?

A: Yes, they were arrested. So also Monmohan. At that time MP Koirala, my elder brother, was in Biratnagar.

Q: Was MP Koirala in government service at that time?

A: Yes, he was in government service. He was attached to the forest ranger, one Mr Smith. He was a famous forest ranger lately retired from the Indian forest service. But when that movement started, MP Koirala felt called upon to join it. Particularly when Ganesh Man Singh and others urged him to take the leadership after all of us were arrested. My mother was arrested, my sisters were arrested why, except my wife, everyone in the family was arrested. So MP Koirala became the party president in my place and led the movement. We were brought to Kathmandu under arrest.

It took us about three weeks to reach Kathmandu. We were made to walk all the way from Biratnagar. But this exercise, in which we traversed hilly areas, served as good propaganda for our party. At every point on the way hundreds of people gathered and eagerly inquired what we stood for, what was the Nepali National Congress — our party was then known as the Nepali National Congress.

Now a mass movement started under the leadership of MP Koirala. From a labour movement they worked up a mass political movement for civil rights, civil liberties, responsible government. We started formulating political demands. After six months I developed throat trouble.

Q: In Kathmandu prison?

A: Yes, but we were not lodged in a regular prison, we were detained in a bungalow where we were very well looked after.

Q: Who was the Prime Minister at that time, Mohan Shumsher?

A: No, Padma Shumsher.

Q: Was MP Koirala taken into custody?

A: No. He was conducting the movement from India, that is from the border town of Jogbani in Bihar, and Banaras, where we had our headquarters. I was released after six months because Mahatma Gandhi interceded on my behalf. He wrote a letter to Padma Shumsher for my release.

Q: Why did Gandhi intercede?

A: Because he thought my life was in danger.

Q: Was your life in danger?

A: Because of throat trouble. I had a history of cancer and my colleagues apprehended that it might be a recrudescence of the old trouble. So they went to Gandhi and he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Padma Shumsher requesting him to release me. But Padma Shumsher told me later that he had released me even before he received Gandhi's letter.

Padma Shumsher told me, "Don't think I released you because Gandhi interceded on your behalf. I released you when the doctor told me your life was in danger. Although I read in the newspapers that Gandhi had sent me a letter, I had not received it when I released you."

Q: What about Jayaprakash? Did he do anything at that time?

A: Jayaprakash of course issued a statement urging my release. When we founded the party, there were a large number of greetings from many Indian leaders, Jayaprakash, Rammanohar Lohia, Vijayalakshmi Pandit — she was then Education Minister in the Uttar Pradesh Government — and many others.

Q: What about Jawaharlal Nehru

A: Nehru? No, he did not send a message. He scrupulously kept himself out of it. He was then vice-president of the interim government. When I was brought to Kathmandu under arrest, Rajendra Prasad sent me an autographed copy of his book *India Divided*. That was his gesture. However, their sympathies were unmistakably expressed, although Jawaharlal Nehru did not give any public expression to them. But he was constantly in touch with developments. I was released, others were also gradually released. But those who had been arrested with me, for instance Girija Prasad, Tarini Prasad, were not released for over three years asd a half.

In the meantime, Prime Minister Padma Shumsher resigned. Padma Shumsher, who had some democratic leanings, wanted to introduce some changes and he framed a new constitution. It was some kind of panchayat constitution which was however not acceptable to us. In any case, he had given some freedom and the constitution also provided an element of electoral process. But Mohan Shumsher's group was very powerful and pressurised him to resign. He resigned and Mohan Shumsher became Prime Minister. Mohan Shumsher dismantled everything and virtually imposed a reign of terror. Our people were rearrested and subjected to torture in prison. During Mohan Shumsher's reign I, alongwith Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Kedar Man Byathit, came incognito to Kathmandu to organise our party. After about a month I was arrested.

Q: When did this happen?

A: In December 1948. After my arrest, I was kept in unimaginably horrible conditions. It was winter and I did not have proper clothes, not even a pair of shoes. The reason for this was that when I saw that the police had surrounded the house where I was staying I did not have time either to put on my jacket or to wear my shoes and I ran for safety.

They arrested me and kept me in that condition and forced me to sleep — mind you, it was winter — on the bare floor of a barrack in the Singha Durbar compound for three days and three nights. For food, they gave me only *chura* [flattened rice], some pieces of fried potato and one small piece of radish both in the morning and in the evening. I shivered all the time because of cold and I fainted once. I thought I would die because I could neither keep standing nor sit as the bare, stony floor was much too cold. My mind did not work. Sometimes, I used to get up, sit down again and crouch just to keep myself from losing my reason. I was handcuffed, put in fetters with a chain round my waist and a military guard kept a 24-hour watch. On the third day, at night I think, I passed out. When I came to 1 found that I was covered with an army greatcoat, there was a fire by my side and somebody was shouting that "Maharaja Mohan Shumsher has graciously sent a carpet for a prisoner. Where is he?"

I saw that the camp commander was leading the man who was shouting towards me. I rolled myself in the carpet and placed a brick under my head for a pillow. That was how I could manage to get some sleep. Then Mohan Shumsher sent word to ascertain if I wanted I could get cooked food. I said that being a Brahman I must bathe. This meant that they must remove my fetters, otherwise I could not bathe as this would require me to take off my trousers.

A blacksmith came every morning to remove the fetters, allow me to bathe and again put me in fetters. They also assigned a cook to prepare hot meals for me. After ten days, they put me on trial. Meanwhile, Mohan Shumsher had again sent word that if I wanted to bask in the sunshine for two hours every day I could do so. Thereafter, I was taken daily to a mound in the Singh Durbar compound to sun myself for two hours. The entire palace used to be alerted by the jingle of my fetters and chain, and its inmates peeped at me through its windows.

Q: Which year was that?

A: It was January 1949. One morning they took me to a makeshift court — a room had been cleared, a sofa and chairs put in and a carpet had been spread. About ten or 15 judges were there in the special tribunal.. The Chief Justice was Hari Shumsher, father-in-law of King Mahendra. There were two assistants, one of them connected with legal matters and the other a *guruji*. Some other judges were also there, one of them being Ganesh Man Singh's grandfather. The police chief was also present but I don't know in which capacity.

Q: Was Ganesh Man Singh arrested with you?

A: No, Ganesh Man Singh was then in Banaras.

Q: Who else were arrested with you?

A: Nobody. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had already left for

India. Byathit would have been arrested but he managed to escape. I alone was arrested on that day.

The trial lasted above two weeks. They wanted to find out all about my contacts in Kathmandu, the places where I had stayed, eluding arrest. I told them that I had made a promise before God not to divulge this and I wouldn't break it before man. Then they threatened to whip me. In fact a triangle was fixed to some bamboo poles and a whip was also procured. This went on for seven days, but I told them that I alone was responsible for what I had done and I would not therefore tell them anything.

The reason the authorities did not give me any clothing at first was that, they told me, I should get that from the people with whom I had stayed. That would enable the authorities to locate my contacts. That was why they did not give me any clothes or bedclothes for three days. Only when they got tired of waiting had they decided to give me clothing.

Q: Did they subject you to any physical torture?

A: No, they did not do that. I think after seven days an army officer came at midnight and asked me to pack up. The carpet was rolled up, put in a waiting truck, and I was asked to board it. Then, with a posse of armed guards, I was taken to the place of detention which was close to Hari Shumsher's palace. Hari Shumsher came out with his overcoat and stood in front of me on a piece of frost covered ground.

The judgement was delivered in a very informal manner. There was Hari Shumsher in his bedroom slippers and a cap. He said that the Maharaja — Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher — was pleased to send me to prison. I asked him how long I would be kept in prison. He said: "You will be in prison as long as your conduct and the conduct of your family members does not improve."

This was about two o'clock in the morning. There were two or three small, very small, rooms near the jail gate and they were meant for incorrigibly ill, mentally or physically, persons who could not be kept in the general wards.

One of these rooms was cleared for me. Those rooms were so unhygienic that doctors felt nobody could survive in

it and so they had been used to store firewood. My room had been repaired and reinforced with cement roof, which was very low and dripping wet. It was about eight feet by seven and had a small hole in the centre which was supposed to serve as a latrine.

There were three bricks in a corner which was to be my kitchen. There was a small cot of wet timber on which they spread the carpet. The room was so dark that I felt it was a dungeon. It had a small skylight with a grill, but this was permanently closed.

I was kept there six months, during which I did not see a human face. I lost count of the days. In the beginning, I used to scratch a mark on the wall daily to keep count of the days I had spent, but after some time I gave this up because I got confused. I was put in fetters, and one of my hands was handcuffed and my waist was tied to a grill with a long chain.

The jailor came on the first morning. He said that I would be given three *paus* (about one and a half pounds) of rice, not properly husked, one paisa, three red chillies, some salt and a bundle of firewood.

Q: They did not give you vegetables or any other foodstuff?

A: No, nothing of the kind. The jailor said — he was with me for about an hour before he locked me up and went away for six months — that if I wanted I could sell the rice and get other things in exchange. Because I could not possibly eat three *paus* of rice, I could sell half of it and buy vegetables with the money thus obtained.

I asked him how I would cook my food as I did not have utensils. He said I should get them from my home as there was no provision for them. I told him that my home was not in Kathmandu. In that case, he advised, I should ask my friends to supply them. When I told him that I did not have any friends either, he said he would give me some pots.

My place of detention was in front of the women's prison. The *chowkidarni*, [female guard] of the prison brought an aluminium *lota*, [a small vessel] which she used to take to the latrine and which was partly broken and very dirty. She said I should clean it and use it to cook rice. I took the *lota* and cleaned it, thinking that fire would destroy any infectious germs it contained. There was a small opening in the wall through which they used to push my ration as well as water every morning, and I used to prepare a kind of gruel. I lived like that six months.

Q: Did they arrange for your bath and all that?

A: No, they did not. What is more, there was no change of clothes for me. Whatever clothes I had became dirty and tattered.

Q: It is amazing that you did not go out of your mind?

A: I told you I was afraid all the time of losing my reason. It was at this point that I went on hunger strike. I thought that it was better to die than live like that.

Q: You went on hunger strike after six months?

A: Yes, after six months. Meanwhile, I noticed one of the guards singing a very amorous song and I called him. He stood outside before the closed door. I flattered him by telling him he had a very beautiful voice. The guard was a Lama and he felt pleased at my remarks. I asked him what he was doing. He said he was washing a handkerchief made by his wife. I said she must have embroidered some flowers on the handkerchief. He said yes.

I asked him why he was in the army and what his pay was. He said his pay was Rs 30 a month. I asked him why he did not go to Lahore to enlist in the Indian Army. He said that he had run away once, but was arrested at Bhimpedi and brought back. He had no help in India and did not know anybody here. Otherwise he would have liked to serve in the Indian Army. I told him that I could help him provided I could contact my people outside. He asked me whom I wanted to contact. I wanted to contact Master Purna Bahadur, a teacher who is now a very important pro-Chinese Communist.

Q: Is he now in the pro-Chinese Communist Party?

A: I do not know if he belongs to any of the Communist Parties, but he is an outspoken communist intellectual. I told the guard that if he could contact him and fetch from him some paper and a pencil, perhaps I could help him. I gave him Purna Bahadur's address.

You see, I had a faint recollection of the man. I had

stayed with him for a night in my underground days here. I had some idea how to reach him and I explained that to the guard. But every time he went there he forgot his name, sometimes he would say some Bahadur or other but never Purna Bahadur. Then I gave him a cue. We have a Nepali term for a woman's unmentionable anatomy whose first syllable is Pu, and I told him ti remember this initial. He remembered it and got me an exercise book and pencil and had them pushed through the opening in the wall. Before he could locate Purna Bahadur he had given me a wrapper of a cake of soap and a pencil stub. I wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on that wrapper.

Q: You said that he gave you an exercise book and pencil?

A: That was given three or four days later.

Q: Before he gave you that he gave you the wrapper and small pencil

A: That's right. Incidentally, that wrapper had blown into our compound from a neighbour's house. I asked him to hand over the latter [written to Nehru] to Purna Bahadur.

Q: Did the letter reach Nehru?

A: Yes, it did. I think Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Balchand Sharma took the letter to Nehru.

Q: I suppose that wrapper must be in the archives of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi.

A: I do not know. I have no idea.

Q: Who took the letter to India

A: One of our comrades who had it sewn inside the sole of his shoes. And he handed it over either to Devendra or Sushila. But the letter was taken to Nehru by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Balchand Sharma. They told me that Nehru was visibly moved and became tearful on reading it. He did not actually weep, but his eyes grew moist and he did not speak for some time.

Q: Were you on hunger strike at that point?

A: No, not yet. Once I got hold of the pencil and paper, I maintained constant communication with him.

Q: Where is this Lama now? Is he still alive?

A: When I became Home Minister I searched for him. Q: Couldn't you locate him?

A: I did see him once. You see, while I was driving back

from office to my residence one day, I saw him. I asked my driver to stop the car and my bodyguard asked the Lama to stop. The Lama feared that he was being arrested and ran away. My bodyguard also ran after him in Thamel. There was a big dump of timber and he hid behind that. He was dragged out of his hiding place.

Meanwhile. I had reached my residence, and he was brought there. He looked shaky. I asked him why he ran away. First of all, he said he did not know me. He had served in the army but he did not do anything wrong. When I reminded him of that incident, he said he was no longer in the army and was looking after his land.

When I inquired whether he wanted help, he said he was happy with his family and did not want any help. I told him to come the following day and that I would go to his house, but he did not turn up. He was lost to me for ever.

Q: It seems he was a great soul - you offered him help but he quietly declined to accept it. Let us get back to the point. You started writing copiously?

A: My problem was where to hide the paper and pencil.

Q: Did they search your room every day?

A: Not every day, but from time to time they used to come and search my room after they knew I was in communication with people outside. I hit upon an idea - I sent for the jailor. When the jailor came I told him that I wanted a big *chula* [oven] because I had saved some money and I wanted to prepare my food properly. He opened the door and asked some prisoners to make a large brick *chula* plastered with mud. I took out three bricks from the *chula* and made a hollow in it where I used to hide the paper and pencil. I also used to get money and books from Purna Bahadur and hide them in the hollow. When they came to know that I had been sending messages outside they started searching the place every day.

Q: Did they find out that you had kept things in hiding?

A: No, they did not find out that, but they found out that messages had been sent. Because things had started moving and Indian newspapers were publishing accounts of the treatment I was getting in prison. Meantime, I informed them I would be going on hunger strike from a particular date. When I received information that the message had been communicated to India I went on hunger strike.

Q: That was in 1949?

A: Yes, and the month was April or May. It was on *Akshay Tritia* day, because on that day I got into contact with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's eldest brother, who was also detained in prison near where I had been kept.

Q: What was his name?

A: Batuk Prasad Bhattarai. He died of cancer. He was a Karmakand Brahman and knew all about auspicious days when new venture should be launched. He said Akshay Tritia was auspicious and whatever I might undertake on that day would be successful. So I decided to go on hunger strike on that day. For eight days, they brought my rations daily, but these were left untouched.

On the eight day—I was taking water with salt--I passed blood in my stool and had motions for anything between 18 and 20 times with blood and mucus. The jail officials were watching from outside and summoned a doctor.

There was no change in my condition and the doctor insisted I should take some food, failing which at least medicine. I said I would accept neither. In that case, he said, there was no sense in sending for a doctor. I told him that I did not ask for a doctor.

The next day, Girija and Tarini---they were under detention since Padma Shumsher's time--were kept in very good conditions, were brought in to persuade me to give up my hunger strike. But they hinted that I should continue. They also gave me to understand that there was tremendous pressure on the Nepalese government from Nehru and others, and the government was likely to yield.

Every day they were brought to my cell ostensibly to persuade me to give up the strike but through hints and suggestions they did the contrary. They however joined issue with the authorities because I was kept in such horrible conditions. They brought a change of clothes for me and washed me. I had a clean set of clothes after six months. My physical condition however started deteriorating and the authorities stopped bringing Girija and Tarini. The government kept quiet as if nothing was happening. My condition became critical and Sushila contacted Jaya-Prakash Narayan. He had met with an accident and was in hospital in Patna. From his hospital bed, he telephoned Nehru to do something to save me.

Nehru sent a telegram to Mohan Shumsher. He also informed Sushila that she should go to Kathmandu and meet me. But there was a warrant of arrest against Prakash [Koirala's son], who was about 2 years old. So Sushila said she could not come to Kathmandu to meet me for fear of arrest.

Nehru then said safe conduct should be provided to Sushila. He also asked the Bihar government to provide her with a government plane to fly her to Kathmandu. The Nepalese government said the Kathmandu airstrip was not serviceable - it was kachcha [unmetalled] - and therefore it was not advisable for her to travel by air. So she came to Kathmandu by land route.

She arrived on the 24th day of my hunger strike, a Tuesday, and the Prime Minister thought that Tuesday was not an auspicions day, and generally we don't meet people on Tuesday.

Q: Is this because of a religious taboo?

A: No, there is a social custom that if you arrive, say, from Calcutta you generally avoid meeting people on Tuesday. The Prime Minister said it was not an auspicious day, so she should meet me the next. In the meantime, they constructed a one-room house with bath and other amenities within 48 hours for me in the jail compound. I was transferred there before Sushila came to see me. I insisted I must meet Sushila as soon as she arrived. She was made to wait till the stars appeared, when the bad effect of the day was not supposed to continue to exist and she was then brought in by a team of doctors. I was losing consciousness and the doctors said...

Q: Were you still in fetters?

A: No, they had been removed the same day. When Sushila came I had regained consciousness and found they were giving me saline dirps through the rectum. The doctor came, Dr Siddhimani, and a doctor from Biratnagar, Bharat Vaidya, a very good man. They told me that I should not talk to my people, this would be dangerous so as my heart was very feeble and any excitement might prove fatal.

They were not happy at the prospect of my meeting Sushila, my mother and Koshu [Keshav Prasad, a brother of Koirala] in that condition. Still, I insisted on meeting them. They did not come near me but stood at a distance. I talked to them for sometime, after which they left—they were staying at a *dharamshala* [pilgrim's free resthouse run by charitable organisations] in Tripureswar.

The same day, I was taken to the place where Girija, Tarini, Monmohan and others were detained, and a doctor kept constant watch. And Sushila, Amma [mother] and others came to that place. The government officers told my mother that I was thenceforth under her care. My mother said, "No, as long as he is not released he will be under the care of the government. The government must remain responsible for him." The doctors insisted that Sushila and others should stay with me, but they refused to do so saying "Not in prison." This continued another five days.

Q: You mean this drama?

A: Yes..

Q: That was calculated to bring pressure to bear upon you as well as your mother and Sushilaji.

A: Yes, in a way. But it did not affect my mother. She was very strong. On the seventh day of their arrival, Sushila, Mother and Bunu [Vijaylakshmi, Koirala's sister] saw Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher. Vijay Shumsher escorted them to a place in the palace where the Prime Minister came after performing his *puja* [worship]. He was in *puja* dress.

Q: Vijay Shumsher was the Prime Minister's eldest son who later became Nepal's Ambassador to India?

A: No, he was the Prime Minister's second son. He died of electrocution while serving as Nepal's Ambassador in India some time later. Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher told my mother that her son was critically ill and might die any moment. My mother told him that she knew it because she had seen my condition. In Kathmandu, she said, "I had a bitter experience. I laid to rest my husband. It was in Kathmandu that I consigned the body of my husband to fire." Q: Your father was taken from prison to the funeral pyre in Kathmandu, isn't that so?

A: Yes, and mother was present there. She told the Prime Minister, "I consigned my husband's body to fire and I have come to put my son's body to fire." Then the Prime Minister said, "How can the government yield to the pressure of an obstinate young man? The government has its prestige to preserve." My mother replied, "What is your prestige compared with my son's prestige?" Then the Prime Minister turned to Vijay Shumsher—he was visibly irritated—and said, "I knew I would receive such replies. It is you who insisted that I meet them."

After that the Prime Minister sent his secretary, Narendra Mani Dikshit, to the place where my people were staying *at dharmshala*. Dikshit happened to be related to my mother. He came there as hurriedly as he could My mother told him, "You have remembered me after about 20 years. I don't recognize you as my relation, I regard you as an emissary of Mohan Shumsher. Tell me what you have come here for, what do you want?"

He appealed to her not to be so harsh, saying that Mohan Shumsher was a kindhearted religious man and that the would not let a Brahman die because he was scared of the stigma of a Brahman's death on his soul. Narendra Mani also told my mother that she should have been a little more diplomatic while talking to the Prime Minister.

On the 29th day of my hunger strike Dr Siddhimani came, but I don't know the purpose of his visit. A high ranking army officer from the Singha Durbar, the Prime Minister's office, also came and told me that I was released, but the Prime Minister thought I was too weak to be moved from there.

Although it was a place of detention, I could meet anybody since I was a free man. There was no restriction on anybody seeing me except Girija and others still in prison. My relative could see me and the Prime Minister sent a doctor to look after me. But the Prime Minister thought that vaidyas [practitioners of an indigenous system of medicine] were better in a situation like mine and his personal vaidya came to see me. Q: So you broke your fast on the 29th day of your hunger strike and only after you were released. Is that correct?

A: Yes. The Prime Minister also sent a message that he would like to see me after I had regained some strength. On the 12th day after I broke my fast he sent a car at midnight along with Dikshit. I was led to a room in the Singha Durbar. There were three folding chairs in the room, the Prime Minister was seated in the centre chair, Vijay Shumsher was on his left and Sarda Shumsher, his eldest son, occupied the chair on his right.

There was a carpet spread on the floor and I was asked to sit on it. Dikshit sat by my side .One officer also came and sat by my side. The Prime Minister said he had released me out of compassion. He did not want a Brahman to die on his hands. He said he had not released me because of any pressure from Nehru or "from your friends. And the government will not yield to pressure from that irresponsible gentleman and others, but we know that we have got to move with the times.

"However, we will determine what steps are to be taken. You are a free man, you can go and enjoy your life. You are in bad health, so you go to your doctor in Bombay or anywhere you like. But don't be under any illusion that we will hand over power to you. Power is given to one, the right to possess power is written here."

Q: On one's forehead?

A: Yes, he said that it is written on one's forehead and he moved his fingers across his forehead. I told him that it was not a question of power, we wanted basic human rights. He also said, poining to the Prime Minister's flagstaff, "You mean to occupy this?" I said that our demands were very modest. We wanted democratic freedom, civil liberties and, later perhaps, if the situation so developed, we would demand responsible government. Then he said, "All these expressions are acquired from books written by foreigners. You don't even talk to me in your own language properly. When you came here you did this *pranam* [that is, showed him respect by folding his hands and raising them to touch his forehead, [but this is not what a Brahman does. A Brahman wishes swasti, he does not do pranam to a Kshtriya, a king or a ruler. You do not even know that." Q: Indeed, he was a wonderful character.

A: I told him, I thought that when I said *pranam*, *namaskar*, it was a kind of obeisance, I was paying respect to him. But he retorted that was not the Nepalese way of saying it.

CHAPTER IV

Nepali Congress is born

Q: What exactly did you bargain for?

A: Our minimum demands were basic human rights like civil liberties, freedom of association, freedom of speech. It is not that we wanted to share power, but that right surely could not be denied to the people for all time.

Q: But then you also put Mohan Shumsher on notice that eventually you would ask for responsible government.

A: Yes, but not at that point. You see, when I came to Kathmandu clandestinely I wanted to contact him immediately and tell him what I had come for. I had come here to organise my party. I wanted to do openly if possible. So I contacted him. I wanted to contact him through the Indian Ambassador, Surjit Singh Majithia.

I got in touch with Majithia — he was playing golf with Vijay Shumsher and others — and told him that I wanted to meet the Prime Minister. I inquired if he could act as a go-between. He said: "I can of course, but I cannot be responsible for your safety." I told him that unless you can guarantee my safety, I told him that "unless you can guarantee my safety" what is the purpose of my asking you to work as a go-between". He said he could not take that responsibility.

Then I contacted a teacher of Vijay Shumsher's son—the teacher, Dhundhiraj Koirala, Dirghiraj Koriala's elder brother, was a relation of mine. I went to his place one night and knocked on his door. He was aghast when he saw me. There was a rumour that I had already come to Kathmandu and the police were after me. I told him that I had come here on this mission. He said all right, he would communicate that to Vijay Shumsher. Then he asked me to meet him three days later at a point near the place which is now called New Road, in the afternoon. It was winter and he said, 'If you find me with one glove off', that indicates the mission is successful, and then you contact me. But if you see I have gloves on both hands, don't contact me. At the appointed time I went there. He came with gloves on both hands. He sent word to me later that Mohan Shumsher was prepared to meet me but not on my conditions. So I said that if as a result of the meeting an agreement was arrived at, it was all right. If no agreement was arrived at, I must get 24 hours' time during which I should not be arrested. That Mohan Shumsher was not prepared to accept. So I could not meet him. And I reminded him of that. He said, "Yes, somebody mentioned some such thing to me." The next day I left Kathmandu. The government provided me with a comfortable chair and I was taken to the Indian border from where I went to Bombay. That was in 1949. In the meantime, Subarna Shumsher had left our organisation and ...

Q: Why did he leave your organisation?

A: I don't know what happened. I was in prison. They issued a very nasty statement against me and formed a party of their own, the Nepali Democratic Congress. But they were not able to do much. They wanted to collect arms to do it.

Q: Now let us take a look at the Nepalese political scene. What was the political situation in Nepal at that point? Was there any political activity, any active opposition to the regime.

A. Some political activities had started an organisation known as Praja Parishad, not the Praja Parishad established by Tanka Prasad.

Q: Tanka Prasad was still in jail?

A: Yes. A few persons in Kathmandu had started the organisation and they were trying to make some noise.

Q: Did you have your men also in that organisation?

A: Our men were there, but the organisers thought that I had come to Kathmandu to take the wind out of their sails. When I was released, their men—some of their members had also been arrested—were not. This was also a charge against me: that I was released with the help of India and they were left to rot in prison. They throught, Subarna Shumsher and others, that they could not do much. So they formed a party, Nepali Democratic Congress, with Mahendra Bikram Shah as president and Surya Prasad Upadhyay as secretary.

Q: Surya Prasad Upadhyay had also left you?

A: No, not quite. Surya Prasad was on the periphery of our party, he was an ordinary member. After some time MP Koirala consented to be president of our party as I did not have time for that.

Q: He became the working president? Did Tanka Prasad continue formally to be president of your party, the Rastriya Congress? When you formed your party, you were the working president and Tanka Prasad was made president. Isn't that so?

A: Yes, but after that there were two or three sessions of the party and the situation changed. Most probably, after two sessions the formality of having two presidents was done away with and I was made president. In the meantime, Subarna Shumsher wanted the merger of the two parties.

Q: He broke away and then again wanted a merger of the two parties, but why?

A: Yes, because he found that nothing much could be done, there was no dynamic worker in his party and large sums of money had been spent without any results. So they wanted the merger. They sent on their behalf their general secretary, Surya Prasad Upadhyay, to start negotiations. MP Koirala was then in Jogbani and I took Surya Prasad to him. They had a talk and the modalities of merger were decided upon. Our Working Committee met in Patna, so did their Working Committee. And we decided on merger in April 1950.

Q: Did Jyaprakash Narayan or Rammanohar Lohia have any role to play in this?

A: No, none whatever. There were three issues: (a) What would be the name of the party? (b) What would be its flag? and (c) Who would be its president? I suggested MP Koirala for president, and when they conceded this, I insisted on retaining their flag. As regards the name of the party, we decided to remove 'National' from Nepali National Congress and they decided to remove 'Democratic' from Nepali Democratic Congress. So the party became Nepali Congress. The merger conference was held at Tiger Cinema in Calcutta.

Q: The cinema hall was owned by Mahabir Shumsher? A: Yes.

Q: Did Lohia have any part to play in the merger talks?

A: No. I don't remember Lohia or Jayaprakash to have been in the picture at that stage. The merger was eventually brought about. MP Koirala became president, and the president of their party, Mahendra Bikram, was appointed general secretary.

From that time my political alliance with Subarna Shumsher started. He drew me aside and said he had spent large sums of money to buy arms. He was convinced that without arms nothing could be achieved, but MP Koirala's public utterances were against violance. And the problem was, Subarna Shumsher said, that MP Koirala was our president, but our objective could not be attained without armed insurrection. I said, "You go ahead. If you have money, we will get arms."

Q: The rest of it of course I already have on tape. What I should now like to know is something about the political scene in Nepal. What was King Tribhuvan doing all this time?

A: I was not in communication with King Tribhuvan, but the Nepali Democratic Congress was. When the two parties merged, Subarna Shumsher and we started working in the closest collaboration. Whatever message was to be sent to the King was sent by Subarna Shumsher with my knowledge. We used to take the help of some physical instructors of the King to send our message. Sometimes we used to send messages through cigarettes. We would remove the tobacco, insert the message and refill it with tobacco. The King was also in communication with CPN Sinha.

Q: What was CPN Singh at that time?

A: He was India's Ambassador to Nepal. When we decided to go in for armed insurrection, we wanted the King to be on our side. He was in fact already on our side. But

the question was how he could be freed from the control of the Ranas. The idea was that he should be taken to Palpa where the local army commander had under him about 1200 soldiers and they comprised the biggest unit of the army outside Kathmandu. We thought that if 1200 men with arms joined us it would be a great accretion to our strength. So I went to Palpa clandestinely and met the army commander and he agreed.

Q: What was the name of the army commander?

A: Rudra Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. I was his guest for two nights in Palpa. Our plan was that we should take the King to Palpa. But the question was how to take him there. If we could get a helicopter we could perhaps do it. We calculated that a helicopter would take about ten minutes to cover the distance from the Palace to the airport. So if we could get 15 minutes and a helicopter we would be out of the reach of the Ranas.

But the Indian government would not give us a helicopter, nor could we buy one without its help. The Government of India had its own idea about what should be done with the King. Our second plan was to carry off the King to Garhi, a fort on the way to Birgunj, rush it and take him from there to Palpa. We had sent some men also, we sent Ganesh Manji and some armed men. But they were betrayed. I think the King became nervous, he thought that we could not manage it. India provided another way of escape by giving him shelter in the Indian Embassy and from there to Delhi.

Q: Who suggested to the King that he should shelter in the Indian Embassy?

A: I don't know, I have no idea. I think the Government of India must have suggested it through CPN Singh. I did not like it because that would land the King in a situation where we would lose touch with him. This actually happened. After the King went to Delhi, we lost touch with him. I went to Delhi many times when the revolution was on but he did not meet me. For that matter, he did not meet anybody.

Q: I believe it was under the instructions of the Government of India that he did not meet you? A: Whenever I tried to meet him in Delhi I was told that he was sleeping or that he was not well.

Q: When did King Tribhuvan's troubles start with Mohan Shumsher? When exactly did the two fall out with each other?

A: When I came to Kathmandu incognito they contacted me, his sons contacted me.

Q: You mean the King's sons?

A: Yes.

Q: Who exactly did that? Mahendra?

A: No, not Mahendra. The second and third sons, Himalaya and Basant. They wanted to meet me, but afterwards they thought that it was not safe to do so. I told you about Tanka Prasad's party which was helped by the King. Their plan was for the King to take over and give command to the army directly. When that plot was disclosed all these people were arrested and the King was brought to the place of trial.

Q: What place of trial?

A: Where Tanka Prasad and other were being tried. There was some kind of an indirect accusation against the King that he was instrumental in all this. So they [the King and Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher] were not on good terms right from the beginning. In any case, Tribhuvan wanted to be the real ruler and not a virtual prisoner in the hands of Mohan Shumsher.

CHAPTER V

Cultural Pursuits

Q: Now a word about your literary activities. When did you take to writing short stories, essays, novels, political writings? What about your taste for music? What kind of music do you like?—Indian, Nepalese or Western classical music? Any particular composer, especially Western classical composer, you prefer? Who are your favourite authors, Indiann, English, Continental and Nepalese? Who has influenced you most among them, politically speaking? I have a feeling that like Gandhi and Jayaprakash, you seem to have a large element of nonconformism in your political thinking. Am I correct?

A: I started writing, at least my writings started being published in Indian magazines when I was a student of the ninth class, in 1929 perhaps. There was a very celebrated journal edited by Premchand [Munshi Premchand, a renowned Hindi litterateur]. I am verv grateful to him as well as to one critic, Shantipriya Dwivedi. Premchand used to dit and publish a literary periodical called Hans from Banaras. I was a student in Banaras, where I came into contact with him and Dwivedi. I wrote a story, an infantile effort, and Premchand read it. He corrected it, reorganised it and asked me to write it again. I wrote it according to his instructions and he published it in the next issue of his magazine. I used to write very short stories, lyrical you might call them, which ran into one or two pages, and Premchand encouraged me.

Q: It seems Premchand was your guru so far as your literary activities were concerned.

A: Yes, that is true. He was a very simple man. I was then a student, a Nepali student at that. I did not belong to Banaras, I was a refugee, but he took very kindly to me. I was also in touch with a great Indian, poet, [Jaya Shankar] Prasad. There was another writer of great repute, an expert on art and literature. Raikrishna Das, who became director of the Art Institute in Banaras Hindu University. I was in that group, I used to listen to their discussions and all that. My first story was published in *Hans*, and then one or two stories were published in *Vishal Bharat*, a Hindi magazine published by the *Modern Review* group of Calcutta.

Q: You mean, Ramananda Chatterji's Modern Review?

A: Yes. I knew his son Kedar Chatterji. I used to go to Ramananda Chatterji's house. The editor of Vishal Bharat he is still alive—was [Banarsidas] Chaturvedi. He liked my story and it was published. These two very prestigious journals published my stories.

Q: From where was Vishal Bharat published?

A: Calcutta. Prabasi, Modern Review and Vishal Bharat were published from Calcutta. There I learnt Nehru had written an article, under the nom de plume Chanakya, about himself and it was published in Modern Review. Kedar Chatterji told me this. That is how I started. You know, those stories caught the attention of the Nepali critic Gewali who was a teacher at the government school in Darjeeling.

Q: What is Gewali's full name?

A: Surya Bikram Gewali. He wrote to me in Banaras to say I should write in Nepali rather than in Hindi. Then I wrote one story in Nepali, I think in the early 1930s, and it was published in a prestigious paper in Kathmandu. And that came as a bombshell because in those days story writing had not developed, there being only mythological stories or symbolic stuff. My stories were psychological, about the problems of women, about sex, the sadness of life.

Q: You were a pathfinder in Nepali literature, I should say?

A: I think in regard to that style my stories were some kind of new experiment in Nepali literature and I became famous almost immediately. I wrote a few stories, and then Surya Bikram Gewali, who was secretary of the Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, a literary organisation in Darjeeling, wrote to me to say he was bringing out a collection of Nepali stories and I should write some new stories for it. I contributed three stories which the critics thought very good. Again, Surya Bikram wanted to publish a collection of all my stories and I consented. Whatever I wrote created an impact and people talked about it.

Thereafter, I was arrested in 1942. My stories were in the press, but Gewali was also arrested and the manuscript was seized. I was released in 1946 and my collection of stories was published in 1947 or 1948. They created tremendous support for me, and when I was arrested here in Kathmandu I thought I should write on serious subjects because I was kept in an utterly desperate condition in prison. I felt I had reached the rockbottom state of existence.

Q: You stood face to face with life in the raw.

A: Yes, you may say so. And then I started writing on serious subjects.

Q: Would it be correct to say at this point that you were influenced by Andre Malraux's Man's Fate?

A: No, I had not read the book till then, I read it in prison. You see, even when I was an eighth class student I used to read Continental writers. I was very much impressed by French short stories and also Russian short stories.

Q: Could you name some authors?

A: As for Russian literature. I liked all important Russian writers—Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Gorky. I consider Tolstoy to be the world's greatest literary figure. But I was greatly influenced by Chekhov in my style of story writing. Among the French writers, I like Anotole France and Maupassant's short stories, but Hugo is too romantic.

Q: What about Andre Malraux, Francois Mauriac Andre Gide?

A: I like Andre Gide but not to the extent that I like Anatole France and Maupassant. I also developed an interest in psychology in relation to the problems of ethics and morality. And Albert Camus become my favourite author, not Sartre. I think I introduced Sartre's existentialism into Nepali. I also introduced Albert Camus, and Sartre and Camus became popular here.

Q: Did existential philosophy influence your thinking, your attitude to life?

A: No, not quite. But I was very much impressed by Nietzsche's philosophy, not of course what was adopted by Hitler and the national socialists.

Q: Would you say that the Nazis accepted only the negative aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy?

A: Yes. Because the problem still agitating me is what is expected of me. I am in politics not as a matter of deliberate choice. I am a member of the Koirala family, I grew up in politics and it was but a matter of course that I should join it. But, while in prison [refers to his detention as of 15 December 1960] I started debating what my duty was, why I was here. Because when Sushila came to see me one evening they were in great difficulties. She had to look after the children and nobody would provide them with shelter in Kathmandu.

When she came here, I saw her two years after I was arrested, and her whole hair had turned grey, her face was full of wrinkles. That set me thinking. What was my duty? This democracy [his struggle was for democracy] was an abstract concept. Was it of greater value than the suffering I was forcing my wife to undergo because of my adherence to this concept. Had I any right to make others suffer in the interest of some ideology? After all, suffering was concrete, but ideology was just a mental concept.

These questions trouble me even today. I started wriiting on these subjects and I wrote three or four novels while in prison. I read the *Gita*. One of the novels was about Hitler. It has not been published, it is in the manuscript stage. But three or four other novels have been published. [The rest of the tape is about the subject matter of one of BP's novels.] As I was telling you, the problem of man is that he is neither beast nor god, his is an intermediate status. He partakes of both, there is divinity in him and also bestiality.

Q: This reminds me of what G.K. Chesterton said about Robert Browning's philosophy: God is, animals are, and man partly is and partly what he aspires to be. That is, animals have reached the end of the process of evolution and there is no scope for their further development. So is the case with God. As for man, he partly is, and the other part of man's story is that he has unlimited scope for development, which may even surpass that of God. That is the reason why even God is jealous of man.

A: I will say the same thing in different language. Man is not only a product of his past, he is also influenced by the future. In the sense that man is not only the creation of his past but of his future aspirations, but what hewants to be. The future exists only for man and not for God nor for animals. There is nothing like tomorrow for God or for beasts. For man however there is always a tomorrow. And it is for the tomorrow that he makes all efforts, tills the land, sows the seed and awaits tomorrow's happiness. But there are other factors which intervene and he may not reap the harvest. That is the problem.

Q: I get the point. He suffers and he makes sacrifices, for instance, you here. The tomorrow is there and the day after, so on and so forth. You have all along been a symbol of suffering, of sacrifice, and still continue so.

A: Not only I, everybody does so.

Q: I understand. What I wanted to emphasise is that I have a living symbol right in front of me. There was Jayaprakash Narayan, whom I saw till the end of his life, and he was also a symbol of suffering and sacrifice.

A: As a matter of fact, every man is a symbol of that. The moment man ceases to have hopes for the future he ceases to exist. He is dead. Man has to make decisions, and he has to do so on the basis of his experience, his past experience. That is, on the basis of very inadequate data he must decide on everything and wait for the results of his actions. There is the tragedy of man.

Secondly, I shall explain my philosophy. There are two aspects of man. One is his social instinct, which makes him a member of society. There is another instinct, which is the nonconformist instinct, that propels him to refuse to be a member of society, to abide by any of the rules society makes. So he is both a rebel as well a comformist.

Man has to live in that state of tension. If he had the sense of social instinct alone, man would not develop. I have always cited the example of animals which have a higher social instinct, the ant and the bee. They offer examples of a perfect socialist society. Everybody does his job, everybody is appointed, everybody is happy. But in the process of evolution they have, because they have no problems, remained where they were even before the advent of man. They will be there even after the extinction of man, but they will exist without making any further progress.

So unless there is a streak of nonconformism in him man cannot develop. And Gandhi had a large element of nonconformism in him. Why only Gandhi? All great menright from Socrates to Christ, were nonconformists. And they had to pay with their lives for their nonconformism.

Q: What about you?

A: Well, while I am writing stories or novels creatively I am a nonconformist, I do not accept any restraint. But in politics I am a socialist, I want to hand down laws which would be applicable to everybody. This means as a socialist I would make everybody conform to the best laws, socialist laws, I should like to introduce. But as a writer I would give myself the freedom to break those laws.

Q: Which means that you live simultaneously on two planes.

A: Yes. One who cannot live on different planes does not live totally.

Q: You mean he only vegetates?

A: Yes, that is true. Either he is a conformist or he is just an anti-social man. That explains my position. There is tension in me. I feel I am an outsider in politics, my profession should have been literary pursuits. When I start writing I feel I am wasting my time.

Q: Are you an atheist, theist or agnostic?

A: First of all, nobody has defined for me what he means by God. But that part of existence in which man starts composing poems, when he is filled with that oceanic feeling, when he sees the vastness of the universe, when he sees its beauty, the flowers, that is the experiencne of God, of divinity.

Man does not live by bread alone. There are other aspects of life which are as important, perhaps more important. Those aspects are the unexplained mysteries of life. Į,

If you are not aware of the mysteries, not awed by them, you have not lived fully.

You know, when I was Prime Minister, Ravi Shankar once came to Kathmandu and gave a performance. I was very tired, but I thought it would be discourteous not to attend. I sat through the entire performance which took about three or four hours.

After it was over, I went up to him and said this was my nearest experience of God. When I listened to his playing the sitar I felt I was very near God. Sometimes you get that feeling when you see a beautiful painting or listen to music like what Ravishankar played.

Q: Tell me, what do you feel when you get up early in the morning, go outside and take a look at nature, the flowers, the trees, the blue sky? Have you ever felt at such moments that you are in communion with something that reason alone cannot explain?

A: Yes, I have had that kind of feeling many. many times. Sometimes what happens is that I become part of the whole thing. I feel there is a living presence in all that, the whole universe is vibrant with life and I become one with it.

Q: At such moments do you feel that this universe and all that goes with it and beyond is not man's creation alone. that there may be something else beyond man?

A: No, not that kind of philosophy. What I feel is that I am part of everything, but I don't go over to philosophy. or stray into the realm of thought.

Q: Do I brand you an atheist or an agnostic?

A: You should brand me as a spiritualist of sorts. I believe there are elements in nature which are not amenable to scientific explanation or scientific analysis. You can read it as a whole but it cannot be understood in pieces. The problem of mind is that the understading has to be in terms of framework of thought. But once you put it in the mould of thought the realisation of truth escapes. Man's understanding will be inadequate if he depends only on his reasoning faculty.

Q: Let us now return to the German philosophers-Kant, Hegel and Karl Marx. Then again, do you have faith in dialectical materialism? For that matter, do you believe in the materialistic interpretation of history?

A: To answer the last first, no. I reject it altogether, but I don't say there is absolutely no truth in that. Man is a multidimensional entity. The mistakes that Marx made was that he created man as an economic being who is interested only in his economic life. I will not say that there is no truth in that, but that is a very inadequate portraiture.

Man is an economic being, but he is also something more. What is that something more? You might say, man is God's creation. I think, yes, but still more. The dimensions are many, and man is not a one-dimensional creature. Secondly, man is never motivated by the consideration of bread. His stomach is not the instigator of his activities. There has never been any human movement on the slogan of bread. Even the socialist revolution that took place in Russia in 1917 was not for bread, it was for something higher, for equality.

Man is only partly a product of history and partly of factors beyond history. Before man came into existence, nature had to provide all that he needed for survival, for instance, water, food, sun, everything. There is a misconception that man created society, but the fact is that it existed before the advent of man. It is only after man's appearance that history came into existence. So far as man is concerned, time also starts from the day he came into existence.

Q: Could it be said that you have no faith in historical determinism, that everything is predetermined?

A: If you believe in historical determinism, then all our efforts are meaningless exercises. Marx propounded the philosophy that man's mind is not free. It is predetermined, conditioned by the social class to which he belongs. At the same time, Marx was a prolific pamphleteer. If man's mind is not free, to whom was Marx's appeal directed?

Q: Did Hegel influence you?

A: No. I have not read Hegel.

Q: What about Kant? So far as morality and ethics are concerned, do you think in terms of categorical imperatives?

A: I think that could be a guide in determining your

social conduct.

Q: Who are your favourite English authors? And Indian authors?

A: First of all, I like English poetry. I am very catholic in my taste. I like Shakespeare, his sonnets more than his dramas, and Marlowe. I like all the romantic poets—Keats, Shelley, Byron, but not Wordsworth to that extent. Then I like Swinburne for his music, his cadence, and I like Browning for his dramatic monologue. I like some of Tennyson's poems, particularly "Crossing the Bar". And John Masefield. I used to like Bernard Shaw very much, but now he seems dated.

Q: What about Charles Dickens?

A: I like Dickens, but I can't go back to him again and again. About Indian authors, Rabindranath Tagore is of course the greatest and I like him. I was in Hazaribagh Jail and I wanted to read him in the original—I had read him in translation. *Gitanjali*, some short stories, particularly "Kabuliwala", and that is one of the best stories I have ever read; if I have one story in mind, it is "Kabuliwala" and I sent for his *Sanchaita*. When the book came I opened it and the first poem that attracted me was "Kach O' Devjani". I read it through—I had meanwhile learnt Bengali and I was so enamoured of Tagore that I could never give up reading him, he continues to have an abiding interest for me. I liked Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, but he appears to be somewhat dated. And then there is Premchand. Also Sumitranandan Pant and Nirala. And Jaya Shankar Prasad.

Q: What about Nepali authors?

A: Balkrishna Sama. His name was Balkrishna Shumsher but after the 1950-51 revolution he said he must declan himself. So out of Shumsher he retained only Sama which means equality. He was a great writer. He died only a month ago. He is indeed a creative writer. Then there is Lakshmi Prasad Devkota, a great lyricist, carver of phrases and words like Tagore. Devkota is very much influenced by Shelley and Keats.

Q: About political philosophers, who has influenced you most?

A: Gandhi, Marx and then again Gandhi. I began with

Gandhi, had an interlude of Marx and then returned to Gandhi.

Q: Did Jayaprakash Narayan have any influence on your political thinking?

A: Gandhi. So far as political philosophy is concerned Jayaprakash is not as important as Gandhi. Gandhi gave germinal ideas, new ideas. He created a few models of thinking for everything, but everything was in a germinal form. Jayaprakash could have developed that, and he did it to a certain extent. I consider Gandhi a greater original thinker than Marx. Marx was a product, he was not an original thinker. He stood on the shoulders of others. But Gandhi was entirely original.

Q: Could you name any American author, political or literary, who has influenced you?

A: As for American political philosophers, no.

Q: Did Karl Popper's Open Society mean anything to you?

A: No. When I was in college I was greatly influenced by Tom Paine and Abraham Lincoln.

Q: Did Thoreau have any influence on you?

A: Not much. I have not read many American authors or philosophers. Of late, of course, I have read John Steinbeck and I like him. I like Eugene O'Neill and I think he is much superior to Shaw.

Q: What about Ernest Hemingway?

A: Yes, he is a great name. I like him, particularly two or three of his novels.

Q: Did you read For Whom the Bell Tolls?

A: Yes. That book, *Farewell to Arms and The Sun Also Rises*—these are the three novels I like most.

Q: And what about Old Man and the Sea?

A: Yes, I like it. Hemingway has a very crisp and powerful style. I also like Tennessee William's dramas.

Q: Would you care to talk about music?

A: I was deaf to music till I was in the BA class. A class fellow, a Maharashtrian, in Banaras, was very much interested in music. He himself was a good singer and *tabla* player. He organised a programme for a great musician from Pune. He sold tickets for it and induced me to part

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with eight annas [fifty paise in terms of the present day decimal currency] for a ticket. With great reluctance I bought a ticket and attended the performance. The musician's name was Narayan Rao Vyas. He sang four or five songs—one was a *bhajan* and two were classicals. That opened a new perception for me—classical music. Since then I have enjoyed following Indian classical music. I don't like film music. I sometimes like Rabindra sangeet, but that appears to be too melodious, it does not have vigour. Rabindra music could well go with drama: if you hear the musicians singing in a group or in a dance drama, then you can appreciate it. Because it must also have a visual demonstration. I like Indian classical music. I like ghazals also, and not for their music only but also their words, the meaning they convey.

Q: You said some thing about your ignorance of the grammar of music. Would you repeat it? Could it be that you like music because it creates a mood in you?

A: Yes, it does. I start seeing things when I hear music. But if somebody were to ask me the name of a raga I shall not be able to do so. I can't differentiate between one raga and another.

Q: What about Western classical music?

A: My acquaintance with it is not exactly intimate except with two or three composers. For instance, Chopin. I took interest in him because I read his biography and saw a film based on his life which depicted how he created music, how he composed, how he was associated with the Polish independence movement, how he left his comrades and started living in Paris with the woman he loved—all this created a romantic background for me to appreciate his music. You know, when the Polish Ambassador in Pakistan heard that I was fond of Chopin. he sent me a set of Chopin's records.

Q: Do you by any chance have Chopin's Funeral March in your collection? You know, Arthur Koestler wrote in one of his books that Chopin's Funeral March attracted him to communism.

A: No. I read Romain Rolland's Jean Christophe which is based on the life of the great composer Beethoven. And I developed a taste for Beethoven.

Q: What about Mozart? Or for that matter Johann Strauss, particularly his immortal piece "Blue Danube"?

A: When I was in Vienna in 1954 I had occasion to listen to "Blue Danube."

Q: Didn't you like it?

A: Yes, I liked it, but not to the extent I like Beethoven or Chopin. I like some of the operas, particularly Wagner's heroic operas.

Q: What about modern Western music, for instance Rock n' roll? Do you have any taste for it?

A:Not at all. An apt characterisation of that type of music was given by Tagore. He said that when he heard Western music, loud music in his childhood, he got the impression as if two trains were colliding. That was Tagore's expression. I don't like this loud music. But there are some songs which I like.

Q: Do you like Paul Robeson?

A: Yes, I like him. And Joan Baez and some folk songs. Q: Incidentally, have you heard Paul Robeson's "Volga Boatmen's Song"?

A: No. I like dancing. My wife is very much interested in dances and she used to take me to dancing performances. I will not say that she is a great dancer, but she is a competent dancer. When she is on the stage her expressions are so spontaneous and natural that they make up for whatever deficiency she may have in art or technique. Thanks to her, I have seen all the celebrated ballets— Russian, English. I have also seen all the renowned Indian dancers perform. My preference of course is for Bharat Natyam, Kathakali and Odissi. I am not much impressed by Manipuri, which is rather slow and monotonous.

Q: What about Bhangra? Don't you think it is tremendously vigorous and lively?

A: I agree there is vigour in it, but I don't like it. I like Kathak. My daughter-in-law is very good in that style of dancing. You see, my interest in dancing was created by Uday Shankar. I saw him dance in Banaras when I was a student. Madam Simki was his partner and I thought that no other pair of dancers could be more complementary than these two.

Q: What about films?

A: I am not very interested in films. Nor have I seen many. In my college days, I liked some films. "Blue Angel" to name one. I liked Emil Jannings' films. Also Greta Garbo's. They are all old names. Charles Boyer was also my favourite. After I was released from prison I saw "Bridge on the River Kwai" and enjoyed it very much.

Q: What about Satyajit Ray?

A: I liked two or three of his films. The last Satyajit Ray film I saw was "Shatranj ke Khilari," but I did not like it as much as his other films—"Pather Panchali," for instance.

Q: What about Hindi films?

A: On the whole, I do not like Hindi films. But there are two or three films like "Ankur" and "Nishant" which I enjoyed. I liked some of Shyam Benegal's films. I liked another Hindi film because the writer happened to be our friend. This was Phanishvaranath Renu's "Tisri Kasam," directed by a Bengali. About Hindi films, I must say I don't like commercials. They are too loud, too noisy, too violent.

CHAPTER VI

Friends in Need

Q: Did you ever receive financial assistance from any Indian political leader for your political activity?

A: No, I have not received any financial assistance from any Indian political leader. But I have received assistance of all kinds from my political and non-political friends while I was in India or while I was in prison in Nepal. As a matter of fact, members of my family were looked after by my Indian friends when I was in prison here.

I particularly remember my friend Devendra Prasad Singh who supported my family. To my children he was a kind of foster father. Like that, there were also other friends. Among political people who helped me were my socialist friends, and the tallest among them was Jayaprakash Narayan. But he did not help me financially and I did not need any financial assistance for my political work. Then there was Rammanohar Lohia, but not for financial help.

Q: What about Jawaharlal Nehru?

A: Nehru of course helped me politically in many ways, but not financially. Nobody helped me financially. But in my illness—this is something remarkable—I have received very warm support from innumerable Indians, for instance doctors. You will be surprised to know that not a single Indian doctor has charged me his fees. In Bombay, in Calcutta, in Patna and in Banaras, not one of them ever did that.

Even when I was in hospital, all the expenses were taken care of either by the doctors themselves or some Indian friends. Some of them helped me in New York also when I went there for medical treatment. I have received help like that, but not for my political work.

Q: What about Chandra Shekhar?

A: Of course, he rendered support but no financial help.

Once he helped me by buying a ticket for my wife to join me in New York when I was hospitalised there. Otherwise he has been a constant source of moral and political support. Is it not very surprising that not a single doctor ever charged fees from me?

Q: Of course it is, particularly when most doctors are known to be sharks so far as money is concerned.

A: But they have been very kind to me. Not only did they not charge fees but they also helped meet my hospital expenses. Jaslok Hospital is a very expensive place, but when I asked for the hospital bills the chairman of the board of trustees said these had been taken care of. The chairman was a Sindhi, and I did not know him. He visited my room twice with the doctors, and when I was being discharged he came and told me that I did not have to worry about the hospital bills.

Q: Did you ever help any Indian political leader financially?

A: I do not think it is proper that I should be on record, but during the election, the first general election in 1952, I helped the Socialist Party with some money. I also instructed the local leaders of my party to help some of the Socialist Party's local candidates.

Q: While on the subject, I should like you to explain what strained your relations with Rammanohar Lohia?

A: A correct answer to that will not be fair to Lohia. He had at first been a great help to me, but later he did not maintain very friendly relations.

Q: Was this because of your closer relations with Jayaprakash Narayan? Was it a reflexion of the Indian Socialist Party's internal conflict between Jayaprakash and Lohia?

A: I think so. It was partly that and partly a reaction to our efforts to build closer relations with Nehru. Lohia had peculiar relations with Nehru, a sort of love-hate relationship. When we developed more friendly contact with Nehru, Lohia thought that his role perhaps would become limited. I am not too sure about it, but he was not happy at our contact with Nehru. I feel Lohia suffered from a complex, more psychological than political. He felt he did not get what he deserved and Jayaprakash was getting more than his due. Jayaprakash was instrumental in bringing us and Nehru together, so he was angry with them both. I don't want to be on record, but Lohia had a terrible inferiority complex.

Q: There is no point in your saying that you do not want to be on record for the simple reason that I am doing a full length study of Jayaprakash and I am going to record all this. I may tell you that I have, independently of you, come across evidence which would bear you out. Did you ever receive any financial assistance from foreign political sources other than Indian?

A:No. But when I was ill and I had to go to the United States for a surgical operation, the Socialist International rather the West German Social Democratic Party, sent me a ticket from Delhi to New York. On the next occasion, the Socialist Party of Austria provided me with a return ticket, and part of my medical bills in the US was paid by these two or three Socialist organisations.

Q: Could you please let me have details of the plan Nehru had made to rescue you from prison in 1962?

A: Bhola, this is a very delicate question. It involves the Government of India apart from my party. I would not like that to be published now.

Q: All right, I promise I shall not publish it until I get your clearance.

A: There was a feeling among our comrades, residing in India and opposing the system from here, that if I could be amongst them the struggle perhaps could be conducted more efficiently. So they wanted to rescue me from prison. I did not have any idea about this as I was kept incommunicado in prison. I fasted for the usual facilities for political prisoners, one of which was that I should be permitted to see my relations and friends. Ultimately, this was granted.

My sister...came to see me on three or four occasions. On the first, she went to Nehru to plead for me. When Lumumba was killed, she thought that I might get the same kind of treatment. Jawaharlalji assured her that our rulers [Nepalese rulers] were not as barbarous as the rulers of the Congo. She was then in constant contact with Jawaharlalji.

On the next occasion or thereafter, she came and told me that she had contacted my colleagues in Calcutta and also met Jawaharlalji and that they wanted to rescue me. And she came again to tell me that ... the idea was given up. That was towards the end of 1961 or early in 1962.⁷⁰

Q: May I have a full account of your insurrectionary activities after you went to India on your release from prison in 1968?

A: There was a group of young Nepali Congress activists in India. I thought that with their help it should be possible to build a strong insurrectionary movement. My problem was that of finance and arms. I raised some money from my relations and friends and contacted some...gun runners. I think this should not be published now because it is too fresh.

Q: Well BP, I am not going to include this part of the account, the insurrectionary part, in my book until I get clearance from you.

A: Because that will perhaps create some difficulties in regard to my present strategy. One group of gun runners contacted me. They... said they would supply arms in exchange for...

Q: Were they Indians or Nepalese?

A: No, they were a mixture of all kinds of... They had their associates in... but the men who actually brought arms were...not of one particular nationality. Their first proposition was that I should give them...and they would supply arms in exchange. They also told me that they were in a position to give me any kind of arms.

By way of establishing their credibility, they gave me a crate of arms free. That was in 1970. There were some rifles and some small arms. But they said that subsequent supplies would have to be paid for. That is how I started

⁷⁰ Since we are very close to the event there is a possibility that Koirala's complete answer, which is on the tape, may not be viewed in its proper historical perspective. Its publication must therefore wait until it becomes part of history.

collecting arms and sending them inside Nepal. Those were mostly small arms, hand grenades and rifles. Some rifles were not in proper condition, but I got the feeling that if I could get money I could get arms.

But money was the problem. So we organised the... [Since we are very close to the event Koirala refers to, its publication must wait until it becomes part of history.] We had some money with which we bought some arms. We had three or four groups of activists: one was in Jogbani, another in Banaras, but the main body of our men was operating along the India-Nepal border area adjacent to Jogbani and also inside Nepal. From time to time we organised raids in Nepalese territory close to the border. After the...we went in for large scale supplies of arms.

In the meantime, whatever money we were able to collect had been invested in arms and we cached them in Banaras. When Pakistan cracked down on Bangladesh, some Bangladesh freedom fighters came to me for help. Jayaprakash also told me that I should help them with arms if I had any to spare.

India had not yet given them any help, it was April or May 1971. Yahaya Khan's crackdown occurred in March, when he arrested almost everybody who was somebody in Bangladesh. So I had a truckload of arms sent to a place in Bangladesh which is contiguous to Purnea district in Bihar. But the young Bangladeshi freedom fighters did not know how to handle arms.

Q: How many weapons did you send?

A: I don't remember the exact number but it was one truckload, all I had in Banaras. The consignment must have cost me about seven or eight lakhs of rupees. I thought I would get back the arms after they achieved their objective. Whatever that is, I had to send a few instructors also to train them.

Two of our boys, Chakra and Sushil [Koirala], accompanied the truck to Bangladesh. Also, I had to send our instructor, Colonel Rai, who recently died of cancer. But Rai came back and told me that it was a hopeless situation. They [the young Bangladeshi freedom fighters] would all be massacred unless the Government of India went to their rescue. It was a futile attempt, everybody would be killed. They did not even have enough explosive to blow up a certain strategic river bridge.

There was a big cantonment near Parbatipur [in Bangladesh]. At night, the Pakistani troops would move out of it, play havoc among the neighbouring villages and return to their barracks before daybreak. Some thing could perhaps be done about it if the freedom fighters were able to destroy that particular bridge. They used hand grenades to demolish it, but that was not possible. They said that unless they got large weapons it would be no use. So he came back after a few weeks.

Q: You mean Col Rai came back? What is Chakra's full name?

A: Chakra Bansetola. He is an MA in political science from Banaras Hindu University. He is a very bright young man. Another young man, Sudhir Upadhyay, also went to Bangladesh along with Sushil and Chakra.

Q: May I include in my study on Jayaprakash just this part of the account, that Jayaprakash asked you to give arms to the Bangladesh freedom fighters and you gave them a truckload of arms and sent some of your men to give them necessary training.

A: You are free to include it. After the Bangladesh incident I started collecting arms again. Our idea was to capture a district in the interior of Nepal, entrench ourselves there and then spread out in different directions. Also shift our headquarters from Indian soil to that place.

We selected Okhaldunga for that purpose, and our people contacted some men from the army there. The army men said that they would not in the first place join hands with our boys, but if there was a meaningful encounter the army would walk over to the insurrectionary forces. Our plan was to attack it once and then to send further reinforcements. Accordingly, we sent the first team.

Q: Who was the leader of the team?

A: The leader of the team was Rai, I forget his full name. The team comprised about 30 or 40 men, including some bright young students. We were expecting another truckload of arms... I was waiting to take delivery of the arms in Delhi and send them direct to the [India-Nepal] border near Jaynagar...

Q: Which year was it?

A: 1975, perhaps. Next morning...came with the newspapers and said, "There is news that some arms have been seized at... I think it is your arms." Then I read the report. It was indeed our arms. I became anxious about my people at Okhaldunga because they could be trapped. There was no way to send word to them to return.

Meanwhile, I was getting arms from Jaipur. So I went to Jaipur. When I reached Bharatpur, Sailja [Sailja Acharya, a niece of Koirala] was with me. We went to a friend's place. He was an MLA and he had organised something for us. He showed me news of the encounter at Okhaldunga, as also of the annihilation of our people there. I think they were betrayed, somebody must have let them down.

You see, it was snowing that day and they had taken shelter in a big cave. It was early morning when the soldiers suddenly threw hand grenades and started shooting. Most of our men died in bed, they had no time to resist, and those who were captured were also killed. One of them escaped. The leader of that group was Captain Thapa and the second in command was Angmani Rai. Capt. Thapa was shot later. This happened some three years ago, about 15 days before Bhutto was hanged.

Q: How many men were killed in that encounter?

A: I think about 26. And they were the first of our men. I was sorry for the death of those young people, particularly the twin brothers Ram and Lakshman. We wanted to send only Ram, but Lakshman asked to be sent, saying that they had never been separated before. I told Lakshman that he would accompany his brother. The group also had some student leaders, very dynamic and promising.

I knew I could as well have gone with them and be killed. This thought saved me from collapse. If I had felt any weakness in me, if I had felt that I could not have gone with them or I could not have sent Prakash [Koirala's eldest son] with them, I would have collapsed. It was a great shock, and I had no more moral inclination to go on with this kind of thing.

Q: When did this happen?

A: 1975.

Q: Do you remember the Jaipur MLA's name?

A: He was a Socialist elected to the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly from a constituency on the Rajasthan side of the Uttar Pradesh-Rajasthan border. I have a bad memory for names.

Q: So have I.

A: In my case, doctors tell me, this is because of paucity of oxygen in my blood. I don't remember proper names. That MLA was a well-known Socialist. In the meantime, the situation had taken a different turn.

Q: What about the attempt on King Birendra's life in Biratnagar?

A: It was not an attempt on King Birendra's life. It was just an expression of resentment. Otherwise, they could have thrown the bomb at the King. The King's procession had already passed and nobody was hurt. Perhaps the man who had the bomb or his comrade was killed.

Q: Would you call it propaganda by deed for freedom?

A: Yes. We have never killed any man because killing is not our policy. We are not terrorists, we did not kill a single individual. We wanted to have open encounters to start an insurrectionary movement. That was my strategy.

Q: What was Subarna Shumsher's role in all this? Was he aware of your efforts to build an insurrectionary movement? Did he approve of it? Did Jayapraksh know anything about it? If so, did he approve?

A: No, we did not take Subarna Shumsher into our confidence. He might have come to know about it through his own sources, but we did not tell him anything. About Jayaprakash Narayan, he did not know exactly what we were doing, but he was aware that we were preparing for insurrection. He also knew that the hijacking of the RNAC plane had been done by us.

Q: I repeat, did Jayaprakash approve of the insurrectionary movement?

A: We did not ask his opinion.

Q: Did you ever talk to him about that? Or give him hints?

A: He did not seem to disapprove of it. I can only say that. Of course, he did not say that I should go ahead with it or that he would help us. We did not place him in that position because we thought that it would embarrass him without being of any help to us. For that matter, we did not seek his help either for money or for arms. But he knew what we were up to.

Q: Could it be said that you bade farewell to arms after the Okhaldunga tragedy in 1975?

A: I would not say that. It is true, Okhaldunga was a very tragic event. Other things apart, something went wrong with our planning, and there was also betrayal. But that fact alone would not have induced me to give up arms for struggle.

My thesis—which I also maintained at my trial—is that the people have an inherent right to take up arms when no other avenues are open to them to express their opposition to a given political system, when there are no constitutional means to express their opposition. I would not say that I bade farewell to arms because of that event. But that did have an impact, it was a terrible shock to me.

We felt that our part of the world, South Asia, was in for a period of instability, and there was a danger even to our national existence. I felt that the King too must have felt like that. So I thought that we should join hands with the King without giving up our stand on democracy, or conceding to the King his right to rule absolutely. But at the same time, as patriots, as nationalists, we must find a way to come to some kind of settlement with the King.

I also felt, but I was proved wrong, that the King had lost his manoeuvrability because of the international situation, because of the political stalemate in the country. His political system, the partyless *panchayat* system, was not in a position to solve any of the country's problems and the King's own personal problems.

So it was a time when I could return to Nepal without incurring much risk to my life, although when the decision rested on one individual's whims it involved considerable risk and the King might not be as reasonable as I thought he should be. But his reaction was all right.

So, Bhola, Okhaldunga did produce an impact. Perhaps my age also was a factor. I have become a little more concerned about loss of life. I feel that one should not very lightly undertake a campaign which could involve loss of human life. Then again, if one can avoid armed action one should do so at all costs. It is only as the last resort that one has a right to do that, but only as a last resort. Secondly, as I have already told you, I felt at the same time that the King also was suffering from some kind of handicap. He was in a blind alley.

Q: You mean, the King was also looking for an opportunity to come out of the blind alley?

A: Yes, that is what I felt, and we therefore decided to return. So Okhaldunga alone is not responsible for the change in our strategy.

Q: A point of clarification. I had told you much earlier that the Yugoslav Vice-Foreign Minister Ales Bebler, said that there must be reconciliation between the Nepali Congress and King Birendra and that you could not make a revolution twice over. Now that Bebler is dead, may I include in my book the letter he wrote you and a copy of which you sent to Jayaprakash?

A: Yes, you may use that letter. Have you got a copy of it?

Q: Yes, I have obtained a copy from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.⁷¹ May I now have a full account of your dialogue with King Birendra since your return to Nepal from exile in India? A point of information. Before you came back to Nepal a highly placed official in the Indian Foreign Office, he was a Joint Secretary, told me you had come to an understanding with King Birendra,

⁷¹ See appendix C for copies of Ales Bebler's letter to BP Koirala and Koirala's letter to Jayaprakash Narayan. Also Jayaprakash's letter to King Birendra and his reply to Jayaprakash. These letters are part of Jayaprakash Narayan papers preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

that both of you agreed that Nepal should have an anti-India foreign policy posture.

A: This is utterly wrong. That official was misinformed. Or it was just malicious propaganda. We came back to Nepal without making any contact with the King. We wanted to contact him. We wanted to tell him that unless the monarchy and the democratic forces combined the nation could not survive.

But there was no response from the King. Still, we came back and were promptly arrested. From prison, I sent word to the King that I should like to meet him, but there was no response. I was kept in military confinement, not in prison.

Sundarijal Jail had been converted into a military prison and I was detained there. Our camp commandant was an army major and some officers used to visit me, but nobody else. We were kept incommunicado. In the beginning, I was kept with Ganesh Man Singh, but he was later removed to another prison constructed alongside the one in which I was kept. And I was kept in solitary confinement.

Q: Who else was arrested along with you at Kathmandu airport? And how were you treated in prison?

A: I came to Kathmandu with five others—Ganesh Man Singh, Sailja Acharya and another three or four persons. I don't know how the others were treated in prison since they were taken to different places, but Ganesh Man and I were kept together, and we had no complaints about our creature comforts. We got whatever we wanted, the food was all right, but we were denied any contact with the outside world.

Nobody knew where we had been detained. Whenever I told the officer that I should like to communicate with the King he said this was not possible. Subsequently, they put me on trial.

I argued in court that it was illegal, it was against the Army Act to keep civilian prisoners in a military prison and place them under the charge of army men. The army could take charge of civilian prisoners—I was a civilian prisoner—only for 48 hours. When I returned from court, the soldiers were preparing to leave and the police were taking over.

Later, we were transferred to the Police Training Centre. I developed there symptoms of loss of vision, fainting fits and all that. Doctors were concerned and used to visit me every day.

When I was transferred to the centre, an officer from the Palace came and said he had been sent by the King. Since I wanted to meet the King, he wanted to ascertain why I wanted to do so. I said I would talk only to the King and nobody else. He replied that he had been sent by the King for that purpose.

I told him that the King did not have any vested interest in the present system but others had. I was against the present system. So emissaries who had a vested interest in the present system could not possibly be neutral and I would, therefore, not talk to them or make use of them to convey my views to the King. If the King granted me an audience, I would talk to him directly but I would not use an intermediary.

In the meantime, I think the King felt that my condition was becoming critical. One evening, his secretary, Ranjan Raj Khanal ...

Q: He is Bidyut Raj Chalisey's father-in-law?

A: Yes. He was the principal private secretary to the King. Khanal came to me and said that I was to see the King. He had brought a conveyance and asked me to get ready. Within half an hour I was ready and accompanied him to the palace. I was taken directly to the King. The King started talking about my health. You see, I did not know how bad my condition was. I was weak, but there was no other symptom of illness except loss of vision. I said that I thought he had sent for me to discuss the political situation. He replied, "Your health is very critical." I remarked that the health of the country was also very bad. He told me that I was not perhaps aware how seriously ill I was. Then he sent for a doctor.

Q: What was the doctor's name?

A: Mrigendra Raj Pandey, a very, very competent doctor. Even in India he would be regarded as a top physician. He had submitted a report on my health to the King. The King gave the report to me. I could not understand some of the technical terms in it.

The King sent for the doctor who was waiting in the anteroom. He came and explained to me how critical my condition was. The King asked me where I wanted to go for medical treatment. I said that I should like to go to Delhi, Bombay or Vellore. The King said that according to the doctor's report Indian hospitals did not have the facilities required for the kind of operation I should undergo.

Since my life was precious, the King said, he would like to send me to the best surgeon in the world. He suggested two names, Dr De Bakey and Dr Cooley. The hospital he suggested was in Houston, USA which was considered the best place for the type of operation I needed. He said these two doctors had developed a new technique of operation. He insisted that I should leave for Houston as soon as possible, preferably the next day. As it was seven o'clock in the evening, I said I could not do so because I would have to raise funds for expenses, and it was not easy to go to the States. Anyway, I had some money which the government had confiscated, and I told him that if he would release that money then I could go.

Q: When was the money confiscated?

A: In December 1960 after I was arrested. It was about a couple of lakh rupees. The King said, "Oh, the process of releasing that money will take a week or so. You can't wait that long. I will provide the expenses for your journey and for your treatment. You should go tomorrow."

The King wanted to know whether I desired to be released ed just then. I said that I could not leave the following day as I wished to meet my relations and some colleagues in prison. He said, "All right, if you want to be released just now, you may go home from here."

I said that I would go back, meet Ganesh Man Singh and stay in that camp for one night. The next day, I should be released and permitted to see the other prisoners. He said, "Yes, that can be done, You make preparations and don't worry about money, that will be taken care of."

I asked what about politics. He said, "When you come

back there will be time enough for discussing that. You save yourself. Don't treat yourself lightly, it is a serious matter. Your life is very precious." I was with him for about 90 minutes and we discussed politics in a general manner. I was then taken back to the Police Training Camp.

Ganesh Manji was waiting for me, and so were doctors. The Inspector-General of Prisons was there as well as the camp commandant. A medical technician took my blood and laboratory tests were done there itself. Incidentally, the King asked me whether I wanted to meet my wife, I said yes, I would be very happy if I could see her. Word was sent to her, and then I came back to the training centre.

Q: This was in 1977?

A: Yes, June 1977. Ranjan Raj Khanal came again to the centre. My wife had already arrived there. It was 11 o'clock in the night. Ranjan Raj told me that the King had suggested that since I could not go to the States alone, I should be accompanied by whomever I wanted, and money would also be provided for him.

I suggested that a doctor should accompany me, but Ranjan Raj and the assembled doctors said that doctors would be there in the US "who would take care of you." I should therefore be accompanied by a member of my family who would comfort me. "Why not take your wife?" they suggested.

It was thus agreed that Sushila would accompany me. A photographer came, passport forms were brought and other technicalities hurriedly attended to that night itself. Next morning, I was supposed to be released for a day. Again, Ranjan Khanal came. I forgot to tell you that the King had told me that this arrangement that I was leaving for the States should not be disclosed to the public before it was officially announced on the radio. The King explained that he had taken this decision without consulting his cabinet. He would consult it the next day. Ranjan Raj asked me to request my wife not to divulge these plans to anybody when she returned home. My wife returned home about midnight and I gave her strict instructions not to say anything about it till it was officially announced the next day.

Q: Tulsi Giri was Prime Minister at that time?

A: Yes. The cabinet met in the morning. When the King told it to concur with the previous night's developments, the cabinet passed a resolution full of praise for the magnanimity of the King. But to say that I was a free man when the charge of treason against me had not been withdrawn would have been anomalous. So the cabinet argued that "so long as he is in Nepal he should be in detention and should leave the country a detenue."

The King had agreed that I should be free for a day and leave as such, but the cabinet thought otherwise. The cabinet members did not say they would not agree to the King's decision but that it would be anomalous.

Secondly, they also hinted there was no assurance from me that I would not indulge in anti-government propaganda in foreign countries. For my personal information, the cabinet resolution was passed on to me through Ranjan Raj. I asked what the purpose of showing this to me was. If it meant that I should give an undertaking that I would not speak, I would not accept this condition.

Ranjan Raj replied: "No, the King has not asked you to give any undertaking, but this is the attitude of the cabinet."

Q: Now, the same Tulsi Giri wants to come back to the Nepali Congress and says that BP Koirala is the saviour of democracy in Nepal. That is what he told me the day before yesterday.

A: About my being released when there were charges against me, to be free to roam about, meet people, meet prisoners would be anomalous. I said I would accept this, I did not want to be released. If that was anomalous, I would not insist on release. But I wished to meet my family, my friends and the prisoners.

They agreed. I met them all. There was a regular procession of visitors to the training centre. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Sailja Acharya, Bhim Bahadur Tamang, all of them were brought from prison to meet me. Next day, a car came and I was taken straight from the place of detention to the airport.

To see me through all the travel formalities, officers

from the Central Bank and the Foreign Ministry came there and Sushila signed all the documents, including traveller's cheques. And the plane, an Indian Airlines aircraft, was detained for an hour or 45 minutes.

Q: How much did you pay for your treatment at that time?

A: I carried 5000 dollars in traveller's cheques and 4000 dollars for our plane tickets. We spent 9000 dollars on the trip to the States, but that was not enough as some bills had still to be paid. So the government instructed the Nepalese Embassy in Washington to pay the hospital bills, which were directly sent to it. I do not know exactly how much the bills came to, but I think it would be about 13000 or 14000 dollars.

Q: When did you meet King Birendra next? What did you talk about?

A: Some time after my return from the States I had to go there again for treatment. There was no question of my meeting the King. I developed the same symptoms and I had to go to the States for another operation. On my return, I was released by order of the King. although I had to attend court. During that period I met the King. I think I met three or four times.

Q: Could you tell me the gist of your discussions with the King?

A: I told him about my point of view, about the need for unity between the monarchy and democratic forces to save the country. I told him that we had three historic tasks to perform. Three tasks that are performed by other societies in three historical stages would have to be performed by us in one stage—building up institutions, giving rights to the people, and development. For these tasks it is not enough for the King to be dynamic. The system should be such that the people are motivated, they are induced, that they feel responsible for their country and its development, and for the stability of the political 'system. The King agreed.

Q: Did he agree on all points?

A: Yes, he agreed. Then I said that our international stance becomes a meaningless exercise if there is no unity,

if our home front is disunited, if we do not set our house in order. He agreed. There was not one single point on which he disagreed.

Q: Did you ask him what he proposed to do to get things moving?

A: The King said that this was a very mature way of seeing things and I should pursue my line. I think the impression he got from my talk was that I did not ask anything for myself. I did not discuss what type of government he should instal, I was interested in the system.

Q: You mean, the focus was on the question of basic principles and system?

A: Yes.

Q: What did the King say to that?

A: He agreed. I also said that it would be unfortunate if a conflict occurs between the monarchy and the popular forces now that the international situation had deteriorated and the people were taking up positions. I explained to him developments in Iran. And I told him that I did not want that situation to develop here.

Q: What was his reaction?

A: He agreed. I think I emphasised three points: we should not permit a Sikkim-type of situation to develop here; we should not allow a situation to develop as in Iran; and we should not allow the situation like that developing in Afghanistan.

Q: Why did you mention Sikkim? Was there any relevance in the Nepalese context?

A: According to me, Sikkim had an intermediary status. It was neither a full-fledged sovereign state nor part of India. What the Chogyal wanted was to raise the international status of Sikkim. By raising his personal status, he was raising the status of the state. But he did not seek the cooperation of the people—that was his mistake. Without the active support of the people, he could not achieve his objective.

Q: Did you ever tell the King that Nepal should have a democratic system of polity?

A: Yes, I did. I also told him that I was realistic enough to appreciate that we could not have democracy, but could make a beginning in the right direction. The people must feel confident that the country was moving in the right direction.

Q: What did the King say?

A: He said he would do it. I told him there should be a time schedule, that the process must not take too long, for he was racing against time. I told him that I had been very frank with him, that I did not think "you have ever heard such hard words in your life. Perhaps for the first time you are hearing the hard truth. Everyone who ever saw you must have told you that everything was all right and the country was happy under your benign rule. But that is not so."

Q: What did he say?

A: He said, "Generally people come and flatter me, but there are some exceptions." He told me that from 1960 I had either been in prison or in exile and again in prison for one year, so I was out of touch with reality, with the people. "A new generation has come up, you go and mix with them. Tour the country, find out the facts for yourself."

I said, "I may be out of touch with the people, but you too must be out of touch with the people, Because you see only what your courtiers want you to see. You hear only what your courtiers think you want to hear."

Q: What did he say?

A: He said, "Usually this is what happens. But there are people who come and tell me also what the reality is."

Q: Did the dialogue between the King and you end on that note?

A: Yes. On the third occasion. Immediately after or just before the referendum in 1980, we discussed foreign policy too. I said, "The feeling that your foreign policy is weighted against India should not be there. It is time—the Janata government is in office—to mend fences with them. They are also in the mood."

Q: Do you still believe that the Palace is an indispensable factor in the given context of Nepalese politics?

A: As regards the King's role, let me make it clear that we are for monarchy, rather we are for kingship. I would not say monarchy for there is a debate going on whether one is a *rajabadi* or a *rajtantrabadi*. We are for kingship.

In the peculiar situation that obtains in our country, the King has a role to play. We are transforming society, we are changing its economic structure, we are changing the political structure, we are changing the social structure in fact, we socialists are engaged in a total revolution.

We want the King to play a role in this social transformation. If we could get his assistance in this great enterprise our task would be easier. But if we use our resources to fight the King, the country will suffer. If we want to overthrow the King, we must build appropriate machinery. In that process, a situation of civil war would develop.

Our political system, our economy are too fragile to sustain such a big upheavel. Of course, in the transformation of our society there will be an upheaval, but that could be contained if we could take the assistance of the King. We have to create the nation with the help of the King, we have to build a democratic polity and also our economy. In this formidable task, we want the assistance of the King, we want an all-embracing national effort.

The King has a big role to play, but what role he will actually play would be determined by what role he wants to play, how far he is prepared to concede power and make himself acceptable to the people. That is why my reference to the King has always been honourable.

I have told the King, and I have also said in public, that I am for kingship not because I am a sycophant, not because I am terrorised into making that kind of statement. Because the worst that the King could do has already been done to me. So I have no apprehension, nothing to fear from the King.

And temptation? What rewards, what gifts could he bestow on me? Prime ministership? I am not prepared to accept prime ministership given by him. I am for kingship not because there is the temptation of office or the danger that I may be put back in prison or that something worse might happen to me—I have suffered all, everything at the hands of the King.

Still, I want to maintain kingship, because if we want

to save our nation, if we want to build our country, even if we want to build our democratic polity, we need the assistance of the King. If we fight the King, our energy will be exhausted in the process and we shall destroy our nation as well.

So far as the King is concerned, I feel he has also made some positive gestures. I addressed a public meeting the other day [31 March] and you were present. While we were holding the meeting on one side of the park demanding political rights and criticising the King's actions, a contingent of troops was on parade and guns were fired on the other side. How could this be possible without some positive attitude of the Palace?

There is a positive attitude of the Palace: I have been talking freely, I have been moving all over the country criticising the constitution and its giver. So I am not filled with despair. Some of our people despair, they feel nothing can be expected of the King, he does not see the writing on the wall.

But I am not despondent, I still have confidence because I feel that the King has seen the writing on the wall. From his side there has been a positive attitude. I will not however say it is appropriate to the situation. It is still very halting and hesitant, but it is a positive attitude and I am trying to cash in on it.

My confidence in my line of reconciliation is based on the fact that it has borne fruit. When I came here from exile there was total darkness. People thought I was committing some kind of suicide. Even Ganesh Manji thought that the choice before us was between slow death in India and dramatic suicide in Nepal and we had chosen the second course.

I said no, it was not that. We have registered very big gains in the last four years. I think this is due to our line of national reconciliation. It has stirred the Palace to some positive actions like the referendum. However manipulated it might be, the people were involved in it. I could move about, all the political parties could move about. And there is the promise of direct election, freedom of speech and the like. I think that is the King's positive response to our line of national reconciliation, and this should not be abandoned in haste.

Q: Is the Palace involved in day-to-day politics in a partisan manner? Do you think the Palace should scrupulously stay away from active politics?

A: The Palace is a bizarre affair. It is not a monolith, so to speak. There is the King, and there are other lobbies also in the Palace. I shall not be surprised if the big powers also have their own spokesmen in the Palace. So I will not speak of the Palace as such, because I do not understand it. I only understand the King and I think the King has some positive role to play—he should not be a dummy. He should play a positive role in starting the process of democratisation. The King should be partisan in favour of the people. I want the King to be modern and democratic. I want democratisation of kingship, and the King should play a role in that.

Q: Do you think that King Birendra is personally honest?

A: I have met the King three or four times. My impression is that he is a well-meaning person, very sincere, and also honest. But what is more important in politics is how he views the situation and how he thinks his interests as King would be served. I think that should be the basic consideration in this case rather than whether he is honest or not. As a matter of fact, I am banking on his assessment of the situation, on his retaining the interests of the dynasty at heart.

Whether or not he has the country's interests at heart, I do not care. It is enough for me if he wants the stability of his dynasty. Because if he is interested in its stability, he should be interested in the stability of the throne and of the country. After all, a dynastic King without a kingdom is meaningless. So he will be interested in the stability of the country. That is the rockbottom of his self-interest on which I have been harping.

I told him, "You may not be a very generous man or a loving King. You may not have love for the people at heart. But you certainly love yourself, your throne, your dynasty. Therefore, any strategy on my part which can serve that interest of yours will serve you too." This should be the starting point of his analysis: How to stabilise the country. Can he rule despotically and strengthen his throne, strengthen his dynasty? Or should he take the people into confidence, bring them into the political process and give them power, that is, give up his political power to the representatives of the people and thereby ensure the stability of the throne?

Once I told him that my nationalism is ideological, whereas his nationalism is basically selfish. Without nationalism he will have no throne, he is nobody. Even if the country loses its independence and becomes part of India or part of China, I told him once, I shall have my farm, my house in Biratnagar, although Biratnagar will be in India or in China.

"I may be voting for some Indian member of parliament or some Chinese legislator but I should be there nevertheless. But what will happen to you if there is no country? So your interest in the stability of the throne means that you are more vitally interested in the stability of the country than I." That is why I tell him that his interests will be served by joining hands with us. I think the King knows this.

Q: Do you think the results of the referendum [which gave the partyless panchayat group and the multiparty group 55 percent and 45 percent respectively of the total votes polled] held last year [1980] reflect the will of the people? If so, why do you oppose the implementation of the referendum verdict? Alternatively, if you believe that the referendum verdict was manipulated, why did you then accept it.

A: My interpretation of the referendum is different from that of the King. Nowhere in the referendum were the people asked to say whether they wanted the continuance of the present political system. The clear choice before the electorate was a reformed *panchayat*. Nowhere was it mentioned in the whole process—immediately after the King called a referendum and till its verdict was announced neither by the King nor by the Election Commission that the election was held to decide whether the people wanted a partyless political system. Partylessness of the polity was never mentioned. In this period the King spoke on two or three occasions, the Election Commission made many announcements, but they and the ballot paper too made no mention that the choice was for partylessness.

I pointed this out to the Constitutional Reforms Commission the King set up immediately after the verdict of the referendum was announced. The commission asked me what in my opinion would be an appropriate constitution in the present context. I specially mentioned this fact—I had to do it—that immediately after the verdict was announced—half an hour after—the King came forward to make the statement that the verdict had gone in favour of the partyless *panchayat* system. I think the King has misrepresented the verdict of the people. He has given it an interpretation which is his own. It is not that of the people. Q: Why don't you participate in the 9 May general election on the basis of universal adult franchise. If you

think the ensuing election, amended constitution and other reforms are a mere cosmetic change, why did you not say so when the reforms were announced?

A: About six months after the King announced a referendum, he made a very significant declaration that three essential principles of parliamentary democracy would be incorporated in the Constitution regardless of the verdict of the referendum:

(i) There would be direct elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. He did not say partyless national *panchayat*. He took care not even to mention the word *panchayat*, he said national assembly (Vidhayak Sabha).

(ii) The second parliamentary principle he mentioned was that the prime minister would no more be appointed by him but elected by the elected representatives, that is the Vidhayak Sabha elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.

(iii) The prime minister and his cabinet would hold office so long as they enjoyed not the King's confidence but the confidence of the assembly.

These three basic principles of parliamentary democracy, the King said, would be incorporated in the constitution regardless of the verdict of the referendum. What do you think is the logical interpretation of this important announcement on the part of the King?

Q: He conceded the basic principles of parliamentary democracy.

A: There were many constitutional experts who said that the proposed referendum would now be a redundant exercise, because the King had already conceded the essence of parliamentary democracy. There was therefore a demand for further clarification from the King on what the people would be expected to vote for in the referendum.

The question of partylessness was thrown overboard by this very declaration by the King. The choice now was between the multiparty system and a reformed *panchayat*, incorporating the basic principles of parliamentary democracy the King had already announced. So the general feeling was that whichever side won it would be parliamentary democracy. At any rate, the concept of partylessness would be removed from the constitution.

But people are very unhappy because only half an hour after the announcement of the results of the referendum the King said that it was a victory for the stand his father [the late King Mahendra] had taken, that the people had given the stamp of approval to the partyless system initiated by his father.

That was a wrong interpretation he imposed on the people. Thenceforth, he has always stressed partylessness. When he instituted the Constitutional Reforms Commission, he specifically mentioned that it was commissioned to draft a constitution not only incorporating the will of the people as expressed in the referendum but also that of the minority. This means that the opinion of the 2 million voters favouring the multiparty system should also be reflected in the constitution.

So we were hopeful that although it would be a partyless Constitution there would also be freedom for others who did not subscribe to the concept of partylessness. We were expecting a constitution which would be acceptable to us but my first reaction to it was that I rejected it and emphasised three or four points: *

(i) The constitution is very unsatisfactory, it is not demo-

cratic, it suffers from a spirit of timidity, the giver of the Constitution had developed cold feet.

(ii) It should have been of the kind which could motivate the people to the higher task of nation-building and break the backbone of the anti-national elements that had come to the centre of the political scene.

(iii) The giver of the constitution should have mustered courage to take decisions appropriate to the demands of the situation.

(iv) It is harmful to the nation and to the King himself.

I also said it would be a very crucial decision on our part and I would therefore consult my party workers throughout the country and contact the leaders of various other shades of political opinion. I would also seek an interview with the King for some clarifications.

I returned to Kathmandu about ten days ago after extensively touring the country, and the last workers' conference was held here on 30 March. While I was on tour, government announced the date for the filing of nominatians for the elections. What is very surprising is that government did not fix the date for them but fixed other dates such as filing nomination papers, withdrawal of nominations and all that. It is like...

Q: Sending out invitations before the date of marriage is fixed.

A: Correct, I like that analogy. We thought that government wanted to hustle us into a decision. We said we were not going to do that. We would take our time to decide our policy, and that only after we had completed a survey of the situation and consulted our party workers as well as others. In a way, we rejected this constitution from the beginning, but I wanted to consult my party workers.

Secondly, there are some good features in the constitution, one of which is the provision for universal adult franchise and direct election. Our one temptation was that since it involved the participation of the people it would give us an opportunity to be with the people. We could project our image, explain our stand to the people, define ourselves and our ideology to the people. But the whole question was that the Nepali Congress has certain features which distinguish it from both the radicals of the left, the so-called left, and the sycophants of the right. I have been explaining it to the people. We have got a tradition which is a fusion of both reality and idealism. This has given a certain courage to our party men, and this distinguishes us from both these camps.

Had we agreed to participate in the election as panchas, our apprehension was that we might lose our identity and the voters might confuse our candidates with the partyless panchayat men. Moreover, we did not expect that the King would give a fully democratic constitution at one go. We expected the process of democratisation to start with this constitution, and also the dismantling of the existing authoritarian and anti-national political structure. But that did not happen. The constitution is a clever device for prolonging the same structure. We feel that the constitution does not take into consideration the existing political realities.

This constitution is not bold enough to take note of the rising expectations of the people. We are the representatives of the people, and so we thought that we would be betraying the trust they had reposed in us if we accepted the constitution and fought the elections. That is why we are not participating in them.

CHAPTER IX

The Party's Options

Q: Don't you think your non-participation in the general election will close all your options except that of the politics of conflict and confrontation? Where do you go from here now that you have decided to stay away from the elections?

A: I think if I had accepted the amended constitution in toto, perhaps my options would have been limited. My options would have been limited if I had joined the system. Thapa's [Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa] options are limited, MP Koirala's [former nominated prime minister and a panchayat leader] options are limited, but not my options because I am with the people.

Q: Don't you think that whatever you might decide to do there is always the possibility of that leading to the politics of conflict and confrontation?

A: No, I don't think so. A debate went on for some time in our party about its approach to the election. Three alternatives were suggested:

(i) Boycott the elections and sit tight in our homes doing nothing. This is called non-active boycott.

(ii) Active boycott which should follow either of two strategies: Don't allow the elections to take place; capture the polling booths on election day and prevent the voters from going to them.

(iii) Create a law and order problem.

We opposed that, and also passive boycott. Our boycott is that we would go to the masses, we would function as if we were participating in the elections. But we would do this only to explain to the voters the political situation and the reasons why we are not participating in the elections, what particular clauses in the constitution, what processes we object to and why. We will not create a law and order situation, we shall not physically prevent voters from going to the polling booths, we shall not physically interfere with the election process. But we shall educate the people, we shall go to them and do a political job, not a job of anti-social elements or law breakers. At the same time, we will not stay quietly at home and just issue statements saying that we have decided not to participate in the elections.

Q: You are on record with the observation that the amended constitution is good for neither the King nor the people. And you stated on 21 March 1981 that your current political line is no confrontation with, no surrender to the Palace. This reminds one of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's "neither acceptance nor rejection" approach to the constitutional changes the British government proposed in India's freedom struggle. What does your line really mean?

A: I will explain what our line is. We shall not compromise on the issue of democracy and we shall not adopt the line of confrontation with the King. That is why I said no confrontation, no surrender, of our right to fight for democracy in our country. But our fight will not be of the nature of a confrontation with the King.

With regard to Gandhiji's statement sometimes I feel that I have started understanding Gandhiji more and more as critical situations develop and one has to take a decision alone because there is no assistance available from any quarter.

When my people, my co-workers, my comrades look up to me for getting out of a tight corner, I feel that I am confronting a situation the like of which perhaps Gandhi also had to face. That is why I say I have started understanding Gandhiji more and more: his line has become a little more relevant in the given context.

Q: You are credited with the statement that "without our acceptance of the constitution and our involvement in the poll, the credibility of the democratic process will be very little." You say, "We intend to ask our supporters to stay away from the polling booths on the election day," for "the choice offered is of candidates having a poor record" and not because you reject on principle the post-referendum political engineering. At the same time, you confirm that "my line of seeking a national reconciliation is still operative and relevant in the national context." Can you really say there is no gap in the logical association of the three formulations?

A: Elections will be meaningful only when the people who remain outside the existing structure participate. If the same set of people who have been with the system, who have been participating in the *panchayat* process for the last 20 years, were to be involved in the elections, if it does not take in those who are outside the system, the elections are meaningless.

This is why I said that the elections would be a futile exercise because they would involve the same people and the voters would have no choice. It would have been a breakthrough if the people from outside the *panchayat* system had participated. We reject the general election because it does not satisfy the aspirations of the people, it is not democratic enough and it does not solve the political crisis the constitution was meant to solve.

Q: Your statement (20 March 1981) that the amended constitution's grant of universal adult franchise and direct election would eventually lead to "watering down!" the Crown's authority because "the people could choose their own candidates in future and not abide by the official list" seemingly suggests that there is a qualitative difference between the pre-referendum political situation and the realities on the ground today. How's that?

A: I told you that the positive feature in the constitution is that there will be direct elections on the basis of universal adult franchise and government will not be responsible to the King but to the elected legislature. But what I have been trying to tell you, Bhola, is that this is not adequate, the situation is developing faster than the mind of the King. Whatever concession the King grants is just a drop in the ocean. It only whets the appetite of the people instead of satisfying their hunger. I do not say that it has no positive aspect. It has some good features, but these are nullified by other features like membership of a class organisation. You see, such membership means that you have got to take a pledge when you offer yourself as a candidate for election. There is a document which you have got to sign saying that you adhere to the partyless principle. We subscribe to the party system. True, we have lost the referendum but we still think that is not good for the country. We reserve to ourselves the right to say so.

Q: Nepalese politics seems to have reached a state of exhaustion after the hectic period starting with the May 1980 referendum and the general election last May. Apparently, there are two courses open to you to get over it: either start a process of agitation and movement and thereby pressure the powers that be to concede a multiparty system of government, or use the present political framework to serve your purpose. What do you propose to do?

A: First of all, I do not agree with your assessment of the present situation as one of political exhaustion. After we returned in December 1976 from political exile in India, a new situation was created. The King took certain steps to liberalise the regime. and in that process he held a referendum, introduced reforms and amended the constitution. On this basis, the country went through a general election last May.

That was a very active period, because after 20 years of total suppression of all political activities the people got an opporunity to give expression to their pent-up feelings. That phase ended with the installation of the Surya Bahadur Thapa government. We have now entered a new phase when the very basis of the partyless *panchayat* system has ceased to exist.

The panchayat has merely a nominal existence and its essential features have been done away with. People are free to hold meetings and can speak freely. The opposition has a constitutional place in the polity, although the law does not recognise it. In practice, however, we enjoy as much freedom as the opposition parties in India. I have been telling my friends and colleagues that the law would not permit me to hold a public meeting or allow any newspaper to be published, but the law is ineffective and newspapers critical of the government, at times subtly critical of the monarchy also, are published. Q: Does this mean that there is freedom of the press?

A: Yes, it does. Although the law does not guarantee the press freedom, it is there in practice. I think in a constitutional monarchy it is not the law but healthy conventions that are important. My assessment of the situation is that the third amendment of the constitution has dealt a death blow to the so-called *panchayat* system.

The panchas are in a quandary about what to do. There is no focal point, which the King used to provide both inside Parlaiment and outside. Of course, the King has great moral as well as legal authority. But the panchayat system has no central focus inside or outside Parliament; it is at its last gasp.

Q: Does the panchayat system have any ideological basis?

A: No. The *panchayat* system functioned so long because it enjoyed the support of the King. That support has been withdrawn. The people are clamouring for the head of the Prime Minister; every member of Parliament criticises the Prime Minister. I have not done so because I hold the system responsible for this.

You cannot criticise Premier Thapa for his past deeds because, after the general election, it is these people, the *panchas*, who have made him prime minister. Now they cannot turn back and say he is a bad man. If they knew he was bad, why did they elect him in the first place? And then they, some of the big guns in the Rastriya Panchayat tell me that the King manoeuvred the whole thing. But the question is, why they permitted themselves to be manoeuvred. When the King had given them the right to elect a prime minister, why did they listen to the phone call from the Palace?

Q: That is a valid argument.

A: Again, the third amendment of the constitution, under which the new legislature was elected, does not solve the country's problems. Even from the point of view of the King, his problems too remain unsolved. Not only that, the problem has been aggravated, and that not a little because of the rapid growth of international tension here. The country's economic problems, its law and order problems have been aggravated, and corruption has touched a new high. In fact, on every front, the system is not in a position to meet the challenge.

There is deep thinking among the people who matter in politics here on how to get to grips with these problems. There are indications of a realignment of forces among the democrats who are with me and the patriots who are with the King. A split is recurring in the *panchayat* just as there is a split in our democratic movement. Those who are not patriots among us will not remain with us, and those who are not democrats will not remain with the King. That is what I am anticipating, hopefully. My purpose is to hasten this realignment of forces.

Q: Should we say that you are trying to bring about a consolidation of democratic forces?

A: Yes, democratic but at the same time nationalist. I emphasise this point because some people with us may be democrats, but their patriotic credentials may not be as clean as I should want them to be. Such people may leave us—for instance, Parsunarayan Choudhuri has left us. Similar is the case with the panchas.

Those who are really patriots will accept my argument that without democratic development you cannot hold the country together, you cannot save the country, you cannot even be a patriot, you cannot be a nationalist without being a democrat. So I am anticipating that the new political system that is going to emerge will be composed of elements both from among my old democratic associates and from among the *panchas*.

I believe that material for a new political system, a new political culture is available also among the panchas [BP wants a synthesis of patriotic, nationalist democrats and democratic, patriotic panchas] and I am waiting for that material to come to me. For this reason I ask democrats not to be scared of panchas and I ask Panchas not to be afraid of democrats. I repeat, after the general election and the installation of the Rastriya Panchayat, everybody recognises that third amendment of the constitution has not solved the country's problem.

Q: In the given situation, what are the courses of action open to the King?

A: The King, I think, has two alternatives. He can carry on as at present, but this will not solve his problem, it would only complicate matters. The King amended the constitution in the hope that he would be able to bring new elements into the system. He granted adult franchise, he also accepted the principle that the prime minister should be elected by the Rastriya Panchayat and the prime minister should be responsible to it. That is how he wanted to win over those elements, the important democratic elements in the country's political life, which had not cooperated with him so far. This was an invitation to them to cooperate with him.

But since we did not cooperate with him, his purpose was not served. The result was that he had to call upon the same prime minister to form the government and retain the old setup. No new elements were inducted into the system. So far as the King is concerned, all his efforts beginning with the referendum to the general election proved futile.

Now, of the King's two possible alternatives the first is: assuming that the present system is not going to solve his problem, he will have to devise constitutional measures which induce important democratic elements which have remained outside the system to get into it. This means that he must satisfy that important segment of Nepal's politics, that is, he must be able to bring people like us over to his side.

For this another amendment of the constitution is necessary. We have not demanded any vital changes in the basic structure of the constitution, we have asked for only two or three minor peripheral adjustments so that he may have our cooperation. On the other hand, I am saying this for the simple reason that international antagonism is casting its shadows on Nepal. And, because of the thinking that the King is the only factor for stability, there will be international pressure on him to be very firm and encourage no more of this kind of experiment with democracy. Rather, he should reverse the process he initiated three years ago. This also could be the advice of some international forces. Q: Could you identify these international powers?

A: I think it would not be proper for me to name them at present. There are four international powers which concern Nepal: India and China, the two regional powers, and the two big powers, Soviet Russia and USA. There are powers interested in the stability of Nepal, and there are powers who want to destabilise it. One big power wants to destabilise, and it cannot be denied that the entire region is being destabilised particularly as a result of the developments in Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also often speaks about attempts by the big powers to destabilise India, of forces inside and outside the country which are out to destabilise India. That factor, the factor of destabilisation, operates in Nepal with greater force. And the unholy alliance between them and their agents in Nepal can create a very difficult situation.

The King can also argue that he did all he could to bring in the democratic elements, but they were not satisfied with his efforts. Therefore, any further concession would only add grist to the mill of the forces of destabilisation, leading to greater chaos. Should that argument prevail, he may also think of reversing the process. That would indeed be dangerous.

Q: Do you have any idea about the King's thinking on the subject.

A: I have not met the King for the last two years, and it is not easy to guess how his mind works. I put myself in his position: I think the King is worried about both stability and the excessive growth of foreign influence in the country. That is why we may feel he must retain power, he must remain the final authority. Our differences with the King are that we want him to hand over to parliament whatever power he holds.

The King's problem is that parliament should be either amenable to him or amenable to the democratic forces but not to foreign forces. His concern, he might say, is, "You have people like Parsunarayan Choudhuri in your party. If you had contested and won the election, people like Choudhuri would have dominated the party. That Choudhuri's action has betrayed your party, at any rate betrayed his lack of loyalty to you and to your political line, is quite evident. I have great faith in you, but you are carrying with you a group of men like Choudhuri. And Choudhuri was either motivated by personal ambition or I, the King, brought about a change in him. He is more loyal to me than to you. Or he is loyal to others outside the country. That is, either he is loyal to himself or to me or to a foreign power, but he is not loyal to you."

Q: That sounds plausible.

A: The King may ask me, "Can I give up power and hand over it to you or to parliament, over which neither you nor I have control?" I think that is his dilemma, and is my dilemma also, I am being very frank with you. The King now says, "I have given you an opportunity to organise, I am preventing your party from getting into power because you do not have a party. You are carrying with you a crowd without any loyalty to you. They are with you because they think that you can deliver the goods. That is why I do not want you to be in power.

"When you have built your party, loyal to your ideas, loyal to the country, loyal to the monarchy, loyal to democracy, then come to me and ask me what I should do. For the present, I have done whatever was possible, whatever is good for the country, for you and for me as well."

I have no answer to that. You see the line that we have adopted is expressed rather epigrammatically—no surrender, no confrontation. This means no struggle to overthrow the present system, but no surrender to it. Now the charge against me is that this is no policy—either I should surrender to the King, to the present system, or launch a movement to overthrow it.

What critics fail to understand is that I am not opposed to local struggles, or to economic sruggles, or to any movement against rising prices. But It oppose a mass struggle strong enough to force the King to grant democratic freedom to us, an unwilling King being forced by the upsurge of our movement to give in. That is fraught with dangerous possibilities. It is not a figment of the imagination that because of the infiltration of foreign powers any movement of that kind will get out of hand. Both the King and ourselves will get locked in a struggle in which we shall be prisoners of a strategy devised in foreign capitals. But this must not be interpreted as our acceptance of the present system.

Q: Do you have any other options?

A: We have been given a tremendous opportunity to educate the people about my strategy, to tell them why a mass struggle is not appropriate at present, why compromise also is not appropriate. There has to be ideological clarity and I have to create a political party in the districts parallel to the *panchayat* system, every village must have a unit of the party. This is the task I shall now be occupied with, the task of organising the people, of clarifying the basic political issues before the people. This will take me about 15 to 18 months, and only after this is done will I confront the King. Until then I do not think I can ask the King to do this or not to do that with any sense of responsibility.

Q: What do you think could be a face-saving formula which might facilitate your participation in the present political system?

A: The situation is too serious and we cannot get over it with a formula which would only help save face. If the formula does not bring about basic change, whatever facesaving formula might be devised would not help. In fact, I do not agree with your expression "face-saving formula." which is not quite appropriate.

If I were to meet the King, I would only tell him that he made a mistake by not granting me an audience when I wanted to meet him sometime before the general election. But in retrospect I think that was a blessing in disguise. Because even if we had participated in the election some of our successful members would have gone over to the other side like Parsunarayan Choudhuri.

The fact that we did not participate in the elections was a deliberate act of non-cooperation. But that served us also, for it revealed the weakness in our party just as the elections revealed the weakness in the *panchayat* setup.

Q: A committed pancha and an elected member of the

Kathmandu Nagar Panchayat, Mrs Kanchanmala Chalisey, made a rather paradoxical observation. According to her, you are the most stable barrier between the King and the extremist forces both within the Nepali Congress and outside. What do you say to that?

A: I think the King is strong enough to look after himself, he does not need my support. I feel that ultra-radicalism or extremist politics does not suit Nepal, but it suits the foreign powers interested in destabilising the country. There are two types of extremists, and after the elections they seem to have converged so far as the democrats are concerned. Those who have all along been very staunch supporters of the *panchayat* system are now greater enemies of the King than the democrats.

Q: That is amazing. How do you explain it?

A: Indeed, it is amazing. If you talk to them in confidence, you will get to know that the important men who were defeated in the election blame the King for their defeat, and those who have won say that they won in spite of the King. If you ask them how Surya Bahadur Thapa became Prime Minister they would say that the King did it, he pulled wires. In fact, everything that is happening here they attribute to the King. The *panchas* who flourished in the last 20 years oppose the King. They are essentially fascists, influenced by foreign powers. They are not interested in the stability and progress of the country.

An economic class has emerged in Nepal in the last two decades which is not dependent on the economy of the country, which is neither capitalist nor feudal. The feudal class depends on the prosperity of the rural economy, and if the economy prospers it will get a share. The capitalist class is interested in developing capitalism—market development, urban development and all that goes with it.

The new affluent class has no roots here. These people are affluent because of foreign help, a large share of foreign aid goes into their pockets. They are affluent because of corruption, denudation of forests, smuggling and illegal business practices.

That is the class which is at the centre of our politics. They have vested interests, they have their ramifications inside the Palace. It is common knowledge that every country has different political lobbies. For instance, India has a US lobby, a Russian lobby. A lobby exists to influence the minds of the rulers, to sell ideas. Here one cannot talk in terms of lobbies but only in terms of agents who are entrenched in our body politic.

Q: There is a good deal of difference between a lobby and an agent.

A: Yes, that is true. When I say this, I am accused of being obssessed with foreign powers. But this is a fact. Even the King is worried on that score. As I see it, Nepal's situation can be symbolically expressed by a triangle. One point of the triangle is the King, another point is foreign power, and we constitute the third.

Q: You mean the democratic forces?

A: Yes, that is correct. If it were only a struggle between the King and us, without having to calculate on the presence of foreign power, this would have been a onedimensional affair. In that case, we could have told the King to hand over power to us. If he refused to do so, we could have told him that we would remove him from the throne. There would have been a straight fight. But not so now. Before we adopt that attitude we must reckon with the fact that there is a bigger power than the King entrenched in our system.

Not to take this factor into consideration would amount to serving the interests of foreign powers, wittingly or unwittingly. If the situation is analysed as if only two factors are taken into account when there are actually three factors present, the perspective would be distorted. That is why I say the King has a role to play, and our struggle against the King must not push him to the wall.

Q: You do not want a struggle with no holds barred?

A: That is true. So far as our relations with the King are concerned—this might sound paradoxical—we are at once riding two horses running in opposite directions. We are with the King on national issues, but on democratic issues he is our enemy, we have got to take power from him. My strategy is to combine these mutually contradictory relationships with the King. At one point we are comrades in arms to hold foreign influence at bay, at another point he is our enemy. That is why I say no confrontation with, no surrender to, the King. Most others who refuse to take into account the foreign factor say we must either surrender to the King, the situation being what it is, or strike at him.

Q: A knowledgeable opposition member of the Rastriya Panchayat told me that the Rastriya Panchayat is a consultative body and the King continues to be the source of all power in the kingdom. What do you think of it?

A: I think I know the gentleman you are referring to. He also told me the same thing. I ask him whether he owes to the King his position as a member of the Rashtriya Panchayat. I am sure he would say he was elected by the people in spite of the King. All other members of the Rastriya Panchayat would say the same. But the King could not have pulled strings to get his men elected.

You ask the prime minister and he would say the same thing. He is there—he has said it in public—in his own right. He says he is the second elected prime minister, after me, of Nepal. That is the constitutional position. The question is, why did these members of parliament allow themselves to be used by the King? Why did they allow the power vested in them to be usurped by the King?

If they accept my constitutional analysis, they would have to accept the fact that the third amendment of the constitution has not brought about any real change in the situation. But they are not going to do that. They are only trying to rationalise their conduct. They want to be members of parlaiment, but at the same time they say that since parliament is impotent, since the Prime Minister rules over them. they feel they have no responsibility for anything.

Q: I suppose this provides their troubled consciences with an escape hatch of sorts.

A: Yes, that is right. I have strongly criticised the argument that the King is all in all, that he selected the prime minister. Assuming this to be true, why did they allow themselves to be manipulated by the King?

Q: It is said that there has been a tremendous amount

of depoliticisation of the people in the last two decades. That being so, democracy, civil liberties, fundamental rights and the like do not mean much to them. The problem of bread matters. That is why the Nepali Congress' appeal to them in the name of democracy, fundamental rights and so on does not cut much ice.

A: I think this is a rather pedestrian argument. My conviction is that the people are not motivated by consideration of bread alone. Their springs of action do not lie in their stomachs. Nowhere in the world has there been a revolution only for bread. Whenever people have risen in rebellion, they have done so in the name of ideology or religion, in the name of liberty, equality, fraternity. This thesis is wholly unacceptable to me.

Q: Politically informed people are somewhat concerned about the question of leadership of the Nepali Congress after BP Koirala, who? The Nepali Congress has regional leaders, but few leaders of national stature. This is considered at once a major weakness of the party and your failure to nurse a competent group of men who could collectively shoulder the responsibility and give the necessary leadership to the party.

A: Bhola, this is a very difficult question. As a matter of fact, I have not applied my mind to this question at all. But people have been asking me this question, they seem to be a little concerned because they think there is no second rank leadership. I am not modest when I say that I am not indispensable.

Of late, I have deliberately tried to keep myself out of day-to-day party politics. The responsibility of running the party has devolved on Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, who is acting on my behalf, and Girija Prasad Koirala, general secretary of the party. Most of the party work is looked after by them.

I meet party workers at home, I do not go to the party office regularly, and party work has not suffered on account of my not being wholly involved in day-to-day activities. So I feel that I am not indispensable, that there are people who can take good care of the party.

The problem is that my political activities span three

generations—my generation, my son's generation and that of my grandson. In the changing politics of Nepal, I am one of the most stable factors. People look on me as an old oak in the courtyard. That is why they think I am indispensable.

Secondly, I will not say I am happy with the situation that obtains in our party. The men in charge of the party's district organisations belong to the third generation, and they are now involved in the business of mass politics. Individually, every one of them has suffered, there is not a single party worker who has not been in prison less than five or six years.

Some of them have been imprisoned for as long as 18 years, but they have had no experience of mass political activity, they are new to it. They are of course learning the tricks of the trade very fast, and I depend upon them to take charge of the districts.

As it is, I am not very well, I do not tour the country as I used to. The organisation that is taking shape is doing so without me, although the party activists turn to me when they are in difficulties and then I give them—I shall not say guidelines, but a sense of direction. I am hopeful that when I am no longer around, the third-generation party workers will be able to make a good job of it.

Q: If I asked you to do a little crystal gazing, what do you think would be the likely political scenario in the near future.

A: It will be somewhat difficult for me to do that. Well, perhaps it is wishful thinking on my part to say that the entire constitutional exercise from the national referendum to the general election was initiated by the King as a sincere exercise to induce an element like us, genuine nationalist democrats who had remained outside the political system, to participate in the system.

The King gave real concessions to the people, universal adult franchise, direct election, cabinet answerability to parliament, in fact most basic democratic rights, although he retained certain emergency powers. All this was done to get our support, not necessarily that of the Nepali Congress alone but democratic support in general. When we decided to boycott the May 1981 general election the King's purpose was not served and he had to call upon the same man, Surya Bahadur Thapa, to form a government.

So far as we, the opposition, are concerned there has been no change. My reading is that the King will soon feel the need to consult us or see his way to further amend the constitution, which will satisfy our minimum demands, hold a midterm election and thereby ensure stability in the political system.

The biggest problem of the nation is instability. If it were only manageable instability, it would not have mattered much. But if the instability is of a nature that government cannot manage it the very existence of the state would be endangered, particularly in view of the pressure put on the country. Naturally, the King would be interested in stability, but this cannot be achieved without the active cooperation of the democrats in any arrangement he may have in mind. That is why I say that the King will be obliged to turn to us.

Q: What is the other alternative the King might opt for?

A: The King might feel that all the exercises he has so far undertaken have been in vain as the democratic elements are not responsive. So no more of these experiments, and he will rule directly. The international situation will also induce him to think along that line, because the international forces are more interested in stability than progress.

This is what I have heard of late in diplomatic circles and political parlours here. Their question is: Stability versus progress. My answer is: Progress and stability. This may cause dislocation, but it would be manageable dislocation. But there are elements which feel that any further concession would only invite dislocation not amenable to *panchayat* management or democratic management. If he is confronted with the alternative of stability and no progress or of instability and progress, he will perhaps choose stability. And there will be no more democratic experiments and innovations.

Q: That is taking a rather grim view of the situation.

A: Yes, in a way. Because I think some of our neighbours would not like too much instability in our country.

Q: Who are those neighbours?

A: Why, I do not think it will help India if a situation af unmanageable instability is created in Nepal. I do not think it will help China either. In that case, it may be asked what would be their choice. Some countries—I do not want to name them—may like to stabilise the Palace and fully support the King. They could argue that the King provides the element of stability in the country.

Q: Don't you think that the Americans advanced the same argument in the case of Iran, only to bring about a disastrous failure.

A: As far Iran, the blame is laid—I do not want to be very explicit about that—on Carter [President Carter] for pressuring the Shah to give concessions and withdrawing support from him. You will recall that Iran's troubles began when the Shah introduced reforms in the system, listening to the opposition, arresting Savak and army officers, even his Prime Minister. The Shah, it is said, could have managed it but he was denied the support he wanted from the US. Anyway, that is a matter of interpretaion and analysis. As for Nepal, there is a feeling in some circles that the King can manage it by taking over the administration himself and stabilising the system by being a little ruthless.

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CHAPTER X

Socialism with a Difference

Q: Your commitment to democratic socialism is a fact of history. You have been a socialist since the early 1930s. What exactly is your conception of democratic socialism? Do you thnik democratic socialism as an ideological movement has a future, particularly in Nepal?

A: Bhola, I have made some comments on the question that you have asked me. I made a speech in Sydney this February where I summarised our experience of struggle and what lesson our experience has for the socialists of the world. I placed before the Asian Pacific Socialist Organisation conference in Sydney the five points I have made.

One is about democracy. Without appropriate political institutions in which the people have a vested interest, even economic development is not possible. The rationale of the King [Mahendra] in staging the coup in 1960 was the idea that economic development could be divorced from politics and could be accelerated under his authoritarian aegis.

This did not happen, As a matter of fact, royal rule brought the economy to the point of collapse. We have become poorer since his takeover. In our experience, development in our economic context, in the context of the Third World, means motivating people for the task of development, involving them at every level of development, from that of decision-making to the level of implementation of the decisions so made. This is a political job. Authoritarian rule can only create a bureaucratic edifice with which the people cannot identify themselves. This is our experience. So a socialist must concern himself with the development of democratic institutions also.

Secondly, what our idea is about foreign aid. Foreign aid in our condition, instead of helping the process of development, only creates a new class of people whose affluence is unrelated to the economic condition of the nation as a whole. The new class has no economic roots in the country. It exists solely on the basis of the manipulation of foreign aid and through corruption and illegal trade.

Thirdly, for a poor country like ours the model of development cannot be provided by the developed societies of the West. It is too late in the day for us to start on the basis of that model. Import of high technology does not suit us. What we need is a technology that is slightly superior to that we currently employ. That is, only slightly improved technology that can be handled by our own men.

Where we have blindly imitated the Western model of development, we have brought about a situation in which the rich have become richer and the poor poorer, and this has created an affluent class without national roots, a class that has no genuine interest in national economic regeneration.

Fourthly, socialists can do no worse than be apathetic to the democratic struggle of the people all over the world. When I say democracy I mean liberal democracy. When I emphasise this point because sometimes there is a tendency for some socialists to give this question less importance than economic development.

Fifthly, we feel that socialism is the wave of the future. Socialism is the natural ally of the Third World and the non-aligned. Without the anchorage of socialism, the countries of the Third World drift either to fascist militarism or to dictatorial communism or to obscurantist reactionary religious fundamentalism.

We socialists therefore face a big challenge in the Third World. The centre of gravity for socialism has shifted from Europe to the Third World, where socialism both as an inspirational ideal of life and as a model and blueprint for development has become relevant.

And if Nepal has a future, that is the only strategy for survival. Democracy at the political level and economic development that does justice to the masses—these are the two major strands of socialism. Without these two aspects, economic development to eradicate poverty, as also political liberty, would be a myth. It is not only a question of idealism or putting faith in high values of life, it is a matter of survival. Q: Do you seriously believe that parliamentary democracy can be worked in Nepal? Or for that matter in any Third World country?

A: I shall not say parliamentary democracy because democracy may not be of the parliamentary variety, but without democracy there cannot be any stability in the country. If there is no democracy, then what form of government should the country have? Who has the right to govern? Who determines the priorities in development?

If there is no democracy, then the man who has the longest sword would rule. And how can you put your trust in a man with a sword more than in a man who derives his sanction from the people and comes to power? I do not accept the idea that development and democracy are antithetical. The whole question is: If I do not accept democracy, who should rule? As for our country, of course, you would say that the King should rule. But that is putting your trust in a system which may not be as aware of the developing situation as those who enjoy the people's trust. So, basically, democracy and development are not antithetical, in fact one complements the other.

Q: What kind of economic system would you like to have in Nepal? How do you think Nepal could expedite its economic development?

A: I will give you my idea of it. My idea is not very clearly defined but I see light in that direction. I am grop-ing my way.

Q: Could I ask you to do a little loud thinking about it?

A: You see, when I was Prime Minister I went to the Planning Commission's office. There was a portrait of the King on the wall of the room where the experts had assembled. I had to address them. I did not know what to tell those experts.

Q: They were all economic experts?

A: Yes, quite a few of them were products of Harvard and Cambridge Universities. I told them that there was a portrait of the King, it was a very appropriate thing to do. But there should be another picture of a farmer bending over his plough.

I also told them that whenever "you have a project or a

scheme of development or a plan, you have got to remember that man with the plough and his hut. And you should ask yourself what benefit that man in the picture, and not the King, is going to derive out of your deliberations, out of your plan here."

This is not my original idea, it is Gandhi's. I am not an economic expert, but I thought that any development that bypasses the villager is no development at all. Any development that takes care of urban amenities and neglects the rural people is no development so far as I am concerned.

Because Nepal lives in the villages, its poverty lies there. You cannot even begin to understand the problem of poverty unless you are aware of the existence of the villages and their inhabitants. The mistake of the planners stems from the idea that they derive from the developed nations with high and sophisticated technology.

These nations are highly urbanised, even their villages are urban pockets. Their agriculture has adopted a highly developed technology. The Nepali planners' model of development is provided by these nations. Unless the minds of the planners are appropriately changed and their conception of development is altered, we cannot even start the process of development—that is the point of departure. I will ask the planners to take sides with the villages and the villagers, think in their terms and introduce only such technology as they can understand and handle themselves.

Such technology as is only a slight improvement on what they are used to—an improved plough, no big tractors, no big machines, no bulldozers, no jet engines, no big roads meant only for imported vehicles using imported fuel, run and maintained by foreign-trained technicians, no cement or iron for construction and less dependence on foreign imports. The planners must put all their emphasis on improving agricultural efficiency and on such industries as are agrobased.

You know, I was admitted to Jaslok Hospital about two years ago for my throat trouble. I used to discuss public health problems with the doctors there. Some of them were very public-spirited. I asked them what I should do if I were in government to improve the health of the people. They said, "Anything between 80 and 90 percent of the diseases are water borne. If you take care of water, if you provide the people with clean potable water, you would have taken care of 80 percent of the diseases. You don't have to have hospitals like Jaslok Hospital or foreigntrained doctors. You start with water and you will be able to control the problem."

So I suggest we should at least make drinking water safe and available to villagers. Motivate them to keep their villages clean, provide them not with costly hospitals, which we cannot afford in any case, but with basic hygienic needs. What I want to say is, let us not be moonstruck with the glamour of the developed countries and romanticise development. Let us start soiling our hands with the dirt of the villages which make up Nepal. Now, Bhola, you may say that this will result in a kind of rural civilisation, rather culture.

Q: Quite so. What you suggest may even remind one of Pol Pot's brand of primitive communism.

A: No, not Pol Pot. He took recourse to coercion. Pol Pot as a matter of fact drove away the urban population, large numbers of them from Phom Penh and other cities and towns. That was absolutely undemocratic.

Q: I get the point. Your emphasis is on democracy. You want things to be done democratically, with the sanction of the people. And that is the most important point.

A: I call the model the US has provided, the Henry Ford model, and this model was taken over by Soviet Russia. When Lenin assumed power, this was his model. He always said Russia could catch up with the US in ten or 20 years. Russians now measure their development in terms of the US. Their model was essentially provided by the US, and the US model was provided by Ford.

Now, the population of the US is only 6 percent of world population. To maintain these 6 percent in their present condition of affluence the US uses up between 30 and 35 percent of the world's natural resources. If China and India, which between them contain 60 percent of world population, try to plan their economies on the same model, there will not be enough resources available. So that model is not relevant by the very logic of it. And that model is very, very inefficient.

When I told an audience in the US—I had been invited to lecture at Columbia University—that the US economy was very inefficient, they were aghast. I said our agriculturists or Punjab agriculturists were more efficient than those in the US.

After all, what is efficiency? It means that there must be a correlation betwen input and output. You invest a huge sum of mnoey in one or two acres of land, but the production of wheat per acre is not higher than that the peasant in Haryana or Punjab produces with limited inputs.

"The Nepali cultivator with limited input produces more rice per acre of land than you do. Then there is the problem of wastage through consumption of fuel. Your economy is dependent on the consumption of fuel which is not unlimited. Unless you redesign your machine, I see a collapse of your system by the turn of the century.

"In the process of redesigning your model I think the Third World scientists and your scientists are at the same level. If you could harness solar energy, perhaps India would become more affluent than you, considering that more solar energy would be available in India. I do not oppose the use of science to improving the economic life of the peasantry. What I oppose is the model you have provided.

"In our country, where we have more men than we know what to do with, why should we go after machines? After all, what is a tractor? It is one farmer multiplied by a hundred. Because you have got only one farmer to do the job of a hundred farmers, you have got to have a tractor. In our country we have a thousand farmers, and unemployed to boot. We have got very little capital but abundant human labour. So why should we go after labour-saving devices? This is also the philosophy of Gandhi and Jayaprakash."

Q: What you have said about the economic model, let us agree, is relevant in the present Nepalese context. But what about the future?

A: If I enter the realm of conjecture, I would say that the future machines will be capable of being handled by a small number of men and the energy required to run them would be locally available. Production would be decentralised without impairing efficiency. Output will not decrease, but the centres of production would be decentralised. You ask me how I say that. I say it is bound to come unless we denude the forests, denude whatever little source of energy we have.

In our country we have both small and big rivers, we can construct dams, produce electricity with locally manufactured dynamos, provide energy for the local people and produce whatever they need. There may be one or two big projects, but that is about all. My contention is—I got this idea from Jayaprakash although he was not himself aware that he had made a very important contribution—that the misconception about science is that it has its own compulsions.

People think it has nothing to do with the human condition, as if it has an autonomous existence. It is not that. Science is a moral decision of man. I shall give an example to make my point clear. There was a big debate when John Kennedy was president about the Sputnik the Russians had sent into orbit. There was consternation in the US on the score that it lagged behind in scientific development. To restore US prestige, Kennedy called a conference of leading American scientists. He said he would like them not only to send a Sputnik orbiting the earth but also place a man on the moon and thus go one better than Russia.

The scientists said this was not difficult and that given ten years' time and 20 billion dollars they would do it. There were a few scientists who however said that was not the best test of scientific knowledge, it was only an engineering feat. They had all the knowledge, all the resources and they could do it.

But this 20 billion dollars could eradicate poverty in the Third World. And they asked what ought to be the decision: land a man on the moon or eradicate poverty. The point is that a decision as to the direction in which you want science to develop is moral. To say that science has its own logic, independent of human volition, is wrong.

In the final analysis man is the ultimate decision-maker.

The decision in the Third World should be not to save labour but to use labour, not to develop technology useful for mass production. Let the scientists of the world be engaged in harnessing the energy that is locally available but not at the cost of production. I think that is possible, I think the world is taking that direction. I am looking forward wih hope.

Q: Do you think that Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of total revolution has any relevance to Nepal?

A: You see, what Jayaprakash meant by total revolution is that man is not the engine of history, his quest is not only for bread. Man is a many dimensional entity, and he is an unfinished product. Man has a tremendous possibility, but if you want to develop man you must attack the problem from all sides—ethical, moral, psychological, economic, cultural, educational. If you take care of one aspect of man, leaving other aspects to take care of themselves, that does not happen.

That is why Jayaprakash said society should attack man's problems from all sides. His point is that it will not do to expect the state, although it is a very powerful factor in human life, to tackle all human problems, and once you elect a government to expect there is no other task left for the people to perform.

It has been demonstrably proved that laws, if you like, the state cannot solve all human problems. We have got to tackle these problems from different angles. That is total revolution. Unless you create a proper will for change in society, create a new social environment, no amount of legislation from above can solve the problem.

That is why he said he did not think that government is irrelevant. On the contrary, it is very, very relevant. But that is a not enough. One who is a revolutionary is not interested only in getting power. He is more interested in tackling the problem at the root and changing the climate, creating the will in society for implementing whatever legislation might be made. This is very relevant to Nepal and to all other Third World countries. Where a new society is being created, where new ideas, new civilisations are being created, this certainly is relevant.

CHAPTER XI

"I have no Regrets"

Q: Would it be wide of the mark if I said that your political thinking and attitude to life betray an element of anarchism?

A: I am an anarchist. There is always a tension in human beings, tension between impulses of anarchism not to be bound by rules, to hew a new path for yourself and at the same time, since you are a member of society, you have got to abide by its norms, values and truths.

Q: You mean, there is a conflict between an unlimited personality and a limited personality.

A: I should rather put it as a conflict between a member of a club and a person. As a member of society, you have certain norms and obligations to conform to. At the same time, you constantly feel that you must get out of this. This tension is always there in me. You see, I was Home Minister in the post-revolution government and I was a very powerful minister. Law and order conditions were very uncertain. My policemen had often to use the gun.

Q: I remember this. Once I was at your residence when you had to use a gun yourself.

A: Yes. Even now I feel the people have a right to break the law. But my business is to govern, and that is why I am in politics. And I may have to shoot, or put you in prison, if you break the law. At the same time, I have sympathy for the prisoner.

Q: Even when you send them to prison you have sympathy for them?

A: Yes, because that is what they should do. They live in tension.

Q: When were you married? Was it an arranged marriage? How many children do you have? When was your first child born? A: I was married in February 1937 and again in Banaras.

My wife—future wife at that time—was a student at the Theosophical School here. I had just taken my law degree. I have three sons and one daughter. I had two daughters, but one died in infancy. Prakash is the eldest son, Shrihars the second, and the third is Shashanka. The daughter is Chetna.

Q: When was Prakash born?

A: He was born in October 1947.

Q: Is your father-in-law still alive? What is his name? What was he?

A: Kamala Prasad Upadhyay, and he is still alive. At the time of my marriage he was the *bada hakim* of Jhapa. He insisted I should see his daughter before marrying her. So the marriage was partly arranged and partly not quite so. I came to Banaras to see her. Then I thought this was a very, very vulgar way of getting a girl for your wife. Immediately after seeing her, I decided to marry because it would have been ignorable on my part to reject her. You see, my mother had great ambitions for me and thought, like every mother, that her son was very good and handsome and deserved the best. My wife Sushila was not as beautiful as she expected.

Q: But she is one of the most beautiful persons I have ever seen.

A: That is precisely what I too thought, but my parents were disappointed [laughter]. But immediately after seeing her, I sent a telegram to my would be father-in-law saying I would marry within 15 days. He was flabbergasted. He said he could not leave his job suddenly, he had to apply for leave and all that. I said no, the marriage must take place on the 4 February or never. It took place that day but few guests could come here. It was a very small gathering, only Devendra, my two brothers and one of my sisters could make it.

Q: I have known you since 1949 and I have noticed that on the face of it, the relations between you and your wife are very loving and full of understanding. But tell me frankly, have you really loved your wife all along, have you been faithful to her always? A: If you ask me this, I shall say that she appears to me even today as fresh as on the day I married her. Partly because I have lived away from her most of our married life—I was in prison or on tour or in exile—I did not have enough of her companionship. So she retains the same attraction for me. She has been a great asset to me. There is a spiritual quality in her that sustains me.

As a matter of fact, she has suffered more than I have. It is only when you look at things superficially that you might not get the point. When I was arrested in December 1960, nobody knew where I had been detained. Nobody was sure about my fate, whether I was alive or not. When I met her after a year or so, her hair was greying, and in the course of three years she became quite grey, with wrinkles on her face. She had suddenly aged not only because I was arrested but because she had to look after the children, all small. She is very brave.

About fidelity, I don't know what is fidelity. If your question is the conventional question whether I had affairs with some others, my experience is that there would be very few people who did not have affairs other than relations with their wives. I am a normal being from that point of view and I had affairs. But the permanent, abiding moorings of my life are there in her.

Q: Have you ever tired of politics? Has the thought ever crossed your mind that you have had enough of spending your life in the almost interminable circuit of struggle, persecution, prison, exile, and then the whole cycle over again, that you would not regret if you could call it quits?

A: You see, I would not be what I am if I had not undergone what you call suffering or privation.

Q: But in your case your entire life seems to have been an account of that?

A: That is the life I have known, I have not known any other life. Moreover, the kind of life people generally lead has no attraction for me. I would be bored to death if I was forced to lead that sort of life. I feel that even if I were given a new life to live, my new life would not be very much different from the one I have led.

I think that there are two aspect to your question. One

is that as a politician I would certainly like to succeed. The kind of society I want to build or the kind of economic system I want to create, the thing that would affect others more than me, I worry about the lack of success on that score. So far as I am concerned, in personal terms, it is not success or failure that matters. If in your heart of hearts you feel that you have done your best, you have staked all that you are capable of, this gives you satisfaction, and that is what I feel. I have not succeeded in the generally understood sense of the term, but when I see people achieving success rather cheap I don't think they get any spiritual satisfaction. You are spiritually more satisfied when you find yourself making efforts, even if you fail. I think this is what has happened to me.

Q: Could I say that there is also a spiritual content in your attitude to life?

A: Yes, perfectly so. Exactly this was the question an American, a man of letters, asked me when I went to the US for medical treatment. I told him he was one of those who asked me not to return to Nepal because I would be arrested, but if I did not return to Nepal I would be more unhappy, I would curse myself.

In our context, Nepal's context, politics is not an avenue to getting elected president or mayor or some such thing. It relates to establishing certain values of life, wanting to live as human beings. We are fighting for basic values, I think not only in Nepal but also in other countries, we want to live as human beings. Unless your struggle has some spiritual content, you cannot survive.

Secondly, even if you survive, you cannot create that impact on society, you cannot create its values, you cannot establish values like democracy. Our people do not know what democracy is, but we want to establish democratic values. I think the basic strand of politics in our country is more spiritual than political.

Q: How long have you spent in prison, both in Nepal and India?

A: In India, slightly more than four years, in Nepal about 11 years, and I have lived in exile for about 19 years. That is, 15 years in prison and 19 years in exile in all. Q: Do you fear death, aware as you are of your uncertain state of health? How long have you been suffering from cancer? As we all know, cancer is a word that frightens everybody, and one who is afflicted with it generally gives in to despondency. Do you ever feel despondent?

A: No, I am not afraid of death. But the idea of death always occurs to me. I feel that I have not done as much as I should have. If I had lived an organised life, I could have done more in every field of life—in literature, in politics, in every way because I have a tremendous capacity for all that.

But I am very, very disorganised, you know. totally disorganised. I may sound vain, but I feel that if I had been organised, I would perhaps have been a great man in the usual sense of the term. I could have produced more writings expressing my ideas, my philosophy of politics, cogently. Or I could have contributed more to building up the democratic forces in Nepal.

In that context the idea of death always occurs to me. My diary is full of references to the idea of death—perhaps I may not live long and I am not organising myself purposively. Sometimes, I think I should go to a *yogi*, for it is said that *yoga* promotes discipline in your system, both mental and physical. The thought does occur in my mind. There is a constant feeling that I may not live long, and I have to do a lot before I die. But death has no terror for me.

Q: What about cancer?

A: I developed cancer in Hazaribagh Jail in 1943, 1944 or 1945. In 1944, I was operated upon in prison. I was taken from Hazaribagh to Ranchi for the operation. They thought that my trouble was tonsilitis because I had a lump on my neck. After my release in 1945, I started bleeding and Rajendra Prasad took me to Bombay [in October 1946]. He wrote a letter to an eminent doctor there who referred me to the Tata Cancer Institute, whose director was Sir A Duncun.

Biopsy was done and the report was given on the third or the fourth day. The report was sent direct to Rajendra Prasad. He handed me the report—it was sealed because they thought the patient would die of fear-and specifically instructed me not to open it.

Rajendra Prasad was visibly perturbed, I could easily see that. He said, "Don't you worry. The disease can be cured and you are in safe hands." The next day I went to the hospital and they started treatment. They told Devendra and my wife I wouldn't survive beyond three years.

But the response was so satisfactory that after the treatment was over they asked me to come again a month later. I was six months in Bombay and they said I was completely cured and that it was a miraculous cure because the ailment had been detected in the second stage. Now the doctors in New York and other places feel that I did not have cancer, there was a tumour or some such thing. Because recovery would have been very rare if I had cancer of that nature.

Q: How did you feel? Didn't you ever feel despondent?

A: No, not at all. Every day I had to go to hospital— I was an outdoor patient—and the treatment weakened me very much. I lived 30 miles out of Bombay and I had to catch a local train to reach Parel station to go to the hospital, get the treament and go back again. Sushila had come to look after me. I thought she would be very unhappy if I looked morose and worried. I used to ask her to come with me to Bombay and take her to the sea beach and all that. Whenever I went to the hospital, the doctors appeared very pleased. They would tell me that I used to bring joy to the other patients.

Q: What is your attitude to suicide and euthanasia?

A: Man has a right to commit suicide, particularly when he is a burden to his family and to himself. I support suicide, but not when one commits it out of sheer frustration. I also advocate euthanasia. When one is suffering from terminal cancer or from any other ailment that has no cure one has a right to opt for euthanasia. As a matter of fact, I have told my people that if I get a paralytic stroke or terminal cancer, I should be administered some injection to put me to eternal rest.

Q: I am in complete argreement with you on this point. And I have also written about both suicide and euthanasia. A: That reminds me, Minoo Masani formed an organisation some time ago to solicit support for euthansia. I appreciate this.

Q: How would you like to be remembered in history? For that matter, what would you like as your epitaph?

A: I have not thought about it. As a matter of fact, I don't think I have done much for which I should be remembered by posterity. I told you in my previous interviews that the spiritual side of my endeavour does not require that I should have a place in history. I have enjoyed life and I feel that I have fulfilled my duties—that is enough,

If I say that I should be remembered by the people with a monument, I think I don't have that ambition, absolutely no ambition of that kind. If I say that I should be remembered as one who introduced the democratic system into Nepal, that too would be a very vague kind of monument. So I am not very much worried about how I should be remembered by the country and the nation.

Q: But then can you say that you have been true to yourself, that you have tried your best to do what you wanted to?

A: Yes, I think I did my best, except that I was not organised. If I were more organised, perhaps my contribution would have been more permanent and enduring.

Q: And you have been true to yourself?

A: Yes, I have been very true to myself. About that there is no doubt. In fact, I have been very honest with myself. Q: BP, do you have any regrets when you look back on the past.

A: I have no regrets. I have lived a full life, exciting, deeply engrossing and satisfying. If I am given a new life to begin, my course, my development, will not be different from the one I have followed in the present life. In the context in which I lived, in the environment of misery, unhappiness, oppression and tyranny, ignorance and exploitation, I couldn't have been otherwise than what I am.

My life is a series of reactions to these facts of existence. In worldly terms—in the eyes of the people—I have undergone great hardship in life, a life of deprivation, hunger, imprisonment, sometimes in inhuman conditions. serious t

illness. But Bhola, I have no sense of suffering. Any other kind of life would have been not only boring but coarse also. Moreover, the tremendous love, affection, respect that I have received from my people, my friends and family is a gift worthy of the gods.

Appendix A

Lok Raj Baral Tribhuvan University Kirtipur, Kathmandu Nepal. 28 May 1980.

Bhola Chatterji Indian Statistical Institute 203, Barrackpore Trunk Road Calcutta-700 035.

Dear Mr. Chatterji,

I wonder whether you received the Political Science Syllabus sent through my office immediately after your departure from Kathmandu. If you have not, I will again send it. If the reforms as proclaimed by the King are *sincerely* implemented, there will be no scope for compliant. You know that Nepal is passing through a very critical phase of history ... I understand that B. P. has well realized it while accepting the verdict of the referendum. No sensible Nepalis should provide excuses for anarchical forces operating against the peaceful democratic transition.

With best regards.

Yours sincerely,

(Lok Raj Baral)

Appendix **B**

प्रेस वक्तव्य

नेपालको संविधानको तेस्रो संशोधन अब पंचहरूका लागि पनि मान्य रहेन भन्ने करा केवल ग्रहिले भईरहेको पंच भेलाले मात्र सिद्ध गरेको छैन, कि, यस मित्र सत्ताको लागि संघर्षमा संलग्न विदेशीका खेमाहरूलाई पनि त्यसले उदांगो पारेको छ । पंचायत व्यवस्थाको निर्दलियता मित्र एक दलीय सर्वसत्तावादको नियन्त्रण कति बलियो रहेछ भन्ने कुरा संविधानको भावना विपरित हन लागेको पंच भेलाले देखाँउदं छ। जनमत संग्रहको परिणाम श्रनुसारको (भण्डे-भण्डे बहुमत जस्तो) ग्रल्पमत ग्रटाउने संविधान पाइएन भन्ने हाम्रो गुनासो त छँदैछ तर त्यो तेस्रो संशोधनलाई पनि बंग्याउँदे विघठित गाँउ फर्क राष्ट्रिय ग्रभियानलाई पंच भेलाद्वारा यति छिटो पुर्नंजिवित गने क्षमता राजा र जनता भन्दा वाहिरको कुनै अक्तिमा छ भन्ने कुराले हास्रो चिन्तालाई स्रभ वढाएको छ । तैस्रो संशौधनमा वालिग मताधिकारको ग्राधारमा निर्वाचित प्रतिनीधिहरूद्वारा खडा भएको सरकारले संवैधानिक मान्यता बेगरको पंच भेलावाट मार्ग दर्शन लिनु पर्ने कुराले राजा र जनताको संविधान प्रदत्त ग्रधिकारहरूमा सफलतापूर्वक भाँजो हालेको छ । राजा र जनता दुवैका झधिकारहरू ग्रपहरण गरि दुवै तत्वलाई पंग् बनाई निर्दलीयता-को स्रावरण मित्र एक दलीयता मात्र होइन, विदेशी हैकम स्थापित गर्ने एउटा नियोजित पाइला सिद्ध हुँदेछ यो पंच भेलको परिपाटी द्वारा ।

प्रजातन्त्र विरोधी ढाँचाले गर्दा पचायतका निकायहरू विदेशी दब्-दबालाइ रोक्न ग्रसमर्थ भइ रहेका छन । हाम्रो ग्रदभ्य राष्ट्रिय मनोवललाई ध्वस्त गर्ने राजनैतिक ग्रखाडा विदेशी शक्तिहरूले पंचायतका निकायहरूलाई नै बनाईराखेको कुरा भन छर्लग हुँदैछ । एक दलीय सर्बसत्तावादको सम्राज्यवादी विस्तारमा संलग्न एउटा विदेशी शक्तिले देशका दक्षिण पंथी प्रतिकृयावादी र उग्रवादी वामपन्थलाई जाँतोको दुइ पाटाहरूको रूपमा प्रयोग गरीरहेका कुराहरू शहरका भित्ताहरूमा लेखिएका उग्रवादी नाराहरू र पंच भेलाको प्रजातन्त्र विरोधी हल्लिखल्लिहरूबाट पनि सिद्ध हुदैछ । सम्राज्यवादी नियत

Appendix B

भएको एउट पडयन्त्रकारी हातद्वारा सँचालित त्यस जाँतो भित्र प्रजातन्त्रका आदर्शहरूका साथ साथ सम्पूर्ण राष्ट्र र राष्ट्रवादी शक्तिहरू पिस्सीदैछन । यस संकटको सम्बन्धमा अरूहरूका अतिरिक्त, मसंग पंच र वर्णिष्ट पंचहरू पनि व्यक्तिगत हैसियतमा सहमति ज्ञापन गर्दछन तर यी कुराहरू बोल्ने कुनै पनि वातावरण र प्रेरणा तिनलाई पंचायतको कुनै पनि तहमा उपलब्ध छैन ।

यस राष्ट्रिय संकटको सामना गर्नमा प्रेसको भूमिका महत्वपूर्ण रहनु पर्ने हो । तर सरकारी स्तरबाट संचालित समाचार पत्रहरू एक दलिय व्यवस्था-का पत्रहरू जस्ता मात्र भएका छन; जनभावना ग्रभिव्यक्ताउने उनके भूमिका यस मर्मलाई <mark>बुभन विभिन्न मुलुकमा</mark> एक दलीय व्यवस्थामा नै भएन । निस्किने पत्र-पत्रिकाहरूको वानगीलाई हेरे पुग्छ । ग्ररू गैर सरकारी भनिने <mark>त्</mark>रखबारहरूमा स्वामित्व नेपालीनै भए पनि नेपाली भावना बचाउनु दुस्तर भएको छ । राष्ट्रिय दृष्टिमा एउटा म्रकों म्रत्यन्त व्यथाको कुरा के छ भने विदेशी दूतावासहरूको प्रछन्न टेवामा चलेका श्रखबारहरूलाई जुन छुट छ, त्यति छुट कुनै स्रात्मनिर्भर नेपालीलाइ छैन । मैले **"राष्ट्रिय मेल मिलापको"** विचार जनता सम्म पु-याउने माध्यमको लागि आफर्न सम्पादनमा र आफने जवा-ब देहीमा एउटा पत्रिकाको स्रनुमति माँगे तरत्यो पाईन । प्रशासन स्रठ्याएर बसेका राष्ट्र विरोधिहरूको ग्राँखामा राष्ट्रिय मेल मिलाप सदैव ग्रवान्छनीय नै रह्यो । तर मलाई कौतुहुल छ यो जान्ने कि कुन त्यस्तो राष्ट्रिय मान्यता प्राग्त संस्था, पद र व्यक्यि छन जसको बिरूद्धमा प्रेस कानून निष्कृय भएको छैन ? मलाई लाग्छ, त्यस्ता प्रेस हरू कुनै पनि बलियो विदेशी शक्तिको सकृय राजनैतिक संरक्षणमा छन भन्ने । म प्रेस स्वतः त्रता ग्रभ वढी र कानूनी र संस्थागत हुनु पर्दछ भन्ने विचार राख्दछु; तर क्रहिले यो स्वतन्त्रता, जो कता-कता उछू खलतामा प्रदर्शित हुन्छ, केवल विदेशी कुटनैतिक संरक्षण-भोगी प्रेसहरूलाइ म।त्र भएकोमा ग्राश्चर्यं छ । विदेशीहरूद्वारा उचालिएका उग्रवादीहरूसँग एकता वा संयुक्त मोर्चा राष्ट्रिय हितमा छैन भन्ने मेरो दृष्टिकोणको कारणले ममाथी कताबाट ग्राक्रमण भइरहेको छ भन्ने कुरा म बुफन सक्दछु तर मुलुकको स्वतन्त्रताने लोप गर्न खोज्ने कुनै खतरनाक विदेशी घुसपैठ र प्रभावको पर्दाफास हुने मेरो ग्रन्तरवार्तालाई प्रकासित गर्ने पत्रकार किन थुनामा पर्छ, किन त्यस्ता पत्रिकाहरूका विकेताहरू दण्डित हुन्छन भन्ने कुरा कसवाट जान्ने ?

यी सबै कुराहरूबाट मेरो यो धारणाले थप पुष्ट्याइ पाउछ कि

प्रशासनमा केही खतरनाक विदेशी शक्तिहरूको हितका पहरेदारहरू बलिया भएर बसेका छन ।

स्वतन्त्रताको एउटा मूल्य छ - निरन्तरको सजगता। म एक पटक यस वक्ष्तव्यद्वारा पुनः सम्पूर्ण देशवासीहरूलाई देश माथी ग्राइ परेको यी खतराहरू प्रति सचेत पार्न चाहन्छु । हामी जहाँ जो रहौ, प्रत्येकले ग्रा-ग्राफनो वुद्धि र क्षमताले भ्याए सम्म ग्राजका यी घातक विदेशी षडयन्त्रहरूलाई विफल तुल्याउनु परेको छ ।

फागुन 25,2038

विक्वेक्वर प्रसाद कोइराला

Appendix C

(True Copy)

B. P. Koirala

Sarnath Varanasi, U.P.

Copy of Bebler's letter to me

My very dear B.P.,

Only a few hours ago I arrived from Kathmandu to this place, to Calcutta. As you see I spent nearly a week in your country. And it was a fascinating week. The natural beauty of Nepal, the charm of your people, the wonderful ancient art, and—above all—the dramatic situation at present all this contributed to make my sojourn full and tense from the first to the last minute. The tragic death of Sherchand added to the intensity of the impression Nepal made on me.

The hospitality I enjoyed was beyond description. My first and foremost host was the indefatigable Sherchand; he knew how to fill out every hour with some encounter or visit. He accompanied me one whole morning on a sightseeing tour (also indispensable, no doubt). After his death the role of the main host was taken over by S. P. Upadhyay, who proved to be extremely attentive in all respects. I knew that your admirable wife, Sushila, was behind the scenes, pulling ahe strings of all arrangemenas for me.

Now because it is a crucial moment in your country's history and that—because of circumstances (I only partly guessed) I was involved in the events those days, I have the duty of giving you a full report of my conversations.

Whom did I see? Here is the list: M.P. Koirala, Prof. D.R. Regmi, Mr. S.B. Thapa, Mr. Acharya, the P.M., Bista, the acting Chairman of the Parichayat Parliament, the President of the Communist Party (pro-Russia), Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the Ambassador of India, Mr. S.P. Upadhyay, a group of young socialists, a group of student leaders of the Nepal Student Union and many others.

The situation is one of great decisions; everyone without exception, left or right, considers that this *cannot last*. (By the way: I had a confirmation of this impression as soon as I arrived in Calcutta. The trade commissioner of my country in Calcutta met a few days ago the princess of Nepal, King Birendra's sister, who told him her brother was preparing important new steps which became indispensable). Everyone in Kathmandu considers that the King is indeed advised by everybody to modify boldly the present set-up.

How? M.P. Koirala reported to me his conversation with the King in the following way: M.P.—"The situation should be normalized." The King—"How?" M.P.—The people in jail should be set free and those in exile should be brought home." The King—"I know this has to be done but I feel I should not hurry." M.P.—"You should also not be slow. For being too slow you might have to pay a high price."

M.P. Koirala is not sure whether the King has taken any decision. According to him much will depend on the advisers, and it is difficult to say who are or who will be the main advisers of the King.

S.B. Thapa (a former P.M.) seem to be sure but does not say so. My impression was that he considers himself as the adviser who is much or even most listened to. To say it quite frankly, what Thapa had to say to me sounded like the *King's message to you*. There can be no other explanation why the man insisted so much to see me in private and why he came alone to my hotel. He performed a *real speech*, as if he were in the Parliament. The main points were the following:

1. The Kink seeks sincerely a democratic way out of the situation, but naturally he is *not inclined to lose face;* the Panchayat system was an invention of his father and the idea of his father was that the system can be developed;

2. The Panchayat system can *indeed* be developed; the last events (the eviction of the President of the Panchayat Parliament) are a proof of it; the system can be for the

time being the *framework* for a democratic political life, acceptable also to the Congress Party;

3. The alternative, an armed insurrection, would be extremely dangerous; it might provoke a *Chinese interven*tion; and in any event, it would stiffen the opposition of the palace which would proclaim the insurrection as the work of India etc.

4. The way to normalization, which is the King's objective, goes through a declaration of B.P. that he renounces the method of subversion and armed fight and that he accepts the Panchayat system as the framework of political life.

It so hapend that I met the Indian Minister Counsellor Mr. Singh immediately after the talk with Thapa. I reported Thapa's ideas to Singh and Singh was *enthusiastic* about them. He thought it probable that the King would make a proclamation on April 12, the Nepalese new year, and that this proclamation will be very *moderate* and *conciliatory*. One should hope for nothing better, said Singh, than that B. P. responds to the King's proclamation by an *equally moderate and conciliatory statement*. This would be the beginning of the dialogue B. P. wishes to have.

Half way through this conversation we were joined by the Ambassador. He fully agreed with his Counsellor.

I must admit that I am quite impressed by the way of thinking of Thapa and the Indians. The main reason for this "opportunistic" position of a Yugoslav revolutionary is the fact that it seems to me important that you be in the country. Your safe return is in itself an objective of paramount significance. All your people, Congress people, feel your absence as a great obstacle to the fight. There is no one in Kathmandu who could replace you. Therefore I should think that you should be ready to pay a rather high price (politically) for your return to the country.

The Indian Ambassador was categoric that there would be no danger for you if you return after a conciliatory statement as envisaged above. So was Thapa.

I might be completely wrong, but I would not be sincere with you if I did not tell you what I think. If you are at least inclined to consider seriously the Thapa-Indian Plan, then you should use Upadhyay who comes to see you on Friday next. He could be the intermediary with the King in the following sense: to convey to the King your intimation to respond to his proclamation if it is conciliatory in a conciliatory way; this would influence the King to make his proclamation conciliatory indeed.

I would have liked to come to Varanasi and to tell you all this and much more orally. But I cannot stay any longer on the Sub-continent. I am absent from my country already one whole month. Anyhow I have put on paper all the essential points. Upadhyay will tell you many more details.

Sushila decided to stay a week or two longer in Kathmandu for rest in the climate of your country, so much better than of Varanasi. May be she hopes to see you arrive in Nepal soon after the new year.

I would like to follow what happens next in Nepal. Could you send me sometimes a publication of yours?

With my very best wishes for the success of your noble fight,

Yours,

Sd. Ales Bebler

Calcutta 20. 3. 72

(TRUE COPY

Royal Palace Kathmandu Nepal March 12, 1972

Dear Mr. Narayan,

l must thank you for your kind letter of February 5, 1972.

I do recall with pleasure our meeting at Harvard and I am glad that you have chosen to write me at this juncture.

It is true that I have greatly benefited by my extensive travels abroad and I have had the opportunity to study the workings of some of the leading democratic institutions in some of the western countries. The system of Panchayat Democracy as evolved in Nepal has great potentials for doing good and it has come to stay for a complex of reasons. It gets its warrant in the social structure of Nepal and our social behaviour which unlike the west has always been hierarchical. Equally has this system been moulded by the geographic need which puts every Nepali on a quest for a national indentity. Conditioned by the Nepalese style of life, their world views and culture, the Panchayat needs reforms rather than replacement.

One thing which many observers from other countries fail to notice in the case af Nepal is that she never came under colonial rule and this characteristic goes a long way to explain for many of the innovations one comes across in the evolution of Nepalese attitudes and postures at various times of her existence as an independent and sovereign country. Perhaps it is in this particular regard that the Nepalese everywhere considered my Father a source of National strength.

I have noted your observations and I shall think over the suggestions you have made. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that I am against anything that is good and adaptable in any system or to mean that I am against the evolution of the existing system in Nepal to further improve it in due course of time.

With best wishes for your personal health and wellbeing,

Sincerely,

Sd/-/Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev/

Mr Jayaprakash Narayan Patna-3 India.

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(TRUE COPY)

B. P. KOIRALA

Phone: 63549 Sarnath, Varanasi, U.P. 4.4.72

My dear J. P.

I received you letter and a copy of King Birendra's letter to you along with it. The King's letter is a great disappointment to me, because he has reiterated his adherence to the present "Panchayat" System and has advanced justification for it in the Nepalese condition. We in the democratic camp had expected that the young King would usher in a new era by starting a dialogue with the leaders of democratic force and start building up democratic institutions endowed with authority. Instead of doing that he is trying to find justification for the continuation of a system that has absolutely no popular support it has proved a failure --- justification on specious grounds, like Nepal's national identity, hierarchical Nepalese society, Nepal's style of life etc, etc, as if they have a bearing on whether Nepal should have a monarchical dictatorship or Absolutism, or Constitutional Monarchy, democracy οΓ dictatorship. The problems of Nepal demand, primarily, establishment of free political institutions that would encourage popular initiative and leadership at all levels.

The king has been meeting some political figures. He has already met 5 ex-P.M.s — M.P. Koirala, Tanka Pd. Acharya, K.I. Singh, Tulsi Giri and Surya B. Thapa. He may be meeting some others. He has, presumably, not given his own mind to these gentleman who have been asked for their suggestions. We will be able to know definitely what his plans are after he meets Subarna Shumsher, who is in London these days for the treatment of his son. Subarna is likely to be back in India in the next week. There is a feeling among political circles in Kathmandu that the King will open out with Subarna. If his letter to you is an indication of his mind, then there is now no hopeful expectancy in me of a fruitful outcome of the meeting between him & Subarna, if & when it comes off. That the King has started interviewing people is by itself no indication of his serious intention — his father was a past master in such political gamemanship.

About a fortnight ago Bebler, our Yugoslav friend, went to Kathmandu on my suggestion. He was on a visit to India, Bangladesh and Ceylon. I asked him to include Nepal in his itinerary. He was in India a guest of the Govt. of India. In Kathmandu he was our guest. Sushila was with him. After his Kathmandu visit he wrote to me a long letter giving me his reactions. I am enclosing herewith a copy of his letter. A foreigner is easily taken in by the superficial indications of a serious situation. Bebler, with all his revolutionary experience, too seems to have been duped by rumours & superficialities.

I think, despite what I have said above, you should be on speaking terms with the King, i.e. you should be in correspondance with him. A channel of communication between you two must be established & kept open. But you must not expect any hopeful results tangibly and soon as a result of the correspondance.

I will keep you posted with new developments if they occur.

With affectionate regards from both of us, Sushila & myself,

Yours affly.,

Sd/- Bishweshwar

(TRUE COPY)

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN Permanent Address: Kadam Kuan, Patna-3 Bihar, India. Telephone: 51239 } Your Majesty, Camp. Patna February 5, 1972

I hope you will not mind my writing to you this personal letter. I am only a private citizen and you are a King. But I am venturing to do so on the strength of the very kind visit that Your Majesty, as Crown Prince, had paid me at the Harvard University Guest House in 1968. I recall our talk then with pleasure and pride.

Please accept my hearty congratulations and felicitations on your accession to the throne of your illustrious forefathers. Your Majesty's father, late King Mahendra of revered memory, had made a great contribution to the projection of Nepal on the international canvas as an independent sovereign country with a distinct personality and mind of its own. He had also succeeded in establishing friendly and mutually respectful relations not only with the neighbouring countries but also with the great and the super-powers. He walked warily but successfully through the maze of international power-politics and remained faithful to his proclaimed policy of non-alignment and world peace. His last act of recognising Bangladesh after India, among the first two Asian countries. along with Burma to do so - proved his foresight and quick appreciation of the great changes that had taken place in the power system of South Asia, and of Nepal's own national interests in the emerging geopolitical situation, apart from demonstrating his sympathy for the just and democratic aspirations of the 75 million people of Bangladesh who had been subjected to the most brutal oppression and

appalling atrocities, known to recent history, by the West Pakistan Government.

But, if Your Majesty will forgive me, late King Mahendra's style of rule at home was so personalised, and at times appeared so arbitrary, that he unnecessarily alienated a large section of his politically conscious subjects and the natural democratic aspirations of his people. The experiment he made with the Panchayat system of rule was a total failure, like the "basic democracy" of Pakistan. The Panchayat system, with the concept of which I myself was in sympathy, could never be a success and a reality except in an atmosphere of complete civic and political freedom which just did not exist under the personal rule of the King. Nor did the primary communities at the bottom enjoy any of those rights of self-government which a Panchayat system, as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi, required.

In these circumstances, I do hope that Your Majesty with your youth and your progressive ideas, and your extensive travels abroad and studies at the best Universities of the West, would take early steps to bring about radical changes in the political structure of your country, so as to associate the people and their genuine representatives in the task of building up a new democratic, progressive and prosperous Nepal. I have no doubt that the democratic forces of Nepal will respond sincerely to whatever steps Your Majesty may consider fit and proper at this stage. But, for that a genuine restoration of the democratic rights of the people would be necessary, and replacement of the Panchayat system with a genuinely democratic and representative government. The Royal prerogatives of the Crown must at the same time be preserved, and I feel that a system with proper checks and balances will not be difficult to evolve. In the conditions of Nepal, the Crown is a symbol, as well as a guarantee, of the unity and territorial integrity of the country. I am sure every Party in Nepal, provided it believes in democracy, is fully aware of this and will do all that is possible to uphold the honour, dignity and strength of the Crown, and assure its continuity.

Appendix C

Lastly, I hope Your Majesty will not think that I am writing all this because I happen to be a friend of B. P. Koirala. That, of course, I am; but my real concern is with certain values and principles and the good of Your Majesty's people and country.

I remain with deep respects,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/- Jayaprakash Naravan

His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal. KATHMANDU.

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