

# Nepal's Politics of Referendum

A Study of Groups  
Personalities & Trends

Lok Raj Baral

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## Preface

The present study is primarily concerned with political developments in Nepal from the mid-1970s onward. At present Nepal is experiencing profound stresses in its efforts to finding out a direction towards institution building through legitimate popular means. This process, if allowed to develop, would also help bring about an attitudinal change, despite the deep-rooted legacies of the past. The first ever held national referendum in the country could be called a strategy or a sudden phenomenon in the Nepali political scene, but the trends it generated, and the ferment it displayed are of far-reaching consequences for the country. Politically and economically, Nepal has reached such a stage after the referendum that no ad hoc decisions or arrangements can resolve the crises confronting the country.

The present study starts with the politics of the referendum, and ends with certain assumptions for the future. In trying to present a coherent picture of issues, trends and dynamics of political forces, it is attempted to be as much fair as possible in regard to all the involved parties. For the study basic source materials published during and after the referendum have been utilized, a number of open-ended interviews were conducted by the author for substantiating the arguments developed in the study.

The book begins with a brief introduction of major trends seen in today's Nepali political scene. The second chapter deals with the main factors responsible for the decision behind the national referendum by King Birendra in May 1979. The third chapter gives the chequered political background, especially the interactions between forces inimical to the partyless Panchayat System and the forces supportive of the system. The next chapter deals with the changed

political climate after the May 1979 Royal decision which put the 18-year old system on public trial. The fifth chapter discusses the people's psyche after the referendum verdict which went in favour of the partyless Panchayat System. The chapter also deals with the politics of constitution making. The sixth chapter deals with the third amendment to the constitution of Nepal, and the controversies over the new reforms. The seventh chapter is an evaluation of political groups, personalities, issues, and trends.

The present work is the result of supportive sympathy of my friends and the Research Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). Centre's former executive Director, Professor Dor Bahadur Bista who felt the need of such a study gave me encouragement. Professor Kamal P. Malla's casual suggestion to prepare a book on the national referendum was a stimulus to me. I am indeed grateful to them for their genuine academic concern. Mr Chaitanya Krishna Upadhyia took much pain in going through the drafts and helped me to make it a more serious study on contemporary Nepali political scene. I am indebted to him for his suggestions, comments and encouragement. Professor Prayag Raj Sharma and Dr Harka Gurung provided assistance to me in various ways. The two research scholars—Jitendra Dhoj Khand and Ananta Poudel, and my research assistance Tika Bhattarai deserve thanks for their help in preparing the book. Thanks are also due to Shambhu Krishna Shrestha for efficient and neat typing of the manuscript. Finally, the author is grateful to all political leaders and activists involved in the referendum for granting interviews and for providing all kinds of source materials. However, the interpretations and views expressed in the study are entirely of my own, and I alone am responsible for any omission or commission in presenting facts or in their analysis.

LOK RAJ BARAL

# Contents

<i>Chapter 1</i>	Introduction	1
<i>Chapter 2</i>	The Setting of Referendum	12
<i>Chapter 3</i>	Referendum: Forces in the Background	42
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Panchayat System on Trial	73
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Panchas Reassert: National Scene after the Verdict	100
<i>Chapter 6</i>	The Limits of Reform	132
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Anatomy of Political Forces: Groups, Personalities and Trends	163
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Concluding Reflections	210
	APPENDIX	215
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	228
	INDEX	239

*To My Father*  
**RABI LAL BARAL**

## *Chapter 1*

# Introduction

Rulers usually have quite a few strategies for meeting emergency situations. In well established constitutional democracies, such emergency provisions are provided for in the constitution itself, and these are evoked when the seat of power is convinced, however subjectively it may be, that a determined use of coercion has become necessary to avert the crisis. If the constitutional mechanism fails to tackle the crisis arising either from internal disturbances or from external threats, or from certain other “contextual environments”, rulers are known to resort to extreme emergency steps for removing such threats. The regime is armed with draconian rules of emergency ordinances which can be prolonged to an indefinite period, and which, then, tends to turn into a permanent dictatorship. When democracies give way to dictatorships, ruling demagogues start flouting every norm of democratic practices. Ordinarily democratic regimes are expected to be tolerant and patient in resolving crisis, but when the seat of power feels its position insecure, emergency provisions become their favourite mandate-making medium. However, strategies for forestalling crises tend to vary from country to country, depending upon the nature, background and dynamics of politics in the different settings.

In Nepal, a Hinduised monarchical state, new and unpredictable circumstances often arise from the abrasive processes that modernization seems to generate. New ideas stir a society to the depths even when the old values are not dismantled. Frustrations, confusion and resentment among people can lead to chaotic conditions

## 2 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

if the processes of change do not elicit appropriate responses from established institutions within the system. A country's cultural setting, its historical antecedents and political culture of its people play significant roles in determining the nature of the crises in the country and way these are resolved.

Nepal's history and its Hindu traditions have made the role of the King in the Nepali polity an assertive one. Political challenges posed either by internal dynamics of change or by external conditions do not provide rulers with unlimited options for exercising their power.

A determined monarch, Mahendra, embarked upon a new political enterprise, committing the people to the partyless model of government under the Panchayat System. It may be recalled that the pivotal role of monarchy in the 1951 revolution had been popularly accepted. The political process which started after 1951 failed to bring stability due to various reasons among which the main ones were the intra-party and inter-party conflicts and the political apathy of the people.

Judging from the experiences of some of the developing countries, however, there seem to be no other alternative course to political development for a modernizing country except to follow a liberal path for ensuring both an "enthusiastic participation"<sup>1</sup> of the people at various units of the political system and for meeting the peoples' demands through legitimate representative institutions created within the system. In Nepal, liberal political process finds expression, because the King, in spite of being supreme in all state matters, does require the cushion of liberal institutions not only to make the saddle of power comfortable but also to display "popular participation."

It has been aptly remarked that "crisis is a plastic term which can be stretched or shrunk depending on who defines it, when and for what purpose, and how he or they get away with it—or get caught or chastised."<sup>2</sup> When King Birendra proclaimed the national referendum in May 1979 offering two choices to the Nepali people—retention of the prevailing Panchayat system with reforms or the

<sup>1</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "Institution Building in Nepal: A Study of the Working of Village Panchayats," (Monograph), (Research Centre For Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1980).

<sup>2</sup>Jyotirindra Das Gupta, "A Season of Caesars: Emergency Regimes and Development Politics in Asia," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 4, April 1978, p. 316.



introduction of a multi-party system—he alone was the “true” judge measuring the true gravity of the political situation then obtaining in the country. From the points of view of other political critiques which were heard in the following months, the mass agitations were only a popular demonstration of widespread dissatisfaction with the fast deteriorating political and economic conditions, and these had by no means dangerous political implications. In King Birendra’s interpretation, it was a “storm” which the Nepali people “successfully rode out.”<sup>3</sup>

The assumptions that political regimes are often vulnerable to “rising aspirations” and “rising frustrations” of the people if the political system fails to provide any safety-valve for absorbing such mass discontentment, is borne out by the case of Nepal. It was evident during and in the post-referendum periods. All dissatisfied sections of people could ventilate their feelings freely, criticising the system, because the conditions for such demonstration were created politically. Indeed, this suggested the resilience of the system in meeting the needs of the transformed national scene.

The national referendum was altogether a new experience for Nepal since no other Nepali ruler before this had ever tried to put his own regime on a public trial. Even in industrialized democracies where peoples’ awareness is fairly high, such a venture is seldom made. It was the French President Charles de Gaulle who bowed down to the popular mandate and quit the office when he failed to secure the requisite number of votes in a national referendum. Mostly countries utilize emergency provisions for replacing one order by another. King Birendra’s announcement of a national referendum can, therefore, be considered a novel strategy for defusing political crisis, which was additionally used for rectifying basic systemic deficiencies in the prevailing order. Certain constitutional amendments made in the name of reform earlier, had caused atrophy in the system. The people actively participating in the system-establishment belonged to different ideological persuasions, because the system itself was make-shift amalgam of different ideologies. So internal contradictions were rampant within it. These

<sup>3</sup>King Birendra’s Banquet Speech at Cairo on February 1, 1981. The King had thus stated: “Two years ago we sensed that people in Nepal wanted change and some even resorted to strife. . . And Nepal successfully rode out a storm in peace.” See *Rising Nepal*, February 2, 1981.

#### 4 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

contradictions were further heightened by “extra-systemic” and “intra-systemic” elements.<sup>4</sup> In 1979, a minor student agitation developed into a mass movement which King Birendra had to pacify by announcing the referendum.

The national referendum may be considered Nepal's historical watershed, because from this point onward all the old political idioms and styles of different political groups which were operating either clandestinely in the country or from India also began assuming new meanings and new implications.

Similarly the panchas who had never been exposed to working in an open system were forced into competitive politics for political survival. Knowing well the shift of their political ground in the changed context, the panchas pressed for new political, economic and social programmes with a view to influencing the referendum verdict. Whereas other political groups opposed to the partyless system and the so-called extreme left groups, which were equally opposed to both the multi-party and the Panchayat system, did not come out with any major programmes or issues but with a clear critique of the system in power to impress the people through the referendum, they could ensure that their future set-up would be entirely different from the questionable Panchayat System. Instead of working together for mobilizing mass support for their common cause, these diverse groups (banned parties) took to separate ways to frustrate the initiative taken by the King. Sometimes ideologically opposed elements were seen trying to forge alliances in spite of protestations by certain political leaders that such alliances would be “unholy”.

Meanwhile, the Panchayat camp found itself in a relatively more advantageous position, and it devised strategies to drive wedges between the Nepali Congress and some left front groups. As the Panchayat System was constantly equated with nationalism, stability, progress and democracy, the opposition was put in the defensive. The systems' democratic credibility was reinforced by the declaration of King Birendra in the wake of the referendum campaigns in which he said that the nature of the future polity would not be the

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed discussion on “extra-systemic and intra-systemic” contradictions, see Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* (Abhinav, New Delhi, 1977) and L.S. Baral, “Opposition Groups in Nepal,” *India Quarterly* (New Delhi).

same irrespective of what the people voted for—either for the existing Panchayat System with reforms or for the introduction of the multi-party system. In future, declared the King, provisions for elections to the National Panchayat on the basis of universal adult franchise, elected prime minister by the National Panchayat, and the cabinets' accountability to the NP would be the essential features of the polity.

The verdict of the referendum which clearly went in favour of the Panchayat side put a stamp of popular legitimacy on the party-less system. Thus the system, which initially was brought in under emergency provisions, was fully legitimized by a popular mandate. Since then, a new political scenario developed in the country in which all political groups and personalities find themselves in a dilemma with regard to their future course of action. Many of them apparently wish for an understanding with the King, so that they may get accommodated in the reinforced Panchayat System without losing face.

In the post referendum period, the homogeneity of one of the main opposition groups—the Nepali Congress—suffered much, because the party stalwarts failed to remove inner contradictions and divergence of views in regard to future programme of the party. The simmering discontentment surfaced after the general elections of May 1981. Some top-ranking and influential leaders dissociated themselves from the old leaders who, it was alleged, neither realized their limitations nor understood the mood of the people. Many hardcore Nepali Congress workers were of the view that divisions within the organization could have been avoided if the top leadership had decided to participate in the elections which, in their opinion, could have been utilized as a means to establishing direct contact with the people. The leadership in the party took a long time to decide upon the vexing issue of whether to participate in the elections or not. It organized mass meetings and conferences all over the country to judge the popular mood before taking a final decision. This style of assessing public opinion for participation in the impending election was apparently motivated by two major considerations: the mobilization of the people in case the party decided to participate in the elections, and the preparation of party activists for the worse in the event that they decided to boycott the polls. It was the latter decision which was finally adopted when certain preconditions laid down by the party, such as the removal

## 6 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

of the requirement of compulsory membership of one of the six class organizations in order to qualify for contesting elections, the formation of an interim government consisting of both panchayat and multi-party supporters for holding the general elections, and the postponement of the election date, were not met. The party General Secretary, Parshu Narayan Chaudhari, who was considered an invaluable asset to the party months later—(after the election) decided to join the Panchayat “mainstream” on the plea that uncertainty and dilemma prevailing within the party was not going to promote the cause of democracy.

To a good many political elements, the post-referendum period appeared to be a return to “politics as usual”—because the victorious camp cared little to take the opposition into their consideration, and so to encourage their participation in the political system. On the opposition front, similarly none of the leaders seemed willing to move from their extremist postures and adjust themselves to the changed condition. If, on the one hand, the victorious side once again became assertive and intransigent vis-a-vis the defeated multi-party supporters, the latter assumed a still more rigid stance and “cultivated an ideologically ambiguous image.” So neither the victorious Panchayat was able to muster support from the various sections of the political spectrum, nor the multi-party side was in a position to muster public support for its stand. It could however be maintained that under the prevailing circumstances, the political groups that were desirous of exercising democratic rights through constitutional means were the greater losers than the groups opposed to a peaceful democratic transition.

The verdict of the referendum and the political scene thereafter, gave a new dimension to Nepali politics. Since almost not one of the opposition groups had any programme to offer, except their anti-Panchayat emotive utterances, there was hardly any difference between the allegedly non-performing Panchayat camp and themselves. Yet the oppositional groups had enough appeal to attract 46 per cent of the voters for the multi-party support, despite all odds confronting them. For the future, this appeal will subside or increase depending on changes in the Panchayat process of political development in the country. The other possibility will be total opposition to the system by the opposition groups. But this possibility is getting remoter, because the political groups are already demonstrating unprecedented fragmentations and a widespread

erosion of charismatic personalities. Political groups are indeed undergoing a rapid transformation both in organizational and ideological terms since the time of the referendum. Mere emotional or a doctrinaire approach without the backing of programmatic actions would be meaningless, and the survival of any political organization in a country like Nepal cannot just afford to depend on that. The Nepali Congress has been considered to be a broad-based moderate and representative organization given to the cause of democracy. This credential of the party has been maintained for over 30 years, but how far this image can be continued in the future is a matter of speculation.

As to the other groups which are less inclined towards a liberal democratic process, no clear-cut political objective seems to be present. Obscure in their missions, and hit by internal dissensions, the "leftists" are in a quandary. The post-1979 politics has brought to light that certain "extremist leftist groups" were under no circumstances interested in bringing in a liberal democratic system, which, according to their view, would be nothing more than a "Congress System". Their activities showed that their entire efforts were mobilized for frustrating the prospects of the Congress ascendancy which would have taken upswing had the multi-party side won.<sup>5</sup> The Marxist-Leninist (ML) group went on changing its political objectives and tactics; it declared that it had abandoned its avowed policy of "liquidation of class enemies" through violent means in its political struggle. Most of the left-front groups have no leaders of stature, nor any viable organization. So they could wield little influence for persuading the people to abstain from the polls. The leadership crisis would be crucial in determining the future roles of these left-front groups.

In the present, after the elections, the tacit permission given to different political groups to operate in Nepal has an extra-legal character. The ruling elites appear to take this situation to heart for its unique political blending and tolerance. Everyone seems to recognize the relationship between the "former parties" and the "present" Panchayat system. The power elites seem to be aware of

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed discussion about the role of "extremist" leftist students, see Giri Raj Acharya, "Krantikari Narama Pratikantikari Gati Bidhiko Sanchalak: All Nepal Independent Student Union", *Jan Andolan* (Varanasi) Vol. 1, Falgun-Chaitra (February-March), 1981, pp. 36-39.

## 8 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

the rampant multi-party influence in the country. In a non-party system, political groups do not comprise any of the "central, intermediate and intermediary structures between society and government."<sup>6</sup> But the direct elections to the National Panchayat and other organs of the system on the basis of universal adult franchise has a propensity towards group politics, despite the claim of the advocates of the partyless character that democracy can be promoted within the parameters of partylessness. Notwithstanding these aspects, the future evolution of the political system would depend most significantly on the interactions between the King and the political groups including the panchas in the future. Considering from the electoral point of view, the arrangements, made under the third amendment of the constitution have yet to be tested. But the general elections held in May 1981 and the character of the present National Panchayat and its working have displayed certain serious anomalies and flaws, which make the political process vulnerable to parochial trends than ever before.

The basic issues concerning the electoral process and their concomitant effects on the prospective course of political development appear to be intractable. The economic aspects of this process act as an independent variable in determining the roles of political groups and other people in the country. Nepal's commercial bourgeoisie is likely to take little interest in providing financial support to opposition candidates in view of their lesser prospects of capturing power by winning a majority of 84 seats as prescribed by the constitution. And, non-opposition candidates, with no resources of their own, have no alternative source of finance but the Panchayat government. Only very few candidates can finance their own elections expenses. Nepal has very few big business houses, which would gamble on their interests by supporting opposition candidates whose chances of coming to power are quite remote. For political groups opposed to the system, it would never be feasible to have their candidates in all the 112 constituencies of the country, but at the same time, the question of their continued survival becomes equally crucial for them. Mobilization of financial resources is as

<sup>6</sup>Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, quoted in Jeane Jordan Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C. 1978), p. 18.

much important for the success of political parties as their mass appeal and organizational strength. In Nepal, political power flows from the Palace, and whosoever forms the government under the current dispensation, can hardly ignore this political reality. So democratic process in Nepal seems to be inextricably linked with the commitment, cooperation and good will of the King.

While discussing the problems and prospects of democracy in Nepal, other problems generating from deep-rooted socio-economic maladies cannot be put to the sidelines. Nepal has so far completed five economic development plans, and has now launched the Sixth Plan from 1980. But there has been a growing realization that even the people's basic needs are still far from being fulfilled under the planned development efforts, let alone the improvement in the overall economy. As Nepal's present per capita income is the lowest—130 US dollars, it appears that over the years the planning process has not been able to bring off economic transformation of the society.<sup>7</sup> During the Fifth Plan period (1975-80), the gross domestic product of Nepal was stated to have increased at the annual rate of 2.2 per cent while the per capita income had remained stagnant because of the annual population growth rate of 2.3 per cent. It means that there was virtually no economic growth in Nepal during this period. According to the preliminary report of the family survey undertaken by the Central Bureau of Statistics in connection with 1981 National Population Census, Nepal's population has reached 15 million as against 11.5 million in 1971. Such a rapid increase in population on the one hand and declining economic trends on the other are likely to create serious problems in the years to come.<sup>8</sup>

Nepal's main income sector—agriculture—also showed a declining trend during the plan period 1980-81, after more than two decades of development efforts. Nepal, a food surplus country, became food importing country. Not only in the agricultural sector, economic regression was seen to hit the industrial and the trade sectors

<sup>7</sup>For a detailed economic study of Nepal in 1980-81, see *Economic Survey: Fiscal Year 1980-81* (His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Finance, 1981); *Budget Speech of the Fiscal Year 1981-82* (His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Finance), and *Nepal Economy: An Overview* (Centre for Economic Development and Administration, Tribhuvan University, 1980).

<sup>8</sup>The 1981 Budget Session of the National Panchayat has highlighted the dark economic scene in the country.

## 10 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

as well. Imports have been overwhelming exports increasingly, and the payments deficit was expected to be more than Rs 3,000.00 million by the end of 1981. If this "disquieting" trend continues longer, "Nepal may have to face a severe balance of payment problem in the near future," states the *Economic Survey* of 1981.

The country's economic activities have hinged to a large extent on foreign aid and concessional loans provided by friendly countries and international agencies. Nepal's major capital resource has continued to be foreign aid (64 per cent in 1980), and without foreign assistance the balance of payment situation could not have been favourably solved even in the past.

Increasing trade deficits and failures in other sectors of the economy on the one hand and spiralling prices on the other have added more difficulties to the common people. Flouting larger interests, a tendency to grow rich overnight through smuggling rackets has been growing among the country's urban bourgeoisie, and this is being sustained and promoted by rampant corruptions in official circles. This is proving highly cancerous to the process of nation-building. The official economic data do not tell the whole economic story, there is a dark area of economic aberrations which remain unreported. The present situation, in a way, has its roots in the country's immediate and distant past in which "elite families always competed for government land grants, administrative positions, and trade monopolies, which could enhance for several generations. New industrial licenses and loans, agricultural inputs, and the location of roads, administrative centers, and numerous development projects have been added to the potential rewards for political power."<sup>9</sup>

Nepal is among the poorest countries of the world today.<sup>10</sup> Although Nepal has created some basic infrastructure for economic development, its endeavours at redressing the common man's economic burden are however far short of expectations. These efforts are rendered ineffective due to a lack of "political will," and the absence of national objectives, and the general economic malaise is

<sup>9</sup>Leo E. Rose and John T. Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1980), p. 114.

<sup>10</sup>A World Bank report has listed Nepal, with a per capita income of 130 US dollars, as the fourth poorest country of the world, after Bhutan (80 dollars), Bangladesh (90 dollars) and Chad (110 dollars). See *Nepal Press Digest*, Vol. 25, No. 33, August 17, 1981.



mainly a creation of certain "vested interest" groups.

Nepal's problems which got sharply focussed than ever before from the early 1980s, were mainly the byproducts of policy decisions taken in the past. In the absence of political directions and objectives, official decisions are essentially ad hoc or short-run measures. The widely felt but never thoroughly analysed collusion between the political and administrative elites and the business elements was thought to be specially responsible for perpetuating and fortifying the interests of certain groups. The gradual erosion of moral authority in institutions and the loss of their credibility in the public eye are serious issues. But surprisingly, general unconcern about these problems hang over the Nepali society. This deterioration in the ethos of the society is accompanied by serious ecological imbalances in the country's physical environment. And, in the light of these problems, the country's situation appears to be nearly hopeless.

In Nepal, problems and issues have always been emotionally approached and never analysed from a long-term perspective objectively. It thus seems that "Nepal's inability to change a direction (or rather a side) to catastrophe is part of the crisis."<sup>11</sup> Such a direction cannot be changed abruptly, or by simply conducting a chorus of the prophets of doom. National goals, once well defined, have to be backed up by the will of the people at large, and the political processes created for promoting these goals have to be innovative, integrationist, and above all effective. The national referendum and the developments after it have undoubtedly opened up new possibilities in the Nepali political scene. A great many national issues were publicly discussed by the Nepali people at large for the first time after the 1960 Royal take-over. The coming period is however likely to be more challenging, and it is up to the political system to cope with these challenges. It is expected that the system will evolve itself further, drawing lessons from the past, and make itself relevant to Nepal's needs in the years to come.

<sup>11</sup>See Piers Blaike, John Cameron, David Seddon, *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*, (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 5.

## Chapter 2

# The Setting of Referendum

Observers in Nepal are not lacking in stating that Nepal's politics has been shaped mainly by accidents. Abrupt changes precipitated both by internal conflicts and external manoeuvres did indeed direct the course of Nepali history. There are valid justifications for this view, because major developments in the past were the products of imponderables. The linkages between the domestic political scene and changing external situations often determined the historical course. Even for the continuation of those in power, external patronage was necessary. But to their credit and ability, the Nepali political elites ranging from the Shah Kings, nobles, and priests to the Rana rulers, always made conscious efforts not to jeopardize national interests, particularly the existence of Nepal as a separate, independent political entity.<sup>1</sup> The link between domestic politics and external situation was more in evidence than ever before during the period 1947-51.

The 1950-51 revolution, waged as it was against the archaic Rana rule, was an unique case in the history of monarchy with a "traditional" monarch, King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Dev, voluntarily casting in his lot with the forces of change. Both King Tribhuvan and the Nepali Congress formed a united front to overthrow the Ranarchy and to establish democracy in the country. Yet, the

<sup>1</sup>How the Rana's Prime Minister, Jang Bahadur, who came to power after a bloody massacre in 1846, did not allow Nepal to be under the British rule has been stated by Muni in S.D. Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal*, (Delhi, 1973), p. 9.

revolution would not have succeeded without the diplomatic pressures brought on the Rana rulers in Nepal by India. The King's decision to join the fray did help to bring off a relatively smooth transition from the traditional rule to democracy in the post—1951 period. But the forces released by the revolution were so diverse and conflict-laden that the course settled by the “Delhi-Compromise”—jointly agreed upon by King Tribhuvan, the Nepali Congress and the Rana, became intractable.<sup>2</sup> It was only in 1959 that a general election could be held in the country. The five distinct political forces released by the revolution of 1950-51 were playing their separate roles in that period.<sup>3</sup> The institution of monarchy, overshadowed as it was for over a century, was thrown into the vortex of party politics in order to play an assertive role in the post-revolution period. As King Tribhuvan had established his credentials of being a popular monarch, he was considered an “intra-systemic agent of change” as he continued to be the legitimate incumbent and intermediary between people's cause and the

<sup>2</sup>The Nepali Congress has started armed insurrection on November 11, 1950 following King Tribhuvan's flight to India after he was granted asylum. The Indian Government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru also put pressure on the Rana rulers to come to terms with the Nepali Congress.

<sup>3</sup>The five forces that played part in the 1950 revolution were: (a) India, (b) Nepali Congress, (c) King Tribhuvan, (d) Ranas and (e) Gorkha Soldiers working in the Indian and British armies. See H.N. Agrawal, *The Administrative System of Nepal*, (Delhi, 1975), pp. 136-147. Although the Nepali Congress had decided to end the Rana System, some reforms announced by the Ranas, of course under the pressure of India, had to be accepted by them. In Delhi, the India government played a “middle way” policy between the two parties with a view to befriending both. On January 8, 1951 Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher announced that under the new dispensation, these reforms would be introduced: (a) the setting up of a duly elected constituent assembly not later than, 1952, (b) recognition of King Tribhuvan as the King of Nepal, (c) formation of an interim government consisting of Rana and Congress ministers, (d) amnesty to all political prisoners, and (e) freedom to political parties to operate within the bounds of law. For details see Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 22-27; Anirudha Gupta, *Politics in Nepal*, (Delhi, 1964); Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Study of Political Acculturations of Nepal*, (University of California Press, 1966); R.S. Chauhan, *The Political Development in Nepal, 1950-70 (A Conflict Between Tradition and Modernity)*, (New Delhi, 1970). Bholu Chatterji, *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics*, (Calcutta, 1967); H.N. Agrawal, *The Administrative System of Nepal, 1901-1960*, (New Delhi, 1976), and Leo E. Rose and Margaret W. Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal*, (Ithaca, 1970).

## 14 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

Rana. Later inter-personal and intra-party feuds raging in the then politics hastened the process of Royal ascendancy.

This expanded monarchical role, sanctioned by the outcome of the revolution, became decisive in the paying of a dominant political role in the later decades. The Royal ascendancy was interpreted as euphemism for the decline of political parties, because a steady fragmentation of parties was in evidence in the late 1950s. In 1960, when King Mahendra dissolved the freshly introduced parliamentary system and its sub-systems such as parties, no one but a few party workers shed tears, which showed that the people's orientation towards democratic values was too tenuous to be taken into account.

These arguments have been advanced for developing the thematic content of the present chapter. The external impact on domestic situation, the spontaneous development of a particular political situation, the eruption of a sort of crisis and certain other imponderables all exerting together helped to create a condition for change which was neither planned nor thought of in advance. When King Mahendra resorted to an extreme in dismantling the parliamentary system, he appeared to be uncertain about his future political set-up. He, dropping a hint about the new order twenty-two days after the take-over, promised to "build democracy gradually, layer after layer, from the bottom upwards."<sup>4</sup> Like the Basic Democracy of Ayub Khan of Pakistan, the new Panchayat System was an indigenous product, not an "imported herb". The new system which was inaugurated in 1962 was not however above controversy. The political parties which had been banned under the new order put up stiff resistance against it. Among the parties, the Nepali Congress was the major casualty of the Royal action which terminated both the elected government and the party. Some hard-core communists, and a few other party workers, including those of the recognized opposition party in the dissolved parliament, Gorkhaparishad, also did not support the new regime. Other party leaders either preferred to keep quiet in order to avoid risks of being arrested or enlisted their support to the King. But as time and circumstances demonstrated, the members of the Royal entourage were as much haunted by the spectre of the abandoned party

<sup>4</sup>H.M. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, (HMG, 1967), Vol. 2, pp. 163-64.

system as by their incapacity to socialize themselves in the panchayat ideology.<sup>5</sup> How deep was the wound and how painfully the new political system was accepted by the members of the former parties can be realized by the reminiscences of one of the senior members of the then Panchayat cabinet, Biswa Bandhu Thapa. According to Thapa, the ban imposed on political organizations on January 22, 1961, was not permanent because the King himself was much concerned over reverting to the party democracy. Once King Mahendra asked Thapa how long partyless situation could continue? "You are a party-man. You can speak anything any time you like. What will history say if I die without lifting the ban on parties?," the King added.<sup>6</sup>

The dilemma with regard to the future character of the system had persisted ever since its inauguration, and ambivalence in the system steadily went on increasing. At the very outset, it was treated as a "make-shift" ideology, implying that after a few years, the experimental phase would be over for going back to liberal democracy.<sup>7</sup> This ambivalence provided enough grist to intra-systemic contradictions. As all former stalwarts of the system went on changing their stand, triggering widespread controversies not only over the organizational aspect of the system but also over the ideology embraced by it. Political debates regarding the operational as well as ideological aspects got accelerated momentum in the early 1970s with senior panchas taking contradictory sides. A trend toward "privatization" of politics and government was pinpointed by Panchas themselves and by opposition leaders. How "privatization" of government was a widely prevalent norm in Asian countries has been succinctly stated in these words: "The institutions maintained their elaborate formal structure but their autonomy was sapped and they became totally dependent on the government."<sup>8</sup> This trend was neither helpful for putting the system on the path

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed study of elites' behaviour within the Panchayat System, see Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>6</sup>Biswa Bandhu Thapa who was the Home Minister during the first phase of the Panchayat system, disclosed it in his article "Panchayat Byabastha—Ek Samsmaran" (Panchayat System—A Reminiscence), *Yauban* (Monthly), Vol. 3, No. 3, 1980, pp. 5-16, and 75.

<sup>7</sup>For details, see Baral, n. 5.

<sup>8</sup>See Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues*, (University Press Limited, Dacca, 1980), p. XX.

## 16 *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*

of democratic evolution nor did it “integrate” political opposition into it. Moreover, the system’s narrowness was in evidence both in its ideological content and the “fear psychosis” developed by the power elites. The fear of oppositional assaults on the system always prevented them from creating a relaxed political climate so as to integrate its dissidents. The oppositional elements, meanwhile, had no legitimate channels through which to ventilate their dissatisfaction. The Panchayat elites were also reluctant to be “responsive to demands made through methods that they define as being coercive for fear that the result will be a widespread disrespect for the established procedures which alone they consider legitimate.”<sup>9</sup>

### *Second Constitution Amendment and “Political Integration”*

In January 1972, King Mahendra, the propounder of the Panchayat system, died of heart-attack and his eldest son, Birendra ascended the throne. Birendra’s mental make up and work style was different from those of his deceased father. Unlike King Mahendra, he was brought up and educated in modern English schools and Colleges, had imbibed the environment of prestigious Universities like Tokyo and Harvard. Birendra undertook trips to different parts of the country with a view to embarking upon new development works. While visiting these places, he gained detailed knowledge which was verified through debriefing of personnel especially assigned. To pursue an all-comprehending development strategy, Birendra created four development regions—east, middle, west and far-west, each of them to be periodically visited by him.

On the political front, he started introducing a number of changes without, however, comprehending the far reaching consequences

<sup>9</sup>Myron Weiner has analyzed the participation crisis within a political system. According to him, “a participation crisis can occur under a variety of conditions” which are, to put them in brief, as follows: the government elite has a tendency to monopolize power rejecting demands for participation. Another reason for participation crisis is that the groups that make demands may be organized into institutions that the governing elite view as illegitimate. Third, governing elites may view demands for political participation as illegitimate. Many authoritarian political systems, for example, are prepared to share power but only with those who enter politics through narrowly prescribed channels.

For details see, Myron Weiner, “Political Participation: Crisis of the Political Process” in Leonard Binder *et al.*, “Crisis of the Political Process” in Leonard Binder *et al.*, *Crisis and Sequences in Political Development*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1971), pp. 186-88.

these measures were likely to produce. Yet, he adhered to the partyless principles of the system since the day of his accession to the throne. In 1972, immediately after becoming the King, he stated that "the Panchayat System of democracy, being consonant with the popular will and having its roots deeply embedded in Nepalese soil-milieu, is not only dynamic but also capable of evolutionary growth and development. We are confident that the system will respond to changing times through suitable improvements."<sup>10</sup> The reactions to the Royal proclamation were mixed, but still oppositional elements, especially the Nepali Congress, and other underground parties, were optimistic when congratulating the new King. Things did not however change in accordance with the expectations of the system's critics. Subsequently, violent activities ostensibly launched by the Nepali Congress, started taking place. It has been said that the first phase of King Birendra's rule was "characterized by a perceptible rise in the incidence or acts of both governmental and popular violence, accompanied by periodic waves of unrest among students and peasants."<sup>11</sup> These sporadic violent activities were the handiwork of the volunteers having allegiance to the former prime minister, B.P. Koirala who had been advocating the necessity of violent revolution in Nepal. Some extremists of the communist party were also active in eastern Nepal. The "Naxalites" a catchy word during those years, was primarily an Indian import to Nepal's eastern Jhapa district where, as in the West-Bengal state of India, a number of people were murdered by them in the name of "liquidation of class enemies". The period between 1972-75 was thus relatively turbulent.

An unusual configuration of events took place following King Birendra's ascension. Some Panchayat members, student groups and others opposed to the system started an opposition movement. The young King seemed to have measured well the frustrations created by the performance of the system, particularly when its organizational wing showed its irrelevance in the changing situation. King Birendra, first of all, introduced some changes in the Back-to-Village National Campaign (BVNC), a machinery created by his

<sup>10</sup>H.M. King Birendra Bira Bikram Shah Dev, *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, (HMG Press, 1977), pp. 34-35.

<sup>11</sup>Rishikesh Shaha, *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978), pp. 189-200.

father for mobilizing panchas along the “partyless” line.<sup>12</sup> A political drift shown by the pancha disunity over the year could have prompted the King to transform the campaign into a political organization. The amended BVNC, which took the form of an organization for enforcing “discipline, and organizational unity” could be interpreted as a forward step in the partyless system. The BVNC was also considered a “pillar” of the system since it was expected to bring about attitudinal change in the society as a whole. The pamphlet distributed by the BVNC central committee noted that this body was an “organization” with certain resemblances to a party organization including (a) evaluation of political workers, (b) enforcement of political discipline, (c) cadre development, (d) voter’s education, and (e) correct interpretation of the Panchayat ideology. In sharp contrast to the party objectives of capturing power, the BVNC did not aim at achieving power for itself in view of the monarchical leadership.<sup>13</sup>

The organizational changes effected by King Birendra were made a part of the constitution when it was amended in 1975. When the coronation was approaching, King Birendra announced on February 9, 1975 the formation of the Constitution Reform Commission with a former Supreme Court chief justice as its chairman.

The modus operandi of the commission was also significant. The members, drawn from different walks of life, not only visited different parts of the country in order to get informed of popular opinion, but they also helped in creating a relaxed political climate hitherto unseen under the Panchayat system. The people were enthusiastic in submitting their opinions individually to the Commission. The opposition leaders living in self-exile in India also followed a policy of wait-and-see in order to give a chance for the introduction of liberal reforms in the constitution.

### *Indian Emergency and Constitutional Reforms*

The so-called political “status quoists” did not lag behind in raising their heads after the declaration of emergency by the beleaguered Indian Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi in June 1975. This

<sup>12</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, “Party like Institutions in Partyless Politics: The GVNC in Nepal,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 7, July 1976, pp. 672-81, see also *Gaun Pharka Rashtriya Abhiyan*, (Amended), 1973.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*



dramatic turn of event in India gave an additional boost to those who did not appreciate the manner in which the Constitution Reform Commission was soliciting political opinions in the country. Now the so-called "largest democracy of the world had taken a sudden plunge into authoritarianism tailored to Madam Gandhi." Although there is no direct correlation between the two, "the declaration of emergency did bring about a change in the thrust and direction of constitutional amendments in Nepal."<sup>14</sup> Kathmandu's "establishmentarian" circles, which were never disposed towards democratizing the system, were delighted to argue that the western model democracy was under no circumstance congenial to the developing countries. Opposition groups, championing the cause of liberal democracy, were obviously democratized when the "bastion" of democracy in Asia was derailed. Among the numerous challenges to the viability of democratic government, the intrinsic challenges "grow directly out of the functioning of democracy."<sup>15</sup> Indian democracy was undoubtedly under undue stress before the declaration of the emergency, especially due to agitational politics which found expression more on the streets rather than in institutions.

Taking a cue from the Indian situation and making determined bids for stalling the forthcoming liberal reforms, the panchas utilized the National Development Council meetings to air their views that indirect elections to the national legislature, the appointment of prime minister by the King, and the active Royal leadership were basic to the partyless system and, hence unchangeable. Meanwhile, the government came with a heavy hand in dealing with the three-month old student unrest. Some University and College teachers were arbitrarily dismissed for their alleged involvement in political activities.

The second amendment to the Constitution was promulgated on December 12, 1975. On the eve of the announcement, the new council of ministers led by Tulsī Giri was sworn in. Giri's proclivity towards maintaining the *status quo* intact was well known. He was the only consistent "Panchayatocrat" opposed to any more undermining of the attributes of the partyless system. In his view, liberal reforms, i.e., election to the National Panchayat on the

<sup>14</sup>Shaha, p. 206.

<sup>15</sup>Michel J. Crozier *et al.*, *The Crisis of Democracy*, (New York University Press, 1975), p. 8.

basis of adult franchise, responsibility of the council of ministers to the legislature, and elected prime minister, meant the party system. Earlier, he was unceremoniously removed from the national legislature to be appointed as King Birendra's political aide. Many had interpreted Giri's resignation from the National Panchayat as the permanent eclipse of his political career, but it was not so. Giri was rewarded for his political stand befitting the Panchayat principle. King Birendra not only nominated Giri to the National Panchayat but also gave him the post of prime minister.<sup>16</sup>

On December 12, announcing the provisions of the amended constitution, King Birendra stated that the BVNC had come to stay with a constitutional status and an enhanced authority. Officially described as the "backbone of the partyless system," the BVNC was hierarchically organized along the lines prescribed in the 1973 amendment. It decided about the candidates contesting elections to the different tiers of the system. The Local Panchayat (Election Procedure) (First Amendment) Ordinance, 1976 prescribing the qualifications of candidates joining the grass-root level bodies, maintained that a candidate without any commitment to the Panchayat would not be eligible for membership. The BVNC could also nominate the chairman of the National Panchayat, chairman of the district panchayat, and *pradhan* (chief) and *upapradhan* (deputy chief) Panchas of village panchayat in case no candidates secured the requisite two-thirds majority. Even when appointing the prime minister and other ministers, the King on his own initiative, could seek the opinion of the BVNC Central Committee.<sup>17</sup>

Since the additional features of the amended BVNC resembled a one-party system, it has been recognized as a typical "device for facilitating mass mobilization" while restricting mass participation. Weiner and Palambora, though in a different context, state that such a regime "may be concerned with developing a subjective sense of participation while actually preventing the populace from affecting public policy, administration or the selection of those who

<sup>16</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "Nepal: The Politics of Nomination," *Occasional Papers in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, (Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1978), p. 70.

<sup>17</sup>See Baral, "Party like Institutions in Partyless Politics."

will in fact govern.”<sup>18</sup> The procedures adopted later by the BVNC made all the more clear its role in controlling mass participation, for the BVNC divided the Nepali people into “panchas” and “non-panchas”. Besides elections, the BVNC also followed an offensive line insofar as its relationship with the opposition was concerned. Opposition leaders, both panchas and non-panchas, were humiliated in different ways at the behest of the BVNC committee. Enjoying a highly favoured and sheltered existence, the BVNC was indeed a patronizing body responsible towards none but the King.

Armed as it was with numerous restrictive measures for reinforcing the partyless character, it was a “consolidatory” constitution, characterized essentially by the absence of competing forces in the practice and philosophy of the constitution as manifest and latent in the political system.<sup>19</sup> By abolishing elections from class organizations and the graduates’ constituency, all sites of legitimate opposition were blocked. Prior to the second amendment, the graduates of the country could elect four representatives to the national legislature directly from among themselves. Elections from this constituency had almost invariably been characterized by oppositional overtones and vigorous ideological encounters among running candidates. Each graduate election had borne witness to a crisis. Most candidates in the elections had demanded structural reforms within the Panchayat system.<sup>20</sup>

The class and professional organizations of the country could send fifteen representatives to the National Panchayat. Designed to function as conveyor-belts to the system, these class organizations were forced to deviate from their *raison d’être*. Later most class organizations did not hesitate to pass resolutions listing demands which, if implemented, were likely to revive the party system. The intensified activities of the class organizations could have been eye-openers for the authorities involved in amending the constitution.

Elections to the National Panchayat and other organs of the system were not held at a time. Nepal was divided into four divisions for election purposes, and elections to the national and other panchayats in these divisions were held in rotation. It meant that

<sup>18</sup>Myron Weiner and Joseph La Palombara, “The Impact of Parties on Political Development” in Weiner and Palombara, eds., *Political Parties and Political Development*, (Princeton, 1966), pp. 403-405.

<sup>19</sup>Leslie Wolf-Philips, *Comparative Constitutions*, (London, 1972), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup>See in detail, Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, pp. 136-44.

each year, only the districts coming under a particular division held elections.

Attempts made by the BVNC for insuring "election" through consensus also checked the people's enthusiastic participation in elections. Many panchas realised that the arbitrary procedures adopted by the BVNC was against the essence of "enthusiastic" participation by the masses. Complaints relating to imposed consensus were duly taken into consideration by king Birendra, who later directed the BVNC central committee to look into these complaints. He said:

It appears that some Panchayat workers are not satisfied with the procedure followed by the National Campaign on the basis of the principle of consensus in election held at different levels of Panchayats according to resolutions passed at Panchayat rallies after the Second Amendment to the constitution. We desire to see the principle of popular participation extensively applied in the partyless democratic Panchayat System.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these guidelines, the BVNC did not encourage open competition in the elections. All organs from the council of ministers to the village Panchayat levels did not show any symptom of growth. The council of ministers was responsible to the King and the national legislature was simply a formal law-making body. The second amendment thus became a means for alienating both panchas and non-panchas, mainly because both the system supporters and opponents did not appreciate the enforced compliance desired by the BVNC. Perhaps that was why the panchas appeared to be generally docile and unenthusiastic, and they did not come forward rallying when the system started reeling under the students' movement in 1979. Patriotic slogans often raised by the panchas did not help to mobilize the people. When legitimate means failed to silence the opposition, coercive measures to overcome problems forced by the dissidents became evident. Moreover, the BVNC as an ideological wing of the system was less innovative and responsive to the demands placed on the system. All these factors suggested that the Panchayat system, as amended in 1975, was neither becoming resilient nor integrative.

<sup>21</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, May 20, 1977.

The assumptions that King Birendra was going to give a coronation gift to the people by democratizing the system did not prove correct in the view of the critics. Many had followed the wait-and-see policy until the amendment was declared. The former prime minister, B.P. Koirala, then living in self-exile in India, criticized the amendment in these words:

The King himself has admitted that national existence is in jeopardy. The King hopes that the second amendment to the constitution may save the country from that danger. In this context, the main question is what was it that caused the nation's existence to fall into danger? Is not the King responsible for landing the country in this crisis by setting up a tyrannical system in the name of Panchayat and by destroying the political rights of the people completely? It is our considered opinion that rule by peremptory and preemptory commands (*hukumiraj*) is leading the country to the abyss of degradation and destruction.<sup>22</sup>

He further stated that if the King had wanted to amend this constitution with the development of the country in heart, the reforms would have been democratic . . . "These amendments have seriously undermined the interests of the nation. The King's step has been an anti-national step."<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Koirala's hard hitting remarks, the other two leaders of the banned Nepali Congress, Subarna Shamsher and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, welcomed the amendments, and they maintained that the proclamations and declarations made by His Majesty were in accordance with the best tradition of the country, since the King knew best "the objective conditions prevailing in the country today."<sup>24</sup> Among the Panchas, a senior Panchayatocrat and former chairman of the National Panchayat, Rajeswar Devkota, was more critical of the constitution which he was reported to have said was a "political corruption." The leftist leader, Man Mohan Adhikari, called it a betrayal of the people.

<sup>22</sup>*Tarun Bulletin* (Kathmandu), No. 7, December 1975.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, December 15, 1975.

*National Reconciliation and Change*

One of the events influencing the course of Nepal's political development was the decision taken by the former prime minister and leader of the outlawed Nepali Congress, B.P. Koirala, on December 30, 1976 to return to Nepal after abandoning the violent activities which his party undertook after his self-imposed exile in India in 1969. On the day of his arrival in Kathmandu, Koirala issued a statement highlighting the reasons for taking such a decision. He said:

Today our country is in a national crisis. It was felt by all that this crisis was developing for few years. It has created a situation endangering the very existence of the nation. This fact has been accepted by others as well. By understanding such grave realities, we are returning to Nepal. In our opinion, the main danger to existence is due to the absence of national unity, without which foreign elements are becoming successful in spreading evil designs and in converting Nepal into an arena of International conspiracy. National unity can only be created by the common endeavours and actions of all Nepalis. . . . Till yesterday, our struggle was only for the democratic rights of the people. We, therefore, gave emphasis on democratic aspects. Today a new dimension has been added to it. Nepali Congress has to shoulder two-fold responsibility. This second responsibility is the protection of the existence of the country. We have realized two-faced conditions of today's Nepal-Nationalism and Democracy.<sup>25</sup>

Although 1976 was the year of decision for B.P.'s return, enough groundwork had been done much earlier.<sup>26</sup> As far back as 1974

<sup>25</sup>Bishweswar Prasad Koirala's appeal to the people was distributed on December 30, 1976. It is also reproduced in his booklet *Rashtriya Ekatako Nimiti Ahwan*, (Tarun Prakashan, 2036) (1979), pp. 4-6.

<sup>26</sup>Different channels were utilized by Koirala to open negotiations with the Palace. The Former Prime Minister, Tanka Prasad Acharya and Tulsi Giri were sounded by Koirala about his plan to return to Nepal since 1973. Bhola Chatterji, one of Koirala's close associates in India, reveals that he had undertaken trips to Kathmandu by way of developing rapport between the Palace and Koirala. The mission of "Exploration" was arranged by the Nepalese consul-general in Calcutta, Rom Bahadur Thapa. Prior to it, "Koirala suggested certain points which should be conveyed to the King." See Bhola Chatterji,

King Birendra himself was on record assuring all that the Panchayat System offered "equal opportunity to all to participate in national development." The King had added that "if any one shows faith in the system, reforms his outlook, and changes his ideology, judgement will not be passed solely on the basis of what he did or where he was yesterday. If inspired by love of motherland, such people turn their face homeward in a spirit of cooperation, time will surely test their service to the country and system, in word and in deed."<sup>27</sup>

Although the declaration of emergency in India by Mrs Indira Gandhi had no direct connection with B.P.'s decision to return home, observers commented on its negative impact on the anti-system movement. After the emergency, the Nepali Congress volunteers might have been put under surveillance, because B.P.'s relations with the Indian opposition leaders belonging to the JP movement was well known in India. Bhola Chatterji has given a categorical view on the impact of the Indian emergency on the Congress movement in Nepal. He states:

The political development consequent upon the declaration of emergency in India had its effect on the Nepali Congress activists. To meet the exigencies of the difficult times, they decided to go slow. What added a complicating dimension to the state of affairs was that New Delhi did not exactly take a benign view of the close rapport Koirala had all along maintained with some prominent opposition leaders, particularly Jaya Prakash Narayan and Chandra Sekhar.

He added that Koirala "was aware that New Delhi's rigid attitude would inevitably queer the pitch. Neither was he unaware that he must act before being overtaken by events."<sup>28</sup>

One argument advanced by B.P. highlighted the domestic and regional trends which were likely to create adverse impact on

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*Palace, People and Politics: Nepal in Perspective*, (Ankur Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980), p. 50.

<sup>27</sup>H.M. King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>28</sup>See Bhola Chatterji, *Palace, People and Politics: Nepal in Perspective*, pp. 58-59.

Nepal. "The Panchayat System could not get the sustenance of its life from within the country; and encouragement and support coming from outside went on weakening. In such a situation, the state-ship becomes rudderless to be bewildered within the sea of problems," wrote B.P.<sup>29</sup> What destructive international trends could prompt him to review his line of political thinking and strategies are still unexplained.<sup>30</sup> At that time, the South Asian region was relatively quiet when the NC took a decision to stop its activities. Kathmandu had some misgivings about the annexation of Sikkim by India in 1974,<sup>31</sup> but to connect this with B.P.'s national reconciliation policy was unrealistic. For, B.P. was on record to have urged the government and the people of India that they should strengthen democratic forces in Nepal, least, one fine morning they find China occupying Nepal by default.<sup>32</sup> This showed that B.P. was more obsessed with the "grand Chinese design" in Nepal than with the Indian move. So the Sikkim incident was not a factor in his decision to return to Nepal.

B.P. and his colleagues, Ganesh Man Singh and six others, did not go unpunished. They were put on trial on the charges of having indulged in or instigated violent activities. But, the situation took a dramatic turn following B.P.'s return. Mrs. Indira Gandhi decided to hold fresh elections in India. Pakistan had already conducted its parliamentary elections. The human rights issue was gaining

<sup>29</sup>Bishweswar Prasad Koirala, "Rashtriya Sahamatika Baidhantik Dhancha," (Legal Framework of National Reconciliation) *Kalpna* (Dharan), Vol. 13, Nos. 1-4, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup>Ganes Raj Sharma, who was closely associated as an advocate with B.P. Koirala during the latter's trial, wrote an article in which he saw a crisis facing Nepal in the mid 1970s. According to him, "If there were no national crises and was no need of national unity, there was no nationality of His Majesty's proposition that Nepal be declared a zone of peace." But why the Panchayat organs were opposed to national reconciliation and national unity which also sought to resolve such crisis"? See Ganes Raj Sharma, "Rashtriya Sahamatiko Bibekshil Upalavdhi. . . Rashtriya Janmat," (Rational Outcome of National Reconciliation: Referendum), *Kalpna*, *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>31</sup>Official circles in Kathmandu reaffirmed Nepal's opposition to outside interference in Sikkim and added that "as a neighbour Sikkim should continue to make progress through the preservation of her traditional entity." Radio Nepal gave a wide coverage of the view of a member of the National Panchayat in denouncing India's move. For official view see, *Rising Nepal*, September 3, 1974.

<sup>32</sup>*The Times of India*, (New Delhi), May 28, 1975.



momentum in the United States with Jimmy Carter blowing it high. The hardliners in Nepal who were assured of the burial of democracy in this part of the world, apparently started getting nervous. When the "Janata Wave" blew in India, the oppositional elements in Nepal found themselves in an advantageous situation, because the primacy of external impact on domestic politics was always decisive. Moreover, a newly formed coalition party the Janata Party — in India picked up the B.P. issue during its election campaigns and even later with a view to putting pressures on the King. In March the Janata was voted to power by an overwhelming majority dethroning Indira Gandhi from power. It was taken as a resurrection of democracy in India. Shortly thereafter on June 8, 1977, B.P. who was being tried in a court under the Treason (Crime and Punishment) Act, was released on parole on medical grounds. Prior to his release, B.P. was brought to the Royal palace where King Birendra and B.P. exchanged political views concerning the country, as B.P. narrated later, to the astonishment of all and to the discomfiture of some, King Birendra allowed him to go abroad and also provided him with financial assistance for his treatment.<sup>33</sup>

King Birendra's decision to set B.P. free was interpreted in different ways. Some called it "the greatness and glory of the Crown and the affection and good will" in which the people were held by the Kings of the Shah dynasty. Some others considered it a timely action on the part of the King, so that safety-valves could be opened in order to avoid a crisis. "The medical grounds provided a neatcover to pull the rug from under the opposition," it was also stated.<sup>34</sup>

The Panchayat camp seemingly changed its tone after the release of B.P. The Chairman of the BVNC Central Committee, Biswa Bandhu Thapa, was more critical and forthright in stressing the role of people's representatives. Thapa asserted that the national campaign workers were "paid functionaries, not public representatives."<sup>35</sup>

The national politics was evidently under particular stress when the BVNC and the bureaucratic machinery started confronting unusual situations. When B.P. returned after treatment, they were

<sup>33</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, June 9, 1977, and *The Times of India*, June 11, 1977.

<sup>34</sup>*Himali Bela*, June 11, 1977. For further details see *Nepal Press Digest*, June 13, 1977.

<sup>35</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, June 10, 1977.

required to mobilize Panchas to demonstrate that they opposed B.P. because he was "a foreign stooge." Emboldened by the King's occasional declarations, they went on stating that no change whatsoever should be introduced under the pressures of the opposition.<sup>36</sup> In nervousness and haste the BVNC and the bureaucracy were working in order to withstand both internal contradictions besetting the system and external pressures exerted by the supporters of domestic opposition; they were taking much pain to explain that nothing was going to happen to the Panchayat system. Subsequently, the Chairman of the BVNC, Biswa Bandhu Thapa was relieved of his post when he visited B.P. It was ironic that Thapa had zealously defended the system in several speeches only a month before.<sup>37</sup>

Although national reconciliation was too vague a term in view of B.P.'s one-sided interpretation, it did help to create a new political situation in the country. As B.P. himself admitted it as being a "heart-breakingly slow process," nothing dramatic could be expected. The developments were however quite welcome to the opposition camp, because the activities of the political leaders, supported by external conditions, was apparently reducing the manoeuvrability of the Panchayat camp.

It is common place that any reconciliation starts with a minimum agreement on ending hostilities or conflicts between two parties. On B.P.'s side, the point of dispute was the "undemocratic" nature of the Panchayat system. When he proposed his reconciliation, did it mean that the dispute was resolved? His was an unilateral offer which was equally likely to get a favourable response or a rebuff. When King Birendra had enunciated his liberal attitude in 1974, he did not provide any clue to the political reforms, if any, within the system.

<sup>36</sup>The Back-to-Village National Campaign Central Committee had passed resolutions in order to remove rumours that the system was going to introduce some reforms to satisfy the oppositional elements.

<sup>37</sup>According to Thapa, some members of the BVNC Central Committee were not happy with his style of working as a chairman, for he was giving a fair trial to popular election in contravention to the policy of *consensus*. Knowing that the King wanted to get rid of him, he decided to go to Koirala during *Dasain* (Durga Puja) whereupon he was asked to resign. Author's interview with Biswa Bhadhu Thapa in September 1980. See also my, "Nepal 1978: Year of Hopes and Confusions," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 2, February 1979.

The national reconciliation and the national unity propositions appeared Palace-oriented, because their thrust was for creating an understanding with the Palace which, by all reckoning, enjoyed maximum political leverage in the country. Confined exclusively to B.P.'s own perception, the policy of reconciliation was equally misunderstood as a strategy, and as a scheme for eliciting concessions from the Palace. If he could have involved other groups or leaders including the Panchas, his policy could have been more broadbased. So national reconciliation appeared to be yet another strategy, *a la* B.P. that searched for finding ways and means for establishing B.P.'s rapport with the Palace. Despite its vagueness and weakness, it could however create a political climate for helping the course of liberalization. B.P.'s obsession with establishing a rapport with the Palace was also reflected on the pressures, which he exerted on the student leaders for calling off the student agitation in 1979. He was afraid of the movement leaders who, in B.P.'s view, were likely to defeat the cause of national reconciliation.<sup>38</sup> B.P.'s view that his proposal of national reconciliation was the only factor responsible for the national referendum proclaimed by King Birendra on May 24, 1979, was, however, far from the truth.

### *External Milieu*

A small country, Nepal, sandwiched as it is between the two Asian giants, India and China, cannot escape the exigencies of the external environment. Both strained relations and burgeoning *detente* or *entente* between powerful nations create respective impacts on their neighbours. The Sino-American *detente* started by the Nixon-Kissinger team in the early 1970s considerably altered the balance of power situation globally and regionally. The impact of the Sino-American *detente* on a small country like Nepal is not difficult to assess. America was guided by the "retrenchment of containment" policy since she was desperately trying to withdraw from East Asia, particularly Korea. Later Vietnam became a war

<sup>38</sup>Student leaders belonging to the congress affiliated *Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh*, held the view that B.P. Koirala was not happy with the student movement launched jointly by three groups of students—Pro-Peking communists, Pro-Moscow communist and Pro-Congress *Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh*. So he always put pressure on calling off agitation so that national reconciliation did not suffer any set-back.

zone for the American policy makers. It became clear to Americans that the Dullesian “brinkmanship” policy pursued vigorously in the 1950s was not going to pay in the 70s. So, a rapprochement with Peking was long-overdue. “Just as the twenty-two years of American-Chinese hostility was a product of America’s globalizing her containment policy, so too was the American-Chinese detente; from the American side, a product of American retrenching on that global policy.”<sup>39</sup>

With the signing of the Shanghai communique, issued at the end of President Nixon’s visit to China in February 1972, the policy of containment of China was suddenly changed into a policy of detente “with the pledge that each party would work toward eventual ‘normalization’ on a full scale.”

The Sino-American *detente* was primarily motivated by a common Russian threat to Asia and Europe, despite Kissinger’s denial. As the Soviet Union got primacy in Chinese foreign policy objectives, the Chinese seemingly moved closer to the United States with regard to Asia and Europe. Japan and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) evidently followed the American line in reshaping and reorienting their policies towards Peking.

In South Asia, India, a sworn enemy of China after the 1962 border war, was also desirous to cultivate relations with China. So was China to befriend India. The Sino-American and Sino-Indian detente had therefore an immediate influence on Nepal as the external manoeuvrability of power elites vis-a-vis the domestic opponents appeared to have reduced. In the 1960s, the estrangement of the Sino-Indian relations did pay rich dividends for out-maneuvring the domestic opposition by producing the “leftist” and “democrats” as countervailing groups. The Indian government which did not hide its sympathy for the Nepali Congress activists fighting against the regime, was made to realize its limitations. How Nepal’s bargaining position had been perceptibly increased in the 1960s has thus been remarked by an observer in these words: “In the middle sixties political circumstances favoured Nepal. The government missed this chance to lay the firm industrial foundations for a signi-

<sup>39</sup>See Robert J. Art, “America’s Foreign Policy: In Historical Perspective,” in Roy C. Macridis ed., *Foreign Policy in World Politics*, (Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi, 1979), p. 369.

ficant degree of economic self-reliance. In 1970-71, when Nepal's political bargaining position was no longer so good, the economic failures of the sixties were bound to take their toll on Nepal's treaty aims."<sup>40</sup>

In the 1970s, India's emergence as a "dominant" power in the South Asian region had been recognized by the super powers after the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. As Scalapino has rightly pointed out, "Gone is the time when India and Pakistan seemed sufficiently matched in power to warrant external effort at sustaining the peace via a military equilibrium between these two states. Some would say, of course, that potentiality never really existed. In any case, India is the dominant power of the subcontinent today and for the foreseeable future." So "developments throughout the region hinge to a very considerable extent on trends within India—both as these pertain to domestic politics and foreign policies."<sup>41</sup>

Such an enhanced status of India in South Asia and the normalization of the Sino-Indian relation, made other small countries of the region conscious of their stakes. Coming close on the heels was the Indian move towards integrating Sikkim into the Indian union. Although the Western bloc nations led by the USA, and the People's Republic of China did not endorse the move, none of them was going to censor India either. Such an aggressive posture demonstrated by India helped to harbour suspicious in future Indian moves. Although no correlation could be established between the Sikkim affair and King Birendra's proposal that Nepal be declared a zone of peace, which he first proposed at his coronation in 1975, Nepal's anxiety over any kind of adventurism on the part of India could not be discounted. Nepal's "peace proposal" could have come as a strategy to keep all regional and global powers at bay. India did not accept it on the grounds that since Nepal and India had at treaty relation guaranteeing each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Peace Zone proposal appeared to be "redundant". The Indian leaders did not respond to Nepal's proposal in their public statements, but underlined the "irrelevance and illogicity" of it

<sup>40</sup>See Pashupati Shumshere J.B. Rana, "India and Nepal: The Political Economy of a Relationship," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, July 1971, pp. 645-60. See also "Trade" in Pashupati S.J.B. Rana and Kamal P. Malla eds., *Nepal in Perspective*, (CEDA, Kathmandu, 1973), pp. 219-37.

<sup>41</sup>Robert A. Scalapino, *Asia and the Road Ahead: Issues for the Major Powers*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976), p. 20.

to the Nepalese in bilateral discussions. The Janata government pursued this policy explaining that the whole South Asian sub-continent and the Indian Ocean area should be declared a "zone of peace."<sup>42</sup>

India's reservations regarding the peace proposal on the one hand, and on the other the ruling Janata leaders' open denunciation of King Birendra's rule since the Janata's coming to power in 1977, created a psychology in the Nepali ruling circles that India was likely to use Nepali congress leader, B.P. Koirala, as a political weapon to influence Nepal's domestic political developments. Unlike the 1960s, Kathmandu's political manoeuvrability vis-a-vis India was in a low key, because the authorities in Nepal could not use, as in the past, the "leftists" as countervailing forces to the Nepali Congress and India. Although the Janata government took cautious steps to discount Nepal's fear of being interfered with by India, yet the party leaders showed their political preference by openly supporting the Nepali Congress leader.

External manoeuvrability, through which domestic equilibrium is usually maintained in Nepal had also been neutralized by the Sino-American and the Sino-Indian *detente*. India and China were no longer sworn enemies despite their impending border dispute. The normalization of relations between the two had been undertaken by Mrs Indira Gandhi when she sent an ambassador to Peking. And Chinese overtures to India were equally forthright, notwithstanding Peking's denunciation of India's move in absorbing Sikkim in 1974. The Janata government's policy of "genuine non-alignment" also helped to promote the Sino-Indian relation, because India was moving slightly away from the Soviet Union despite the 1971 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Moscow.<sup>43</sup> So, when the Panchayat government was feeling the heat of the opposition movement fuelled by internal contradictions within the system, the external situation was not helping the regime to cool it. On the contrary, it was the opposition which was successful in catching the attention of the external powers. However, China did not show

<sup>42</sup>Statements of Prime Minister Morarji Desai and External Affairs Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, time and again referred to the South Asian region as a zone of peace. See also Mavin Kurve, "Nepal's Peace Zone Move: Attempt to Change 1950 Treaty", *The Times of India*, (New Delhi), January 14, 1981.

<sup>43</sup>*United States Policy Statement Series—1978 America's Goal: The Enhancement of Human Rights*, (USICA, 1978), pp. 1-3.

any kind of political preference and continued to maintain its state-to-state relation on the same footing as before. The wind blowing in favour of liberal reforms in other countries also created a climate for the national referendum declared by King Birendra in 1979.

### *Human Rights' Wave and Nepal*

“The politics of human rights” vigorously pursued by the United States in the early phase of the Carter administration has been given due credit for creating humanitarian concern at the global level. The Nixon-Kissinger model of diplomacy had been criticized as being void of values. And Carter treated the human rights issue as the “domestic counterpart to the foreign policies or diplomacy, each being a microcosm of more complex issues.” Jimmy Carter also showed his penchant for being morally political or politically moral. As if to censure governments all over the world, he declared immediately after assuming presidency that as long as he was President, “the government of the United States will struggle for the enhancement of human rights” and no force on earth “can separate us from that commitment,” he asserted. Carter went on to add that “the first duty of a government is to protect its citizen; when government itself becomes the perpetrator of arbitrary violence, it undermines its legitimacy.” Human rights were no longer considered as peripheral to the foreign policy nor did the administration treat them as “decoration”.<sup>44</sup>

Conceivably, Carter’s human rights policy created a world-wide response. Some countries honoured it by releasing political prisoners or by granting amnesty to dissidents. How President Carter could create a climate at the global level has been well stated by Hedley Bull in these words: “President Carter continued to project the vision of a new world order; in place of Kissinger’s starting point of the national interest there was a return to ideological objectives; in place of the negative ideological objective of anti-communism there was the positive one of the promotion of American values; in place of the order values of American liberal

<sup>41</sup>See Hedley Bull, “The Conduct of American Foreign Policy: A View from Abroad: Consistency under Pressure,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 1978, p. 459.

internationalism—the rights of individual human being.”<sup>45</sup> Carter’s assertion that American foreign relations were both with governments and non-state groups and individuals in all societies, made American officials abroad realize that they ought to move as freely with the establishment as with the opposition. The American embassy officials started hobnobbing with opposition leaders, when their old style of working was criticized in the late 1970s. Though relegated to a lower priority later, Carter’s policy was a protection for all those who were involved in democratic struggles. Foreign assistance was also devised as a weapon for censuring regimes with low human rights record. The Map of Freedom prepared by the Freedom House in January 1977 had put nations under three categories—free, partly free, and not free. According to this Map, ‘not free’ nations ranged from Afghanistan to Zaire, including Nepal, in South Asia. Among other South Asian nations, Bangladesh, India (before the 1977 elections) and Pakistan were put in the group of ‘partly free’ nations. Sri Lanka was the lone member in the comity of ‘free nations’ in South Asia.<sup>46</sup> The Map of Freedom was however changing from time to time depending on the degree of freedom permitted by the regimes. Some ‘not free’ and ‘partly free’ nations like Nepal and India were subsequently rated as ‘partial free’ and ‘fully free’ nations in 1977. The release of political prisoners and relaxed political climate became other yardsticks for rating the nations.

Although it is difficult to see correlations between Carters’ doctrine and political changes taking place in India and adjoining countries, the human rights ‘wave’ had been partly responsible for prompting Indira Gandhi to lift the emergency rule. The regimes which were central to American strategic interests were not much affected by Carter’s policy, however.

<sup>45</sup>*The Map of Freedom*, January 1977 reproduced by David E. Apter in *An Introduction to Political Analysis*, Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi, 1978, (Indian Reprint), p. 463.

<sup>46</sup>President Carter’s concern about human rights in Nepal was revealed by two journalists, Chandra Lal Jha, Editor of *Nepal Times* and Madhav Acharya, a local senior Reporter of *Rashtriya Sambad Samiti* (National News Agency), when they interviewed the US Ambassador L. Douglas Heck in August 1978. The Ambassador said that “the President has been very forthright and clear in his human rights concerns and interests.” See “Interview with Ambassador Heck,” Cyclostyled by USICA (Kathmandu), August 9, 1978.



To single out the case of Nepal, it could be realized that the Carters' human rights wave apparently created an impact on the government circles. The US Ambassador to Nepal stated that he raised the human rights issue with the Nepali government by what might be called 'private diplomacy'. It was reported that President Carter had sent a letter to King Birendra urging him to encourage the enjoyment of human rights in Nepal.<sup>47</sup>

### *Impact of India and Iran on Nepal*

As to the dismay of many, India had suddenly turned authoritarian after the emergency imposition by Indira Gandhi, equally to the astonishment of all, Mrs Gandhi suddenly took up the cause of democracy and freedom. According to Rudolph and Rudolph, "Rarely has a country experienced so curious and kaleidoscopic a set of political changes as India since 1975."<sup>48</sup> Equally maligned and applauded for her performance as the Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi seemed to be very much conscious of history and of the role of her family which had supported democratic institutions, in a manner befitting the spirit of the Indian independence movement. When Indira Gandhi was strenuously defending the emergency rule in India, Zulphikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan had held elections which proved to be fatal for him. Other international situations favouring liberal movements developed simultaneously along with Carters' appeal for universal application of human rights. Mrs Indira Gandhi's own calculations, besides others, that she would get a massive popular mandate on the basis of the "gains" of the emergency rule were yet other reasons for her taking a decision to go to the polls.

Lifting of the ban on political parties with a view to allowing opposition forces to participate in the March 1977 election was

<sup>47</sup>Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "India's Election: Backing into the Future," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1977, p. 836.

<sup>48</sup>Statements and counter-statements relating to B.P. Koirala and democracy became a routine affair since the victory of the Janata Party in March election in India. When the situation was steadily drifting, Desai seemed to have demarcated the line between government leaders' view and party leaders' views. It was a peculiar demarcation as ruling party was also a part of government, despite Desai's efforts for separating the two. For Prime Minister Morarji Desai's view see *Gorkhapatra*, May 31, *Samaj*, June 1, 1977. See also Mavin Kurve, "Wind of Change in Nepal: Why Dr Giri was Ousted," *The Times of India*, September 16, 1977.

just like the opening up of Pandora's box for her rule. For the first time in the history of democratic India after 1947, opposition forces could become successful in shedding their party differences, when five democratic parties—Jana Sangh, Swatantra, Congress (Morarji), Bharatiya Kranti Dal and Socialist Parties—agreed to form a new organization—the Janata Party. And Jaya Prakash Narayan who had been instrumental for putting Mrs Indira Gandhi's government on the dock, after waging successful anti-Indira movements, became responsible for forging this coalition of democratic parties.

Its leaders created a 'Janata-wave' cutting across regional, caste and other parochial barriers. The intensity and force with which the Janata was clamouring for the liquidation of legacies of the emergency regime, was creating uneasiness on India's neighbours as well. For Nepal, the Janata leadership, especially its mentor, Jaya Prakash Narayan, and his erstwhile socialist compatriots, had both personal and ideological relations with the Nepali Congress leader, B.P. Koirala, who was already on trial for his alleged anti-state offenses. Later, the massive mandate received by the Janata stood as a striking repudiation of authoritarianism and a "reaffirmation of the legitimacy" of democratic institutions based on competitive politics.

Nepal's immediate concern over readjusting its political relationship with the Janata government were understandable. Almost all the papers including the two official dailies, the *Gorkhapatra* and the *Rising Nepal* advocated close friendship between India and Nepal. Despite the conciliatory tone of the Indian and the Nepali press and the government leaders, B.P. Koirala became an issue to which Indian leaders often referred to demanding his release. The Nepali authorities were visibly perturbed over the Indian leaders' attitude towards Nepal. As the B.P. issue was being highlighted by the Janata Party leaders outside the government, the newly elected Prime Minister, Morarji Desai and the External Affairs Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, however, assured Nepal that India would not interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal. Often intrigued by Jaya Prakash Narayan's statements demanding the release of B.P., Morarji and Vajpayee both explained that Jaya Prakash's opinion did not necessarily constitute the government's view. Desai added that J.P. was not the government and the Indian government's policies were based on non-interference on the internal affairs of

others. The Janata rule in India had inevitably created unprecedented enthusiasm in the Congress circles in Nepal. Other liberal democrats were also apparently delighted by the events turning to their favour, but it was yet to be seen how the new state-to-state relationship was going to help or abate the parliamentarians in the Himalayan Kingdom. It could be seen that the ruling Janata Party in India seemed to have maintained a two-tier relationship—one at the state level and another at the party level. Under the circumstances, the Janata leaders neither tried to hide their relations with the opposition leader B.P. Koirala nor did they pour cold waters on the usual Indo-Nepal relations. Yet statements demanding the release of B.P. Koirala were coming in since the Janata's coming to power. Thirty four Indian parliamentarians in their joint statement urged King Birendra to release B.P. They were followed by party leader, Chandra Shekhar's mission which was kept a top-secret. To the surprise of many, including the ministers, Chandra Shekhar was accompanied by a senior official of the Nepali Embassy in New Delhi. In an interview with a local weekly, Chandra Shekhar stated that he did not share the view that democracy was not possible under monarchy. He added: "Nepal's monarchy cannot be compared with the definitions current in India, Europe or the Middle East. Monarchy had a tradition of its own in the context of Nepal's history and needs. There should be no difference between the King and the people."<sup>49</sup>

Shortly thereafter, B.P. was released from detention on the ground of health. B.P. went on reaffirming his faith in national reconciliation and national unity which could only usher in democracy into Nepal. While returning from the United States after his medical treatment, he stayed in India, where he conferred with Jaya Prakash and Chandra Shekhar. The Janata Government always seemed to be enthusiastic in according him a warm welcome thereby obliquely giving ample reasons for government's sensitiveness in Nepal. In March 1979, the Nepali government took a strong exception to the statement of the Janata Party president, Chandra Shekhar, who had urged King Birendra to negotiate with the Nepali Congress leader, B.P. Koirala. B.P. and his colleagues were arrested in the wake of the student movement, and the authorities evidently out of nervousness tried to drive a wedge on the movement by

<sup>49</sup>See *Pratidhwani Weekly* (Kathmandu), May 2, 1977.

arresting the party leaders. Reacting to Chandra Shekhar's dictation, the chairman of the BVNC castigated Shekhar for making "such irresponsible utterances" which tantamounted to interference in the internal affairs of Nepal. "Nepal was not in a position to take advice even in a minor problem from India as in the 1950s."<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the Nepali Ambassador to New Delhi was asked to lodge a protest with the Indian government, which, in turn, dismissed it on the ground that Chandra Shekhar's view did not represent the government's view.<sup>51</sup>

The foregoing paragraphs can thus be summarized: Indian leaders, a few of them aggressively, were apparently favouring a change in Nepal's *status quo* in order to accommodate the Nepali Congress led by B.P. Koirala, which, they thought could be a genuine representative of the democratic force in Nepal. But, as the Janata leadership was characterized by its heterogeneity and complexity, the points of agreement were offset by the points of disagreement on Nepal's affairs. If B.P. Koirala were an old ideological ally of the socialist-wing of the Janata Party, the other elements keeping low profiles within the party were equally important. The modalities of the Janata leadership could be discerned when they reacted to issues pertaining to Nepali politics. Prime Minister Desai and External Affairs Minister Vajpayee, always dispelled Nepal's anxiety that "Janata" rule might force Nepal to do anything it wished. It was however observable that they did not object to highlighting B.P. through the official news media and warm hospitality.

Second, most Janata leaders were obviously more concerned with Koirala's welfare than with the prospects of democracy in Nepal. The support and sympathy with which they enhanced the case of B.P. could not be seen in other South Asian neighbours—Pakistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan. This aspect was well reflected by a Nepali weekly allegedly supporting the cause of the establishment in Nepal.<sup>52</sup> Although B.P. was indeed the most popularly known politician in the country, he was not however the figure enjoying

<sup>50</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "Nepal 1979: Political System in Crisis," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 2, February 1980.

<sup>51</sup>*Samrakshyak Weekly*, April 17, 1977.

<sup>52</sup>For a very interesting case study of emergency regimes and development politics in Asia, see Jyotirindra Das Gupta, "A Season of Caesars: Emergency Regimes and Development Politics in Asia," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 4, April 1978, pp. 315-349.

political consensus. When Chandra Shekhar was urging King Birendra to enter into immediate negotiations with Koirala for restoring democracy, he was, as most political observers felt, overplaying his cards vis-a-vis Nepal. Furthermore, such utterances by a public figure belonging to the ruling party were likely to do more harm to Indo-Nepali relations as well as to Koirala and to democracy in Nepal.

Although Indo-Nepal relations occasionally moved along a rugged course after the 1951 revolution, every political change in India did have its impact on Nepal. This could as well be discernible in the late 1970s. When the "season of Caesar"<sup>53</sup> was drawing to a close in India, following Mrs Indira Gandhi's decision to hold fresh elections in India, the political climate in Nepal also started changing. The democratic euphoria in India had its echo in the popular democratic nostalgia in Nepal. The movement of opposition leader within the country, and the close contacts being established by them with the masses led to the relaxation of the political situation in the country. Emboldened by the external environment turning to their favour, the oppositional forces also helped to generate internal contradictions within the partyless camp because the Panchayat leaders were not certain about the likely repercussions of the changing external environment on Nepali politics. Meanwhile, the Tribhuvan University students found an excuse in the hanging of Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Zulphikar Ali Bhutto. It was ironic that only a few months before, they could not protest against the killing of the two Nepali Congress activists after they were found guilty of anti-state activities by a tribunal. Bhutto became a martyr simply because the students wanted to register their protest against the death penalty. Whether the student movement started on the pretext of the police highhandedness on the protestors of Bhutto's death sentence was a pre-planned affair or not is yet to be established. But a relatively minor issue was responsible for triggering mass protest against the existing order in Nepal.

The disgruntled elements in Nepal always appear to be looking outward for getting inspiration for change. The Bangladesh struggle in 1971, the rise and fall of Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1975 and 1977

<sup>53</sup>For a brilliant analysis of Iranian Revolution see James A. Bill, "Iran and the Crisis of '78," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1978 79, pp. 323-342.

and a host of other external issues seemed to have provided enough ground for both the opposition and the establishment for their respectable activities. The former were delighted to see the external situation turning in their favour, the latter were unnecessarily unconcerned. Similarly, much enthusiasm was created in Nepal following Carter's campaigns for the observance of human rights all over the world. With the fall of the Shah of Iran by the Khomeini wave, political zealots in Nepal were also strenuously trying to establish parallel features. When political opposition did not cut much ice within the country, they found themselves in an untenable situation. But psychological boost helped them particularly at a time when their organizational efforts were wanting in decisive action. Although the exact nature of the interactions between the domestic opposition and the distant external developments was complex, yet the domestic opposition in Nepal found the external factors, however irrelevant and intractable they might have been on the surface, reinforcing their own cause at home. Sometimes the "interaction of internal and external forces then is not only obscure but also constantly changing."

The Khomeini revolution in Iran provided enough grist to boost the morale of the political opposition in Nepal. How the simmering discontent took the form of a mass movement which was unprecedented in history, could indeed be a very good case-study for those engaged in protest movement studies. For America and the Western world in general, Iran was an island of "political stability that had been able to survive the storms of revolutionary change." And "Iran, with its political system directed by an absolute monarch and an enormous wealth of natural resources," had been widely viewed in the Western world as the most important refuge in the area.<sup>54</sup> But how sudden was its decay and how shifting was its foundation was suddenly exposed. No political leaders or scholarly writings had ever predicted the fall of one of the cleverest, and solidly based political leaders of this century. It was really a dramatic end of a dynasty which had been getting the support of the mightiest power on earth, the USA. After Shah's exit, Khomeini held the referendum to legitimize the Islamic republic envisaged by him. The people of Iran had confirmed Shah's

<sup>54</sup>Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Fall of The Shah*, Wyndhom Books, New York, 1979, p. 12.

process of modernization by overwhelming majority. Now they endorsed the Khomeini measures of Islamization of politics by the same majority. How people have been used by the rulers and how people's memories are short-lived, have been succinctly stated by Fereydoun Hoveyda who had served the Shah as his Ambassador to the United Nations, and who was a brother of the ex-Prime Minister, Hoveyda (executed by Khomeini trial). He writes:

It is curious fact that both the Shah's success in 1963 and the Ayatollah's in 1979 were confirmed by referendum with majorities of ninety-five per cent: the first in favour of monarchy and of modernization, the second in favour of the Islamic Republic and against modernization.<sup>55</sup>

The Iranian development was indeed a unique phenomenon in the contemporary world history. It demonstrated that even without organizing a mass party, and without creating a politically revolutionary situation, a total revolution was possible. This revolution found expression in a figure, a messiah-like character.

A country's own traditional values and the people's mental make-up have a bearing on political issues. If a Nepali tries to find parallel idioms or political ethos with Iran, he would be misplaced. The Nepali Congress leader, B.P. was thus sensible when he denounced the Khomeini revolution as retrogressive in orientation and authoritarian in character. It was not a democratic revolution, but was a part of Islamic resurgence.<sup>56</sup> However, the nature of the Iranian revolution gives a lesson in history that can hardly be dismissed.

<sup>55</sup>B.P. Koirala was criticized by some newspapers for his view on the Iranian situation, which he did not appreciate. His forthright view was known when he was in India on his way to the United States for medical treatment.

### *Chapter 3*

## Referendum: Forces in the Background

It is necessary to have an overview of different political forces interacting in contemporary Nepal in order to study their roles during and after the national referendum. Although the Panchayat political system started by King Mahendra was considered to have fared well in the 1960s and 70s, yet dominant political groupings had been able to maintain their respective ideological appeals in the country. Such forces were not exterminated despite the heavy odds they had to face because of the continuation of the partyless system. Among the groups worth noting were the political parties—the Nepali Congress (NC), the different factions of Nepal Communist Party (NCP), a number of splinter groups of the Nepal Prajapari-shad and the Nepal Rashtriya Congress led by Tanka Prasad Acharya and Dilli Raman Regmi, respectively, and the student groups allegedly affiliated with the Nepali Congress and the communist factions. Besides these oppositional groups, there were panchas who had been struggling hard to resist the pressures of the anti-system elements which were, of course, illegitimately working.

The political parties mentioned above had their genesis and growth before the 1951 revolution. Among these the NC had been able to continue as the largest party even after the 1960-royal take-over. Indeed, the NC, which operated in exile in India after 1960, and which was joined by some leaders of other parties, did become a forum for democratic unity. Although the actual strength of the party had never been tested due to the ban on the party system in the country, the NC was the only organization to put up active



resistance to the Panchayat System, thereby dominating the oppositional political scene after 1960. Immediately before December 1960, the party was in power after getting a massive mandate in the 1959 general elections. Its democratic credentials, which the party had established after successfully overthrowing the Rana system in 1951, and which had been further boosted by absolute majority it had got in the first ever held Parliamentary elections, did help it considerably to project itself as the largest democratic party in the country.

Turn by internal conflicts and personality considerations, the leftist forces, particularly working within the communist fold were not able to mount active opposition against the Panchayat System as the NC. Yet, radical communist leaders—especially Puspa Lal Shrestha, and others who were in exile in India, were trying to keep pace with the activities of the NC in the 1960s. But their grip on the extremist groups burgeoning inside the country loosened, when these groups started devising their own organizational strategies in the 1970s. As early as 1960, when the King dismissed the elected government and banned the party system the undivided NCP, barring the pro-Moscow faction led by Rayamajhi, openly rejected the take-over. Subsequently, among the political parties, the NC and the NCP went into action notwithstanding the heavy odds confronting them. Other political party leaders either joined the new order or preferred to keep quiet to escape arrest and harassment. In the 1970s, the party picture underwent a sea-change in both ideological and organizational terms.

### *Nepali Congress*

Even the political adversaries recognized the dominating position of the NC as a reality of Nepali politics.<sup>1</sup> Its reasons were not far to seek. First, the NC's history and its credibility of being uncompromisingly democratic had been established since 1951. Second, the oppositional role played by the party even when it was in the government<sup>2</sup> could be cited as yet another positive factor for its

<sup>1</sup>Among the opposition leaders, Man Mohan Adhikari has accepted it during and after the referendum. During his audience with King Birendra, he allegedly said the King that Nepal's *politics* without the Nepali congress was unthinkable. Such an acceptance of Adhikari has also been mentioned in D.P. Kumar, *Nepal: Year of Decision*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 59-60.

<sup>2</sup>B.P. Koirala time and again expressed the view that the Congress government in 1959-60 had to play the role of an opposition party in view of the role

popularity. Third, the leadership of the party was fairly broadbased in spite of occasional intra-organizational conflicts over leadership and other issues. Fourth, the NC was the only party which was known in many countries. By virtue of its being the largest democratic party in the government, it had been well known to others. Moreover, sympathy was shown to the party when it was dethroned from power in 1960. Fifth, NC had other international connections as it held the membership of Socialist International which often raised its voice favouring the party's efforts for restoring democracy in Nepal. Sixth, even moderate people pinned their hopes on the democratic role of the party in future. The Panchayat System was beset by internal contradictions with panchayat elites showing ideological aberrations when they were out of office. They were thus indirectly reinforcing the moderate democratic ideology of the NC. Finally, the fairly stable and charismatic personality of its leader, B.P. Koirala, gave the party an image.

The NC was organized by a few enthusiastic young Nepalis then staying in India in the 1940s. Some of them were closely associated with the Indian nationalist movement, which was giving an impetus to develop anti-Rana sentiments. Such an enthusiasm for overthrowing the Ranarchy in Nepal led them to organize the Nepali National Congress on the model of the Indian National Congress, in Calcutta in 1947. Some disgruntled Ranas notably Subarna Shamsher and Mahabir Shamsher and Mahendra Bikram Shah formed another Party—the Nepali Democratic Congress. The former party was the creation of Bisweswar Prasad Koirala, Dilli Raman Regmi and others, and the latter was headed by a combination of dissatisfied Ranas and their associates. The main objective of both parties was the same—the overthrow of the autocratic Rana rule. The two Ranas were making a determined bid to overthrow the ruling Ranas obviously because of familial conflicts that deprived them of their claims to power.<sup>3</sup>

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of the King vis-a-vis the Nepali Congress.

<sup>3</sup>Jang Bahadur Rana had established the Rana rule after seizing power in a blood massacre in 1846. Since then the oldest brother was considered as a successor to the post of Prime Minister. But such rules were changed from time to time in order to establish one's own family control. Jang Bahadur himself violated this convention and subsequently, Bir Shamsher followed suit by putting his three sons on the roll despite 'C' class origin. Beginning of Bir Shamsher's Prime Ministership that the Rana regime "institutionalized the

In 1947 significant developments took place with the transfer of power in India. As the new leadership in India had close relations with some of the Nepali leaders, their sympathy for democratic movement was natural. In 1950 the two parties decided to merge together into a new organization—the NC with a view to waging an armed insurrection against the Rana rule. Quite a few enthusiastic young men sharing the common objective also joined the Congress movement. In September 1950, the newly organized NC “took a historic decision” at its Bairgania Conference to launch a liberation movement in Nepal.<sup>4</sup> The NC leaders launched a two-pronged strategy: they were establishing secret contacts with King Tribhuvan who was also dissatisfied with the Rana rule, and cultivating rapport with the Indian leaders. Meanwhile, on November 6, 1950, King Tribhuvan and his family members, except his grandson, Prince Gyanendra, left the Palace and took political asylum at the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. Subsequently, they were flown to Delhi by a special plane sent by the Government of India.

The King’s decision to side with the forces of revolution was an electrifying news for the Congress camp. It equally “focussed the attention of the entire world on the developments in this little Kingdom.” The Congress volunteers, taking a cue from the King’s flight and Indian government’s overt and covert support for them, started armed movement in accordance with the Bairgania resolution. The movement spread like wild-fire till its containment by the ‘Delhi settlement’ in January 1951.<sup>5</sup>

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three-way division in the Rana family by specifying the privileges and functions of each group.” Ranas were categorized into ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ class. ‘A’ class Ranas were the actual wielder of power and privileges ‘B’ and ‘C’ had lower roles to play. Thus ‘B’ and ‘C’ statuses were in effect debarred from succession to the prime ministership, since they were not eligible to hold appointments as commanding generals.” Later quarrels among these three ‘classes’ led many Ranas to revolt against others. See in detail Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study of Political Acculturation*, University of California Press, 1960, pp. 47-49, and Satish Kumar, *Rana Polity in Nepal*, Bombay, 1967.

<sup>4</sup>Anirudha Gupta, *Politics in Nepal*, Bombay, 1964, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>Prior to the ceasefire, the government of India and the Rana rulers had exchanged the terms of reference. According to the final decision taken on January 1, 1951 which was endorsed by the *Nepali Bharadari Sabha* (Rana’s assembly), “the government of Nepal agreed to recognize King Tribhuvan as King of Nepal, to form an interim cabinet of 14 members half of whom would

The armed insurrection of the NC was not alone responsible for the ultimate success of the movement. The mass upsurge which followed in the wake of the insurrection scared the Rana circles. Similarly, the King's moral support and the "firm attitude which the Indian government adopted towards the Ranas" gave a death blow to the Rana system.<sup>6</sup> How the Indian government tried to play a mediatory policy vis-a-vis the Ranas had been stated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself in these words:

We have tried, for what it is worth, to advise Nepal to act in a manner so as to prevent any major upheaval. We have tried to find a way, a middle way, if you like, which will ensure the progress of Nepal and the introduction of some advance in the ways of democracy in Nepal. We have searched for a way which would, at the same time, avoid the total uprooting of the ancient order.<sup>7</sup>

A close look into the "Delhi settlement" is necessary as it became a major point of dispute between political parties that came to the forefront after the 1951 revolution. The NC leaders did not show their enthusiasm to enter into such a settlement. But circumstances seemed to have conspired against them as they had no other option but to join the settlement. In the post-1950 period, the NC was held responsible for its alleged collusion with India in foisting the Delhi settlement on the people of Nepal. The post-revolution developments were more traumatic for democracy in Nepal. The NC leaders were as much responsible for spoiling the climate as other factors.

The NC was much hampered by the power struggle between the

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be popular representatives, to hold elections to a constituent assembly by 1952, to give legal sanction to political parties" and "to proclaim a general amnesty" after giving up armed violence conducted during the insurrection and after a ceasefire. When the Government of India and the Ranas agreed to the proposal, King Tribhuvan was prompted to declare a ceasefire, thereby forcing the Nepali Congress leaders to enter into the finalization of the settlement.

See in details, Gupta, *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49 and Bhola Chatterji, *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics*, Calcutta, 1967.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>See *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches, 1949-53*, Publication Division, Delhi, 1954, p. 175.

two Koirala half brothers—B.P. Koirala and M.P. Koirala. The former had fallen from the grace of King Tribhuvan after the first coalition government formed in accordance with the Delhi settlement; the latter was closer to the King who often used him as a countervailing force to B.P. Koirala. The parting of company between the two-half-brothers, with the concomitant rise of other forces inimical to the NC seemed to have paved the way for Royal ascendancy in the country's political scene. Moreover, the period between 1951 and 1959 also witnessed a rapid fragmentation of political parties, which also helped to sidetrack the major issue of democratic development in the country. At a time when all democratic forces were required to unite for a common goal of establishing and consolidating democracy, the NC "functioned on the basis of two principles—first, to use pressure tactics on the party in power and, secondly, to negotiate with the same party for a place in the government."<sup>8</sup> But the NC did not get a chance to form the government till King Mahendra finally decided to hold general elections on his own terms in 1959. In 1958, a coalition government was formed under the chairmanship of the NC leader, Subarna Shamsher Rana, in order to hold the elections.

Although the NC had to undergo the period of trial and tribulations after 1951, its hardcore leadership did not break up. Composed of radicals like B.P. Koirala and Ganeshman Singh, moderates like Subarna Shamsher and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, the party showed its unity during every crisis. B.P. Koirala was always the leading light despite his setback in the 1950s. When King Mahendra was successful in outwitting and outmanoeuvring the party leadership, they had no other option but to accept the election for parliament under a constitution to be awarded by the King.<sup>9</sup>

The 'tactical' line adopted by the party to participate in the elec-

<sup>8</sup>Anirudha Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup>The changing stand of the Congress leadership with regard to the great debate: 'Constituent Assembly vs. Parliament' was evident when the Party finally decided to depart from the 1951 Delhi settlement under which King Tribhuvan had declared that the constitution was to be drafted by a constituent assembly duly elected by the people. While changing this stand in 1958, B.P. Koirala stated that political conviction should not be converted into a doctrine, it must be practised too. For details see "Unnais Gateko Sahi Ghoshana ra Birganj Mahasamiti," *Kalpana*, Falgun 2014 V.S. (Royal Proclamation of Nineteenth and Birganj Executive Committee), quoted in Gupta, p. 180.

tions by accepting the constitution paid rich dividends when it received an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections. The NC captured 74 out of 109 seats in the Parliamentary elections in the House of Representatives (lower house). Such a massive mandate received by the party established that it was the only single largest party in the country. Being socially representative, politically articulate and organizationally better, the NC, despite internal conflicts besetting the party, could display its popularity in the elections. The people were also fed up with the nauseating succession of various types of governments. Political expediency abetted by the rapid fragmentation of political parties were mainly responsible for complicating the political climate before the general elections. Human and material resources under its command, and the support and sympathy received by the party from the bureaucracy also helped the NC to win the elections.

Ideologically, the NC represented a broad spectrum of political leaders consisting of the 'big-four'—B.P., Subarna, Ganesh Man and S.P. Upadhyaya. B.P.'s political orientation had been shaped by the Indian Socialist Party led by Jaya Prakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia. B.P. Koirala continued his close association with Jaya Prakash after the 1950 revolution. It was mainly due to this association that B.P. always projected himself as a radical democrat, a posture which is still adopted by him. Ganesh Man Singh had established his individuality by being an arch enemy of the Rana rule since the mid-1930s. He was one of those political leaders surviving the death sentence meted out by the Ranas at the initial stage of the anti-Rana movement. Temperamentally, Singh always appeared to be tough, hard-hitting and pugnacious, but always amenable to B.P. Koirala whose leadership has in most part remained unchallenged.

The NC government in 1959-60 introduced moderate economic reforms, including the abolition of *zamindari* and *Birta* tenure systems. As Nepali economy was basically feudalistic, these reformatory economic measures were challenged by obscurantist forces during 1959-60. The NC leaders, wavering as they did from time to time, tried to establish rapport with the Palace which was harbouring suspicion that the NC leaders were bent on weakening the base of monarchy in Nepal. As the period following the 1950 revolution had established the Royal supremacy, the King's legitimate power for awarding the constitution as a Royal gift had also been accepted

by all. King Mahendra had shown his dissatisfaction with the Congress government from time to time.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, he took a decision on December 15, 1960 for terminating both parliamentary democracy and the government of the NC.

Dismantling of parliamentary democracy did not however disintegrate the NC and its ideology. The NC in exile, led by Subarna Shamsher, the Deputy Prime Minister during 1959-60 period, was being revitalized in India. As the Party was joined by other party leaders then living in India, its sagging morale was considerably boosted.

### *Nepali Congress in Exile*

The NC's performances over the years demonstrated that it played more the role of a pressure-party than that of a revolutionary party. This has been more or less a general trend ever since the 1950 revolution. The pressure tactics were more evident in the 1960s and 1970s. The NC activists were in a quandary immediately after the Royal crackdown on the Congress government. But their leader, Subarna, mobilized them presumably after getting a supportive hint from his ideological allies in India including the Nehru government. Behind the mobilization of NC cadres were two reasons: the NC planned to mount armed insurrection against the Royal government, and, secondly, India's disapproval of the Royal take-over was open when Nehru came out with a categorical statement that the Royal action was a set-back to democracy.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the NC held a conference in Patna, India, in which Subarna, who had escaped arrest, declared that "the hard-won democratic rights of the people of Nepal cannot be snatched away" and that Nepal would never remain silent nor its people could rest as long as democracy was not restored.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, the NC's strategy changed from non-violence to violence on the ground that peaceful means were only possible in the absence of 'brute-force'.

Resorting to armed tactics, which were usually adopted by revo-

<sup>10</sup>King Mahendra gave a strong warning to the Nepali Congress leaders at Nepalganj in early 1960. For details see *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, (HMG, 1967), Vol. I, pp. 163-164.

<sup>11</sup>India, *Rajyasabha Debates*, Vol. 13, December 20, 1960, Cols. 2707-10.

<sup>12</sup>"King Joins Side of Reaction," *Janata* (Bombay), Vol. 16, Nos. 2 and 3, p. 6, see also *Naya Samaj*, January 26, 1961.

lutionary guerillas, the NC had limited objectives: to bring the King to a conference table in order to arrive at a negotiated settlement, for "the congress leadership did not want to do more harm to monarchy because in that case there would be a fight to the finish."<sup>13</sup> Despite this limited objective, the NC volunteers mounted their armed activities by raiding government posts, burning down police stations, dynamiting bridges, destroying airports and railway lines, etc. An attempt on King Mahendra's life was also made in early 1962, but the Congress leadership denied its involvement in the attempt, because, as stated, "the party did not believe in individual acts of terrorism."

Meanwhile, the NC decided to suspend insurgency on November 8, 1962 stating that the Sino-Indian border war which had then started had bearing on Nepal as well. Drawing attention of the people of Nepal to the implications of the Sino-Indian border war, Subarna stated that if the NC went on mounting attacks on the Nepali regime from India, it was likely that the Chinese would categorize it as India's collusion with the NC for mounting hostile activities against Nepal. Earlier in October 1962, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chen Yi, had declared that China would help King Mahendra in the event of an aggression against Nepal. This statement, coming as it did in the wake of armed insurrections launched by the NC, implied that the NC's armed movement was tantamount to aggression against Nepal from the side of India.

There was no gainsaying that the reason for the ceasure of the NC's armed movement could mainly be attributed to the Indian pressure, which B.P. Koirala later underlined in a statement that the NC leadership had unnecessarily "succumbed" to pressure. After the suspension of the movement, the NC's animation was suspended, because it was not easy to mobilize its cadres for a second round of struggle. It was only in May 1967 that the NC passed a resolution adhering to its commitment to continue struggling for restoring democracy in Nepal through a duly elected cons-

<sup>13</sup>The limited objective of hit and run tactics was later verified by B.P. Koirala when he (B.P.) asked Subarna, "why did not you capture a district," and consolidate position. Subarna was reported to have replied that their "strategy was to bring the King to a conference table." See Parmanand, "The Nepali Congress since its Inception: A Critical Assessment", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, March 1980, p. 429.



tituent assembly. This resolution proved to be short-sighted and ill-conceived in 1968 when the NC took another decision. On May 15, 1968, the NC's acting president, Subarna, issued a statement "extending cooperation" of the Party to the King for further development of the constitution (Panchayat) under the guidance of the King.<sup>14</sup> Trying to draw the outlines of a political scenario similar to that of 1962, he stated that the "menacing activities of certain forces of subversion inside the country," (by implication, communist), were at the moment threatening the very fabric and the values of the nation's life. Subarna and his colleagues, except a few, got amnesty. Later, Subarna's statement was endorsed by his colleagues, B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man, then languishing in prison, whereupon they were also released by King Mahendra.

The NC lacked a consistently coherent policy while pursuing its objectives. This was shown by the contradictory lines adopted by the party leaders, especially B.P. Koirala. On the one hand, B.P. supported the May decision of the party offering cooperation to the King, and on the other he started developing another line of confrontation as shown by his statements. Gradually B.P.'s views crystallized with the impression that he was willing to risk confrontation, because he was not happy with the constitution in force. Consequently, he crossed over to India from where he started elaborating his views on the necessity of armed revolution in Nepal.<sup>15</sup> In the early 1970s, some sporadic violent activities were started by the NC from India. However, B.P.'s desire to start a fullfledged armed revolution did not materialize. Nor did Subarna's line of cooperation produce any positive result. Both the leaders, however, continued pursuing their respective course without achieving any tangible result. Later on B.P. strove hard to establish a line of communication with the Palace but to no effect.

The "revolutionaries" led by B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man had virtually given up the line of armed confrontation when the state of emergency was declared in India in June 1975. Frustrated and

<sup>14</sup>*Nepal to-day*, May 15, 1968, *The Statesman* (New Delhi), May 16, 1968 and *The Commoner*, May 17, 1968.

<sup>15</sup>B.P. Koirala endorsed Subarna's statement offering cooperation to the King. But after a month of his release, he took line of confrontation. In an interview with Bhola Chatterji, Koirala criticized Subarna's statement as an "abject surrender." See Bhola Chatterji, *Palace, People and Politics: Nepal in Perspective*, Ankur Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980, p. 134.

demoralized by this development in India, B.P. who had been impatient to open a dialogue with the Palace since the early 1970s, picked up the theme of “reconciliation” which he had abandoned in 1969. Judged by B.P.’s later moves, it can be maintained that the NC was constantly plagued by ill-conceived strategies and unrealistic policies. The convening of the working committee meeting in 1967 for reaffirming the NC’s faith in establishing democracy through a duly elected constituent assembly, and the revocation of this decision a year later was really a *volte-face* on the part of the Congress leadership. Similarly, B.P.’s ideas on “revolution” and “reconciliation” changed intermittently. The line of reconciliation which he put up in the late 1970s could have been even more convincingly set forth in 1969, if he had not reacted emotionally to Subarna’s line of action and to the slow process of the Palace culture. It can be assumed that B.P. was terribly upset when all his efforts to get an audience with King Mahendra proved abortive. Yet B.P. himself was responsible for puncturing the “cooperation” concept at the initial stage, because it was he who started confrontation immediately after his release as amply testified by his statements.

However, despite these contradictory postures adopted by the NC leadership for over two decades, the NC by and large remained intact even after the death of Subarna Shamsheer in 1978. And, the intra-party cleavages appearing occasionally did not affect the NC’s influence in the country. B.P. Koirala’s unchallenged leadership was a positive factor for its solidarity, despite rumblings over his strategies which often landed the party in trouble. Perhaps, given the political conditions in Nepal, B.P.’s penchant for simultaneously blowing hot and cold was accepted by his admirers as a political asset with which the NC’s dynamic image could be kept safe from erosion. The broad-based composition of the party in the late 1970s was another factor that helped maintain its rank and file intact. The diagram given below shows the Party hierarchy with B.P. Koirala at the top.

*Supreme Leadership*

B.P. Koirala

*Central Leadership*

Ganesh Man Singh

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai

Parshu Narayan Chaudhari

Girija Prasad Koirala  
*Front Rankers*  
District Leaders  
District Second Rankers  
Ordinary Members

But this diagram does not show the composition of the Central leadership in totality, because in this group were other stalwarts who were excluded due to various reasons. The former Home Minister, S.P. Upadhyaya originally belonged to the central-core leadership, but he was removed from the group, following B.P.'s decision to make Krishna Prasad Bhattarai the acting President of the party.<sup>16</sup>

Although the NC's pressure tactics either of armed violence or of peaceful agitation did not succeed to get concessions from the King, its influence in the country remained undiminished. Moreover, contradictions evident in the Panchayat System had been accentuated with the help of the party's ideology. And the hardcore Panchayat supporters began to be preoccupied with the possible course of action to be followed by the NC. But still no underground parties were posing a threat to the partyless Panchayat system. To the extent that the NC went on reminding the people of the absence of democracy in the country, its student front became a regular site for mounting oppositional pressures against the system. In 1979 students were credited with having launched a movement which was unprecedentedly able to catch the attention of the people. All political leaders including those of the NC were caught unawares when the crisis accelerated in alarming proportions. A number of student leaders allegedly belonging to three political groups—the NC, the pro-Peking and the pro-Moscow Communists—provided leadership in the movement. The movement was what King Birendra

<sup>16</sup>Author's interview with some prominent members of the break-away group. See also *Rising Nepal*, June 5, 1978. Similarly Surya Prasad Upadhyaya maintained that ever since his release in 1961, he has taken the line of conducting politics from within the country. It was accepted by the party in 1968, whereupon B. P. Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh were released by King Mahendra. Upadhyaya also did not like the way Bhattarai was designated as an acting President of the Party by Koirala. For details see *Nepal Times*, December 7, 1978.

himself called “a storm” which Nepali successfully rode out<sup>17</sup> in 1979. It was indeed a “storm” which encompassed all. And, as any other storm did not continue for an indefinite period, it can be presumed that it could have passed off even without proclaiming the national referendum. But King Birendra utilized it for launching a new course of political development in the country.

#### *Left Front: The Role of Splinter Groups*

The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) was first organized in Calcutta, India in 1949. During the anti-Rana movement, a separate identity of the NCP was unnoticeable. The NC was, under the then prevailing circumstances, accepted as a common forum for achieving the objective of overthrowing the century-old family oligarchy of the Ranas. And so, the actual role of the “communists” during the 1950 movement is still unclear. But the Nepali Communist zealots were not slow in raising their voices in denouncement. The Delhi-settlement which was a compromise between the King, the NC and the Ranas, arrived at through the active mediation of the Nehru government, gave the communists a cause to denounce the NC leadership as “a clique of the nationalists-capitalists bourgeoisie composed of Subarna Shamsher—B.P. Koirala groups.”<sup>18</sup> The Delhi-settlement was called a conspiracy against the people of Nepal. since then the party started adopting anti-Congress, anti-establishment and anti-Indian attitudes, sometimes bracketing all of them into one category. Other democratic leaders, who had been isolated from the congress movement, also felt a sense of humiliation at the hands of the Congress leaders and the Indian government. So they helped to inflame the anti-Indian and anti-Congress feelings inside the country. The Communist party was banned in the years 1952-1956, but it continued to function in the name of *Kishan Sangh* and Civil Rights Defence Committee.

In some of the Tarai districts the *Kishan Sangh* organized rallies and demonstrations highlighting certain economic issues. In 1956 the ban on the NCP was lifted when it accepted the monarchical system and declared its belief in the constitutional path. But intra-

<sup>17</sup>King Birendra’s Banquet speech at Cairo, February 1, 1981. *Rising Nepal*, February 2, 1981.

<sup>18</sup>*Jatiya Andolanma Nepal Communist Party* (Nepal Communist Party in National Movement), Report, Kathmandu, 1951. Quoted in Gupta, *Politics in Nepal*, p. 201.

party conflicts increased further after the lifting of the ban. Keshar Jang Rayamajhi, who later became a pro-Moscow faction leader, was for reorienting the party to Nepal's realities. The party under his leadership came out with the principle of "constitutional monarchy". He went on to add that they were "against any action which would affect the prestige of the supreme leader of the Nation." This approach of Majhi came under criticism when Pushpa Lal and other leaders did not toe Rayamajhi's line. Pushpa Lal viewed it as a "revisionist" line, a betrayal of the revolutionary ideology of the party. The growing rift between Moscow and Peking particularly emanating from the twentieth party congress of the Soviet Communist Party held in Moscow in 1956 also brought rupture among the Nepali Communists as well. After Nikita Khrushchev's denouncement as a revisionist, Moscow was no longer considered as the "Mecca" of the Communists. Instead, Peking was recognized as the bastion of revolutionaries all over the world. Thus Rayamajhi was branded as a revisionist toeing Moscow's line; the rest, though in disarray, claimed themselves to be "Maoists".

Still formally undivided, the NCP decided to participate in the 1959 parliamentary elections, despite its opposition to the constitution awarded by King Mahendra on February 12, 1959. Maimed as they were by fierce intra-party conflicts, most of their top-ranking leaders lost the elections. Of the total 109 seats, NCP had contested 47 seats, of which only four could be bagged by it. It showed that NCP was too weak a political organization to get popular mandate, despite its apparent widespread influence in urban centres and among the nations' peasantry. Yet such a low electoral profile did not deter the communists to go ahead with their post-election programme. They appeared to be cohesive and quite aggressive when they came to opposing the Congress government. Its General-Secretary, Rayamajhi, highlighted the two-pronged strategy of the party: to convert the prevailing popular discontent and frustration resulting from the Congress mismanagement, and to win over the people from the influence of reactionary and revisionist elements.<sup>19</sup>

### *The "Great Divide"*

If Moscow-Peking conflicts sowed the seeds of division in the

<sup>19</sup>Dr Kesharjang Rayamajhi, *Partyko Daswan Barsha Ganth* (Tenth Anniversary of the Party), *Navayug*, Vol. 9, 2016 (1960).

NCP, the 1960 Royal take-over hastened this process. In the Darbhanga conference held in India in March 1961, the Communists formalized the split when the conference rejected Rayamajhi's objectives—the restoration of fundamental rights, the release of political prisoners, the lifting of party-ban and the election for a new parliament.<sup>20</sup> The extremist faction in a majority move, however, passed yet another resolution demanding elections for a constituent assembly. Later, identifying himself as a moderate, Rayamajhi talked of civil disobedience movement for restoring people's liberties. It was, however, made clear that such a movement would not aim at overthrowing monarchy. For this monarchical posture, Rayamajhi was subsequently branded by his radical colleagues as a "royal communist".

Left to themselves, the so-called Peking faction did not succeed in maintaining party unity. Among the anti-Rayamajhi leaders, Pushpa Lal and Tulsi Lal Amatya who were living in India after the Royal take-over, parted company following the recriminatory central committee meeting held at Varanasi in India in 1963. Since then, the two accused each other of deviating from the correct ideological path. Pushpa Lal appeared to be busy finding a possibility of tactical alliance with the NC from 1961 onwards. But the alliance with the NC was assailed by others, including Man Mohan Adhikari, then languishing in jail. Adhikari along with Shambhu Ram Shrestha were released in 1969 following King Mahendra's decision to release the two NC leaders, B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh.

The 1970s witnessed further fragmentations within the leftist camp on personalistic and regional considerations. All top-leaders of the old NCP such as Pushpa Lal, Man Mohan, Tulsi Lal, Mohan Bikram Gharti, etc. were at loggerheads with each other. How these leftist leaders were pursuing contradictory approaches towards national and international issues could be seen during the Bangladesh crisis. Rayamajhi and Pushpa Lal were together in applauding the heroic struggle of the people of Bangladesh. In sharp contrast to them, Man Mohan Adhikari opposed it calling it an aggression of India on Pakistan. Implicating B.P. Koirala, who was then living in India, and warning that a similar development was possible in Nepal, Adhikari stated: "In Nepal, too, many Rahmans (Sheikh

<sup>20</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 84.

Mujibar Rahman) are working actively and openly demanding that Indian troops should enter into Nepal in the name of so-called democracy.”<sup>21</sup>

It was, however, clearly seen that Man Mohan's line vis-a-vis Peking and the Panchayat system went on changing since 1973. He did not come out condemning the NC armed activities in 1973-75. On the contrary, he said that such activities were bound to occur when other legitimate channels of public dissent had been blocked by the system. It could also be seen that Pushpa Lal and Man Mohan came closer to each other's line of thinking during the last phase of Pushpa Lal's political career, but none of them ever showed any reconciliatory posture in public. The growing rapport between the NC leaders and Man Mohan Adhikari prompted the former to call him a “nationalist”, despite his pro-Peking bias in the past. To quote B.P. Koirala: “Man Mohan Adhikari has been commonly daubed to be pro-China. According to my estimate, he is a nationalist communist.” Man Mohan was not less categorical when he said that once B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man took a bold decision to work from within the country, “we also changed our tactics to joining hands with the Nepali Congress.”<sup>22</sup>

The Communist movement under Pushpa Lal, Tulsi Lal and Man Mohan Adhikari, did not fare well in the 1960s. So the ‘ultra-extremists’ in Naxalites and the non-Naxalite extremist varieties came to the surface in the 1970s. As early as 1972-73, a small group called the “Jhapali” dominated the scene when it started chopping off heads of a number of people who were called by them the “class enemies”. The “Naxalites” were later termed as Marxist-Leninist (ML) in the same manner as the Indian Naxalite faction was designated in 1970.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>*Nepal Times*, December 13, 1971 and *Naya Janvad*, Bulletin No. 4, May-June, 1971.

<sup>22</sup>For detailed interviews of these leaders see D.P. Kumar, *Nepal: Year of Decision*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 41-65.

<sup>23</sup>Revisionist lines adopted by the Communist Party and reactionary's penetration into it drove the youngmen to organize a new radical faction called Marxist-Leninist. It was equally influenced by the May 1970 decision of the Indian Communist Party to organize a separate group called ML. The “Naxalites” who were working also influenced them. See in detail, Krishna Bilash Ghimire, “Janmat Sangraha ra Samsayik Bampanthi Rajniti,” (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Political Science, Tribhuvan University, 1980), p. 50.

The relatively free atmosphere generated by the referendum brought out to light all the political forces working inside the country. Similarly, the referendum atmosphere catapulted Mohan Bikram Singh Gharti into national prominence, though his actual strength within the party was relatively less than that of the 'ML' faction. Yet, Mohan Bikram became a 'myth' even without a proof of his actual mettle. After Pushpa Lal's death in 1978, Mohan Bikram's popularity shot up overshadowing all other factions except the ML. Pushpa Lal's widow, Sahana Pradhan, a dismissed government lecturer, came to the fore front during the referendum, but she too could not match the two other factions both in appeal and organization.

With the gradual fragmentation of communist forces it became quite difficult to make a distinction between extreme nationalists within the system and the leftists working outside of it. This similarity and tactical repertoire was possible in the 1960s when the NC followed anti-Chinese and anti-regime policies.

#### *Extramural Character of Student Politics*

In a situation where political dissent was seen with scare and where opposition could not offer resistance in forms other than clandestine activities, the overt political field was left to students. On several occasions students threw down the gauntlet to derive political concessions, but at times their call for strikes was inconsequential. So the student phenomenon was neither fully credited with having intensified as an organized movement nor was it totally ignored. In India, Pakistan, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, West Germany, France or in other places, students have created havocs in the ruling political circles. In Nepal too "student politics" started assuming certain significance in providing inputs into the process of change, particularly in the period straddled over by the referendum.

The student front largely represents the conscious and economically sound segments of society, and as the early revolutionary generations were mainly drafted from student community, this front became naturally related to the political environment in the country. Nepali students played an important part in the 1950 revolution. In the post-1950 period also, knowing fully where their actual strength lay, both the NC and the NCP had created their separate student wings which were their adjuncts.

The post-1950 period also witnessed how the new panchayat



elites were trying to mobilize student support for the system. But it could not be brought off due to the polarization of students into “democrats”, and “leftists” in appellations identifying them with the underground NC and the NCP.

Nepal's only one university started functioning in 1959, but the student union at the university level was organized only in 1961-62. The confusion created by the Royal take-over was clarified by students, when politicized students began regrouping themselves. In the beginning, ideological differences between the NC supporters and the leftists were also shelved in order to mount a joint opposition to the system. And despite all resources utilized by the new regime to mobilize students, it did not succeed.

In 1963-64, four major planks of students were evident in the front. The leftists organized their own union. Their *All Nepal Rashtriya Swantantra Vidyarthi Union* (ANRSVU) for all intents and purposes identified itself with the banned pro-Peking faction of the NCP. Prompted by the swiftness with which the leftists started rallying students around it, students supporting the NC revitalized their old *Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh* (NVS). Coming close on the heels was yet another organization the *All Nepal National Students' Federation* (ANNSF) which was allegedly the protégé of the pro-Moscow faction of the NCP. The ANNSF had reportedly penetrated into the officially launched students' organization since its inception in 1963.

The two student groups—the ANRSVU and the NVS often posed a challenge to the system since the system did not recognize other organizations than its own. In 1964, these two groups demanded independent unions at both college and university levels. The zealots of the system believed that the recognition of independent unions was tantamount to recognizing political parties. The students' moves also exposed the divergent line of thinking among the Panchayat elites. Inaugurating the ANRSVU in 1964, Rishikesh Shaha, the Chairman of the Panchayat Constitution Drafting Committee in 1962 and Chairman of the *Standing Committee of Raj Sabha* (Council of State), declared: “Neither the law nor the constitution prevents students from assembling without arms for peacefully discussing matters concerning their interests.” The central level joint conference of students could not be successful owing to pre-emptive arrest of student leaders on charge of “indulging in unlawful activities at the

instigation of certain political parties.”<sup>24</sup> Rishikesh Shaha was also not left unpunished. He was unceremoniously dismissed by King Mahendra when Shaha's non-conformist activities had been brought to the King's notice by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Dr Tulsi Giri.

The officially created student organization was in a moribund condition ever since pro-Moscow student leaders had successfully penetrated into it. Intra-organizational conflicts were also increasing. Finally, the government had no other option but to dissolve the official organizations leaving the entire student field solely to the opposition student unions. Recasting and recrystallizing student politics along ideological lines, the two wings—the ANRSVU and the NVS held their national conferences. Since the middle 1960s, both organizations tried to expand their support base in order to wield an absolute impact on the student field. As political parties were not standing up to time's challenge openly, the student activities were thinly veiled party activities. Their militancy was realized in 1970 when they passed political resolutions criticizing the suppression of fundamental rights and demanding the legalization of political organizations in the country.<sup>25</sup> It was therefore conceivable that student politics looked like party politics when students manifestly played the role of banned parties. The ANRSVU made a point of drawing popular attention toward an artificially created threat of “Indian expansionism and American imperialism” which were nothing more than abstract jargons often used by extremist Communists.

Disbanding of the official political organizations was tactically wrong in view of the growing challenges of the party-affiliated co-organizations. Meanwhile some young students supporting the system showed their enthusiasm in organizing the *Rashtravadi Swatantra Vidyarthi Mandal* (RSVM). Although the RSVM could not match

<sup>24</sup>*Samaj*, May 12, 1964. Shaha also wrote an article describing how students all over the world had been successful in toppling down the authoritarian governments. See his article in *Dainik Nepal*, April 5, 1965. Shaha's article was simultaneously published by two dailies *Dainik Nepal* and *Swatantra Samachar*. Paradoxically the Kathmandu Magistrate banned the publication of the two dailies for an indefinite period whereas no action was taken against the author himself. See also *Naya Samaj*, June 9, 1964. For details see Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, pp. 152-155.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

the organizational and political role of its adversaries, yet it was more a well-knit organization than its system-engendered predecessor.

Its aggressiveness developed along with the hardline posture adopted by the government vis-a-vis the anti-system elements. Affirming faith in the partyless system led by the King, the RSVM became pugnacious in the 1970s. Clashes between the RSVM and other student unions often occurred. The Back-to-Village National Campaign (BVNC), which had assumed a constitutional status in 1975 constitutional amendment, patronized the Mandal for denigrating the leaders of outlawed parties. In the long-run the official support to the Mandal was counter productive. When the Mandal mounted its offensive, it triggered off mass indignation, which was subsequently capitalized by the system opponents.

A student movement is often characterized by its spontaneity. In Nepal an excuse was provided by President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan. Bhutto's execution became symbolic for a few university students. On April 6, 1979, when a few hundred students were going to the Pakistan embassy in Kathmandu to register their protest, they were stopped and unceremoniously beaten by the police. On the following day, the students prepared a list of 24 demands, including the permission for opening independent student organizations at both central and unit levels and the dissolution of the RSVM—the officially-supported student group. It may be recalled here that independent unions or associations were not permitted after the introduction of the New Education System Plan in 1973.

Spontaneous by nature, the student movement unexpectedly spread like wild-fire drawing students of all campuses into the fray. The university was closed indefinitely, but when it was reopened, the situation was further aggravated by a series of violent incidents in the campuses. The three students' organizations, ANRSVU (pro-Peking), ANSF (pro-Moscow) and NVS (pro-Congress), then operating clandestinely had already formed a central action committee headed by a 'troika'. They alleged that the 'Mandal' was responsible for fueling the violent incidents. Prompted obviously by the gravity of the situation which was fast deteriorating, King Birendra, who was also the Chancellor of Tribhuvan University, constituted a five-member high-powered commission with a supreme court judge as its chairman. The commission was asked to investigate into the "nature, process and incidents" of the student movement.

The commission, concerned with the mass support and sympathy received by students, tried to get suggestions from different sources as to how the crisis was to be defused.

The psychological impact of the then international events also added grist to the movement. As already mentioned, the Mandal was made a target by the striking students because the Mandal was generally called "a gang intimidating them by their hooliganism, beating them up, and even indulging in looting and arson in the style of Mafia, to which the authorities shut their eyes."<sup>26</sup> The Mandal was also hurriedly compared with the Iranian secret service 'Savak' by the students and dissatisfied politicians. Whether the Mandal was responsible for all incidents of violence occurring all over the country or not, it earned extreme notoriety.

The commission constituted for looking into as well as redressing students' grievances, began fulfilling demands without much delay. Swiftness and authority with which it disposed the issues, including the dissolution of the Mandal, showed that the commission was virtually a powerful safety-valve for stemming popular discontent. The commission fulfilled almost all demands put forth by students, and they were obliged to call off the agitation. The strikes were called off on May 22, 1979.

The banned political party leaders, particularly B.P. Koirala, were not in favour of continuing the student movement because he had developed a fear-psychosis that such a movement would sabotage his move of national reconciliation. When the rapprochement between the commission and the student action committee was made known through the official Radio Nepal, the forces trying to reap the kindly harvest did not lag behind. On the following day, 'extremists' of both the left and right, together with the dissatisfied elements, wanting to create an abnormal political climate in the country fanned anti-action committee sentiments. Two of the three action committee leaders were subjected to the humiliation of having their faces smeared with black, of being made to wear garlands of shows, and of being taken around the city on a pushcart.<sup>27</sup> When the police intervened to rescue them, the mob turned violent setting fire to the Royal Nepal Airlines' vehicles and to the building

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in D.P. Kumar, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup>For details see Rishikesh Shaha, "Drama in Nepal: Democracy's Second Chance, A Plan for Vindication," *Vasudha* (Kathmandu), July-August, 1979, p. 3.

housing the two official dailies *Gorkhapatra* and *Rising Nepal*. Although the actual death toll was not available, it was reported that some deaths occurred during the riot.

The May 23 mass demonstration and violence was in no circumstances a well-thought out plan for continuing the struggle against the system. As all the students' demands had been fulfilled, and students' energies had been taxed too much due to the protracted movement, it was destined to peter out after the agreement. Moreover, a powerful section of the movement — Nepali Congress supported student wing—was no longer prepared to continue it because of pressures being exerted by B.P. Koirala. It was therefore an immediate reaction shown by those students who felt isolated and humiliated by the agreement arrived at between four parties—the pro-Congress students, the Pushpa Lal and Man Mohan factions of the NCP, the pro-Moscow communists and the Royal commission. It was subsequently seen that the other two students groups—the Marxist-Leninist faction and the Mohan Bikram faction—which showed their strength later during the referendum, were quite involved in the reaction against the student action committee's attempt by humiliating the two students calling off the strike. The Mandal was also hurt and humiliated by the student movement as it was being disbanded following the Royal commission decision.

Much to the surprise of students and public alike, about 40 of the 75 districts of the country were affected by the movement during April-May. It was estimated that not less than 30 people lost their lives and many others were injured in the spread out movement. Panicked and harassed, the government tried to defuse the crisis by arresting senior politicians. Eventually King Birendra, perhaps feeling that the situation was really going out of control, made a proclamation on May 24, affirming his deep faith in the aspirations and democratic values of the people.

For the first time, students in Nepal had been able to draw the undivided attention of the people after 1960. In the 1960s, students did form free unions, but this achievement could not be consolidated by them, because the New Education Plan, tending to reinforce the partyless system, did not allow them to continue in operation. When students tried to show their power by waging a protracted movement in 1975, the government dealt with a heavy hand. Since then students had not been able to mobilize themselves. In 1979, they could muster support of the general people, peasants and professio-

nals who became close allies of students. The referendum period and after made it clear that the student movement alone would not have created any impact unless it had been supported from other sections of the people.<sup>28</sup>

#### PANCHAS AND THEIR ORIENTATION

The Panchayat System inherited contradictions. It had legitimate grounds to be so. King Mahendra, the propounder of the new order, was obsessed with the idea of liberal democracy which he had abandoned by his action in December 1960. When the King dismantled the parliamentary system, he appeared to be disgusted by conflict-ridden party politics. It was up to him to introduce an appropriate type of democracy in the post-take-over period. But this was a paradoxical proposition. Having been closely associated with the 1950 revolution, the King did not want to forsake democracy. Urged by a sense of history, King Mahendra proposed that he would like to know the opinion of the people after a few years; what type of political system they would prefer. But for the time being, the Panchayat political system patterned on a pyramid like structure was introduced. After this, village, town, district, zone and national panchayat institutions were organized. As attendants to the Panchayat system, class organizations were created. These class and professional organizations were basically required to fill the vacuum created by the ban on political parties. The Panchayat system was not only acclaimed as being the synthesis of tradition, nationalism and a spiritual and cultural heritage of the country, but was also said to be in perfect consonance with the ethos of the people. However, the new system which the King wanted to construct, eclectically imbibed different contents of various other systems then obtaining in some other countries. In fact, as King Mahendra said: "This system seeks to and will incorporate all the contributions of all the political principles that have been in force in the world till now along with those of our religion, culture and traditions."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>See Louis Hayes, "Educational Reform and Student Political Behavior in Nepal," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, 1974, pp. 752-769.

See also Lok Raj Baral, "The Dynamics of Student Politics in Nepal, 1961-75," *International Studies*, (New Delhi), Vol. 14, No. 2, 1975, pp. 305-314.

<sup>29</sup>H.M. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, *Proclamation, Speeches and Messages* (HMG, 1967), Vol. 2, p. 77.

### *Panchayat Structure*

It becomes necessary to have an overview of the Panchayat structure in order to show the inner contradictions within the system. The structural components of the new system had been well publicized even before the formal announcement of the constitution on December 16, 1962. The National Guidance Ministry had announced its blue-print in June 1961, besides numerous official pamphlets and pronouncements had explained the nature of the polity.

The Panchayat system was based on a pyramid-like structure with the basic units in the village and town panchayats. At the apex was the National Panchayat. In between the apex and the base were district and zonal Panchayats, the latter was abolished by the first amendment of the Constitution in January 1967.

All persons residing within the area of *gaun sabha* (village assembly) and of the age of 21 years became members of the *gaun sabha*. Each *gaun sabha* elected its 11-member executive body, called village Panchayat, for a period of two years, one-thirds of these members retiring after every two years. The *Pradhan Pancha* (Chief) and *Upa-Pradhan Pancha* (Deputy-Chief) of the village Panchayat were elected by the village assembly for a period of two years. Each village Panchayat sent a representative to form the district assembly which elected 11-member district Panchayat. And each district Panchayat member automatically became the member of the zonal assembly which elected National Panchayat member. But election procedures of village Panchayats went on changing from 1962 onwards, but other Panchayat election patterns remained by and large the same till the second amendment of the constitution in 1975. According to the second amendment each village Panchayat area was divided into wards which elected one ward chairman to become the member of village Panchayat. Of the nine members elected by the wards, one became the *Pradhan Pancha*. Similarly, district Panchayat election also underwent a modification after the amendment. A district was divided into nine zones. Each zone sent representatives to constitute the district assembly. And each district assembly member became an eligible voter for electing national panchayat members.

Before the second amendment of the constitution, there were other channels for giving memberships to the national panchayat. Class and professional organizations sent 15 members, while the

graduate's constituency had the provision for electing four members from amongst the graduates of the country. The graduates' elections were held directly on the basis of proportional representation. There were also 15 King's nominees. The second amendment eliminated representatives from class organizations and the graduates' constituency. Thus by 1975, the National Panchayat was a body of 125 representatives. The membership was extended to 135 by the second amendment and of these, 23 were Royal nominees.

This structural pattern of the system markedly checked the prospect of group formation for sustained political activities. The constitution which was amended in 1967 had also a bias for enforcing the partyless character as the preamble to the constitution incorporated "partyless" as an inherent characteristic of the system so that the old controversies regarding the revival of party system could be set at rest. How such changes gave rise to debates dominating the entire Panchayat decades is required to be highlighted.

The theme of *status quo* vs. reforms within the Panchayat system had been persistently dominating the national political debate. And Panchayat elites were solely responsible for these controversies. The indirectly created structure of the system and conformist role expected from its participants always put heavy responsibilities on the Panchayat members. Candidates for the National Panchayat from the graduates' constituency and peasants' organization more often than not tried to attract voters by showing radical postures on the eve of elections. Parliamentary democracy was their obvious preference since all their election campaignings and publications did not hide their preference.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, all other class organizations' central committees followed suit by passing an unanimous resolution demanding radical parliamentary reforms within the Panchayat system.<sup>31</sup> The resolution demonstrated to what extent

<sup>30</sup>The two graduates' elections held in 1967 and 1971 were conspicuous by their marked radicalism demanding structural changes within the system. Most members standing to NP elections from this constituency demanded reforms. And all four candidates winning these elections had pro-party proclivities. Similarly some candidates standing from peasants' and youth organizations demanded radical liberal reforms including direct elections to the National Panchayat on the basis of universal adult franchise, provision for an elected Prime Minister, and accountability of the council of ministers to the National Panchayat. For details see Baral, *Oppositional Politics*, Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>31</sup>See *Bargiya तथा Byabasaik Samyukta Karya Samitiko Pramukh Sammelanma Prastut ra Sarba Sammatibata Parit Pratibedan ra Prastabharu* (Report



the leading Panchayat figures of officially-sponsored organizations were inclined to put pressures on the system. Experience also showed that to the extent these organizations depended upon the government, they became ritualistic and eventually non-conformist.

As most Panchayat elites had come from a party background or orientation, they were prone to groupism through which they could establish their distinct political credentials. This phenomenon continued until a more restrictive constitutional measure was imposed on Panchayat politics in 1975 when stress on maintaining pancha discipline was laid.

Such a restrictive measure only helped to silence the panchas for the time being, for the pancha unity forged by the state-made organization—Back-to-Village campaign was too fragile to continue. Even by taking recourse to all strong measures, the BVNC could neither sustain panchayat unity through coercion nor did it insure the enthusiastic participation of the people at large. The politics of consensus, which it tried to enforce without taking due consideration of popular mood, was counter productive for the system. Its experimentation was therefore frustrated in a country which under no circumstances was prepared to accept a kind of totalitarian political culture. The political institutions created by the system had been providing political training to the people. And it was a continuous process after the 1951 change. So when an organ like the BVNC was superimposed on the people, it promoted atrophy in the political system. The Panchas were either coerced into acquiescence or treated at par with dissidents. It was indeed an incredibly short-sighted exercise which was not likely to do any good to the people or the King.

The BVNC's activities did not however mean that Panchayat experiment was a futile exercise. In Nepal the Panchayat system had become an umbrella under which all the shades of political persuasions found berth. Moreover, the Panchayat has its roots and branches all over the country, and a distinct Panchayat culture appeared to have been developing over the years. But the process of acculturation responding to basic democratic norms was also equally evident. Such a process is likely to be innovative and abrasive in Nepali society. And what the Panchayat experiment dis-

played was that the national political system ought to be both integrationist and dynamic. But this aim required to be pursued in accordance with well-set norms and procedures.

King Birendra's proclamation of the national referendum and his subsequent commitments to go ahead for prescribed liberal reforms was presumably nothing more than his dissatisfaction with the then prevailing state of affairs. Even before the declaration of the referendum, a committee was understood to have been set up with a view to bringing about some changes within the constitution. Although this move could not be called a factor responsible for the referendum, it still gave a clue that the King had something in his mind.<sup>32</sup> King Birendra should have realized the need for urgent reforms in the system after the failure of the BVNC.<sup>33</sup>

Though many other factors, both seen and unseen, might have prompted the King to take the risky decision of the national referendum, a widespread criticism with regard to the institutional weaknesses of the system as well as behavioral weaknesses of the Panchas might have been responsible for the King's decision. Indeed, when Panchayat stalwarts were put out on a limbo in the wake of the political crisis then fast developing, what other considerations could have been but to opt for the referendum.

### *The Press after 1960*

An inquiry into the conditions of the press in Nepal would also reflect the mental make-up of the Nepali society. How the press suffers from poverty and other non-professional hazards in transitional systems have been well explained in these words:

<sup>32</sup>It has been learnt that a three-member committee consisting of National Panchayat members, K.B. Shahi and Krishna Prasad Pant and National Panchayat Secretary, Ananta Nath Poudyal, had been set up in order to introduce such reforms as elections to the National Panchayat on the adult franchise basis, elected Prime Minister, and Cabinet accountability to the National Panchayat. The former Prime Minister Kirti Nidhi Bista told the author in a personal interview in November 1980 that King Birendra had "active consideration" to bring about certain reforms in the system. The King had also told him that such reforms would be made under the auspices of his (Bista's) government.

<sup>33</sup>Dr Mohammad Mohsin who was also the member Secretary of the BVNC Central Committee told the author in September 1980 that the Back-to-Village National Campaign did not get a fair trial due to conspiracy hatched by the bureaucracy and "vested interests".

In transitional systems those who would be the journalists and the reporters of public affairs generally do not have a strong sense of independent professional standards. In large part the economic poverty of the mass media make it impossible for the society to support a full community of professional communication. Journalists in most of the new states tend to be so underpaid that they can hardly feel that they represent an independent force capable of criticizing and judging those holding power.<sup>34</sup>

The above statement reflects considerably the conditions of the press in Nepal as well. Newspapers in Nepal are relatively colourless, personalityless and above all, valueless. The government papers—the *Gorkhapatra* and the *Rising Nepal* thrive on the Treasury, enhance the value of the system, and read like gazette or notification. The question of the newspapers' survival is also greatly determined by the attitude of the government towards them. Only a few dailies and weeklies which try to be independent survive the financial pressures of the government. In short, quite a few of these papers are in a manner of speaking, "born in idealism and live in frustration."

Although the press in general behaved in conformity with the officially prescribed taboos after 1960, the relationship between the press and the system did not always seem cordial. The Press Act, first introduced in 1963, created a climate of misunderstanding between the government and the press, for its section 30 imposed several restrictions on the working of the press. It stated:

His Majesty's government may issue an order directing the suspension of any news, criticism or publications in case it deemed reasonable to do so in the public interest. No appeal or complaint shall be entertained against such order.<sup>35</sup>

In 1970 the Press for the first time heaved a sigh of relief when the government amended the Press Act of 1963. The amendment incorporated the provision for appeal to guarantee judicial protec-

<sup>31</sup>"The Emergence of Professional Communicators" in Lucian W. Pye (editor), *Communications and Political Development* (Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 79.

<sup>35</sup>*Nepal Gazette*, Vol. 12, January 12, 1963.

tion of the press. As a consequence, many newspapers, harassed under the previous article, were allowed to function. However, this was a short-lived comfort in the face of the increasing pressures of the hardliners within the government. In 1975, the government stopped the circulation of seven dailies and weeklies which were considered as pro-party papers.

### *The Press and Referendum*

It is an uphill task to find a fixed, consistent political orientation in the Nepali press because of the continuing tradition of personalistic, individualistic behaviour of individual owners of newspapers and periodicals. An individual is the overall in-charge of an individual paper; he is responsible for what the paper writes. Such newspapers have managed to survive because of their covert sources of income. The newspapers are not independent ventures of the affluent commercial elites as is generally the case in other countries.

There can be little doubt that the political orientation of the press in Nepal, characterized by ostentatious shifts in loyalty, is determined by what the government has up its sleeves. However, a number of dailies and weeklies with their overt political orientations have been pursuing consistent policies towards the system and the current governments. Their affiliation and identification with the anti-system environment became pronounced when they started advocating the need for changes within the system. Some other newspapers being motivated by fringe benefits, became thoroughly confused, while the rest supported the *status quo* of the system.<sup>36</sup>

During the April-May crisis of 1979, the press in general departing from its *modus operandi*, barring the two official dailies, sided with the spontaneously developing mass upsurge. The national and international developments, which were then fast changing, apparently emboldened the press more than ever before. In a way the system, which started showing its dysfunctionality, also encouraged the press to come out openly against its deficiencies.

External mass media, particularly the Indian press and the British and American radios followed developments, with a tilt towards the mass movement. Their tone also fuelled the crisis, because foreign radios particularly the BBC and the All India Radio carried news

<sup>36</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "The Press in Nepal 1951-74," *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* (Kathmandu), Vol. 2, February 1975, pp. 169-183.

which are mostly ignored by the official Radio Nepal.

The referendum period was a testimony to the fact that the press in Nepal acted as a force to capitalize the popular discontent. All newspapers were solidly behind the movement started by the students. Although motivated to a certain extent by the idea of spreading sensation for pushing up sales, newspapers at large were successful in focussing on the crisis by supporting the movement.

### *Role of Other Professional Groups*

Professionalism is largely related to what Emile Durkheim calls "division of labour" which comes as a consequence of economic and social development. We cannot borrow Durkheim's view of division of labour in an industrialized society, for relevancy in the Nepali context. But even without going for widespread industrialization, professionalism has been developing in the country along with educational and occupational development. "A profession is a learned (i.e. scholarly) activity, and thus involves formal training," but within a broad intellectual context certain core elements of professionalism are available in Nepal. Above all, the idea of profession "implies an idea of competence and authority, technical and moral, and that the professional will assume an hieratic place in the society."<sup>37</sup>

Among professional groups in Nepal, lawyers play the most important part in politics, since lawyers are the professionals, who are most familiar with the political milieu, "because juridical vocations seem to predispose men to a political career." In Nepal only a small number of lawyers have been able to join the national legislature through the graduates' constituency elections or through Royal nominations. And, all of them rejoin their legal profession after the expiry of their terms in the National Panchayat. However, compared to other fields, the lawyers are (were) inclined towards active politics, for the legal profession, however underdeveloped in the country, "may be temporarily abandoned and taken up again without any obligation or compulsion. Some political parties have some lawyers who not only provide counsel to the leaders but also become party activists taking risks of being imprisoned."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: Adventure in Social Forecasting* (Arnold Heinmann Publishers (India) Private Limited, 1964), p. 79.

<sup>38</sup>The role of lawyers in Nepali politics has been seen since 1960. The Nepali Congress has some young lawyers who act both as activists and theoretical

There is a general feeling that the partyless Panchayat system lacked the support of the intellectuals and professionals in the country. But it is difficult either to prove or disprove, because there is no growth of independent intellectualism in Nepal. An intellectual is supposed to be a critic or a judge who speaks out his mind as freely as he deems fit. But how these prescriptions can be applied in the case of Nepali intellectuals and how far they are responsive to social needs, are quite relevant questions.

Except the lawyers and their associations, no other professional intellectuals have consistently provided forums for developing critical ideas. In this sense, is there a body of intellectuals in the country? To quote a candid comment: "We have none, except decent, and respectable cogs in the wheel of Nepalese society, persistently striving towards the beautitude of an exploitationless state."<sup>39</sup>

Intellectuals and professionals who lie in permanent hibernation are not the agents of change. It does not however mean that there is no process of change in the country. In spite of still quite adherence to traditional norms, social mobility appears to have been accelerated with contacts being established between different groups of the people in the country. The sharp rise in literacy rate, the influence of alien ideas being disseminated through books, radio and other media and intimate contacts with the outside world have shown that Nepali society is no longer a fixture in an abandoned land or in the nowhere "Sangrila." Nepal has, indeed, become a part of the complex interdependent world system. And old values are eroding without the new ones taking their place. The gap between 'aspirations' and 'frustrations' appears to be unbridgeable, because national resources are being strained out in the absence of priorities and the competence to achieve the priority targets. Thus, while talking about the forces of dynamic political process, we cannot isolate socio-economic and political changes which have been taking place in the country over the years.

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advocates of the party's role. Similarly there is no dearth of leftist lawyers. All of them also deal with political cases concerning their leaders.

<sup>39</sup>Kamal P. Malla, "The Intellectual in Nepalese Society," in Pashupati Shumsher J.B. Rana and Kamal P. Malla eds., *Nepal in Perspective* (Kathmandu, 1973), p. 290.

## Chapter 4

# Panchayat System on Trial

The Panchas and opposition politicians alike were caught unawares in the early morning of May 24, 1979 when King Birendra made an historic proclamation over the state-controlled Radio Nepal. The King was explicit in his proclamation that the “Partyless Panchayat democratic system has been like an umbrella embracing the whole of the Nepalese people.”<sup>1</sup> King Birendra declared:

. . . on the one hand, public consent has remained the basis of the Panchayat system, on the other, it has been our duty and tradition to run the administration of the country according to the aspirations of the people. Accordingly, with the objective of clearly ascertaining what type of changes our countrymen desire in the context of the situation prevailing in the country today, and taking appropriate steps thereafter, we hereby proclaim that arrangements will be made to hold a referendum by secret ballot of the entire Nepali people throughout the Kingdom of Nepal on the basis of adult franchise. Such a national referendum will be held on two basic questions: should the existing Panchayat system be retained and gradually reformed or should it be replaced by a multi-party system of government.<sup>2</sup>

As expected, reactions to the Royal proclamation on a national

<sup>1</sup>*Gorkhapatra and Rising Nepal*, May 24, 1979.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

referendum were positive. Opposition leaders, representing a wide spectrum of political forces, acclaimed the Royal decision. The former Prime Minister and leader of the banned Nepali Congress party, B.P. Koirala, was more than happy when he welcomed it without any reservation. B.P. who, towards the end of 1978, had predicted that 1979 would be a crucial year for Nepal's democratic development, stated that his call for "national reconciliation", which he had made in 1976 before returning to Nepal from his voluntary exile in India, had borne fruit. Other leaders of the underground political parties, except those belonging to the two extremist factions of the Communist party, gave a qualified support to the announcement. They expressed the view that certain preconditions, including the suspension of all Panchayat organs, the formation of an interim government for holding a free and fair referendum, an amnesty to all political prisoners and political exiles living in India, the suspension of Back-to-Village National Campaign, freedom for propagating party principles, were necessary.<sup>3</sup> Only fulfilling these preconditions, the timely and courageous decision of King Birendra would produce desired results, Man Mohan Adhikari, the veteran Communist leader stated.

On the other hand, B.P. Koirala did not subscribe to the demand made by his own party colleagues and other leaders for certain necessary preconditions without which the impending referendum, given the then obtaining situation, was unlikely to be free. Undeterred by such arguments, B.P., instead, drew a parallel picture between the Indian emergency imposed by Mrs Indira Gandhi, which was rejected by a massive majority by the Indian people in 1977 and the "dictatorial Panchayat system" which would also be voted out by the people "lock, stock and barrel".

Initial gloom and frustrations dawned upon the Panchayat elites as they were conspicuous by their silence on the Royal decision. Senior Panchas were in a state of nervousness because of the emergent awkward political situation about which they were completely unfamiliar. They had never expected such a move to surface in the system. How deep was the shock and how painful was the Kings' decision would be realized when talking to some of them. Their anger and resentment could also be gauged by the euphoria gene-

<sup>3</sup>All political leaders, except B.P. Koirala, repeatedly demanded these demands in order to insure free and impartial referendum.



rated in the pro-multi-party camps whom they had discredited for over eighteen years. After a week, the King as stated in the proclamation, also constituted a 15-member Election Commission with a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as its Chairman. Although the composition of the commission seemed to have created some doubts in the minds of the opposition leaders, it was by and large accepted on the basis of the King's desire for insuring a free and fair referendum.<sup>4</sup> On the same day—May 30, 1979 King Birendra also granted freedom to the people to enable them to campaign for and against the partyless system, though the imposition of a ban on the operation of political parties continued in the formal-legal sense. According to the Royal Palace communique, it was stated: "Irrespective of whatever has been written in the constitution of Nepal, Part III, Article II, Clause 2 (a) and Article 71, people will be free to hold mass meeting, write, comment or criticize and propagate their views fearlessly and without restraint."<sup>5</sup> These freedoms granted to opponents and supporters alike also apparently came as a blow to the Pancha camp making them watch the situation with studied silence. A few of them however came out with statements supporting the multi-party system. The former Chairman of the Back-to-Village National Campaign, Biswa Bandu Thapa, and two other former ministers, Rabindra Nath Sharma and Sri-bhadra Sharma, made a strong plea for a multi-party system to be bestowed by the King so that the existing controversy which would sharply divide the nation on such a vital issue as that of choosing a political system could be set at rest. But other Panchas joined the issue by affirming their faith in the vitality of the Panchayat system. The Panchas' silence was finally broken when they decided to regroup by holding a Pancha convention from June 28 to 30, 1979 so that they could go to the people as an organized force. Prior to the convention, Surya Bahadur Thapa who had once been imprisoned for demanding liberal reforms and for attacking what he called "dual government one run by the Palace secretariat and the other by the central secretariat" in 1972, was appointed as a caretaker

<sup>4</sup>Most of the members of the Commission were retired civil servants. Some of them were also drawn from such ethnic or tribal groups as Newar, Lama, Tharu, Gurung and Muslim. Of them ten were Chhetris and Bahuns, one Lama, one Tharu, one Muslim, one Gurung, one Newar, one Rajput. See *Rising Nepal*, May 30, 1979.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

Prime Minister on the basis of unanimous recommendation of the National Panchayat on May 30. Proving his bonafides as a Pancha, Thapa had published as statement welcoming the Royal proclamation for holding the national referendum, because timely reforms were the ingredients of the system and all Panchas should stand up to the challenge of the referendum.<sup>6</sup>

The Pancha convention held primarily for going to the people in an organized manner, provided the Panchas with an opportunity to see the political scene in a total perspective. This was also an occasion for introspection and assessment of their performances for over eighteen years. Heated discussions on issues relating to the nature of the Royal leadership, the process of liberalization, and economic programmes, etc. took place. The Back-to-Village National Campaign came under scathing criticisms when Panchas in general held this body responsible for spoiling the ethos of the panchayat politics. While deliberating on political resolutions, the diehard Panchayatocrat, who is generally known to opt for a *status quo*, Tulsi Giri, did not favour the liberal reforms suggested by the convention on the grounds that if "reforms sought in the system were to determine its basic principles such as active Royal leadership, partyless character, and indirect elections to the national legislature, it would be better for us to request His Majesty to give us the party system." The reforms suggested by the convention, he argued, would "lead to the disintegration of the system."<sup>7</sup> Despite divergent lines taken by some senior panchas, the convention passed an unanimous resolution affirming deep faith of the Panchas in democratic reforms within the system. Such reforms as direct election to the national legislature, provision for electing the Prime Minister on the basis of the recommendation of the national panchayat and accountability of the ministry to the legislature were endorsed by the convention. One curious side of the convention was that it preferred to remain quiet with regard to the nature of the leadership of the King under the reformed Panchayat model.<sup>8</sup>

The first few months were dominated by a series of mass meetings, press statements and interviews supporting the multi-party side.

<sup>6</sup>*Rising Nepal, op. cit.*, May 31, 1979.

<sup>7</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, June 29, 1979.

<sup>8</sup>The resolution passed by the convention had political, economic and social programmes. See *Nirdaliya Panchayatko Niti ra Karyakram 2036* (Policies and Programmes of Partyless Panchayat, 1979).

Many party leaders who were in hibernation for several years after 1960 were awakened from torpor by the declaration of the referendum. Man Mohan Adhikari was the first leader to fire shots by organizing a mass meeting at Patan on June 5, in which he spoke out that the King and leadership were two separate entities, and that the King was surrounded by "vested interests". He also stated that since the referendum was the result of struggle of all sections of society, democratic and progressive forces should be united for turning the referendum to their advantage. Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa who had shown his pro-Panchayat bias while holding the nation's highest office, also came under criticism. It was apprehended that the referendum would not be free under such a dispensation. Coming close on the heels of Man Mohan Adhikari was the first ever held opposition mass meeting after 1960 in which B.P. Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai addressed. They showed their over-confidence in the future verdict of the referendum. B.P. warned the Panchayat government headed by Thapa that it had no legitimate authority to take major decisions, because the coming people's government, which would be theirs would have to face troubles in such a case. B.P.'s remarks and hopes for forming a government even without crossing the hurdle of the impending referendum bewildered the people. In his address, B.P. also did not endorse the demands of the striking teachers and corporation employees because such strikes and lockouts according to him, would sabotage the cause of the referendum. Ganesh Man Singh and Bhattarai on the other hand demanded the suspension of all Panchayat units and dissolution of the Pancha government for insuring a fair referendum. Three Congress leaders were thus speaking contradictory languages which obviously created a good deal of confusion in the minds of the people.<sup>9</sup>

Other opposition leaders also seized the opportunity to come to the people in mass meetings. All former Prime Ministers, including Tanka Prasad Acharya and K.I. Sing, and former ministers S.P. Upadhyaya and Dilli Raman Regmi, and the pro-Moscow communist leaders, Keshar Jung Rayamajhi and Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar, the widow of the communist leader, Pushpalal, Mrs Sahana Pradhan, virtually every one asked for fulfilment of certain preconditions before the referendum. The former Prime Minister K.I. Sing

<sup>9</sup>*Samaj and Commoner*, June 5, 1979.

was again seen changing sides. In the early 1970s, he had become a National Panchayat member. When the referendum was announced, he joined the multi-party camp and lashed out at the Panchayat system as dictatorial. Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, sharing a common platform with Sing, had however dropped a hint that in a manner the new Zonal Commissioners were then appointed and the type of people selected for the job did not augur well for the referendum. Demanding the fulfilment of preconditions, Upadhyaya asserted that he needed "King's prime minister", and not that of the Panchas.

The Panchayat front remained more or less intact, despite the change of sides by some senior Panchas. The pro-party Panchas went on reiterating that there was no need of national referendum for choosing a system since King Birendra could have straightaway granted a multi-party system. Moreover, the Pancha convention held in June boosted the sagging morale of the Panchas, who started holding mass meetings in different parts of the country. The first meeting was held in the capital's open air-theatre where several pro-party meetings had been held before. Replying to the charges of the multi-party leaders, the Pancha speakers maintained that a party system would hasten the process of national disintegration since parties would be mostly influenced by foreign forces.

Meanwhile, the National Panchayat passed nine bills, one of which provided for elections to the national legislature on the basis of universal adult franchise, under which candidates would be elected directly by the people of the district. Such candidates would also be required to become members of village or town or district Panchayats.<sup>10</sup> Opposition leaders criticized the government for introducing such reforms on the eve of the referendum.

The announcement of the referendum and the political atmosphere that followed it was similar to the 1951 change, because, in both situations, euphoria had given way to a kind of disorder. Unrest and demonstrations dominated the political scene. The Panchas did not lag behind in pointing out that a grave crisis would be created as a result of the revival of the party system. Some Panchas, known as the "hawks" of the system, came out with pamphlets underlining the importance of monarchical institution which, in no circumstances, should be made a subject of controversy. They stated that the anarchical situation obtaining in the country in the post-declara-

<sup>10</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, September, 1979.

tion period should be immediately controlled and the protection of life and property secured.<sup>11</sup>

All political parties, except the two extremist factions of the Nepal Communist Party, i.e., the Marxist-Leninist and the Mohan Bikram (Fourth Conference) factions had welcomed the announcement. According to the two extremist groups, the drama of referendum would not solve the fundamental problems of the Nepali people. A Change in the government set-up would not change the class character, and referendum would be a hoax, and it must be boycotted.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, these factions, advancing the logic of choosing lesser evils, paid lip-service to the referendum on the grounds that the referendum in spite of its incapacity to affect class character, could be a medium to provide greater amount of freedom to the people than the Panchayat system. For a few months following the announcement of referendum, extremist activities were reported on the increase in Ilam, Sankhuwasabha, Dhankuta, Sarlahi and Chitwan districts, provoking the government to resort to armed operations. Besides these activities, students allegedly connected with extremist groups concentrated their efforts on both denigrating the Nepali Congress and the referendum. The Majority of school and college student unions were captured by the leftists, but the prestigious Tribhuvan University union was won by the pro-Congress students. The main reason the leftists lost this union was the disunity between the ML faction and Mohan Bikram faction.<sup>13</sup> However, both extremist factions were raising their voice in denouncing the referendum.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Former Minister and Chairman of the Back-to-Village National Campaign, Khadga Bahadur Singh and former ambassador to the Peoples' Republic of China, Randhir Subha, issued pamphlets emphasizing the need of retaining the partyless Panchayat System. Khadga Bahadur held the Pro-Party elements responsible for disturbances affecting the life of the people.

<sup>12</sup>"Bargiya Sangharsha" (class struggle) (pamphlet), special issue no 8/036 (1979).

<sup>13</sup>My interview with some prominent young panchayat leaders and other student leaders could get the impression that the pro-panchayat students-known as Mandal *supporters* along with the government had a role to play in insuring victory of the Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh. In other campus unions' elections, they threw their weight for the victory of anti-congress students. By insuring the victory at the top, these leaders felt, they could neutralize the aggressiveness of the extremist-factions.

<sup>14</sup>*Election Manifesto* distributed on December 9, 1979 at Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur.

*Strategies*

The referendum was indeed a forum-like issue on which each political group or force showed its strength as well as weaknesses. The so-called extremist Communists were made uncomfortable by the King's announcement; for them the success of the multi-party side in the referendum would be tantamount to the victory of the Nepali Congress which, in their calculation, had both influence and workers to turn the ensuing parliamentary elections to its favour. B.P. Koirala, principal spokesman of the multi-party camp, had provided enough grist to this kind of speculation when he declared that his party had legitimate claims to power after the fall of the panchayat system. The Opposition forces hostile to the denouement of the referendum, became active to frustrate the Congress ascendancy in the referendum. B.P., perhaps unwittingly fanned the flames of the opposition by repeating that his call for national reconciliation and national unity was the only causal factor responsible for the King's decision. The former American Ambassador, Douglas Heck, who was then in Nepal, stated though obliquely, that the King took the referendum as a means to introduce a change in the political system. It was recognized that the existing partyless Panchayat system had not worked and was not generating either the policies or the energies required to move the country forward.<sup>15</sup> The Opposition leaders as well as Panchas, therefore, appeared to be obsessed with the coming of the Congress which, as was generally speculated had brought off certain understanding with the King. So many leaders supporting the multi-party system became apathetic as their chances in the future political set-up looked bleak. Such a feeling in the pre-1960 period had been partly responsible for the overthrow of the Parliamentary system. Twenty years later, the forces hostile to what some called the "intransigence" of the NC leaders, again began to outline the same kind of scenario as was obtaining before 1960. In 1979 much more powerful forces than active earlier had emerged. The extremists of both the "right" and "left" had come to influence the political scene. And these extremists were acting in collusion in college elections or in organizing strikes or demonstrations. It was in fact a strange ensemble of diametrically opposite forces.

<sup>15</sup>See Douglas Heck, "Nepal in 1980: The Year of the Referendum," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 2, February 1981, pp. 181-182.

These developments were making the referendum issue more complex. The euphoria generated by the Royal declaration slackened because of the worsening law and order situation in the country. Public meetings organized by Panchas or by pro-multi-party leaders were often disturbed; political leaders were beaten or harassed. The multi-party campaigns were relatively in a low key since prominent leaders did not dare to visit in districts due to harassments by militant Panchas and other extremists. Senior Panchas were also harassed despite the protective government umbrella provided for them during campaigns. The multi-party leaders were becoming increasingly apprehensive, presumably because they felt that they were going to fight an unequal battle in view of the "unlimited resources" and organizational networks available to their adversaries.<sup>16</sup> With the lone exception of B.P., most of the other leaders supporting the multi-party side again emphasized the necessity of certain preconditions to make the forthcoming referendum free and fair. Some Nepali weeklies did not however give any credence to the "extremist-bogey" for, according to them, "it was wrong to identify every social protest against traditional vested interests as a form of extremist activity and charged the local administration with exploiting the situation by daubing every demonstrator against social injustice an extremist."<sup>17</sup> B.P. drew certain connections between such incidents and the local administration. The incident in Syangja district, from which he had a 'miraculous' escape, was commented upon by him as a perpetration of conspirators bent on widening the gulf between the King and people. Later he called on the Thapa government to maintain law and order or make room for others who could do this effectively.<sup>18</sup> The deteriorating law and order situation was a matter of concern to many, for if the referendum was disturbed as a result of violent activities which were deliberately carried to discourage participation in the referendum, the country's

<sup>16</sup>*The Times of India* (New Delhi). Among the victims of the extremists' fury were the former Premiers B.P. Koirala, Kirti Nidhi Bista, the former N.P. Chairman, Rajeswar Devkota, and leader of the banned communist party (pro-Moscow) Keshar Jang Rayamajhi and his colleagues. Similarly former Minister Kashi Nath Gautam and a host of others were also beaten or harassed or man-handled.

<sup>17</sup>*The Times of India*, November 26, 1979.

<sup>18</sup>For details see *Commoner, Samaj*, September 26, 1979 and *The Statesman* (New Delhi), September 9, 1979.

future set-up was likely to be affected.

Meanwhile, only a month before, the National Panchayat (Election of Member) Act, was amended by the national legislature under which candidates to the NP were required to be elected to village, town or district panchayats before they could seek election to the highest legislature of the country. The act enjoined the candidates for election to the NP to enlist proposition from 50 persons in the district. When the bill was given assent by the King, the multi-party leaders reacted sharply. "It was politically unethical" for the government to go ahead with the Panchayat elections when the Panchayat itself was subject to referendum.<sup>19</sup>

Some political and economic measures taken by the government were rather deliberate, calculated with an eye on the referendum. The Panchas capitalized on their national network of Panchayats and spent considerable time touring the hill districts which the Nepali Congress incorrectly assumed to be its pockets.<sup>20</sup> For the first time after 1960, the Panchayat camp appeared as an organized party with its political, economic and social manifesto. By adopting some major reforms in the Pancha convention, the Panchas had belied the charge of the opposition that they were basically anti-democratic in orientation and hence detestable. On the contrary, Prime Minister Thapa's bonafides first as a Pancha, and only then as the Prime Minister, had given the incontrovertible impression that the reformed Panchayat would be different than the narrowly defined structure. Both contending camps were unanimous regarding the noncontroversial role of the Crown. The Panchas were apparently trying hard to demonstrate that the strength of the system was not in evidence only in the King's involvement under the practice of direct leadership, but also in its capacity for self-sustenance. The inter-elite conflicts, bolstered by the idea of the people's larger participation, and liberalization was no longer a live issue in view of the crisis facing the future of the system. And the conventionists seemed to have well comprehended their future should the multi-party win the referendum. Therefore, unity among the Panchayat corps was the first pre-condition for successfully surmount-

<sup>19</sup>*The Times of India*, November 17, 1979. S.P. Upadhyaya, a multi-party leader remarked that these reforms were unusual as panchs could not come up with reforms of adult franchise which was passed by the pancha Convention. The party supporters had nothing to worry.

<sup>20</sup>Douglas Heck, *Nepal in 1980: The Year of the Referendum*, p. 184.



ting the hazards of the referendum, and such an unity had been created, however fragile it may be, by the convention. Shortly later, a new body *Yuba Pancha* (the Pancha *youth cadre*) was created mobilizing committed young man and students with a view to launching more effective campaigns.

In the meantime, some multi-party leaders repeatedly expressed the view that the issues involved in the referendum were not clear. The two choices—the retention of the existing Panchayat system with reforms or a multi-party system were vague, and it was up to the King to clarify it. Maintaining that both choices were being interpreted in different ways, what type of party system would be introduced if the referendum went in favour of the multi-party system had not been explained. The multi-party system, in their view, need not necessarily be a parliamentary system as in Britain or in India. It could also be a presidential type of government as in France or in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously with a view to clarifying confusions regarding the nature of the future polity and also presumably with the objective of narrowing down the gap between the multi-party and the Panchayat systems through gradual reforms, King Birendra chose an opportunity to declare on the occasion of the Constitution and King Mahendra Memorial day on December 16, 1979 that whatever be the referendum result, elections to the national legislature on the basis of adult franchise, an elected prime minister and responsibility of the council of ministers to the legislature, would be the three major principles of polity in the future. King Birendra however gave a hint of the prospective role of the institution of monarchy and declared that these reforms did not mean that the Crown will abdicate its “commitment to uphold democracy or to perform its duties in the preservation of national security, good administration, peace and justice.” The King also referred to the partyless Panchayat system, which stood at the “crossroads”. Then he dwelt upon the referendum by reminding the voters that they should ponder deeply over the unique challenge posed before them while casting their votes. How the country was gripped by the widespread disquieting trends emanating from

<sup>21</sup>See Rishikesh Shaha's view in *The Times of India*, November 5, 1979. Surya Prasad Upadhyaya also held the same view and stated that clarification was essential.

the rise in petroleum prices, sharp inflation, the growing pressure of population, the general lack of education and skills, and aggravation of difficulties by scarcities, the continuing hartals and demonstrations were also highlighted by the King.<sup>22</sup>

King Birendra's declaration produced a near consensual reaction from amongst the leading opposition politicians as well as panchas. The Royal guideline on the nature of the future political set-up was generally taken as a step towards democratization even if the Panchayat side won the referendum. Although King Birendra's declaration had come close on the heels of the Panchayat reform measures adopted by the National Panchayat for which he had given assent, this Royal declaration did however bridge the differences between the multi-party system and the reform-oriented Panchayat system, because the latter, if at all genuine in accordance with the Royal guidelines, would also likely be a multi-party-like system. Certain political quarters also saw in these guidelines a shrewd move for weaning away moderate democrats on the plea that there was only a thin margin of difference between the two systems.<sup>23</sup>

The Panchayat supporters were particularly happy with the Royal guidelines, for it was considered as a grand culmination of the decision of the Pancha convention. This declaration just a few months before the referendum, helped the Panchas to appear in much more an advantageous position. The disorderly scene created in the aftermath of the proclamation of the national referendum also lent credence to the view that the victory of the multi-party system would be essentially no better than the victory of the reformed Panchayat system. According to Prime Minister Thapa, King Birendra's declaration on December 16 seemed to have favoured both camps since the big psychological gap—the branding of one group as authoritarian and the naming of the other as the “harbinger of democracy”—was drastically narrowed. By all reckoning, the Royal declaration was a decision to affect the national polity in its entirety. Even the so-called hard-core democrats belonging to the

<sup>22</sup>King Birendra's Proclamation on December 16, 1979.

<sup>23</sup>Bhadra Kali Mishra, a former minister and leader of the banned Nepali Congress party, reacted to King's proclamation as a “mockery of the proposed referendum”, because it indicated preference for the panchayat system. *The Times of India*, December 18, 1979. See also “A Hesitant King” (editorial), *ibid.*, December 20, 1980.

multi-party side had reconciled themselves to this reality.

Despite the Royal clarification, there were other tangled issues to be settled. It was still uncertain how a political system with an expanded suffrage, with strongly articulate groups operating in the society, and with above board political competition could efficiently run the government without devising certain organizational mechanisms, such as parties for both ensuring popular participation and maintaining governmental accountability to the legislature. Many could join this issue, but it was neither desirable for the King nor for others to enter into the fray all at once. For all intents and purposes, it appeared that evolution of the existing system and not an abrupt coming of the party system was courtly accepted. For the Panchayat system it was a second revolution inasmuch as it was going to depart from its path in the past. Moreover the declaration was a move to undo what had been done by the second amendment of the constitution which had artificially created certain institutions blocking the evolution of democracy in the country.

Both the multi-party and the Panchayat sides tried to interpret the King's decision in different ways to further their respective prospects in the referendum. Drawing a good deal of consolation from his thesis of national reconciliation, B.P. said that the King's speech called in question the validity of Panchayat system, and that there could be no going back to the old "authoritarian rule."

### *The King and Panchas*

Both King Mahendra and, later King Birendra provided active leadership to nurture the Panchayat System for over twenty years. Many people, particularly belonging to the multi-party side were however effortful in making the King desist from being involved in controversial day-to-day politics under the new dispensation which would follow the referendum. The Panchas themselves were engaged in fierce debates over the role of the King in a liberalized broadbased political order. In the division of the Panchayat elites into two camps—hard core "status quoists" and reformists—the former were seen trying to retain active Royal leadership in order to protect the system's partyless character and the indirect Panchayat structure, and the latter were found opting for broadbasing the system with liberal reforms. The "status quoists" held the view that liberalization would mean both an end to the partyless Panchayat system and an undermining of the monarchy's role.

The Royal declaration once again brought the King's leadership issue into a sharp focus. The Panchayat elites apparently guided by practical considerations, did not mention the nature of the Royal leadership, and the pro multi-party leaders more or less shared the view of maintaining Royal neutrality vis-a-vis all political forces including the Panchas. When laws were framed, zonal commissioners were appointed and all kinds of resources were utilized for furthering the prospects of the partyless side, the panchas were regaining their confidence. King Birendra's proclamations on May 24, on December 16 and February 19, 1980 were by no means ambiguous in pointing out the importance of the Panchayat system over the past two decades.

The Panchas were all at once thrown into competitive politics by the referendum and they themselves became strong advocates of the referendum. Prime Minister Thapa time and again took up the cudgels against those who had been demanding the direct granting of the multi-party system by the King without holding the referendum. It may be recalled that some multi-party leaders had been stressing the futility of the referendum; they maintained that King Birendra could save the country from the national division into two camps, if he desired. Moreover, they added that the holding of the referendum would entail a lot of expense, would create ill-feelings on both sides and would be time consuming. But the Prime Minister and other Panchas stoutly rejected this plea, criticizing it as undemocratic. To wish to have a party system by the King's grace would deprive the people of their democratic rights.<sup>24</sup> This kind of attitude indeed only amounted to a negation of the rights granted to the people but also contempt for them.<sup>25</sup>

There was yet another line of thinking in regard to the King's position during the referendum. Press reports and statements preferring the King's personal rule, pending the referendum, were also floated in order to make the outcome of the referendum credible, fair and impartial. Former minister D.R. Regmi claimed that workers of the partyless Panchayat System were provided with all facilities including travelling and dearness allowances through the

<sup>24</sup>Some pro-party leaders held the view that the King's position will be unchallenged even after the referendum.

<sup>25</sup>*Gorkhapatra* and *Rising Nepal*, August 19, [and *The Statesman*, August 20, 1979.

state treasury for electioneering and propagating the cause of the Panchayat system. Ridiculing the argument that the victory of the Panchayat System would automatically bring democracy, he stated that without parties and “without any opposition, it is not possible to have democracy and no amount of social reforms can make a cow out of a donkey.”<sup>26</sup>

The pro multi-party leaders were also concerned about the alleged ‘tilt’ of King Birendra towards the partyless system. B.P. Koirala often expressed the opinion that “any ‘tilt’ apparent or real would be harmful to the monarchy itself. If the King were to ‘tilt’ towards the Panchayat side and if the panchayat side won the referendum by 60 per cent to 40 per cent, the 40 per cent not voting for the Panchayat system would forever be alienated from the Crown.” If the multi-party side were to win despite the King’s ‘tilt’ the consequences would be even more grimmer. “The virtue of monarchy is that it is not subject to votes and it is there because of the unanimous support of the people,”<sup>27</sup> stated B.P. But politics does not always move along with the views of some political leaders. Several intervening variables affect the dynamics of change, and did this happen during the referendum. Moreover, it was justifiable for the King to feel close to the Panchayat system to which he and his father, King Mahendra, had been providing active leadership. The referendum in this sense had been announced only to know the people’s feelings towards the system.

The political style of King Birendra had also undergone a change after the May declaration. Politicians representing both camps were received in audience with a view to ascertaining their opinions on Nepal’s politics and challenges confronting it.<sup>28</sup>

### *The King and Multi-party Leaders*

The entire political scenario started changing during the referendum, and political leaders hitherto treated as *persona non grata* in the Palace were rehabilitated along with certain Panchas. The former Prime Minister, B.P. Koirala, who claimed himself as the

<sup>26</sup>*The Times of India*, November 13, 1979.

<sup>27</sup>*The Statesman*, September 29, 1979.

<sup>28</sup>King Birendra was alleged to have conferred with both opposition leaders and panchayat supporters either by inviting them collectively or by granting them audience individually. These leaders discussed pros and cons of the partyless and multi-party systems—the two choices on trial.

chief spokesman of the multi-party side, developed his hypothesis stating that the nature of political alignment evident in the 1960s and the 70s had been transformed after the King's decision to hold referendum. Pressed as he was by the then emerging political trends in the country, the King could no longer isolate the democratic camp since his interests and those of the democrats coincided. Other multi-party leaders did not, however, subscribe to B.P.'s view, because B.P. alone was not the factor to be reckoned with in the current political equation. All the multi-party leaders got access to the Palace. In the context of Nepal, this was not a small gain as it could establish a rapport between the Palace and the diverse political forces. The bitterness existing between the Palace and the opposition was suddenly transformed into cordiality. However, it was yet to be tested how that atmosphere was going to be kept unaffected by the verdict of the referendum.

Most of the opposition leaders also drew the people's notice to the "vicious circle" surrounding the King, and maintained that the bold political initiative taken by the King was likely to be frustrated by this circle which had been powerful in Nepal from 1960. But the opposition leaders' dialogues with the King did not produce any desired effect, particularly in regard to the opposition leaders' desire to holding the referendum under the auspices of a neutral government. All opposition leaders directed their fury more on B.P. Koirala than on the King for the non-fulfilment of their pre-conditions. This was beneficial to the panchayat camp, because what the Panchas were expected to defend, was defended by B.P. himself. All the multi-party leaders discussed at length about the position of the monarchy in Nepal. The communist leader, Man Mohan Adhikari, was on record to have stated that "so long as there is Pashupatinath (God Pashupati) in Nepal, we accept the King."<sup>29</sup>

The cordial relationship between the King and the opposition leaders was primarily based on psychological considerations, for the latter were apparently trying to drive a wedge between the King and the Panchas who were trying to further the prospects of the victory of the partyless system. The Panchas were successful to

<sup>29</sup>Addressing a mass meeting at Hetaunda in Makawanpur district, Man Mohan Adhikari expressed this opinion which was repeatedly told on other occasions also. See *Nepal Times* and *Samaj*, October 28, 1979.

outwit them by spreading the rumour that multi-party victory would undermine if not abolish the Kingship, and some party leaders fell headlong into the booby trap. Even B.P. Koirala who had been maintaining a moderate view since his return to Nepal in 1976, was unable to maintain his poise during the referendum period. He went on record saying that the future parliament should have the power to control the army as in England. Later he stated that (after the referendum) the constitution would be reviewed in the light of the result of the referendum. If the referendum was won by him (i.e. the multi-party side) by an overwhelming majority, the constitution would be framed accordingly, but if the victory was by a simple majority (51-49) then the situation could be quite different.<sup>30</sup> These statements were valid in view of B.P.'s belief in constitutional monarchy, but in the given context, these statements helped the Panchayat camp. Later many other Nepali Congress leaders followed suit insinuating a circumscribed role for monarchy in Nepal.<sup>31</sup> Keeping the King's consecrated position intact, the doctrine of popular will was being given a trial in the country. King Birendra himself had referred to it while proclaiming the referendum. As "power needs ideas and legitimation the way a conventional bank needs investment policies and the confidence of its depositors,"<sup>32</sup> the mutual recognition of the King's position and parties' existence was going to be a new experiment in Nepal. Keeping this reality in view, these statements of B.P. and other leaders in regard to the future of the monarchy in the country were untimely to say the least.

### *The King and External Powers*

To the extent that the mass media in the West and India highlighted the anti-system trends, foreign governments were careful in declaring their views on the national referendum. The Indian leaders, particularly belonging to the Janata Party, also kept quiet

<sup>30</sup>B.P. Koirala expressed these views while replying to questions in talk programmes arranged by the Pokhara and Rajbiraj Bar Associations. See *Rastra Pukar*, Vol. 10, 1979.

<sup>31</sup>On the eve of the referendum, Bharat Shamsheer, a leader of the NC, addressed a public meeting at Naxal in Kathmandu in which he was alleged to have used such language.

<sup>32</sup>Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), p. 16.

after the announcement of the referendum. The Americans too had every reason to be satisfied since President Carter's human rights policy was considered to be gaining ground in this part of the world also. In American calculation, the referendum "was a major undertaking" to introduce a change in the political system.<sup>33</sup> It had been well understood in the then obtaining condition that the American policy in Nepal was concerned with forging 'reconciliation' between the King and the democratic force so as to ensure stability with change. When the King announced the referendum putting the 19-year old Panchayat System on trial, it was considered as a bold step towards democratization.

The People's Republic of China, Nepal's immediate neighbour, gave a factual reporting of the referendum announcement. By any calculation, China had nothing to gain from the national referendum, for the system which was likely to be introduced after the verdict would not necessarily be an ideological ally of China. For China it was the government's policy which mattered and not the system. At a time when China itself was undergoing changes in both ideological and organizational terms, its preference for a particular system was untenable. Yet along with India it must have entertained certain apprehensions that other forces could fish in Nepal's troubled political waters. India could have been sensitive to the likely repercussions of the burgeoning Sino-American axis in Nepal; in India's strategic parameter Nepal's role was vital for security and stability in the south Asian region. Yet America's perception of stability in Nepal as a common issue was hardly to be discounted by either of the three powers—China, India and US.

Nepal's international status was further enhanced by the announcement of the referendum. The foreign policy issue which was dormant for several years came into sharp focus during the referendum. The former Prime Minister, B.P. Koirala, was the first politician to generate controversy over certain issues relating to Nepal's relations with neighbours, as well as relating to Nepal's peace zone proposal which had been enunciated by King Birendra in 1975. B.P.'s assertion that India was a brother, and China a friend was interpreted as a strategy for undoing Nepal's policy of equidistance pursued by Nepal since 1955. B.P. stated that relationship between neighbours was governed by the "mutuality of self-

<sup>33</sup>See Douglas Heck, *Nepal in 1980: The Year of the Referendum*, p. 181.



interests.” “More points of contacts or mutual interest with one neighbour than with another would determine the pattern of relationship. If this state of affairs gives rise to ‘special relationship’, one cannot help it,”<sup>34</sup> he added. Many other politicians not subscribing to this view criticized him for making such an “imbalanced statement” on foreign policies. The Panchas and the leftists interpreted B.P.’s view as ‘pro-Indian’. In 1975 when B.P. was in India, he had stated that it was imperative on the part of India to support Nepali democrats in order to reduce the prospect of the rise of communism in Nepal. This statement was linked with the above stated view to brand him a puppet of India.

King Birendra’s China trip, which he undertook in September 1979, was partly a routine affair and partly a result of controversies generated by political circles. Nepal’s support for the Chinese line on the Kampuchean issue had considerably helped to create an understanding between Nepal and China. Nepal’s permanent representative to the United Nations had said, “The Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea in December 1978” and in spite of “almost universal condemnation of that aggression, it seems that the Vietnamese have come to stay in Kampuchea.”<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, Nepal’s reaction to the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan was similar to its view on Kampuchea as the King asked the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from that country. Coming as it did in the wake of international condemnation of the Soviet interference in another country’s internal affairs, Nepal’s attitude could have received Chinese sympathy and support.

The Chinese and the American concern over the alleged Soviet activities in Nepal during the anti-regime movement had been understandable. There was a rumour that four officials of the Soviet embassy in Kathmandu were asked to leave Nepal, because their activities were objectionable to the Nepali government. This rumour was neither officially confirmed nor denied. Shortly thereafter, a New Delhi-based correspondent of an Indian daily created a stir in Kathmandu’s political circles when he declared that King Birendra, on a private visit to the Indian capital in September, had discussed with the Indian leaders about the increasing Soviet activities in Nepal, and the correspondent commented that “unless effective steps

<sup>34</sup>B.P. Koirala’s interview with *Weekly Mirror* (Kathmandu), July 20, 1979.

<sup>35</sup>*Rising Nepal*, November 20, 1979.

were taken to stop the Soviet interference in Nepal, China would not sit quiet for long. This situation would convert Nepal into a hotbed of international tension, and intrigue.<sup>36</sup> King Birendra's message to the nation on his return to Nepal in the last week of September also warned the Nepali people to be vigilant of colonialism with attractive slogans" and a "cold-war like situation in the South Asian sub-continent."<sup>37</sup>

Why King Birendra chose New Delhi to express his anxiety over the alleged foreign powers' activities in Nepal was significant. New Delhi has a strong Soviet lobby which generally upholds the Soviet role in the South and the South-west Asian regions without any reservation. As the Nepal-Soviet relation was in the low-key, the Soviet Union had been dragging its feet in augmenting economic assistance to Nepal. Moreover, the Soviet Union was not happy with the Nepali government when it welcomed the Sino-Japanese treaty of peace and friendship opposed to "hegemony"—an euphemism denigrating the Soviet Union. In view of the Soviet opposition to the signing of the treaty, observers in Nepal did not fail to find a 'tilt' in Nepal's foreign policy towards China vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Thus King Birendra presumably wanted to convey his feelings through India, because Indian 'security' in the northern region could be threatened if the Chinese were provoked to retaliate against the Soviet activities. When India itself was trying to improve its relations with China, it was not prepared to side with the Soviet if there was a conflict between China and the Soviet Union in this region. How India could risk a further deterioration of its relations with China when the Soviet aggressiveness was steadily on the increase in the region. Nepal's concern over the big power rivalry in the south of the Himalayas and its grave consequences for a small country like Nepal had thus been explicitly conveyed. And King Birendra did it after visiting Beijing which might have made the Nepali monarch cognizant of China's sensitiveness about this issue.

Nepal's adherence to the doctrine of non-interference in other's internal affairs and recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity has received a general support in the country. All political forces, except the pro-Moscow faction of the Nepal Communist Party,

<sup>36</sup>*The Statesman* (New Delhi), September 22, 1979.

<sup>37</sup>*Rising Nepal*, September 26, 1979.

criticized the Soviet action in Kampuchea and Afghanistan. People at large also started realizing that Nepal was likely to attract the attention of super and regional powers in their search for their strategic thrust into the region. What was the actual Soviet strength in Nepal was never realized, but the anti-Soviet lobby had been successful in highlighting the growing Soviet menace in the country.

External attention with which opposition forces were trying to influence political events in Nepal before the declaration of the national referendum was no longer effective after May 1979. The King's handling of foreign policy was credible and it was receiving broadbased support. China, India and the United States were in agreement that no outside forces should try to meddle in Nepal's domestic affairs. It was therefore realized that the King's external manoeuvrability which was rather reduced in the pre-referendum period had been restored after the May 1979 declaration.

The reduction in external manoeuvrability of the King did not however mean that Nepal's relations with the world outside suffered a set back in the 1970s. The quantum of foreign aid flowing into Nepal demonstrated that the Royal regime was establishing perfect rapport with countries, big or small, despite occasional misunderstandings. Domestic opposition politics did never come as a barrier to the flow of foreign assistance into Nepal. From a foreign policy point of view, the 1970s could be considered as a period of achievement especially in the context of Nepal-India relation with Nepal adroitly dealing with both the emergency regime and the Janata rule in India. In 1978, the Nepali authorities appeared to be trying to grasp the linkage between the changing external situation and domestic political opposition. The Janata Party with a bias for the Nepali Congress had voted out Mrs Indira Gandhi's party. It was to the credit of the Royal regime that it could maintain good relationship with neighbours, particularly with China and India, without conceding any political demand to the opponents of the partyless system.

Nepal's relations with India were more cordial than ever before. The ruling Janata coalition, which had shown its abrasive posture before forming the government, appeared to be maintaining a two-tier relationship—one at the state level and another at the party level. The Janata leaders' pro-Nepali Congress statements did never stand on the way in increasing bilateral economic relations; India

accepted Nepal's long standing demands for separate treaties on trade and transit. The Indian initiative for providing trade and transit facilities was followed by a similar agreement between Nepal and Bangladesh. These new developments provided land-locked Nepal adequate transit facilities to Bangladesh and to the third countries.

Despite the friendly relations subsisting between the two countries, the Indian and the Nepali leaders did not come to an understanding over King Birendra's proposal that Nepal be declared a zone of peace. It showed that neither the Janata and nor the Indira Gandhi's government was prepared to change the mutual security obligation as guaranteed by the treaty of peace and friendship of 1950. On basic issues, the two governments policies were similar, despite the Janata governments efforts for promoting more understanding between India and its neighbours. Nor did the two sides agree over issues relating to joint river projects, especially the 3,600 megawatt Karnali Project in western Nepal. India wanted to make it a joint venture thereby preventing third parties from entering into multilateral agreements as suggested by Bangladesh and Nepal. It was noted, however, that these differences did not prevent the then Prime Minister Bista from expressing satisfaction over India-Nepal relations when he said that India-Nepal relations "had never been better, not even in 1950-51."<sup>38</sup>

The Chinese and the US assistance was also continuing, notwithstanding President Carter's threat to cut down American economic aid to countries allegedly violating human rights. Whatever psychological problems had been created by the issue of human rights were overcome after the declaration of the national referendum. And even before it, Nepal's human rights record had been upgraded by the Carter's administration when several political prisoners were released from jail in 1978-79.<sup>39</sup> How the Carter administration saw Nepal as a zone of stability could be realized by President Carter's laudatory remarks after the verdict of the referendum. Carter said:

<sup>38</sup>See S. Nihal Singh, "Nepal to-day-II: walking the tight-rope," *The Statesman* (Delhi), November 8, 1979.

<sup>39</sup>See *Report on Human Rights Practices in Countries Receiving U.S. Aid*, (report submitted to the committee on foreign relations US senate and committee on foreign affairs US House of Representatives by the department of state, February 8, 1979), pp. 599-603.

Under the leadership of its monarchy, Nepal has progressed significantly in orderly economic, political and social development since the historic revolution in 1951 . . . The recent national referendum in Nepal succeeded in engaging the Nepali people's participation in deciding Nepal's political future. We are confident that the process of building up representative political institutions in accord with the genius of the Nepali people will continue. We also believe that your success in these efforts will contribute to the interest we share in maintaining stability in Asia and ensuring Nepal's continued freedom.<sup>40</sup>

Appreciating President Carter's gesture, the local papers wrote editorials stating that the US attitude towards Nepal was realistic and was no longer coloured by preconceived political notions. The national referendum appeared to have convinced the US government that Nepal was making endeavours for strengthening democratic institutions.<sup>41</sup>

United States and India were the two countries primarily concerned about the liberalization of the political process in Nepal. When the King decided to put the 19-year old Panchayat System led by him on public trial, these two powers were more than happy. The political leaders, the mass media and the government leaders were watching the new political developments during the referendum. The political forces opposed to the system displayed their strength as well as weaknesses during the period which, in turn, provided the King and the external powers with new perspectives. Gripped by unrest, demonstrations and normless activities, the people in general were fed with the idea that such disorder was inevitable under the multi-party system. The external powers were believed to have adopted a neutral posture regarding the national referendum, and in the context of the referendum neutrality was a misnomer for tacit support. With the coming of the Soviet Union to the doorsteps of Pakistan, India, despite its formal treaty relationship with the Soviet Union, had reasons to be worried.

King Birendra did not appear to be naive in grappling with the emergent international impact on the maintenance of the domestic political equilibrium. When he responded to the external develop-

<sup>40</sup>*Rising Nepal*, September 17, 1980.

<sup>41</sup>See *Gorkhapatra*, *Rising Nepal* and *Himali Bela*, September 18, 1980.

ments by adopting measures to the political climate in Nepal, he showed an appreciable grasp of popular feelings. It may be inferred that when the King realized that the external situation was solidly behind his move, the May 1980 referendum was held.

### *Ethnic Groups and Partyless System*

Not only did the referendum announcement produce a new political climate for the first time since the dissolution of the parliamentary system in 1960, but it also brought different ethnic and other groups to the scene. The resurgence of ethnic or tribal groups was revealing in the showing of their discontent over the discriminatory policies adopted against them for over the years. Most of them appeared restive; they began mobilizing support by holding a conference of the 'mongols'. And, for the first time in Nepal's history, the Gurung, the Limbu, the Tamang, the Lepcha and others came out in the open declaring that they had been denied their legitimate rights and that the mongoloid communities had been suppressed by the upper caste Hindus, particularly by the Brahmins and the Chhetris. The new wave of regional and ethnic activities suggested that the Panchayat decades had been playing less integrating role than what was generally claimed by the official circles. How the absence of political freedom does help to intensify regional, ethnic and tribal tensions was evident in the psychology of the newly articulate groups. It does not mean that all efforts made under the Panchayat system over the years were totally futile, however. The country's political and economic elites mainly spring from the higher caste or class groups and compared with the number of the mongoloid people, their percentage is not low in political and bureaucratic structure. It is true that the authority structure in Nepal is based on tradition and history, and the Hindu value system has an important role to play in determining this structure. History and tradition bear witness to the fact that the people of the different ethnic groups had never been the insiders in the power structure, but army which was and still is the main stay of power in the country is never denied.

The announcement of the national referendum provided opportunities to all segments of society to ventilate their simmering discontent. The conference of the 'mongols' put up the demands for the recognition of the Nepal Samvat (i.e. era calendar) instead of the Vikram Samvat which commemorated King Vikramaditya of

ancient India and for promotion of regional languages, etc. It was stated that without their help and bravery, the making of modern Nepal started by King Prithvi Narayan Shah would not have been possible. In fact, they asserted, they had fought against the then tiny principalities in order to forge the Kingdom of Nepal under Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Compared with the 'mongols' the Tarai Hindus have not raised their voice despite the general feeling of relative deprivation of privileges and power. But the situation began changing fast after 1951. According to Gaige, two additional determinants of success in national politics have gained importance since the 1951 revolution. The first is identification with the hill culture, and the second education.<sup>42</sup> With the development of consciousness in the Tarai, these people have been demanding a more proportionate distribution of placements in the decision-making structure. And the relatively free and liberal atmosphere created as a consequence of referendum announcement seemed to have emboldened the Tarai people, like others, to come out with their grievances.

### *Educational Scene*

The new education system introduced in 1973 "for the attainment of the system-goal and its cardinal plank aimed at realising an exploitation-free society" also showed trends accelerating of disintegration along with the trial of the partyless system. The new education plan had the objective of producing "citizens, who with full faith in the country and the Crown, will conduct themselves in accordance with the Panchayat system."<sup>43</sup> With a view to achieving national solidarity through planned socialization the new education system was suddenly superimposed on the old structure without making any attempt to establish its viability in the Nepali context. It not only replaced the old Indian modelled education system but also aimed at creating a new political culture in consonance with conformist ideology of the system. Student associations and student unions were not permitted after the promulgation of the new system. The annual examination system was immediately changed

<sup>42</sup>Frederick H. Gaige, *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal* (Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, Delhi, 1975), p. 159.

<sup>43</sup>See *National Education System: Plan for 1971-75* (Ministry of Education, HMG, 1971).

into semesters, and the authority of grading students' academic performance was invested with individual teachers. Most of the university and college teachers were unfamiliar with the new system, and the Nepali situation being totally different from the West, it was quite unrealistic for the decision makers in expecting excellent results of the system.

The irony of making student evaluation an integral part of the teaching was that students conspired to learn less by obstructing the instructional process on the one hand, and insisted that questions be set only from the portion of the course actually covered in the lecture rooms, on the other. The teacher had thus no choice but to teach what his students wanted, examinations could be held only on the courses which the students desired.<sup>44</sup>

A kind of academic uncertainty was evident when the plan which was introduced with unprecedented enthusiasm began modifying and even completely changing its format and its content. Within a short period, the National Educational Committee took an initiative to study the implementation aspects of the plan. Mid-term and full-term evaluations also effected certain changes in the plan when flaws during the course of implementation were highlighted by these studies. The system-principles were being gradually compromised with the re-introduction of the centralized examination system. The University authorities more often than not had to succumb to political pressures. How the university came under the influence of the *Rastravadi Swatantra Vidyarthi Mandal* for hiring and firing of university teachers was stated unambiguously by the then Rector of the Tribhuvan University:

Tribhuvan university should also clarify its relations with the Rastravadi Swatantra Vidyarthi Mandal. The efforts of some of its members to pressurize the University through the political sector particularly in hiring and firing the university teachers should be resisted. The *Pajani* of the University teachers is none of the Mandals' business.<sup>45</sup>

The solution of this particular problem took some time. When

<sup>44</sup>Kamal P. Malla, *The Road to Nowhere* (Sajha, Kathmandu, 1979), p. 97.

<sup>45</sup>Kamal P. Malla, *The Role of the Rector* (Restricted cyclostyled report submitted to the NESP full-term Evaluation team, 1979), p. 22.



the student movement gained momentum in 1979, the Royal commission formed by King Birendra to investigate into the Student problems fulfilled almost all students' demands, both academic and non-academic, including the dissolution of the Mandal which was a protege of the government.

During the referendum period, the education system, which was as much assailed by the opposition as the partyless system, was also on trial. The students encouraged by the referendum felt that they were invincible powerful enough to make or break both the political and the education systems. The teachers also thought that they could have paralyzed the education system had the government failed in meeting their demands. The teachers, like the students, were trying to assert themselves. As if to give a larger context to the students and the teachers' agitations, all sorts of employees belonging both to the private and the public sectors did simultaneously make a show of their grievances. In sum, all these developments during the referendum period, showed that the entire nation was in a ferment when the partyless system was put on trial.

## Chapter 5

### Panchas Reassert: National Scene after the Verdict

The May 2, 1980 national referendum held for showing a clear popular preference either for retaining the partyless system or for giving grounds to the multi-party system did not leave any trace of ambiguity; a clear majority to the 20-year old Panchayat model was given. Out of 7,155,438 voters, 4,441,417 (66 per cent) participated in the polls. On the eve of the referendum, on April 29, 1980, King Birendra once again reminded his countrymen of their "foremost duty to discharge their responsibility towards the people in an impartial and honest manner." He further stated that "through decent and civilized behaviour, we must be able to prove that the people of Nepal are really devoted to the ideal of democracy."<sup>1</sup>

The polling was by and large peaceful in all parts of the Kingdom, exception some districts such as Dhanusha, Mahottari, and Syangja where clashes occurred between the partyless supporters and multi-party activists. Opposition leaders, particularly B.P. Koirala, Man Mohan Adhikari, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala and partyless leaders, Matrika Prasad Koirala and Nagendra Prasad Rijal, and a host of others came out with statements and reactions expressing satisfaction over the peaceful polls. According to Koirala, "The faith that the Nepali people have shown in the restoration of democracy heralds a bright future for it." Unlike others, Koirala was certain that the polls had been held

<sup>1</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, April 30, 1980.

in a fair and impartial manner. Another multi-party leader, D.R. Regmi, thanked the election commission for the "excellent" arrangements made for the polls. Similarly, three communist leaders, Man Mohan Adhikari, Kamal Koirala and Mahesh Prasad in their statements released at Biratnagar commended the honesty, dedication and efficiency of the officials concerned. Similarly, the partyless camp also came out with statements appreciating the peaceful polls. The national Pancha Convention, organized for Pancha solidarity during the referendum campaigns, described the peaceful process as a "proof of the evolution of democracy in Nepal." The statements given by the Panchayat stalwarts, including the former Prime Minister, Tulsi Giri, in which they did not confine themselves to call it a peaceful performance but went on to urge their adversaries to accept the verdict in the same amicable and peaceful atmosphere in which the referendum had been held.<sup>2</sup> Two considerations could have presumably motivated them to say this. The Panchayat stalwarts were quite sure about the victory of the partyless side. Tulsi Giri was more than candid when he, by way of expressing his reactions to the unruly behaviour shown by the alleged multi-party supporters at Kathmandu on the eve of the polls, had challenged that he did not require the votes of cities like Kathmandu, because, he was confident of getting plus votes in rural areas where Panchayat had its roots. The Panchayat leaders had a fear that the victory of the partyless side was likely to trigger off mass indignation and violent reactions in the country. It was therefore imperative on the multi-party supporters to restrain themselves to forge unity on the basis of the three principles to be followed by King Birendra while amending the constitution.

### *The Verdict*

The political scenario took a sudden turn after the formal announcement of the referendum result. The result was announced twelve days after the polling. The counting took two days and nights. Although all communications between the election commission and the media were controlled so as to prevent any leakage before the formal announcement, conflicting reports indicated that the Panchayat side was poised for victory. A member of multi-

<sup>2</sup>*Rising Nepal*, May 5-9, 1980, see also *Nepal Press Digest*, Vol. 24, No. 19, 1980, pp. 187-188.

party leader charged the government with deliberately leaking information through the governments' own channels. Kathmandu's political circles knew the verdict on May 13 evening; its final result was however announced by the chairman of the commission on May 14. He was followed by King Birendra who, an hour later, proclaimed over the Radio Nepal:

...The referendum has shown that the people of Nepal are determined to retain with timely reforms the partyless Panchayat System which our revered father, the late King Mahendra had instituted nearly two decades ago after deeply pondering over the situation prevailing in and outside the country. We consider the sacred will of the entire people to retain the partyless Panchayat System with timely reforms as the foundation of Nepal's political system. We shall always respect the peoples' desire as demonstrated through their will. In our message on the occasion of King Mahendra Memorial and Constitution Day, last year, we had outlined the basic reforms we had considered immediately necessary in the Panchayat System. We shall introduce amendments in the constitution within some time according to these proposals in consultation with all sides.<sup>3</sup>

Addressing the voters preferring the multi-party side, King Birendra said, "Ideological differences are natural for the development of democracy. Under this system it is equally essential to comply with the decision of the majority and respect the views of the minority." At the same time, obviously with the feeling that the victory of the partyless side would not be easily acceptable to the defeated side, he sounded a warning that "no one should venture to undermine or play mockery with the will and mandate of our people." An attitude of "insolence, anarchy or violence goes against the very principles of democracy and peace," the King added. In a conciliatory tone, he also urged all sections of the Nepali people to join in the single mainstream for the welfare of the nation.<sup>4</sup>

Reactions to the victory of the partyless side by 54.7 per cent as against the multi-party (45.3) were characterized by three main

<sup>3</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, May 15, 1980.

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

trends: (i) The Panchayat side was satisfied with the victory, however, the tone of victory of the Panchas was rather subdued. (ii) The welcome to the result was qualified with hope that respect of the minority would be duly shown in the future political set up. (iii) There were some negative reactions refusing to accept the defeat.

The first trend was shown by the prime minister and other Panchas. On the day of the announcement of the verdict, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa held a press conference in which he urged everybody to join the national mainstream as shown by the referendum. Assuming that some untoward incidents might occur as an outcome of a sense of victory in one camp and frustration and anger in another, he said that this unique moment in the history of the nation demanded tolerance, patience, and peace more than ever before.<sup>5</sup> The Pancha Convention committee said that the verdict was in conformity with Nepal's culture and tradition. It also urged everybody to forget party differences in order to join the partyless Panchayat System. Referring to the support shown by the people to the panchayat system "under the active leadership of the King", Tulsī Giri emphasized 'national reconciliation' among all political forces. At the same time he declared his desire to retire from active politics and lead the life of a peaceful citizen. Similarly, a host of others, including the former prime ministers, Kirtinidhi Bista and Nagendra Prasad Rijal, and former minister Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya urged for establishing peace and harmony in the country. But Upadhyaya was conspicuous by his statement when he said that the percentage of votes secured by the multi-party camp showed that a large section of the people had realized the need for an organized opposition.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, another set of leaders welcomed the verdict with critical remarks. B.P. Koirala, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, Rishikesh Shaha and some others belonged to this set. The most hurt and humiliated persons among the leaders of the multi-party side was the perennially controversial figure, B.P. Koirala, who had not only rejected the pre-conditions for insuring a free and impartial referendum but had also developed his own hypothesis that the partyless system was not going to win. Yet, Koirala fulfilled his earlier commitment that he would accept the result of the referendum

<sup>5</sup>*Rising Nepal*, May 15, 1980.

<sup>6</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, May 15, 1980.

even if its mandate was in favour of the system which he was opposing for over twenty years. He thus stated:

In accordance with democratic norms and according to my own statements, I accept the result of the referendum, however *unexpected* and *inexplicable* (emphasis supplied) it may be. The support that the multi-party side has received is massive, and this support receives unusual importance because people cast their votes in an adverse situation. I appeal to all comrades and workers, as well as to democratic elements, not to lose heart but to wait and watch and see what turn of events will take and then decide how we can play an effective role. . . The fundamental rights of the people are inalienable and cannot be taken away on any excuse, referendum or otherwise. . . The votes cast for the multi-party side are votes committed to democracy. We will have to build our democratic strategy in the coming days on the basis of this committed support.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Koirala, his two senior colleagues, Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, did not accept the verdict on the grounds that “the entire administrative resources and machinery had been misused during the past eleven months in the context of the referendum.” Singh went further to say that no political crisis had been solved by the referendum, rather it had sharpened the conflict. Bhattarai believed that the Nepali people had opted for “slavery in preference of freedom.” Similarly, other multi-party leaders, S.P. Upadhyaya, Dilli Raman Regmi, Tanka Prasad Acharya, Rishikesh Shaha accepted the defeat with reservations. Attributing the defeat of the multi-party side as much to “the arrogance of some unrestrained and self-seeking elements” as to the adverse situation faced by the multi-party side, Upadhyaya pinned his hope on the King’s promise to reform the constitution. A number of multi-party leaders belonging to both the left and democratic camps did not accept the referendum verdict. The leader of the banned Nepali Congress, Bhadrakali Mishra said that the “people of Nepal will oppose” the system foisted on them through referendum. Man Mohan Adhikari alleged that there had been tampering of ballot boxes, and also pledged that he will continue to struggle

<sup>7</sup>*Nabin Khabar*, May 14, 1980. See also *The Statesman*, May 15, 1980.

for the restoration of party system and a democratic constitution to be drafted by the elected representative of the people.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Bala Ram Upadhyaya, another leader of the Puspa Lal-faction of the Nepal Communist Party, stated that the victory of the partyless side was possible due to gun-firing, booth-capturing on the day of election, rigging and conspiracy. He refused to accept the popular will demonstrated through "rigging and conspiracy". Other extremist factions which showed their reaction after some time tried to justify their earlier stand that the "referendum drama" was not likely to go in favour of the multi-party side.<sup>9</sup>

### *Voting Pattern*

The referendum result had given a mandate to the partyless side by 54.7 per cent. The multi-party camp polled 45.3 per cent thereby creating a narrow margin of ten per cent. The high percentage of votes polled in the referendum was remarkable in a country like Nepal where difficult geographical situation and topography did not hinder the voters from participating. One-third voters were in the central development region, about a quarter in the eastern development region, and the remaining 43 per cent in the two western development regions. The percentage of eligible voters by geographical regions were as follows: 48.1 per cent in 37 district, 38 per cent in 18 plain districts, 7.7 per cent in 17 mountain districts and 6 per cent in inner Tarai districts.

One main feature of the result was the panchayat sides' lead in all fourteen administrative zones of the country. Its nettings in the mountain regions were 88.4 per cent in the western region, 73.2 per cent in the far western region, 71.3 per cent in the central region and 65.7 per cent in the eastern region. In the hill regions, the Panchayat secured 65.4 per cent in the eastern region, 64.3 per cent in the central, 62.4 per cent in the west and 53.52 per cent in the far west. In the inner Tarai, the multi-party won in the east by 65.2 per cent and in the farwest by 54.3 per cent. The multi-party secured 52.2 per cent in the Tarai, 55.5 per cent in the central Tarai, 51.5 per cent in the far western Tarai. The multi-party lost by 48.3 per

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, Later addressing a mass rally at Kathmandu, Adhikari charged the Government with rigging elections by printing 4 lakh ballot papers at Sanothimi. These were additional papers which determined verdict in favour of the partyless system.

<sup>9</sup>*Nabin Khabar*, May 15, 1980.

*Pattern of Voting*

<i>Geographic Region</i>	<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>Percentage Polled</i>	<i>Invalid Votes</i>	<i>Percentage Invalid</i>	<i>Valid Votes</i>	<i>Panchayat Votes</i>	<i>%M</i>	<i>Multi-Party</i>	<i>%</i>
15 Mountain Districts (Regional %)	555,913 (7.7)	340,338	61.2	25,061	7.3	321,617	228,617	71.1	86,658 (4.3)	28.9
37 Hill Districts (Regional %)	3,461,068	2,127,615	61.4	158,81	7.4	1,967,295	1,126,1.69	57.2	844,124 (42.0)	48.8
5 Inner Tarai District (Regional %)	433,233 (6.0)	278,780	64.3	70,645	7.4	258,135	87,895 (3.6)	34.0	139,071 (6.9)	66.0
18 Plain Districts (Regional %)	2,747,237 (38.1)	2,066,753	75.2	169,041	8.1	1,897,715	848,754 (34.7)	44.6	938,162 (46.7)	55.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,192,451</b>	<b>4,813,486</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>372,069</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>4,441,417</b>	<b>2,433,452</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<b>2,007,965</b>	<b>45.3</b>

NOTE : Adapted from Harka Gurung, "Nepal: Geography of Referendum," *The Motherland*, June 9, 1980.



cent in the western Tarai.<sup>10</sup>

Districtwise data also shows that out of 75 districts, 54 districts gave an overwhelming victory to the Panchayat side against the multi-party victory in 19 districts. In all mountain and hill districts, except a few in the western hills Panchayat side could establish a comfortable lead over the multi-party side. Even 50 per cent of the Tarai districts (9 out of 18) showed preference for the partyless side. Districts bordering India and having urban centres like Bhadrapur, Rajbiraj, Janakpur, Birganj and Nepalganj voted for the partyless camp, thereby invalidating a popular hypothesis that politically conscious Tarai districts would vote for the multi-party side. Unless a thorough behavioral study is made for assessing the actual conditions determining the referendum, no definite clue to the result would be available. The government, placed as it was on a vantage position, could be one of the factors, but this does not give a complete picture. Siraha which is adjacent to Dhanusha opted for the multi-party system by a big margin, while the latter preferred partyless side.

It was not surprising to note that remote districts such as Dolpa preferred the Panchayat side by the highest 96.4 per cent, while Bhaktapur in Kathmandu valley, considered a strong-hold of leftists, showed its lowest preference by the lowest 34.4 per cent. "The eastern mountain and hill districts remained a compact strong-hold of the partyless," and almost all remote areas and hills showed "overwhelming dominance" of the partyless panchayat side. The multi-party side could wrest support from some western hill, eastern plain and hill districts such as Palpa, Tanahu, Kaski, Kailali, Bardiya, Chitwan, Sarlahi, Siraha and Udaipur, and the three districts in Kathmandu valley. Some districts such as Ilam, Morang, Sunsari, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Rautahat in the east, and Lamjung, Syangja, Rupandehi, Kapilbastu, Argha Khanchi, Gulmi, Dang, Surkhet, Jajarkot, Kanchanpur, Dandeldhura, Baitadi in the west showed moderate multi-party trends. Some of these districts were marginally defeated by the partyless Panchayat.

It was also interesting to see Udaipur in the eastern inner Tarai opting the multi-party by the highest percentage of votes (65.11 per cent). Very narrow victory of the multi-party side was noticed

<sup>10</sup>See Harka Gurung, "Nepal: Geography of Referendum," *The Motherland*, June 9, 1980.

in Doti which showed its preference by 50.69 per cent. The partyless Panchayat bagged the highest percentage of votes in the Karnali zone whereas Gandaki zone recorded the lowest percentage in its favour. It was also surprising that only 0.98 per cent votes were declared invalid in Manang district, but other districts with a higher literacy rate and consciousness showed larger number of invalid votes.

An analysis of the pattern of voting for and against the two choices of the national referendum shows that urban areas with high percentage of literate people seemed to have opted for the multi-party side. The capital's three districts—Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, were the case in point. But to the surprise of many, some hill districts voted for the multi-party and some Tarai districts did the opposite. These were highly intractable trends. It is also said that "it would be misleading or even spurious to try to explain the voting pattern on hill-plain dichotomy and such cultural factors as ethnicity or religion".<sup>11</sup>

The multi-party supporters were unanimous in seeing the government's hand in influencing the referendum. It is also stated by the then American Ambassador to Nepal, Douglas Heck who states that "there are numerous indications that the government did in fact use its powers to advance the panchayat cause."<sup>12</sup> Multi-party leaders were however consoling themselves that despite unlimited resources and power utilized by the Panchayat government for achieving overwhelming support to the 20-year old partyless system, the margin of victory was quite narrow. Some of them drew comfort from the royal proclamation that "all Nepalis are henceforth Panchas", and that the views of the 45.3 per cent would be respected.<sup>13</sup> Yet, such a promise did not pacify others. Mrs Sahana Pradhan, the widow of Puspa Lal, was arrested under the Treason Act when she called on the people to struggle for democracy. Some newspapers criticized her for her remark as untenable. "Those who refuse to accept the peoples' verdict must be regarded as enemies

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Douglas Heck, "Nepal in 1980: The Year of Referendum," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 2, February 1981, p. 182.

<sup>13</sup>See the statements of Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, Dilli Raman Regmi, S.P. Upadhyaya, Tanka Prasad Acharya, Rishikesh Shaha, Biswa Bandu Thapa, Rabindra Nath Sharma, Bakhan Singh Gurung, *et al.*, *Nepal Times, Samiksha, Gorkhapatra*, May 14-16, 1980.

of democracy, or, for that matter, of the people, and be Ostracized by all means.”<sup>14</sup>

Two extremist factions—the Marxist-Leninist (ML) and the Fourth Conference faction together with the ‘Rohit’ faction of Bhaktapur did not accept the defeat. ‘Rohit’ alias Narayan Man, President of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Organization, attributed the defeat of the multi-party to the path of boycott followed by “certain anarchical elements”.<sup>15</sup> On the other side, the two extremist factions which had called for boycott of the referendum, appeared to stress that their assessment of the referendum as a collusion of the Royalists and the Nepali Congress had come true. They were of the opinion that the referendum held under the existing situation was going to put a label of popular legitimacy on the Panchayat, thereby confusing the international public opinion about the people’s struggle in Nepal. They also saw the referendum as a conspiratorial move of the King to disintegrate the people’s struggle.<sup>16</sup>

The students who were beginning to feel their clout as a political force to reckon with were humbled by the referendum result. But student groups affiliated with political parties joined the issue by calling on the people to reject the verdict of the referendum. The extremist wings of students rejected the verdict, since the result “vindicated our stand that the referendum was nothing but a fraud and a conspiracy.”<sup>17</sup>

Press reactions to the referendum verdict also polarized into two groups—acceptance and rejection. The Press criticizing the verdict argued that since the verdict did not produce national consensus,

<sup>14</sup>*The Motherland and Himali Bela*, May 19, 1980.

<sup>15</sup>*Sahi Awaz*, May 24, 1980.

<sup>16</sup>For a detailed view of communist factions on the national referendum see *Janmanash*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (Varanasi), 1980, pp. 2-5. According to Nirmal Lama who belongs to the ghartifaction stated in India that Leftist forces must intensify their ideological struggle, reduce areas of difference and emphasize those of unity. He also called for the joint struggle to expand and consolidate the support that has been extended for the multi-party system. See *Iana Jagriti*, May 18, 1980.

<sup>17</sup>The Pro-Congress *Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh* blamed the government for utilizing funds and resources or for unleashing a reign of terror during the referendum. So were the reactions of the Pro-Moscow Nepal Student Federation and extremist-factions supported All Nepal National Independent Union. See *Jwala*, May 24, 1980.

the Panchayat could not be called a national political system. "A system which has been rejected by a number of districts, and which has not been supported by the enlightened section cannot claim to be a national system," wrote a Nepali daily. Putting a question mark, another paper asked, "Has the referendum solved the 20-year old political problem?"<sup>18</sup> Yet many other dailies and weeklies emphasized that the success of the referendum did not lie on the victory of one camp over the other; real success would be seen only when all political forces supporting both camps were integrated in the political process. As the margin of victory was very narrow, it was argued that there could be no development without taking into account the 45 per cent supporters. The partyless side called the verdict a victory of democracy and declared that in the days to come the panchayat system would have a new force because of its democratic image even without the party-system.<sup>19</sup>

Setting a tone of anxiety, the foreign mass media commented in a precise manner the "great divide" in Nepali politics. One Indian daily stated: "The referendum has solved few problems and that the King will need a good deal of dexterity and imagination to steer clear of pitfalls ahead." Another daily attributed the defeat of the multi-party advocates to the over-confidence with which opposition leader Koirala decided to work single-handedly. "Such a confident prediction betrayed their relative inexperience of voting patterns, and ignorance of the regularity with which pollsters and opinion analysts are proved wrong in far more predictable situations in the West."<sup>20</sup> Similar were the comments made by the Western mass media, particularly the B.B.C. and the Voice of America.

The Nepali people, so fiercely divided between the partyless and multi-party camps however showed a considerable degree of restraint and modesty and also democratic norm by acknowledging the verdict of the referendum. The assumptions that there would be a blood bath between the two rival camps, if the partyless side won the referendum proved totally wrong. To quote Heck:

<sup>18</sup>*Nepal Times*, May 19, 1980 and *Kasthamandap*, May 1980.

<sup>19</sup>For a detailed reaction of the Press in general, see *Nepal Press Digest*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 1980. See also weeklies: *Matribhumi*, *Arati*, *Partidhwani*, *Rashtradhwani*, *Samrakshyak*, *Rastrapukar*, *Jan Jagriti*, *Nepal-Post*, *Nava Kiran*, *Weekly Mirror*, *National Star*, May 15-30, 1980.

<sup>20</sup>*The Times of India* (New Delhi), and *The Statesman* (Delhi), May 15, 1980.

The referendum was indeed a significant achievement and a fitting answer to those who assert that a country like Nepal with incredible administrative difficulties and a largely illiterate population cannot successfully conduct national elections or insure popular participation in national business. In fact, the responsible manner in which the people carried out the two opportunities given them to express themselves—1959 national elections and the 1980 referendum as opposed to the much more narrowly based and controlled panchayat elections during the 1960s and 1970s—should encourage those who believe that a partnership of the people acting through their democratically elected representatives and the monarchy is the most likely solution to Nepal's political problems and the best guarantor of political stability and economic progress.<sup>21</sup>

Although reports about the “wave of repression” started dominating the columns of pro-multi-party papers in the post-verdict period, all of these were not true. Despite the official denial that multi-party supporters were harassed and arrested, some people allegedly supporting the multi-party side were indeed arrested under the Arms and Ammunition Act, the People Offenses Act, and Security Act when the government felt that some sorts of preemptive arrests were necessary to inhibit forces inimical to the partyless system. It could, on balance, be said that politics after the referendum had undergone a change with attention being paid by all to the amendment to the constitution in accordance with the guidelines that King Birendra had given on December 16, 1979.

### *New Context, New Debates*

All non-Panchayat political forces were apparently in disarray after the verdict, but they were not necessarily dejected and frustrated. King Birendra's promise to accommodate all of them gave them new hope for developing a new “democratic strategy”. Moreover, the political forces belonging to the multi-party camp had at the moment no cards under their sleeves; they could only enter into yet another round of constitutional debates persuading King Birendra to devise a broadbased constitutional mechanism in which the respectable minority would be accommodated. As a

<sup>21</sup>Douglas Heck, *Nepal in 1980: The Year of the Referendum*, pp. 182-183.

follow up measure, the King, after a week of the announcement of the referendum result, formed an eleven-member Constitution Reform Recommendation Commission (CRRC) with a Supreme Court Judge as its chairman.<sup>22</sup> The Commission's major responsibility was to recommend necessary and appropriate reforms in the constitution, keeping in view the larger interests of the nation and the people as highlighted by the Royal message of December 16, 1979, in the light of the clear majority received by the partyless

<sup>22</sup>Eleven members of the commission were: Basudev Sharma (Chairman), Mrs Kamal Rana, Surendra Bahadur Shrestha, Kamal Thapa, Hira Lal Biswakarma, Jagadish Jha, Randhir Subba, Achyut Raj Regmi, Narendra Chaudhary, Mohammad Iqbal Iraqui and Dhruvabar Singh Thapa (Member-Secretary). Mrs Kamal Rana had been within the Partyless Panchayat system since the very beginning and had worked in different official capacities either in the women's organization or in the National Panchayat or as a member of various officials delegations. She is married to a Rana, Army-General (now retired). Kamal Thapa (Chhetri) was a student in Tribhuvan University. He was one of the founder-members of the *Rastravadi Vidyarthi Mandal* which was disbanded by the Royal Commission while fulfilling students' demands in May 1979. Hira Lal Biswakarma comes from the depressed class (lowest in the Hindu caste-Hierarchy) and was Assistant Minister of Education only a year before. Jagadish Jha (Terai Bahun) was also a staunch Panchayat supporter and had occupied higher offices including the State Minister of education during the 47 days Bista Ministry on the eve of the announcement of the national referendum. Ranadhir Subba (Limbu) originally came from Kalimpong to become the President of the Rashtravadi Gorkha Parishad organized by the Ranas after 1951 revolution. He was Minister, Ambassador and Vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University, and is known as a 'hawk' within the Panchayat camp. Subba had strongly defended the cause of the Partyless system during the referendum campaigns. Narendra Chaudhary was a Tharu from Sunsari district and had served as a Pancha. Mohammad Iqbal Iraqui was a Muslim of Nepalganj in Banke district. He was the member of the Zonal level Back-to-Village National campaign committee after the second amendment to the constitution in 1975 and was well-known for his pro-partyless panchayat view.

Achyut Raj Regmi (Bahun) was the lone member representing the multi-party camp. He was the leader of the banned Nepali Congress since the 1950s. He dissociated with Koirala's Congress after the latter's return to Nepal when he along with his colleagues did not like to stay with Koirala on some personal grounds. He had campaigned for the multi-party during the referendum. Surendra Bahadur Shrestha (Newar) was a college teacher before his appointment as a zonal commissioner after 1972. He had resigned that post in 1980. Another member, Dhruvabar Singh Thapa (Chhetri) was the secretary in the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Panchayat System committed to gradual reforms.

The reaction of the multi-party supporters on the composition of CRRC was not, on the whole, favourable particularly because of the inclusion of political light weights belonging to the victorious camp. The bio-data of the members considerably discouraged both Panchas and their opponents. Despite the weight carried by the multi-party camp, so clearly shown by the referendum, it was represented by only one member. Except the three, all the seven members were Panchas.<sup>23</sup> Moreover the CRRC composition demonstrated community representation rather than political ideologies. Prime Minister Thapa was, however, prompt in responding to the criticism when his attention was drawn to the one-sided representation in the commission, and he stated that "the political leaders should confine themselves to the reforms promised by the King and not to the bio-data of the personnel of the Royal Commission."<sup>24</sup> But rumblings over the non-representation of other diverse communities were heard in the public meeting organized by the Panchayat side to celebrate its victory. A speaker belonging to the Tamang community complained that the Tamangs, who had played a crucial role in ensuring the victory of the partyless camp during the referendum was not represented in the commission.

The CRRC swung into action by soliciting suggestions from different sections of the Nepali society. But most Communist and some Congress leaders including Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai did not give suggestions for the envisaged constitutional reforms. Many of them shared the view that the constitution should provide an opportunity to all people irrespective of political affiliations to join the national 'mainstream'. B.P. Koirala stated that the division of public opinion between 2 million and 2.4 million voters as shown by the referendum represented respectively the wish of the people and that of the King; and the Constitution reform should take full cognizance of this major opinion in

<sup>23</sup>Sahana Pradhan, widow of the communist leader, Pushpa Lal Shrestha, said that since "the commission represented only Panchas, not the people, the need of the hour was for democratic forces to unite and march forward toward democracy." See *Nepal Times*, May 25, 1980. For further reactions of other leaders see *Nepal Post*, *Nabin Khabar*, *Jwala*, *Dainik Nepal*, May 24, 26, and 28, 1980.

<sup>24</sup>See Surya Bahadur Thapa's interview with *India Today*, June 16-30, 1980, p. 77.

the country. Another multi-party leaders, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya and some other leading professionals, pleaded for a bi-cameral legislature instead of the existing unicameral one for properly accommodating minorities, backward classes and persons of eminence in the upper house. Upadhyaya added that the King should have the power to proclaim an emergency on the advice of the Council of Ministers.<sup>25</sup>

Immediately after the announcement of the CRRC, King Birendra promulgated the freedom of speech and public ordinance under Article 57 of the constitution on the advice of the Thapa government. The ordinance among other things restricted the organisation of political parties or organizations with political party objectives.<sup>26</sup> Haunted by the specter of the pre-referendum period, almost all multi-party leaders criticized the ordinance as 'abridging' freedom granted during the referendum. Many of them were of the view that such a step by the government did not indicate that an open and democratic governance was going to emerge under the improved Panchayat System.<sup>27</sup>

The Panchayat members were equally critical of the ordinance. Several members of the National Panchayat took strong exception to it in the house and successfully formed a committee under the Chairmanship of the former Prime Minister, M.P. Koirala, to study

<sup>25</sup>For B.P. Koirala's view see *Rashtrapakar*, Vol. 10, No. 44, 1980 and *Gorkhapatra*, June 21, 1980 and for S.P. Upadhyaya's view see *Nepal Times*, June 19, 1980. Similar arguments and suggestions were advanced by Ganesh Raj Sharma, a Supreme Court Advocate. See Ganesh Raj Sharma, "Prospect for Reforms in the Constitution of Nepal" (Paper presented to a talk programme on constitutional Reforms held under the auspices of Nepal Council of World Affairs, June 14, 1980).

<sup>26</sup>Some features were as follows:

Every Nepali citizen enjoys full freedom of speech, publication and peaceful assembly subject to the constitution. However, no person shall establish or operate political parties and organizations, with party objectives, or indirectly indicate their existence. Nothing shall be permitted or published in the name of any such political party or organization, nor shall any defamatory, false, or exaggerated propaganda be made in this manner. Public meetings may be held, and posters and slogans affixed only at such times and at such places as may be prescribed by the local administration. . ."  
*Nepal Gazette*, Jestha 16, 2037 and *Gorkhapatra*, May 29, 1980.

<sup>27</sup>For negative reactions of Multi-party leaders, see *Nepal Press Digest*, Vol. 24, No. 23, June 9, 1980.



the reactions of Panchas on the ordinance. Subsequently, the committee voiced its conclusion that the ordinance was "illiberal and unnecessary." Humbled by the Panchas, the multi-party leaders and the press in general, the government stated that public meeting had not been restricted, and the meetings as they could be held at certain places with the prior approval of the owners of such places. Yet the press did not fail to criticize the motive of the government as an attempt at suppressing opposition. A local daily wrote that the "verdict of the people should not have been interpreted as a means for eliminating opposition." Similarly, the Bar Association, showing its concern over the "draconian ordinance," declared that the ordinance was seeking to take Nepali to a situation more stringent than which had prevailed before May 24, 1979.<sup>28</sup>

On August 13, the ordinance was amended, thereby a court was designated to exercise the authority to entertain and dispose of cases under this Act, in which the government would be the plaintiff. Appeals against the government, judgement or final decision of this court could be filed with the appropriate regional court. The absolute authority vested earlier with the local administration was thus passed on to the court.<sup>29</sup>

Most of the political leaders who had earlier considered the ordinance as embodying a carrot and stick policy favourably responded to the amendments calling it a 'good portent' in the obtaining political situation.<sup>30</sup> The Panchas opposed to Prime Minister Thapa were more than happy over their successful efforts towards safeguarding freedom in the country.

### *Intra-Panchayat Conflict*

The National Political scene in the post-referendum period was as much characterized by a sense of uncertainty for the future political set up as by conflict within the Panchayat camp. Panchas who

<sup>28</sup>*The Motherland*, June 10, 1979 and *Nepal Press Digest*, Vol. 24, No. 29, June 16, 1980.

<sup>29</sup>*Nepal Rajpatra* (Gazette), August 21, 1980.

<sup>30</sup>*Nepal Times*, August 21, 1980. B.P. Koirala who was then in the Philippines came out with a statement favouring changes. Calling for more liberalization, he said that "there is no half way house between authoritarianism and democracy." Nepal could save itself only through a fullfledged democratic system in which "restraint on the freedom of organisation will be seen obstinately unwarranted." *Nepal Press Digest*, Vol. 25, No. 34, August 25, 1980.

had shown their flexibility during the campaignings were being censored. Some National Panchayat members allegedly supporting the multi-party side were either pressurised to vacate the Panchayat seat or were criticized on moral grounds. Others belonging to the local tiers of the Panchayat were expelled on the charge of having violated the appropriate code of conduct by supporting opposite camp in an hour of crisis.<sup>31</sup> The situation took an ugly turn with some national Panchayat members shouting slogans against their colleagues at the house. Some of the members who were the butt of criticism, were reportedly forced to sign a letter of resignation, despite their denial of having indulged in multi-party campaigns. Holding a press conference, four of the accused members stated that the whole incident had been pre-planned in collusion with the Prime Minister.<sup>32</sup>

Harassments of the National Panchayat members did not however go unnoticed on the multi-party side. Some 'Panchas' supporting the party system demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Thapa since he did not represent the reformed Panchayat for which the people had voted in the referendum. Some other leaders called the harassment a suppression of political dissent.<sup>33</sup> But there were many Panchas who felt that the harassed members had forfeited their claim to continue in the house as they had shifted their allegiance. A section of the press did not hesitate to criticize the members as "opportunistic, immoral, shameless and unprincipled."<sup>34</sup>

Uncertainty about the organizational aspect of the system was often debated in the National Panchayat. A suggestion for forming a political organization consisting of Panchayat workers holding identical views was mooted by some senior Panchas. The need for new strategy for accommodating all dissidents and for realizing national reconciliation in the true sense of the term was also felt. Pointing out the cracks noticed in the Panchayat unity, some mem-

<sup>31</sup>For expulsion of members, see *Rashtrapukar*, May 29, *Gorkhapatra* and *Samiksha*, May 30, 1980.

<sup>32</sup>*Rising Nepal, Nepali and Nepal-Post*, June 17, 1980.

<sup>33</sup>For details see the statements of Biswa Bandhu Thapa, Rabindra Nath Sharma, Sribhadra Sharma, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Hikmat Singh. *Dainik Nepal*, June 20, *Rashtrapukar*, June 19, and *Samaya*, June 12, 1980, The Pro-Moscow leader, Rayamajhi called it an act of vendetta against the minority.

<sup>34</sup>*Naya Samaj*, June 16, 1980.

bers emphasized the need for organizational unity which could be achieved only through the Pancha convention. They also opined that liberalization of outlook and accommodation of all multi-party supporters were essential in order to insure that the system "would not veer toward a narrow one-party set up."<sup>35</sup> The dilemma among Panchas was evident in the conflict between the 'ministerialists' and dissidents. A vernacular weekly gave an account of this Pancha disunity in these words:

Panchas today are also facing a dilemma on the question of leadership. They had won the referendum in the name of the King. Even now, they are unable to maintain unity except in the name of the King. The conscious urban electorate has already rejected the Panchayat system. In these circumstances, the Panchas can either revive the concept of the leadership of the King thereby making a mockery of the Royal message of December 16, 1979 and the Royal proclamation of May 14, 1980 or create a Panchayat leadership.<sup>36</sup>

The Pancha convention committee mobilized earlier for forging unity after the referendum was dissolved but fresh moves were afoot for organizing another Pancha convention obviously with the aim of isolating the prime minister and his supporters. When no other stalwarts were available for rallying the anti-Thapa Panchas, M.P. Koirala provided the leadership to spearhead the "Remove Thapa" campaign. Other three former Prime Ministers, Giri, Bista and Rijal, also fueled the anti-Thapa campaign in the post-referendum period. Claims and counter-claims for holding a Pancha convention dominated the newspaper columns, and the Panchas were found engaged in showing down each other. Groupism within the monolithic Panchayat community crystallized when the National Panchayat members showed a sharp division during the election of the vice-chairman of the National Panchayat. A group supporting the government-sponsored candidate secured only 46 votes as against the opposition-backed candidate who got 49, but both of them failed to secure the requisite number of votes for the office. The King, instead, appointed a third person, one of

<sup>35</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, June 26, 30, and July 2, 1980.

<sup>36</sup>*Samiksha*, July 4, 1980.

the three recommended by the house. It was reported that as many as 49 members allegedly belonging to the dissident camp had boycotted the session on the day of taking chair by the new vice-chairman.<sup>37</sup>

The factional feuds which was increasing unabatedly was not going to refurbish the Panchayat as a political system, but such battles were waged for "self aggrandisement." A local daily, thus, stated: "This means that one set of Panchas known for their non-performance will be replaced by another set equally known for their inability to govern. What is worse, the Panchayat system will be rendered even more impotent, because we do not see any better Panchas who can be said to have the capacity to lead and give it a new lease of life."<sup>38</sup> Prime Minister Thapa's denial that there was any rift within the Panchayat camp and that he was in favour of setting off a race for leadership did not produce any result. On the contrary, quite few senior Panchas including some ex-Prime Ministers, made an abortive attempt to dethrone him by submitting a petition to the King. Interestingly, the Pancha in-fighting also drew the attention of some pro-party Panchas who considered the Thapa government as the root of all evil since it was responsible for the collapse of the economy after the referendum and for the worsening inflation. Dilli Ram Regmi, a consistent believer in the British-model parliamentary democracy, saw no ideological content in the Pancha conflict. Regmi in his usual manner went on to suggest the King should invite patriotic and capable persons to join in an interim government, so that the deteriorating conditions in the country could be checked.<sup>39</sup>

All these intra-Panchayat cleavages did not however break the Pancha camp. Thapa's adversaries were not also prepared to take the battle to a logical conclusion. A loosely-defined unity, however fragile it might be, continued with a view to fighting the impending elections under the amended constitution. And a change of the government was perhaps an unrealistic proposition in view of the bargaining of the multi-party side, particularly Nepali Congress,

<sup>37</sup>The government-sponsored candidate was Kedar Mani Dhakal of Jhapa district, whereas the anti-ministerialist group had supported another candidate, Gopal Chandra Singh Rajbhanshi from the same district. *Gorkhapatra*, August 20 and *Jwala*, August 23, 1980.

<sup>38</sup>*The Motherland*, September 3, 1980.

<sup>39</sup>*Nepal Times*, September 3 and *Janmabhumi*, August 31, 1980.

which was likely to participate in the general elections. But how the Panchas were going to maintain unity in a situation when political competition during elections would be solely confined among themselves and not with the multi-party camp.

### *Multi-party Politics: A Guessing Game*

The result of the referendum had shown that politics does not always move along the course desired by political forces. Obviously reasonable calculations had disastrous consequences, hopes were dashed and general enthusiasm was slackened due to the victory of the Panchayat system. It was a victory of the “partyless” system which was in existence for 20 long years and running under the active leadership of the King. It was thus a new situation legitimized by the popular mandate along with the preference shown to the opposite side.

The democrats had by and large accepted the verdict despite radical postures shown by some of the leaders. The leftist-forces along with some other democrats stood in another side of the political spectrum. For moderate democrats, including B.P. Koirala who had “assumed the uncrowned mantle of leadership in the multi-party camp,” the period beginning from the announcement of the referendum verdict was a period of guessing, persuasion, warning or threatening with a view to eliciting much desired political concessions in the name of ‘minority’. And King Birendra had provided contours for such postures, because his pre-referendum announcement had pledged the following of the three principles—adult franchise, elected prime minister and responsibility of the cabinet to the legislature.

The principle of national reconciliation had set the tone of politics of persuasion which Koirala carried through the Constitution Reform Commission and through his modest approach to issues concerning both partyless and multi-party camps. Other multi-party leaders also pinned their high hopes on the CRRC. Meanwhile, the CRRC chairman stated that political controversy over the nature of the future polity was over after the popular mandate shown in favour of the ‘partyless’ Panchayat system. Reacting sharply to the undue enthusiasm shown by the chairman for closing the debate, Koirala stated that the chairman was exercising the authority which was beyond his prerogative. But it did not mean that the persuasion game was over. Instead Koirala suggested that the constitu-

tion should remain silent on party in order to respect the will of the minority.

The Nepali Congress leadership was, however, in a dilemma since May 1980. Koirala and his senior colleagues were showing much concern over the constitution reforms and were in no way prepared to risk their persuasive policy. As B.P. Koirala had rejected the demand for an interim government to hold the referendum, his fresh demand for forming such a government to hold elections to the National Panchayat could not be effectively put forth. Other opposition leaders also were not equally enthusiastic in demanding such a government. Even Koirala's two senior colleagues, Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, were also showing contradictory postures in regard to the constitution and their prospective roles under the new dispensation. On the one hand, Singh and Bhattarai rejected the referendum mandate on the specific ground of the referendum being rigged, and on the other they showed their concern over forming an interim government on the eve of the elections to the National Panchayat. Moreover, they were categorical in rejecting the request of the Constitution Reform Commission asking for their suggestions.<sup>40</sup>

Congress leaders, perhaps fearing that the constitutional reforms would be sabotaged by the Panchas unreconciled to liberal reforms, went on repeating their warning that if the constitution did not represent the minority view, it would be rejected by them. In the meantime, other political forces expecting constitutional reforms in accordance with the King's announcement appeared to be frustrated when some copies of the draft constitution was "conveniently leaked out" on the eve of King Birendra's official visit to the United Kingdom in November. Some of the provisions of the draft constitution, circulated in a limited way, did not show any sign of improvement over the existing constitution. Reacting to the so-called draft, a senior leader of the banned Nepali Congress, S.P. Upadhyaya did not believe that King Birendra was going to award such a constitution, but if it was done, he would be compelled to start a noncooperation movement against it. In the same spirit, the press and politicians alike totally rejected the draft calling it a deceptive document which would be creating more problems rather

<sup>40</sup>Statements demanding the formation of an interim government were published from time to time. See also *Rashtrapukar*, November 27, 1980.

than solving them.<sup>41</sup>

All kinds of articles and views in relation to the tangled issues of the 'partyless' and party system often dominated pro-party papers. According to them, the retention of partylessness and a reformed Panchayat as stated by the King were incompatible in view of narrow margin between the two contending camps. It was held that, given the operation of political forces during and after the referendum and in the context of the Royal desire to follow three parliamentary rules in the future the 'partyless' character of the system would be attenuated. It was also forcefully argued that if efforts were made for retaining the partyless character, then reforms would become redundant.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Nepali Congress circles appeared to be convinced that simple arithmetic of victory and defeat in the national referendum would not resolve the crises facing the nation, and it was imperative on the part of the King to provide the minimum conditions necessary for organized opposition.

The Nepali Congress leadership which remained unchanged even after the referendum debacle, had been following the policy of persuasion both at the party and non-party levels. Although B.P. Koirala's popularity had suffered a set back temporarily, the 'hawks' within the party could not assert their position vis-a-vis Koirala. Similarly, pro-Congress youth once again looked upon Koirala for guidance, despite simmering discontent on Koirala's handling of the national referendum. The party 'hawks' had no other options but to show their confidence in the national reconciliation thesis proposed by their leader.

### *Pro-party Panchas*

One of the trends evident during the referendum was the emergence of a "group" of Panchas supporting multi-party system. Some political heavy-weights of the Panchayat System joined the multi-party camp after King Birendra announced the referendum. Although all of them were connected with the Nepali Congress before the 1960 Royal take-over, they were the new Brahmins in

<sup>41</sup>*Nabin Khabar*, November 24, 1980. For some features of the draft see *Arati Weekly*, November 15, 1980.

<sup>42</sup>See Daman Dhungana, "Harjit Bhandra Mathi Utheka Prashnaharu" (Questions Raised Above Victory and Defeat), *Rashtrapukar*, Vol. 10, No. 39, 1980.

the new political order after 1960. Two of them Biswa Bandhu Thapa and Sribhadra Sharma had also become the party general-secretaries in the late 1950s. Some other national, district and village Panchayat members also changed their sides following the King's decision. They were conspicuous by their remarks that the King could have given straightaway the party system for salvaging the nation from division and conflict. When their persuasion for not holding the national referendum failed, they campaigned for the party system. In the post-referendum period, they, like other pro-party campaigners, concentrated their energy to influence the reforms in favour of the minority. The leading figure of the group, Biswa Bandhu Thapa, categorically suggested that prime minister should be appointed from among the elected representatives of the people, because a "nominated prime minister will naturally rely on the Royal Palace for his political survival." Criticizing the role of the Palace Secretariat for creating "demoralizing impact on political workers," Thapa maintained that political institutions could not grow in such a situation.<sup>43</sup>

Drawing another picture of the coming political scenario, Sribhadra Sharma, who had served both as a minister and member of the Constitution Reform Commission in 1975, was of the view that the first round of the fight between the partyless and the multi-party camps was over. But the coming general elections, which would take place under the reformed Panchayat constitution, would engage them on the second round. Unlike the previous elections which were stage-managed by the administration, the partyless camp would have contest the elections on the basis of mass popularity. Because "the partyless camp lacks a viable mass base with which to defend itself, it dreads the prospect of open competition with the multi-party camp." Sharing his view with other analysts, he stated that the seed of the party system had already been sown by the King himself by pledging to abide by three principles for the governance of the country. Yet another pro-party Pancha, Rabindra Nath Sharma added a new note when he stated that the new constitutional reforms should also be submitted for public approval in the same manner as the referendum had been held to enable the people to choose the political system.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>See *Arati Weekly*, July 16, 1980.

<sup>44</sup>For Sribhadra Sharma and Rabindra Nath Sharma's views see *Arati Weekly*, August 25, 1980, *Naya Nepal*, October 4, 1980, respectively.



To the extent that the pro-party Panchas tried to make a dent on the Panchayat camp, their efforts were mostly ineffective. For the Pancha establishment they were deserters and for the Nepali Congress side, their credentials were questionable. Yet Biswa Bandhu Thapa managed to return to the Congress fold after twenty years calling it as his "home-coming". The group as such was going to disintegrate with Rabindra Nath and Sribhadra Sharma participating in the elections held in May 1981. In sum, the political situation was in a state of flux, and what course was likely to take place was beyond anybody's guess.

### *The Left-front*

The fury and fear with which the Leftist-forces were operating in the post-May 1979 period did not continue in the aftermath of the referendum. Partly successful as the 'extremists' were in creating adverse conditions for the multi-party system, they were relatively in the low profile after the verdict. And developments that followed the referendum announcement had become so complex that it was difficult to make a distinction between 'the right' and 'the left' extremists working within and outside the Panchayat. The left and the right were so intermixed that they often made common cause, and could hardly be identifiable as being exclusively leftists.

Hoping to buy time to consolidate their positions, the two extremist factions of the Nepal Communist Party—the "Jhapali" (Marxist-Leninist) and the Mohan Bikram-faction (fourth conference) did show their muscle by going successfully on general strikes (*bandh*), and by disseminating their anti-system views to the people at large. Though split into groups and individual leaders, the two extremist factions on the left-front appeared to have been successful in rallying students and teachers to their points of view. But they were still far from the poverty-stricken masses. It was indeed ironical for the communists in Nepal.

The post-referendum scene did not show any relationship of the leftists with the constitutional process since almost all factions, with the exception of the pro-Moscow faction, had denounced the verdict. As usual, the Marxist-Leninist, (popularly known as the "Jhapali" or the "Naxalite" group), declared that the referendum was a "fraud, a conspiracy, and a farce organized to suppress the rising movement of the Nepali people." According to this group,

armed struggle was the only means with which "the fascist Panchayat System could be overthrown." Its central committee had also underlined the need for "creating a strong peoples' army and territorial base areas" to march ahead on the path of armed struggle. For this group, the impending constitutional reforms would only add to the bank of illusions.<sup>45</sup>

The ML faction was categorical in rejecting the path of parliamentary democracy, nor in its view was a people's republic possible in Nepal due to national and foreign reactionaries. Instead of going on that line, revolutionaries should go to the villages and create territorial bases by making them the strongholds of revolution. All Maoist tactics of guerilla warfare were thoroughly reproduced by this faction while underlining the means of revolution.<sup>46</sup> Wavering as they were during the referendum, their activities in the post-referendum period were characterized by ambiguity and normlessness.

Another so-called extremist group led by Mohan Bikram Singh Gharti was equally hardhitting at the referendum result. Calling the referendum a fraud that aimed at stifling the struggle of the people, it declared: "Participation in the reformed Panchayat system imposed through a rigged referendum will be to deal a blow to the country and the people." Therefore it decided to boycott the "so-called reformed Panchayat System." Its central committee decision called for establishing a broad united front of progressive and leftist forces for engaging in constant struggle.

Two extremist factions working in the name of ML and Fourth conference (Gharti faction) could create a genuine impression in the political circles that minus them there could be no reckoning with communist forces in Nepal. But there were others as well with a following in small pockets. A group called the Nepal Workers and Peasants Organization led by "Rohit" of Bhaktapur had participated in the referendum. Unlike the two so-called extremist groups, other factions did not change their stands intermittently.

### *Politics of Ethnic Communities*

The post-referendum scene was as much dominated by the

<sup>45</sup>See in details *Jwala*, May 24, 1980 and *Barga Sangharsha* (Class struggle) (Nepal Communist Party) (Marxist-Leninist), Struggle Issue, June 1979.

<sup>46</sup>*Jwala*, June 21, 1980.

demands of the minority supporting the multi-party system as by social minority groups. Demands for their greater representation had been put forth one after another before the CRRC. The conference of 'Mongoloid' groups held immediately after the referendum announcement had set the tone for such participation. As if the CRRC was exclusively constituted for looking into their grievances, they came in groups to present their respective demands. And political parties were by passed by these ethnic and tribal groups. So were the Panchas.

One of the suggestions presented before the commission by the Gurung community asked for declaring Nepal a secular state in lieu of the Hindu state as incorporated into the Panchayat constitution. Article 20 of the constitution declared the King of Nepal as one who is both a descendent of the Aryan culture and of the Hindu religion. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, better known as the parliamentary constitution, was, however, silent with regard to the state-religion as it stated in its Article 5 that "every citizen, having regard to the current traditions, may practise and profess his own religion as handed down from ancient times. . . provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person to his religion." The local groups including some political party leaders, lawyers and professionals, raised this issue of state religion with a view to maintaining parity relationship between a predominantly Hinduised society and other minority religious groups in the country. In a suggestion, ostensibly backed by a meeting of the Gurung community representatives, it was suggested of the CRRC that "Nepal must be declared a secular state, not a Hindu State. And separate arrangements were necessary for research and development of languages, culture and script of the Kirati mongoloid communities." One of the suggestions was for changing the present national anthem and for provisions to contest elections on the basis of unrestricted adult franchise.

Resurgence of other "depressed" groups was evident in the post-referendum period. It became more crystallized when each section started mobilizing demands as input for the constitution reforming process. As far back as July 1979, the former Prime Minister and leader of the Nepali Congress, B.P. Koirala, had also generated a much heated debate over the issue of the "Hindu state". According to him to call Nepal a Hindu state was a "fraud". Elaborating his view, he thought that Nepal's society was secular with freedom of

worship enjoyed by the people. Equally emphatic was the opinion of Harka Gurung, who stated that minority communities could be integrated into the process of nation-building only through carefully designed strategies for their upliftment. Gurung also warned that "any classification of the population by race and religion for political purposes will prove detrimental to the process of national integration." He did not like to incorporate "Hindu state" into the constitution on the simple reason that the social realities of the country did not conform to it.

Presumably stung by these opinions, the Sanatan Dharma Sewa Samiti, a religious Hindu organization, came out with a statement calling for protection and development of Hinduism and Hindus on the basis of the ideals of the Aryan culture and the Hindu religion. It emphatically maintained that the constitution should declare Nepal a Hindu state, and that His Majesty was an adherent of the Aryan culture and a follower of the Hindu religion.<sup>47</sup>

For the first time, after 1960, ethnic and other minority groups and 'depressed' classes came out in the open to ventilate their grievances showing that the national integration process must be accelerated in accordance with the heightened aspirations of these people. Groups with militant self-consciousness are better placed for bargaining. Their capacity to put up demands could be seen in the post-referendum period. "Ethnic awareness is intensified by inter-ethnic contact, and ethnic loyalties come to the fore only when the members of the group recognize common interest vis-a-vis others." Such an awareness was subdued in the system for about two decades, but when the lid was opened, ethnic loyalties appeared in sharp focus. The system had been inducting members of some of these social groups to different levels of the Panchayat institutions, but this alone proved inadequate. A closer study of these institutions show that the same status groups had been continuing in positions of power and authority.<sup>48</sup>

One of the strategies adopted by the Panchayat supporters during the referendum campaigns was to highlight ethnic politics in order to drum up support of these groups. They went on saying that the

<sup>47</sup>For details, see Harka Gurung, "Social Dimensions of National Integration in Nepal." (Paper presented to a Seminar organized by the Research Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu in July 1980.) See also *The Motherland*, July 14, 1980.

<sup>48</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, July 21, 1980.

partyless system was more accommodating than the multi-party system. Although ethnic votes were divided into the two camps in the referendum, the Panchayat side was able to get overwhelming support in the northern hill regions. It could be seen that the Tamang Community particularly voted for the partyless system, while others showed divisions in their preferences.

Political freedom and a rise in the level, of consciousness made ethnic groups more assertive. The more a society gets involved in the process of "modernization" the more it is impregnated with social cleavages. How a community reacts to domination of class and caste groups could be a pointer to the political elites, both in the establishment and in the opposition. The socio-psychological feelings of deprivation are strongly present in social relationships and if such a trend develops along with the consciousness of people, then it may create social conflicts endangering the integration of the country itself. Such a situation, if allowed to continue, would also eventually create social dislocations which can neither be settled nor cured. The referendum in Nepal could play a contributory role in the field of nation building. More attention has since been paid to the representation of these social communities in the body politic as well as in other organs of public life.

The only non-Hindu social group—Muslim community—did not lag behind in suggesting to the CRRC for protecting the interests of minority communities in accordance with their faith. The Nepal Muslim Service committee also demanded their representation in proportion to their population in constitutional organs and the services. It may be recalled that a Muslim conference was held in Kathmandu after the announcement of the referendum. And rumour was rife that the Panchayat government had arranged the conference with a view to mustering the support of this community in the referendum.

### *National Economy*

The national economy during and after the referendum was in shambles. The price index of most essential commodities spiralled due to inflation fuelled by ad-hoc measures taken during the referendum. One political economist, while making observations on Nepal's economic scene, compared the economic anarchism with a "stray bull". The growing deficit in Nepal's export trade with India, the scarcity of foodgrains in some parts of the country, the

increase in price of edible and kerosene oil, became dominating issues.

In the annual economic survey for 1979-80, presented to the National Panchayat, it was stated that the target of 4 to 5 per cent GNP growth fixed by the Fifth Five Year Plan (1975/80) could not be increased by more than 2 per cent. Accordingly, the agricultural sector also suffered much in which the target to achieve food production increase was put at 16.7 per cent during the fifth plan period. Food production declined by 13.4 per cent during 1979/80 and cash crops declined by 1.3 per cent.

Similar was the trend in the industrial sector. During the plan period, industrial production was expected to increase by an average of less than 5 per cent every year. In year 1979/80, foreign trade also showed a downward trend declining in exports by Rs 707.80 million as against Rs 1,269.8 million in 1978/79. The deficit in foreign trade thus added up to Rs 1,671.3 million.

The budgetary estimate for FY 1980/81 was Rs 5868.09 million, out of which 64 per cent was expected to be borne by the foreign assistance. Drawing a gloomy economic picture of the country, the minister of state for finance stated that economic scene was "unsatisfactory" because of inflation. As it was a "global phenomenon," it was difficult for Nepal to escape from worldwide economic crisis.<sup>49</sup>

King Birendra's royal address to the National Panchayat, however, highlighted the steps being taken by the government to solve the basic problem of poverty and hunger. He also referred to the creation of a new Local Development Ministry in order to step up development efforts in rural areas. Later debates that followed in the National Panchayat were mainly concentrated on the state of the economy, particularly stagnation in the agricultural and industrial sectors, the rising prices of essential commodities, the undue dependance on foreign assistance which amounted up to 64 per cent of the total budgetary allocations.

<sup>49</sup>The author had conducted a study of four village panchayats—Dhulabari (Jhapa), Shyaphru (Rasuwa), Madan Pokhara (Palpa) and Latikoili (Surkhet). The pattern of leadership in those panchayats showed that the inherited status groups were still dominating village politics, while other groups had peripheral roles to play in decision-making process. See Lok Raj Baral, "Institution Building in Nepal: A Study of Four Village Panchayats," (Mimeo) (Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 1980).

The country's economic performance was not an isolated phenomenon. The economic malaise was related to the political uncertainty and indiscipline reflected in the period under scrutiny. During the referendum year, the beleaguered Panchayat elites allegedly mobilized financial resources through sources known to themselves. The people were appeased when the new government withdrew several tax measures in order to lighten the burden on the people who were going to the polls to show their political preference. From the government's viewpoint, winning the referendum was more important than concentrating on long-term economic measures. How the government mobilized economic resources for extensive campaigning has been discussed by the Panchas themselves. Moreover, there was a growing realization that the future polity could have a chance of survival only when the country's economic situation received appropriate political will and honest commitment from the decision-makers.

Reports of malpractices, corruptions and scandals figured frequently in the local press. Even the Nepali Army officials were alleged to have indulged in unauthorized trade. So was the case with Nepal Airlines personnel including senior members of the crew and the administrative staff.<sup>50</sup>

Although the government came under strong denunciation for its business deals, rampant corruption and scandals, no effective measures were taken to check them or to mitigate the people's economic hardships. The politicians and the press alike referred to the emergence of a new economic class whose loyalty to the nation was questionable.

Amidst the gloomy economic scene in the post-referendum Nepal, peasants and students of Jhapa and Morang districts, obviously taking a cue from the growing assertive posture adopted by peasants in adjoining India, extremely frustrated by the declining prices of agricultural products, created a stir in September. The low

<sup>50</sup>*Rising Nepal*, July 9, 1980.

On August 3, 1980, parcels were received in the name of the Royal Army Air Transport Service at the Tribhuvan Airport which, on being opened in the presence of the airport customs and police officials, were found to contain 25,700 unlicensed watches in addition to 61 packets of parts of watches, 34,500 watch batteries. The Royal Nepali Army subsequently announced that the case would be referred to a military court for hearing and disposal. *Gorkhapatra*, August 25, 1980.

price of jute and the rising prices of essential commodities made them restive because, for them, it was a life and death problem. At Bhadrapur and Damak in Jhapa district, followed by Uurlabani at Morang, students, who picked up a quarrel in regard to the sale of jute at low price, were joined by peasants in organizing a protest march, which terminated in the looting of a number of Marwari's shops. Marwari traders thus became the target of the protesters who demanded the expulsion of the Marwaris from Nepal.<sup>51</sup> This incident was also symptomatic of how the Tarai could be an area of conflict between the people of Indian origin (specially the Marwaris) and the people who have migrated there from the hills. The government was also held responsible for not paying due attention to fix the price of essential items.

None of the banned political parties had ever showed their economic programmes during and after the referendum. A few of them criticized the government for economic offences allegedly committed by it. The Nepali congress leader Koirala had decried the strikes of school teachers, industrial labourers and corporation employees stating that these pressure tactics were not going to bail out Nepalis from economic and political malaise. The Jhapa and Morang incidents demanding fair price for jute and other products were branded as being whipped up by "foreign agents." But realizing the gradual alienation of the peasantry from the party, the Nepali Congress subsequently organized a peasants' rally at Biratnagar. Declaring his 11-point demands for the welfare of the peasantry, Koirala declared it as an election manifesto which would be used for the forthcoming election campaign.<sup>52</sup> Coming close on

<sup>51</sup>For a detailed report see *Pratidhwani Weekly*, September 19, 1980.

<sup>52</sup>11-point demands, which mostly referred to agrarian problems were as follows: (1) fifty per cent of the rice collected as levy should be retained for supply along with other essential commodities through fair-price shops in villages, (2) jute-price should be fixed at Rs 95 per maund and of summer paddy at Rs 60. Emancipation of people from hoarders and black marketers, (3) refunding of compulsory savings collected from the people, reduction of interest rate of Sajha Societies and Agricultural Development Bank, (4) abolition of Panchayat tax on agricultural production and double and triple taxation should be avoided, (5) violence and repression should be stopped and important inquiries should be conducted into firing incidents in the eastern region and the victim should be paid compensation, (6) records of genuine landless peasants should be compiled and measures should be taken to settle them, (7) prices of agricultural inputs should be reduced by 25 per cent, (8)



the heels was yet another peasant rally organized by the government. All these moves and counter-moves only showed that both sides—Nepali Congress and the Panchayat, were only keeping an eye on elections to be held sometime in the 1981 summer.

In view of the impending constitutional changes, politics in the post-referendum period was a guessing game. Political parties desirous of participating in the new order, expected to be created by the constitution amendment, were merely trying to persuade the King to accept and accommodate them. For this, party leaders however, continued to say that the multi-party system was not defeated by a genuine popular mandate. The Leftist-forces did not care much for the constitutional changes since they had least prospect of influencing the elections. Yet some moderate leftist leaders echoed the sentiments expressed by other multi-party leaders. Knowing that their actual strength lay in organizing *bandhs* and strikes, the extremists tried to intensify their anti-system campaigns.<sup>53</sup> Schools and colleges which were always utilized as their prime sites for mounting anti-system movements were often paralyzed by school teachers and college students allegedly affiliated with them. On the contrary, the Nepali congress adopted a relatively low posture when the question of agitation arose. Such a posture was considered desirable on the eve of the coming of the amended constitution. How the party reacted to the constitution, and what developments followed the amendment would be discussed in the next chapter.

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all local peasants should receive water power within five years, (9) cottage industries should be established in every village. New employment opportunities should be made to supply agricultural credit against tenancy and citizen and (10) representatives of peasants should be associated while formulating and executing policies and programmes relating to agriculture. *Pratidhwani Weekly*, October 31, 1980.

<sup>53</sup>The first *Nepal Bandh* called by the All Nepal National Independent Student's Union (fifth conference) affiliated with the ML faction was successful in November 1980. Capital's major shopping centres, schools and colleges closed and traffic was paralyzed. It was also reported to have been successful in other urban centres of the country. Such *Bandh* (strike) was also organized by the students belonging to the Gharti faction on the eve of the coming of the constitutional reforms of December 15, 1980.

## *Chapter 6*

### **The Limits of Reform**

The logical end of the national referendum was reform in the Panchayat constitution and the elections to be held under it. The political parties which were trounced in the referendum were anxiously waiting to enter into constitutional battle for establishing party system in the country. The Panchas were also feeling out of depths as they had never seen competitive electoral politics. In the meantime, the much awaited constitutional reform announced by King Birendra on December 15, 1980 generated heated debates in the country. King Birendra declared:

Our late father, King Mahendra, gave us the partyless democratic panchayat system on the basis of its suitability to the life, genius and cultural make-up of the people of Nepal. . . . Judged dispassionately, under the Panchayat system, the foundation of democracy has been laid in thousands of villages across Nepal; its popularity has been vindicated in the national referendum. Indeed, in Nepal today (the) Pancha and (the) Panchayat are household words. This is why we feel the need to embrace and accommodate within the system everyone who takes pride in being a Nepali. Accordingly, on May 21, 1980 subsequent to the national referendum, we formed the Constitution Reform Commission with a view to realizing the reforms outlined in our message of December 16, 1979. Following the recommendation made by this Commission on the basis of the suggestions put forward by our countrymen and in consultation with the

special commission formed under Article 82 of the constitution of Nepal, we hereby promulgate the third amendment to the constitution of Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

After these prefatory remarks, King Birendra went on highlighting some basic features of the amended constitution, among which the main were election to the national panchayat on the basis of adult franchise, the prime minister's appointment on the recommendation of the National Panchayat, and the responsibility of the council of ministers to the house. How the new constitution would infuse the spirit of homogenous democratic culture and national unity was also stated by the King. He said that "every Nepali is a Pancha and all Panchas are Nepalis." Exhorting all Nepalis to "shed their artificial differences," King Birendra urged them also to participate in the system. He went on to note that provision has been made for the election to the National Panchayat—the highest legislative body in the land—on the basis of adult franchise in accordance with the Royal message of December 16, 1979.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Features of Amended Constitution*

There was no dearth of constitutional reforms in Nepal since 1960. In fact the constitution of Nepal 1962 had been rewritten thrice in the name of amendment. The first amendment promulgated in 1967 by King Mahendra seemingly tried to incorporate certain provisions for a responsible government incorporating a semblance of the parliamentary process. A cabinet headed by the prime minister, individual and collective responsibility to the King was accepted. But these provisions were tailored to the newly added "partyless" character of the system. On the one hand, King Mahendra stated that he was handing over the responsibility of running the country's administration to the Peoples' representative,<sup>3</sup> and, on the other, several measures strengthening the "partyless" polity were adopted. Shortly thereafter, political debates with regard to the *status quo* vs. change came to the fore, which showed contradictory

<sup>1</sup>Royal Proclamation on 15 December, 1980.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>King Mahendra said in 1968 that the "trust" of the people i.e. the Panchayat system would be handed over to the Panchas themselves and accordingly invoked the amended clause of the constitution which provided for the council of ministers headed by the prime minister.

trends in the body-politic. A local weekly commented in 1972 that "Mahendra era was characterized by inconsistencies and contradictions and almost all institutions and processes considered indispensable in modern statecraft were created, but each of them was lifeless."<sup>4</sup>

The second amendment to the constitution was a sharp swing from the first. All features—elections, governmental structure and organizational aspects were made consolidatory of the systems' partylessness character. The scope for broader political interaction was blocked through the Back-to-Village National Campaign—the ideological wing of the system. These developments in the field of constitution change showed that all of these were more or less prompted by *ad hoc* calculations than by a desire to evolve genuine political processes. And, these measures did not help to deal with the emergent crises then developing in the country. The third amendment was a product of timely realization on the part of the King as well as the changing national and international atmosphere.

One basic feature of the third amendment was the provision for direct election to the National Panchayat on the basis of adult franchise. It was a radical departure from the practice which hitherto followed the indirect process from the grass roots level to the central level. Now under Article 34, the members of the National Panchayat would be elected on the basis of adult franchise for a term of five years and would be qualified only when they fulfill prescribed qualifications. Other things apart, a candidate standing for the election to the National Panchayat "must have taken oath in the form prescribed by the election commission in the application" and should take the membership of any one of the class organizations (i.e., the six class organizations of the peasants, the youth, the adult, the women, the workers, and of the ex-servicemen), and must not be disqualified under any law.<sup>5</sup> Regarding the disqualification Article 36 thus states:

In case any question arises as to whether or not any member of the National Panchayat is disqualified under Article (35), final decision therein shall be taken by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in consultation with the election commission.

<sup>4</sup>*Samiksha*, February 14, 1972.

<sup>5</sup>See in details, *Constitution of Nepal* (third amendment), 1980.

Moreover, Article 41 (B) prescribes for the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee to be formed under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the National Panchayat to safeguard the partyless Panchayat System. ("No question shall be raised in any court of law as to whether or not such rules have been complied with.")

Another feature of the constitution is the provision for a Coordinating Council. According to Article 20 (A) the King "may form a Coordinating Council for unifying the entire Nepali people in one bond through the partyless Panchayat system for maintaining security, order, tranquility and justice in the country, safeguarding the nation's independence, sovereignty and integrity by promoting coordination among the executive, legislative, judicial, and other working procedures of His Majesty."

The formation of the ministry and its relationship with the King and the National Panchayat is covered by Article 26 (A) and Article 27. "The prime minister can be appointed by the King only when a candidate desiring to become the prime minister gets the approval of at least 60 per cent of the total 140 members of the National Panchayat." In case there are only two candidates in an election held under this sub-clause, and in case neither is able to secure the required majority, both of them, or in case there are more than two candidates none of whom is able to secure the required majority, the first two candidates who have secured the largest number of votes, shall be retained as candidates, the names of the other candidates shall be removed from the list, and fresh election shall then be held. In the event no candidate is able to get the required number of votes, the National Panchayat can recommend to the King the names of three members, one of whom shall be appointed prime minister.

The prime minister as in the parliamentary procedure would present a list of the council of ministers, whereupon the King would appoint them as ministers who would be individually and collectively responsible to the National Panchayat. One of the sub-clauses, besides others, vests the King with the power to removing the prime minister at his discretion, and in case the prime minister is relieved of his post by the King under specified conditions, all other ministers would also be automatically relieved.

The national unicameral legislature, consists of 140 members, of whom 112 are elected and rest are nominated. The Article 34 (5) of the constitution avoids the delimitation of a constituency on the

dasis of population. A district consisting a few thousand people would also be sending one representative in the same manner as other districts with larger population. Of the 75 districts in the country 38 would send two representatives and 37 one representative. One-fourth of the total number of members elected from the districts would be nominated by the King from "class organizations, politicians, social communities and intellectuals" at his discretion.

The third amendment of the constitution gave due consideration to the necessity of maintaining social harmony in a society comprised of quite a few ethnic and tribal communities. The Article 9 (5) (3) emphasizes on the maintenance of "national unity with due respect to the mutual amicability and tolerance toward Nepal's wealth, heritage and national character from time immemorial."

The constitutional amendment vested in the King the power to constitute the council of ministers under special circumstances. Under this provision, notwithstanding other arrangements in the constitution, in the event of the national Panchayat not being in session, immediately following the acceptance of the resignation of prime minister or his death, or the office of the prime minister becoming vacant for some other reasons, the King can make any arrangement.<sup>6</sup>

The constitutional reforms did not touch the "Hindu state". Nor did it introduce any constitutional role of the King. The King for all intents and purposes, is the repository of powers; and, in case there is constitutional crisis, his role unencumbered by constitutional restraints becomes paramount. The council of ministers is responsible to the National Panchayat; it can be dissolved through a vote of no candidance passed against the prime minister by 60 per cent of the total members of the house, and if such a resolution is approved by the King. The King has also the power to remove the prime minister at his discretion.

### *Controversy over the Constitution*

The third amendment was the most applauded as well as the most assailed document since 1960. Its full support came mainly

<sup>6</sup>*Third Amendment: Background and Main Features* (HMG, Ministry of Communication, Department of Information, Kathmandu, 1981), p. 24.

from the Panchayat camp, while others either gave it a qualified support or totally rejected it. The provisions relating to elections to the National Panchayat on the basis of universal adult franchise was singled out for praise by almost all people believing in the constitutional process. Statements from local, district and national panchayat members were issued acclaiming it as the best reform measure the country had ever seen. Former prime minister, Kirti Nidhi Bista,<sup>7</sup> who held the office for “five times” in the period between 1969 and 1979, called it, “the first important reform in the partyless democratic Panchayat System.” Another former Panchayat Prime Minister Rijal, whole-heartedly supported the amendment, but Tulsi Giri struck a different note. Frustrated by the new reform, Giri did not think that the amendment was in tune with the partyless Panchayat spirit as enunciated and introduced by King Mahendra. In a satirical vein he expressed his hopes that Panchas would be able to retain the partyless system in the face of the objectives of the third amendment.<sup>8</sup>

Yet another former Prime Minister, Tanka Prasad Acharya and a number of pro-multiparty Panchas, including Biswa Bandhu Thapa, were not happy with the amendment. Acharya deplored the “hesitation to take people into confidence.” Striking a similar note, Thapa said that the third amendment belied the assurance of the King that the minority would be respected. Loaded with numerous restrictions which would demoralize the political workers, the amended constitution showed a ‘crisis of confidence’, he added.

Reactions of the banned party leaders were as diverse as were the party factions. But all of them decried the amendment. As B.P. Koirala was abroad, the Nepali Congress did not issue any official statement. At a meeting held under the acting president of the party, however, the view was expressed that the constitutional reforms were “incomplete and undemocratic”. The party general-secretary, the youngest brother of B.P. Koirala, Girija Prasad Koirala showed his resentments that democratic forces had been “shocked and perturbed” by the new reforms. If the King did not take any concrete step to rectifying the shortcomings in the consti-

<sup>7</sup>Bista was appointed Prime Minister five times since 1969 and was also the member of the Constitution Reform Commission constituted by King Birendra for introducing second amendment in 1975.

<sup>8</sup>See *Gorkhapatra*, December 18, and *Commoner*, December 19, 1980.

tution, "we have to wait for the harsh decision of history," he added.<sup>9</sup>

The Subarna faction of the Nepali Congress, led by Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, held its meeting in order to pass an unanimous resolution endorsing the constitutional reforms. Upadhyaya clarified his position on the new reforms and stated that he welcomed the Royal commitment to democracy as underlined by the proclamation of December 15, 1980. Rather dissatisfied with the restrictive clauses of the constitution even for ensuring participation, Upadhyaya said that the working procedures should be so designed as to allow every Nepali citizen to participate freely in elections. "Democracy cannot thrive through restrictive provisions based on distrust and suspicion," he added.<sup>10</sup>

A long-time advocate of parliamentary democracy, Dilli Raman Regmi, did not see any hope for the development of democracy under the third amendment, and, expressed his feelings that the partyless Panchayat, which was one party-like system, would not be capable of accommodating other democratic institutions. In the same spirit, the leftist leader, Man Mohan Adhikari criticized the constitution because it had "intensified the process of concentration of power in the hands of the King." Another leftist-faction led by Sahana Pradha, urged everyone not to fall into the trap of adult franchise as incorporated in the constitution. Yet another leftist faction (the Rohit faction of Bhaktapur) declared that "the third amendment has shattered the daydreams of those elements who seek to gain maximum benefit from minimum effort or to uproot feudalism in Nepal through the blessings of foreign forces."<sup>11</sup>

The pro-Moscow Communist party group was conspicuous by its silence on the amended constitution. But subsequently when the issue of participation in the elections under the constitution arose, it followed divergent lines: Raya Majhi advocated participa-

<sup>9</sup>For all these comments, see *Dainik Nepal*, *Rastrapukar* and *Nepal Times*, December 17, 18 and 19, 1980.

<sup>10</sup>*Gorkhapatra*, December 19 and 20, 1980. Upadhyaya told the author in a personal interview that the party meeting was not expected to pass a unanimous resolution. When he knew that his views were not compatible with those of other group leaders, he had withdrawn from the group.

<sup>11</sup>For Regmi's view see *Yauban* (Youth Digest), Vol. 3, Nos. 4-7, 1981, pp. 9-18. Man Mohan's view could be known through an interview granted to BBC. For Rohit's view, see *Nepal Times*, December 22 and 25, 1980.



tion and others, including the General-Secretary, Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar, criticized the undemocratic nature of the constitution and called for a boycott of the elections.

Reactions from extremist groups were not immediately available. Meanwhile, B.P. Koirala was available to give his comments that the constitutional reform was "disappointing" in spite of its positive features of parliamentary democracy. According to him, these features had been nullified by other provisions, and no attempts had been made to control the monopoly of power. Not showing all the cards in his hand, B.P. said that the Nepali Congress would take a final decision only after ascertaining the opinion of the people from all over the country. Accordingly, he along with his senior colleagues started mobilizing public support. Time and again they complained that the constitution was not worth accepting as it had failed to respect the views of the minority supporting the multi-party system in the referendum. Other restrictive clauses of the constitution were also said to be humiliating. However, they maintained that the King could rescue the amended constitution from being totally rejected by them.

The main points which the Congress objected to were: The mandatory membership of any one of six class organizations for qualifying the candidature to the National Panchayat. The multi-party supporters would in no case be able to form the government by securing 84 seats (60 per cent members support) out of 140, of whom 28 were direct Royal nominees.

Besides the predicament in regard to the constitution faced by the Nepali Congress, the Congress leaders demanded an interim government to hold the elections. Whether or not the party leadership would participate in the elections even without getting constitutional concessions from the King, it was generally held that the formation of an interim government and postponement of the election for sometime would pacify the congress leadership.

If this were correct, then the NC was entangled more in procedural matters than in fundamental issues. At Tansen in Palpa district, B.P. Koirala appeared to have hardened his posture in regard to the constitution. At a meeting organized there he stated that the constitution did not help to remedy the situation in which the people were deprived of their rights. He declared: "Our faith in the Crown does not stem from fear. Rather it springs from our belief that there must exist a basis for state authority. I had previ-

ously stated that membership of class organization was intended solely to foster national consciousness. But I now realize that this provision is designed primarily to force people like us, who refused to give any undertaking.”<sup>12</sup>

A country's constitutional process has to have relevance in the context of its environment. The reactions coming from different quarters against the amended constitution emphasized the following aspects: (a) restrictive participation, (b) difficulty in forming a majority government, (c) one-party like situation within the partyless system, and (d) crisis prone nature of the constitution.

(a) *Restrictive Participation*: A political system is lifeless without enthusiastic participation of the people. So participation has different connotations and purposes in different countries. In some countries, the mobilization of people is ensured through monolithic party instruments which were concerned more with the execution of party policy rather than formulation. This model does not fit into the system envisaged by the third amendment in the constitution of Nepal. Compared with the formalistic participation designed within the system in the past, the new arrangement could be considered a step forward towards popular participation and democratization of the polity. Direct elections on the basis of adult franchise in itself was an antithesis of the “partyless” character of the system. Under the amended constitution, candidates willing to contest elections would have to be quite adept in electioneering in view of the broadbased voters who for the first time after 1960 had been provided with an opportunity to elect their representatives in the National Panchayat. The Panchayat elections in the past were tame affairs with both voters and candidates separated from each other by intermediary organs of the system. Later, the BVNC invested with patronizing authority formalized the process of participation either through coercive manipulation or unanimous selection. It was, done for all intents and purposes, with an eye on reinforcing partylessness of the system.

As the test of loyalty was considered a crucial aspect of participation under the amended constitution, the eligibility of candidates willing to contest the National Panchayat elections was determined either by making them sign a pledge in the prescribed form that swore by the constitution or by forcing them to join a class or-

<sup>12</sup> *Biswadoot*, March 7, 1981.

ganization. These two procedures came under criticism, for opposition leaders thought that such procedures were nothing more than a design to obtaining unconditional commitment to the partyless Panchayat system. The political party leaders, who had suffered a lot for the party system and their ideologies, were hesitant to give a formal binding commitment to the system so much opposed by them.

Two considerations could be advanced for examining the practically minor but symbolically quite important aspect of this issue. It was minor because accepting the verdict of the national referendum was as much an acceptance of the partyless system as its class organizations. If the referendum result was acceptable in accordance with the democratic rule of the game, there should have been no hitch for accepting the membership of class organization. The political party leaders were, however, ill disposed towards participation not because they rejected the participatory nature of the reformed constitution but because they apparently made this a prestige issue. B.P. Koirala on whom the whole issue hinged stated that he "wanted to find a determined intention rather than a document of rights. If one has the intention of getting a formal document, he will get a piece of paper."<sup>13</sup> Other multi-party leaders willing to participate in the system on their own terms shared similar opinion with regard to the new reforms. It has thus been stated by Shaha: "Strictly speaking, it will be even immoral for everyone of those 2 million and odd voters who have voted for the multi-party system to profess loyalty to the partyless Panchayat system in all honesty."<sup>14</sup>

The restrictions imposed by constitutional procedures alone cannot resolve the emergent crisis. Although the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee is not directly related to the participation issue, it has been assailed as an organ with unlimited authority to enforce partylessness. The PPIC has been incorporated obviously for two reasons: First, the national panchayat is primarily a house

<sup>13</sup>Bisweswar Prasad Koirala, "Sambidhan Sambandhi Kehi Sadharan Bichar" (Some general opinion on the constitution), *Roop-Rekha* (Monthly) (Kathmandu), February 1981.

<sup>14</sup>Rishikesh Shaha, "The Third Amendment to the Constitution of Nepal: Old Wine in New Bottle" (paper presented at a meeting held under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of Nepal, Department of Political Science, BHU, on February 2, 1981).

of individuals elected individually by the people. There is every possibility of disorder either through the so-called "party-oriented representatives" or through ambitious Panchas jockeying for power in the house. Perhaps to manage it, the PPIC has been invested with whip-like functions which are unchallengeable at any court. It is because of this that most legalistic criticism ascribe the constitution with "one-party trend."<sup>15</sup> The second reason seemed to have been prompted by a fear-psychosis owing to the broadbased election system which in all calculations appeared disposed towards the party system. The maintenance of the partyless character in open competitive politics might be the other consideration for superimposing the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee. The Article 38 (2) reads thus:

In case any member of the National Panchayat does not behave in a manner befitting his post, or acts in contravention of the constitution, and in case a resolution passed by the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee of the National Panchayat is presented at the National Panchayat and approved, the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee shall give him a warning as provided for in the regulations or suspend him, or expel him.<sup>16</sup>

Yet another controversial provision of the constitution is the Coordination Council to be formed by the King if he so desires. As King Birendra himself had said at length about checks and balances in the constitution and other fields of public life, the CC would attempt to strike a balance among different organs for the smooth functioning of the government.<sup>17</sup> The National Panchayat has been

<sup>15</sup>Ganesh Raj Sharma has stated that "one party system has been started by making provision for a single ideology as a qualification for candidate." See Ganesh Raj Sharma, "Nepal ko Sambaidhanik Bikashma Pratinidhi Mulak ra Uttardai Sarkarko Sambhawana" (Prospect of Representative and Responsible Government in the constitutional development of Nepal), *Yauban*, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-7, 1981, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup>*Constitution of Nepal* (third amendment), 1980.

<sup>17</sup>Positive aspects of the constitution have been discussed by Surendra Bahadur Shrestha, a member of the Constitution Reform Recommendation Commission. See his "Nepalko Tesro Sanshodhan—Jana Akansha Anuroop" (Third amendment to the constitution of Nepal relevant to popular aspiration), *Yauban*, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-7, 1981, pp. 29-37.

already put under check through the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee, and so is the case of the cabinet headed by the prime minister. The CC, in view of its unlimited authority above that of the council of ministers, can be considered as a sword dangling over the head of the prime minister. Shaha has stated that as the CC would be a "super cabinet," there will be no need for a cabinet or council of ministers." But as the CC is not a regular feature of the constitution, it would presumably remain idle. In the Nepali political context, no constitutional process would evolve if the King's cooperation is withheld. It could, however, be maintained that constitutional organs like the Coordination Council appears to be redundant in view of the general acceptance of monarchical supremacy.

Participation is also expected to insure popular legitimacy. That is why every modern system is referred to as "acts of support for as well as demands upon government elites."<sup>18</sup> When one talks of restrictions on participation in the Nepali political system, one should try to see whether these restrictive procedures are likely to create a condition of apathy and alienation or not. Weiner states:

Alienation—as distinguished from apathy—is sometimes seen as a form of participation. Apathy suggests a lack of interest as well as a lack of action, while alienation suggests intense political feelings concerning the futility of political action. The inaction of the alienated and the apathetic may have quite different consequences for the performance and subsequent development of the political system, but how, in practice, do we treat one form of inaction as participation while excluding the other.<sup>19</sup>

Are these two criteria likely to become pervasive features in the prospective development of the Panchayat constitution or whether the restrictive flaws are likely to be attenuated? Participation in today's polity is *sine qua non* for democracy and development. Are the people left out either through devices of "support participation" or "ritualistic participation," or are genuinely politicized for deve-

<sup>18</sup>Myron Weiner, "Political Participation" in Leonard Binder *et al.*, *Crises and Sequences in Political Development* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1971), p. 161.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 162.

loping enthusiastic participation are legitimate queries. The Panchayat polity, guided by the King, had had enough of participation experiments, but these were not characterized by competitiveness. How the people in villages looked upon local Panchayat institutions as artificially created structures, has been dealt at length by the present author while studying the process of institution building in Nepal.<sup>20</sup> One of the important factors examined in the study was related to the progressive 'depoliticization' in village politics. It also indicated peoples' apathy towards the principles and practice of the political system. In the study it was suggested that unless the people were urged to take active interest in politics, they were unlikely to develop their political orientation in system objectives.

The apolitical trend observed in the past could be the product of political institutions, recruitment into which was narrowly devised. Political aspirants belonging to different walks of life had been complaining that they were deprived of political opportunities. The present constitutional dispensation does not restrict people willing to participate in the national polity, but as any other system, it seeks a definite commitment to its philosophy and institution. The Opposition groups shared a common view that the conditions for participation were crisis-oriented, for they felt that the majority (the Panchayat) denied a share of political power to minority groups. One point to be noted here is that neither the channel prescribed for participation is as narrow as in many authoritarian countries nor are the people deprived of opportunities for participation. In fact, even the banned political parties are operating as political groups in the obtaining environment influencing day-to-day developments. They are allowed to operate as "extra-systemic" opposition groups, as parties not participating in the elections belonged to this category.

(b) *Formation of Government*: The executive is the most important side in a polity, because the entire election processes are directly or indirectly concerned with the recruitment of elites. An organic relationship between the government and the legislature is the characteristic feature of a parliamentary executive. The third amendment of the Nepali constitution introduced certain parliamentary features

<sup>20</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "Institution Building In Nepal: A Study of the Working of Village Panchayats" (Mimeo) (Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1980).

in its provision on formation of the government. But these features are diluted by other clauses of the constitution. The term 'executive' in the parliamentary system refers to the "whole body of ministers, of the civil service, of the police and even of the armed forces. In the second, and narrower sense, it signifies the supreme head of the executive department."<sup>21</sup> The King in Nepal is not the nominal executive as all powers—legislative, executive and judicial—emanate from him, and the council of ministers enjoy the limited power delegated by the monarch. Under the third amendment also these prerogatives were reserved, but a substantial change was brought about in the procedures relating to the recruitment of political elites.

According to Article 26 (1) of the constitution, "Any member of the National Panchayat who has been proposed and seconded by at least 25 per cent of the total membership of the National Panchayat may be a candidate for the post of prime minister." Looking at the provision for making an elected government, only under a remote possibility can a certain member form a government on the recommendation of 60 per cent members. In case no candidates secure the requisite 60 per cent votes, then the King would step in to appoint a prime minister from a list of three names submitted by the house.<sup>22</sup>

The multi-party side also raised the controversy over the foreseeable role of the nominated members who would in all likelihood show their preference for the officially-backed contender to the post of the prime minister. If past experiences were any guide, such nominees would invariably support the government, and only a few of them would try to be assertive when they would not like the government view.<sup>23</sup> It is a truism that in Nepal no cabinet can be formed without the cooperation of the King and, no prime minister can go against the wishes of the King. Nepal's case is peculiar, and constitutional proprieties of the prime minister *a la* Western parlia-

<sup>21</sup>C.F. Strong, *Modern Political Constitutions* (London, 1966), p. 234.

<sup>22</sup>There was no dearth of criticisms regarding the provision for an elected prime minister. Rabindra Nath Sharma, a pro-multi-party Pancha stated that the "concept of a person becoming a prime minister through the choice of the National Panchayat, therefore, is illusory." See *Matribhumi Weekly*, December 30, 1980.

<sup>23</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "Nepal, Politics of Nomination," *Occasional Paper No. 1*, (Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, 1978).

mentary democracy model cannot be relevant in the Nepali context. Vested as he is with sovereign powers, the King is both a *de jure* and *de facto* executive head overriding the prerogatives of the cabinet headed by the elected prime minister. Placed as he is, the prime minister has to enjoy the confidence of the house as well as the King. Regarding the functions of the council of ministers, the Article 25 (1) of the constitution states:

There shall be a council of ministers to assist and advise His Majesty in the discharge of His Majesty's functions. It shall be the duty of the council of ministers to direct and control the routine administration of the country subject to this constitution, other laws for the time being in force, and the directives granted by His Majesty from time to time in the interests of Nepal and the Nepali people.<sup>24</sup>

As in any other parliamentary systems, the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, and other ministers are individually and collectively responsible to the National Panchayat. One of the provisions for the removal of the prime minister is related with the King who can remove the prime minister if he desires to do so. Besides, the National Panchayat can pass a vote of no-confidence motion by 60 per cent members of the house on the charges that the prime minister has failed to discharge the responsibilities of his office honestly. In case the prime minister is relieved of his post, other ministers of the council would also sink out of sight together with the prime minister.

In Nepal, unlike in other parliamentary democracies, the prime minister, after he has been beaten down in the house, cannot go to fresh polls by dissolving the National Panchayat. The house is a "fixed" legislature that is not likely to be disturbed by the changes in the government. In parliamentary process, the created can destroy the creator, because the executive (cabinet), which in fact is the child of the legislature, can destroy its creator (i.e. the legislature) when prime minister decides to go to the polls. To quote Bagehot, "A cabinet is a combining committee, a hyphen which joins, a buckle which fastens, the legislative part of the state to the executive part of the state. In its origin it belongs to the one, in its func-

<sup>24</sup>*Constitution of Nepal*, (Third Amendment, 1980).



tions it belongs to the other.”<sup>25</sup>

In the present Nepali context, tangled with several restrictive provisions of the constitutions, the council of ministers headed by the prime minister appears to be placed in a precarious situation. The prime minister is neither the head of the executive branch as in the parliamentary system nor is he considered as the leader of the house. The Nepali system seeks to combine both the characteristics of the parliamentary system and of the French cabinet system under the Fifth Republic. Assuming that extreme parliamentarism would, under the obtaining circumstances, tend to result in instabilities, the King could have devised a built-in guarantee for cabinet stability.

The constitution has also adopted another check—the recall. All members of the National Panchayat can be recalled in the manner provided in the law, but members who are appointed as prime minister and other ministers, cannot be called back by the voters unless one year has passed since their assumption of office. Looking at these provisions, the position of the prime minister or the government, therefore, seems to be intriguing under the third amendment. There are still other restrictive provisions in the constitution. How these provisions are implemented and what the giver of the constitution thinks about them are more relevant than the jotted lines of the constitution. It is rightly pointed out by Carter and Herz: “To make democracy effective, however, requires not only institutions and guarantees, but also attitudes.”<sup>26</sup> If the King does not lend any helping hand to the growth of institutions created under the constitutions, Nepal’s democratic experiment may as well become a futile exercise.<sup>27</sup>

(c) *One-party Situation*: Another criticism made against the third amendment is its preoccupation with the retaining of partylessness which was for the first time incorporated into the preamble of the constitution in 1967. In its preamble, the constitution defined the system as “the partyless democratic panchayat system” rooted

<sup>25</sup>Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (Oxford University Press, London, 1961), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup>Gwendolen M. Carter and John H. Herz, *Government and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Wiley Eastern Private Ltd., 1967), p. 17.

<sup>27</sup>Kusum Shrestha, “Ain Parichaya: Sangha-Sanstha Niyantran-Garne Ain 2019,” (Introduction to Law: Organisation and Association (Control) Law, 1962), *Nyayadoot*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1970, p. 49.

in the life of the people in general.

How partylessness dominated the minds of the then incumbents including King Mahendra, has been well stated by no other persons than Biswa Bandhu Thapa, who had played an active role at the nativity of the Panchayat system. Since the first amendment in 1967, measures reinforcing partyless character were adopted in the system. The second amendment to the constitution created institutions such as the BVNC which, tried to promote partylessness by all means. As the BVNC's style of functioning and behaviour was to a certain extent responsible for creating apathy among the Panchas towards the political system, its efforts for achieving compliance was, in this sense, counter-productive. The background for the declaration of the national referendum was affected a good deal by the BVNC as well.

It had been alleged by the opposition that nowhere in the Royal proclamation of May 24, 1979 the word "partyless" had figured, implying that "partyless" Panchayat was not the issue of referendum. On the contrary, one of the choices provided for the voters was a reform-oriented Panchayat system. While showing their choice in the referendum, the 55 per cent voters had in fact preferred to retain the reformed Panchayat system and not the "partyless" system. The ballot paper had also categorically mentioned it by showing the panchayat system and multi-party system.<sup>28</sup> The critics believed that the panchayat system in no way be mentioned as "partyless" under the third amendment in the constitution.<sup>29</sup>

The necessity for the BVNC was not realized while introducing constitutional reforms. But the Panchayat Policy and Investigation Committee has been interpreted as yet another form of the BVNC. The PPIC does not necessarily confine itself to functions originating in the National Panchayat alone. It is also likely to adopt any measures for reinforcing the system's partyless character. It is believed by the opposition that the representatives of the people would be perpetually haunted by the specter of the PPIC. The constitution is yet to be tested in action, and it is too early to hazard

<sup>28</sup>See *Nepal Rajpatra* (Nepal Gazette), Part 4, Vol. 29, Additional Number 65, Chaitra 13, 2036, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup>Krishna Prasad Bhandari and Harihar Dahal, two advocates, have dealt this issue at length in their cyclostyled joint paper presented at the second conference of All Nepal Legal Practitioner held in Birganj on Magh 25-27, 2037 (1981).

such a guess. The concentration of powers in the King, the numerous interdicts hedging in the elected prime minister, the severe constraints imposed on the peoples' representatives in the National Panchayat, and other restrictive clauses showing major preoccupation with the retaining of partylessness, the new constitutional reforms, if judged solely on the basis of the western constitution theory and practice, cannot at all be considered as democratic. Nor can we ignore its positive features, such as the broadbased participation of the people for recruiting political elites, the making of government in accordance with the parliamentary procedure, and the government's accountability to the legislature. The socio-political environment in which these reforms were introduced is also equally important. As Strong states, though in a different context, that a "government must, after all, be relative to the conditions of the society it governs, and account must always be taken of the peculiarities of the people to which it in each case applies."<sup>30</sup> The third amendment, given the constraints of tradition and history and also the background of the Panchayat system, was a definite improvement. Improving on the narrowly created structure, the third amendment has broadened the system in consonance with the changes in the environment of the political system.

(d) *New Political Crisis*: Moderate multi-party supporters and the political parties, except the extremists, were pinning their hopes on finding the constitutional way out for participation in the reformed Panchayat System. Their main objection was in relation to certain restrictive clauses in the constitution. Reacting to the threatening language of the opposition to boycott the elections if their demands remained unfulfilled, the official daily, *Rising Nepal* had been vehemently condemning what it called "untenable, misleading, irrational, illogical, anti-people and anti-democratic" demand that dissolution of the partyless Panchayat System be made a pre-condition for universal participation in the forthcoming general elections. Another official daily decried in no ambiguous terms and stated that since the national referendum was held under the Panchayat and since there was no need of suspending it at that time, why then had the suspension of the Panchayat become necessary for the forthcoming election.<sup>31</sup> These criticisms had started pouring in much earlier than

<sup>30</sup>C.F. Strong, *Modern Political Constitutions*, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup>*Rising Nepal and Gorkhapatra*, October 6 and 7, 1980, respectively. For

the announcement of the new reforms. The opposition were blowing hot and cold in regard to their participation. Controversy over participation continued unabated after the coming of the constitution. B.P. Koirala reiterated that the constitution could still be saved from being totally rejected if certain adjustments were made in it, but he emphasized that he would seriously object to elections held under the Panchayat government.<sup>32</sup>

It was realized that the banned Nepali Congress, led by B.P. appeared to be relatively conciliatory in its approach to the tangled constitutional crises. This was appreciated by the press in general. Stating B.P.'s line to be modest and positive, a daily commented: "By issuing a press statement notable for its sobriety, B.P. Koirala, who has assumed the leadership of the opposition, has given the establishment a chance to ponder. Indeed, his approach is now more acceptable than at any time after 1960."<sup>33</sup> Although B.P. was in apparent sincerity trying to persuade the King to reconsider certain aspects of the constitution, a number of papers with pro-establishment orientation linked his 'indecision' to "external mentors," without whose advise he was unlikely to decide anything.<sup>34</sup>

In the meantime, the Panchas were engaged in settling the vexing problem of selecting candidates for the forthcoming elections to the National Panchayat. Unconfirmed reports said that the general elections would be held in May 1981.

The Panchas, however, started holding district level conventions which, to quote a local weekly, more or less "achieved only scuffles and quarrels among the participants." Conflicts over the nomination of candidates for the NP elections were particularly revealing. Two factions—Prime Minister Thapa supported Panchas and other

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similar views particularly criticizing B.P. Koirala for his threat that any system without their participation would be meaningless, see *Samaj*, *Samrakshak* and *Naya Samaj*, October 14 and 9, respectively.

<sup>32</sup>Rastrapukar, February 5, 1981.

<sup>33</sup>See *Samaj*, *Naya Nepal*, February 4, *Nepal Times*, February 5 and *Pratidhwani Weekly*, February 6, 1981, respectively.

<sup>34</sup>In a speech delivered at Asian Pacific Socialist Organization Conference held at Sydney (Australia) on February 7, 1981, Koirala said, "... two months ago he (the King) announced some changes in the constitution introducing some positive features. But there are other negative features invalidating the positive ones. We are seeking clarification from King on these points."

Panchas backed by rivals—the four former Prime Ministers, M.P. Koirala, Tulsī Giri, Kirti Nidhi Bista and Nagendra Prasad Rijal, did not come to a compromise formula in regard to their candidates. It was however maintained that Panchas, notwithstanding the candidates selected by the top echelons, preferred enter into the elections fray individually. And Prime Minister Thapa's list was reported to have been accepted by the Panchas as an 'official' list.

On the other hand, the banned Nepali Congress ostensibly decided to hold party conferences and mass meetings at six different places in the east and west for mobilizing its cadres for any course to be adopted by the party and for developing party contacts with the masses. Starting from Jhapa district, the NC leaders began highlighting the drawbacks of the constitution. People were informed that under the then prevailing circumstances, they were hesitant about participating in the elections to be held under the reformed panchayat constitution. Mass meetings and party conferences provided the NC members the opportunity to regroup themselves, thereby presenting the party as a reckonable political force in the country. It was also evident that the leadership was trying to muster strength in order to persuade the King to reconsider the constitutional flaws which had inhibited the party from joining the system.<sup>35</sup>

At times the NC leaders also created impressions that they were not behaving responsibly. In one of the mass meetings, the acting President of the party, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, went to the extent of demanding that "the forthcoming elections should be held under the auspices of the United Nations," for the Panchayat government had forfeited its credibility during the referendum.<sup>36</sup>

The reactions to the tactical moves of the Nepali Congress were diverse. Some newspapers supporting the government viewed it as a "political horse-trading". Ridiculing the demand that the United Nations presence was essential for the elections, some thought it showed a lack of confidence. Yet others interpreted B.P.'s move as a "Hamlet-like dilemma".<sup>37</sup> In the midst of a controversy over participation in the elections, the election commission came up with the schedule, beginning with the publication of the voters'

<sup>35</sup>The party leaders went on insisting that a new interim government was necessary to supervise and ensure a free and fair election.

<sup>36</sup>*Rastra Pukar*, February 26, 1981.

<sup>37</sup>*Naya Sandesh, Commoner and Samaj*, February 27, 1981.

lists at district headquarters on March 15. The last date for the publication of the final list of candidates and allotment of election symbols, etc. was fixed on March 27, i.e. five days after the filing of nominations on March 22. Still there was animated suspense when the commission did not announce the exact date of elections to be held all over the country on the same single day.

The left-front, ranging from the moderate Man Mohan Adhikari and Sahana factions to the extremists, except the pro-Moscow Rayamajhi faction, had already declared "not to fall into the trap of adult franchise elections." According to Mohan Bikram, leader of the 'fourth conference'—extremist faction, the "political forces had then only two options before them either to push back the peoples' movement or try to intensify it" by taking it to a "decisive stage." He further emphasized that the peoples movement would be weakened if they participated in the Panchayat elections in the obtaining circumstances. "We will oppose, expose and boycott those who talk of participating or actually participate in Panchayat elections,"<sup>38</sup> he declared.

By the time the election commission began burning its midnight lamp, the political picture had become more or less clear with all opposition forces deciding to boycott the polls. The Panchayat camp, the Rayamajhi faction of the pro-Moscow communists, and break-away group of the Nepali Congress (Subarna) led by Bakhan Singh Gurung and a few former party influentials and other individuals, were on one side of the political spectrum, while all others were on the other. And finally, the commission also broke its silence by announcing on March 21, 1981 a day after the return of King Birendra from his two-week unofficial visit to far-western Nepal, that elections to the National Panchayat would be held all over the Kingdom on Saturday, May 9, 1981. On the day following the announcement, B.P. Koirala reiterated that his party was not going to "cooperate in meaningless exercise." He stated: "We accept the verdict of the referendum, but we do not accept the one-sided interpretation put forward either by His Majesty or by the partyless Panchayat System with regard to the peoples' will."<sup>39</sup>

The referendum scenario was fast drawing to a close with political parties finally preparing for boycotting the May 9 elections. On

<sup>38</sup>*Naya Upahar*, March 11, 1981.

<sup>39</sup>*Jana Marga*, March 27, 1981.

March 31, 1981 the Nepali Congress which had been holding mass rallies and workers' meetings held its final mass meeting at Kathmandu to tell the people about the party's decision. All leaders declared that they would campaign strongly for boycotting the elections.

The modalities of the boycott of the Panchayat elections were interpreted in as many ways as there were political groups. Among the leftists, the Sahana faction wanted to form a united democratic front to start a mass struggle on the basis of a minimum programme. Another leader 'Rohit' interpreted the election boycott issue quite differently. He said that their decision not to participate in the elections did not mean a political boycott. His group intended to contest elections unofficially. Yet another left-leader, Nirmal Lama, issuing a statement from India, claimed to have received support from all over the country for their decision to boycott the elections. Drawing a line of demarcation between his (Mohan Bikram's group) and others, he maintained that other groups were concerned only with the boycott for securing certain reforms, while his group wanted to bring about a radical change by placing total power in the hands of the people. "We refuse to become Panchas. It is this difference which places us in the revolutionary camp, and others in the opportunist camp,"<sup>40</sup> Lama declared.

The opposition leaders, particularly belonging to the democratic camp, were in disarray as all of them appeared to be in a fix as to their future strategies vis-a-vis the system that had received the popular mandate. On the one hand, the Nepali Congress leaders pledged to continue their efforts for national reconciliation and unity as before with the King and other nationalist forces, they categorically stated that they would campaign for boycotting the polls, on the other. Theirs' was expected to be an active boycott, which as some observers pointed out, amounted to an infringement of the democratic rights of the people. "What exactly do they want, national reconciliation or national confrontation, or national confusion, or national bewilderment or national mud-bath"? asked a local daily. Yet another remarked: "What has been disappointing is that B.P. Koirala though a very articulate politician with a lot of charisma has of late been quite equivocating. He seems to have suffered from

<sup>40</sup>For all opinions see *Naya Sandesh*, *Samaj* and *Matribhumi*, March 17 and 20, 1981, respectively.

the classic dilemma of to be or not to be. . . Even more unfortunate is the fact that while talking of the need for national reconciliation, he has adopted the line of confrontation."<sup>41</sup>

The pro-multi party Panchas, suffering from individual schisms were pursuing their individual lines with regard to the May elections. Some prominent leaders like Sribhadra Sharma and Rabindra Nath Sharma decided to participate in the elections in order to—as the latter said—“expose the futility of the third amendment to the constitution.”<sup>42</sup> Biswa Bandu Thapa was successful in rejoining the Nepali Congress. Obviously the government did not pay any heed to political forces opposed to the elections, it showed its readiness to hold the elections on the appointed day. There were altogether 1096 candidates for the 111 seats. Manang district in the western hills had already elected unanimously its one representative.

### *Election Politics*

The general elections held on May 9, 1981 was indicative in many respects. It was the first countrywide election, after a gap of 22 years to elect 112 representative to the National Panchayat. Out of the 7,793,119, voters, 40,73,836 (52.27 per cent) participated in the elections. This percentage was challenged by both the banned party circles and the Panchas. Altogether 5.6 ballot papers were declared invalid.<sup>43</sup> The election involving 7.8 million Nepalis was significant, because it marked the culmination of over two years of popular clamour, ferment and agitation for a change and a more meaningful participation in the government national consensus, however, proved elusive, due to non-participation of major political groups.

Perhaps nowhere in the world such a large number of candidates take part in elections in the 112 constituencies as was seen in Nepal. In two-member districts, as much as 35 candidates fought the elections on an individual basis, Kabhre district in the Bagmati zone, followed by Kathmandu and Jhapa districts, recorded the highest number of candidates, while Manang and Rasuwa districts had two and one, respectively. The Pancha side, despite intramural differences over the selection of candidates, did try to go to the

<sup>41</sup>*Commoner*, April 3, and *The Motherland*, April 9, 1981.

<sup>42</sup>*Pratidhwani Weekly*, 1981.

<sup>43</sup>*Election Commission Cyclostyled Statistics of Votes*, 1981.



polls with certain programmes. A booklet highlighting socio-economic and political programmes was distributed on the eve of the elections,<sup>44</sup> but no candidates paid any heed to the official booklet because of competition among the individual Panchas. When no former parties joined the elections, it became apparent that the elections were exclusively confined to the Panchas. Yet there was a big controversy over the official and non-official candidates as the officially sponsored candidates were alleged to have received financial and administrative assistance during the elections. The chief election commission however did not accept this division, because, as far as it was concerned, there were no government and non-government candidates. "To us all the 1,096 candidates are equal," the Chief Election Commissioner, stated.<sup>45</sup>

Broadly speaking, there were five categories of candidates fighting the elections. And never had the Panchayat workers experienced such behaviour among their ranks. Some candidates showed radical postures in order to identify themselves with their respective political orientations. In Bhaktapur, Kabhre, Makwanpur and Nawal-Parashi districts this trend was particularly noticeable. Only a few of these 'radical' Panchas were successful, however. There were many candidates who dealt with peripheral issues like the improvement of health, education and welfare of the people. No candidates, except a very few, talked of reforming the constitution or of resolving political problems confronting the nation. Some of them censured the government for dividing the candidates into 'governmentalist' and 'non-governmentalist', and assured the voters that if they were elected, they would try their best to prepare the grounds for the accommodation of all Nepalis in the polity. Another category of moderate candidates were generally quiet. They had their own backing to woo the voters in their strong pockets. The fourth category was that of the adventurists, who thought that they could easily cash on in the popularity of political forces boycotting

<sup>44</sup>*Dal Bihin Prajatantrik Panchayat-Byabastha ko Niti ra Karyakram* (Policy and Programmes of Partyless Democratic Panchayat System), n.d.

<sup>45</sup>*Rising Nepal*, May 6, 1981. Despite this clarification of the Commission, it was open that the then government had prepared a list of 112 candidates to be supported by it. But as many as 1,096 candidates decide to contest and many of them were diehard Panchas for over 20 years. When all of them did not get the support, there was a slogan for defeating the so-called government-backed candidates.

the elections. Even some members of the former parties including the pro-Moscow Communist Party, resorted to this strategy by giving populist slogans. Some opportunists considered that they would be the obvious choice of the pro-party voters since no Pancha candidates could fill the vacuum created by the non-participation of former parties.

A category comprised of an unique phenomenon was seen during the elections. Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, itself witnessed it. Out of 119,367 votes polled in Kathmandu, Mrs Nani Maiya Dahal who was hardly a known figure until then, bagged 65,777 votes—56 per cent of the total votes polled in the district.<sup>46</sup> On the day of the announcement of the Kathmandu result, an unprecedented mass procession was organized demonstrating how people reacted to the elections. A local daily wrote that the victory of an insignificant candidate in Kathmandu should not be taken as a lone case but should be treated as a phenomena. It should be taken as the embodiment of anger, frustration, dissatisfaction and incomplete form of the third amendment of the constitution.<sup>47</sup> Kathmandu district's choice for a political non-entity was suggestive in many respects as well. Political preference for Mrs Dahal above caste, region and personal and similar other parochial considerations, which were generally found in other cases was indeed unique. It was officially stated that about 26,000 were single votes cast in her favour. Many political observers called it a 'negative vote', because Kathmandu's intelligentsia were stated to be dissatisfied with political developments taking place after the declaration of the reformed constitution. Some other districts also showed this kind of 'phenomenon', but to a lesser degree, by catapulting political light-weights, into the National Panchayat.

A remarkable feature of the elections was the popular slogan: "Defeat the government-backed candidates." Almost all candidates except a few contesting the elections had been Panchas for over 20 years, but when the question of direct election arose, a list was reportedly prepared by the government for providing government

<sup>46</sup>A candidate, Mrs Nani Maiya Dahal, was not known by the Kathmandu's electorate. But she was catapulted into prominence when a 'wave' was created by some dissatisfied youngmen who wanted to show their protest-votes by insuring the victory of Mrs Dahal. Ultimately the entire district voters rose for inflicting a defeat to the political stalwarts belonging to the Panchayat camp.

<sup>47</sup>*Nepal Times*, May 15, 1981.

assistance to the selected ones in the elections. Those who were out of the government's direct favour mounted their attack on the so-called "official candidates." It was thus a polarization of Pancha candidates into "official" and "non-official" lines. It was also stated that many of the candidates were allegedly getting discreet support from different sections for diverting the energies amassed to defeat the official candidates.<sup>48</sup> From a general election point of view, the May election was issueless. Even when some candidates tried to raise certain issues, the people could feel that there were nothing but bouts of shadow boxing.<sup>49</sup>

### *Nature of Elite Recruitment*

A call to boycott the election given by major political groups had some effect on the turn-out of the voters in the May 1981 elections. But still 52.2 per cent of the total eligible voters came to cast their votes. This figure was low in comparison to the 66 per cent votes cast during the referendum.<sup>50</sup> From the Panchayat's point of view, this figure was quite comforting, and an irrefutable answer to the controversy which was tried to be raised by the opposition that such a turn-out was not possible.<sup>51</sup>

Continuity and change in the nature of elite recruitment got highlighted in the elections. It was worth noting that of the 678 candidate of the 1959 parliamentary elections, nearly 11 per cent or 70 candidates had again entered into the fray in 1981.<sup>52</sup> But the number of these who had entered politics after the introduction of the Panchayat System exceeded this number as 96 former and 46 sitting members of the National Panchayat contested the 1981 election.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup>It was understood that Panchayat unity was seriously affected by the division of official and non-official candidates. Ministers themselves were reported to be quarrelling during elections. Prime Minister Thapa was understood to have sent his emissaries to different districts for ensuring unity among the Panchayat candidates.

<sup>49</sup>*Biswadoot Weekly*, May 8, 1981.

<sup>50</sup>*Samiksha*, May 2, 1981.

<sup>51</sup>*Biswadoot*, May 11, 1981. Ganesh Man Singh, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala held the same view calling the boycott as "an unprecedented moral victory for the entire Nepali people." See *Rastrapukar*, May 14, 1981.

<sup>52</sup>*Biswadoot*, *ibid*.

<sup>53</sup>See *Naya Sandesh*, May 15, *Himali Sandesh*, May 14, *Himali Hulak*, May 11, *Samaj*, May 13, and *Samiksha*, May 15, 1981.

Another feature of elite recruitment was the increase of the percentage of candidates from the Hill ethnic caste groups. The percentage of Chhetri (including Thakuri) candidates, however, continued to maintain the lead by 30.9 per cent over other groups. So did the Brahmin group preserved its second position; as in the past 25.3 per cent candidates were the Hill Brahmins. It was also interesting to note that "the Chhetri candidates contested the 1981 elections in 69 districts and Brahmin candidates in 61 districts." The percentage of the Hill ethnic candidates rose to 14.4 per cent while the Newar percentage decreased slightly; the Hill tribal candidates contested in 42 districts and Newar candidates in 38 districts.<sup>54</sup>

The percentage of candidates belonging to different communities (e.g. the Rajput, the Bhumihar and the Yadav) was more less stabilized, but the Tarai Brahmins recorded a low percentage point. Among the tribal groups in the Tarai, the Tharu, the Rajbanshi, and the Dhimal showed some improvements by collectively increasing their percentage. And, so did the Muslim candidates (1.48 per cent).

The composition of the National Panchayat did not show any remarkable departure from the past. The social groups represented in the house were the Brahmins 20 (14.81 per cent), the Chhetris 47 (34.81 per cent), the Newars 11 (8.15 per cent), the Gurungs 5 (3.70 per cent), the Thakalis 4 (2.96 per cent), the Limbus 5 (3.70 per cent), the Sherpas and Tamangs 7 (5.19 per cent), the Rais 4 (2.96 per cent), the Magars 4 (2.96 per cent), the Giris 2 (1.48 per cent), the Shah and Singh 2 (1.48 per cent), the Muslims 3 (2.22 per cent), the Dhimals 1 (0.74 per cent), the Yadavs 7 (5.19 per cent), the Rajbanshis 1 (0.74 per cent), the Tharus 8 (5.93 per cent), the Guptas 3 (2.22 per cent).<sup>55</sup>

The above figures shows that the National Panchayat witnessed an "increased political representation of certain social groups that had fewer members" in the preceding house. The percentage of the Tarai people slightly increased in 1981. And the Tarai tribals had the largest gain followed by the Hill tribals. Regional considerations had also been followed by King Birendra while nominating members from Nepal's 14 zones. It could therefore be said that the

<sup>54</sup>Harka Gurung, "Nepal: Sociology of Election," *The Motherland*, June 20, 1961.

<sup>55</sup>Figures based on the list of National Panchayat, 1981.

National Panchayat was, on the whole, a fairly representative body so far as its social composition was concerned.

TABLE 2  
*Regional and Ethnic Groups in the 1981 National Panchayat*

<i>Regional and Ethnic Groupings of Representatives</i>	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Nominated</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Brahmins	15	5	20	14.81
Chhetris	42	5	47	34.82
Newar	9	22	11	8.15
Hill Tribals: (Limbu, Rai, Magar, Gurung Sherpa-Tamang and Thakali)	22	7	29	21.48
Tarai Hindu Minority Groups: (Tharu, Yadav, Dhimal, Gupta, Singh (Rajput) Rajbanshi and Shah)	21	1	22	16.30
Muslim	2	1	3	2.22
Giri	1	1	2	1.48
Depressed Class (Biswakarma)	—	1	1	.74
<i>Total</i>	112	23	135	100.00

NOTE: Caste and ethnic distributions made from lists of members of 1981 National Panchayat. Five members are yet to be nominated by the King to add up to 140.

It was however worth noting that caste and communal considerations seemed to be the basis of contesting elections in 1981. But only a few districts displayed these trends in more glaring ways than others. Even “outsiders” were reported to have gone to certain districts for mobilizing ‘communal’ votes in the elections. As Individual candidates had no other symbols or appeal to cash on, they were mainly inclined to fan parochial feelings during the elections. Even in India where the party system is considered to have struck its roots in the body politic, communal or cast line voting has been a persistent feature, despite the efforts for reducing such feelings at institutional levels. Appropriate organizations provide a range of alternatives to voters, extricating them from the tentacles of parochialism. In Nepal’s direct elections, the voters had no choice and they were vulnerable enough to be swayed by parochial feelings. It was interesting, however, that in certain instances candi-

dates of the same social group had contested the election. It was seen that in such cases the candidates representing the same group cancelled each other, and the victory of candidates belonging to other social or caste groups was secured. Because of this, in certain districts the candidates who had no support of their own in the local caste or community groups got elected.

The 1981 elections provided some clues worth pondering to us. First, the direct elections held on the basis of universal adult franchise could not be easily fought off by candidates desirous to become the members of the National Panchayat. Nor definite prediction could be made for the victory of any candidate. This "led to the rejection of some traditional elites in politically conscious districts and in many districts, the people voted in favour of younger and popular candidates." If the political groups which boycotted the polls, had decided to contest the elections, the composition of the house as well as the alignment pattern within it would have been considerably different. Many officially backed candidates, including the members of the Constitution Reform Commission, were routed by ordinary candidates who were allegedly backed by the political groups in the background. Although the number of such members is rather low, they are likely to act as an opposition group in the house.

Second, individual election is likely to put the members under serious pressure. In every five year, they have to go to their districts for getting fresh mandate, and to become popular there, they will have to make a showing of having bringing off some popular measure for the district during their earlier tenure. And to ensure this, they will have to have government's blessings. If they fail in getting some benefits from the government for their districts, it is not likely that they would be re-elected. Such a situation would deter than from becoming outright radicals, and in the meantime they will not be inclined to be the 'yes' man of the government. Even in politically conscious districts, the members would be confronting a serious situation. The voters who had pushed them headlong into the corridors of power would entertain certain expectations. When their representatives do not fulfil such expectations, they would be likely to forfeit their new political career. It can therefore be assumed that in every five years, the political careers of the NP members would either come to an end, or only a few of them would survive the test.

Another feature of the elections was the huge amount of money allegedly spent by both the victorious and the defeated candidates.<sup>56</sup> For the defeated candidates, it was so much money lost, but the victorious candidates particularly those who did not get official support, would be naturally inclined to regain the losses incurred during the elections. For this, they would have to be amenable to the government in power. If this tendency develops, the political process would lose its ethical base and the evolution of the system would be jeopardized. As a commentator puts it: "Many representatives have made to the house at great cost in terms of their energy and resource. Both for them and the countrymen who voted, the politicking in the forthcoming *Rastriya Panchayat* will have much at stake."<sup>57</sup> As several government sponsored Panchas lost the elections, the victorious candidates would be showing their free-floating loyalties with a view to realizing their objectives. How the government would be able to complete its five-year term in accordance with the provisions of the constitution is yet to be seen. If such a situation intermittently threatens the government, Royal intervention in the affairs of the state would be more frequent than warranted. Looking at other provisions of the constitution, such an acute Cabinet instability would be averted. Panchayat elections had provided definite indications which, if unresolved, would be unhelpful for the dynamics of the system.

Almost all political leaders in the scene criticized the 1981 elections. One of the framers of the Panchayat constitution stated that he had found the general election to be something like a "mobile dramatic performance staged in a village."<sup>58</sup> Yet another leader stated that communal politics could never succeed in Nepal, and "artificial delimitation of constituencies made it impossible for the people of Kathmandu Valley and the Tarai to send representatives in proportion to their population."<sup>59</sup>

In spite of these criticisms and trends analysed above, the 1981 election was the third largest democratic exercise in the country. Whatever be the nature of the composition of the National Panchayat, the people of Nepal did show their tremendous appetite and

<sup>56</sup>Gurung, n. 54.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Rishikesh Shaha expressed this view in his lengthy statement on the 1981 election. See *Bishwadoot Weekly*, June 8, 1981.

<sup>59</sup>See B.P. Koirala's view in *Pratidhwani Weekly*, June 12, 1981.

ability for this exercise. The May election was definitely a mass action in political communication. An assurance of popular participation alone would not suffice for the evolution of the system along democratic lines. Popular participation has to be carefully nurtured by creating appropriate political institutions which would not only channelize the peoples' enthusiasm but also insure against the breach of desirable political norms by action going out of bounds. Certain trends demonstrated by the May elections would have to be thoroughly analysed before making any further futuristic readings.

The referendum came to a logical end with the inauguration of the new National Panchayat, followed by the installation of the government headed by an elected Prime Minister. On June 15, 1981 Surya Bahadur Thapa who had the privilege of heading the government during the national referendum and that followed elections was recommended unopposed by the National Panchayat for appointment to the post of the Prime Minister. Later Thapa held a press conference and urged all the people showing their faith in the multi-party system during the referendum to join the "mainstream" of the country. "There is no alternative to the mainstream, to look for any alternative is to invite disorder," he added. Although the new political arrangement appeared to have certain built-in contradictions or anomalies, its success or failure would largely depend upon the commitment of the institution of monarchy as well as the cool and calculated judgement of political forces inside and outside of the system. If the newly achieved adult franchise and political freedom are not consolidated through mutual understanding among all concerned, an atmosphere of uncertainty and speculation would continue influencing events in the country.



## *Chapter 7*

# **Anatomy of Political Forces: Groups, Personalities and Trends**

The forces at work during the referendum were diverse, but each of them shared a common social and economic background. The political actors belonging to both the Panchayat and the multi-party camps were by and large similar except that the political orientation of some of the multi-party advocates was somewhat different from that of the Panchas. Yet many Panchayat stalwarts had political origins in the political parties before 1960. From an ideological point of view, the 'leftist' need to crystallize their views, because as many factions claim to be genuine ideologies as individual leaders. Panchas, 'leftists', 'democrats' and the student groups, all come from the same socio-economic background in which high caste groups occupy leading positions in organizational matters both inside and outside the government. Indeed, the groups with inherited traditional socio-economic status have been occupying strategic positions of decision-making, in spite of the changes set off by the 1951 revolution.

Thus while discussing the group equation in the Nepali society, one should not ignore the endeavours made over the years for making the various ethnic and lower echelon Hindu social groups participate in the process of nation-building. In the post-1951 period, care has been taken to induct a few community leaders into the cabinet. The political parties had also pushed on their membership drive among different social groups, and many of such members had been elected to the first-ever parliament in 1959-60. The

Panchayat model, in spite of its partylessness, has successfully penetrated into the peripheral areas through the institutions of village Panchayats, despite narrowly created electoral base for the national level representation until the third amendment to the constitution of Nepal.

Before 1950, Nepal was virtually a private holding of the ruling family for a century, and its economy served as a bedrock for sustaining the despotic rule. "Similarly, formal education was virtually non-existent, and compliance with social requirements of the overarching ideology of Hinduism-including caste-based inequalities was legally enforced."<sup>1</sup> The legal code promulgated by the first Rana prime minister, and subsequent arrangements made for integrating the economic system into a predominantly *chhetriya* based power structure had established a firm basis for socio-economic and political stratification. It has been stated that political and economic antecedents have to cope with a "formidable legacy of inequality that the past has bequeathed to the rulers of the post-1951 era, and it is obvious that one cannot expect any thoroughgoing changes in the few years that have passed since the Ranas were toppled."<sup>2</sup> It is therefore imperative to understand that the ethos of the present Nepali society and polity have been mainly influenced by this legacy. The political forces working in the Nepali society have to be studied in this context.

### *Panchayat Elites*

Broadly speaking, there are four categories of Panchayat elites in all, each of them representing typically the hierarchical order of the Nepali society. First, the former political party leaders and activists had joined the Royal entourage since 1960. Many of them were democrats with liberal views advocating the establishment parliamentary democracy in due course.

The Royal take over, in itself, was the consequence of a myriad of interlocking variables—national and international which prompted King Mahendra to take a drastic decision of dismissing the parliamentary system. Dissatisfied as he was with the then going party government which was reeling under disparate traditional and

<sup>1</sup>Bengt-Erik Borgstrom, *The Patron and The Panca: Village Values and Panchayat Democracy in Nepal* (Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1980), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

obscurantist forces, he seemed to have made up his mind for a more assertive rule. Not reconciled to their defeat in the first general elections, the political parties in opposition mounted their increasingly hostile attacks on the elected government. Although in a democracy, every citizen has a right to ventilate his grievance either through opposition forums or through his own individual efforts, the motivation and strategies of the then opposition party stalwarts were rather questionable. The opposition in collusion with certain militant feudal elements and obscure social organizations started dismantling the parliamentary process. It was demonstrated that the opposition was too uncomfortable with the degree of freedom permitted by the democratic set-up. In sum, the oppositional trends during the short spell of parliamentary system seemed to be both conspiratorial and agitational: the former was a legacy of tradition and history and the latter was an Indian import which was taken to heart by some Nepali leaders. What all these suggest is that Nepal's history and socio-economic and political tradition, which was basically feudal, played a dominant role in the post-1951 period and in the post-1960 as well. Its reasons are not far to seek. First, the political leaders belonging to the era of party politics were apparently lacking in norms needed for the smooth growth of a democratic society. Second, the temptation to show their partisan loyalty was strong among political agitators. The King's displeasure with the Congress government was open. This could have emboldened the agitators to be more assertive against the government. Finally, the Royal court being the centre of politics, the prevailing norm of political aspirants was to curry Royal favour. Neither of these forces had ever tried to broad-base their mass support nor did they make any effort to work as legitimate opposition.<sup>3</sup>

This short background provides enough indications to show as to how the political elements were trying to find a common umbrella under which they could be sheltered. But the post-1960 developments showed that it was not only the disgruntled elements that joined the Panchayat System, but also many senior Nepali congress leaders preferred the Royal order. Many of them, including two prominent Nepali Congress leaders, Tulsī Giri and Bishwa Bandhu Thapa, were obviously attracted by the King's direct leadership in the new political order, because the King was not only the leader

<sup>3</sup>See my book, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 37-42.

of party politics, but also the symbol of national unity.<sup>4</sup> "Democracy is safe in the hands of our democratic King," asserted Thapa. Later he assured the nation that the party system was not being abandoned for ever, the people would see party flags and sign-boards after some time. These two Congress leaders, joined by other colleagues, served King Mahendra for building the Panchayat institutions.

The Nepali Congress was not the only party to be deserted by some prominent members. Former Praja Parishad factions led by the former Prime Minister, Tanka Prasad Acharya, and by Bhadrakali Misra, the Nepali National Congress led by Dilli Raman Regmi, the Nepal Communist Party faction led by Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, and K.I. Singh's United Democratic Party were also affected by the massive side changes. These parties provided the new system with effective party workers at the central and district levels. Lower grade leaders of the banned parties were easily adjusted and they assumed status and privileges under the new order. Instructively, 60 per cent of the 125 members of the National Panchayat, at the time of its inauguration in 1963, were former party members.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that the new regime led by the King had been successful in enlisting the support of a fairly large number of former partymen ranging from the largest party—Nepali Congress, to the regional party level—the Tarai Congress. From the point of view of representation also the Panchayat order could be an umbrella under which heterogeneous political and social forces had assembled.<sup>6</sup> It was perhaps due to this reason that class

<sup>4</sup>Tulsi Giri and Biswa Bandhu Thapa were General-Secretaries of the Nepali Congress. Later they became minister and Chief-whip, respectively. After the dismissal of the parliamentary government, both of them were noted for taking cudgels against the dismissed government.

<sup>5</sup>Among the party members, 35 per cent members of Village Panchayats and 20 per cent members of the National Panchayat belonged to the Nepali congress. See Benjamin N. Schoenfeld, "Nepal's Constitution: Model 1962," *Indian Journal of Political Science* (Delhi), Vol. 24, 1963, pp. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup>Numerous former party leaders were either nominated by the King to the National Panchayat and offered ministerial posts. Many others joined the five class and professional organizations which provided them both channels for National Panchayat and for organizational leadership. The constitution of Nepal had provided fifteen seats to class organizations which were: Peasant, Women, Labour, Youth and Ex-servicemen. Four seats each for the peasant, and youths and two each for the Labour and Ex-servicemen and three for the Women's organization were allotted.

organizations, infected as they were by former party men, mostly played deviant and even oppositional roles ever since they started functioning. There were several factors goading them to play such roles: (a) vagueness inherent in their purpose and missions and (b) pervasive dominance of party orientation.<sup>7</sup>

The contradictory trends developing within the Panchayat organs came to the surface while amending the constitution in 1975. The representation of class organizations in the National Panchayat was discontinued after the amendment. A strict disciplinary code was also enforced by the ideological wing-Back-to-Village National Campaign. The Panchayat elites showing marked propensity to liberal reforms were either coerced into proper equiescence or were treated as dissidents.

The second category of Panchayat elites are the 'leftists' who had also given their support to the new system. The former communists were quite successful to extend and expand their hold both in the administration and in the Panchayat organs. Although all political party elements joined the system endorsing its ideology, the leftists obviously became more reticent with regard to the liberalization of the system. So both *status quo* bound Panchas and the 'leftists' considerably shared a common strategy for diminishing the prospects of democratization. As compared to the pro-Moscow faction of the Nepal Communist Party, the pro-Peking elements were in low profile, but subsequently, their impact on running the system was increasingly realized by others opposed to them. The pro-Peking communists' support for the new regime was particularly significant after the worsening Sino-Indian border dispute; they worked as a countervailing force against the Nepali Congress which was then mounting anti-system activities from India. King Mahendra had the best of conditions to get their support in the 1960s, but in the 1970s the communists appeared to be more concerned about losing their credibilities as communists. It was however noteworthy that very few former communists defected to the multi-party camp following the Royal decision to hold the national referendum in 1979. The ranking communist leaders in the Panchayat camp kept a low profile, whereas the rest campaigned loudly for the survival of the partyless Panchayat system.

The third category of Panchas come mainly from Nepal's tradi-

<sup>7</sup>*Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, p. 10.

tional landed class which inherited traits of the privileged due to their *Khandani* (i.e. inherited family status), connections with the power elites, property and similar other ascriptive criteria. How politics of the village Panchayat level operated on the basis of economic and social dominance of people belonging to the *Khandani* group could be well studied by looking into the pattern of representation in local village Panchayats. Caste dominance is equally prominent in determining leadership roles in the country. A study of Kitini village Panchayat in Kathmandu valley and three others in east, west and far western regions, very clearly demonstrate this trend. While presenting the case of Kitini, Borgstrom writes:

In Nepal the tradition of the ruler elevating families in the caste hierarchy, or promoting individuals who were able to attract his attention, is still alive and can be seen in, for instance, the selection of Ministers, which is the prerogative of the King. By force of necessity this mode of appointment at the top becomes the model throughout society and hence there appear the personal relationships that range from favours done to equals to the unequal patron-client relationship.<sup>8</sup>

In three village Panchayats—Dhulabari (Jhapa), Madan Pokhara (Palpa) and Latikoili (Surkhet), the traditional role-structures were unbreakable because the village elites were firmly entrenched in their roles due to the habitual obedience of local groups to their superiority based on inherited status.<sup>9</sup> This sort of dominance can only be broken when all groups are equally politicized as a result of political consciousness and training in electoral processes.

Coming to the national scene, the village level picture of the pattern of representation had shown its trend in the National Panchayat as well. Prior to the third amendment, the National Panchayat had been dominated by Chhetries, Brahmin and Newars. In view of the total national population, the low percentage of representation of other ethnic or tribal, depressed Hinduised social groups of the Tarai, and economically weaker sections of the Nepali society at large, showed imbalances. In 1975, of the 120 members

<sup>8</sup>Borgstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Lok Raj Baral, "Institution Building in Nepal: A Study of the Four Village Panchayats" (Monograph) (RCNAS, Tribhuvan University, 1980).

of the National Panchayat interviewed by the author, 36.7 per cent belonged to the Chhetri community followed by Brahmin (18.33 per cent) and Newars (12.5 per cent). Among members representing different ethnic and Tarai people, 16.7 per cent were Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa, Thakali, Tamang, while the percentage for the Tarai people, i.e. Yadav, Rajput, Muslim, Tharu, Rajbanshi and Kalwar was 10.3 per cent only. The "depressed" class represented by *Kami* (i.e. blacksmith) according to the Hindu caste hierarchy was 0.83 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Similar representation trend was evident in 1980 also.

TABLE I  
*Representative Pattern of the National Panchayat in 1980*

<i>Caste Groups</i>	<i>No. of Seats</i>	<i>Total No. of Percentage</i>
<i>Non Tribals Hindu:</i>		
Brahmin and Chhetri	64	69.036
Newar	8	8.6
<i>Hill Tribals:</i>		
Rai	8	8.6
Gurung	4	4.08
Tamang	3	3.06
Magars	1	1.00
Thakali	3	3.06
<i>Tarai Hindu:</i>		
Tharu	4	4.08
Muslim	+	+

SOURCE: Tabulated from *National Panchayat Secretariat, 1980*.

Castewise distribution of seats was likely to continue unchanged for a length of time, but this should not be taken as an alarming situation. History gives testimony that Chhetri and Brahmin and Newars have been continuously playing the roles of hardcore political elites and that situation cannot be discontinued overnight. Since the 1951 revolution conscious efforts have been made so that these underprivileged groups should be effectively accommodated in the political process. Caste dominance would be eroded

<sup>10</sup>See Lok Raj Baral, "Pattern of Representation in the National Panchayat of Nepal" (A preliminary study) (mimeo) (Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1975), pp. 15-16.

if the economic condition is improved along with the process of politicization. Unless political participants particularly coming from the less privileged sections of the society assert their legitimate interests, complaints against the privileged ones turn out to be ritualistic.

The Panchayat institutions have however played an important part in disseminating central level policies among the villagers. The Panchas also made determined bids for maintaining the existing power equation intact. No Panchayat head and his colleagues were jittery when an actual crisis confronted them during the referendum. Why the Panchayat did not disintegrate, and what was the motivation of the Panchas for retaining the partyless system are some pertinent questions.

The socio-economic make-up of the Panchayat system was broad-based from another angle. At the lower levels of the system, many ordinary people—small land-holders and tenant cultivators came within the panchayat lists because of certain measures taken by the system for their welfare.<sup>11</sup> The low income farmers got tenancy rights, and they often sought the shelter of local Panchayat institutions when tenancy problems arose. Although the tenant cultivators' population did not belong to the power structure, it became the mainstay of the system in the hour of crisis.

One of the factors for the sustenance of the Panchayat politics for over two decades was the involvement of the institution of

<sup>11</sup>The Land Act 1964 classified land into three categories and provided for ceilings on both owned and tenanted land. "Provisions were also made for compensating land owners for land held in excess of the illegal ceilings and so acquired by government for redistribution. The government also ensured the legal registration of tenancy rights. Laws were enforced to collect compulsory savings from both landowners and tenants at fixed rates," the proceeds of which were to be used to finance production loans to farmers. Measures relating to land reforms and compulsory savings scheme were taken from time to time. Other features of the Lands Act, 1964 were: abolition of the *Zamindari* system, ceiling on individual landholdings, land acquisition on compensation, regulation of rent, prohibition of forced labour, debt regulation. See *Bhumi Sambhandhi Ain 2021* and *Bhumi Sambhandhi Niyamharu 2021* (Laws relating to lands 1964, and Regulations relating to laws, 1964), *Nepal Gazette*, Vol. 14, 1964 and *ibid.*, No. 21. See also Ludwig F. Stiller, S.J. and Ram Prakash Yadav, *Planning for People: A Study of Nepal's Planning Process* (Kathmandu, 1979), p. 150; B.P. Shrestha, *The Economy of Nepal* (Bombay, 1967), pp. 70-75 and Mahesh C. Regmi, *Land Ownership in Nepal* (University of California Press, 1976).



monarchy in its genesis and growth. King Mahendra and subsequently King Birendra, became the propounder and protector of Panchayat principles. King Mahendra had introduced the system with due comprehension of the then changing geo-political environment, developing particularly after the flight of the Dalai Lama from Tibet in 1959. China and India, the two powerful neighbours of Nepal, developed strains in their relations which, in turn, had created an impact on the domestic political scene in Nepal. Subtle in his calculations, King Mahendra like any shrewd ruler, turned the external situation to his advantage, in spite of international reactions expressed against the Royal take over.<sup>12</sup> By all reckoning, King Mahendra was determined to be firmly on the saddle after the dissolution of the parliamentary system, and threats emanating from India did not deter him from his plan of introducing the system as conceived by him.<sup>13</sup>

The King's involvement in the building of the Panchayat System provided legitimacy to it, for the King is looked upon by the people at large as the symbol of national unity, the source of authority and stability in accordance with Nepal's own tradition and customs. Yet traditional legitimacy alone would not always provide longevity to a system; it requires popular legitimacy. The national referendum of 1980 provided the opportunity to give popular legitimacy to the Panchayat System. It also showed that the King's continuing leadership is still a political reality in Nepali politics.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>How King Mahendra took advantage of the external situation has been analysed by almost all writers working on Nepal's foreign and domestic politics. Most important of these studies are: Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* (New Delhi, 1977), Chapter Seven; S.D. Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal* (New Delhi, 1973); Shree Krishan Jha, *Uneasy Partners* (New Delhi, 1973); Tribhuvan Nath, *The Nepalese Dilemma* (Sterling, New Delhi, 1974); Rishikesh Shaha, *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>13</sup>The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had sharply reacted to King Mahendra's action of dismissing an elected government as a "set-back to democracy." But Nepal's northern neighbour, China was conspicuous by its silence over the royal action. This paid dividends to King Mahendra, who successfully maintained parity relationship with both China and India by giving a "deliberately anti-Indian orientation to his foreign policy in order to solidify popular support behind the royal regime." See Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 235.

<sup>14</sup>Surya Bahadur Thapa, Prime Minister, was quoted as having said the need of "active" leadership of the King after the verdict of the referendum. Talking

Indeed, the most powerful factor behind the continuance of the partyless system was the perennial involvement of the monarchy. Thus it can be maintained that any kind of democratic development in Nepal requires Royal cooperation and commitment. Generally a royal commitment to and cooperation with democracy are incompatible; but if one tries to bring out this incompatibility in the Nepali context within conventional western yardsticks, he will be misplaced.

The monarchy's position in Nepali politics was once again sharply highlighted by almost all multi-party leaders, except a few 'extremist' groups which remained ambiguous about the role of monarchy. All leaders showed as much reverence to it as the Panchas. The Nepali Congress leaders particularly were more than satisfied with the historic decision taken by King Birendra on May 24, 1979, and they stated that whenever a grave crisis would overwhelm Nepal, the monarchical institution had shown its resilience in thwarting or defusing such a crisis.

#### *Nepali Congress as a Party*

In social and economic background, there was hardly any difference between the Panchas and the multi-party activist. However, the former had thrived under the protection of the state, the latter had undergone sufferings and hardships for over twenty years. Among the multi-party groups, the Nepali Congress (NC) appeared to be homogeneous and broad based in both organizational and functional terms.

With all blames put on him following the defeat of the multi-party side in the referendum. B.P. Koirala's charisma considerably suffered a set back, but he once again emerged as the unquestionably acceptable, respected and unchallengeable leader of the NC. Koirala was equally praised for his intellect and maligned for his miscalculations and "intransigence". Moreover, he has been criticized as the most contradictory politician who, for all practical purposes, could neither comprehend Nepal's political context nor did he ever try to take his political stand to a logical end.

Many political commentators are of the view that Koirala's offer

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to the present author in November 1980, he however said that he preferred to call "supreme" leadership, for "active" leadership was misinterpreted by the disbanded Back-to-Village National Campaign.

of 'national reconciliation' could have been well received by the Palace had he ever tried to do it in the early phase of the partyless system. When advised to offer cooperation to King Mahendra, Koirala rejected it. In 1968, he was released from prison presumably with the hope that he would give a fair trial to the party's decision to accept the development of the constitution under the guidance of the King. Not satisfied with the 1968 decision of the party, he, however, reverted to the line of confrontation, which he advocated and practised from India since 1969. When he found that his pressure tactic was not going to pay any dividends to him, he made his 'national reconciliation' offer in 1976.

The whole activities of the NC more or less hinged on B.P. Koirala's thesis of reconciliation. Koirala apparently suffered from a kind of fear that his image would be seriously tarnished if he kept quiet for any length of time. When the King released him on parole and provided him with medical expenses enabling him to go anywhere in the world for his treatment, he declared repeatedly that he was released by pressures being exerted on the King by Koirala's foreign friends. Tactically, Koirala seemed to be committing mistakes at a time when his reconciliation theory was being supposed to be in progress. The Palace was presumably harboring suspicions about Koirala's activities that would take place after his return to the country. The Palace could also have taken his offer of 'national reconciliation' as yet another design of undermining the King's active leadership in the Nepali political scene underlined since the 1951 revolution. Moreover, the diehard Panchas opposed to B.P. were more often than not categorical in insisting that his reconciliation was a strategy for sharing power.

How B.P. was often outmanoeuvred by the establishment could be seen by a series of developments which he pulled him along. In the obtaining situation none of the political parties had the capacity or resources to win the national referendum without certain preconditions. B.P. single-handedly tried to be the chivalrous champion of referendum rejecting any precondition, at a time when his adversaries—the Panchas were particularly concerned about the continuation of the Panchayat organs and the government for insuring the victory to the partyless camp. By rejecting preconditions for the referendum, B.P. was playing into the hands of the Panchas; the Panchas rejoiced because B.P. was speaking their own languages.

With unchallengeable leadership B.P. took most of the decisions in the name of the party, and at times, like an academic, on the basis of certain pet hypotheses. But for a politician what mattered much was reality not a favourite hypothesis. His style which was often characterized by ambiguities put his admirers on their toes. Above all, he had a flair for oppositional politics, but he did not necessarily possess an aptitude for extracting concessions through negotiations or bargaining. As Nepali politics is characterized by indigenous oddities, these often put bargainers in a difficult situation. During the referendum campaign, B.P. went on emphasizing his role for creating a new liberal climate in the country, and at times he launched on an ego trip saying that the constitutional arrangements after the referendum would mainly depend on the percentage of votes polled by him. The statement that his "neck was tied to that of the King," a much controversial statement, was yet another instance of his own self. B.P. was badly misunderstood by the multi-party circles when he, without waiting for any information from the districts, issued a statement in Kathmandu that the referendum was held impartially and peacefully. This haste in accepting the conduct of the referendum was capitalized by the opposite camp.

B.P.'s contradictory posture got all the more revealed when he reacted on the third amendment to the constitution. His trenchant criticism of the partless system led by the King at the Asian Socialist Conference held in Sydney, Australia, and his expectation that the constitutional obstacles standing on the way of his participation in the elections would be eventually lifted, were contradictory. B.P. stated in Sydney: "For the last 20 years we have been subjected under an authoritarian rule of the King. In 1960 the King staged a coup against a popularly elected government headed by me (as the prime minister). During these twenty years the people were subjected to tyrannical rule. Many of our comrades lost their lives fighting against the imposition of the Kings' dictatorship, thousands were imprisoned or driven out of the country into exile in India."<sup>15</sup> Such a statement did not at all indicate that B.P. was advancing his programme of 'national reconciliation' with the King, nor did it help him to get an audience with the King for

<sup>15</sup>See "A Gist of speech by Mr B.P. Koirala to Asian Pacific Socialist Organization Conference of Sydney, Australia, on February 7, 1981."

clarifying constitutional anomalies. Consequently, the two sides—the King and B.P.—followed divergent lines with King Birendra urging the Nepalis to participate in the May polls and with B.P. giving a call to boycott it. Why B.P. chose an international forum to criticize the King was a matter of conjecture. Tactically he was wrong, because he was trying to get an audience with the King. If verbal hostilities are mounted by one party against another on the eve of a dialogue, it naturally created an adverse situation. Although there was no guarantee that the King would have conceded B.P.'s demands if the latter had kept quiet before the meeting, yet it was not a move to elicit trust.

Besides B.P. the NC leadership was composed of Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Ganesh Man, a long-time fighter since the days of the birth of the Praja Parishad (the organised oldest party) in 1935-36, had been imprisoned for life during the Rana regime. A Newar by caste and Kathmanduite by birth, Singh's stories of courage have widely circulated in Nepal. He was also called by his admirers the 'iron-man' of Nepal because of his courage, integrity and suffering. Ganesh Man's reputation rests not on his shrewdness, intellect, and international contacts or political acrobatics but on dedication, unassuming frankness and down-to-earth realism with which he carries the masses with him. Always playing a second fiddle to B.P.'s leadership, Singh, in spite of being highly critical of B.P. on occasions has not been able to assert his own personality decisively.

Another ranking leader in the Congress party is Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, a Brahmin. He was the speaker of the *Pratinidhi Sabha* (House of Representatives) in the 1959-60 parliament. A bachelor, Bhattarai was imprisoned for about 12 years, and he has earned the distinction of being the only politician released from prison without any commitment or undertaking. Bhattarai's economic background is humble. He possesses neither B.P.'s political stature nor Ganesh Man's innate simplicity. He was brought into political prominence when B.P. decided to make him the acting President of the NC in 1978. Since then Bhattarai earned notoriety for being harsh towards the former N.C. partymen who wanted to rejoin the party after the announcement of the national referendum. Though a "purist" in the party, as he held extreme views with regard to the existing partyless system, he did not seem to have created much impact on the party organisation, because his strong likings and dislikings

often came as obstacles to the adoption of a practical course by the party.

It will not be out of context to mention a few lines about the two prominent leaders of the NC—Subarna Shamsheer Rana and Surya Prasad Upadhyay. The NC was virtually pursuing a dual policy since the party's declaration of May 1968 offering the loyal cooperation to the King for further democratizing the Panchayat System. Before the release of B.P. and his other colleagues, Subarna was instrumental in mounting armed activities against the new political order started by King Mahendra. As Subarna was bent on pursuing a modest line vis-a-vis the King after 1968, many party leaders had been advocating his line with a view to desisting B.P. Koirala to give up his armed tactics in the 1970s. After Subarna's death in 1978, some top ranking leaders formed another congress group—Subarna group—in order to dissociate themselves from B.P. group. Since then, it has distinct identity even though the NC led by B.P. is also being deserted by others for participating in the reformed system.

Closely associated with Subarna's mission of constitutional development is Surya Prasad Upadhyay, a top ranking leader of the NC. After the return of B.P. and Ganesh Man Singh, Upadhyay was in the sideline, because he did not like the manner with which Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was designated as the acting President of the Party. Upadhyay participated in the referendum campaigns independently but later he joined the breakaway "Subarna" faction. The subsequent developments show that Upadhyay is not associated with any group. Nor does he accept the constitution and the elections held in May 1981.

As no political organization had any strong mass base in Nepal, the NC did not come up as an exception, despite Bhattarai's claim that the party had 5,000 active and 50,000 ordinary members in 1981.<sup>16</sup> It is quite surprising that it has continuously shown its dominance in the oppositional circles even without going for any action that could give dynamic sustenance to the party. Its leaders went into action without solidifying and popularizing the party. When the actual crunch came, it could neither show its vitality nor assert its strength. Its own workers after discussed its weaknesses but they seldom prevailed upon their leaders. After the elections to

<sup>16</sup>*Deenman* (New Delhi), June 28-July 4, 1981.

the National Panchayat under the third time amended constitution, the NC suffered a set-back when the General-Secretary of the NC. Parshu Narayan Chaudhari joined the Panchayat 'mainstream' for what he called the "enhancement of democracy and nationalism" in the country. Later, Chaudhari disclosed that the majority of the members including B.P. Koirala and himself were in favour of participating in the general elections. "However, a secret conspiracy was hatched in the pretense of consulting party workers on the question of postponing the date of the elections and removing the provision for compulsory membership of class organizations in such a manner that no decision was reached by the time the election programme commenced,"<sup>17</sup> Chaudhari declared.

How the vacillating, divided and frustrated NC is going to rejuvenate its image is still to be seen. Similarly, how the party will withstand pressures from both right and left extremists and how it will establish its hold particularly at a time when its top leaders are ageing and are under severe health constraints are other aspects determining the future of the NC.

#### *Personalities without Organization: Non-Congress Democrats*

Among the political personalities in the country, the former Prime Minister, legendary Tanka Prasad Acharya and the leader of the banned Nepali National Congress, Dilli Raman Regmi, came out in the open following the referendum declaration. Tanka Prasad, who was the founder member of the first ever organized anti-Rana group, Praja Parishad, had survived death sentence in 1936 by virtue of being a Brahmin by caste. He was however kept in the prison until the 1950 revolution. In the beginning, the ideology of Praja Parishad was ambiguous, a singular mixture of communism, socialism, new socialism and Leninism. Isolated and neglected as he felt after the revolution, Acharya developed his anti-Congress and anti-Indian posture, thereby coming closer to the communists. After his ignominious defeat in the general elections

<sup>17</sup>Parshu Narayan Chaudhari subsequently published a booklet giving reasons for his decision to join the Panchayat 'mainstream'. He has also analysed party's weaknesses during and after the national referendum. How the party leaders never looked into the national problems particularly in deciding a practical course of action is forcefully stated. For details see Parshu Narayan Chaudhari, *Let Us Face The Reality* (Booklet) (Kathmandu, Srawan 24, 2038 August 8, 1981).

in 1959, Acharya became more assertive in oppositional politics under the elected government. After 1960 political role of Acharya was hazy. Yet Acharya continued airing his voice of dissent and did never join the system. His role in the referendum was that of a dejected politician. Politically, Acharya does not have any following. Nor does he see any prospect of reviving his old Praja Parishad Party, nor does he entertain any hope for the future of democracy.

Besides Acharya, Dilli Raman Regmi of the banned Nepali National Congress party deserves a mention. Regmi's political orientation had been shaped by the Indian nationalist movement of the 1940s. He along with B.P. Koirala and others organized the National Congress which subsequently became the NC after the merger of both the Democratic Congress and the National Congress. When the participants of Delhi-compromise left him alone, Regmi turned a bitter critic of the NC. After the Royal take over of 1960, almost all his lieutenants deserted him for the new political order of King Mahendra. But he preferred to be alone consistently holding the view that a parliamentary democracy of the British type was the only choice for Nepal. In spite of being a strong-pro-parliamentary figure, Regmi has had been urging King Birendra to form a national government comprising of nationalists and capable persons with a view to grappling with the emergent economic and political crises. When the multi-party system was defeated in the referendum, he, like others, held B.P. Koirala responsible for the defeat.

Among the multi-party leaders, the former Prime Minister, K.I. Singh was a force with a following. K.I. Singh has shown considerable inconsistencies in his political career. In 1963, he threatened to launch a *Satyagraha* (non-violent movement) and was preemptively arrested. His major demands were: (a) the establishment of constitutional monarchy, and (b) the grant of democratic rights to the people.<sup>18</sup> In 1968 he joined the official ex-soldier's organization. In early 1970s, he was elected to the National Panchayat. Despite K.I. Singh's change of political stand, he was an asset for the multi-party side during the referendum. K.I. Singh, calling the

<sup>18</sup>Nepal Today (Calcutta), Vol. 1, 1961, pp. 4-6, see also *Kessing's Contemporary Archives* (Bristol) Vol. 13, 1961-62, Prominent Party leaders joining the congress movement were Bhadrakali Mishra (Praja Parishad, Mishra faction) and Kashi Prasad Srivastav (United Democratic Party).



third amendment to the constitution a positive development towards democracy, participated in the May 1981 elections, despite a call of boycott by other multi-party leaders.

### *Left Front*

The banned Nepal Communist Party has about a dozen faction. The left-front elites are divided not over a wide range of crucial political and ideological issues, but in most cases over one's own perception of ideological genuineness. Only a few of those divided factions were active during the referendum. The two extremist factions—the 4th conference and the Marxist-Leninist (ML) or “Naxalite” factions wielded impact when they started showing their muscle power during the referendum. The schools and colleges became their sites of operation. Their activities were also allegedly fuelled by the rightist-extremists, within the system, because they were ill-disposed towards establishing a multi-party democracy. However the extremist groups invoked the Marxian contradictions in order to justify their respective ideological positions vis-a-vis other rival factions.

How the left movement in Nepal has been personality-oriented and ego-centric could be seen since the middle of the 1950s. Nepal's complex socio-economic and political background or milieu can be mentioned as one of the responsible factors for weakening the left movement. But still, the rupture of intramural feuds along caste, personal and regional lines did not seem to have hindered the attraction of leftism to the young generations. The new supporters of the left parties are mostly from the student community, which largely represents the youth of the middle class of the Nepali society.

At the very outset, two extremist leftist factions created an impression that they were the actual wielders of communist force in the country, for both held the common view that the national referendum was nothing more than a “Royal strategy to save himself from the popular struggle.” One of the pamphlets stated that “the drama of referendum would not solve any fundamental problem facing the Nepali people nor a change in government would change the class character.”<sup>19</sup> It was however evident that

<sup>19</sup>See *Bargiya Sangharsha* (Class Struggle) (Pamphlet), Special No. 8/036. See also “Bartaman Paristhiti ra Hamro Kartabya: Rajnaitik Prastav” (Present

the two extremist groups differed on tactics; the ML group had been harping on the liquidation of class enemies through violent means which they learnt from their Indian counterparts, the Mohan Bikram faction (4th conference) condemned such an extreme “leftist terrorism.”

The Naxalite faction of the banned Nepal Communist Party had its linkage with the Naxalite communist movement in India. Naxalbari, a small township across the Mechi river in the eastern border, brought it into light for the first time when violence erupted in the Naxalbari, Fansidewa and Khoribari areas of Darjeeling district in West-Bengal (India). Since then communists pursuing the extreme line of violence are branded as ‘Naxalites’, implying that moderate communists working within the parliamentary framework were outside its fold. In Nepal too, the eastern Jhapa district adjoining Naxalbari sprung surprise with the murders of a number of “class enemies” in the early 1970s. There was a sensation no doubt, but when the government started armed operations, the movement subsided. But ‘Naxalite’ activities were frequently reported in other hill and Tarai districts—Ilam, Sankhuwa Sabha, Dhanusha and Okhaldhunga.

The ‘Naxalite’ movement was a peculiar phenomenon, because it was the handiwork of a small group of young people coming

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Conditions and Our Duty: Political Resolution), n.d. Numerous pamphlets and booklets distributed by various factions devoted much space and energy to state their line of thinking. While doing that, most of them criticized and denounced other factions in unequivocal terms. Such a trend within the left front had been in evidence since the late 1950s. But in the 1960s and 70s, several other factions with radical slogans and actions appeared. Most prominent of these factions that came in the open were two extremist units. For more broad view see D.P. Adhikari, *Nepal Kamyunist Party Bhitraiko Saidhantik Matbhed Keho?* (What is the Ideological Difference with the Nepal Communist Party?) (Varanasi, 1964); Tulsi Lal Amatya, *Janvadi Krantiya Sansodhanbad* (People Oriented Revolution or Revisionism) (Kathmandu, 1966). For recent developments see Mohan Bikram Singh, *Jhapali Ugrabampanthi Line Ko Khandan* (Contradiction of the Line of Jhapali Extreme-leftist) n.d. Mohan Bikram, *Kranti Sambandhi Ugra Bampanthi Dristikonko Khandan* (Contradiction of Extreme Leftist View Concerning Revolution) n.d. and Mohan Bikram Singh, *Ugra Bampanthi Bhatkawaka Samnya Bisheshataharu* (General Features of Extreme Left Terrorism), *Jamarko* (Palpa), Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 9-16; *Barga Sangharsha* (Class Struggle) Nepal Communist Party Marxists-Leninist's paper, 2036 (1979), special struggle issue.

from petty bourgeoisie. Some of its leaders had formal education in colleges while the rest followed them with a mission to fulfil i.e. the liquidation of "class enemies" through Maoist action.<sup>20</sup> Popularly known as 'jhapali' the movement leaders criticize all other leftist factions as un-Marxists. As it is a movement without any mature and far-sighted leaders, it often provides ample scope for adventurism which most of the other left groups denounce. But when their violent tactics floundered in the wake of mass indignation the ML faction had been repeatedly announcing that it had decided to renounce "left terrorism." It was stated that after a period of self-criticism, it had opted for a peaceful struggle.<sup>21</sup> Yet Mohan Chandra Adhikari's line of peaceful struggle was not supported by the Mainali-group, a splinter group in the ML faction, pointing to the fact that the ML leadership was also not free from inner conflicts. The ML group mostly suffered from the dearth of well thought out plans and tactics. As the Nepali people are temperamentally modest in their political outlook, the extremist posture shown by the ML faction was not appreciated by them. Unlike the ML group, the factions led by Mohan Bikram and Nirmal Lama—showed influence in Kathmandu's educational institutions and in certain pockets of western Nepal. It was, however, difficult to measure this faction's strength as the students supporting the All Nepal National Independent Students' Union did not necessarily belong to this faction as was generally alleged.

Mohan Bikram Gharti, an obscure political figure till the declara-

<sup>20</sup>The 'Naxalite' activity was reported for the first time in 1972 in Jhapa district when some prominent figures including a former National Panchayat member Dharma Prasad Dhakal were killed. A large number of suspects were arrested. Later the four "ring leaders" allegedly connected with the movement were shot dead in the middle of the forest. Other prominent leaders singled out by the government were two Mainali brothers, Chandra Prakash and Radhakant, and Mohan Chandra Adhikari, a close relative of the communist party leader, Man Mohan Adhikari, Mohan Chandra Adhikari and Radhakant are still in the jail and Chandra Prakash fled from the Kathmandu jail.

<sup>21</sup>According to the jailed leader of ML faction, Mohan Chandra Adhikari, the group arrived at the conclusion that their policy of "left adventurism had not brought about the expected popular support. He also said that inadequate success in arousing the peoples' consciousness and political awareness prevented his armed struggle from succeeding. . ." *National Star* (Kathmandu), Vol. 7, No. 26, March 18, 1981.

tion of the national referendum, suddenly sprang up into political prominence when his 'myth' of being a 'communist force' spread all over the country. Waves of strikes and violent demonstrations and unrest that followed the announcement brought him to light, his name gained in prominence as the leader of an extremist lobby which called for boycotting the referendum. Some local papers even published stories how Mohan Bikram had been conducting clandestine operations against the Panchayat System inside the country. Although Mohan Bikram condemned the ML group for its terrorism, he recognized that the ML was still nearer to his organization because of its 'ideological purity' and strength. In 1980, the two students' wings—pro-Gharti and ML factions—also made a fresh bid for resolving their differences. After a joint meeting, they came out with a statement for stopping "white attack" (A typical jargon used to highlight what they call 'fascists' character of the system. Despite such joint declarations made from time to time, the two factions were still known as the 5th conference (ML) and the 6th conference (pro-Mohan Bikram) factions, thus maintaining their separate identities.

The third group was led by Man Mohan Adhikari (MM) and Pushpa Lal Shrestha (PL). MM and PL were top party comrades pursuing contradictory lines since the Royal take-over. PL had worked from self-exile in India while MM was in jail till his release in 1969. Both of them differed on both tactics and principle with PL always trying to show his radical posture by claiming himself a staunch republican. PL also supported the "Liquidation of class enemies" movement of the 'Naxalites,' but MM did not appreciate it. Pushpa Lal died in India in 1978 whereupon his widow, Sahana, took up the leadership role bequeathed by her husband.

Contrasted with ML and Gharti factions, PL's supporters mainly came from Kathmandu and some pockets in Western Nepal. But, diluted as they were, factional identify became a problem for each group. PL's followers also denounced the Mohan Bikram faction because of the latter's 'terrorism' as emanating from one who did not expect or work for any change and who wanted to usurp sovereignty and power for self aggrandisement, thereby inviting their movements' demise. The PL group alleged that Mohan Bikram served as an agent of feudal dictatorship.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>See *Shakti-Doot Bulletin No. 1* (Laheria Sarai, Darbhanga, December, 1979).

M.M. Adhikari, on the other hand, had been branded by moderate multi-party supporters as a 'nationalist' communist. How MM was closely associated with B.P. Koirala's Nepali Congress has been discussed in chapter three. The post-referendum declaration period demonstrated that MM became a popular name along with BP though the former's organizational base and charisma was no match for the latter's. The other leftist factions looked at MM with disdain because of the rapprochement established by him with the NC. His political arguments were persuasive, yet he was often censured for his "irresponsible utterances". MM's energies are getting dissipated in the wake of normless trends developing within the left camps.

One of the top ranking communist party leaders working from self-exile in India was Tulsi Lal Amatya, a communist member in the dissolved parliament. Tulsi Lal, while in India in the early 1960s, fell out with PL more on personal, and tactical than on ideological grounds. Since then both of them pursued their individualist line of action. Yet PL cultivated an image that helped him to work with students and youth. Tulsi Lal kept quiet until his return to Nepal after the announcement of the referendum. Tulsi Lal criticized the "so-called Maoist parties in Nepal, for neither of them had any programme or policies. They opposed the Soviet Union, blocked the prospect of party unity, opposed democracy in the hope of launching a national democratic revolution and helped develop capitalist path," he stated.<sup>23</sup>

There was yet another senior Communist leader, Shambhu Ram Shrestha who wielded neither influence nor possessed any popularity. His forte was to criticise both India and the NC to the hilt. During the national referendum, Shambhu Ram's campaigning style was two-faced-to block the NC and to pay lip service to the multi-party side. But he chose to denounce those who talked of boycotting the referendum, calling such an action quite "childish."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>See Tulsi Lal Amatya, *Nakkali Krantikariharu Mawabadi Hunya C.I.A. Ko Jal?* (Fake Revolutionaries are Maoist or C.I.A.'s trap), (Nepal Communist Party Prakashan, New Delhi, n.d.).

<sup>24</sup>See Shambhu Ram Shrestha, "Yo Janmat Sangraha ko Rajnaitik Prayog Garaun: Bahiskarko Nara Ketaketiko kura ho" (Pamphlet), Kathmandu, February, 1980.

*Pro-Moscow Faction*

The pro-Moscow faction was not left intact following the declaration of national referendum. The simmering intra-party conflict came to the open with Keshar Jang Rayamajhi, pro-Moscow leader, and new General Secretary, Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar following divergent lines in regard to the participation in the May elections. Calling the elections being conducted on the basis of adult franchise as a great democratic exercise, Rayamajhi claimed that he was putting about 50 candidates in the field, though himself abstaining from the contest. In sharp contrast to this, Manandhar stated that the constitution was basically "undemocratic because it seeks to ignore democratic forces. The restoration of democracy is our first political task which can be accomplished through broad unity among democratic forces. "He went on to add that there could be no reconciliation with those who were favourably disposed towards the Panchayat System."<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, a pro-Moscow weekly noted that the communist movement in Nepal was now split into at least ten factions.

## II

*Dynamics of Political Forces: Pancha VS Parties*

A short discussion of the anatomy of political groups and personalities interacting in the national referendum and after has been given in the foregoing sections. But how their working style and behaviour played negative and positive parts in influencing the referendum verdict has to be assessed. Were the multi-party supporters responsible for turning victory into defeat? Were the leaders unrealistic, unimaginative and lacking in strategies? Or were there other factions which led to the rejection of the multi-party system by the people? Those questions are raised here with a view to linking these with the *modus operandi* of the different participants in the referendum.

Nepal's socio-political milieu and the national referendum represented two contradictory situations. The political forces participating in the referendum obviously missed this truth. Spurred on by the sudden change in the political environment, the opposition

<sup>25</sup>For Rayamajhi's view see *Gorkhapatra*, May 5, 1981, and for B.B. Manandhar's rejoinder see *Nabin Khabar*, May 5, 1981.

leaders were seemingly losing their heads over issuing statements, addressing mass meetings and boasting of their easily predictable overwhelming victory. In the first phase of the post-announcement period, the political parties exhausted all their energies in verbal euphoria. People listened, evaluated and made decisions. Simple villagers who were in the dark about the Royal decision were led by the village influentials—the Panchas. For the more aware voters, past glories were not the criteria at stake. What the leaders spoke, how they spoke and why they spoke were made important factors for popular evaluation. The political euphoria often turned into grotesque exhibitions, which was not at all indicative of democratic sentiments. It took quite some time for the multi-party supporters to make up to the necessity of eliciting country-wide support to win in the referendum.

The Panchas's proclivities towards democratization were shown by the unanimous resolution passed in the Panchas convention immediately after the announcement of the referendum. When they started regrouping themselves, they came into clash with the multi-party supporters. It was however worth noting that the Panchas were as much infected by normless elements as were the multi-party supporters. The extremists belonging both to the left and the right had not reconciled with the King's decision which was likely to go against their interests. So the Pancha extremists were aggressive in creating a climate of fear implying that the victory of the multi-party means an open invitation to chaos and anarchy. The multi-party supporters whose arrogance had also developed after the announcement, unwittingly fueled this provocation. Thus in the second phase, the multi-party chances appeared relatively dimmer with the concomitant rise of the prospects of the partyless side.

The young people with no political norms became the catalysts in creating disturbances in different parts of the country. So were the extremists who had made the multi-party leaders their targets of denunciation. After wavering indecisively in the first and the second phase, the two leftist-extremist factions denounced the referendum as a farce and betrayal which was not going to solve the problem confronting the country. For them, the multi-party system and parliamentary democracy were synonymous, and so were the multi-party system and the Nepali Congress. The multi-party leaders, particularly the NC stalwarts, were also responsible for such misgivings, because they went on repeating that the NC alone

was credible for turning the table in favour of the party system. One commentator who was closely associated with the multi-party campaign under the Nepali Congress went to the extent of blaming the NC leadership for not acknowledging the 20-year efforts contributed by peasants and other professionals. He stated that by not acknowledging the endeavours of these group of people, the NC lost their sympathy because of its declared intent of capturing power under the so-called organizational efforts of one party itself.<sup>26</sup> The author of the national reconciliation, B.P. was repeatedly stressing that the referendum was the result of his proposition and not the product of the countrywide students' movement. Although this assertion did not alienate his young followers, it created furore in other circles. Moreover, the congress leadership did not lag behind in creating a feeling that their party was "much ahead of referendum," and that its whole efforts were not aimed at success in the referendum, but at the general elections after the referendum. Thus the NC office which was opened shortly after the announcement of the referendum was apparently concerned more with projecting individual image of its leaders particularly B.P.'s than with highlighting the significance of the referendum. All these activities suggested that the entire party machinery was geared to the forthcoming general elections.<sup>27</sup>

Other non-congress multi-party leaders could not as well cut much ice in the face of revamped Panchas campaigns. Most of them went on narrating past deeds of the Panchayat System and Panchas in quite derogatory terms which were not always appreciated by the people. Emotional utterances and aggressive postures do but rarely if ever attract the voters. No multi-party leader went out to cover the length and breadth of the country. The northern mountain belt was in most part left untouched by them. Depending wholly on urban centres which subsequently proved not that reliable, millions of village voters had no other option but to hear the panchas and do their bidding.

<sup>26</sup>See Kuber Sharma, *Nirdal Kata? Bahudal Kata? Ek Rajnaitik Bisleshan* (Whither partyless? Whither multi-party? A Political Analysis) (Naya Bazaar, Kathmandu, 1980).

<sup>27</sup>B.P. Koirala's large photo with his finger pointed had been publicized all over the country. The Panchas were quick to capitalize it in their favour when they played tricks that such a posture of Koirala meant whether the people wanted the King or Koirala.



The political parties had no mass base because of the imposition of ban on their activities. Whatever they did in the past were either done clandestinely or from across the country's borders. Some people having affiliations with the banned parties also continued their struggle within the country through constitutional or extra-constitutional means. Emasculated and fragmented as they were, they never succeeded in launching a mass based peaceful agitation against the system. Only a few hundred students could mount their oppositional pressures when circumstances favoured them. All these handicaps, evident on the organizational side made the party-workers more leader-oriented than organization-oriented. Whoever came into contact with leaders were considered to be confidants, thereby superseding other activists not blessed by the leaders' favours. Rumblings over the link-system diverted the workers' attention towards getting favour. It was particularly so when hot discussions on getting election tickets began taking place among the party workers. The dispensation of favours from above was likely to be the rule of the 'promised' society. Thus a peculiar angle was developed in the perceptions of the multi-party activists.

The much vaunted assurance that 95 per cent of the votes would be bagged by the multi-party camp proved elusive. This assurance, however, developed complacency and over confidence. Such populist illusions could have been deliberately raised for engendering the enthusiasm of the multi-party supporters or for demoralising the opposition camp. But, given the then fast changing political context within the Panchayat camp, such a slogan not at all backed by appropriate strategies, proved counter-productive. How self-induced excitement blinded the multi-party activists could also be realized when the party workers failed to enlist the voters. None of them appeared to have checked the voters' list which had missed registering blocks after blocks of voters in Kathmandu and elsewhere. The method of preparing the voters' list was also faulty because if a person deputed to collect the names of eligible voters did not find them at their home on their visits, the absentees were not recorded in the list. The pro-multi-party leaders could have directed their volunteers to check and verify the lists thus insuring the participation of a maximum number of people. The non-listing of voters in the urban centres was presumably a loss to the multi-party side.

The lack of coordination in activities among the multi-party

campaigners was yet another factor marring the prospect of multi-party victory. The people supporting the multi-party side could have been well mobilized in each village had there been a well-defined distribution work among the party workers. Hundreds of people could have been enlisted to work as local agents with the party machinery playing supervisory roles. As there was no possibility of forging a broad coalition based on understanding, other multi-party supporters who did not see any prospect of winning the elections after the victory in the referendum seemingly dragged their feet leaving the field exclusively to the NC and the three communist factions.

In addition to these, certain psychological reasons were held responsible for the defeat of the multi-party side. B.P. who was blamed for the political debacle himself stated that the people, as they were terror stricken for eighteen years, could not be bold enough to assert their rights. Moreover, they were fed by rumours that the King was siding with the Panchayat, and hence, they did not take the risk of supporting the opposite camp. They had the feeling that the Panchayat camp would take a reprisal against them if that side won the referendum. These factors apart, as the multi-party side lacked in financial resources, tactics, techniques and so on, their defeat was inevitable.<sup>28</sup>

### *Issues*

The multi-party leaders woefully failed in highlighting fresh issues with a view to drawing the voters towards them. Their entire resources were utilized for downgrading the Panchas and the Panchayat System. Conceivably, after some time, the general people, other than diehard activists, were nauseated with the uniform pattern of speeches and mass meetings. On the contrary, the Panchas were working not only on their own strength, but on the weaknesses shown by their adversaries. Each issue was thoroughly proved in order to make it saleable before the voters. Equipped equally with both administrative support and tactics, they preferred personal contacts with the villagers to mass-meetings. When the multi-party supporters withdrew from the field, they swung into action. Taking

<sup>28</sup>B.P. Koirala has enumerated reasons responsible for the defeat of the multi-party side in his long interview with *Yauban (Youth Digest)*, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-7, 1980.

cudgels against their opponents, the Panchas raised the issue of tenancy rights which had been given by the Panchayat System in 1964. Most of the voters in the Tarai and the hills were stirred by this issue when a rumour spread that the multi-party's victory would withdraw the tenancy rights from the people.<sup>29</sup>

The Panchas had been quite successful to drive a wedge between the multi-party leaders and the King. The role of the institution of monarchy became an issue despite significance being attached to it by multi-party leaders. It was not only the strategy of the Panchas but the Palace itself appeared to look askance at the motivation and rhetorics of the multi-party side. It was presumably felt that it was not only the Panchayat system that was on trial but also the role of monarchy for which the Nepalis shown habitual deference. Similarly, the Panchas proved themselves to be astute tacticians when they mounted the propoganda that the multi-party system would inevitably open the door for communism in the country. The voters disgusted with the "difficulties" created in the wake of the pro-multi-party euphoria could not obviously be convinced by the genuine multi-party supporters that party system and communism were not necessarily the same, though within the framework of party democracy, all political opinions and ideologies would have a chance to operate. Alarmed at and bewildered by the spate of violence and disturbances, the Panchas could successfully prevail upon the people that they should under no circumstances caste their votes for the victory of the party system. The Panchayat was identified with peace and order while the multi-party allegedly meant chaos and anarchy.

Above all, an election is not only a choice of ideology, but also a contest of strategy or tactical manoeuverability of the respective contenders. The partyless camp had the government and resources on its back. The open involvement of the government in devising as well as actualizing strategies boosted the initially sagging morale of the Panchas. The opposite camp, on the contrary, had neither strategies nor resources, despite widespread rumour being spread by the Panchas that the multi-party side was more than well off with resources coming from the external powers. The country's difficult topographical and geographical situation also handicapped

<sup>29</sup>My field work in some Tarai districts could gather this information, see also Kuber Sharma, p. 93.

the movement of the multi-party supporters, leaving all inaccessible areas of the country to be influenced by the partyless side.

How organizational networks play a significant role in a country's politics could also be discerned during the referendum. The Panchayat System had created 2,911 village Panchayats and 75 district Panchayat units which were manned by thousands of local Panchas. These Panchayat members were in constant contacts with villagers, and their dominance was evident. Although the local Panchas were quite disreputable because of their continuous occupation of posts which was mainly possible through ascribed status and links, yet majority of them could not be discredited. To the Panchas, the 20-year old system had given status and privileges which they were not willing to give up. The multi-party activists often mouthing cliches could not go to infiltrate the Panchayat strong holds. Furthermore, the local Panchayat institutions did not show any kind of split when the actual crunch came. They highlighted the good work done by the Panchayat System and pointed out the dangers to be let loose by the 'reckless' multi-party supporters.

The external leverage of opposition was reduced after the announcement of the national referendum. Not any power showed its preference for the multi-party system. It was understood that Nepal's southern neighbour India, had virtually sealed its borders on the day of the referendum, on the spacious ground that the unchecked movement of the people across borders could affect the verdict of the referendum. China and the USA were also apparently preoccupied with Nepal's stability in view of developments in Southwest Asia, particularly after the "occupation" of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. For America and India and also for other democratic powers, the victory of the Panchayat camp was not going to frustrate the spirit of the referendum. King Birendra's declaration of December 1979 that he would abide by three principles of adult franchise, elected prime minister and accountability of the ministry to the legislature in future elections also came as a Royal desire for promoting democratic development. This Royal gesture seemingly helped the Panchayat camp, because the three ingredients underscored by the King were going to be the regular features of the Panchayat System. If those features were sincerely inculcated in the system, the gap between the party system and Panchayat System would be narrowed down. How the direct elections under the adult franchise were going to disintegrate the party-

less character of the system had been stated by the hardcore Panchas themselves.

King Birendra who had been providing active leadership to the system talked at length about the bright sides of the partyless system. His proclamations on May 24, 1979, December 15, 1979 and February 19, 1980 had given clear indications that the obtaining political system was integrationist, and the "main entrance" for the accommodation of all the Nepali people. On 15 December, 1979 King Birendra hinted at the political situation that had been created since the declaration of the referendum and keeping in view the then obtaining international situation, the people were asked to vote in the referendum. Similarly, on February 19, 1980, he said:

His late Majesty King Mahendra, having realised the need to make democratic order compatible with the realities of Nepal, *introduced the partyless democratic panchayat system. This polity, over the past 19-years, has been able to defend Nepali nationalism, and, without doubt, scored achievements in many spheres of Nepali life. . . .*<sup>30</sup> (Emphasis added)

Highlighting the true spirit of the Royal proclamation, a Nepali daily expressed the view that the Nepali people would grasp the meaning of the sentiments conveyed by the Royal address and accordingly, *choose the immediate past and not the days of divisive politics which will only tend to put the nations' unity and progress into jeopardy.*<sup>31</sup> (Emphasis added).

A group of commercial bourgeoisie having alleged connections with the administration reportedly showed their willingness to provide financial support to the partyless side. Licenses were reportedly distributed to export timber and such other items which were restricted. They were also given import licenses to meet the financial requirements of the Panchayat side.<sup>32</sup> Several members of the

<sup>30</sup>For full texts of the King's proclamations of May 24, December 15, 1979 and February 19, 1980, see the Appendix.

<sup>31</sup>*Himali Bela*, February 21, 1980.

<sup>32</sup>According to a report published in a local weekly, account of Rs 1,150,225 spent by the National Youth front was given. In the later part of 1980, the partyless camp spent the money on campaigns. Of this account Rs 75,000 had been disbursed as travelling allowances and Rs 5,000 as monthly allowances

National Panchayat stated in the house that Panchayat camp could have won the referendum by more than 80 per cent votes had the government been free from malpractices. It was also alleged that the government had distributed government funds among its own people.<sup>33</sup> But Prime Minister Thapa was of the view that the picture drawn by his Panchayat critics did not bear the truth in view of the difficult situation facing the Panchayat camp during the referendum campaigns.

Many other factors also worked to help the Panchayat side. The traditional forces both in villages and urban centres lent their support to the Panchayat. The people belonging to the upper socio-economic strata with their connections with the establishment were understood to have supported the Panchayat camp. Similarly the army and the police had been provided with the opportunity to take part in the referendum. Taking strong exception to the alleged involvement of the army and the police for influencing the verdict of the referendum, Man Mohan Adhikari stated that the politicization of the army and the police did not augur well for the country. According to him, ballot boxes were put in military barracks where no multi-party supporters could even enter into the premises. Similarly, he charged that the government had printed 400 thousand additional ballot papers to insure the victory of the partyless side.<sup>34</sup>

Any government in power would do its best to turn the election results to its favour. Nepal was no exception. Numerous intervening factors also helped the Panchayat side. The multi-party leaders had exposed all cards under their sleeves and no one could prove that the referendum was really rigged. Kissinger once said: "The task of a leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been. The public does not fully understand the world into which it is going. Leaders must invoke an alchemy of great vision." As "politics is the management of the people it is impor-

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among members of its central committee. A special reporter of the weekly, who had an opportunity to see the files relating to the budget of the National Youth Pancha Front, had learnt that it had so far obtained funds totalling Rs 3,450,675. See *Jana Akansha*, February 4, 1980.

<sup>33</sup>It had been alleged that each National Panchayat member got huge sum of money, the district Panchayat member got 15 to 25 thousands and other ordinary Panchas 12 thousands each for election campaigns.

<sup>34</sup>Man Mohan Adhikari said "with full responsibility" in a mass meeting at Kathmandu held immediately after the verdict of the referendum.

tant to understand the psychology as well as the symptoms of problems.”<sup>35</sup> The multi-party leaders in general could neither read into history nor into geography nor the peoples’ psychology. Under the circumstances, they were no match for the partyless side.

### III

#### *Nepal’s Politics: A Prognosis*

Whether the pace set by the national referendum would prove enduring or not, it brought several trends in the open. Some of these trends were procedural but others were fraught with far-reaching consequences for determining the role of Nepal as a nation. Politics which was so strenuously defended in the past appeared to be irrelevant to resolving the numerous crises facing the nation. Similarly, the political forces which often claimed to have a popular base got an opportunity to show their actual strength. So did the political leaders. Some of them stood up to the challenge, but many showed their limitations. Political polarization was also a trend which showed its true colours after the announcement of the referendum. As the fear psychosis of the past was no longer effective, the 46 per cent people supporting the multi-party could not be condemned as “anti-national elements” as in the preceding years nor could they be ignored. Moreover, several features introduced into the system with the emergent a relatively free society were likely to bring about attitudinal changes in the political process. (These are only topical assumptions which may or may not take the intended direction.)

And yet, there are other trends which would in all probability negate the trends of democratization. Nepal being a monarchical country is required to be more cautious in not allowing those negative trends to exist. Although late comers in history have a limited scope for logical development because of unthought of imponderables, yet for a country like Nepal, a peaceful transition to democracy and development appears to be the only alternative.

#### *Relevance of National Reconciliation*

Many political observers were tempted to say in the post-referen-

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Hugh Sidney, “The President: Majority, Poetry and Power,” *Time*, October 20, 1980.

dum period: "National reconciliation is dead, long live the national reconciliation." The author of this thesis B.P. Koirala defended it even after it was totally rejected by the Palace. Normally, when a concerning party does not care for reconciliation, it ceases to be reconciliation because it must possess certain traits of conciliation or *quid pro quo*.<sup>36</sup> The Panchayat ideologies of the Back-to-Village National Campaign particularly were quick to link national reconciliation offer with a "conspiracy" for destroying the partyless character of the system and hence, detestable. Yet Koirala repeatedly affirmed that any reconciliation was a heartbreakingly slow process, he was optimistic with regard to its ultimate success. The Congress leader maintained that the King who was the "King-pin" of Nepali politics had no alternative but to free himself from the "vicious circles."

The 'national reconciliation' appeal appeared to have suffered a set-back after the promulgation of the third amendment to the constitution by the King in 1980. According to B.P., the victory of the Panchayat was not the people's affirmation for retaining the "partyless" system, but for the "reformed" Panchayat System. He stated: "The people are very unhappy because only half an hour after the announcement of the referendum verdict, 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 which he imposed on the people."<sup>37</sup> The NC opposed the constitutional reforms as these did not accord due recognition to the 46 per cent minority registering their support for the multi-party system. Nor did the Palace look into their grievances. While B.P. and other opposition leaders were persuading the people to boycott the May 9 elections, King Birendra, calling upon the people to participate peacefully in the elections, stated that the Nepali people had already chosen their path and constitutional amendment had projected where they stood.<sup>38</sup> B.P.

<sup>36</sup>One hard-core Nepali Congress Youth leader, Shanker Ghimire and former Prime Minister, Tulsī Giri, were in common to express such a view in their separate interviews granted to the author in April 1981.

<sup>37</sup>See "The constitution is not democratic" (B.P. Koirala's personal interview with Bhola Chatterji), *Sunday* (Calcutta), Vol. 8, No. 34, April 26, 1981, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup>*The Commoner*, April 13, 1981.



Koirala's dilemma was explained when he admitted that his group had to take a painful decision, because

. . . The dictatorship of the Panchayat system has stood as an obstacle in our two decade long efforts to restore democracy. We therefore, had had to involve ourselves in a state of confrontation against the King, who is protecting this system.<sup>39</sup>

He added that the King had as much at stake as themselves in the preservation of the independence and national identity of the country and "We have developed a relationship with him. As a result, a new atmosphere conducive to national unity has emerged amid a mixture of confrontation and cooperation."<sup>40</sup>

Although B.P. seemed to have hardened his posture after the boycott of the elections, he was, however, not prepared to admit that his efforts towards reconciliation had exhausted. On the contrary, he had been seeing some positive indications from the Palace; after all an atmosphere had developed which permitted him to criticize the King for awarding such a constitution. How he saw a silverlining in the Nepali political horizon could be seen in these words:

. . . We have registered very big gains during the last four years. I think this is due to our line of 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 direct elections, 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.<sup>41</sup>

The NC policy in 1981 was ironically paradoxical, for on the one hand, it opposed the constitution by giving a call for boycotting the elections and, on the other, it went on reaffirming its faith in national reconciliation. While opposing the Panchayat System, it opposed the King for his alleged role of being the "protector of the

<sup>39</sup>*The Statesman* (Delhi), March 23, 1981.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, *Rashtrapukar*, April 9, 1981.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Chatterji, *Sunday*, April 26, 1981.

system.” Yet the NC leaders declared that they were not for ‘monarchy’, rather they were for ‘kingship’. The former, according to them, implied a monarchical system unrestrained by any popular sanction. Despite such a jugglery of words, monarchy in Nepal means an efficient monarchy. So their interpretation of the limited role of the Kingship might be theoretically valid, but it appeared only as a distant possibility in view of the obtaining political conditions of the country. So when one talked of ‘real politic,’ national reconciliation seemed to have entered into a new phase of ‘confrontation’. When B.P. was talking of emerging positive features from his national reconciliation offer, he was not referring to a sort of informal understanding between the King and the NC for creating an environment allowing them freedoms to operate. The new developments in the political environment were the expressions of an unilateral gesture which could be withdrawn at any time.

From the systemic point of view, the national reconciliation thesis carried no meaning when both parties failed to appreciate each other’s difficulties. With the entire resources mobilized for maintaining the partyless structure even after the promulgation of the reformed constitution, and with opposition groups failing to participate in the elections, the emergent political trends did not favour the ‘democrats’ who boycotted the elections.

The NC leaders in particular were apparently tempted to participate in the elections had some procedural matters—formation of an interim government and the postponement of elections for some time—been resolved to their satisfaction. Besides the NC, the leftist groups, with the lone exception of the small Rayamajhi faction of the pro-Moscow group and the Bakhan Singh faction of the NC, and other multi-party groups did not join the system. The so-called powerful factions of the extremist group ML and Mohan Bikram factions came out with a scathing criticism of the May elections “as a conspiracy to show that the regime enjoyed a popular mandate.” Calling upon all people to actively boycott the polls, the ML faction also urged the people to “liquidate the fascist and tyrannical Panchayat System.” Another extremist leader stated that authoritarian forces were attempting to consolidate their positions by creating the illusion of general elections. By boycotting the election, political groups “should try to take the struggle against the present

system to a decisive stage.”<sup>42</sup>

Did Nepali politics which had shown the trends of ‘political integration’ of all forces hitherto working against the partyless system, come back to square one? Political realities speak otherwise. For there was a perceptible change both in the form and the content of the 22-year old Panchayat system. So were these changes in the oppositional forces. However, they have still to go a long way to present themselves as decisive force in the country’s politics.

### *Political Trends: Then and Now*

The political forces which emerged after the 1950 revolution were both tradition-bound and proponents of change. The former category represented the Nepali society in its totality, the latter constituted a fragment which was exposed to western values channelled through Indian nationalist movement. Only a small group of people were nostalgic about communism then in evidence in the Soviet Union and China. But westernized party activists could neither appeal the Nepali people nor did they set in motion participatory democratic trends through the adoption and use of indigenous symbols. In India, Gandhi knew how traditional symbols could be an effective instrument for the masses. It is partially due to this reason that India has been able to carry on with its democratic tradition.<sup>43</sup> One of the tragedies in Nepal was that immediately after the 1951 revolution, the political forces got themselves embroiled in non-issues in regard to their respective roles during the revolution. The Delhi compromise which was agreed upon between India, the NC, King Tribhuvan and the Ranas also did not count in the contending forces. Moreover, the 1951 revolution gave Nepal a ready made model of democracy in the festering soil of “feudocracy.”

The national political leaders also failed to inject a new political consciousness for consolidating the gains of the revolution. The 1951-60 which was an era of party politics in Nepal in the formal-legal sense passed off witnessing the gradual erosion of the party

<sup>42</sup>*Jana Marga*, April 15, 1981. Sahana Pradhan, another leftist leader, said that communists “were prepared for a thousand-year struggle,” but were not prepared to surrender. See *Matribhumi*, April 14, 1981.

<sup>43</sup>K. Seshadri, *Indian Politics, Then and Now* (Delhi, 1976), p. 87.

system in the country; the overwhelming majority demonstrated by the NC in the 1959 general elections was a significant achievement in the otherwise uniformly gloomy picture. In the period that followed the 1960 take-over the parties' role underwent a change along with the political system. Such a sudden swing threw the political forces into wilderness, restricting all their legitimate operations within the system. The political parties, irrespective of their claims that they were still the forces to reckon with, had not been successful to come in regular contact with the masses. Nor did they succeed in disseminating their ideologies. As the new order followed a carrot and stick policy, their inability to launch peaceful mass movements became all the more evident. A party like the NC had no other options for its political survival except to adopt pressure tactics.

The left force were relatively well placed in the post-1960 period, because they were not hit as hard as the Congress leaders. The leftists took the opportunity by driving a wedge between the Congress and the King. A number of national and international developments including the Sino-Indian border conflicts and the Sino-Soviet ideological rifts, also wielded their impact on the patterns of the political equations in Nepal. In the absence of legitimate political channels for putting up the people's grievances, underground activities became more pronounced in the post-1960 period. The leftists, sheltered as they were in the new order, appeared to have penetrated into the system. However, there were others who preferred to be in exile in order to carry anti-system activities from across the borders.

Divided as they are into almost a dozen factions, the Communists in Nepal had not been able to make any sizeable dent in the Nepali society. The extremist faction--ML appear to have established its hold among the conscious younger generations, but its popular base is yet to be tested. Their actual test lies more not in organization-based electoral politics in the country but in anomic activities. The general trends indicate that the leftist forces in the country are steadily on the increase due to political rifts and economic stagnation. The ascendancy of the left force was particularly felt after the drawing of the curtains in 1979.

A peculiar trend demonstrating the psyche of the political parties could be seen in the 1979-80 period. The left forces especially the extremists, were very much preoccupied with outwitting and

outmanoeuvring democrats in order to establish their own credentials of political potency. Second, both groups regarded the NC as a common enemy which was likely to come to power through the "back door," i.e. the victory of the multi-party system in the referendum and the general elections to be held subsequently. If the leftists could dismantle the hold of the NC, they would have an easy going for establishing their supremacy. How passionately the two extremist groups operated to thwart the prospects of the NC could be observed during the referendum. After the defeat of the multi-party side in the referendum, both groups became less pugnacious when opposing the NC.

### *Fragmented Groups*

The political parties could not go to the masses due to the severe operational constraints imposed on them by the system. The party leaders also showed poor organizational ability by resorting to a kind of pressure tactics in order to gain concessions from the King. The NC which was still the largest party in every sense of the term was quite short of policies and appropriate strategies. All the violent activities conducted in the 1960s and 70s by them turned out to be only an exercise or an unrealistic proposition. B.P. in spite of his undiminished charisma and domestic and international image, could achieve only a partial success after his return to Nepal in 1976. But how the party would be carrying both the lines of 'reconciliation' and 'confrontation' appeared intractable. The leaders of the party have earned a good deal of applause and abuses, applause for their symbolic decision to stick to the basic principles and abuses for their lack of actions and irresponsible utterances. So never had the NC been so dependent as in the present on the personality of B.P. Koirala whose failing health and ageing leadership is likely to afflict the future role of the party. Although the NC possessed every potential of emerging as a moderate democratic group in the country, its present character is likely to get diluted in the event of Panchas joining the party. The polarization of Nepali politics along moderate democratic and leftist lines is not probably distant in view of the changes brought about in the Panchayat System. In that case different kinds of alliances and alienations would be taking place among the forces working within and outside the system.

All political groups, as the present demonstrated, appeared to be

suffering from a leadership crisis, because the old leaders are being worn out both mentally and physically, and a new leadership has yet to emerge and prove its mettle. Many in the NC cadres have undergone hardships and sufferings, but none of them have an image of national and international standing. As in India where Mrs Indira Gandhi's "domination was so decisive that it weakened the position of other leaders as well as institutions." So in Nepal, the triumvirate of B.P. Koirala, Ganesh Man and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai did not necessarily mean a collective leadership within the Party. "Koirala" as one of the student leaders said, "was an institution in himself" because his personality was linked with the democratic movement in the country.<sup>44</sup> B.P.'s actions also appeared to be unchallengeable and infallible within the organization. Although B.P. was perennially controversial in Nepali politics, his moderate stand did create a sobering effect in the post-referendum period. If B.P.'s present leadership role becomes ineffective or if he leaves the political scene, the NC would either be headed by radicals or undergo a massive change.

If "personality cult" marked the NC, heterogeneity plagued the leftists. Party building in a partyless polity would naturally be a difficult task. The NC could maintain its identity as a leading democratic party due to its moderation, mission, and leadership. Its abortive actions launched in the name of democracy also paid dividends in the sense of assuring its survival. How the new alignment takes place in the future would also be contingent upon the nature of the Panchayat polity. If the Panchayat system would go on extending and expanding its democratic base both in form and in content, it is likely to affect the conventional image of the NC. Even in a country like India, the party system is being fragmented. A staunch advocate of liberalism, Minoos Masani, describes the Indian situation in these words:

. . . The spirit of compromise is not there among us; the party in our country becomes an end in itself and therefore it goes on splintering; it is the ego of the various party leaders that creates problems. This absence of a spirit of compromise is what broke

<sup>44</sup>The President of the pro-congress, *Nepal Vidyarthi Sangh*, Bimalendra Nidhi went on repeating it during the referendum campaigns.

up not only the Janata but many parties before that as well.<sup>45</sup>

India has been taken as the best model of parliamentary democracy working in a poor country. The political parties and pressure groups which are identified with a democratic society are said to have worn out in India due to caste, illiteracy, and the personality cult. We cannot make a comparison between the Indian situation and that of Nepal's, because the former had the institutional legacies of the British Raj, extensive experience of successive elections that followed the independence, etc. Nepal was a late comer in democracy's history. But both countries are caste and class-ridden. India has noticed the caste phenomenon as significant because "caste is a greater factor than ideology." In Nepal, the caste system is tied up with political structure, though the intensity of caste affiliations is not realized politically as in India. With rising levels of consciousness along with the process of 'social mobilization,' caste and other considerations are likely to come up to the fore. Elections fought on the basis of individual standing would be greatly intensifying caste conflicts. This was even evident in the first Panchayat elections fought on the basis of adult franchise in 1981. (Yet as compared to the general elections held in India, Nepal's exercise was not discouraging.)

A progressive fragmentation of groups in Nepal could be seen both in the democratic and the left camps. In the democratic camp, excluding the NC and the Panchayat, there were no groups, only leaders.<sup>46</sup> As most of these leaders were in hibernation since 1960; they only came out after the referendum announcement. Looking at the political trend, there were mainly five political groups which showed their influence during and after the referendum: (a) Nepali Congress, (b) The pro-Moscow communist, (c) The Moderate left groups, (d) The extremist left and, (e) The Panchayat. To prove into their functioning most of them were characterized as splinter groups. A few political stalwarts often dominated newspapers

<sup>45</sup>See a dialogue between Mino Masani and Giri Lal Jain, "Is the Party System Dying," *Times of India* (Sunday issue), May 25, 1980.

<sup>46</sup>Political parties in India have also been showing a decline. It has been brilliantly put by Piloo Mody, a leader of the Janata Party. According to Mody, "If ten Indian leaders coalesce, it makes a big party; if three leaders get together, it is a small party. After a while all organizations are reduced to one-man parties." See *Times of India* (Sunday Issue), August 17, 1980.

headlines, but none of them showed any organizational capacity during the referendum. A few factional politicians fought the Panchayat elections on the basis of their individual popularity. The personalities' impact on the election results has already been discussed.

### *Monarchy and Party System*

Normally, monarchy and party system are antagonistic with each other trying to reduce the influence of the other. But modern political systems as defined by the western world, are necessarily party systems, for, political parties are considered to be both means and content of democracy. In one-party systems, the party machinery and the state power are treated as one and the same, but in multi-party systems, parties are organizational parts for running as well as realizing a democratic order. Democratic political systems can be roughly be divided into three subclasses. The first of these has high sub-system autonomy.<sup>47</sup> In such types of political systems political parties, interest groups and the media of mass communication are relatively differentiated one from the other, and there is a relatively well developed and widely distributed participant culture.<sup>48</sup> Among the western liberal democracies, as Almond and Powell state, some have "limited sub-system autonomy and some low sub-system autonomy." The authoritarian model of political system also varies from country to country depending on the degree of legal and actual "pluralism" or, autonomy in the political infrastructure.

Such classifications of political systems may not neatly categorize a mixed type, because certain characteristics of democracy and authoritarian system may be manifest in such a system. Nepal is a monarchical Hindu state whose ruler is a hereditary King, who rules and reigns in accordance with sanctions derived from history and tradition. When the issue of popular legitimacy is often raised by political forces demanding more accommodation in power sharing, the King either has to go for building institutions or has to opt for ascertaining popular view through strategies devised by

<sup>47</sup>Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* (Englewood, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963), pp. 3-5.

<sup>48</sup>Gabriel A. Almond, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1966), p. 259.



him. The national referendum was such a strategy for both defusing the crisis and ascertaining popular sentiment. Ordinarily, a patrimonial like system does not "assert the august and omnipotence of the King, but also his great duties as the protector and benefactor of his people. The King is admonished to adhere to sacred tradition, yet custom supports the image of a ruler whose will is supreme."<sup>49</sup> How the institution of monarchy is taken as an embodiment of sovereignty, integrity, culture and traditions of the country has been explained by King Birendra himself in his address to the nation on the occasion of his coronation:

. . . The basic unity of the Kingdom as a mosaic of numerous diversities and contrasts has been nurtured by the Crown. Naturally, therefore, our people look up to it as an enduring expression of their unity and strength. The throne embodies this country's sovereignty, integrity and national dignity together with our independence, tradition and culture.<sup>50</sup>

The present Shah dynasty has also undergone trial and tribulations in history "ranging from periods of political impotence to periods of absolute authority." The Rana rulers took advantage of the troubled political scene in the nineteenth century to strip the power of the Shah Kings. It was only after the 1951 that the King's powers were again restored through a revolution launched jointly by the King and the people. And for the first time in Nepali history, the interests of both the King and people were so decisively one and the same. The monarchy became more assertive in the post-1951 period because of the steady decline of the party system in the country. The democratic leaders could be held responsible for precipitating this, because they were engaged in infightings than in preparing themselves for democracy. The period since 1951 was a testimony to the fact that the King ". . . represented the continuity of tradition and yet he had been the spearhead of revolution against tyranny,"<sup>51</sup> and was still central to the growth

<sup>49</sup>A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), pp. 85-86 quoted in Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-Building & Citizenship* (Wiley Eastern Pvt. Ltd. Publishers, 1964), p. 216.

<sup>50</sup>*Proclamations, Speeches and Messages* (HMG, 1977), p. 115.

<sup>51</sup>Leo E. Rose and Margaret W. Fisher, *The Politics of Nepal: Persistence and Change in an Asian Monarchy* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1970), p. 43.

of democracy in the country.

Two considerations assume significance in showing the relationship between democracy and monarchy in Nepal. First, monarchy enjoys a broadbased consensus because of its historical, traditional role in both making modern Nepal and integrating people into a single nationhood. Second, the mediatory role of monarchy is equally important in a situation when political organizations—parties and groups—are too fragmented and emaciated. The broad-based elections and the atmosphere created as a consequence of the referendum also demonstrated how frustrating was the national scene. The Panchayat system, despite its several positive aspects for institutionalizing local political process, always made efforts for concentration of power. The King's role was thus often brought into the centre of controversy, rendering other peripheral institutions lifeless. Even the national legislature appeared to be a formal body having some recommendatory functions. Such a trend not only afflicts the growth of democracy and democratic institutions but also fosters a false political culture. Nations created by warriors often vanish if they fail to receive emotional integration of people living within the territory. For this, the role of institutions such as monarchy seemed to have been successful in forging social equilibrium with the help of cultural and religious synthesis emanating from Hinduism and Buddhism. Religious tolerance, cultural assimilation and moderate temperament of the people at large are, besides numerous other factors, positive features for evolving democracy in Nepal. If the institution of monarchy which wields both symbol and authority commits itself to democracy for the larger and enduring interests of both Kingship and people, prospect of democracy in Nepal appears to be bright.

The history of developing countries show that a committed institution or leadership was necessary for the development of democracy. Pakistan and India are the two cases in point. Indian democracy was the product of its tradition as well as commitment of its leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and a host of others. If Nehru had become ambitious for wielding absolute power, the fate of Indian democracy would possibly have taken a different turn in the 1950s when almost all 'new nations' after gaining independence either fell into the hands of "praetorian guards" or politician-turned dictators. Pakistan has a traumatic experience of political development because of the absence of a committed political leadership,

charismatic or institutional, after the death of Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. The succeeding generation of Pakistani elites “were reluctant either to broaden their ranks by including the regional leaders from within Pakistan or to risk an election for fear of losing power.” When politicians clung to power without going for elections, a close working alliance developed between the national political elites and the civil-military bureaucracy—an alliance that in later years, especially after 1954, was dominated by the latter.<sup>52</sup> The series of coups and counter coups in Pakistan are nothing more than a demonstration of the effects of de-institutionalization of democratic polity. It can thus be stated that a strong committed leadership was essential for the growth of democracy in developing countries, perhaps even more than institutions. It is the leadership that creates as well as nurtures institutions and binds factional groups together. It was due to this reason that serious political observers often raise the question of the “Nehru” model when they start seeing erosion of democratic institutions and norms in India. The 1970s particularly noticed such a decline, but the system seemed to have been put back on the rails after sometime. “Political systems themselves, of course, also influence the men who mature under them.”

When we single out the leadership side as one of the basis ingredients of democratic development, we can present the case of many Southeast Asian countries in which organizations and leadership decline, military interventions tookover. Today many countries have neither democracies nor a systematically developed leadership.<sup>53</sup> In Singapore, political opposition has been routed in the elections. Singapore is an oddity in several respects. But what happens to Singapore’s democracy hinged on an individual is still an unresolved question.

Stability is another requirement for democratic development. If a society is in flux both politically and mentally, democracy’s chance of survival becomes bleak. An evolving social ethos and a viable political institution like a monarchy can create conditions conducive for democracy. It becomes particularly relevant to a small

<sup>52</sup>See Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure of National Integration* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 24.

<sup>53</sup>Richard Butwell, *Southeast Asia: A Political Introduction* (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1975), p. 15.

country like Nepal where ethnic and parochial loyalties are still within manageable bounds. Moreover, in Nepal almost all ethnic groups, democratic and other forces have unanimous view about the modernizing role of the monarchy. As the country's army is completely loyal to the King along with the people, domestic stability is never in question. If a country is politically fragmented, the role of a traditional institution should be utilized for channelizing the forces working in the country. Monarchy in Nepal, despite its own surroundings and inhibitions, has to be responsive as well as accommodative in setting participatory trends in motion. The national referendum and the period that followed it have shown that the country would have no other choices but to see this trend.

Popular participation that was supposedly in evidence for about 18 years (1961-79), always tended to be on the government's terms, that is, on the terms of the elites in the government. But this situation has changed after the declaration of the referendum. Many political stalwarts were defeated by ordinary people in the May elections. Although there exists quite serious flaws in the provisions of the constitution, the general elections have taken place after 20 years, and this is a medium even if other improvements fail to come up for the evolution of democracy in the country.

“Revolutions are often initiated by dissension among the dominant groups in society rather than by the protest of subordinate groups,”<sup>54</sup> writes Bendix. The Monarchy, as that of Nepal, the live symbol of stability, should avoid any unwanted revolution by revolutionizing itself. But such a process of revolutionization should under no circumstances be led by emotional appeal for immediate interests. The commitment to a pious goal or value does not mean a strategy. To quote Bendix again, “major changes have occurred in the absence of political revolution, and they also have enhanced some freedoms and diminished others.”<sup>55</sup> It is easy to give a call for revolution but difficult to move forward a society in a revolutionary spirit. The anarchical international order today clearly shows the magnitude of difficulties inherent in the proposition.

<sup>54</sup>Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), p. 597.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

### *Students and Politics*

Student politics in Nepal merely is an extension of political parties' activities. But like "red guards" on the rampage, the student population in the post-referendum period entered into an orgy of unconstructive activities while party leaders kept on mouthing platitudes. The political parties have always banked upon the students for mounting oppositional pressure.

Nepal's student phenomenon and its relationship with parties was reminiscent of the Indian situation after independence. The Indian national leaders threw the student population into the freedom movement, urging them to boycott classes in order to give a deathblow to the decadent foreign rule. And the student unrest in India today has continued the old tradition. It has thus been commented: "Having released the student population from the bonds of their duties on the plea that a foreigner was ruling the country, the nation today finds itself in a sticky position in which the released student population continues to adopt the same agitational attitude even after the alien government has gone."<sup>56</sup> Something like this happened in Nepal after the announcement of the referendum.

Unlike student politics in the western countries and in India, Nepal's student psyche is primarily partisan. It is obviously due to the weakening positions of the banned parties, which never concentrated their energies in organization building. Whatever agitational roles the students played were welcome to the party leaders. But in fact the student agitation in Nepal is a passing phenomenon, not a stabilized trend for creating impact on political processes. Nor is it always ideological in orientation.<sup>57</sup> It comes as a occasional storm afflicting the political system. How the students often presented themselves as a retrogressive force when they blindly attacked the progressive legitimate political order also got attention in the

<sup>56</sup>K. Sheshadri, p. 30.

<sup>57</sup>Although student politics in Nepal showed its resemblance to other students' movements of the world, it had its some distinct characteristics. Students, who were politicized in accordance with party ideology could be amenable to party leadership and went into action as party cadres. Some students lost their lives during the period or armed confrontation launched by the Nepali congress. Some students belonging to the ML faction of the Nepal communist party had been killed when they resorted to violent methods for what they called "liquidation of class enemies."

post-referendum period.<sup>58</sup> Regarding the 1979 student movement, the NC leader, B.P. Koirala decried it on the ground that the “movement was controlled and financed by foreigners,” despite some of its positive features providing an opportunity to ventilate peoples resentment against the system.<sup>59</sup> Although these were vague charges against the student movement, yet there was no dearth of such opinion during the movement.

A few tentative conclusions can be inferred from the above discussion. First, Nepal's younger generation is increasingly becoming conscious, but they are not necessarily politicized. Modern lifestyles and disorientation regarding national issues have made them politically apathetic and normless. Most of them are led by some articulate, emotional and idealist peers whose roles would be ambiguous. Most of them are neither for education, nor for career nor for politics. They want to have the best of all these fields without doing anything. Second, the decline in the standard of education has had a considerable impact on their career. The new education system which introduced semester examinations also made them dependent upon teacher and class notes. As atmosphere was not congenial for such a radical change, serious educational problems arose affecting the student generation at large. The neglect of human resource has far reaching consequences for a country.

While discussing Pakistan's experience, Mahabub ul Haq has thus stated: The most important challenge for development planners is to devise a system of education which extends universal literacy, imparts relevant training, and is accessible to all irrespective of income levels. Without such a sound base, the pattern of development can easily get warped in favour of a privileged

<sup>58</sup>In 1980, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala discussed at length about the nature, and content of student movement. According to him, students should know their limitations and responsibility. Otherwise, their struggle for democracy would also give way to more detestable authoritarian and fanatical regimes. Koirala also criticized Nepali students for pulling him down when he was the Home Minister in the first ever formed coalition government in 1951. Similarly he criticized the student movement that helped instal the Surya Bahadur Thapa's government in 1979. For details see, Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, “Bartaman Rastriya Sandharvama Bidyarthi Haruko Bhumika” (Role of Student's in the Present National Context), *Jana Akansha*, Vol. 13, No. 26, March 19, 1980 and *Yauban (Youth Digest)*, Vol. 3. Nos. 4-7, 2037 (1981).

<sup>59</sup>See *Yauban, ibid.*, p. 90.

minority.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, despite all these negative trends evident in the student behaviour, many political groups find the student field as the most suitable site for recruiting their cadres. As the student problem is largely related with the prospective course of political development in the country, the students’ political role would accordingly be decided. If the groups possessing different political ideologies find difficulty in identifying themselves with their previous values, then their role as disseminator of meaningful ideologies would be seriously attenuated. In what way the Panchayat polity would be moulding its course is likely to influence student politics. A major factor in this regard will be the improvement in the present education system.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the country in the 1980s is likely to confront serious economic challenges and the erosion of norms in public life. And ideologies with which different political groups had been augmenting their appeal over the years are not likely to be equally appealing in the future.

<sup>60</sup>See Mahbub ul Haq, *The Poverty Curtain: Choices for the Third World* (Oxford University, 1976), p. 24.

<sup>61</sup>Quoted in Michel J. Crozier *et al.*, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York University Press, 1975), p. 2.

## *Chapter 8*

### **Concluding Reflections**

Nepal's national referendum was a great democratic exercise since the dawn of democracy in 1951. The first general elections held in 1959 had provided a unique opportunity to the Nepali people for choosing their representatives on the basis of universal adult franchise. This democratic process was abandoned in 1960 on the plea that abrasive tensions generated by party politics were quite harmful for an underdeveloped country like Nepal. It was however maintained that democracy was not wholly written off in Nepal, though for a considerable length of time, debates over the course of appropriate political process dominated the national scene. A number of factors had then supported the King who embarked on a new partyless polity, the disposition of which was towards creating a homogenized political society. The Panchayat experimentation provided stability because of the active and effective leadership of the King. But it did not succeed in integrating the disparate political groupings outside its fold. These groups brought occasional pressures to bear on the system making it more reactive and defensive rather than purposive and accommodative. Over the years, this modus operandi was under acute strain which peaked in May 1979. King Birendra, with the objectives of defusing the immediate crisis and of giving a new dimension to the 19-year old Panchayat System, acted as if the whole system was being put on trial by ordering a national referendum to assess its viability.

The national political scene, suddenly changed by the Royal decision, showed a number of trends which were likely to influence



the future of the nation. Although the Royal decision was a sudden swing fraught with far reaching consequences, it was a timely and positive step. The political party men who were often denounced as 'antinational elements' now acquired a new status. A new environment was created by the referendum decision, and conciliatory gestures shown by both the Panchayat side and the opposition groups after the announcement of the verdict of the referendum were on the whole exemplary.

Of the important trends brought to the surface after the referendum was related to an option for giving a trial to liberal political process which was already a *fait accompli* in the country. For ensuring popular legitimacy to the system as well as for making the system a development strategy, appropriate development of institutions was necessary. The Panchayat model as it was practised for 19 years was no longer relevant to the emergent trends. Although the Panchayat model received popular mandate during the referendum, King Birendra's preemptive commitment to abide by three principles—the election to the National Panchayat on the basis of adult franchise, the provision for elected prime minister, and the responsibility of the cabinet to the house—had already outlined the contours of reform within the partyless character. Both Panchayat supporters and multi-party activists took advantage of the Royal commitment during the referendum; the former doing their best to establish their democratic credentials and the latter predicted the end of the partyless experimentation. Both sides agreed on one point that such constitutional measures promote group politics which would surface steadily in due course after the implementation of the reformed constitution.

Another trend evident in the post 1979 political scene was related to the actual organizational strength and immediacy of ideological appeals of respective political groups that ranged from the 'democratic' camp to the 'progressive' factions. Somewhere between these two were the *status quo* bound but liberal Panchas. The prediction that Panchayat fortress would crumble after the referendum proved however to be elusive, in spite of certain significant change of side by some senior Panchas. Despondency and a feeling of inferiority put a damper on the Panchas in the beginning, but they overcame this psyche when they found that they were placed in a more advantageous situation than their adversaries. The multi-party stalwarts were also responsible for indirectly boosting their

position. The people were nostalgic about democratic reforms, and the political leaders, particularly belonging to the banned parties, had a chance to evaluate their performances during the campaigns. The dilemma of the Nepali Congress with regard to its participation in the Panchayat System was seen after the verdict of the referendum. It has yet to be seen how the party will be able to continue asserting its democratic credibility that it was able to project for so long when it had played a major oppositional role in the past. If the new reforms initiated by King Birendra get distorted on the implementation, the NC is likely to retain its image of the past. If these reforms are further expanded and extended so as to integrate all groups irrespective of ideologies, then the NC's dominant position will perhaps be considerably reduced. Anti-congress forces that have been in the ascendancy in the country, too, might put up stiff resistance to its continuation as the single largest group. Consequently, the party's homogeneity will not likely be retained if the leadership will not give due consideration to adjust itself to the changed political context.

The leadership of the NC was quite helpful in averting a crisis after the referendum results. But its decision to boycott the 1981 general elections, however, proved to be costly. Senior party leaders including its general secretary dissociated themselves from the uncertainty and confusion in the party in regard to future course of action. The NC would be facing additional dilemmas if it becomes less action-oriented in the future. To forestall such developments, the organization would either have to risk confrontation or enter into the system, possibly gaining some concessions from the King. Since its own organizational strength can hardly be called adequate for confrontation, the latter course is more likely in view of the obtaining national and international developments. India and China are coming closer and so are the United States and China, changing the balance of power situation in the South and Southwest Asian regions. This will also dictate other peripheral powers to maintain domestic equilibrium. Monarchy in Nepal has been providing stability for the country's transition towards modernity. Perhaps no power in Nepal's neighbourhood and also the others concerned about maintaining peace and stability in the region would be inclined to disturb it by openly aiding and abetting political groups which are hostile to the system. Moreover, the political groups, on their part, have decided to work within the country after the declaration of the

referendum.

On the left-front, no group appears to be well-kint under an acceptable leadership, even though the 'ML' faction showed a semblance of homogeneity. The fourth conference (Mohan Bikram faction) which was another offshoot of the communist party and the ML do not think in terms of developing democracy through constitutional reforms as underlined by King Birendra. Nor do they set their objectives. So both factions apparently made determined bids to thwart the prospects of constitutional reforms. Both groups were partly successful in enlisting the support of young emotional students and school teachers, but their massbase still leaves much to be desired. During the period under scrutiny, their militancy got sharply focussed when extreme forces on the right also joined hands with them forming a coalition for sabotaging democratic liberal reforms. In Nepal the left forces are gaining ground mainly because all legitimate channels of public dissent were either blocked or patronized by the system. In fact, many diehard leftists have expressed their willingness to join the system since its beginning. They have therefore been able to influence the course of the leftist movement in the country significantly. Economic hardships faced by the people and rampant corruption in public life also enhance the prospects of left trends. Although the leftists were in disarray mainly due to parochial and personalistic causes, the popular appeal of "communism" that only this would salvage the country from its rotten condition provides obviously enough to catch the attention of the emotional youth.

The first Panchayat general elections showed certain portents for the future of the system. During the elections intramural conflicts were more pronounced than ever before with hundreds of Panchayat activists showing their determined willingness to contest 112 seats of the National Panchayat. Not only they defied the officially approved list of candidates, but also gave a call to defeat the 'official' candidates by all means. So the election was actually contested on individual resources. The voters had no other options but to be lured by caste, community, personal links and monetary considerations while deciding their choice. Yet caste and community alone were not the decisive factors in several constituencies. The political picture could have been different had the political groups boycotting the election decided to participate. Then, the panchas could be presumably mobilized for drumming up their support to

the candidates put up from the Panchayat side. Although individualistic trends have also been seen in Western democracies, these cannot provide any alternative except party's ideology and organization for ensuring people's participation as well as for running the system in a disciplined manner. The role of the party in these democracies are also declining as Huntington notes: "Not only has the massbase of the parties declined but so also has the coherence and strength of party organization." In other countries, particularly India, party institutions have been generally bypassed by the "rise of anomic" tendencies reflecting in the political process a steady fragmentation of the party system and a decline in the normative side of politics. In India, the movements by students and peasants and other non-partisan groups have raised numerous questions in regard to the effective working of the party system.

In Nepal, the post-referendum declaration period demonstrated such trends when teachers, corporation employees, labourers, students and others started articulating their respective interests. And political groups had lesser roles to play in influencing the strikes, lockouts and demonstrations. Despite such trends faced by them, liberal democracies in general have no other choice but to refurbish the organizational side of politics. Its alternative would be a one man dictatorship or dictatorship by a clique or by the "praetorian guards" whose legitimacy is always questionable. For Nepal, where monarchy has been taken as the symbol of stability, the building of democratic institutions in accordance with the national ethos and popular aspirations would be the only course for the future development of the political process. If the path of democratic development is abandoned for short-term interests, the future would be more traumatic for a small country, whose psychological, economic and physical problems are increasingly becoming acute if not already unsolvable. Thus if the government installed after the general election cannot function confidently and effectively and if the traditional conspiratorial politics gets primacy even under the new context, the people's faith in the reformed political system would be eroded. The crucial point, then, is the system's capability in acting decisively both in the direction of institution building and in mitigating people's hardships. In sum, any thorough assessment of the reformed Panchayat System must take into account how well it works in coming to terms with the enormous problems that Nepal is facing today.

## *Appendix I*

### *Royal Proclamation on May 24, 1979*

Beloved Countrymen,

Time and again in the past there have been occasions when we made it clear for all that we shall always be true to the ideals of democracy. Since the partyless Democratic Panchayat System has been like an umbrella embracing the whole of the Nepalese People, we have been laying stress until now on the all around development of our people trying at the same time to protect, preserve and perpetuate the territorial integrity and independence of our motherland.

If on the one hand, public consent has been the heartbeat of the Panchayat polity, and duty with Us to conduct the affairs of the State in consonance with the wishes of Our people. We therefore proclaim hereby that in view of the situation as it obtains in the country today, in order to explicitly understand the kind of change our countrymen desire, we shall arrange to hold a National referendum on the basis of universal adult franchise through secret ballot. In this referendum, all eligible citizens will be asked to vote on one of two choices: whether we should retain the present Panchayat System with suitable reforms or whether we should set up a multi-party system of Government?

As any delay in such referendum is undesirable, we shall constitute a National Election Commission within a week and within the framework of those alternatives every adult Nepalese shall be allowed to cast the vote on the basis of universal adult franchise. In the course of such a referendum, we hope that cooperation will

be forthcoming from all quarters to ensure that the choice to the voters is free, impartial and completely fair.

The love we owe to our motherland is common to every Nepali heart. As we have advanced shoulder to shoulder at all times of our history it is a duty common to all of us to preserve, for all time to come, the independence of our beloved Hindu Kingdom together with our distinct culture, while sharing in full the joys and sorrows of each other Nepalese.

May Lord Pashupatinath bless us all!

JAYA NEPAL

## *Appendix II*

*Message to the Nation from His Majesty  
King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev  
on the Occasion of the King  
Mahendra Memorial and  
Constitution Day, December 16, 1979*

Beloved Countrymen,

1. The Panchayat polity in sometime to come will have completed nearly two decades since it was first introduced in our land. In the context of the national referendum, although the Panchayat System stands on a cross-road of scrutiny, it befits us as our duty to pay tribute to the memory of our late Father, who, through his love of the motherland, proved to be a living flame of patriotism, a feeling that glows warmly in the heart of every Nepali.

2. The will of the people, as is known to all, constitutes the mainspring of the Panchayat System. Accordingly, we had assured our beloved people that we shall always stand by the ideals of democracy. It was precisely in reference to these commitments that, following the situation at the beginning of this year, we decided to call for the holding of a national referendum in Nepal. I believe, once we know the popular verdict, the referendum will help, not only to realize the will of the people, but also to establish the course this nation has to take for itself. Obviously, it should also reflect the assessment people will have made on the situation obtaining in and outside of Nepal before and after the May 24 Proclamation.

3. In our view, the national referendum poses an unprecedented challenge to every adult in Nepal in exercising one's judgement. Everyone, before he makes a choice, will reflect upon—which polity will contribute to the harmony, order and unity rather than the discord and disunity among the people of Nepal? In a country as diverse and as heterogeneous as ours, what is it that will blend the people together in unison, in bonds of harmony and in peace? Given today's international situation, by which means is it possible to make this country a zone of peace rather than an arena of tension? Similarly, through what system is it possible to promote speedy economic development for the common good by harnessing the human and natural resources of Nepal? What polity can give to every Nepali the opportunity to enjoy the Civil Rights, fearlessly and, without pressure from anyone? What system can guarantee to each Nepali the right to speak, write and express one's views freely, fearlessly and without infringing upon the similar rights of others? What polity will permit public criticism without which no corrective measure can be taken? Similarly, what system will enable every Nepali to grant for others the same rights that he seeks out for himself. Again, what polity will help us preserve the values, culture and traditions indigenous to this Kingdom? And finally, what system will help safeguard the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Nepal, now and hereafter? These then are some of the questions that will make every Nepali who enjoys the rights of adult franchise answerable to posterity.

4. Today, if we are looking forward to know the final outcome of the national referendum our attention is seriously drawn to the situation of drought and shortages of food that have hit many of our districts. Added to this, the unavailability and the scarcity of various items of daily necessity have created for the people numerous hardships causing anxiety for us all. There are also difficulties we are facing internationally—such as the high cost of fossil fuel. But when to this are added problems of population pressure, inflation, dearth, disturbances and strikes—the matter becomes weighty enough to look for remedial measures to relieve people from their burden. Nevertheless, we must not forget that whatever work we may initiate, without the willing cooperation and participation of the people, the efforts of a government alone can never prove adequate or effective.



5. The Panchayat Constitution recognises popular will as the bedrock of its cardinal faith. We have, moreover, repeatedly affirmed our desire to hold onto this democratic ideal. It is keeping with the same values and commitments that after the forthcoming referendum, whether the multi-party or partyless system emerges victorious, we have resolved to clarify some of the points: these are—from now on, all elections to be held to the national legislature shall take place solely on the basis of the 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. This is not to suggest that we are trying to evade the responsibilities we owe to our people.

6. In the interest of Nepal and the Nepalese people, we shall, as best we can defend the ideals of democracy. We shall not shirk from the responsibilities we owe to our people in maintaining peace, stability, security, order and justice together with the protection, preservation and safety of the national independence, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of our motherland. We have come to view that, as far as day-to-day governance of the country is concerned, it is desirable that this is a responsibility people's representatives should shoulder and be held accountable for. It is in this spirit to respect the wishes of the people that we wish this day to inspire all of us Nepalese with reason and wisdom.

· May Lord Pashupatinath bless us all!

JAI NEPAL

### *Appendix III*

#### *Royal Proclamation on February 19, 1980*

Beloved Countrymen,

On this day, in the year 1951, an era of democracy was ushered in Nepal. This was a cause for which all those who has faith in the ideals of democracy had joined hands with each other. It therefore behoves us, on this occasion, to pay tribute to the memory of our revered grand-father, the late King Tribhuvan, as well as, to all those who laid down their lives for the cause of democracy in Nepal. During the three decades since a democratic order had been instituted in Nepal, the Nepalese Society, notwithstanding numerous hurdles, has made some significant advances. In this connection, it must be added that our revered father, the late King, having realised the need to make democratic order compatible with the realities of Nepal introduced the partyless Democratic Panchayat System. While this polity over the past 19 years has been able to defend Nepalese nationalism, it has, without doubt, scored achievements in many spheres of Nepalese life. In the light of the changes, both internal and international, questions as to the justification for the continuation of this system had been raised last year. Therefore, in keeping with our democratic tradition, we have proclaimed a National Referendum with a view to assess the public opinion on the subject of polity we need.

On the 16th of Last December, we put before the nation some earnest questions of the day with a view to maintain a just milieu whereby the nation may decide its choice freely and democratically, without putting peace, stability and our national unity into jeopardy.

Problems and challenges on these scores have continued to vex us. Democracy, I presume, is not only a political order but a system that expresses itself, more fully in the human behaviour. It cannot thrive in the absence of a system of mutual recognition and mutual respect for each other's views and identity. Democracy to be genuine also demands a diminution of inequalities between individuals. It is my firm belief that a society without the ideals of democracy can hardly thrive. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that forms of democracy differ from one country to another, it is important to realise the type of democracy which will ultimately go with our national character, and help us achieve order and stability making us ever responsive to the needs of our people rather than to those of others. The need of the day, therefore, seems to be a realization for us all of a system that will not only ensure the durability of democracy but also safeguard the interest of Nepal and the Nepalese helping us to move in our continued march through history.

I do not think we can afford to overlook the growing uneasiness that makes the international situation of our times. Extending from the middle East, it looks as though the shadows of cold war have overtaken the region in our neighbourhood. Foreign intervention and arms race in the eastern, as well as, the western regions of this continent have brought about a situation marked by tension and a call to arms. Coupled with these developments, the problems of spiralling prices and energy crisis have caused real hardships to our people. In this challenging situation, the need is being felt for a wider unity, self restraint and courage combined with a fairness in approach to all problems.

If there are the persistent challenges at home, in our international dealings, a firm belief in the principles of peaceful co-existence is all the more essential. It is a fact of life that without a condition of peace, development in a country can hardly gain momentum. It is therefore important that we refuse to be dragged into the rivalries of big powers and contribute to the cause of world peace through an adherence to the philosophy of nonalignment, mutual co-operation and understanding among nations. It is in keeping with this belief that we in Nepal have desired to have our country declared a zone of peace. The global situation of our times has further attested to the aptness of this concept. It is only appropriate, therefore, that we keep working to secure universal support to this noble end.

In conclusion, on this occasion of the King Tribhuvan Memorial and National Democracy Day, let us all draw inspiration from our forebeares and martyrs and pledge once more to defend the integrity of our motherland and help to establish a just Society among us.

May Lord Pashupatinath bless us all!

JAI NEPAL

## *Appendix IV*

### *Appeal to the Countrymen by B.P. Koirala, the President of the Nepali Congress on the Day of His Return to Nepal, December 30, 1976*

After a long time in exile, we are returning home. On this occasion I would like to say a few words to my countrymen.

Our nation is facing a crisis today. It is realized by all that for the last few years this crisis has got more and more intensified. This has put in jeopardy the national existence itself. This crisis being faced by the nation has been acknowledged by the people in general and by the King as well. Realizing this grave threat, we are returning home. In our opinion, the main danger to the nation's existence is due to the absence of national unity, as a result of which foreign elements are becoming successful in their evil designs and in converting Nepal into an arena of international conspiracy. National unity can only be realized by the common endeavours and effortful actions of all the Nepali people. Such common endeavours create the institutional base for emotional interaction of the Nepalis. If abstract slogans had been effective during the last 13 years (?), the country would not have precipitated itself towards the present crisis in the wake of overall disintegration of national unity. In Nepal today, self aggrandisement, communalism, egocentrism and orientation towards foreign countries are the dominant features of the society. Under this kind of situation the first casualty would be nationalism.

Till yesterday, our struggle was confined to bring democratic rights to the people. So we had put more emphasis on democratic

norms. Today a new dimension has been added to our struggle. The Nepali Congress today is shouldering two responsibilities. The second responsibility is in regard to the safeguarding of the nation's existence. We see the two sides of the situation being faced by Nepal today—Nationalism and Democracy.

In other words, Nepalis have to take up the responsibility of both attaining democracy and safeguarding the nation. If we undertake one responsibility alone, we would be one-sided, and would be following a wrong track. If we emphasize only the attaining of democracy, we would not be doing anything towards resolving the national crisis. Besides, this one-sided approach may make us the gullible puppets of foreign elements. Similarly, if we emphasize nationalism, we would be only adding to the 16 year long chorus of empty nationalistic slogans, and thus make ourselves defenders of absolutism. This sort of hollow sentiments cannot create the necessary morale among the people for the protection of the country. So we have to understand that national unity can install itself on the foundation of democracy and democracy's foundation can be strengthened only through gradual economic development and just economic order. In our view, nationalism, democracy, progress and development are, therefore, interdependent.

Everybody knows that since its very birth the Nepali Congress has been taking historical and important decisions from time to time for the welfare of the country: the decision of 1950 revolution and its execution, and thereafter, knowing that the general election was being postponed indefinitely, it took the leadership in the national campaign for holding the general election. In that campaign, we had also received the cooperation of other parties. After inflicting a ruthless and deadly blow on democracy in 1960, the Nepali Congress waged its resistance movement in favour of democracy. Fully understanding the danger to the nation today, we have taken yet another historical decision befitting the tradition of the Nepali Congress. In the life of a nation certain situations arise because of which its people are left with no choice but to defend its existence at the cost of their own lives. We feel that similar situation is being faced by Nepal today. We would like to tell our well wishers, who tried to desist us from the risky decision of returning to the country, that the potential danger to our personal lives is negligible in the context of the danger to the nation and so, we have taken this historical decision. The Nepali Congress

workers have also displayed their exemplary courage and love for the motherland by returning home under the instructions of the party.

In this national crisis, we all have to unite forgetting the past unpleasant debates, experiences and differences of opinion. Our programmes should be inspired by a feeling that we would cease to be Nepalis if there would be no nation. I do not know what will happen to me after my return to the country. As the President of the Nepali Congress, I want to appeal to all Nepalis by this statement to work in unison for the pious work of safeguarding of the nation, the country's development, and for the progress and happiness of the people. I will put my convictions before the King if I am given an opportunity. The responsibility of protecting the nation is a common responsibility.

JAYA NEPAL

Figure 1.  
**VOTES POLLED**  
(In percentage)

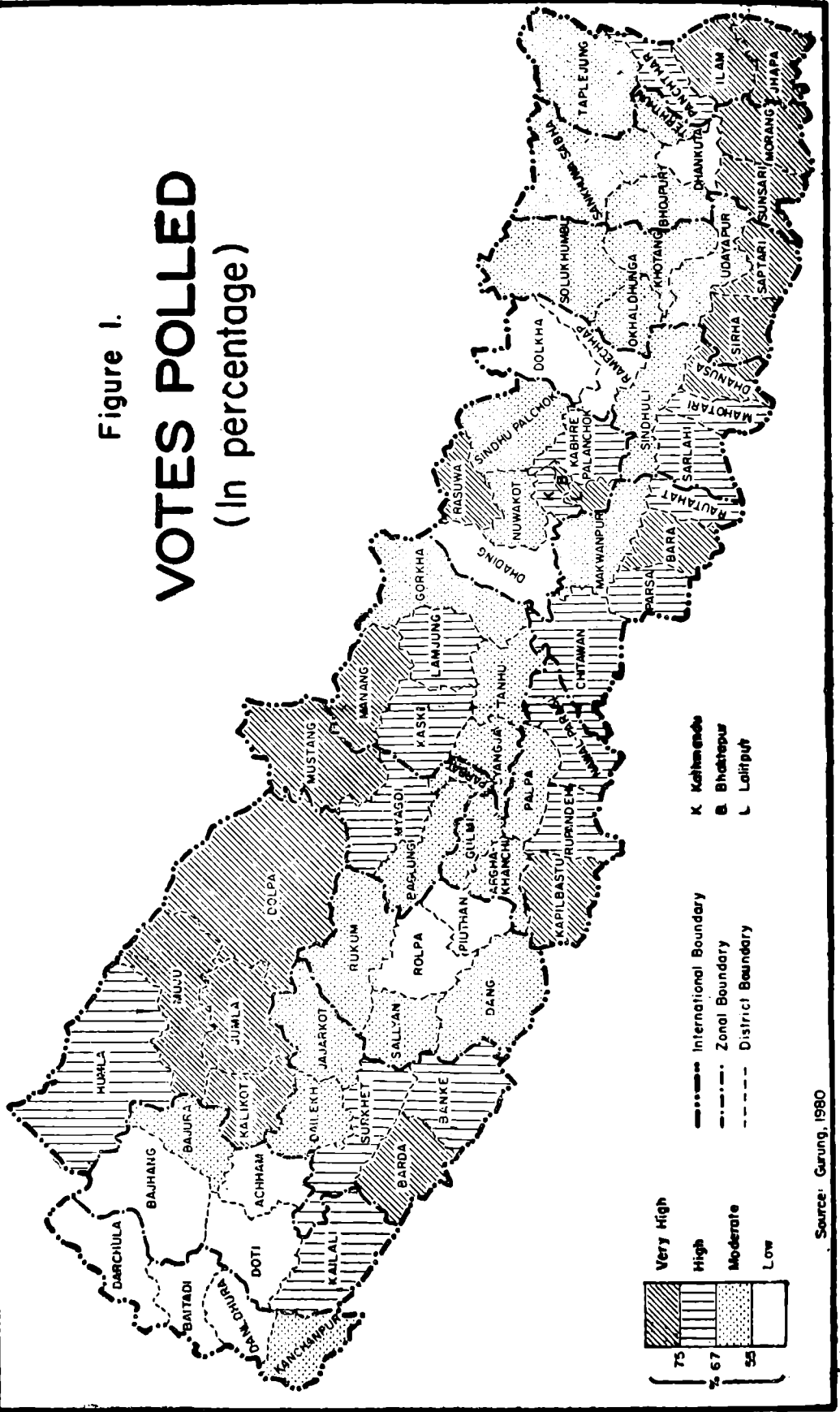
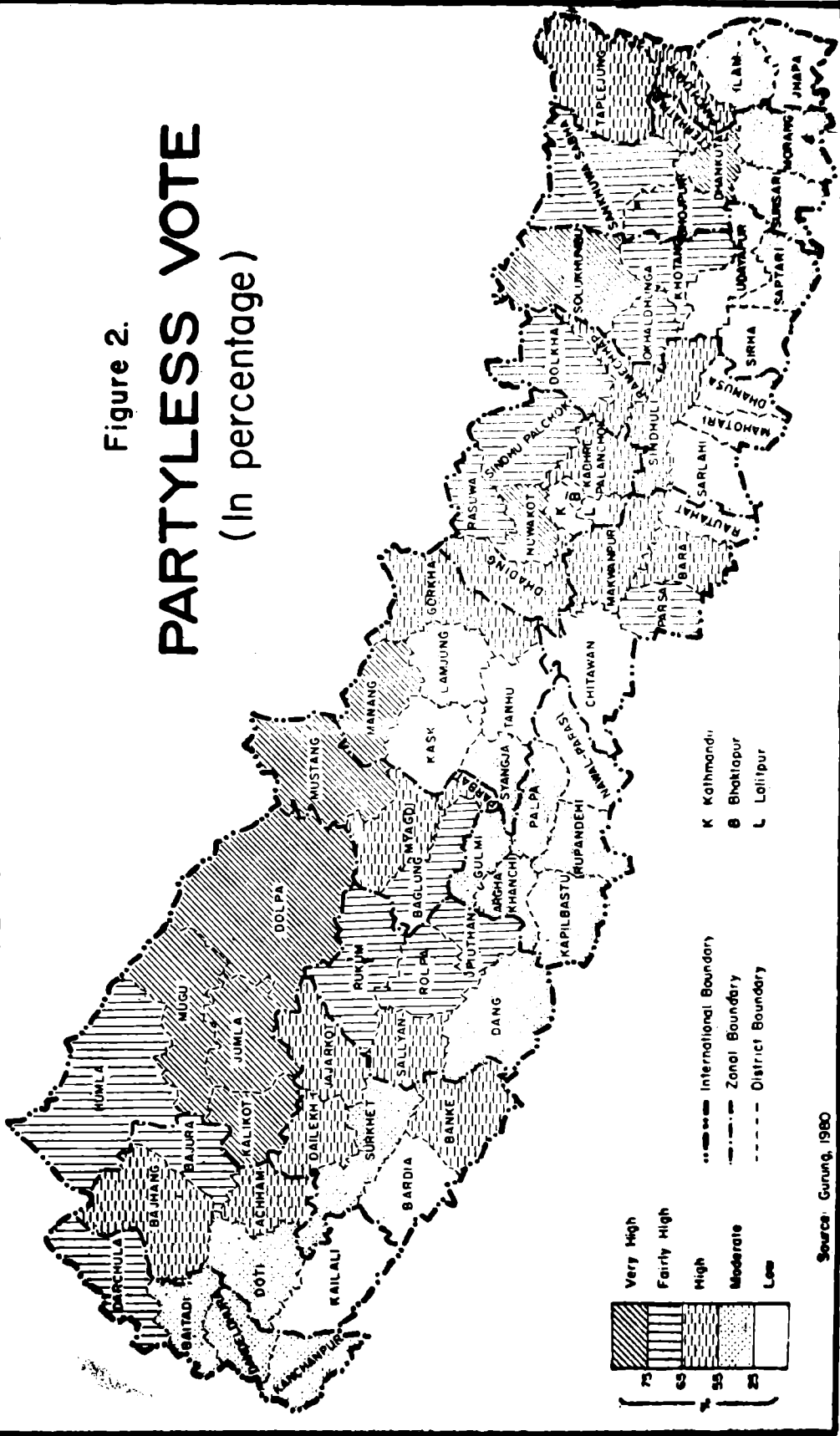




Figure 2.  
**PARTYLESS VOTE**  
 (In percentage)



Source: Gurung, 1980

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*Sunday* (Calcutta)

*Time* (New York)

## Index

- Acharya, Giri Raj, 7n  
Acharya, Tanka Prasad, 77, 105, 137, 167, 177, 178  
Adhikari, Man Mohan, 23, 56, 57, 74, 77, 83, 100, 101, 104, 105n, 138, 152  
Adult franchise, 5, 8, 20, 73, 133, 134, 137, 138, 140, 162, 190, 201; Universal, 210  
All Nepal National Independent Students' Union, 131n  
All Nepal Student's Federation, 59  
All Nepal Rashtriya Swatantra Vidyarthi Union, 59, 60  
Amatya, Tulsilal, 56  
Annual economic survey, 1979-80, 128  
Asian Socialist Conference, 174  
Authoritarian rule, 85  
Autonomy, 15, 202  
Ayub Khan, 14
- Bairgania Conference, 45  
Ban, 43, on parties, 130, 212; on leaders, 62, 139  
Baral, Lok Raj, 2n, 3n, 15n, 18n  
Basham, A L, 203n  
Bell, Daniel, 71n  
Bhattarai, Krishna Prasad, 53, 77, 100, 104, 113, 120, 151, 157n, 175-76, 200  
Bhutto, Z.A., 35, 39
- Birendra, King, 2, 3, 3n, 4, 17, 17n, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 27-29, 31, 32, 35, 37, 39, 53, 61, 63, 68, 73, 78, 83, 85-87, 87n, 89-93, 95, 99-102, 111, 119-21, 132, 133, 137n, 152, 158, 171-72, 175, 178, 191, 194-203, 210, 212, 213; Preemptive commitment, 211; Proclamation, 84n, 86, 191, 191n; Royal address, 128  
Bista, Kirti Nidhi, 81n, 151  
Bull, Headley, 33  
B.V.E.C. (Back-to-Village National Campaign), 17, 18, 20-22, 28, 28n, 61, 75, 76, 79n, 134, 140, 148, 167, 294; central committee, 20, 22, 27; chairman, 28, 38
- Carter, Jimmy, 27, 33-35; and human rights, 33, 90  
Chandra Shekhar, 25, 37-39  
Charles, De Gaulle, 3  
Chatterji, Bhola, 25  
Chaudhari, Parshu Narayan, 6, 177, 177n  
Chen, Yi, (Chinese foreign minister) 50  
China, 197  
Civil Right Defence Committee, 54  
Class enemies, 57, 180, 181; liquidation of, 182

- Communist party, 74, 213; leaders, 183
- Concessional loans, 10
- Congress government, 165; leaders, 166; movement, 54
- Constitution, 1; amended features of, 133, 136; amendments, 13, 19, 61, 102, 194; first (amendment) of Jan., 1967, 65; second (amendment), 16-18, 19, 22, 65, 134; third (amendment), 134, 136, 138, 144, 145, 147, 148, 156, 168, 174, 179; Objective, 137
- Constitutional crisis, 150
- Constitutional development, 176
- Constitutional monarchy, 55, 89
- Constitutional reform, 124, 133, 137, 138, 149, 194, 213
- Constitution Reform Commission, 18, 19, 112, 113, 119, 120, 125, 132, 160
- Council of Ministers, 19, 119n, 133, 135-36, 145-46
- Crisis, April-May, 70; national, 24; political, 3, 149-59
- Crozier, Michel, J., 19n
- Dahal, Nani Maiya, 156
- Dalai Lama, 171
- Darbhanga Conference, 56
- Delhi settlement, 13, 45-47, 54
- Democracy, 6, 7, 13, 38, 46-47, 99, 100, 172, 195, 204; absence of, 53; basic, 14; enemies of, 108; evolution of, 206; growth of, 203, 204; liberal, 15, 19, 214; model of, 179; multiparty, 179; parliamentary, 49, 124, 138, 146, 201; peaceful transition to, 193; problems and prospects of, 9, 204
- Democratic development, 16, 205
- Democratic forces, 47
- Democratic rights, 24, 49, 86, 178
- Desai, Morarji, 36, 38
- Devkota, Rajeshwar, 23
- Dictatorship, 1
- Diplomatic pressures, 13
- Domestic policy, 12
- Economic survey, 9n, 10
- Economy, 3, 10, 127, 129
- Education, 79-99
- Elected government, 43; representatives of the people, 105
- Election, 5, 21, 22, 161, 162, 179; boycotting, 153, 155, 157, 195, 196, 213; commission, 75, 100, 101, 134, 151, 152; direct, 140, 154; general, 13, 43, 47, 48, 149, 150, 177, 186, 196, 199, 210, 214; graduate's, 66n; national, 111; new parliament, 56; parliamentary, 47, 55, 157; politics of, 154-57; postponement of, 196; results, 202
- Electoral policy, 191
- Elite, 157, 162
- Emergency, 1, 5, 34, 35
- Ethnic group, 206; partyless system, 96-97
- External threats, 1
- External milieu, 29-33
- Extremist group, 43, 124, 172, 179, 180
- Feudocracy, 179
- Foreign aid, 10
- Fragmentation, political, 199-202
- Free Nations, 34
- Fundamental rights, 60; restoration of, 56
- Gaige, Frederick, A., 97n
- Gandhi, 204
- Gandhi, Mrs. Indira, 32, 34, 35, 93, 94, 200
- Gaun sabha, 65
- Gharti Mohan Bikram Singh, 56, 58
- Giri, Tulsi, 19, 20, 60, 96, 101, 103, 132, 151, 165, 166n, 194n
- Giovann, Sartori, 8n
- Gorkhepatra, 63, 86n
- Government, formation of, 144-47
- Graduates' constituency, 66, 71
- Great Divide, the 55-58
- Heck, Douglas, 90n

- Hoveyda, Fereydoun, 41  
 Human rights, 33; and Nepal, 33, 35 wave, 34, 35
- India, emergency and constitutional reforms in, 18-23, 51; Janata-wave and, 36; national movement in, 44, 178, 197  
 India-Nepal relations, 37, 39, 94  
 International agencies, 10  
 Iran, 40  
 Islamic resurgence, 41
- Jang Bahadur, 12n  
 Janta Government, 37  
 Jhapali, 57  
 Jinnah, Mohammed Ali, 205
- Khan, Liaquat Ali, 205  
 Khomeini, 40  
 Khrushchev, Nikita, 55  
 Krishan Sangi, 54  
 Kissinger, 192  
 Koirala, B.P., 17, 23-29, 32, 35n, 36-39, 41, 44, 47-48, 50-53n, 57, 62, 74, 76, 81n, 85, 87-90, 100-3, 113-14, 119, 120, 125, 137, 141, 150-52, 153, 172, 173-74, 74n, 175-78, 186, 186n, 194, 199, 200, 207, 207n  
 Koirala, G.P., 100  
 Koirala, M.P., 47, 100
- Lal, Pushpa, 43, 55-58, 77, 182  
 Lama, Nirmal, 181  
 Land Act, 1964, 170n  
 Left front, 123-24, 179-83; elite, 179; splinter groups, 54-55  
 Leo, E. Rose, 10n  
 Liberal democratic process, 7
- Mahendra, King, 14, 16, 42, 47, 49-51, 53n, 54, 55, 60, 64, 75, 83, 85, 87, 102, 132, 133, 137, 143, 164, 166, 167, 171, 171n, 173, 176, 178, 191  
 Mandal, 62  
 Map of freedom, The, 34  
 Man Mohan's line, 57
- Man Singh, Ganesh, 26, 47, 48, 51, 56, 77, 104, 113, 120, 157n, 175, 176, 200  
 Marxist Leninist faction, 7  
 Masani, Minoo, 201n  
 Mass agitations, 3, 63  
 Mass media, 69, 95  
 May declaration, 87  
 Moderate Democratic group, 199  
 Modernization, 41  
 Mody, Pилоo, 201n  
 Monarchy, 204; in Nepal, 212; institution of, 170, 203; modernization of, 206; role, 85; role of institution of, 189  
 Mongoloid communities, 96; group, 125  
 Moscow-Peking conflicts, 55  
 Multi-party, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 82, 85, 101, 103; activists, 100, 172, 187, 190, 211; advocates, 163; camp, 75, 105, 110, 111, 113-19, 121, 122, 162, 187; campaigns, 81, 186, 188; groups, 81, 82, 83, 86, 88, 101, 104, 108, 114-15, 172, 178, 179, 185, 189, 192; leaders, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87-89, 101, 104, 108, 114, 115, 172, 175, 179, 185, 189, 192; non congress, 186; politics, 119-21; side, 104, 107, 108, 111, 116, 118, 145, 188, 189, 199; stalwarts, 211; supporters, 101, 108, 113, 117, 139, 149, 183-85, 188-90; victory, 89, 188, 189
- Narayan, J.P., 25, 36, 37  
 National Congress, 178  
 National Development Council, 19, 25  
 National Educational Committee, 98  
 National legislature, 20, 22, 71, 76, 82, 204  
 National Independent Students' Union, 181  
 Nationalism, 24  
 Nehru, J.L., 46, 171n, 204; government, 49  
 Nepal, aggression against 50; consti-

- tution of, 75, 133, 133n; Communist Party, 42, 43, 54, 58, 59, 63, 92, 105, 123, 180; direct elections in, 159; foreign policy of, 92; history, 12; lawyers of, 71; Muslim Service Committee, 127; national congress 44; political system of, 143; society 11, 67, 68, 164, 168, 179, 197, 198
- Nepali Congress, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 17, 23, 24, 30, 37, 38, 39, 42-53, 56, 59, 63, 74, 82, 89, 93, 104, 109, 118, 120-22, 130-31, 137, 138, 150-53, 165-67, 172, 176, 183-86, 199, 201, 212; activists, 25, 39, 49; as a party, 172-77; in exile, 49-54; leaders, 172; supporters, 59; youth leaders, 194n
- Nixon-Kissinger model of diplomacy, 33
- Non-interference policy, 36
- Opinion of the people, 64
- Opposition, 40; group, 6, 211; leaders, 74, 100
- Palombara J.L., 20, 21n
- Panchas, 4, 8, 85-87, 172, 188, 213; Convention, 185; Convention committee, 103, 117; extremists, 185; orientation, 64; pro-party, 121-23
- Panchayat, 5, 6, 21, 23, 58, 201; activists, 213; cabinet, 15; camp, 28, 138, 163-87, 190, 192; communist leader, 167; constitution, 122, 132, 162; drafting committee, 159; election, 140, 152, 153; elites, 85, 86, 164-72; experimentation, 210; government, 150, 151; institution, 166, 170, 190; leaders, 39; local ordinance, 20, 21; National, 5-8, 19, 20, 21, 23, 65, 66, 71, 82-84, 116, 120, 128, 133-37, 140-42, 145-50, 154, 156-62, 166, 167, 169, 177, 192, 213; Budget session, 9n; elections, 82, 140, 150, 202, 211, 213; members, 17, 116, 214; new, 58; partyless, 138, 148; Policy and Investigation Committee, 143, 148; politics, 67; policy, 209; structure, 65-68; supporters, 211; village, 82, 190
- Party hierarchy, 52
- Partylessness, 21, 76, 85, 100, 102, 105, 110, 113, 134, 142, 173, 189, 191, 194, 211
- Peaceful agitation, 53, 187
- Peasants, organization of, 66; professionals, 63
- People's verdict, 108
- Personalities, among Non-congress democrats, 177-79
- Philips Leslie Wolf, 21n
- Polarizations, 199
- Political aspects, 2, 4, 6-8, 11, 16-18, 19, 25, 29, 39, 40, 42, 45, 48, 53, 54, 95-165, 184, 193, 197, 205, 209, 212-14; electoral processes, 168
- Political fragmentation, 199-201
- Political prisoners, 56
- Politics of Ethnic communities, 124-27
- Politics of Human Rights, 33
- Popular Mandate, 5, 55
- Praja Parishad, 42, 178
- Press, the, 68-71
- Proclamation of Deaths, 1980, 138
- Pro-Moscow Communists, 43, 53, 59, 63, 138, 152, 157, 184, 201; Nepal's Communist Party, 167
- Pro-Peking communists, 53; faction, 59
- Rana, 197; group, 177; Jang Bahadur, 44n; Rule, 44n, 45, 48, 203; system, 43, 46; Subana Shamsher, 48-52, 176
- Rashtravadi Swatantra Vidyarthi Mandal, 60
- Rayamajhi, 43, 55, 56, 84, 184n
- "Reconciliation", 52, 195; lines of, 195, 199; National, 29, 37, 62, 74, 103, 119, 121, 153-54, 173-74, 194-96; and change, 24-29; policy, 26, 29
- Referendum, 5-7, 41, 58, 63-64, 71, 77-79, 81-86, 88-90, 96, 99-100, 102, 104, 118, 119, 121, 182, 186, 192n



- 202; announcement of, 94, 96, 111, 123, 127, 185, 193, 194, 207, 211; verdict, 211; boycotting, 103, 182, 183; campaign, 4, 126, 174; conditions, 107; decision, 211; consequence of, 204; declaration, 177, 191, 206, 213; drama, 105; force in the background, 42-71; free and impartial, 103; National, 2-4, 29, 42, 68, 73, 74, 76, 70-90, 93, 95, 100, 108, 109n, 121, 122, 132, 148, 162, 167, 171, 173, 175, 179, 182, 183, 184, 190, 193, 203, 210; Post, 3, 5, 6, 122, 123, 124, 126, 129, 131; declaration, 214; result, 105; scenario, 152; setting, 12-41; verdict, 109, 110, 190, 192; victory, 111
- Regmi, D.R., 42, 86, 108, 104, 138, 177, 178
- Report on Human Rights Practices, 94n
- Revolution, 1951, 197
- Revolutionary guerillas, 50
- Rigging, 105
- Royal government, 49
- Royal leadership, 76, 86
- Royal proclamations, 17, 108, 117, 145
- Royal take-over, 56, 59, 164, 178
- Secret ballot, 73
- Shah of Iran, 40
- Shaha, Rishikesh, 17n, 59, 60
- Sharma, Ganesh Raj, 26n
- Sharma, Rabindranath, 75
- Sheshadri, K., 207n
- Singh, K.L., 77
- Sino-American detente, 29, 30, 32
- Sino-Indian border, 50; conflicts, 198; Sino-Indian detente, 30, 32
- Sino-Indian relations, 32, 44
- Sino-Japanese treaty of peace and friendship, 92
- Sino-Soviet ideological rifts, 198
- Sovereign powers, 146
- Soviet Union, 92, 179
- Status quoists, 85
- Students, politics and, 207, 209
- Students' movement, 1979, 22, 208
- Super and regional powers, 93
- Thapa Government, 81
- Thapa, Biswabandhu, 15, 27, 28, 75, 148, 151, 154, 157n, 162, 165, 166n, 171, 208
- Thapa, Surya Bahadur, 77, 102, 113, 116
- Transfer of power in India, 45
- Tribhuvan, King, 45, 47
- Tribhuvan University, 79
- United Democratic Party, 166
- United Nations, 151
- Upadhaya, S.P., 23, 47, 48, 53n, 77, 78, 82, 104, 176
- Vajpayee, A.B., 36, 38
- Violence, 53
- Voting pattern, 105, 111
- Weiner, Myron, 15, 16n, 20, 21n
- World Bank Report, 10n
- Zia-Ul-Haq, 93
- Zone of peace, 31, 32, 93



