

**KINGS  
AND  
POLITICAL LEADERS  
OF  
THE GORKHALI EMPIRE  
1768 – 1814**

**MAHESH C REGMI**

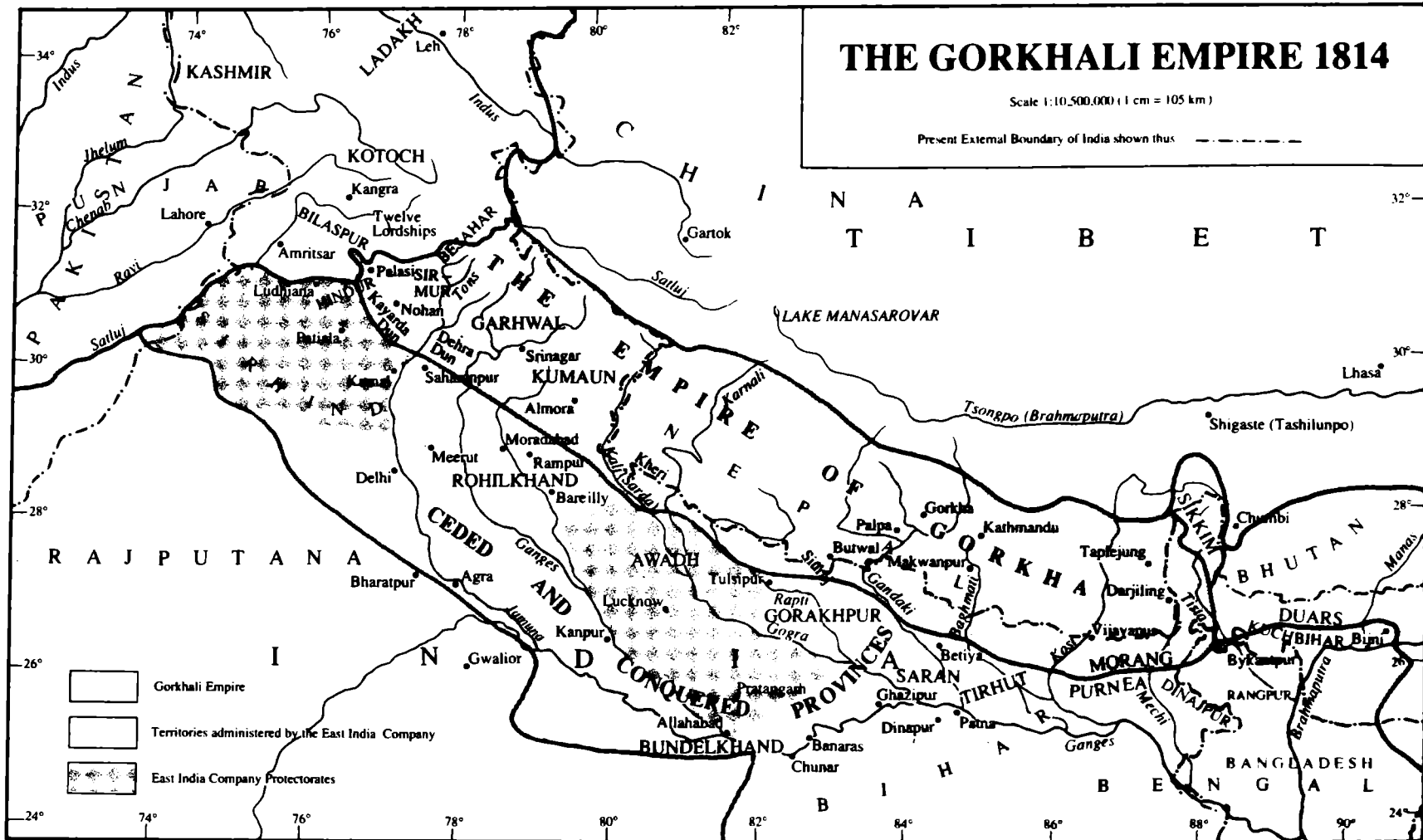
Mahesh Chandra Regmi (born December 1929) is the author of several books on Nepal's agrarian system and economic history. In 1977, Mahesh C. Regmi received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts in recognition of his "chronicling of Nepal's past and present, enabling his people to discover their origins and delineating national options."

His published work includes *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal* (1978), *A Study in Nepali economic History, 1768-1846* (1971), *Landownership in Nepal* (1976), *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th Century Nepal* (1978) and *Readings in Nepali Economic History* (1979).

# THE GORKHALI EMPIRE 1814

Scale 1:10,500,000 (1 cm = 105 km)

Present External Boundary of India shown thus - - - - -



**KINGS AND  
POLITICAL LEADERS OF  
THE GORKHALI EMPIRE  
1768–1814**

**MAHESH C REGMI**



**Orient Longman**

## **Orient Longman Limited**

### *Registered Office*

3-6-272 Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029 (A.P), India

### *Other Offices*

Kamani Marg, Ballard Estate, Bombay 400 038

17 Chittaranjan Avenue, Calcutta 700 072

160 Anna Salai, Madras 600 002

1/24 Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi 110 002

80/1 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bangalore 560 001

365 Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneshwar 751 007

41/316 'Gour Mohan', Ambady Lane, Chittoor Road, Eranakulam, 682 011

S C Goswami Road, Panbazar, Guwahati 781 001

3-6-272 Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029

28/31, 15 Ashok Marg, Lucknow 226 001

City Centre Ashok, Govind Mitra Road, Patna 800 004

© Orient Longman Limited 1995

Map facing the title page © Government of India copyright, 1994. Based upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor General of India. The responsibility for the correctness of internal details shown on the map rests with the publisher.

First published 1995

ISBN 81 250 0511 0

### *Published by*

Orient Longman Limited

3-6-272, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029

### *Typeset by*

S S Graphics, Hyderabad

### *Printed at*

The offsetter, S. K. Nagar, Patna

**To the political leaders of Nepal**



# Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Steven A. Hirsch for his meticulous editing of the text. I thank Suresh C. Regmi for his help in the research and writing, as well as the use of his computer skills in preparing the final script.





# Contents

*Prologue* ix

*Chapter one*

THE CONQUEST OF GORKHA 1

*Chapter two*

THE KING AND THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD 18

*Chapter three*

THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP 36

*Chapter four*

THE QUEST FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY 49

*Epilogue* 63

*Appendices* 71

*Glossary* 76

*Bibliography and Source Materials* 78

*Index* 81



# Prologue

In the year 1768, King Prithvi Narayan Shah shifted his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu and laid the foundation of the Gorkhali Empire. In 1814, the Empire fought a disastrous war with the East India Company government in India, and consequently found itself reduced in size and status to a kingdom. This book is a study of the social and economic history of the Empire during this period of approximately 46 years.

However, I must begin with an apology. More than two decades ago, in the Preface to my book, *A Study in Nepali Economic History, 1768-1846*, I had claimed that "in not confining my attention to wars, dynastic chronologies and political intrigues in Kathmandu as a fitting, and indeed, the only subject-matter of historical study, I had set up a precedent in Nepali historiography." The study, therefore, sought "to describe how the people of Nepal earned their living and what factors affected their economic life." It dealt with the economic aspect of people's lives "in the belief that this is the aspect that concerns their very survival, and as such, governs the nature of their life in other aspects too."

A quarter-century of on-going research and meditation has led me to modify that belief. The overarching importance of the economy is, no doubt, a truth, but nevertheless only a partial truth. I now realise that too exclusive an attention to economic history can be as misleading as too much concentration on politics.

It has been said that history in its essence is change, movement. Change, however, is a complex concept. History, as a study of change, can concentrate on the catalysts or on the objects of change with equal validity. An illustration will make this point clear. I have discussed elsewhere the economic condition of the peasantry and the impact it suffered from the Gorkhali campaign of territorial expansion. However, the peasantry were only a subsidiary element in the overall process of change, lacking any control over the course of their own economic destiny. If history is a study of change, the mainspring of change in the economy and society of Nepal during that period has to be found not amidst the peasantry, but in the political decision of the

principality of Gorkha to expand its territories. It was that basic decision that shaped the course of the social, political, economic and administrative history of the entire Himalayan region, from the Tista river in the east to the Satluj river in the west, with consequences rippling out even to the present times.

One may, therefore, ask: What was the nature and source of that decision? Who controlled the principality of Gorkha during the mid-18th century and took the momentous decision to embark on the campaign of territorial expansion? More concretely, one may ask: Who benefitted from the expansion of Gorkha, and who did not, in terms of social status and economic condition? From this perspective, one can see a wide gulf between the two ends of the Gorkhali social spectrum. At one end we find the king and the ruling elite, who won the laurels and reaped the fruits of expansion. Since it was the political elite of the principality of Gorkha, led by the king, that made the decision to expand, it is not surprising that they received the direct benefits of territorial expansion. At the other end of the spectrum, we find workers and peasants, for whom territorial expansion meant little else than over-taxation, enslavement, forced labour services and other onerous burdens. This volume focuses on the elite end of that dichotomy. It begins with a general geographical and historical background of the Gorkhali Empire in Chapter 1, and then describes the two institutions that exercised decision-making authority in the Empire, namely, the king (Chapter 2), and the political leadership (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 discusses how the political leadership sought to translate its political domination of the state to the appropriation of its economic resources. The Epilogue recapitulates the main themes and explains the chain of causation in the rise and fall of the Gorkhali Empire.

I have often been faulted for having concentrated my intellectual energies on the past rather than on the present. I acknowledge the criticism without apology. My defence is a simple one. I find a study of the past much more thrilling than the study of the present. In the life of any society the past and the present represent a continuum rather than discrete periods of time. The present is determined by the past, but our view of the past is determined by the present. In any case, this is a study of the Nepali society in its early stage, and I feel confident that in the story that unfolds in these pages, every Nepali of the present lives a vicarious existence, with the atavistic urges for political power and economic security and feels strongly that political rivalries among the political elite today are no less pronounced than they were two centuries ago.

## CHAPTER 1

---

# The Conquests of Gorkha

During the latter part of the 18th century, a new state was founded in the Himalayan region in the north of the Indian subcontinent. That state, formed through the expansion of Gorkha, a small principality in the western part of that region, was the forerunner of the modern Kingdom of Nepal. The fledgeling state faced innumerable trials and challenges in the process of expansion, the most serious being a war with the British East India Company during 1814-16, which resulted in the loss of extensive territories. Only thereafter did Nepal emerge as an independent state within clearly demarcated boundaries. Our aim in this study is to analyse the course of Gorkha's imperial expansion and its social and political impact on different classes and groups of the society.

History, particularly political and social history, is unintelligible without a knowledge of physical and political geography, so we shall begin with a general account of the Himalayan region, the locale of these events, and the political divisions that existed in that region before the Gorkhali conquests. We shall then describe the process of political unification that led to the establishment of the Gorkhali Empire with its capital at Kathmandu in 1768, and the territorial expansion of the new state.

## The Himalayan Region

The Himalayas, the world's highest mountain range, extend from the bend of the Indus river in the west to the gorge formed by the Brahmaputra river in the east, along the northern frontiers of the modern states of Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bhutan. They form a great arc over an area approximately 2,400 kilometres long and 200 kilometres to 300 kilometres wide, and separate the Tibetan plateau in the north from the basins formed by the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers in the south.

The Himalayas comprise at least three parallel mountain systems. The main Himalayan range, adjoining the Tibetan plateau, is composed of the world's highest peaks, including the Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest). Since the snowline is above 5,000 metres, no vegetation is possible in much of the region. The Middle Himalayas are situated about 80 kilometres to the south of the main Himalayan range, the stretch running through Nepal being traditionally known as the Mahabharat range. They vary in altitude from 1,500 to 4,500 metres. The terrain is cut into deep ravines and precipitous defiles, but comprises a number of valleys, including Kathmandu and Pokhara, which are extensively cultivated. The Siwalik range, a broken range of dry sandstone hills situated 600 to 900 metres above sea level, runs parallel to the Middle Himalayas in the south. It is the outermost range of the Himalayan system, varying in breadth from 8 to 16 kilometres. A number of broad, longitudinal valleys, situated at about 600 metres above sea level, separate the Siwaliks from the Middle Himalayan range. These valleys are known as *duns* and in Nepal are usually called the Inner Tarai. The best known among these valleys are Udayapur and Sindhuli in the east, Chitwan and Makwanpur in the central region, Dang and Surkhet in the west, and Dehradun in the Jamuna region.

South of the Siwalik range, the terrain merges into the Tarai region, a long and narrow strip comprising the northernmost fringe of the extensive basins of the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. While no physical boundary separates the Tarai region from the Indo-Gangetic plains, geopolitical considerations justify the inclusion of the Tarai in the Himalayan region. Because territories in the Tarai, in contrast to those in the hill and Himalayan regions, possessed abundant agricultural and forest wealth, and also had access to markets in the south, rulers of hill-region principalities usually sought control of a strip of territory in the Tarai, which they acquired on lease from the rulers of northern India.

The Himalayan region is intersected by several of the world's largest river systems, for it is through the Himalayas that the Tibetan plateau receives its drainage. The drainage of the southern part of the plateau flows northwest through the Indus river system into the Arabian sea and southeast through the Brahmaputra river system into the Bay of Bengal, while the Ganges river system is located in the central Himalayan region. The tributaries of these rivers that have a bearing on our study are the Satluj of the Indus system, the Jamuna, the Karnali, the Gandaki and the Kosi of the Ganges system, and the Tista of the Brahmaputra system.

## Political Divisions<sup>1</sup>

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, the Himalayan region between the Tista river in the east and the Satluj river in the west was under the control of a large number of independent principalities. It is possible to count at least sixty such principalities, although a complete, authentic list is not yet available. The eastern section of the Himalayan region was less fragmented than the western. It was comprised of two small states, Sikkim and Bhutan, which were dissected by numerous rivers, including the Tista. The territories west of Sikkim, up to the Dudhkosi river, a tributary of the Kosi, were divided into the three comparatively large principalities of Vijayapur, Chaudandi and Makwanpur. These principalities controlled extensive agricultural and forest areas in the Tarai, comprising the modern districts of Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Bara, Parsa and Rautahat, while the borders of Vijayapur and Chaudandi also touched Tibet in the north.

The valley of Kathmandu was the centre of three independent states, namely, Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaun. These states also owned territories in the hill areas between the Trishuli river, a tributary of the Gandaki river in the west, and the Dudhkosi in the east. The boundaries of both Kathmandu and Bhadgaun touched Tibet in the north, while in the east they included parts of the modern districts of Kabhrepalanchok, Sindhupalchok and Dolakha. In the west, Nuwakot and Dhading belonged to Kathmandu and Patan respectively. Patan's disadvantage in not having a direct link with Tibet was compensated by its proximity to the Bhimphedi-Hitaura route leading to the southern plains through the Kingdom of Makwanpur. The valley was of great importance from the economic point of view, for it accommodated important trade routes connecting northern India with central Tibet.

Farther west, beyond the Trishuli river, lay the Kingdom of Gorkha, which was destined to bring the whole of the Tista-Satluj region under its control by the first decade of the nineteenth century. Unlike most of the principalities of the west, Gorkha has had a recorded history from the time of its establishment in 1559, when Drabya Shah, a prince of the royal house of the adjoining principality of Lamjung, wrested the territory from local tribal chiefs and brought it under the authority of a Hindu king for the first time. Gorkha comprised an area of about 2,500 square kilometres in a triangular area east of Lamjung and Tanahu, with Tibet in the north and the inner Tarai region of Chitwan in the south.



Lamjung and Tanahu belonged to a cluster of 24 principalities, or Chaubisi, situated between the Marsyangdi river, a tributary of the Gandaki, in the east and the Bheri river, a tributary of the Karnali, in the west. Other important principalities in that region which have affected the course of modern Nepali history during the late eighteenth century were Kaski, Parbat and Palpa. Palpa, the biggest and most powerful among the Chaubisi principalities, possessed Butwal and other territories in the western Tarai, which it had obtained on lease from the Nawab of the Indian state of Awadh.

Farther to the west of the Chaubisi states lay another group of states collectively known as Baisi, which included Jumla, Doti, Jajarkot, Salyan, Dullu and Dailekh. Two small states in the mountain region across the Mahakali river, Juhar and Dharma, were also traditionally regarded as constituents of the Baisi group, having once formed parts of the territories of Jumla.

The Himalayan region situated west of the Mahakali river and east of the Jamuna river contained two states, Kumaun and Garhwal. Kumaun had possessed some territory in the Tarai, but that territory had come under the control of the Nawab of Awadh during the late 1770s. The territories of Garhwal, on the other hand, extended to the Doon Valley, north of the Siwaliks. The Jamuna-Satluj region encompassed approximately 14,000 square kilometres, but was divided into nearly 34 independent principalities during the late eighteenth century. Four of these principalities outstripped the others in size and strength, namely, Sirmur, adjoining Garhwal on the west, Hindur, Bilaspur and Besahar in the north. Between Besahar and Bilaspur were situated two groups of tiny principalities collectively known as Barha Thakurai and Atthara Thakurai. Beyond the Satluj river lay the principality of Kotoch, which boasted Kangra, the most renowned fort in the Himalayan region.

## **The Expansion of Gorkha**

Gorkha's founder, Drabya Shah, was the progenitor of the Shah dynasty, which led the campaign of territorial expansion and founded the present Kingdom of Nepal.

The rulers of Gorkha had nurtured the ambition of invading Kathmandu Valley at least since the early years of the 17th century. Because they lacked the strength and resources needed for such a

venture, they seem to have confined their ambitions to occasional interventions in the chronic inter-state rivalries that marked the Valley's political scene. Only around 1735, during the reign of Narabhupal Shah (1714-40), was the first step towards Kathmandu Valley launched through the invasion of Nuwakot, but unsuccessfully.

In 1742, Prithvi Narayan Shah succeeded his father, Narabhupal Shah, to the throne of Gorkha at the age of twenty. Soon after his succession, he started energetic preparations for the conquest of the three states of the Kathmandu Valley. Nuwakot was finally conquered in 1744, ensuring Gorkha's participation in the profitable trade between Kathmandu and Tibet. By 1748, Prithvi Narayan Shah had subjugated Sindhupalchok, Kabhrepalanchok and other areas east of the Valley. The passes of Kuti and Kerung, which constituted the main routes through which trade flowed between the Valley and Tibet, also came under Gorkhali control. The conquest of the Kingdom of Makwanpur in September 1762 enabled Prithvi Narayan Shah to control such areas in the Tarai as Bara, Parsa and Rautahat, as well as Sindhuli-Gadhi, through which the Valley maintained contact with India.

Military expeditions sent against him by the Nawab of Bengal in Makwanpur in January 1763, and by the East India Company in Sindhuli-Gadhi in 1765, were repulsed, although in the process the Tarai areas of Bara, Parsa and Rautahat remained under the occupation of the East India Company until January 1771.

In March 1767, Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the territory of Kirtipur after repeated attempts and thus gained his first strategic foothold in Kathmandu Valley. Gorkha-held territories now completely encircled the three states of Kathmandu Valley enabling Prithvi Narayan Shah to impose an economic blockade on the Valley. Demoralised and bereft of any natural defences, Kathmandu was finally overrun in September 1768. The conquest of Patan and Bhadgaun was completed less than a year later. Prithvi Narayan Shah then shifted his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu and laid the foundation of the modern Kingdom of Nepal. Gorkha's campaign for the conquest of Kathmandu Valley was thus completed in about 25 years.

Prithvi Narayan Shah's next campaign, launched in April 1771 against the Chaubisi states, particularly Lamjung and Kaski, ended in defeat in March the following year. There is evidence to suggest, however, that Prithvi Narayan Shah launched the campaign only to protect his rear flank, and that his real goal was the conquest of the Kingdoms of Chaudandi and Vijayapur in the east. This goal was accomplished within three years.

In 1775, when Prithvi Narayan Shah died at Nuwakot at the age of 53, the Gorkhali Kingdom comprised the whole of the eastern Tarai (Morang, Sunsari, Jhapa, Saptari, Siraha, Sarlahi, Mahottari, Dhanusha, Bara, Parsa and Rautahat), the eastern and central inner Tarai (Sindhuli, Udayapur, Chisapani and Makwanpur), the whole of Kathmandu Valley, the eastern hill region up to the Tista river bordering Sikkim, and the western hill areas of Nuwakot and Dhading between Gorkha and Kathmandu. The principality of Jajarkot on the borders of the Baisi region had signed a treaty accepting Gorkha's suzerainty in January 1769, a few months after the conquest of Kathmandu.

### *Other Conquests*

Prithvi Narayan Shah was succeeded by his son, Pratap Simha Shah, who was then 23 years of age. He reigned for less than three years, and died in November 1777. The Most notable event of his reign was the conquest of Chitwan, a part of the territories of Tanahu.

The conquest of the Chaubisi states had to wait until 1781, when Pratap Simha's widow, Rajendra Laxmi, became Regent for their infant son and successor, Ran Bahadur (1777-99). During the next five years, the Gorkhals succeeded in occupying several Chaubisi states, including Kaski, Lamjung and Tanahu. The campaign received a further boost when Bahadur Shah, Pratap Simha's younger brother, succeeded his sister-in-law, Rajendra Laxmi, as Regent, after her death in July 1785. During the six-month period between May and October 1786, the Gorkhali forces subdued the whole of the Chaubisi region west of the Kali-Gandaki river. By 1789, the Baisi states of Jumla, Dullu, Dailekh, Achham, Bajhang, Bajura and Doti had been conquered one by one, and the Gorkhali frontier extended to the Mahakali river.

However, not all the Chaubisi and Baisi states were fully incorporated into the Gorkhali Kingdom. Those rulers who had fought hard and tenaciously against the Gorkhals were, once defeated, driven out of their territories, which were then annexed by Gorkha. Such was the fate of almost all the prominent Chaubisi rulers. In the Baisi region, active assistance to the Gorkhals in their campaign of territorial expansion, rather than passive acceptance of their suzerainty, seems to have been the criterion by which a ruler was allowed the status of a vassal. Jumla, which resisted the Gorkhali advance for more than two years, was annexed, but several other states of the region, including Jajarkot, Bajhang, Bajura and Mustang, were recognised as vassal *rajyas* under contractual agreement.

By the end of 1786, of the 46 states of the Chaubisi and Baisi groups, only Salyan and Palpa remained nominally independent. The Gorkhalis made no attempt to annex Salyan, for in 1766, two years before the conquest of Kathmandu, Prithvi Narayan Shah had given his daughter, Vilasa Kumari, in marriage to Ranabhim Shah, son of Salyan's Raja, Srikrishna Shah. The Gorkhalis had tried to conquer Palpa in mid-1783 during the regency of Rajendra Laxmi, but had been compelled to withdraw. The state was allowed to remain independent and Bahadur Shah married a daughter of the Raja, Mahadatta Sen, a few months after succeeding Rajendra Laxmi as Regent. Palpa rendered valuable help to the Gorkhalis in the conquest of the Chaubisi states east of the Bheri river and was given control of the states of Gulmi, Argha and Khanchi as a reward. Even though both Salyan and Palpa remained outside Gorkha's suzerainty at this stage, they still seem to have been treated as vassals for all practical purposes. For example, they were ordered to furnish troops for Gorkha's military campaigns in the same manner as the vassal states of Jajarkot, Bajhang and Bajura.<sup>2</sup>

### *Across the Mahakali River*

The Gorkhali campaign of territorial expansion did not stop with the conquest of Doti in 1789. In early 1790, Gorkhali troops crossed the Mahakali river, invaded the state of Kumaun and occupied it within less than two months. Without wasting time, they continued westward towards Garhwal. However, they suffered a series of reverses. The Garhwalis entrenched themselves at a fort called Langurgarh, located on the route leading to the capital, Srinagar, and the Gorkhalis retaliated with a year-long siege of that fort, daily expecting reinforcements from Kathmandu.

The Gorkha capital, however, had become embroiled in a conflict with China and therefore, ordered the Gorkhali commanders in Garhwal to withdraw. Unaware of that development, and seeing no prospect of saving his kingdom, the ruler of Garhwal, Pradyumna Shah, signed a treaty with Gorkha conceding a yearly tribute of Rs. 3,000. Garhwal thus became yet another vassal state under Gorkha's suzerainty.

### *Wars With Tibet and China<sup>3</sup>*

As discussed above, the withdrawal from Garhwal stemmed from Gorkha's conflict with China, itself a result of Gorkhali forays into

Tibet the previous year. In 1788, even as the campaign for the conquest of the Baisi states was going on, Gorkhali forces had crossed the border with Tibet, and seized the four districts of the Kuti-Kerung pass area, Nyanang, Rangshar, Kyirong and Dzongka. Tibet soon sued for peace. A treaty was signed on June 2, 1789, under which Kathmandu agreed to withdraw from those Tibetan districts. The treaty also obligated Tibet to pay an annual tribute. After paying the first year's instalment, however, Tibet refused to render the stipulated tribute. In August 1791, therefore, the Gorkhalis again invaded Tibet, seizing the trade centre at Kuti and advancing rapidly along the main trade route to Shigatse. In less than two months they reached Shigatse and occupied Tashilunpo, the political centre of the Tsang province.

The Chinese responded to these Gorkhali successes in Tibet in a manner that Kathmandu probably had not anticipated. In July 1792, a joint Chinese-Tibetan force launched a military campaign against the Gorkhalis and inflicted a series of defeats. The Gorkhali army was forced to retreat to Dhaibung in Nuwakot, scarcely 30 kilometres from Kathmandu. Kathmandu then sued for peace, and the Chinese forces, which had suffered heavy losses and faced shortages of food and ammunition, agreed. In an agreement concluded on September 30, 1792, the Gorkhalis relinquished all claims based on the 1789 treaty and also agreed to maintain fraternal relations with Tibet.

Beyond interrupting the campaign of territorial expansion in the west, the wars with Tibet and China had little impact on the Gorkhali state. As one study has noted, peace was established "on terms that were neither humiliating nor catastrophic" for the Gorkhalis, and, in the final analysis, the war had little permanent impact on the country or on its military capacity.<sup>4</sup> More important, Kathmandu's territorial acquisitions in the east, south and west remained unaffected.

## A Time of Troubles

By 1794, the state of Gorkha had expanded phenomenally. Its boundaries stretched over a distance of approximately 2,100 kilometres, from the Tista river in the east to the Jamuna river in the west, including extensive areas in the Tarai. It had come out of the conflict with China unscathed and unhumiliated. However, "the golden age [*sic*] of Nepal's unification"<sup>5</sup> soon ended, and the cause lay not in external factors but in political conflicts within the fledgeling state.

The wars with Tibet and China brought in their wake a serious challenge to the position of the Regent, Bahadur Shah. In May 1794, less than two years after Gorkha's defeat, King Ran Bahadur Shah, who had then reached the age of 19 years, terminated the regency, dismissed Bahadur Shah, and assumed full powers himself.<sup>6</sup> The action was natural and inevitable, as the king had attained majority. But Ran Bahadur's subsequent actions defy explanation. Indeed, the decade following Ran Bahadur's assumption of power, that is, 1794 to 1804, was a time of political turmoil for the Gorkhali state, during which its campaign of territorial expansion came to a full stop.

The troubles started in early 1797, when Ran Bahadur married Kantavati, a girl belonging to a Mishra Brahmin family from the Tarai. He already had two queens, Rajrajyeshwari and Subarnaprabha, and the latter had borne him a son, Ran Udyot Shah. Ran Bahadur, however, designated Kantavati as his chief queen. In March 1799, as Kantavati was dying of smallpox, he abdicated and placed her infant son, Girban Yuddha Bir Bikram Shah, on the throne. Ran Bahadur then professed to be a mendicant, or *sanyasi*, with the title of Swami Nirvananda.

When Kantavati died in October 1799, Ran Bahadur Shah seems literally to have gone out of his mind. According to a British official source,<sup>7</sup>

He cut off the noses and ears of many of the Brahmins who officiated at the temples where prayers had been offered for the recovery of the Rannee; he deprived others of their cast[e] by forcing the flesh of dogs and hogs into their mouths. He caused the golden idol from the venerated temple of Bhawanee to be ground to dust with the most abominable filth; he directed the temple itself to be demolished, and the three companies of Sepoys, to whom he gave the orders, demurring at the sacrilege, he commanded scalding oil to be poured upon their naked bodies, feasting his eyes upon the sight of their sufferings. The first members of the administration were not exempt from his ferocity. Some were publicly scoured, others drawn up by the heels to the branch of a tree...

Ran Bahadur had shifted from the royal palace in Kathmandu to Deopatan in the Pashupatinath temple area to nurse the ailing Kantavati. After her death, he went to Patan and began making attempts to regain control of the administration. The Gorkhali nobility split into two factions, one side supporting King Girban in Nuwakot, and the other, Ran Bahadur in Patan. Both sides began to mobilise

forces and a civil war seemed imminent. Apprehending defeat, Ran Bahadur fled to Banaras, India. On June 26, 1800 the Governor-General reported to the Board of Directors of the East India Company: "The Rajah of Nepaul, having been compelled, apparently in consequence of the revolt of his principal chiefs, to take refuge in the Hon'ble Company's territories, has lately arrived in Benaras."<sup>8</sup> Ran Bahadur Shah's entourage included Queen Rajrajyeshwari and Bhimsen Thapa, the future prime minister.

Even from Banaras, Ran Bahadur continued to interfere in the political affairs of the Empire. His objective seems to have been to regain control of the administration with the support of the East India Company. He appealed to the Governor-General to adopt effective measures "to punish the turbulent people of Nepaul, who have thrown off their allegiance and sacrificed their eternal welfare,"<sup>9</sup> and even expressed his willingness to accept for Nepal the status of a vassal state under the East India Company. In a letter to the Governor-General on November 6, 1801, he proposed that, if restored to the throne through the intervention of the Company, he would pay the Company 37.5 per cent of the revenue from the hill areas and 50 per cent from the Tarai areas. Ran Bahadur Shah also proposed that "if a time should come when none of my descendants shall be in existence, I agree that the whole of the country of Nipaul shall devolve to the administration and control of the Company."<sup>10</sup> The proposal, which has been described as "outrageous"<sup>11</sup> and "one of the most amazing documents ever to be written by a ruler of Nepal,"<sup>12</sup> gives a measure of Ran Bahadur's desperation.

In Kathmandu, where Queen Subarnaprabha was acting as Regent for the infant-King Girban Yuddha Bikram, the political situation remained chaotic. Factionalism among the Gorkhali nobility continued unabated, and Subarnaprabha seemed unable to provide the leadership that the situation demanded. In early 1802, Queen Rajrajyeshwari returned to Kathmandu and assumed the regency. Eventually, in March 1804,<sup>13</sup> Ran Bahadur Shah himself returned from Banaras. A new government was then formed, with Bhimsen Thapa as one of its members.<sup>14</sup>

## The Westward Expansion

The campaign of territorial expansion resumed a few months after Ran Bahadur's return from India. The Kingdom of Palpa was finally incorporated into the Gorkhali Empire.<sup>15</sup> The Tarai territory of Butwal,

which the rulers of Palpa had obtained on lease from the Nawab of Awadh, and which the Nawab had ceded to the East India Company in 1801, also came under Gorkhali control.<sup>16</sup> In October 1804, the Gorkhalis invaded Garhwal, which had signed a treaty of subsidiary alliance with Gorkha 12 years previously, and annexed it to their empire. During the next two years, they occupied most of the principalities of the cis-Satluj region, including Sirmur, Hindur and Besahar.

In February 1806, Ran Bahadur assumed the post of *Mukhtiyar*, or Regent, "a post that placed him legally at the head of the government during his son's minority."<sup>17</sup> Fears arose among the nobility that the days of terror preceding Ran Bahadur's exile might be repeated. Three months later, Ran Bahadur was assassinated by his half-brother, Sher Bahadur Shah. Bhimsen Thapa took advantage of the situation to put a number of the leading nobles to death on the charge of conspiracy against the ex-king and was able to gain complete control of the government. King Girban Yuddha Bikram Shah was then only about nine years of age. The Regent, the widowed Queen Lalitatripurasundari, whom Ran Bahadur had married after his return from Banaras, was also a minor.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, the Gorkhali military successes in the cis-Satluj region led the chiefs of several principalities in the trans-Satluj region to solicit Gorkhali assistance in their long-standing conflict with Sansar Chand, the ruler of the principality of Kotoch. Sansar Chand had been extending his influence in the region for about two decades. He had occupied the fort of Kangra in 1788, although his territorial designs in the plains had been checked by the Sikh ruler of Punjab, Ranjit Singh. The Gorkhalis responded enthusiastically to the hill chiefs' appeal to join the anti-Sansar Chand front. In December 1805, Gorkhali troops crossed the Satluj river and occupied most of Sansar Chand's territories. Sansar Chand then withdrew to the fort of Kangra, to which the Gorkhalis laid siege. The siege continued for four long years, until 1809, when Ranjit Singh came to Sansar Chand's aid and repulsed the Gorkhalis. Gorkhali plans to resume the Kangra campaign were checked by subsequent disputes with the East India Company, culminating in the Nepal-Britain war of 1814-16. The unsuccessful siege of Kangra thus marked the final phase of the Gorkhali campaign of territorial expansion.<sup>19</sup>

The persistent Gorkhali attempt to occupy the fort of Kangra, despite the heavy drain of manpower and material resources that the prolonged siege entailed, requires explanation. Available Nepali sources shed no light on the matter, but British sources hint that the Gorkhalis regarded the fort as a stepping-stone in a plan to capture the valley of



Kashmir. Indeed, British officials believed that "had the Nepalese succeeded in reducing Kangra, there is little doubt that they would have very shortly after extended their conquest to Cashmere."<sup>20</sup> In Gorkhali eyes, therefore, Kangra was the last hurdle in the creation of "a unified hill state, subordinate to the Gorkha dynasty."<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime, the Gorkhalis found time to annex one more territory to their empire. This was the principality of Salyan, which, as mentioned previously, formally had an independent status but was treated as a vassal state within the Gorkhali Empire for all practical purposes. In 1809, the Raja, Ranabhim Shah, son-in-law of Prithvi Narayan Shah, was deposed on the charge of colluding with Gorkha's enemies, and the territory was placed under Gorkhali administration.<sup>22</sup>

## The Gorkhali Achievement

When we consider that it took less than a half century (1768-1814) for Gorkha, a small and poor hill principality, to extend its territory along a 2,000 kilometre section of the Himalayan region from the Tista in the east to the Satluj in the west at the cost of more than sixty principalities, many of which were much stronger and resourceful than itself, the achievement provokes our surprise, admiration and reflection. A modern British historian has paid tribute to the Gorkhali achievement in the following words:<sup>23</sup>

On the eve of the war with the British, the Gurkha empire was at its zenith. It stretched from the Tista river in the east to the Satluj in the west, a distance equivalent to that between the southern coast of England and the northern tip of Scotland; and its average breadth was not much less than that of Great Britain. In the space of half a century, the Gurkhas had unified, for the first time in history, a belt of territory which was the most beautiful, the most inaccessible and traditionally the most fragmented in Asia. There seems no reason to suppose that, had the war with the British not intervened, this empire would not have proved viable.

However, the Gorkhalis were denied the "greatness" of a Himalayan empire. The political factors that shaped the ultimate fate of the Gorkhali effort lie beyond the scope of the present study, but one can hardly resist the temptation, with the wisdom born of hindsight, to place one's judgement on record. The campaign for the annexation of Garhwal, and the subsequent advance into the Jamuna-Satluj region

and beyond, may have been justified in terms of territorial objectives, but the Jamuna river seems to have been the line at which the Gorkhali's military superiority was neutralised by the handicap of the ever-lengthening distance of the front from the base of operations at Kathmandu. We may, therefore, agree with the view of a contemporaneous British observer that in their campaign of conquest the Gorkhals "knew not where to stop."<sup>24</sup>

The events that led to the Nepal-Britain war of 1814-16, and Gorkha's defeat in that war, have been described elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> Under the treaty of Sugauli, which ended the war, Nepal ceded approximately 64,000 square kilometres of territory, mostly in the Tarai to the East India Company. The treaty fixed its boundaries along the Mechi river in the east and the Mahakali river in the west. About ten months later, the East India Company restored a part of the ceded territories in the central and western Tarai regions.<sup>26</sup> These arrangements marked the finale of the seven-decades-long phase of Gorkha's territorial expansion.

Gorkha's defeat in the 1814-16 Nepal-Britain war and the consequent heavy loss of territory, however, should not blind us to the fact that the Gorkhali Kingdom, at the end of 1816, was still left with an area of more than 136,000 square kilometres in the Tarai, the hills and the mountain region. In other words, the Kingdom of Gorkha, which comprised less than 250 square kilometres during the early 1740s, expanded by more than 500 times during a period of about seven decades, beginning with the conquest of Nuwakot in 1744.

The Gorkhali achievement was possible because the state of Gorkha satisfied a minimum of three conditions. First, it had a leadership with a vision, the vision of bringing most, if not the whole, of the Himalayan region under it. That leadership, despite its origin within the narrow confines of a hill state, responded with remarkable resourcefulness and imaginativeness to the formidable challenges of conquering and administering a far-flung empire. Second, the state of Gorkha was able to organise a standing army of a significant size. Last, more territories meant more people, hence more tax-payers, more fighting men, and more porters and labourers. They also meant more natural resources such as agricultural lands, forests and mines, hence more sources of revenue and more supplies and provisions. Territorial expansion was thus a self-propelling process, generating *per se* the resources needed for further expansion. These three conditions cumulatively ensured Gorkha's political and military superiority in the

Himalayan region. It was only when the Gorkhalis more than met their match in the British that they were checked in their campaign of territorial expansion.

### *The Heartland and the Provinces*

The brilliance of Gorkha's achievement in building up an empire that spanned almost two-thirds of the Himalayan region should not blind us to that empire's inherent heterogeneity and fragility. Perhaps the most significant of its many discontinuities was the division between its heartland, that is, the "geographically central area having crucial economic, political or strategic importance,"<sup>27</sup> and its provinces, denoting "the parts of [the empire] removed from the capital and the populated, cultural centers."<sup>28</sup>

The state of Gorkha was the heartland of the new empire, whose capital shifted to Kathmandu in 1768. Situated almost in the centre of the empire, Kathmandu was indeed an ideal site for the capital. It was surrounded on all sides by hills through which a few tracks joined it to the rest of the empire. As the new residence of the Shah Kings and the Gorkhali elite, and as the seat of government of the expanding empire, it was in Kathmandu that major decisions of political, administrative and military significance were taken and communicated to local administrators and field commanders.

But though Kathmandu was the capital of the Gorkhali Empire, it was the heartland Gorkha and its peripheral territories such as Nuwakot, Kaski, Lamjung, and Tanahu in the Trishuli-Marsyangdi region that furnished the political leaders of the Gorkhali Empire, as well as most of its high-ranking administrative personnel. The ruling families and nobility of those states belonged to the same ethnic, caste and cultural groups as their counterparts in Gorkha. Many were also bound together by ties of kinship and marriage. For that reason, they could largely identify their interests and aspirations with those of the Gorkhalis.

Outside the heartland, Gorkhali territorial acquisitions were no more than colonies with subject populations. Seldom were members of the colonies' erstwhile ruling families and nobility recruited as members of the Gorkhali ruling elite. There is no evidence that the subject populations of these territories (such as the Limbus of the eastern hill region, the Tharus of the Tarai, or the inhabitants of territories beyond

the Bheri river, such as Jumla, Doti, Kumaun and Garhwal) possessed either the capacity or the inclination to identify their interests and aspirations with those of their Gorkhali masters. Certainly the Gorkhalis tried to enlist support for their rule in the colonies by attracting local influential individuals and groups through land grants and other favours. Such individuals and groups, no doubt, acted as agents and representatives of Gorkhali interests at the local level. Nevertheless, their acceptance of Gorkhali authority by no means assured them a role in the Gorkhali political, military or administrative leadership.

### *Principle of Allegiance*<sup>29</sup>

The Gorkhali rulers made an attempt to bridge the gulf between the populations of the heartland and the provinces by devising a new principle of allegiance. The traditional principle of allegiance was based on kinship or personal loyalty to the ruler, which pre-Gorkhali states in the Himalayan region had used at the risk of frequently releasing fissiparous forces. These states were, consequently, subject to fragmentation because of such factors as the division of the succession rights among the king's sons and relatives by the king himself, or else disputed succession. King Mukunda Sen of Palpa, for instance, parcelled out his kingdom among four sons, one grandson and a nephew. Similarly, Kathmandu Valley was ruled jointly after the death of Yaksha Malla by his sons and one grandson, ultimately leading to the emergence of the three independent kingdoms of that region.

In contrast, the Gorkhali rulers devised the principle of allegiance to the *dhungo*, which literally means a stone, but used metaphorically to denote the state. The concept of *dhungo* implied that the Gorkhali state was a permanent entity that transcended the person of the ruler. In other words, allegiance to the state superseded personal loyalty to the ruler. The concept found practical application in the principle of territorial integrity, an essential attribute of the state in the modern sense of the term. It was in accordance with that principle that Prithvi Narayan Shah refused to share his conquests with his brothers, although they had worked hard in the Gorkhali cause. The Gorkhali state was thus immune to the fissiparous tendencies that had plagued its predecessors in the Himalayan region. But those who were bound in allegiance to the Gorkhali state by the concept of *dhungo* were mainly members of the Gorkhali establishment themselves, rather than the subject populations of the conquered territories. Seldom in the history of the world have subject populations accepted the imperial control

of a foreign power with docility, and those of the Gorkhali Empire were no exception. Indeed, the inhabitants of the conquered territories, particularly those in the regions situated east of the Dudhkosi and west of the Bheri river, long remained unreconciled to Gorkhali suzerainty, and engaged in armed insurrections whenever the opportunity was favourable.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. The accounts of political divisions in the central Himalayan region and of the Gorkhali conquests are based on the following sources: Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, 1819; Fr. Ludwing F. Stiller, *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*, 1973; John Pemble, *The Invasion of Nepal*, 1971; Baburam Acharya, *Shri 5 Badamaharajadhiraja Prithvi Narayan Shah* (The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah), 1967-69; and *Nepalako Samkshipta Vrittanta* (A Concise Account of Nepal), n.d.
2. Separate royal orders to the Rajas of Palpa, Jajarkot, Bajhang and Bajura, Chaitra Badi 6, 1860 (March 1804), *Regmi Research Collections (RRC)*, Vol. 19, pp. 171-72.
3. This section is based on Leo E. Rose, *Strategy for Survival*, 1971, pp. 23-74.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
5. Stiller, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
6. Chittaranjan Nepali, *Shri 5 Rana Bahadur Shah* (King Ran Bahadur Shah), 1963.
7. National Archives of India, Secret Consultation, No. 42, June 30, 1802; Report of Captain W.D. Knox to the Governor-General, in *Stiller Typescript*, A Transcription of the Documents Contained in Reel One of the Microfilms Obtained from the Archives of India and Preserved in the Tribhuvan University Library, Kirtipur, p. 136.
8. *Ibid.*, No. 85, June 26, 1800, p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, No. 133, June 16, 1801, p. 44.
10. *Ibid.*, No. 14, June 30, 1802, pp. 115-17.
11. Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
12. Stiller, *op. cit.*, p. 303.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 307-20.
14. Chittaranjan Nepali, *Janarala Bhimasena Thapa ra Tatkalina Nepala* (General Bhimsen Thapa and Contemporary Nepal), 1956, p. 13.
15. Stiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-22.
16. C.V. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds*, 1863, Vol. 2, p. 123.
17. Nepali, *op. cit.*, p. 74; Stiller, *op. cit.*, p. 322.
18. Baburam Acharya, *op. cit.*, p. 125; Stiller, *op. cit.*, p. 322.
19. Stiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-47.
20. Stiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 231 and 240; Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 259. Kashmir was then under the control of Afghanistan. Only in 1819 was it conquered by Ranjit Singh and united with Punjab.
21. Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

22. Triratna Manandhar, "Salyani Raja Ranabhima Shahko Padachyuti" (Deposition of Raja Ranabhim Shah of Salyan), in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 2, April 1984, pp. 85-92.
23. Pemble, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
24. James Baillie Fraser, *Journal of a Tour through Part of the Snowy Range of the Himal Mountains and to the Sources of the Rivers Jamuna and Ganges*, London: Rodwell and Martin, 1820.
25. Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-89; Stiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-70.
26. For the texts of the treaty (December 2, 1825) and the memorandum of restoration (December 8, 1816), see B.D. Sanwal, *Nepal and the East India Company*, 1965, appendices 11 and 12, pp. 330-35.
27. David B. Guralnik (ed.), *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition, New Delhi, Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1972, p. 646.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 1144.
29. Mahesh C. Regmi, *Readings in Nepali Economic History*, 1979, pp. 21-22.
30. The inhabitants of Majhkirat in the Dudhkosi-Arun region which had been brought into the Gorkhali Empire in early 1773, appear to have engaged in active rebellion against their new masters. They were granted general amnesty in 1781. (Royal amnesty to rebels in the Dudhkosi-Arun region, Shrawan Sudi 13, 1838 (July 1781), RRC, Vol. 5, p. 61.) The Limbu inhabitants of the Arun-Tista region in the east similarly joined the Chinese side in large numbers to fight against the Gorkhali forces during the Nepal-China war of 1792-93. (Mahesh C. Regmi, *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, 1978, pp. 540-41); separate royal orders granting amnesty to Rai and Limbu rebels for rebellions during the Chinese invasion, Shrawan Badi 5, 1853 (July 1796), RRC, Vol. 4, pp. 65-67. Other communities who rebelled against Gorkhali rule during the Nepal-China War were the Bhotes and Murmis of Nuwakot. ("Bhote and Murmi Rebels", *Regmi Research Series*, year 16, nos. 9-10, September-October 1984, pp. 129-30.) In Jumla, Sobhan Shahi, a prince of the displaced ruling house who had taken refuge in Tibet after the Gorkhali conquest of that state in 1789, instigated a rebellion against the Gorkhalis with the active support of the local population. (Royal order to *Kajis, Sardars*, etc., Jestha Badi 11, 1850 (May 1793), RRC, Vol. 36, pp. 50-51. For a translation of these documents, see "The Royal Family of Jumla", *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, no. 1, January 1987, pp. 8-9.) The rebellion was suppressed with great severity. In 1794, a royal order to the people of Humla and Jumla noted that "it has been five years since we occupied that territory, but you have all along caused us much trouble." ("Rebellion in Jumla", *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, no. 5, May 1987, p. 61.)

# The King and the Royal Household

Gorkha's campaign of territorial expansion, which culminated in the emergence of the Gorkhali Empire by the early years of the nineteenth century, made it possible for the Shah Kings to widen the base of their political authority from the hill state of Gorkha to the Tista-Satluj sector of the Himalayan region. This chapter examines how those Kings, from Prithvi Narayan to Girban, used that enhanced political authority to enrich the monarchy.

## The Shah Kings of Gorkha

On the eve of its campaign of territorial expansion, in approximately the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Gorkha was by no means an affluent state. Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton, a medical doctor attached to the British Residency in Kathmandu during 1802-3, noted:<sup>1</sup>

The chiefs of Gorkha being cut off from any direct communication with either the low country or Tibet, and having no mines nor other productions as a basis for commerce, were considered as insignificant.

Fragmentary records of the income and expenditure of the royal house of Gorkha some time during the rule of King Narabhupal Shah (1716-43), recently unearthed, illustrate the precarious nature of Gorkha's finances.<sup>2</sup> These records show that sources of revenue in Narabhupal's Gorkha were strikingly sparse, consisting, for the most part, fees paid by the palace officials and local functionaries, duties on buffaloes, and fines and penalties collected from persons guilty of cow-slaughter and other crimes. Other evidence hints at the existence

of a tax on homesteads.<sup>3</sup> Agricultural lands and villages seem to have been granted to individuals under various forms of tax-free tenure; no evidence indicates that the state derived any income from that source. The king's lands were cultivated through forced labour, although food was provided to the labourers. The yield of such lands must have been insufficient to meet the needs of the royal household, for money was spent on the purchase of such basic commodities as rice, ghee and oil, as well as sacrificial sheep, goats and buffaloes.

Besides ordinary expenses such as wages to carpenters and washermen, and gifts and rewards to local functionaries, visiting envoys from other states, money was also spent on such luxuries as soap, tobacco, betel, betelnut and cloves and other spices imported from the southern plains. The amounts spent on these items were relatively modest: a quarter-rupee to one rupee for betelnut, 2 annas to a half-rupee for soap, and Re. 1 to Rs. 3 for tobacco, the daily consumption of this commodity in the royal court being worth about half-a-rupee.<sup>4</sup> It is true that money was scarce and had a relatively high purchasing power in the hill state of Gorkha during the early years of the eighteenth century compared with the capital city of Kathmandu about half a century later, but this by no means mitigates the truth of Hamilton's observation that the chiefs of Gorkha were considered economically insignificant.

Prithvi Narayan Shah himself seems to have spent an austere childhood. A sum of six-and-a-half rupees was spent on his clothes at a time and he received his pocket money in quarter-rupees and half-rupees, with only one recorded payment of a full rupee. He kept pigeons as a hobby, with a dip in the Daraundi river, a sprint along its sandy banks, and a munch of sugarcane growing in the adjoining fields as his recreations.<sup>5</sup> In keeping with his frugal background, he wore homespun cloth and disliked imported fabrics to the last days of his life. He frowned upon foreign dancers and musicians because, among other things, they caused a drain of wealth.<sup>6</sup>

### *Shortage of Money*

The rulers of Gorkha accordingly suffered from a chronic shortage of money. The means that they adopted for raising cash illustrate the fragile nature of the Gorkhali financial base. One method was to borrow money from individuals in the name of the King, in effect pledging future revenues as security. Such loans often remained unpaid for long periods of time. In 1715, for instance, King Prithvipati Shah (1677-



1716) renewed a loan of Rs. 320 that his grandfather, King Krishna Shah (1659-66) had obtained from a Brahmin, Vyas Upadhyaya.<sup>7</sup> Presumably, the loan was renewed because the treasury had no money for repayment. Another expedient was to mortgage lands and homesteads to individuals. That is to say, individuals were allowed to take possession of Gorkha-controlled lands and homesteads in return for specified sums of money, free from any fiscal or other obligations to the state. Although the Gorkhals could redeem such mortgages at any time through repayment of the original sum,<sup>8</sup> they rarely did so during this period.

Lack of cash forced the Gorkhals to finance their early campaigns of territorial expansion, at least partly, through loans and gifts from affluent individuals. Such individuals included Kalu Khadka, Chief of the royal household in Gorkha, who had loaned "gold, copper, lead, and money" worth about Rs. 4,000 to King Prithvi Narayan Shah. A receipt issued in September 1772 in Kathmandu stipulated that the loan would be repaid "at a time when money is available."<sup>9</sup> More crucial to the military campaigns were funds obtained from Harinandan Pokharel, a Brahmin of Kharpa who had served as priest to King Karna Sen of the eastern hill state of Chaudandi before defecting to the Gorkhali side. During 1773-74, Harinandan Pokharel provided about Rs. 11,000 to the commanders of the Gorkhali forces which conquered the principalities of Chaudandi and Vijayapur. This was quite a significant sum of money for the Gorkhals, especially since it was a gift rather than a loan.<sup>10</sup>

## The Royal Court of Kathmandu

Prithvi Narayan Shah's austerity seems to have set the tone of life in the royal court of Kathmandu, for his immediate successors adhered to that policy more or less faithfully. In 1793, when Bahadur Shah was Regent for the minor King, Ran Bahadur, a British Colonel, William Kirkpatrick, who spent about three weeks in Nuwakot and Kathmandu in March 1793 as an envoy of the East India Company government, noted "the economical, not to say parsimonious habits of the Regent...," and added: "This court affects on no occasion either splendour or munificence."<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the trend toward a more luxurious life style in the royal court of Kathmandu had already started. For example, in December 1776, less than two years after the death of Prithvi Narayan

Shah, King Pratap Simha appointed three men on a monthly salary of Rs. 5 to Rs. 6 each to prepare betel for the royal household.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to imagine such extravagance so long as Prithvi Narayan Shah was alive, although his household had used betel.

The trend accelerated in subsequent years, particularly after the mid-1790s, when Ran Bahadur Shah assumed control. Born in June 1775, he was then barely 19 years of age, a hot-blooded and pleasure-loving youth who behaved from the very beginning like a man who had come into a good deal of money, as indeed he had. The royal court therefore witnessed a splendour of the ruler of an empire which now stretched from the Tista river in the east to the Satluj river in the west --- a splendour of which Ran Bahadur's forefathers in Gorkha, including Prithvi Narayan Shah, had probably never even dreamt. The tone set by Ran Bahadur Shah continued under the patronage of the Gorkhali elite during the reign of his successor, King Girban. The comparison between the hill state of Gorkha during Prithvi Narayan's childhood and the royal court in Kathmandu during the mid-1790s, when Gorkha had attained the status of an empire, is perhaps unfair. The contrast is nevertheless real, and reflects the new Empire's wealth and power.

During the period from 1794 to 1814, possibly for the first time, the Shah family began to spend money on brocade and other fabrics imported from China and India. In January 1800, for example, the royal household bought seven lengths of brocade from a local trader for Rs. 307 the administrator of the provinces of Bara and Parsa was ordered to pay the amount from revenues collected there.<sup>13</sup> Money was procured from the same source in 1799 to purchase betel, and at least five persons were employed at the royal palace to prepare it on a monthly salary of Rs. 26 each.<sup>14</sup> Members of the royal family seem to have started dining off gold plates — Rs. 6,800 were spent on gold for this purpose in August 1794.<sup>15</sup> Many more examples could be cited to underline the new style and atmosphere of the royal Gorkhali court in Kathmandu.

Ran Bahadur also seems to have been fond of entertainment, so he invited large numbers of musicians, dancers and wrestlers from India,<sup>16</sup> paying them high salaries by Gorkhali standards.<sup>17</sup> In 1799, Gosain Prasad Giri, a wrestler, received a monthly salary of Rs. 75.<sup>18</sup> One Indian musician, Qayum Khan Kalawat, was given villages in Bara and Parsa yielding a yearly income of Rs. 1,500 although he chose to have the amount charged on the revenues of those two provinces.<sup>19</sup> Another Indian musician, Jivan Shah Kalawat, was paid a salary of Rs. 700 a month,<sup>20</sup> in addition to other perquisites. In contrast, in 1798,

the monthly salary of a Subedar or Commander of a military company in Kumaun was fixed at Rs. 30 a month.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, music and dance came to occupy such an important place at the royal court that in October 1799, ten months after Ran Bahadur's abdication and less than a week after the death of Queen Kantavati, the Gorkhali leadership, nominally headed by the two-and-a-half-year old King Girban, found the subject important enough to appoint an Indian, Bhawani Dayal Kathak, chief of musicians and dancing girls.<sup>22</sup>

Under Ran Bahadur, the royal court became the scene of much revelry and merry-making. The spring festivals of *Basanta Panchami* and *Fagu*, in particular, were celebrated on a grand scale, the expenditure in 1797 amounting to about Rs. 1,100 for vermilion powder and Rs. 400 for perfumes, which was paid from the revenues of the provinces of Saptari and Mahottari.<sup>23</sup>

If Prithvi Narayan's pets in Gorkha were limited to the humble pigeon, his successors in Kathmandu had a full-fledged menagerie, comprised of exotic varieties of dogs, as well as musk-deer, blue sheep, wild horses, tahr, goral and rhinoceros, and pheasants, partridges, peacocks and other birds.<sup>24</sup> The royal menagerie must have contained tigers and leopards also, but no documentary evidence is available. But Ran Bahadur's best-loved pets were bulls. He kept a stable of bulls at the royal palace at Basantapur,<sup>25</sup> featuring exotic breeds procured from different parts of the Empire and even from India.<sup>26</sup> The importance Ran Bahadur attached to that hobby is shown by the fact that in early 1798, Chamu Thapa and Ramachandra Thapa, military administrators in Chainpur, were each fined Rs. 200 for disobeying a royal order to supply bulls for the royal stables.<sup>27</sup> Cotton seed and other feed was procured from different parts of the Empire for the royal bulls,<sup>28</sup> while millet was procured from lands set aside for that purpose in Kathmandu and elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> In 1804, Rs. 2,510 were appropriated from the revenues of Bhadgaun to purchase fodder for the royal bulls.<sup>30</sup> At the royal palace at Basantapur, a separate department was created to manage the bull stables.<sup>31</sup>

### *Supplies for the Royal Kitchen*

The Gorkhali rulers took special care to ensure that the royal larder was abundantly stocked with such basic provisions as rice, ghee, oil and meat. The royal household received such supplies without paying for them; instead, it obtained each staple through a specific system of direct requisition.

For the supply of rice, as well as such auxiliary agricultural commodities as wheat, pulses and mustard, the Gorkhali rulers set aside lands, known as *sera*, in different parts of Kathmandu Valley and the hill regions. There were *sera* lands in Gorkha,<sup>32</sup> possibly the earliest *sera* holdings of the royal household. Large areas were taken up under *sera* tenure in Nuwakot<sup>33</sup> as well as at different places in Kathmandu Valley,<sup>34</sup> and in the Marsyangdi-Kaligandaki region, which came under Gorkhali control in 1785-86.<sup>35</sup> Tenants usually cultivated these lands, although at times forced labour was exacted from the local people for this purpose.<sup>36</sup> Such labour was also used to construct and repair irrigation facilities, with the army's assistance when local manpower proved inadequate.<sup>37</sup> The royal household also owned lands at several places in Dhading and Gorkha from which it collected rents in the form of commodities such as turmeric powder, condensed citrus juice and chillies, as well as fish and gelded goats.<sup>38</sup>

For the supply of ghee, the royal household established cattle farms at different places in both the eastern and western hill areas within two or three days' distance from Kathmandu. Such farms were established at Baguwa and Makaibari in Gorkha,<sup>39</sup> Jiri, Khimti, Phaplu and Solukhumbu in the hill region east of Kathmandu,<sup>40</sup> and in at least twelve locations in the western hill region as well, including Dhor, Thak and Kaski.<sup>41</sup>

A royal household officer known as the *kapardar* supervised the *sera* lands and royal cattle farms. He allotted rice and other commodities collected from *sera* lands to the royal kitchen as well as to slaves and other servants at the palace. He was also instructed to use the income from cash levies collected on *sera* lands, as well as the sale proceeds of rice-straw, to procure silver utensils for the royal table.<sup>42</sup>

Ghee and oil, as well as goats and boar, were also supplied to the royal household through a tax known as *saunefagu*.<sup>43</sup> The tax was collected from each household in the hill regions of the Gorkhali Empire, from Chainpur to Kumaun. Common households supplied one *mana* each of ghee and oil as *saunefagu*, while landowners supplied twice as much, and local functionaries, goats or boar.<sup>44</sup> An official of the royal palace collected the commodities and transported them to Kathmandu through porters recruited under the forced labour system.<sup>45</sup> Because of the difficulties of collection, payments in money were permitted as an alternative,<sup>46</sup> hence the *saunefagu* tax became an increasingly uncertain source of commodities for the royal household. In 1807, the tax was wholly commuted into cash,<sup>47</sup> thus becoming a source of cash revenue, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Money

and commodities collected as *saunefagu* taxes were used for religious functions at the royal palace, and surpluses, if any, were kept in reserve.<sup>48</sup>

Essential items such as rice, ghee, oil and goats were not the only commodities the Gorkhali rulers appropriated from their subjects. Similar arrangements existed for such items as ice from the hill regions (started a few months before Ran Bahadur's abdication in 1799),<sup>49</sup> and mangoes from the Tarai.<sup>50</sup>

The royal household was also able to draw on the exotic products of territories of various geographical and climatic zones. In addition to the wild birds and animals for Ran Bahadur's menagerie, other exotic items procured by direct requisition included medicinal herbs, the skin and fat of a python, the jaw-bone of an ass, the bile and fat of a bear, and the milk of a tigress.<sup>51</sup> In 1805, the chief administrator of the province of Bara-Parsa was ordered to supply the fat of a porpoise, the tongue and fat of a crocodile, the skin of a camel's breast and its urine, and the crown of a two-headed snake.<sup>52</sup> Numerous examples exist of similar exotic requisitions by the royal palace.

## Royal Palace Revenues

While direct requisitions kept the royal larder abundantly stocked, the lavish style of the royal court, and the personal affluence of the King and his family necessitated additional financial resources — chiefly, loot and monetary taxation. As a result of territorial expansion, the Shah Kings of the late eighteenth century could draw upon an incomparably greater supply of loot and cash than could their Gorkhali predecessors half a century earlier.

Territorial expansion often conferred direct and immediate benefits upon the king and the royal household. Some of these benefits accrued from the pillage of enemy property, a recognised practice in territories conquered by the Gorkhalis. The king claimed certain categories of such property as his own. In June 1786, Damodar Pande, the Gorkhali military commander in the Marsyangdi-Kaligandaki region, was instructed:<sup>53</sup>

Property looted from the palaces of the (defeated) Kings shall be transmitted to the royal palace (in Kathmandu); property looted from other people shall be handed over to the troops.

More detailed instructions regarding the King's share of pillage were issued to Kirtiman Simha Basnyat, Badal Simha Basnyat and Purnananda Upadhyaya, commanders of the Gorkhali forces on the Dudhkosi-Tista front during the 1791-93 war with China. According to those instructions:<sup>54</sup>

Foodstuffs looted in monasteries and the houses of the nobility and top-ranking officials may be appropriated by the troops, but other property shall be sent to the Palace. Property looted at other places shall also be sent to the Palace after deducting as the finder's share one-twentieth of corals, pearls, and other jewels, as well as gold and silver, one-sixth of brocade and other fabrics, copper, brass, and other metals, and horses and mules, and one-tenth of musk, yak tails, and borax.

During the early stage of that war the Gorkhali troops looted the Tashilunpo monastery at Shigatse in Tibet, "stripping the walls and altars of the gold, silver and jewels donated in the course of centuries by devotees." Some of the loot was returned in compliance with the agreement signed with China on September 30, 1797, but apparently a considerable portion was retained. According to one Nepali source, King Ran Bahadur "had stored in his treasury much of the property looted from Shigatse so he offered a golden roof to the Bhairavi temple at Nuwakot."<sup>55</sup> Some amount was also used to meet the routine administrative expenses of the government.<sup>56</sup>

### *Royal and State Revenues*

Pillage, however, was a one-time operation. Once a territory was incorporated into the empire, more acceptable and regular sources of revenue had to be instituted. The Shah Kings, particularly after the 1790s, headed a relatively extensive empire with a correspondingly extensive revenue system. An affluent empire with an impecunious monarch is seldom met with in history, and in the Gorkhali Empire there was at no time any distinction between the revenue of the state and the income of the king. In other words, the King appropriated for himself the revenues of the state for his personal and household expenditure, subject, of course, to the urgency of the royal needs and the availability of state funds.

The manner in which the revenues of the Gorkhali state were used to finance the personal expenses of the royal family is well illustrated

by the arrangements made to meet Ran Bahadur's expenses while in exile in Banaras, India, during the period from June 1801 to March 1804.<sup>57</sup> On October 26, 1801, the government of Nepal and the East India Company signed a treaty stipulating an annual payment of Rs.72,000 in cash and elephants worth Rs.10,000 to Ran Bahadur Shah so long as he remained in Banaras, or elsewhere in the territories of the East India Company. The treaty also stipulated that "the Pergunah of Beejapoor (i.e., the eastern Tarai district of Morang), with all the lands thereunto attached (excepting rent-free lands, religious or charitable endowments, *jaghires* and such like as specified separately in the account of collections) be settled" on Ran Bahadur Shah.<sup>58</sup>

While in Banaras, Ran Bahadur borrowed large sums of money to meet his personal expenses. The East India Company government was one of his creditors, although no information is available about the amounts borrowed. Ran Bahadur Shah also borrowed at least Rs. 60,000 from the Banaras firm of Sahu Dwarikadas, and Rs. 15,000 from the firm of Mahant Jayaram Giri and Gulab Giri. Kathmandu undertook liability for the repayment of all these loans, and even for the payment of Ran Bahadur Shah's house-rents and religious ceremonies in Banaras.

Repayment of Ran Bahadur Shah's debts in India was, of course, an extraordinary case, but the royal palace also drew freely on the revenues of the state for meeting its regular financial needs. A few examples may be illuminating:

In July 1796, [Rs.] 1,515 was assigned from the revenues of Bhadgaun to meet the expenses of religious prayers for King Ran Bahadur, Queen Kantavati, and other members of the royal family.<sup>59</sup>

In June 1807, [Rs.] 500 was assigned from the revenues of Kathmandu Valley to meet the daily expenses of the royal kitchen.<sup>60</sup>

In April 1809, 5,198 rupees a year was assigned from [the] income from state-controlled rice-lands and villages in the central hill region for religious ceremonies at various temples and for birthdays and death anniversaries of members of the royal family.<sup>61</sup>

### *Personal Incomes of Queens and Royal Concubines*

Ran Bahadur initiated a policy of granting lands and other sources of income to his numerous queens and concubines. Neither Prithvi Narayan Shah nor Pratap Simha Shah, nor their predecessors in Gorkha, ever seem to have made such grants. As a wedding gift to one of his

queens, Ran Bahadur granted the right to appropriate the revenues of Patan town.<sup>62</sup> He granted another queen, possibly Subarnaprabha, 22 *khets* of rice-lands in the Harisiddhi area of Patan as *jagir* in early 1796,<sup>63</sup> a novel use of the *jagir* system in the history of the Gorkhali Empire, for the system was normally used, as will be seen in Chapter 4, to provide for the emoluments of government employees and functionaries. One year later, the queen's *jagir* was augmented by Rs. 2,001 taken from the revenues of Banepa and Bhadgaun.<sup>64</sup> The queen's *jagir* seems to have continued in more or less the same form until 1803,<sup>65</sup> but by 1805, it had been replaced by a cash allowance of Rs. 3,001 from the revenues of Bara-Parsa,<sup>66</sup> possibly reflecting Queen Subarnaprabha's diminished status after Ran Bahadur returned from India. Another concubine of Ran Bahadur received an allowance of Rs. 1,200 per year, charged on the revenues of Patan town,<sup>67</sup> like the earlier wedding gift. In early 1808, King Girban granted approximately 12 *khets* of rice-lands in different areas of Kathmandu and Bhadgaun to yet another concubine of Ran Bahadur under *sera* tenure, this too being a novel use of the *sera* system.

This was not all. In November 1796, King Ran Bahadur gave his four queens and concubines a free run of the state treasury for "religious and other expenses, rewards, money for clothes, etc." The concerned officials being instructed not to make inquiries, but to make disbursements forthwith "so long as money is available."<sup>69</sup> The *Kapardar* of the royal household was similarly ordered to supply "clothes and other items, utensils, ornaments, foodgrains, etc." requisitioned by the queens and concubines for these purposes without any inquiries.<sup>70</sup> These orders perhaps have no parallel in modern Nepali history. One can only imagine the predicament of the officials of the state treasury and the royal household in meeting the unlimited wants of the four rivals for the youthful king's amorous favours.

### *Royal Taxes and Levies*

Although the king had the right to draw on state revenues within practical limits to finance his personal expenses, as well as those of the royal court and the royal household, he also had two personal sources of income: the *saunefagu* tax, a regular annual payment, and occasional levies collected to finance specific royal expenses. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the *saunefagu* tax, traditionally used as a source of foodstuffs to the royal household, was increasingly paid in cash and so was converted into a cash payment in 1807. Ordinary households



were then required to pay the tax at 2 annas each, while landowners and local functionaries paid twice as much.<sup>71</sup> About six years later, in April 1813, the rate for ordinary households was halved,<sup>72</sup> possibly in an attempt to facilitate recruitment of troops on the eve of the Nepal-Britain war. At times, however, it was used to finance military salaries through special royal orders, as happened in the Kali-Kumaun region, for instance.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps these diversions of the *saunefagu* tax reflected the difficulty of collecting the tax in such far-flung territories, or a shortage of other revenues normally earmarked for the troops.

At least three special levies were collected on special occasions connected with the king and other members of the royal family. The *chumawan* was collected when the Crown Prince was invested with the sacred thread according to traditional Hindu rites, while the *gadimubarakh* was collected when he ascended the throne. The *goddhuwa* was collected during the wedding of the eldest royal princess.<sup>74</sup> The *chumawan* levy was collected twice during this period, once for King Ran Bahadur Shah in 1779,<sup>75</sup> and once for King Girban in 1808.<sup>76</sup> The *gadimubarakh* levy was collected twice for Ran Bahadur Shah and Girban when they ascended the throne in 1794 and 1799 respectively.<sup>77</sup> The *goddhuwa* levy was imposed in 1804 when King Girban's elder sister, that is, ex-King Ran Bahadur Shah's daughter, was married.<sup>78</sup>

These levies were broad-based and progressive not exempting high-ranking officials or sparing even landless peasants. According to Hamilton,<sup>79</sup>

On a great variety of occasions, ... there is levied a Rajangka, which is a kind of income tax that extends to all ranks, and even to such of the sacred order as possess free lands. A Rajangka is levied at no fixed period, but according to the exigencies of the state.

Although no information is available on the amounts of revenue collected from these levies, their yield must have expanded considerably following the westward expansion during the late 1780s. The following disbursements from revenues of the *gadimubarakh* levy, selected at random, illustrate the nature and scale of such disbursements and also give an idea of the amounts collected:

In May 1802, 893 rupees was assigned from the *gadimubarakh* revenues of Bhadgaun town, 716 rupees for the salaries of betel-makers and the cost of betel leaves, and 177 rupees for the wages of priests and other functionaries at the temple of Sri Nandikeshwar.<sup>80</sup>

In January 1803, [Rs.] 5,000 was assigned from the *gadimubarakh* revenues of Morang against payment made to Captain W.D. Knox, the British Resident.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, there were one-time levies to meet occasional royal expenditures, including, for example, the arrangements made for repayment of Ran Bahadur's loans in India. Although, as previously discussed, revenues from different sources were raised for such purposes, the chronically precarious state of the Gorkhali revenues precluded prompt and full repayment. The government, therefore, had no alternative but to explore ad hoc sources. Accordingly, during 1803-4, a special levy was collected from all civil and military employees as well as the common people throughout the territories of the Gorkhali Empire to pay back these loans, although the 1804 *goddhuwa* levy was then remitted. The amount of the levy depended on status and occupation. The *chautariya*, the top-most civil official of the Empire, paid Rs. 551 while the lowest category of civil employees paid two-and-a-half rupees. In the army, a commander paid Rs. 50.5, while a soldier paid about two rupees. Ordinary peasants paid between Rs. 1.5 and Rs. 5 according to the size of their holding.<sup>82</sup> Even though the levy was a one-time measure and took several years to be fully collected, its broad base suggests that the total receipts were quite large by Gorkhali standards.

If Ran Bahadur's four-year residence in India proved costly for the people, his assassination in early 1806 proved no less burdensome. Another special levy was collected throughout the Empire on that occasion. It was called *godan*, or the gift of a cow, a traditional Hindu ritual during a funeral ceremony, and was assessed on agricultural lands and incomes from various sources.<sup>83</sup> A *godan* levy was similarly collected when Ran Bahadur's son and successor, Girban, died in December 1866.<sup>84</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

If King Prithvi Narayan Shah embarked upon the campaign of territorial expansion in order to augment his power, wealth and glory, he achieved that aim in ample measure. Prithvi Narayan Shah himself referred in a tone of quiet satisfaction to "the prosperity that we have attained"<sup>85</sup> through the conquest of the three states of Kathmandu Valley, as well as the Sen Kingdoms of Makwanpur, Vijayapur and

Chaudandi. Subsequent years witnessed the steady growth of that prosperity as the size of the Empire progressively expanded. By the early years of the nineteenth century, when the Empire reached its zenith, the Shah kings could reckon their annual incomes in thousands and often in hundreds of thousands of rupees. Although the scale was small by the standards of the subcontinent, and the tenure brief, the king of what had been only an impoverished hill state had become the ruler of the Gorkhali Empire.

## NOTES

1. Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (reprint of 1819 edn.), New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, p. 245.
2. Dinesh Raj Panta, *Gorakhako Itihasa* (A History of Gorkha), Kathmandu: the author, 2041-43 (1985-86) pt. 2, pp. 450-64 and 595-611.
3. Royal order confirming *saunefagu* tax exemptions to the descendants of Chandrarup Shah, Aswin Badi 1, 1862 (September 1805), *Regmi Research Collections (RRC)*, Vol. 6, pp. 430-31. The exemption had been granted by King Prithvipati Shah (1677-1716) of Gorkha to his son, Chandrarup Shah.
4. Information about Gorkha's finances is based on Panta, *op. cit.*, pp. 450-64 and 595-611.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Naya Raj Panta, et al., *Shri 5 Prithvi Narayana Shahko Upadesha* (Teachings of King Prithvi Narayan Shah), n.d., pp. 324-31.
7. Dinesh Raj Panta, *op. cit.*, 451-52.
8. *Loc. cit.*, *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, nos. 9-10, pp. 126-32.
9. Naya Raj Panta. *op. cit.*, pp. 1097-98.
10. *Ibid.* pp., 1158-61.
11. Colonel Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul*, 1811, p. 213.
12. Yogi Naraharinath, *Itihasa Prakasha* (Light on History), pt. 1, p. 99.
13. Royal order to Subba Gaja Simha of Bara and Parsa regarding payment for brocade purchased from Mahendra Basnyat, Magh Badi 9, 1856 (January 1800), in *RRC*, Vol. 24, pp. 68-69.
14. Do. for betel leaves and salaries of betel-makers, Marga Sudi 10, 1856 (November 1799), *ibid.*, p. 5.
15. Royal order to Jasadhar Pantha and others regarding payment for gold, Bhadra Sudi 1, 1851 (August 1794), *ibid.*, pp. 356-57.
16. Separate letters of appointment to Qayoom Khan, Noor Khan and Miya Karim Sen, Falgun Sudi 9, 1854 (February 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 23, pp. 301-2.
17. An Indian musician, Tapa Kathak, was paid a salary of two rupees daily, according to a royal order of Pousha Badi 6, 1856 (December 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 24, pp. 10-11.

- In December 1810, two Indian Muslims were appointed as *sarangi* players at the royal court on a monthly salary of Rs. 100 each. Royal order to Arman Khan and Bhikhan Khan, Poush Badi 1, 1867 (December 1810), *RRC*, Vol. 38, pp. 661-62.
18. Royal order regarding appointment of Gosain Prasad Giri, Poush Badi 9, 1856 (December 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 24, p. 14.
  19. Royal order to Subba Gaja Simha regarding land grant to Qayoom Khan, Magh Sudi 7, 1856 (January 1800), *ibid*, p. 86.
  20. Royal order to Jivan Shah Kalawat, Poush Badi 12, 1856 (December 1799), *ibid*, p. 27.
  21. Royal order to *Chautariya* Bam Shah regarding salaries of companies stationed in Kumaun, Shrawan Badi 3, 1855 (July 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 52, pp. 29-30.
  22. Royal order to Bhawani Dayal Kathak, Kartik Sudi 9, 1856 (October 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 437.
  23. Royal order to Subba Dinanath Padhya, Poush Badi 30, 1853 (December 1796), *ibid*, p. 225. In January 1797, King Ran Bahadur Shah summoned several of his fellow-revellers in Gorkha to arrive in Kathmandu in time for the *Fagu* festival, "since this year we plan to celebrate the festival with special jubilation." Royal order to Shrestha Khatri and others in Gorkha, Magh Badi 14, 1853 (January 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 257. Ran Bahadur had then just been married to Queen Kantavati.
  24. Separate royal orders regarding supply of wild birds, animals, forest products, etc., from Bhirkot, Morang and other areas. Aswin Badi 11, 1853 (September 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, pp. 128-52; Shrawan Sudi 9, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 362-63; and Jestha Sudi 3, 1864 (May, 1807), *ibid*, p. 345; do. supply of dogs, Baisakh Sudi 7, 1855 (April 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 23, pp. 322-23; and Royal order regarding supply of rhinoceros calves from Chainpur, Falgun Badi 11, 1853 (February 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 326.
  25. Royal order to Subba Gaja Simha regarding purchase of linseed for feeding bulls at Basantapur, Chaitra Sudi 15, 1854 (March 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 317.
  26. Order to *Bhardars* of Palpa regarding procurement of bulls from Lucknow, Shrawan Sudi 1, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 6, p. 255. In August 1795, Ran Bahadur sent a team consisting of Bandhu Khawas and Laxman Giri, to Gujarat, India, to purchase one bull and two male calves for not more than Rs. 2,000 each, and four cows for not more than Rs. 1,200 each. The two officials were also instructed to learn from the Indians the techniques of twisting or straightening the horns of cattle. Regulations in the names of Bandhu Khawas and Laxman Giri regarding purchase of bulls and cows from Gujarat, Bhadra Sudi 1, 1852 August 1795), *RRC* Vol. 40, pp. 444-46.
  27. Royal order regarding imposition of fines on *Subedars* Chamu Thapa and Ramachandra Thapa, Chaitra Sudi 13, 1854 (March 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 308.
  28. Separate orders regarding procurement of cotton seed from Tanahu, Gorkha, Nuwakot and other areas, Magh Badi 14, 1853 (January 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 257, and Jestha Badi 4, 1854 (May 1797), *RRC* Vol. 25, p. 363; see also note 25 above.
  29. Royal order regarding supply of millets from lands in Deopatan, Ashadh Badi 12, 1873 (June 1816) *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 307.
  30. Royal order regarding purchase of fodder with revenues of Bhadgaun, Jestha Badi 1, 1861 (May 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 2, p. 58.
  31. Royal order regarding appointment of Sri Krishna Padhya as *Dittha* of royal bull stables, Baisakh Sudi 13, 1873 (April 1816), *RRC*, Vol. 28, pp. 296-97.
  32. Royal order to Dasharath Baniya regarding cultivation of *sera* lands in Gorkha Poush Badi 30, 1853 (December 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 221; do. to Sridhar Pantha and other *Tharghars* regarding demarcation of boundaries of *sera* lands in Gorkha, Poush Sudi 15, 1853 (January 1797), *ibid*, p. 235; royal order to *Theoghars* regarding supply of labourers for cultivation of *sera* lands in Gorkha, Marga Sudi 5, 1860 (November 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 19, p. 145.

33. There were *sera* lands in Nuwakot, which the Gorkhalis had occupied in 1744. Separate royal orders to the Amalis of Kewalpur and other villages regarding compulsory labour for cultivation of *sera* lands in Nuwakot, Magh Sudi 9, 1859 (January 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 10-11; allotment of *sera* lands in Nuwakot for cultivation on *kut* tenure to Bala Padhya, Poush Badi 30, 1853 (December 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 221.
34. After 1768, lands were allotted as *sera* in Lubhu (Patan), Tokha and Gokarna in Kathmandu, and in Bhadgaun. Royal order regarding acquisition of rice-lands in Lubhu as *sera*, Poush Badi 6, 1847 (December 1790), *RRC*, Vol. 5, p. 30; Royal order to Mahidhur Jaisi regarding management of *sera* lands in Lubhu, Ashadh Sudi 2, 1849 (June 1792), *RRC*, Vol. 25, pp. 221-22, and Magh Sudi 5, 1849 (January 1793), *ibid*, p. 292; Royal orders regarding *sera* lands in Lubhu, Ashadh Sudi 13, 1854 (June 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 502; Poush Sudi 9, 1856 (December 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 24, p. 68; and Shrawan Sudi 9, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 361; do. in Tokha, Ashadh Badi 10, 1864 (June 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 411; Royal order regarding conversion of *sunabirta* lands in Gokarna into *sera*, Marga Sudi 3, 1849 (November 1792), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 195; Royal order regarding rents from *sera* lands in Bhadgaun, Ashadh Sudi 5, 1854 (June 1797), *ibid*, p. 527; Royal order regarding conversion of rice-lands of Jangam monastery in Bhadgaun into *sera*, Shrawan Badi 8, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 6, p. 223. In January 1812, all *manachamal* grants in Kathmandu Valley were converted into *sera*. (*Kaji Bir Kesar Pande's Order to Mohinaikes in Kathmandu Valley*, Magh Sudi 12, 1868 (January 1812), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 48.
35. Mahesh C. Regmi, *Readings in Nepali Economic History*, 1979, pp. 12-13.
36. See notes 32-34 above.
37. Royal order regarding forced labour for irrigation of *sera* lands in Nuwakot, Marga Sudi 5, 1860 (December 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 148-49; do. to *Subedar* Parashuram regarding construction of embankments on *sera* lands in Gorkha. Kartik Badi 14, 1854 (October 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 639; separate royal orders regarding do. for *sera* lands in Nuwakot, Marga Sudi 9, 1856 (November 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 123, pp. 528-30, and Magh Sudi 9, 1859 (January 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 10-11.
38. Royal order to Bhajuman, Baisakh Badi 12, 1873 (April 1816), *RRC*, Vol. 36, pp. 273-74.
39. Royal order to Dasharath Baniya, Poush Badi 30, 1853 (December 1796), see no. 32 above.
40. Receipt for supplies of ghee from royal cattle farm in Khimti, Jestha Badi 9, 1838 (May 1781), *RRC*, Vol. 5, pp. 602-4; receipt for supplies of ghee from royal cattle farm in Solukhumbu, Bhadra Sudi (?), 1839 (August 1782), in Naraharinath Yogi, *Itihasa Prakasha* (Light on History), 1955, pt. 1, p. 100; Royal order to Charu Padhya and Jagat Ram Khawas regarding management of royal cattle farms, Marga Badi 3, 1848 (November 1791), *RRC*, Vol. 5, pp. 80-81; do. to Gajendra Khawas, Chaitra Badi 14, 1849 (March 1793), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 307; Royal order to Pashupati Padhya and Bishnua Singh Karki regarding reorganisation of royal cattle farms in Jiri, Khimti and Phaplu, Ashadh Sudi (?), 1854 (June 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, pp. 500-1; Royal order regarding allotment of lands for supply of salt and other provisions for royal cattle farm in Khimti, Poush Badi 9, 1856 (December 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 24, pp. 67-68; and Royal order to Dhirajbir Singh regarding management of royal cattle farms in Jiri, Khimti and elsewhere, Ashadh Badi 10, 1864 (June 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 410.
41. Royal order to Dhirajbir Singh regarding supplies of ghee from royal cattle farms in Dhor, Thak and elsewhere, Bhadra Badi 1, 1854 (August 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, pp. 566-68; Royal order to Bhimsen Karki regarding royal cattle farm in Kaski, Bhadra Badi 1, 1854 (August 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, pp. 557-58; do. to Jitaram, Shrawan Badi 3, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 6, pp. 206-9.

42. Regulations in the name of *Kapardar* Bhotu Pande, Jestha Sudi 11, 1859 (May 1802), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 539-44. The *kapardar* had several other functions relating to the management of the royal household and munitions production, but these are not relevant in the present context.
43. Separate royal orders for the collection of the *saunefagu* taxes for the Chepe, Marsyangdi-Kaligandaki and other regions, Chaitra Sudi 13, 1842 (March 1786), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 73.
44. do., Ashadh Badi 9, 1860 (June 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 5, pp. 359-91.
45. Royal order regarding transportation of *saunefagu* supplies from the Bishnumati-Bheri region, Baisakh Sudi 8, 1854 (April 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, pp. 356-57; do. from the Bishnumati-Mahakali region, Bhadra Badi 3, 1860 (August 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 379-80.
46. See notes 42 and 43 above.
47. Royal order regarding commutation of *saunefagu* taxes, Shrawan Badi 9, 1864 (July, 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 469-70.
48. Royal order to the Dware of the royal palace regarding use of *saunefagu* incomes, Falgun Sudi 8, 1852 (March 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 5, p. 309.
49. Royal orders regarding supplies of ice from different areas, Bhadra Badi 15, 1856 (August 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 23 pp. 388-89; Jestha Sudi 8, 1861 (May 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 19, p. 195; Jestha Sudi 8, 1862 (May 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 6, pp. 20-22; Aswin Sudi 2, 1862 (September 1805), *ibid*, p. 506; Kartik Badi 13, 1862 (October 1805), *ibid*, p. 630; and Magh Badi 3, 1862 (January 1806), *ibid*, pp. 713-14.
50. Royal order regarding supply of mangoes from Tirhut, Jestha Sudi 11, 1861 (May, 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 2, pp. 61-62; do. purchase of mangoes for royal palace with revenues of Bara, Parsa and Rautahat, Baisakh Sudi 13, 1855 (May 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 327.
51. See note 24 above.
52. Royal order to *Ijaradar* Shakti Ballabh of Bara-Parsa, Kartik Sudi 14, 1862 (November 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 19, p. 379.
53. Regulations in the name of Damodar Pande, Ashadh Badi 6, 1843 (June 1786), *RRC* Vol. 25, pp. 127-28.
54. War regulations in the names of Kirtiman Simha Basnyat and others, Bhadra Sudi 2, 1848 (August 1791), *RRC*, Vol. 5, pp. 17-19.
55. Cited in Leo E. Rose, *Strategy For Survival*, 1971, pp. 53-63.
56. Royal order to Abhiman Simha and Captain Kalu Pande, Shrawan Sudi 12. 1848 (July 1791), *RRC*, Vol. 5, p. 13.
57. This account is based on "Ran Bahadur's Expenses in Benaras", in *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, no. 6, June 1987, pp. 84-89; year 19, nos. 7-8, July-August 1987, pp. 92-99; and year 20, no. 3, March 1988, pp. 31-37.
58. C.V. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds*, 1863, Vol. 2, pp. 203-5.
59. Royal order to Amalidar of Bhadgaun regarding payment of expenses on religious ceremonies, Shrawan Sudi (?), 1853 (July 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, pp. 127-29.
60. Royal order to Anirudra Padhya and Ganapati Jaisi, Ashadh Badi 10, 1864 (June 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 406.
61. Royal order to *ijaradar* of *kut* revenues, Baisakh Badi 8, 1866 (April 1809), *RRC*, Vol. 6, pp. 996-97.
62. Royal order reconfirming the grant of Patan town to the Queen-Mother, Chaitra Badi 12, 1859 (March 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 16.
63. *Jagir* grant to Junior Royal Concubine, Baisakh Badi 13, 1852 (April 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 97-98.
64. *Jagir* grant to Junior Royal Concubine, Baisakh Badi 1, 1854 (April 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 539.

65. The grant then comprised the town of Banepa, 22 *Khets* in Harisiddhi and 900 rupees from the revenues of Kathmandu, as well as orchards in Kathmandu and Bhadgaun and two cattle farms in the hill region. Royal order reconfirming the grant of lands and revenues to the Junior Queen-Mother, Chaitra Badi 12, 1859 (March, 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 20, pp. 16-17.
66. Royal order to Subba Shakti Ballabh regarding payment of allowance to the Junior Queen-Mother, Kartik Sudi 12, 1862 (October 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 19, p. 343.
67. Royal order to the *ijaradar* of Patan regarding payment of income from *khang*i of the Third Royal Concubine, Magh Sudi 7, 1856 (January 1800), *RRC*, Vol. 24, p. 88.
68. Royal grant of *sera* lands to the Second Royal Concubine-Mother, Magh Sudi 15, 1864 (January 1808), *RRC*, Vol. 2, pp. 345-46.
69. Royal order to *Kaji* Tribhuwan and Jagat Khawas, Marga Badi 11, 1853 (November 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 188.
70. Royal order to *Kapardar* Bhotu Pande, Marga Sudi 5, 1853 (November, 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 209.
71. See notes 42-43 above.
72. Separate royal orders for different areas regarding new rates of the *saunefagu* tax, Baisakh Badi 5, 1870 (April 1813), *RRC*, Vol. 41, pp. 249-50.
73. Royal order regarding payment of salaries of companies stationed in Kali-Kumaun, Falgun Badi 12, 1869 (February, 1813), *RRC*, Vol. 39, p. 523.
74. Mahesh C. Regmi, *A Study in Nepali Economic History*, 1971, pp. 63-64.
75. Royal order to *Fouzdars* Indramani Basnyat and Garbhu Khawas regarding collection of *chumawan* levy, Shrawan Sudi 15, 1837 (July 1780), *RRC*, Vol. 5, p. 583.
76. Royal order regarding collection of *chumawan* levy from *bhardars*, Poush Sudi 13, 1864 (January 1808), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 347-56; Royal order regarding rates of *chumawan* levy in Kumaun, Ashadh Badi 13, 1866 (June 1809), *RRC*, Vol. 40, pp. 64-65; "The Chumawan Tax", *Regmi Research Series*, year 21, January 1989, no. 1, pp. 14-15.
77. "Imposition of Gadimubarakh Levy in Kumaun", *Regmi Research Series*, year 5, no. 3, March 1, 1973, pp. 49-53, translation of a royal order dated Ashadh Badi 13, 1853 (June 1796); "The Gadimubarakh Levy", *Regmi Research Series*, year 20, no. 2, February 1988, pp. 21-24; "Gadimubarakh Levy in Badagaun (Lalitpur)", *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, no. 2, February 1987, pp. 23-35.
78. Royal order regarding imposition of *goddhuwa* levy in Bara and Parsa, Chaitra Badi 2, 1860 (March 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 5, p. 462.
79. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
80. Royal order regarding disbursements from *gadimubarakh* revenues of Bhadgaun, Jestha Sudi 2, 1859, (May, 1802).
81. Royal order regarding disbursements from *gadimubarakh* revenues of Morang, Magh Sudi 9, 1859 (January 1803), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 1.
82. Royal orders regarding imposition of *salami* levy to repay Ran Bahadur Shah's loans, Jestha Badi 13, 1861 (May 1804), in Chittaranjan Nepali, *Shri 5 Rana Bahadur Shah*, 1963, pp. 140-41. The levy seems to have been collected for two consecutive years, 1860 and 1861 Samvat (A.D. 1803-4 and 1804-5), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 185-93. For full translations, see "Ran Bahadur Shah's expenses in Benaras", *Regmi Research Series*, year 20, no. 3, March 1988, pp. 36-37. Imposition of *salami* levy on military companies, Baisakh Sudi 4, 1861 (April 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 2, pp. 74-75; imposition of *salami* levy in Pansayakhola, Kartik Badi 11, 1861 (October 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 2, pp. 189-91; imposition of *salami* levy in Garhwal, Chaitra Badi 8, 1863 (March 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 5, pp. 151-54 and Baisakh Sudi 3, 1866 (April 1809), *RRC*, vol. 40, pp. 13-16, with a translation in *Regmi Research Series*, year 3, no. 7, July 1, 1971, pp. 153-54.

83. Royal order regarding imposition of *godan* levy in Saptari and Mahottari, Marga Sudi 11, 1863 (November 1806), *RRC*, vol. 5, pp. 110-12; Royal order to Umanidhi Pantha regarding disbursements of income from *godan* levy, Chaitra Sudi 1, 1863 (March 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 5, pp. 155-56.
84. Royal order regarding imposition of *godan* levy in Morang, Falgun Badi 30, 1873 (February, 1817), *RRC*, Vol. 36, pp. 403-6.
85. Naya Raj Panta, *op. cit.*, p. 328; "The Godan Levy", *Regmi Research Series*, year 18, no. 8, August 1986, p. 128.



# The Political Leadership

As noted in Chapter 1, the Gorkhali Empire owed its existence to a political leadership which had the vision of bringing most, if not all, of the Himalayan region under its authority. It was, in fact, the political decision of that leadership to expand the territories of Gorkha that shaped the course of the political and economic history of the Himalayan region. In this chapter we will analyse how that leadership was able to translate its political power into a level of relative economic affluence. For the purpose of such analysis, a distinction will be drawn between two terms, the political elite and the political leadership. The "political elite" were members of those prominent families from whom the King recruited state officials; those who were actually recruited comprised the smaller and more exclusive "political leadership".

Under the Gorkhali political system, the king, legitimised by association with the throne of Gorkha and buttressed by the right of conquest, was the ultimate source of authority. This has led some modern historians to give the entire credit for the empire-building campaign to King Prithvi Narayan Shah.<sup>1</sup> This view must be regarded as a sterile one. It seeks to place Prithvi Narayan Shah outside the Gorkhali milieu and "above" history. However powerful and unchallenged he may be, no king can rule without aides, that is, without a supporting political leadership. Prithvi Narayan Shah, with his ambitions and his undisputed qualities of personal leadership, was only a representative of the political elites of Gorkha that sought to extricate themselves from the confines of the Gorkhali hill state and seek their fortunes in the wider Himalayan arena.

The political elites played a prominent role in the founding of the state of Gorkha and its administration from the very beginning. Indeed, if the chronicles are to be believed, Gorkha had been brought under the rule of Drabya Shah under a plan devised by two Brahmins, Narayan Arjyal, an astrologer of the royal court of Lamjung, and Ganesh Pande, a straggler from the forces of King Mukund Sen of

Palpa.<sup>2</sup> Their objective was "to live under a Hindu King of a Kshatriya caste," since "the (Magar) King is of low caste and indulges in injustice and evil customs and usages."<sup>3</sup> The political leadership played an even more prominent role in the Gorkhali Empire during the approximately four decades from the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah in early 1775 to the beginning of the Nepal-Britain war in late 1814, the only ruling kings being Pratap Simha (January 1775 to November 1777) and Ran Bahadur (May 1794 to February 1799). Thus the Gorkhali conquests west of the Marsyangdi river up to Garhwal were the handiwork not of the Shah Kings but of the political leadership. While King Pratap Simha managed in the two years and ten months of his rule to achieve "quite a satisfactory record,"<sup>4</sup> Ran Bahadur's rule of approximately five years was an unmitigated disaster, for "he must go down in history as a king who irresponsibly deserted his office for personal reasons and in doing so seriously weakened the country he was called on to serve."<sup>5</sup> In such critical situations, it was the political leadership, backed by the authority and mystique of the monarchy that held the Empire together and even continued the campaign of territorial expansion with a considerable measure of success.

## The Political Elite

Successive Gorkhali rulers attempted to limit the choice of political leaders to specified families from among the traditional elites of Gorkha who had rendered outstanding service to the Gorkhali state on different occasions during its turbulent history. King Rama Shah (1609-36) ~~made the first~~ such attempt to delimit the political elite. We have earlier seen how ~~the two Brahmins, Narayan Arjyal and Ganesh Pande,~~ took the lead in founding the state of Gorkha in 1559. Besides Narayan Arjyal and Ganesh Pande, Bhagirath Pantha, Sarveshwar Khanal, Keshav Bohra and Ganga Ram Rana also ~~aided~~ Drabya Shah in this enterprise.<sup>6</sup> Rama Shah later gave their descendants the collective status of *Chhathar*, permitting them to remain in their posts so long as they remained loyal to the throne. The *Chhathar* families were expected to function as a check "lest any government official or other person should commit injustice and oppression and harm the interest of the throne and the people."<sup>7</sup>

Prithvi Narayan Shah similarly reserved key administrative posts for specified families: "The post of *Kapardar* shall belong to the descendants of *Kapardar* Kalu, while a descendant of Shivaram Basnyat shall

be given charge of relations with the south, and a descendant of Kalu Pande, of relations with Tibet."<sup>8</sup> Prithvi Narayan Shah regarded the Pandes, Basnyats, Panthas, Thakuris and Magars as "loyal and faithful servants who should not be punished even if they commit any crime punishable with death, but should be sent to the battlefield to live or die."<sup>9</sup> In his words, the invasion of Kathmandu Valley had been launched "with the shields of the Pandes and the swords of the Basnyats."<sup>10</sup> In July 1800, Ran Bahadur Shah, then living in exile at Banaras designated Parashuram Thapa Budha, obviously a Magar, as the seventh *thar* in an attempt to win support for his cause, enjoining him and his descendants "to remain loyal solely to the reigning King, rather than to any other member of the royal family."<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, none of these steps seem to have had any lasting impact on the structure of the Gorkhali political elite. In the course of time, the *Chhathar* families of Arjyal, Pande, Pantha, Khanal, Bohra and Rana lost their political role. Successive kings employed them exclusively in work relating to the demarcation of royal land grants and paid them almost the same emoluments as a sweeper at the royal palace.<sup>12</sup> Parashuram Thapa, the seventh *thar* created by Ran Bahadur was a non-starter and ended his career as one of the three administrators of the province of Garhwal.<sup>13</sup> Royal fiat proved to be no substitute for the dynamics of inter-familial political rivalry. The need for leadership in the expanding Gorkhali Empire could not be met within the narrow confines of select families, nor were the qualities of leadership inheritable.

The ineffectiveness of successive royal attempts to delimit the political elite nevertheless did not mean that the elite was an open-ended body. This was by no means the case, for the Gorkhali political elite remained virtually closed to all but the traditional families of Gorkha who had accompanied Prithvi Narayan Shah to Kathmandu. These families included, besides the ruling Shah family, Chhetris, Magars and Gurungs, and Khawas. Magars and Gurungs belonged to ethnic communities of the central hill region where Gorkha was located, whereas Chhetris and Khawas had a more complex social origin. A brief note on their origin may, therefore, be helpful.

Kirkpatrick has referred to Chhetris as the major component of the Gorkhali political elite<sup>14</sup> but the term is rarely used in contemporary documents. Chhetris actually consisted of two separate groups, one of which was the Khas immigrants from the west, who were divided into such clans as Basnyat, Bhandari, Kunwar and Thapa,<sup>15</sup> and who had succeeded in moving the Hindu caste hierarchy to be invested with the sacred thread and listed officially as sacred-thread wearing

Khas. The other group consisted of descendants of the Pande and Pantha families, both Brahmin, whose ancestors had entered into informal alliances with Khas, Magar and other non-Brahmin women, but nevertheless had retained their Brahmin family names. As Brian H. Hodgson, the scholarly British official who was posted in Kathmandu from 1820 to 1842, has noted:<sup>16</sup>

The offsprings of the original Khas females and Brahmans with the honours and rank of the second order of Hinduism got the patronymic titles of the first order.

Tularam Pande, one of the commanders of Prithvi Narayan Shah's army, was thus a fifth generation Chhetri descendant of the Brahmin, Ganesh Pande,<sup>17</sup> who had encouraged Drabya Shah to occupy the throne of Gorkha in 1559. In mid-18th century Gorkha, these two Chhetri groups of Khas and Brahmin origins seem to have been assimilated to the extent of permitting intermarriage, a practice which continued under the Gorkhali Empire.

Khawas comprised yet another important group in the Gorkhali political elite. The term was used to denote slaves in the royal household, as well as in the households of people belonging to the Thakuri and Rajput families. Even before the conquest of Kathmandu, Khawas played a prominent role in the Gorkhali hierarchy. For instance, Murali Khawas was one of the men who had accompanied Drabya Shah during the invasion of Gorkha in 1559. Similarly, Prithvi Narayan Shah's forces during the invasion of Nuwakot in 1744 included at least six commanders belonging to the Khawas community. In subsequent years, people belonging to that community were placed in important positions in the Gorkhali Empire.<sup>18</sup>

### *Career Opportunities*

Membership of the Gorkhali political elite was the stepping-stone to a post of political leadership in the Gorkhali Empire. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that the Gorkhali Empire opened up new career opportunities for the Gorkhali political elites, not only in the political leadership but also in the army and the provincial administration, and at times, even in the field of tax-farming. The career of Dhaukal Simha Basnyat furnishes an example of these opportunities. From 1770 to 1773, Dhaukal, and his brothers Kehar and Abhiman, were in charge of the revenue affairs of the new kingdom, although

their exact status is not known.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter, King Prithvi Narayan Shah deputed Abhiman to eastern Nepal to subdue the kingdom of Vijayapur, which he did successfully. Dhaukal and Abhiman were subsequently appointed *dewans* of the hill territories between the Bariya and Tista rivers, with the revenues of Sindhuli as their emoluments. Dhaukal was occupying the post of *dewan*, and exercised "considerable authority in the Durbar" when Kirkpatrick visited Kathmandu in March 1793.<sup>20</sup>

In early 1793, the Regent, Bahadur Shah, granted an *ijara*, or contract, to Dhaukal to collect revenue in Banepa for a three-year period.<sup>21</sup> He achieved success in this assignment, for he was thereafter appointed *kaji* and granted authority over revenue collection and civil administration in the eastern Tarai province of Morang, with emoluments of Rs. 4,000 a year.<sup>22</sup> Dhaukal remained in that position till April 1797.<sup>23</sup> While in Morang, he made the most of the opportunity to enrich himself, subjecting the local population to oppressive and illegal taxation and, at least in one case, intruding into the jurisdiction of his fellow *bhardars*.<sup>24</sup> All this, however, had no effect on his status as *kaji*.

In 1800, Dhaukal was appointed chief administrator of the trans-Mahakali province of Kumaun, which had come under Gorkhali control about a decade previously.<sup>25</sup> However, Kumaun marked the end of the road for Dhaukal. The story is best told in Edwin T. Atkinson's words:<sup>26</sup>

Dhaukal Singh [*Sic*] was a man of violent temper and possessed of little tact in the management of his troops, so that in a dispute which he had with them regarding their pay he attempted to cut down one of his men, but was himself killed in the fray.

Dhaukal's end may have hardly been typical of Gorkhali political elites, but his career illustrates the many opportunities available to them for advancement and enrichment.

## The *Bhardars*

According to traditional Gorkhali usage, the stratum at the top of the political leadership was known as *bhardar*, a term which literally means "bearer of burdens".<sup>27</sup> Kirkpatrick has recorded that the stratum was comprised of six top-ranking posts — *chautariya*, *kaji*, *sardar*, *khardar*,

*kapardar* and *khajanchi* who were "the principal administrators of the government." According to his account, the *chautariya*, invariably a member of the ruling Shah family, was "considered as the Prime Minister of the Rajah," while the *kajis* "resemble the superior *dewan* of the Mogul government and superintend generally all civil and military affairs." The *sardars* "generally command the armies of the state, in the management of the civil affairs of which, however, they likewise participate." The *khardars* "act as secretaries," and the *Khajanchi* "besides making all disbursements as treasurer, superintends what may be called the public wardrobe."<sup>28</sup> This discussion will confine itself to officials of the first three posts — the *chautariya*, the *kaji* and the *sardar*, who were political leaders and decision-makers, as opposed to the *khardars*, the *kapardars* and the *khajanchis*, who were primarily administrators.

The top-level political leadership, or the *bhardar* group, was relatively small. At the time when Hamilton visited Kathmandu in 1802-3, there were four *chautariyas*, four *kajis* and four *sardars*.<sup>29</sup> These were "the twelve great officers of state"<sup>30</sup> who comprised "the great Council of the Raja."<sup>31</sup> In 1804, after Ran Bahadur Shah's return from India, there were two *chautariyas*, seven *kajis*, and seven *sardars*, making a total of sixteen officers.<sup>32</sup> Another official list, compiled in 1808 for the purpose of collecting the *chumawan* tax on the occasion of the sacred-thread investiture ceremony of King Girban, mentions two *chautariyas*, six *kajis* and five *sardars*, making a total of thirteen officers.<sup>33</sup> The 1804 and 1808 lists are shown in Appendix I. They are obviously limited to *bhardars* functioning in the central government. Bam Shah, for example, who was working as *chautariya* administrator in Kumaun in 1808, finds no place in the 1808 list.<sup>34</sup>

### The Pajani System

As already noted *bhardars*, or members of the political leadership, were recruited from the political elite. They were never appointed for life, and seldom for specified terms. Rather, they held office at the pleasure of the king and were appointed by rotation. This rotation system was traditionally known as *pajani*, and seems to have been held every year. According to Kirkpatrick, "The Choutra [Sic] is annually liable to be removed from his station, as well as the other principal officers of government."<sup>35</sup> Explaining the rationale of the system, he writes:<sup>36</sup>

It is the policy of this court to make frequent changes, with the view of preventing local attachments, and the dangerous effects of

long confirmed local authority; of accustoming its subjects to serve indifferently in all parts, and of keeping its dependents always in a state fluctuating between hope and fear.

Membership of the *bhardar* leadership was thus unpredictable and intermittent. But it would be incorrect to infer that the entire official corps was changed *en masse* every year under the *pajani* system. Such a wholesale change would have undermined a stable administration, and available evidence suggests that this was never a practice. What the *pajani* system did was to keep the Gorkhali *bhardars* on their toes and provide the King with periodic opportunities to cut out political deadwood. Reappointments or promotions were, however, never ruled out.

As a result of the *pajani* system, and the death, both natural and penal, of several individuals, the total number of *bhardars* during the period from 1768 to 1814 was much larger than the annual figure of about 16. A survey of contemporary official documents shows that at least 102 men had occupied the top *bhardar* positions of *chautariya*, *kaji* and *sardar* in the Gorkhali political leadership during this period. They included 14 *chautariyas*, 49 *kajis* and 39 *sardars*. The lists are given in Appendix II.

Among the 102 *bhardars*, 14 *bhardars* belonged to the Shah family, while at least 70 *bhardars* were Chhetris belonging to different groups. In other words, as many as 84 *bhardars* among a total of 102 belonged to the Shah-Chhetri groups, the remaining 18 *bhardars* being Magar, Khawas and Gurung.

### *The Chautariyas*

As already mentioned, only members of the ruling Shah family could become *chautariyas*. Appendix III makes the relationships clear, although it is not a complete genealogy. The names of those who became *chautariya* at any time between 1768 and 1814 have been underlined.

Members of the Shah family were by no means assured of becoming *chautariyas*. Several were appointed to other positions in the political leadership, as well as in the army and the provincial administration. *Chautariya* Bam Shah thus started his career as a Captain in the army, but mostly remained involved in provincial administration rather than in central politics and administration, while his brothers Hastadal

and Rudrabir never reached the position of *chautariya*. Jiv Shah was appointed *kaji*, possibly the lone member of the Shah family to be so appointed, but his son, Pran Shah, later became a *chautariya*.

Bahadur Shah, King Pratap Simha's brother and the second son of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, was the most prominent among the *chautariyas*. He was not only a *chautariya*, but also *Mukhtiyar* during the minority of King Ran Bahadur Shah from 1785 to 1794. Dalamardan Shah and Mahoddam Kirti Shah, both brothers of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, also became *chautariyas*, but neither seems to have played any prominent role in the politics and administration of the Empire. Dalamardan Shah's son, Kul Chandra Shah, held no official appointment, but the two sons of Mahoddam Kirti Shah, Balabhadra and Shrikrishna, were both *chautariyas*. Mere designation of the member of the Shah family as *chautariya*, however, did not provide an exact index of his status in the political leadership. For instance, when Hamilton visited Kathmandu in 1802, "the first *chautariya* was a boy, brother to the Raja (King Girban), and never appeared except on occasions of ceremonies, where he was exhibited like a puppet, in the same manner as a sovereign."<sup>37</sup> Hamilton must have been referring to Ran Udyot Shah, barely ten years old at the time.

### The Kajis

The next highest position in the hierarchy in the Gorkhali political leadership consisted of *kajis* as already noted. Approximately 49 men attained the position of *kajis* during the period from 1768 to 1814. The list includes only one member of the Shah family, Jiva Shah. The Basnyat family alone provided at least eleven among the 49 *kajis*. Their common ancestor, Shivaram Simha Basnyat of Gorkha, was killed in the battle of Sangachouk in 1746, and his four sons, Nahar, Kehar, Abhiman and Dhaukal, had accompanied Prithvi Narayan Shah from Gorkha to Kathmandu.<sup>38</sup> The genealogy of the prominent family, which contributed almost one-fifth of the 49 *kajis* of the 1768-1814 period, is shown in Appendix IV.

The political fortunes of the Basnyat family dwindled in subsequent years. In 1814, no member of that family seems to have been a *kaji*.

The Pandes, who supplied at least nine among the 49 *kajis*, belonged to two separate families: one belonged to Tularam, to whom a reference has been made above, and the other to Kalu Pande, who had been appointed as *kaji* in Gorkha before the conquest of



Kathmandu. Their family charts, showing their *kaji* descendants, are given in Appendix IV, but it has not been possible to identify two Pande *kajis*, namely, Bir Keshar and Gaja Keshar.

The Basnyat family was linked to the Pandes by marriage: Kehar Simha's wife, Chitravati was daughter of *Kaji* Kalu Pande.<sup>39</sup> Kehar's three sons, Bakhtwar, Kirtiman and Jahar, all of whom were appointed as *kajis* in the course of time, were thus nephews of *Kaji* Damodar Pande, who was Chief Minister from 1799 to 1804.

The nine Thapa *kajis* similarly belonged to several families. It should be noted that Thapa is a family name of both Chhetris and Magars. The leading Thapa-Chhetri clan descended from Birabhadra Thapa. Birabhadra and his son, Amar Simha, were both *kajis*, and jointly administered the province of Palpa after that state was annexed by Gorkha in 1804. King Ran Bahadur Shah appointed Amar Simha's son, Bhimsen, as *kaji* in 1804. Bhimsen Thapa served as head of the government from 1806 to 1837, with the designation of General and Prime Minister. His brother, Nayan Simha, also a *kaji*, was killed on the Kangra front in 1811. Other members of the Thapa family who became *kajis* were Bhimsen Thapa's other brothers, Bakhtwar and Amrit, and Nayan Simha's son, Ujir. The second branch of the Thapa family consisted of *Kaji* Ambar Simha, Gorkhali Commander of the western front after 1805, and his son, *Kaji* Ranadhwaj. Yet another Thapa *kaji* was Jaspau, but he cannot be linked with either of the prominent Thapa families mentioned above.

The Kunwar family furnished three among the 49 *kajis*, namely, Ranajit, a son of Prithvi Narayan Shah's military Commander, Ramakrishna, and Ranajit's sons, Balnarsing and Rewant. Its representation in the Gorkhali political leadership during the early years of the nineteenth century thus gave no hint of its eventual domination of that leadership, for it was Balnarsing's son, Jung Bahadur, who became Prime Minister in 1846 and laid the foundation of the century-long Rana rule.

At least seven among the 49 *kajis* of this period were Magars of the Rana and Thapa clans, while one, Narsing, was a Gurung. Several Magars were appointed as *kajis* during Queen Rajendra Laxmi's regency (1777-85), including Bandhu Rana, his brother, Sarvajit Rana, and Devadatta Thapa. The turbulent period following Ran Bahadur's assassination marked the virtual end of Magar-Gurung representation at the *kaji* level. Narsing Gurung was beheaded, while the four Rana-Magar *kajis* were removed from their posts. The six *kajis* in the 1808 list include only one Magar, Devadatta Thapa.

At least three of the 49 *kajis* mentioned above belonged to the Khawas community, Tribhuwan and his brothers, Ranadhvaj and Ritudhwaj. They were grandsons of Dhanavanta, a *chautariya* of the erstwhile Malla Kingdom of Patan. Both Dhanavanta and his son, Bir Narsing, transferred their allegiance from Patan to Gorkha in 1767,<sup>40</sup> and Bir Narsing's sons were then brought up in the royal court as slaves or Khawas. They were eventually appointed as *kajis*, but both Tribhuwan and Ritudhwaj were beheaded in the aftermath of Ran Bahadur Shah's assassination in 1806.<sup>41</sup> These events marked the end of the Khawas representation in the *kaji* corps of the Gorkhali Empire. No member of the Khawas community seems to have occupied the post of *kaji* thereafter.

Significantly, the ancestry of 45 of the 49 *kajis* can be traced to Gorkha, the exception being the three Khawas brothers mentioned above, whose ancestors came from Patan, and Swarup Simha Karki, who hailed from the former principality of Chaudandi.<sup>42</sup> King Prithvi Narayan Shah had appointed Swarup Simha as chief of Crown Prince Pratap Simha Shah's bodyguards. Pratap Simha appointed Swarup Simha as *kaji* when he ascended the throne in January 1775. However, Swarup Simha Karki fled to India when Pratap Simha Shah died two years later. He came back when Queen Rajendra Laxmi became Regent for the infant-King Ran Bahadur Shah and served as Gorkha's Military Commander during the invasions of Vijayapur, Palpa, Parbat and Kaski. However, Rajendra Laxmi died in June 1785, and was succeeded by Bahadur Shah as Regent. One of Bahadur Shah's first acts was to sentence Swarup Singh Karki to death. Swarup Singh Karki seems to be the lone entrant to the exclusive Gorkhali political elite from the provinces.

The position of *kaji* in the Gorkhali Empire was no bed of roses. Leaving aside the uncertainties of the *pajani* system, it is noteworthy that at least ten among the 49 *kajis* died an unnatural death. Only two of them were killed in battle, Kehar Simha Basnyat fell fighting against the Chaubisi states in 1791, while Nain Simha Thapa was killed on the Kangra front about 37 years later in 1808. Two other *kajis* were assassinated, Dhaukal Simha Basnyat in Kumaun and his nephew, Kehar's son Kirtiman in Kathmandu, both in 1801. At least five *kajis* were sentenced to death and beheaded, Swarup Singh Karki in 1785, Damodar Pande in 1804, and Narsing Gurung, Tribhuwan Khawas, and his brother, Ritudhwaj Khawas, in the wake of Ran Bahadur's assassination in 1806. Bhimsen Thapa, the premier *kaji* of this period, outlived Gorkha's imperial phase, only to be ignominiously dismissed and die in prison in 1837.

## The Sardars

The Gorkhali rulers cast a wider net in their selection of *sardars*. A survey of the 39 *sardars* appointed between 1768 to 1814 shows that there were 4 Baniyas, 2 Basnyats, 2 Bhandaris, 1 Karki, 6 Khatris, 5 Khawas, 3 Kunwars, 1 Malla, 1 Pantha, 1 Pande, 4 Ranas, 1 Rokaya, 3 Shahs and 6 Thapas. Almost all these families were Gorkhali, but there were important exceptions. For instance, the Baniyas came from Nuwakot, while at least one Thapa, Bhakti, came from Lamjung. The Gorkhali forces had taken him prisoner during the invasion of Lamjung in 1782, and he had later defected to their side. The list of *sardars* may look short compared with that of *kajis*, but it omits several *sardars* who were later promoted to *kajis*. For example, Ajambar Pantha and Bahadur Bhandari were *sardars* in 1804, but later became *kajis*. Another reason for the shorter list may be the lower rate of turnover among the *sardars* compared with the *kajis* under the *pajani* system.

## The Shah-Chhetri Coalition

To conclude, the Gorkhali political elite comprised a tiny minority in the hill region, not to speak of the Empire. Most of its members came from Gorkha and consisted of individuals and families who had accompanied Prithvi Narayan Shah when he transferred his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu. The political elites of states incorporated into the Gorkhali Empire seldom found any place in the Gorkhali political leadership. Indeed, Prithvi Narayan Shah instructed his successors "not to let any Khas or Brahman from the east and west enter into the Palace," since "outsiders violate traditions."<sup>44</sup> The Gorkhali political leadership was dominated by two groups, the Shah royal dynasty belonging to the Thakuri caste and Chhetris. Though Thakuris were generally considered to be ritually superior to the Chhetris, claiming to be the descendants of Rajput refugees from India, the two groups may be considered homogeneous in social life for all practical purposes, including intermarriage. The political leadership, in essence, was thus a Shah-Chhetri coalition which retained state power in its hands in order to wring economic surpluses from the peasantry and share the proceeds.

## NOTES

1. According to Baburam Acharya, King Prithvi Narayan Shah had devised a plan for the unification of Nepal which he started implementing soon after his return from Banaras, India, in early 1744. Baburam Acharya, *Shri 5 Badamharajadhiraja Prithvi Narayan Shah* (The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah), Kathmandu: His Majesty's Press Secretariat, 2024 (1967), pt. 1, p. 202. In his book, *The Rise of the House of Gorkha* (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1973, p. 99), Ludwig F. Stiller, S.J. similarly writes: "Prithvi Narayan Shah was King at twenty, conqueror at forty-seven, and father of his country by the time of his death at the age of fifty-three.... Very shortly after he assumed the direction of affairs in Gorkha, ... he set on a career of conquest that led him to a mastery of the Valley and the entire territory of eastern Nepal." The following observations of E. H. Carr may be noted in this context: "The desire to postulate individual genius as the creative force in history is characteristic of the primitive stages of historical consciousness.... The great man is an individual, being an outstanding individual, is also a social phenomenon of outstanding importance.... The view which I want to discourage is the view which places great men outside history and sees them as imposing themselves on history in virtue of their greatness..." (E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975 (reprint), pp. 45 and 53-54.
2. Dinesh Raj Panta, *Gorakhako Itihasa* (A History of Gorkha), pt. 1, p. 48.
3. Yogi Naraharinath, *Gorkha Vamshawali* (A Genealogy of Gorkha), 2021 (1964), p. 3.
4. Fr. Ludwig F. Stiller, *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*, 1973, p. 148.
5. *Ibid*, p. 325.
6. Panta, *op. cit.*, p. 400.
7. Edicts of King Rama Shah, in Yogi Naraharinath, *Itihasa Prakasha* (Light on History), Vol. 3, p. 422.
8. Naya Raj Panta, *Shri 5 Prithvi Narayana Shahako Upadesha* (Teachings of King Prithvi Narayan Shah), p. 325.
9. *Ibid*, pp. 325-26.
10. *Ibid*, p. 319.
11. Yogi Naraharinath, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 98.
12. Royal order to the *Chhathar* families regarding fees demarcation of *birta* boundaries, Poush Badi 3, 1856 (December 1799), *Regmi Research Collections (RRC)*, Vol. 24, pp. 42-43; Royal orders to Bhanu Padhya Khanal of Gorkha, Kartik Sudi 3, 1873 (October 1816), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 162, and Shyamalal Arjyal of Kathmandu, Jestha Badi 12, 1873 (May 1816), *ibid*, p. 139. Bhanu Padhya Khanal received 2 *khets* of rice-lands as his *jagir*, and Shyamalal Arjyal 3 *khets*, according to these documents, while Rana Budha, a sweeper at the *Sadar Dafdarkhana*, or central administrative department, received 2.37 *khets*. (*Jagir Assignment to Rana Budha*, Magh Badi 12, 1868 (January 1813), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p.40.)
13. Parashuram Thapa, grandson of Nara Thapa and son of Angad Thapa, was a *subba* or provincial governor in 1799. (Chittaranjan Nepali, *Shri 5 Rana Bahadur Shah*, (*King Ran Bahadur Shah*) 1963, p. 119.) He was posted in Garhwal until 1808. (Miscellaneous Documents of Marga Sudi 1, 1865 *Regmi Research Series*, year 20, no. 4, April 1988, p. 46.)
14. Colonel Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul*, 1811, p.123.
15. Brian H. Hodgson, "On the Military Tribes of Nepal", in *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*, 1874, pp. 42-43.
16. Cited in Perceval Landon, *Nepal*, 1928, Vol. 2, p. 241.

17. Yogi Naraharinath, *Itihasa Prakasha*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 132.
18. "The Khawas Community", *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, nos. 11-12, November-December 1987, pp. 166-72.
19. Yogi Naraharinath, *Itihasa Prakasha*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
20. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 359.
21. *Ijara* grant to Dhaukal Simha Basnyat for revenue collection in Banepa, Poush Sudi 4, 1849 (January 1793), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 275.
22. Royal orders regarding payment of salary to *Kaji* Dhaukal Simha Basnyat, Marga Sudi 12, 1856 (November, 1799), *RRC*, Vol. 24, p. 81; Chaitra Badi 11, 1856 (March 1800), *ibid*, pp. 211-12.
23. Replacement of Dhaukal Simha Basnyat by Garbhu Khawas as *ijaradar* of Morang, Baisakh Badi 10, 1854 (April 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 351.
24. Royal orders to Subba Bhaukal Simha, Baisakh Sudi 8, 1854 (April 1797), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 355; and Falgun Sudi 9, 1854 (February 1798), *RRC*, Vol. 23, p. 300.
25. Appointment of *Kaji* Dhaukal Simha Basnyat in Kumaun, Falgun Badi 13, 1856 (February 1800), *RRC*, Vol. 24, p.122.
26. Edwin T. Atkinson, *The Himalayan Districts of the North-Western Provinces of India*, 1882, Vol. 2, p. 616.
27. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
28. *Loc. cit.*
29. Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, 1819, p. 107.
30. *Ibid*, p. 154.
31. *Ibid*, p. 108.
32. Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-41.
33. Royal order regarding collection of *chumawan* levy from *bhardars*, Poush Sudi 13, 1864 (January 1808), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 347-56.
34. Royal order to *Kaji* Ambar Simha Thapa regarding despatch of troops to *Chautariya* Bam Shah in Kumaun, Baisakh Sudi 3, 1865 (April 1808), *RRC*, Vol. 36, p. 76.
35. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
36. *Ibid*, p. 87. See also King Prithvi Narayan Shah's letter to Debu Rana, Magh Badi 14, 1824 (January 1768), Naya Raj Panta, *op. cit.*, p. 1136.
37. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
38. Yogi Naraharinath, *Itihasa Prakasha*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
39. The marriage was sponsored by King Prithvi Narayan Shah himself. Naya Raj Panta, *op. cit.*, p. 319.
40. Baburam Acharya, *Shri 5 Badamaharajadhiraja Prithvi Narayan Shah* (The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah), pt. 3, pp. 436-37; Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, p. 122. Royal order to Vijaya Simha, Ashadh Badi 30, 1862 (June 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 79-80. This document mentions *Kaji* Tribhuwan Khawas' brother as the officer who had been sent to Kumaun, while another royal order of Ashadh Sudi 12, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 6, p. 120, identifies the officer as Ranadhwaj Khawas. See also Royal orders to *Kaji* Ritudhwaj and Haridatta Ojha, Ashadh Sudi 14, 1862 (July 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 6, p. 98; and Bhadra Sudi 10, 1862 (September 1805), *ibid*, pp. 409-10.
41. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 616. Atkinson is wrong when he describes Ritudhwaj as a Thapa.
42. This section is based on Baburam Acharya, *Nepalako Samkshipta Vrittanta*, (A Concise Account of Nepal), n.d., pp. 72-161.
43. Naya Raj Panta, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
44. *Ibid*.

# The Quest for Economic Security

Chapter 3 underlined two basic characteristics of the political leadership of the Gorkhali Empire. In the first place, that leadership originated in Gorkha, a hill state economically far behind most of its neighbours. The second characteristic is a corollary of the first. If Gorkha was poor, so were its leaders. Indeed, it seems likely that the Gorkhali elites brought little with them when they moved to Kathmandu after 1768. Kirkpatrick has accordingly recorded that they were not "particularly distinguished among their countrymen either for their opulence, their extensive possessions, or the number of their adherents."<sup>1</sup> Nor were they comparable with a nobility in the western sense of the term, for they lacked an independent material base. This chapter will show how the Gorkhali elites used their control of the state power as a stepping-stone to economic security and affluence.

## The Jagir System

If the Gorkhali *bhardars* lacked an independent material base, this was primarily a result of deliberate state policy. Prithvi Narayan Shah wanted to deny both pillars of the Gorkhali state, the *bhardars* and the army, opportunities for amassing great wealth, so that they might not be distracted from their duties by a life of luxury.<sup>2</sup> A comfortable rather than luxurious life was thus the goal that Prithvi Narayan Shah set for his *bhardars*, a goal he attained through the allotment of lands and other sources of income. Under that system, known as *jagir*, sources of revenue were assigned to *bhardars*; collection was their own responsibility, not that of the government.

*Jagir* is a term of Persian origin which the Gorkhali rulers borrowed through India. According to Indian usage, *jagir* denoted "a tenure,

under the Mohammedan government, in which the public revenues of a given tract of land were made over to a servant of the state, together with the powers requisite to enable him to collect and appropriate such revenue, and administer the general government of the district."<sup>3</sup> This definition of the Indian *jagir* system perfectly describes the system followed in the Gorkhali Empire. Previous studies of the system have emphasised its connection with land tenure and defined it as denoting lands assigned to government employees and functionaries in lieu of their emoluments.<sup>4</sup> In the present context, that definition needs to be somewhat broadened; the term will be used here to denote assignments not only of agricultural lands but also of such other sources of income as homestead and other taxes. *Jagirs* were assigned on an exclusively individual basis; the recipients were not permitted to transfer or subdivide the lands, homesteads and villages comprising the assignment.

A *bhardar* received his *jagir* in two forms, namely, *khet* or rice-lands, which yielded rice and other agricultural commodities, and *khuwa* or villages and settlements from which he received a cash income through taxes of various categories. The three categories of *bhardars* previously discussed in Chapter 3, namely, *chautariya*, *kaji* and *sardar*, received *khet* and *khuwa* assignments at the following standard rates. The area of *khet* is given in terms of the *muri*, that is, an area comprising between 1190 and 1785 square feet, the actual area varying according to productivity.

#### *Jagir Assignments of Bhardars*

Designation	<i>Khet</i> (in <i>muris</i> )	<i>Khuwa</i>
<i>Chautariya</i> <sup>5</sup>	12,500	Rs. 4,001 a year
<i>Kaji</i> <sup>6</sup>	16,600	Rs. 3,500 a year
<i>Sardar</i> <sup>7</sup>	8,000	Rs. 1,600 a year

Occasionally, a *bhardar* received his *jagir* only partly in the standard form mentioned in the table, the reason being that rice-lands and villages were not always readily available for assignment as *jagir*. Elsewhere, the shortfall was met in cash and usually paid from specified sources of revenue not officially included in the *jagir*. For this purpose, income from rice-lands was computed at the rate of Rs. 25 for each 100 *muris*. An example may be given to show how the system

actually operated. In 1805, Sher Bahadur Shah and Bidur Shah were reappointed as *chautariyas* with a *jagir* assignment of 12,500 *muris* of rice-lands and a *khuwa* revenue of Rs. 4,001 a year. However, only 9,297 *muris* of rice-lands were actually assigned. The balance of 3,203 *muris* was converted into cash at the rate of Rs. 25 per 100 *muris*, totalling about Rs. 800. Similarly, only Rs. 2,913 from the *khuwa* income of Rs. 4,001 was actually derived from villages assigned for the purpose, leaving a shortfall of Rs. 1,088, the total shortfall in terms of both *khet* and *khuwa* thus being Rs. 1,888. The amount was paid from the revenue of nine villages in the Tarai provinces of Saptari and Mahottari.<sup>8</sup>

However, *bhardars* were seldom able to appropriate the full income from their *khet* and *khuwa* assignments comprising their *jagir*. There were two main reasons why they were not able to do so. Firstly, *bhardars* were required to equip and maintain a specified number of fighting men and weapons with a part of their *jagir* incomes. Thus a *chautariya* was required to equip 46 men with muskets, a *kaji*, 45 men, and a *sardar*, 22 men.<sup>9</sup> In addition, all these three categories of *bhardars* were required to maintain one piece of cannon each. Similarly, the *bhardars* had to spend a part of their *jagir* incomes for administrative purposes, since collection was their own responsibility. The expenses and difficulties of collection were compounded by the fact that *jagir* assignments were usually dispersed over extensive areas. In fact, most *bhardars* owned *khet* and *khuwa* "indifferently in all parts of the Nepal[']s territories," according to Kirkpatrick.<sup>10</sup> The *khet* lands assigned to *Chautariyas* Sher Bahadur Shah and Bidur Shah in 1805, as mentioned above, were thus located in different parts in Kathmandu, Bhadgaon, Nuwakot and Gorkha, while the *khuwa* revenue was derived from Dhading in the hill region west of Kathmandu, Listi in the eastern hill region, and Rautahat province in the central Tarai region. The shortfall of Rs. 1,888 in *khet* and *khuwa* assignments, as mentioned above, was paid from the revenues of Saptari and Mahottari.<sup>11</sup> The *jagirs* of General Bhimsen Thapa, as listed in a royal order of July 1820, also reflect this geographical dispersion of *jagir* assignments. Bhimsen Thapa's *khet* assignment of 12,843 *muris* were divided into approximately 400 parcels spread over Bhadgaon, Kirtipur, Pharping, Bungmati and Satungal in Kathmandu Valley, Nuwakot and Gorkha in the western hill region, and Timal, Tilpung, Khimti, Manthali and other areas in the eastern hill region. His *khuwa* similarly included at least thirteen villages in both the eastern and western hill regions, in addition to villages in Bara, Parsa and Mahottari in the Tarai region, yielding a total income of Rs. 7,190.<sup>12</sup>



*Bhardars* enjoyed broad administrative, fiscal and judicial powers, comparable in many respects with those of the lord of a manor in medieval England. The powers of lord and magistrate that *bhardars* exercised in their *khuwa* villages were then translated into income not only from the traditional homestead taxes, but also from such natural resources as rivers and forests as well as from fines and penalties, including, at times, people enslaved for crimes, whom they could sell or keep for themselves.<sup>13</sup> There were also cases in which *bhardars* received payments from their *khuwa* villages which should more appropriately be regarded as tribute rather than rents. From his *khuwa* in the Tsarka region on the Nepal-Tibet border, for instance, *Chautariya* Ran Udyot Shah received falcons, horses, blue sheep, four-horned antelopes, partridges, copper, Tibetan rugs and blankets, and other products of the Himalayan region.<sup>14</sup>

### *Economic Insecurity*

The *jagir* system did not create an affluent and privileged class in the Gorkhali society for the simple reason that loss of *bhardar* status — a common occurrence under the *pajani* system — entailed loss of one's *jagir* as well. Even those *bhardars* who were reappointed often found their assignments substituted by cash salaries or transferred elsewhere. A *bhardar* thus had "but a temporary and precarious interest in the lands which he holds," and was liable, at every *pajani*, "to be deprived of them altogether; to have them commuted for a pecuniary stipend, or to have them exchanged for others."<sup>15</sup>

Since the *jagir* system could not provide a stable, secure and regular source of income, Gorkhali *bhardars* faced a chronic problem of economic insecurity. Such insecurity explains many political trends of this period, such as the endless and occasionally sanguinary factionalism among the *bhardars*. It also explains the attempts made by the *bhardars* to gain control over income-yielding assets, primarily land, both through the use of their political power and through economic means within the existing framework of land-ownership and land-holding rights.

Land grants not tied to actual service of the state, which *bhardars* used as a means to gain control over lands outside the ambit of the *jagir* system belonged to two main categories: *chhap* and *manachamal*. *Chhap* usually were comprised of homesteads, that is, hillside lands used as residences and for cultivation of dry crops, whereas most *manachamal* grants were comprised of rice fields. Such grants were

valid only at the pleasure of the King, and therefore, could be revoked at any moment. They were also not inheritable.<sup>16</sup> Even then, *chhap* and *manachamal* land grants were not subjected to annual review under the *pajani* system and so made it possible for the *bhardars* to attain a measure of economic security for themselves, if not for their descendants. The practice of obtaining such grants accordingly seems to have been widely followed.

Indeed, influential *jagirdars* had often the foresight to acquire such lands while they were still in office. For instance, each of the two *chautariyas*, six *kajis* and five *sardars*, who were in power in 1808 owned *manachamal* lands in addition to the *jagirs*.<sup>17</sup> Those who were out of power in that year also owned such lands, thus underlining the role of the *manachamal* system in guaranteeing a living to *ex-bhardars*. But even *manachamal* lands did not leave the *bhardar* enough to fall back upon. Most *manachamal* grants to *bhardars* ranged between 500 and 1,200 *muris* of rice-lands each.<sup>18</sup> Compared with their *jagir* rice-land holdings, which ranged between 8,000 to 12,500 *muris*, the income from *manachamal* lands was not sufficient to enable them to maintain their standard of living in the event of dismissal.

Access to lands through economic means within the existing framework of land-holding rights, other than through the exercise of political influence similarly took several forms. Often *bhardars* obtained allotment of rice fields from the state in the capacity of tenants independently of their *jagirs*. In 1791, for example, *Kaji* Ranajit Pande obtained an allotment of about 42 *muris* of rice fields near the Tundikhel in Kathmandu, as well as in the village of Bahapal.<sup>19</sup> In 1812, *Sardar* Bhairav Singh Khawas similarly obtained about 32 *muris* of rice-lands on the banks of Dhobikhola river in the same area.<sup>20</sup> The allotments, although made under the royal seal, were not tied to service, so that the *kaji* and the *sardar* were under no obligation to relinquish them even if they were dismissed from service.

In the Tarai region, *bhardars* similarly obtained land grants under what was known as *mokarri* tenure. Under that system, lands were granted to individuals on payment of a specified sum of money to the state every year. In consideration of that payment, the recipient exercised authority to collect revenues from land and other sources, and also reclaimed waste tracts, if any. The difference between the amount he paid to the government and the amount he collected constituted his profit.<sup>21</sup> The list of *mokarri*-holding *bhardars* included *Kaji* Damodar Pande, who owned two *maujas* (a unit of settlement and cultivation) in Bara,<sup>22</sup> and *Kaji* Sarvajit Pande, who similarly owned one *mauja* in Rautahat.<sup>23</sup>

Colonisation schemes in the Tarai provided the Gorkhali *bhardars* yet another avenue for building up an economic base independent of their *jagirs*. Certainly, such schemes were undertaken by people of different classes and occupations, but the participation of the *bhardars* lent a new dimension to this purely economic enterprise. *Bhardars* and other individuals who were granted permission to undertake colonisation schemes paid taxes at concessional rates for each *mauja*, the amount gradually increasing every year during a stipulated period usually between seven and ten years. At the end of that period, the lands were measured, taxes were assessed at current rates, and the beneficiary was confirmed in his status as landlord, and permitted to retain the best lands for his own use.<sup>24</sup> Heading the list of *bhardars* who received royal charters entitling them to undertake colonisation schemes in the Tarai is Bhimsen Thapa. In 1808, he obtained a charter for colonising two *maujas* at Tokani in the province of Bara and to appropriate the income over a seven-year period.<sup>25</sup> Previously, he had undertaken a similar colonisation of two *maujas* in Sidhmas and Parsa, as well.<sup>26</sup>

## ***Birta* Grants**

So long as Prithvi Narayan Shah was alive, the Gorkhali *bhardars* lacked the political influence to acquire *birta* land grants from the state in their quest for economic security, although such grants traditionally were both tax-free and inheritable. *Birta* grants were traditionally limited to Brahmins, thus excluding not only the *bhardars* but even members of the royal family. A single instance dramatically illustrates the power of that tradition. In 1744, Prithvi Narayan Shah offered the whole of the newly-conquered territory of Nuwakot as a *birta* to his brother, Dalamardan Shah, who had played a leading role in its conquest. Dalamardan Shah, however, declined the offer on the ground that "Brahmins alone deserve *birta* grants."<sup>27</sup> Prithvi Narayan Shah himself acknowledged the tradition in 1768, when, in a proclamation, he declared: "*Birta* lands are granted to Brahmins for the sake of religious merit."<sup>28</sup>

Paradoxically, although a non-Brahmin could seldom obtain *birta* grants from the state, he could always buy *birta* lands from a Brahmin, whose privileges apparently extended to alienating such lands as he pleased. In other words, individuals belonging to any caste or community could buy *birta* lands from Brahmins but the lands retained

their tax-free character. In the 1761 proclamation referred to above, Prithvi Narayan Shah declared that "people belonging to any caste or community may acquire *birta* lands (from Brahmins) through purchase, if they have money."<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the proclamation goes on to say, "In Nepal, as in the plains, the mountains, Jumla, Kumaon and Doti, *birta* lands are owned by people belonging to all castes and communities."<sup>30</sup> Regulations promulgated for the Kali-Gandaki-Bheri region in July 1787, that is, within one year after the Gorkhali conquest of that region, referred to circumstances in which "the money of a non-Brahmin is put in the lands of the Brahmins,"<sup>31</sup> due to the sale or mortgage of tax-free *birta* lands. The tradition of non-Brahmins, including *bhardars*, purchasing or mortgaging the *birta* lands of Brahmins continued in the Gorkhali Empire. In 1794, for example, Zorawar Khawas, Chief Administrator of Morang, purchased three villages in that province which had been granted as *birta* to a Brahmin of Tanahu.<sup>32</sup> Around 1812, *Kaji* Faud Bir Rana took up a mortgage on the *birta* lands of Raghav Ram Mishra in Salan, Dhading.<sup>33</sup>

Although Prithvi Narayan Shah did grant tax-free *birta* lands to a few *bhardars*, most of these grants were actually mortgages, a system already discussed in Chapter 2. Even members of the royal family paid money to gain access to tax-free lands under this system, traditionally known as *bandha*. Beneficiaries of *bandha* land grants made by Prithvi Narayan Shah thus included such members of ruling Shah family as Birbahu Shah and Jiva Shah, who paid Rs. 1,540 in 1760 for 300 *muris* of rice-lands and attached homesteads at Lakwa in Dhading. Not even Sur Pratap Shah, Prithvi Narayan Shah's brother, or Rana Simha Shah, his illegitimate son, were spared, the latter paying a total of Rs. 1,390 for *bandha* landholdings in Phirkep (Dhading) and Khinchet (Nuwakot) in 1764. If Prithvi Narayan Shah's own brother and son had to make payments to gain access to tax-free lands under the *bandha* system, other *bhardars* such as Tularam Pande and Damodar Pande could hardly be expected to have been granted royal concessions.<sup>34</sup> Another prominent *bhardar* of Prithvi Narayan Shah's time, Rama Krishna Kunwar, the ancestor of the Rana family of the post-1849 period, paid the king Rs. 6,700 to acquire about 270 *ropanis* of lands in Bhadgaon as an endowment for a temple he had constructed in the Pashupatinath complex in Kathmandu. The lands had been confiscated from an illegitimate son of the last king of Bhadgaon, Ranajit Malla.<sup>35</sup>

During the turbulent years that followed Prithvi Narayan Shah's death in 1775, the Gorkhali *bhardars* became strong enough to prevail upon regents and minor kings to grant them tax-free and inheritable

lands on par with Brahmins. Although various terms were used to denote such grants, they were functionally identical to those traditionally granted to Brahmins, and therefore, will also be called *birta* grants here.

One of the first *birta* grants to a *bhardar* was made to *Kaji* Abhiman Simha Basnyat. The grant was promised by King Pratap Simha in July 1777 in recognition of Abhiman Simha's success in adding to the Gorkhali Empire "territories in the hill and Tarai regions of Saptari and Vijayapur, which yield an income of Rs. 175,000 every year."<sup>36</sup> However, it was actually made 21 years later, in 1798, and comprised 901 *bighas* of lands in the eastern Tarai province of Bara.

King Pratap Simha's widow, Queen-Mother Rajendra Laxmi, continued the practice of granting *birta* lands to non-Brahmin *bhardars* when she was Regent for King Ran Bahadur Shah. In early 1785, she granted two villages in Mahottari as *birta* to *Kaji* Swarup Simha Karki. Rajendra Laxmi died a few months thereafter, and Swarup Simha Karki was sentenced to death by her successor, Bahadur Shah. King Girban re-confirmed the grant in favour of Swarup Simha Karki's grandson, Sainya Dhvaj Karki, in early 1813. The grant contained the traditional injunction inserted in *birta* land grants to Brahmins that any person who violated its conditions would be reborn as a worm living in human excrement for 60,000 years.<sup>38</sup> In December 1794, about nine months after assuming power, King Ran Bahadur Shah granted 500 *bighas* of income-yielding lands in the Khesraha region of Mahottari, as well as about 1,500 *bighas* of uncultivated tracts to Damodar Pande in recognition of Pande's services during the conquests of Lamjung, Parbat and Pyuthan, the looting of Digarcha, and the repulsion of the Chinese invasion.<sup>39</sup>

Other *bhardars* who received *birta* grants from the King during this period included *Chautariya* Pushkar Shah,<sup>40</sup> *Kaji* Ranadhwaj Thapa,<sup>41</sup> and *Kaji* Bahadur Bhandari,<sup>42</sup> although it is difficult to compile an exhaustive list. General Bhimsen Thapa also availed himself of this privilege, acquiring extensive tracts of lands under *birta* tenure. Some of these grants were meant for residential purposes in Kathmandu, their beneficiaries including *Kajis* Dhaukal Singh Basnyat,<sup>44</sup> Bal Narsingh Kunwar<sup>45</sup> and Chamu Bhadari.<sup>46</sup>

### *New Opportunities*

Thanks largely to *birta* grants, the impecunious *bhardar* families of Prithvi Narayan Shah's time were able gradually to strengthen their economic base under his successors. The prime example is *Kaji* Dhaukal

Simha Basnyat, one of the sons of Shivaram Simha Basnyat, whose career was described in some detail in Chapter 3. Shivaram died a poor man and left no property that could be divided among his sons, except for 100 *muris* of rice-lands in Nuwakot which he had obtained on mortgage from the government on payment of a sum of Rs. 500<sup>47</sup> Five years later, in 1791, Bahadur Shah, the Regent, granted Dhaukal a home site of 50 *ropanis* around the site of the present royal palace at Narayanhiti in Kathmandu.<sup>48</sup> The grant laid the foundations of Dhaukal's fortune. Two years later, he acquired as many as 85 *ropanis* around that home site, 50 *ropanis* through a royal grant, and 35 *ropanis* by purchase from 29 Newar families of the area.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, King Ran Bahadur granted him about 600 *bighas* of agricultural land in Bara, part of which was cultivated and so yielded an immediate income.<sup>50</sup> Dhaukal thus became a man of property, quite substantial by prevailing standards.

The affluence of Bhimsen Thapa and his family is even more striking. Bhimsen Thapa was almost penniless when he returned from exile in India to Kathmandu along with Ran Bahadur Shah in March, 1804. His circumstances were so straitened at that time that Ran Bahadur granted him a sum of Rs. 2,600<sup>51</sup> apparently to help him set up his household in Kathmandu. During the years that followed, royal favours followed fast, and Bhimsen Thapa and his brothers, who too had attained the position of *bhardars*, were able to amass property on a truly massive scale. Sixteen years later, in July 1820, the brothers subdivided their common property among themselves. Their collective holdings comprised agricultural lands and residential sites totalling approximately 1,450 *ropanis* (72.5 hectares) and several houses in Kathmandu, including a new one built by Bhimsen Thapa, as well as houses in Gorkha and Nuwakot. Lands and houses in Palpa, obviously built by their father, Amar Simha Thapa, and lands at Khinchet in Nuwakot, and in the Tarai, were left undivided,<sup>52</sup> while Bhimsen Thapa retained for himself his newly-built palace at Lagan,<sup>53</sup> for which King Girban had granted him lands in 1813-14.<sup>54</sup> His share of the family property included another palace in Kathmandu and a house in Nuwakot, for which King Girban had granted additional lands.<sup>55</sup> Both Dhaukal Simha Basnyat and Bhimsen Thapa held extensive *jagir* assignments in addition to their *birtas*.

### *The Role of Birta Ownership*

*Birta* ownership, whether acquired through a royal grant or purchase, provided the Gorkhali *bhardars* with a measure of economic security

which their *jagir* or *manachamal* holdings alone could never insure. Many, if not most, *birta* grants made to the Gorkhali *bhardars* during the period of the Empire, long remained in the possession of their descendants. For example, *Kaji* Abhiman Simha Basnyat's descendants were in possession, in 1913, of the *birta* lands granted by King Ran Bahadur Shah to him in 1791.<sup>56</sup> *Birta* was thus the key institutional mechanism through which the *bhardars* of the Gorkhali Empire succeeded in translating their political power into economic security.

Nevertheless, the *bhardars* regular apostrophe's to be used ownership of their *birta* lands was subject to fluctuations in their political fortunes. If their political influence made it possible for them to acquire *birta* lands, the converse was equally true; loss of political influence brought loss of *birta* lands in its wake. For example, Bhimsen Thapa's extensive *birta* holdings were confiscated when he was dismissed from the prime-ministership and placed in detention in July, 1837.<sup>57</sup>

## Abuse of Power

Given their power and influence over the lives of ordinary people, it should not be surprising that the Gorkhali *bhardars* occasionally abused their position for personal benefit. Opportunities for such illegal gratification were more numerous for *bhardars* who were deputed to the provinces. The following discussion is confined to the conduct of the central-level *bhardars* even though the evidence is meagre and sporadic.

Hamilton has referred to "the presents to the twelve great officers of state," or *bhardars*, by the Chief Administrator of the eastern Tarai province of Morang in the year 1809-10.<sup>58</sup> This bland statement has significant connotations which reveal the true character of the Gorkhali *bhardar* corps. It shows that they exacted unauthorised payments from provincial and other administrators over whose appointment they had any degree of control. Another legitimate influence might be that they contrived situations in which such unauthorised collections could be made with impunity. For example, in August 1796, King Ran Bahadur Shah unearthed a major corruption scandal involving several *kajis* and other *bhardars*. It appeared that they had sent a Brahmin, Kulanidhi Tiwari, to Bhirkot, a western hill territory which had recently been brought under central administration, to collect the *gadimubarakh* tax without royal authority. Kulanidhi Tiwari collected Rs. 6,000 which he

shared with his co-conspirators. Ran Bahadur Shah punished the Brahmin with degradation to the lowest caste and banished him from the kingdom. The *bhardars*, on their part, were made to pay to the government twice the amount they had received, plus a fine of Rs. 100 each. The erring *bhardars* included Prabal Rana, then working as Governor of Kumaon. He was found to have taken Rs. 500 so he was ordered to pay the government a total sum of Rs. 1,100<sup>59</sup> He was dismissed from his assignment in Kumaon about six months later.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, one reason for Ran Bahadur Shah's unpopularity among the Gorkhali political elite, which eventually led to his abdication in 1799 and assassination in 1806, seems to have been the campaign that he launched soon after assuming power in 1794 to rid the Gorkhali *bhardar* corps of corruption and abuse of power. According to one source, it was the charge made by Ran Bahadur Shah against *Chautariya* Sher Bahadur Shah, *Kaji* Tribhuvan Khawas and *Kaji* Narsing Gurung of misappropriation of state funds that precipitated his assassination by Sher Bahadur.<sup>61</sup> The Gorkhali rulers believed in the principle that "the money of the people must either remain with them or be paid to us; it cannot be appropriated by cunning people."<sup>62</sup> No exceptions were made for the *bhardars*.

## NOTES

1. Colonel Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, 1811.
2. Naya Raj Panta, *Shri 5 Prithvi Narayana Shahako Upadesha* (Teachings of King Prithvi Narayan Shah), n.d., p. 325.
3. H. H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Revenue and Judicial Terms*, 1855, p. 224.
4. Mahesh C. Regmi, *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces*, 1978, p. 162.
5. *Jagir grant to Chautariyas Sher Bahadur Shah and Bidur Shah*, Kartik Badi 7, 1862 (October 1805), *Regmi Research Collections (RRC)*, Vol. 19, pp. 322-23.
6. Appointment of Bhimsen Thapa as *Kaji*, Baisakh Sudi 7, 1861 (April 1804), in Chittaranjan Nepali, *Janarala Bhimasena Thapa ra Tatkalina Nepala* (General Bhimsen Thapa and Contemporary Nepal), 2013 (1956), pp. 252-53.
7. The *jagir* of a *sardar* amounted to 71 *khets* and Rs. 1,100 as *khuwa* in 1798. *Ibid*, pp. 253-54. The number of *khets* was later increased to 80. (Royal order regarding collection of *chumawan* levy from *bhardars*, Pousha Sudi 13, 1864 (January 1808), *RRC*, Vol. 19, 347-56.)
8. See note 5 above.
9. See notes 5-7 above.
10. Colonel Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
11. See note 5 above.



12. Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-64
13. *Jagir grant to Chautariya Pran Shah in Bara and Parsa, Baisakh Badi 2, 1864 (April 1807), RRC, Vol. 20, p. 275.*
14. Royal order regarding transportation of commodities from *jagir* lands of *Chautariya* Ran Udyot Shah in Tsarka, Kartik Badi 30, 1856 (October 1799), *RRC, Vol. 23, p. 48.*
15. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.
16. "Ceilings on *chhap* landholdings", *Regmi Research Series*, year 20, nos. 6-7, June-July 1988, pp. 80-82. *Kaji Bir Kesar Pande's order to Mohinaikes in Kathmandu Valley, Magh Sudi 12, 1868 (January 1812), RRC, Vol. 28, p. 48*
17. See no. 7 above.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Adhiya* land allotment to *Kaji Ranajit Pande*, *Aswin Sudi 15, 1848 (September 1791), RRC, Vol. 5, p. 72.*
20. do. to *Sardar Bhairav Simha Khawas*, *Poush Sudi 6, 1868 (January 1812), RRC, Vol. 28, p. 30.*
21. "Mokarri Land Grants in the Eastern Tarai", *Regmi Research Series*, year 16, no. 8, August 1984, pp. 116-19.
22. *Mokarri* land grant to *Kaji Damodar Pande* in Bara, *Chaitra Sudi 15, 1859 (March 1803).*
23. Royal order regarding *mokarri* lands of *Sarvajit Pande* in *Rautahat*, *Baisakh Sudi 8, 1854 (April 1797), RRC, Vol. 25, p. 365.*
24. Mahesh C. Regmi, *A Study in Nepali Economic History, 1768-1846*, p. 146.
25. *Ijara* grant to *Kaji Bhimsen Thapa* for land reclamation in *Tokani, Bara, Ashadh Badi 7, 1865 (June 1808), RRC, Vol. 36, p. 120.*
26. Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
27. *Yogi Naraharinath, Gorkha Vamshavali (A Genealogy of Gorkha), 2021 (1964), p. 181.*
28. Royal proclamation of *Aswin Badi 10, 1818 (September 23, 1761)*, in *Baburam Acharya, Shri 5 Badamaharajadhiraja Prithvi Narayana Shah (The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah)*, pt. 4, pp. 772-73, translated in *Regmi Research Series*, year 2, no. 12, December 1970, pp. 278-79.
29. *Loc. cit.*
30. *Loc. cit.*
31. "Kusahi-Bisahi Tax Regulations in Western Nepal", *Shrawan Badi 30, 1844 (July 1787), Regmi Research Series*, year 4, no. 9, September, 1972 pp. 173-74.
32. "Confirmation of Birta Grants", *Regmi Research Series*, year 21, no. 5, May 1989, p. 69.
33. Royal order to *Kaji Foud Bir Rana*, *Falgun Badi 9, 1869 (February 1813), RRC, Vol. 39, p. 521.* A similar practice was followed in the adjoining areas of northern India. *Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton* has recorded how in the district of *Purnea*, "there is no necessity for lands, that have been granted for pious uses, being applied in that way, and the lands (which have been) granted to support Brahmin may be sold, and belong to a cobbler." *Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton, An Account of the District of Purnea, 1928, p. 448.*
34. "Bandha Land grants", *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, nos. 9-10, September-October 1987, pp.126-32.
35. *Birta* lands registered with the *Kathmandu Pota Bandobast* in 1953 (1896) by *Balkumari of Ichangu, Kathmandu, RRC, Vol. 13, pp. 28-29.*
36. *Yogi Naraharinath, Itihasa Prakasha (Light on History)*, pt.1, p.14.
37. "Land Grants to Prime Minister *Chandra Shumshere*", *Regmi Research Series*, year 13, no. 5, May 1981, pp. 70-71. About 150 *bighas* of this grant were confiscated when

- Daviman Simha Basnyat, a descendant Abhiman Simha was convicted on charges of treason. The remaining 750 *bighas* were purchased from his five brothers by prime minister Chandra Shumshere for 106,427 Indian rupees in 1913.
38. Reconfirmation of *birta* grant in favour of Sainya Dhvaj Karki, Chaitra Sudi 4, 1869 (March 1813), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 283.
  39. *Birta* grant to Damodar Pande, Poush Badi 4, 1851 (December 1794), *RRC*, Vol. 43, pp. 655-56, translated in *Regmi Research Series*, year 21, no. 12, December 1989, p. 167.
  40. *Bekh-Bunyad* land grant to *Chautariya* Pushkar Shah in Gorkha, Poush Badi 9, 1868 (December 1811), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 34.
  41. Order regarding *birta* grant to *Kaji* Ranadhvaj Thapa, Baisakh 1, 1869 (April 1812), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p.83.
  42. *Phikdar* land grant to *kaji* Bahadur Bhandari, Shrawan Badi 1, 1864 (July 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 6, pp. 905-6. The lands had been granted to him as *chhap* in 1805 (*Chhap* grant to *Sardar* Bahadur Bhandari, Kartik Badi 6, 1862 (October, 1805), *RRC*, Vol. 19, p. 312). This shows how the *kaji* was able to strengthen his tenurial rights in the lands.
  43. *Birta* grants to *Kaji* Bhimsen Thapa at Lagan, Kathmandu, Magh Sudi 2 and Chaitra Sudi 15, 1869 (January and March 1813), *RRC*, Vol. 28, pp. 273-82 and 287-88; Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-68.
  44. Land grant to Dhaukal Simha at Narayanhiti, Kathmandu, Chaitra Badi 5, 1848 (March 1792), *RRC*, Vol. 5, p. 72; and Falgun Sudi 11, 1849 (February 1793), *RRC*, Vol. 25, p. 235.
  45. *Birta* land grant to *Kaji* Balnarsingh Kunwar, Aswin Sudi 2, 1867 (September 1810), *RRC*, Vol. 39, pp. 421-22.
  46. *Birta* land grant to Captain Chamu Bhandari, Poush Badi 7, 1868 (December 1811), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 19.
  47. Yogi Naraharinath, *Itihasa Prakasha*, pt. 1, p. 49.
  48. See note 43 above.
  49. *Ibid.*
  50. *Bekh-Bunyad* land grant to Dhaukal Simha and his brother in Bara, Bhadra Sudi (?), 1851 (August 1794), *RRC*, Vol. 24, p. 53.
  51. Cash grant to *Kaji* Bhimsen Thapa, Baisakh Badi 3, 1861 (April 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 2, p. 53.
  52. Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-74.
  53. Perceval Landon, *Nepal*, Vol. 1, p. 89.
  54. See note 42 above.
  55. *Bekh-Bunyad* land grant to General Bhimsen Thapa in Nuwakot, Kartik Sudi 15, 1872 (October 1815), *RRC*, Vol. 28, p. 205.
  56. See note 36 above.
  57. "Confiscation of *Birta* lands", *Regmi Research Series*, year 16, no. 5, May 1984, p. 65. This refers to a royal order of Shrawan Sudi 1, 1894 (July 1837) confiscating the *birta* lands of Bhimsen Thapa and other *bhardars*. Some of these lands were restored the following year (Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, pp. 60 and 282). A parallel case is that of Bhimsen Thapa's nephew, Mathbir Simha Thapa, who was Prime Minister from April 1843 to May 1845. (Mahesh C. Regmi, *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces*, pp. 35-36.)
  58. Francis (Buchanan) Hamilton, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, p.154.
  59. "The *Gadimubarakh Levy*", *Regmi Research Series*, year 20, no. 2, February 1988, p. 22. The royal order is dated Bhadra Badi 11, 1853 (August 1796).

60. Royal order to Subba Prabal Rana, Bhadra Badi 11, 1853 (August 1796), *RRC*, Vol. 23, pp. 59-60, translated in *Regmi Research Series*, year 18, no. 2, February 1986, p. 27.
61. Baburam Acharya, *Nepalako Samkshipta Vrittanta* (A Concise Account of Nepal), 2022 (1966), p. 123; Chittaranjan Nepali, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
62. Royal order to Baijanath Giri and Tula Shahi in Rukum, Jestha Sudi 3, 1864 (May 1807), *RRC*, Vol. 20, p. 342.

# Epilogue

An attempt will be made here to recapitulate the main themes of this study and explain the chain of causation in the rise and fall of the Gorkhali Empire. Broadly speaking, the prominent links in that chain are the relative poverty of the king and political leaders of the hill state of Gorkha, who took recourse to territorial expansion and the building up of an empire as a means to improve their economic condition. Acquisition of territory made it possible for the Gorkhali kings to garner an economic surplus and use a part of that surplus to reward the political leadership. But they retained ultimate control of the surplus, thereby fostering a sense of dependence on the king and insecurity among the political leadership. This, in turn, bred rivalries among the political leadership for the spoils of office and the use of war, or preparations for war by the ruling leaders to suppress their rivals, or remove them from the seat of power at the centre. Such a policy resulted in reckless military adventures, culminating in shattering military defeats and loss of territories, and reducing the status of the Gorkhali Empire of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to a mere kingdom.

## Poverty and Insecurity

The initial impetus toward territorial expansion was provided by the relative poverty of the king and the political elite of Gorkha. Indeed, such expansion was the only means available to them for enrichment, since Gorkha possessed few agricultural and mineral resources. Nor was it connected with trade routes to the south or the north, which might have enabled it to derive an income from commercial taxes like the three states of the Kathmandu valley. Chapter 2 described the austere style of the royal household in Gorkha; the households of the political elite must have been even more frugal.

The situation changed after Gorkha's initial successes in the campaign of territorial expansion. By 1775, when Prithvi Narayan Shah

died, the Gorkhali states controlled extensive territories in the Himalayan region, including the Tarai. Those territories encompassed rich agricultural, forest and mineral resources as well as population, and internal and transit trade sizeable enough to make commercial and other taxes an important part of the state's fiscal system. The change had a profound impact on the economic condition of the king and the political elite. Possibly for the first time in the Gorkhali state's history, individuals belonging to the elite families who were appointed to positions of political leadership received economic support from the state through the *jagir* system. Such support was, however, tempered by a basic condition of insecurity, *jagirs* being subject to annual *pajanis* as well as to frequent transfers. Lacking an independent economic base, the political leadership remained more amenable to political control by the king.

This study has revealed the complete subservience of the political leadership to the king. Decision-making was centralised in the person of the king, with the political leaders playing only advisory and administrative roles. That centralisation helped the Gorkhali rulers implement their chief goals of mobilisation of resources and territorial expansion. The political leadership, at that stage of its development, lacked internal autonomy, its *esprit de corps* systematically undermined by frequent *pajanis*, transfers from one place to another and from one function to another, and disciplinary action taken in a rough and ready, often arbitrary manner. The political leaders were thus no more than the personal servants of the king and of the state as personified by the king. Their livings were doled out by the king in the form of *jagirs*, with few alternative opportunities for making money or acquiring property.

## Political Rivalry

The complete dependence of the political leadership on the King had serious political as well as economic implications. In the first place, it meant a perpetual state of competition with fellow members of the elite for the economic favours of the king. Secondly, it meant a perpetual state of insecurity and rivalry, for under the *pajani* system, royal favours were intermittent and unpredictable. This competition did not assume a critical form so long as Prithvi Narayan Shah was alive. He not only dominated the Gorkhali political leadership but also succeeded in gradually expanding the Gorkhali territory on a

scale sufficient to provide career opportunities, at least to the first generation of Gorkhali political leaders. The situation changed after his death. His successors were unable to provide the strong hand at the helm of state that the expanding empire needed. Moreover, by the early years of the nineteenth century, the progressive growth of the *bhardar* population outpaced the expansion of territory. Rivalry among the political elites for positions of political leadership consequently became a prominent characteristic of Nepal's political history.

It would be simplistic to suggest that access to the state's land and other economic resources was the sole motive for rivalries among the Gorkhali political leaders. Players on the political stage have been rivals under all political systems in the world throughout history. However, a distinction must be drawn between societies where the leaders constitute a distinct class and are bound together by common interests and those where they owe their status to such factors as caste, residence and proximity to the centre of political authority. For example, in pre-industrial England, landed property was the foundation of political authority and landowners controlled all the organs of government.<sup>1</sup> Their common interest in preserving their right and status as men of property, and the economic security that accompanied that status, gave the English gentry a unity of outlook and purpose wholly lacking in the Gorkhali context. The political leadership of the Gorkhali Empire lacked such a class character and was wholly comprised of individuals who needed political power in order to obtain some measure of economic security for themselves. Their rivalries were palpable enough to draw the attention of W.D. Knox, the British Resident in Kathmandu in 1801-2 who remarked upon "the violent hatred subsisting amongst the principal men in Nipaul." He added, "few in number, they are perpetually engaged in traducing and supplanting each other, and the injuries intentionally inflicted have to the spirit of rivalry [*sic*] added a personal enmity incapable of reconciliation."<sup>2</sup>

## Divergence of Interests

Rivalry for political power and its spoils set the stage for a reckless, and one may say, even a mindless course of imperial expansion. Thus it was that the interests of the Gorkhali state and the personal interests of the *bhardars* holding power at the time began to diverge. The divergence of the interests between the Gorkhali state and its *bhardars* can perhaps be detected as early as 1788, when the Gorkhali government,

then headed by the Regent, Bahadur Shah, invaded Tibet. The motive for the invasion was flimsy and its timing ill-advised, for the Gorkhali forces were then engaged in the conquest of territories west of the Bheri river. That Bahadur Shah may have hoped to use the war to silence the internal opposition to his regency is evident from the fact that some of his more dangerous opponents in Kathmandu were shipped off to the battlefield under close supervision.<sup>3</sup> If so, his course was indeed reckless, for it set off a chain of events culminating in the Chinese invasion of 1792, forcing Kathmandu to sue for peace. Bahadur Shah's adventurism thus brought the Gorkhali state to the brink of disaster. If, in the final analysis, the war had little permanent impact, the credit certainly does not go to the Gorkhali leadership.

## Failure of Leadership

In May 1794, when the 19-year-old King Ran Bahadur ousted Bahadur Shah, the Gorkhali state had perhaps reached the limit of viability. It stretched from the Tista river in the east to the Jamuna river in the west, with Garhwal as a vassal state farther west. No part of its territories was disputed, either by the East India Company or by the other powers of northern India.<sup>4</sup> What the new state lacked was a sense of national identity and purpose. The Gorkhali *dhungo* was a concept that eluded the subject populations east of the Dudhkosi and west of the Bheri, for whom the word Gorkhali evoked a feeling of terror rather than of emotional affinity. What the new state needed, therefore, was a phase of conciliation and consolidation, reforms in administrative structures and practices, diminution of the burdens of taxation and compulsory labour on the worker and the peasant, an end to military conscription and the transformation of *khukuris* into plough-shares. Certainly, implementation of these difficult reforms might have required an entire generation. But a beginning could have been made with the realisation that the Gorkhali state could not sustain further expansion. Moreover, Ran Bahadur could have applied the healing touch to the malaise created by rampant factionalism among the *bhardar* corps.

However, all this was not to be. Far from providing effective and positive leadership to the Gorkhali state, Ran Bahadur Shah let his personal emotions, foibles, eccentricities and idiosyncrasies affect his role in the conduct of state affairs, harming both himself and the state in the process. One is, therefore, compelled to agree with the view that Ran Bahadur must go down in history as "a King who irresponsibly

deserted his office for personal reasons and in doing so seriously weakened the country he was called on to serve."<sup>5</sup>

King Ran Bahadur's failure to provide effective leadership at a crucial stage in the history of the Gorkhali Empire set off a crisis with far-reaching consequences. The man who grabbed the opportunity created by that crisis was Bhimsen Thapa. He took advantage of Ran Bahadur's assassination to eliminate potential rivals among the Gorkhali *bhardars*. The obscure and politically inexperienced commander of Ran Bahadur's bodyguards was thus catapulted to the position of the supreme political leader of the Gorkhali state, although he had only recently acquired a high-ranking post in the central leadership and had never participated in any military campaign.

## The Kangra Campaign

The Gorkhali state's campaign to annex the vassal state of Garhwal and extend its territories farther toward the west began only a few weeks after Ran Bahadur's return from Banaras. The haste with which the decision was taken again raises the suspicion that Ran Bahadur may have put the nation on a war footing in order to pre-empt his domestic rivals.<sup>6</sup> Similar motivations may explain the subsequent mandate to the Gorkhali commanders to play imperial games in the Satluj region and lay siege to the fort of Kangra in 1805, a siege that lasted over four years. Next came a clash with the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh (1809), followed by the events culminating in the Nepal-Britain war (1814-16), which deprived the Gorkhali state not only of Garhwal and other territories occupied by it after 1804, but even the territory of Kumaun, of which it had been in undisputed possession since 1790. Indeed, the post-1804 Gorkhali campaign of imperial expansion was actually a series of barren and destructive adventures devoid of any positive achievements.

That the Kangra campaign, which bled the Gorkhali Empire white and in which the Empire found its nemesis, was a quixotic enterprise is by no means the figment of a historian's hindsight. The site was more than 500 miles from Kathmandu and presented formidable difficulties of transport and communications. The entire region west of the Bheri river was hostile territory, the Gorkhalis having alienated the local subject populations through their policies of requisitions and rapine. Moreover, the pitched battles and sieges of the campaign in Kangra and elsewhere in the Satluj region were foreign to the traditional Gorkhali strategy of mountain warfare.<sup>7</sup> The decision to occupy the



fort of Kangra, even as a stepping-stone to the valley of Kashmir, was thus politically obtuse and strategically unsound. The fact that the Gorkhals kept up their attack of Kangra for more than four years may be proof of Gorkhali tenacity but certainly not of statesmanship.

## Removal from the Seat of Power

The Gorkhali campaign in Garhwal and the Satluj region was led by *Kaji Ambar Simha Thapa*, who had been a commander in the campaign against the Chaubisi states in 1782-85, as well as in the 1791 invasion of Tibet. Ran Bahadur, then acting as Regent for King Girban, had appointed him *Mukhtiyar*<sup>8</sup> of the western front, vesting him with broad, almost independent political, military and diplomatic authority. After Ran Bahadur's assassination, Bhimsen Thapa seldom interfered with the *Kaji's* actions, including his decisions to lay siege to the fort of Kangra and to confront Ranjit Singh. The obvious intention was to bolster the *Kaji's* egoism and let him remain preoccupied on the western front.<sup>9</sup>

Several other *bhardars* who had lost out at the seat of power in Kathmandu were similarly given scope for their ambitions on the western front. The list of *bhardars* deputed to the western front as military commanders and administrators under *Kaji Ambar Simha Thapa* is long and impressive. One therefore wonders whether the decision to renew the military campaign on that front was based on genuine political and military considerations or was only a ruse to remove Ambar Simha and other *bhardars*, most of whom were senior to Bhimsen in both age and experience, from the race for political leadership at the centre.

The political history of the Gorkhali Empire might have taken a different course had there been no internecine rivalries among the Gorkhali political leadership or had there been a strong leader at the top to check such rivalries from harming the interests of the state. That is to say, neither the King nor the political leadership acted in the interest of the Gorkhali state after the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1775.

## A Lesson from History

As mentioned in the Prologue, it was the political decision of the Gorkhali political elite to expand the territories of the hill state of

Gorkha that provided the mainspring of social and economic change and determined the destiny of the workers and peasants of the Gorkhali Empire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was also noted that the benefits of expansion were appropriated by the Gorkhali elites, whereas the costs and burdens fell on the workers and peasants. This study has shown that the workers and peasants of Nepal have paid not only for the ambitions of their kings and political leaders, but also for their follies and rivalries. Today, the people of Nepal have gained both a national identity and the national purpose of advancing their own welfare through democratic means. They have also finally won the right to make and unmake their political leaders. One would like to hope that the Nepali nation today will learn a lesson from the history of the Gorkhali Empire and shape its future in the interests of the people themselves, rather than in the interests of its kings and political leaders.

## NOTES

1. B. A. Holderness, *Pre-Industrial England: Economy and Society from 1500 to 1750* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1976), p. 27.
2. National Archives of India, "Secret Consultation, 2nd May, 1805, No. 350", in *Stiller Typescript*, 1971, p. 258.
3. Leo E. Rose, *Strategy for Survival* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 37.
4. In October 1801, Nepal and the East India Company government signed a treaty which established "a system of friendship" between them. The articles of the treaty show that the British had no territorial claims on the Gorkhali State, and were willing to resolve "any dispute of boundary and territory... through our respective vakeels or our officers, according to the principles of justice and right." Of particular significance is Article 7 of the treaty, under which the British relinquished their claim to tribute in the form of elephants paid by Kathmandu for the Tarai territories of Bara, Parsa and Rautahat, which had been occupied by the Gorkhalis after the conquest of Makwanpur in 1762. It is a measure of the political obtuseness of the Gorkhali political leadership in power in Katmandu that it was generally opposed to the treaty, accepting it only for fear lest the British should assist Ran Bahadur, then living in Banaras, to regain his throne. In February 1804, the Governor-General, Lord Wellesley, reluctantly came to the conclusion that "the failure of the State of Nipaul in the fulfillment of its stipulations virtually constitutes the dissolution of the alliance," and therefore, decided to abrogate the treaty. Rivalries among the political leadership thus deprived the Gorkhali state of a valuable opportunity to consolidate its territories. Thirteen years later, in December 1815, it was forced to sign the Sugauli treaty at the end of the Nepal-Britain war under which it lost even those territories that the British had recognised as Gorkhali possessions under the

- 1801 treaty. (C. V. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, (Calcutta: Bengal Printing Company Limited, 1863), Vol. 2, pp. 198-205; National Archives of India, "Secret Consultation, 26th April 1804, No. 297", in *Stiller Typescript*, pp. 239-44.)
5. Ludwig F. Stiller, S.J., *The Rise of the House of Gorkha* (New Delhi, Manjusri Publishing House, 1973), p. 325.
  6. A general mobilisation was ordered in the western hill region on Chaitra Sudi 2, 1860 (April 1804), that is within about a fortnight after Ran Bahadur returned from India. (*Regmi Research Collections (RRC)*, Vol. 19, pp. 171-74.) *Kaji Ambar Simha Thapa* was then appointed as administrator of the Province of Kumaun. (Regulations in the name of *Kaji Ambar Simha Thapa*, Baisakh Badi 1, 1861 (April 1804), *RRC*, Vol. 19, pp. 174-80.)
  7. Stiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-59.
  8. "Garhwal Appointments: A.D. 1805", in *Regmi Research Series*, year 19, no. 4, p. 46.
  9. The following royal order, sent from Kathmandu under the royal seal to *Kaji Ambar Simha* on Aswin Sudi 10, 1862 (September 1805), may be mentioned in this context: "The astrologers have said that it will be good if the sword in my hand is sent to you on the auspicious occasion of the Vijaya Dashami festival. Accordingly, I have kept my Khorasan sword on my waist for some days after ritually consecrating it, and am now sending it to you. Keep it with you. Remain ritually pure so long as this sword lies on your waist. Wear it in the battle-field, and victory will be assured." ("The Western Front, A.D. 1805", *Regmi Research Series* year 20, no. 4, p. 80.)

# Appendix I

## The Gorkhali Political Leadership (1804 and 1808)

### A. 1804

<i>Chautariyas</i>	Pran Shah Sher Bahadur Shah
<i>Kajis</i>	Ambar Simha Thapa Bhimsen Thapa Dalabhanjan Pande Jahar Simha Basnyat Nahar Simha Basnyat Narsing Gurung Tribhuwan Khawas
<i>Sardars</i>	Ajambar Pantha Angad Khawas Bahadur Bhandari Indra Singh Thapa Musya Baniya Rana Gunj Baniya Ranjit Kunwar

### B. 1808

<i>Chautariyas</i>	Pran Shah Ran Udyot Shah
<i>Kajis</i>	Bahadur Bhandari Balnarsing Kunwar Bhimsen Thapa Devadatta Thapa Ranadhvaj Thapa Ranjit Pande
<i>Sardars</i>	Bakhat Simha Basnyat Bhairav Simha Khawas Gandharva Khawas Rana Gunj Baniya Shumshere Rana

# Appendix II

## The Gorkhali Political Leadership (1768-1814)

### *Chautariyas*

1. Shah Bahadur	8. Shah Mahoddam Kirti
2. Shah Balabhadra	9. Shah Pran
3. Shah Bam	10. Shah Pushkar
4. Shah Bidur	11. Shah Ran Simha
5. Shah Daksha	12. Shah Ran Udyot
6. Shah Dalamardan	13. Shah Sher Bahadur
7. Shah Jan	14. Shah Srikrishna

### *Kajis*

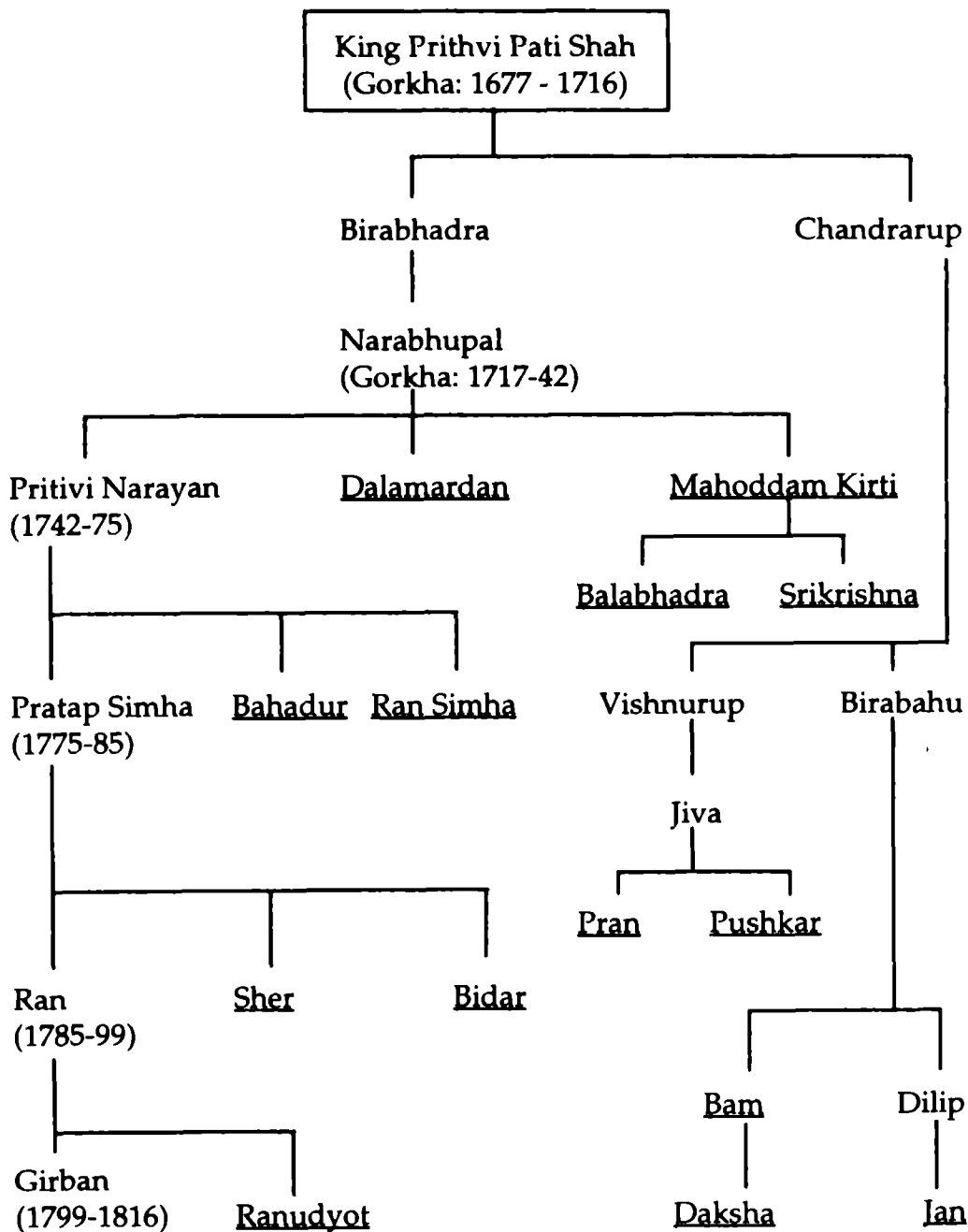
1. Basnyat Abhiman	26. Pande Gajakesar
2. Basnyat Bakhtwar	27. Pande Jagajit
3. Basnyat Dhaukal	28. Pande Ranajit
4. Basnyat Kehar	29. Pande Ranasur
5. Basnyat Jahar	30. Pande Survajit
6. Basnyat Jitman	31. Pande Vamsharaj
7. Basnyat Kirtiman	32. Pantha Ajambar
8. Basnyat Nahar	33. Rana Balabir
9. Basnyat Prasad	34. Rana Balawant
10. Basnyat Ranadhir	35. Rana Bandhu
11. Basnyat Ranadip	36. Rana Foud Simha
12. Bhandari Bahadur	37. Rana Madhav Simha
13. Bhandari Chamu	38. Rana Sarvajit
14. Gurung Narsing	39. Shah Jiva
15. Karki Swarup	40. Thapa Amar Simha
16. Khadka Subuddhi	41. Thapa Ambar Simha
17. Khawas Ranadhwaj	42. Thapa Amrit
18. Khawas Ritudhwaj	43. Thapa Bhimsen
19. Khawas Tribhuwan	44. Thapa Birabhadra
20. Kunwar Balnarsing	45. Thapa Devadatta
21. Kunwar Ranjit	46. Thapa Jaspau
22. Kunwar Rewant	47. Thapa Nayan Simha
23. Pande Bir Kesar	48. Thapa Ranadhwaj
24. Pande Dalabhanjan	49. Thapa Ujir Simha
25. Pande Damodar	

*Sardars*

1. Baniya Anirudra	21. Kunwar Birabhadra
2. Baniya Bali	22. Kunwar Chandrabir
3. Baniya Musye	23. Kunwar Ramakrishna
4. Baniya Ran Gunj	24. Malla Shatrubhanja
5. Basnyat Bakhat Simha	25. Pantha Birabhadra
6. Basnyat Indrabir	26. Rana Prabal
7. Bhandari Jaswant	27. Rana Pratiman
8. Bhandari Partha	28. Rana Sarvajit
9. Karki Arjun	29. Rana Shumshere
10. Khatri Chandrabhan	30. Rokaya Jaya
11. Khatri Damu	31. Shahi Bhotu
12. Khatri Gaja Simha	32. Shahi Puran
13. Khatri Ranabir	33. Shahi Rana Gunj
14. Khatri Shiva Narayan	34. Thapa Bhakti
15. Khatri Vamsha Raj	35. Thapa Bhayaharan
16. Khawas Angad	36. Thapa Chandrabir
17. Khawas Bhirav Simha	37. Thapa Dalakhamba
18. Khawas Gandharva	38. Thapa Indra Simha
19. Khawas Kirti Simha	39. Thapa Parashuram
20. Khawas Vilochan	

# Appendix III

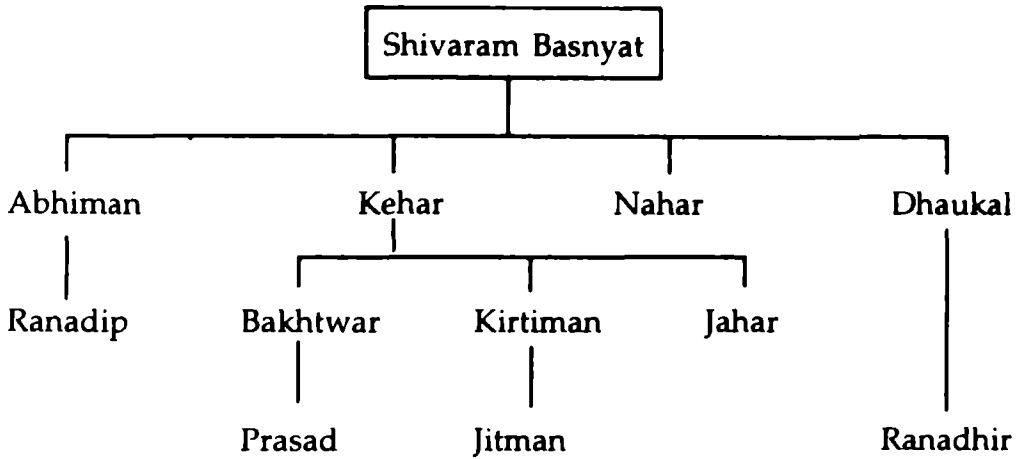
## The Shah Family



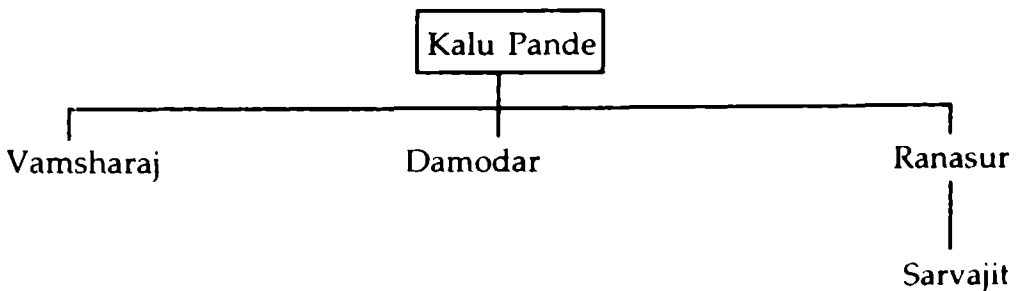
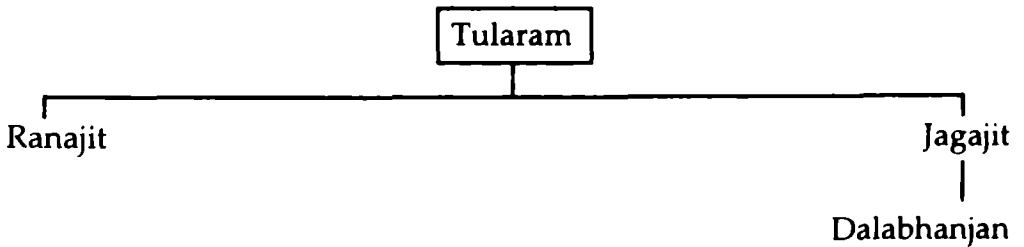
*The underlined names are of members of the Shah family who became Chautariyas between 1768 and 1814.*

# Appendix IV

## A. The Basnyat Family



## B. The Pande Families





# Glossary

<i>Anna</i>	A unit of currency consisting of 4 <i>paisa</i> ; 16 <i>annas</i> usually made one rupee.
<i>Bandha</i>	Lands mortgaged by the state to individuals.
<i>Bhardar</i>	A member of the Gorkhali political leadership; the term is used in this study to denote a <i>chautariya</i> , a <i>kaji</i> or a <i>sardar</i> .
<i>Bigha</i>	A land measurement unit in the Tarai region comprising 8,100 square yards, or 1.6 acres, or 0.67 hectare; and with several local variations.
<i>Birta</i>	Tax-free and inheritable land grants made by the State to individuals.
<i>Chautariya</i>	A royal advisor or Regent, belonging to the ruling Shah family.
<i>Chhap</i>	Residential sites or homesteads allotted to <i>bhardars</i> and other individuals which were not tied to service of the state.
<i>Chhathar</i>	The six leading families of Gorkha, namely, Arjyal, the two Pandes, Khanal, Bohra, and Rana.
<i>Chumawan</i>	A tax collected during the sacred-thread-investiture ceremony of the king or the crown prince.
<i>Dhungo</i>	Literally, a stone; metaphorically, the Gorkhali state.
<i>Gadimubarakh</i>	A tax collected during a royal coronation.
<i>Goddhuwa</i>	A tax collected during the wedding ceremony of a royal princess.
<i>Guthi</i>	Land and other sources of revenue endowed by the state or by individuals to finance religious or charitable functions.
<i>Ijara</i>	A revenue-farming assignment.
<i>Jagir</i>	Land, homesteads, villages and other sources of revenue assigned to government employees as emoluments.

<i>Kaji</i>	A minister-level <i>bhardar</i> .
<i>Kapardar</i>	Chief of the Royal Household.
<i>Khajanchi</i>	Chief of the State Treasury.
<i>Khardar</i>	A civil officer.
<i>Khet</i>	(1) Irrigated lands in the hill region on which rice and wheat are grown. (2) A measure of rice-lands in the hill region equal to 25 <i>ropanis</i> or 100 <i>muris</i> .
<i>Khuwa</i>	Homesteads or villages assigned as <i>jagir</i> .
<i>Mana</i>	See <i>muri</i> .
<i>Manachamal</i>	Rice-lands allocated to <i>bhardars</i> and other individuals which were tied to service of the state.
<i>Mauja</i>	An area of settlement and cultivation in the Tarai region.
<i>Mokarri</i>	Land grants in the Tarai region, subject to a fixed tax on the entire holding.
<i>Mukhtiyar</i>	A Regent or Viceroy.
<i>Muri</i>	(1) A volumetric measure for grains, equivalent to 2.40 bushels. A <i>muri</i> is equal to 20 <i>pathis</i> , with 8 <i>manas</i> to a <i>pathi</i> . (2) A measure of land equal to an average of 1,369 square feet in the hill districts and Kathmandu Valley.
<i>Rajya</i>	A vassal principality.
<i>Pajani</i>	Appointment, dismissal, confirmation, etc., of government employees.
<i>Ropani</i>	A measure of land in the hill region equal to 5,476 square feet or 0.13 acre. The area varied with the grade.
<i>Sardar</i>	A civil or military officer of <i>bhardar</i> rank.
<i>Saunefagu</i>	A tax on rural households in the hill region.
<i>Sera</i>	Rice-lands allotted for the supply of provisions to the royal household.
<i>Zamindar</i>	A landlord (in the Tarai region).

# Bibliography and Source Materials

The records of the Department of Land Revenue in the Finance Ministry of His Majesty's Government of Nepal have provided the main source materials for the study. Copies of these materials are in the personal possession of the author in the form of the *Regmi Research Collections (RRC)*. These have now been microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscripts Preservation Project. Some of these documents have been translated in the *Regmi Research Series*, an English language monthly journal edited and published by the author from November 1963 to December 1989. Other unpublished materials used in the study include the *Stiller Typescript*, a transcription of the documents contained in Reel One of the microfilms obtained from the Archives of India and preserved in the Tribhuvan University Library, Kirtipur, prepared by Ludwig F. Stiller, S.J., 1971. These sources have been cited at appropriate places in the notes, but are not individually listed in this bibliography.

Published materials in the Nepali and English languages used in the study are listed below.

## A. Nepali

Acharya, Baburam, *Shri 5 Badamaharajadhiraja Prithvi Narayan Shah (The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah)*, Kathmandu, His Majesty's Press Secretariat, Royal Palace, 2024-26 (1967-69), 4 pts.

....., *Nepalako Samkshipta Vrittanta (A Concise Account of Nepal)*, Kathmandu, Pramod Shumshere and Nir Bikram "Pyasi", 2022 (1966).

Manandhar, Triratna, "Salyani Raja Ranabhima Shahko Padachyuti" (Deposition of Raja Ranabhim Shah of Salyan), in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, Vol. 1, no. 2, April 1984, pp. 85-92.

- Naraharinath, Yogi (ed.), *Itihasa Prakasha* (Light on History), Kathmandu, Itihasa Prakasha Mandala, 2012-13 (1955-56), 4 Vols.
- ....., *Gorkha Vamshavali* (Genealogy of Gorkha), Varanasi, Aryabirsanghia, 2021 (1964).
- Nepali, Chittaranjan, *Janarala Bhimasena Thapa ra Tatkalina Nepala* (General Bhimsen Thapa and Contemporary Nepal), Kathmandu, Nepal Samskritik Sangh, 2013 (1956).
- ....., *Shri 5 Rana Bahadur Shah* (King Ran Bahadur Shah), Kathmandu, Mrs. Mary Rajbhandari, 2020 (1963).
- Panta, Dinesh Raj, *Gorakhako Itihasa* (A History of Gorkha), Kathmandu, the author, 2041-43 (1985-86), 2 Vols.
- Panta, Naya Raj, et al., *Shri 5 Prithvoinarayana Shahako Upadesha* (Teachings of King Prithvi Narayan Shah), Lalitpur, Jagadamba Prakashan, n.d., 4 Vols.

## B. English

- Aitchison, C.V., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Calcutta, Bengal Printing Company Limited, 1863, Vol. 2.
- Atkinson, Edwin, T., *The Himalayan Districts of the North-Western Provinces of India*, Allahabad, North Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1882, 2 Vols.
- Carr, E.H., *What Is History?*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1975 (reprint).
- Fraser, James Baillie, *Journal of a Tour through Part of the Snowy Range of the Himal Mountains and to the Sources of the Rivers Jamuna and Ganges*, London, Rodwell and Martin, 1820.
- Guralnik, David B., (ed.), *Webster's New World Dictionary*, second college edition, New Delhi, Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1972.
- Hamilton, Francis (Buchanan), *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (reprint of 1819 edn.), New Delhi, Manjusri Publishing House, 1971.
- ....., *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10*, Patna, Bihar and

- ....., *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10*, Patna, Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928.
- Hodgson, Brian H., *Essays on the Languages, Literature, and Religion of Nepal and Tibet* (reprint of 1874 edn.), New Delhi, Manjusri Publishing House, 1972.
- Kirkpatrick, Colonel (William), *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul* (reprint of 1811 edn.), New Delhi, Manjusri Publishing House, 1969.
- Landon, Perceval, *Nepal* (reprint of 1928 edn.), Kathmandu, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1978.
- Pemble, John, *The Invasion of Nepal*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Regmi, Mahesh C., *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal* (reprint of 4-volume 1963-68 edn.), Kathmandu, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1978.
- ....., *A study in Nepali Economic History* (reprint of 1971 edn.), New Delhi, Manjusri Publishing House, 1978.
- ....., *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th Century Nepal*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1978.
- ....., *Readings in Nepali Economic History*, Varansi: Kishor Vidya Niketan, 1979.
- Rose, Leo E., *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Sanwal, B.D., *Nepal and the East India Company*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965.
- Stiller, Ludwig, Fr. S.J., *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*, New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1973.
- Wilson, H.H., *A Glossary of Revenue and Judicial Terms and Useful Words Occurring in Official Documents Relating to the Administration of British India* (reprint of 1855 edn.), Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978.

# Index

- Abuse of power:  
  corruption, 58  
  revenue, 26  
  treasury, 28
- Allegiance:  
  *dhungo*, 15, 66  
  principle of, 15
- Annexation of hill states, 4–7, 11, 12
- Army  
  size of, 13  
  income tax from, 29
- Basnyat, Abhiman Simha:  
  *birta* grants to, 56, 58  
  as *dewan*, 39–40
- Basnyat, Dhaukal Simha:  
  as *dewan*, 39–40  
  assassination of, 45
- Bhardar(s), 40–41, 49–59, 65–67
- Birta*, *see* grants
- Brahmin(s), 9, 20, 39, 54–56, 58–59
- British, the:  
  East India Company, 1, 5, 10, 11, 20, 66  
  Governor-General, 10  
  Resident, 19, 28–29, 65
- Ceremonies:  
  coronation, 28–29  
  marriage, 28  
  thread, 28, 38–39
- Chatthar(s)*, 37, 38
- Chautariya(s)*, 29, 40–41, 42, 43  
  appointment of, 43  
  *Jagirs* to, 50
- Chumawan*, *see* levies
- Coalition:  
  China–Tibet, 8  
  Shah–Chhetri, 46
- Communities, ethnic, 37, 38, 43, 44, 46
- Conquests, 4–7, 8, 10–14
- Dhungo*, *see* allegiance
- East India Company, *see* British, the
- Expenditure:  
  on basic commodities, 19  
  borrowings towards, 19–20  
  on entertainment, 21–22
- Empire, *see* Gorkhali Empire
- Festivals, 22
- Founding of Gorkha, the, 4–5, 18, 36–37
- Gadimubarakh* *see* levies
- Garhwal, 4, 14–15  
  fort, siege of, 7  
  invasion of, 11  
  as vassal state, 7, 67
- Godan*, *see* levies
- Goddhuwa*, *see* levies
- Gorkhali Empire, the, 12, 16, 22, 23, 30, 50, 55, 63, 67, 68, 69  
  establishment of, 1, 45, 46  
  political leaders of, 14, 36, 37, 38, 39, 46, 58, 65, 69  
  revenues, 25–26, 29  
  fall of, 63, 67  
  *see also* treaty with, Gorkhali;

wars with, Gorkhali  
Grants:  
    *bandha*, 55  
    *birta*, 54–58  
    *jagir*, 27, 49–54, 57, 64  
    *ijara*, 40  
    *sera*, 23, 27  
    to queens and concubines, 27  
Himalayan region, geography of the,  
    1–4, 13–14  
Income:  
    from *jagirs*, 51  
    sources of, 52–56, 57  
    *see also* grants  
India, 1, 9–10, 29, 46, 50–51  
    artists from, 21  
*Jagirs*, *see* grants  
*Kaji(s)*, 40–46  
*Kangra*, 67–68  
*Kapardar(s)*, 23, 27, 37–38, 40–41  
*Kajanchi(s)*, 41  
*Khardar(s)*, 40–41  
Kirkpatrick, William, 20, 40, 49, 51  
    *see also* Resident under British, the  
Knox, W. D., 29, 65  
    *see also* Resident under British, the  
Land  
    cultivation of, 23  
    mortgage of, 20, 55  
Levies, 28, 29, 40, 57  
    *chumarwan*, 28, 41  
    *gadimubarakh*, 28, 29, 58  
    *godan*, 29  
    *goddhuwa*, 28, 29  
    *rajangka*, 28  
Loans and gifts, 20  
*Mokarri* tenure, 53  
Nawab of Awadh, 4, 10–11  
Nawab of Bengal, 5  
Nepal  
    geography of, 1–2  
    kingdom of, 1, 4

Nobility  
    affluence of, 51, 64  
    ethnicity of, 14  
*Pajani* system, 41, 42, 45, 46, 52, 53, 64  
Peasantry, burdens on, 69  
Pillage, 24, 25  
Pokharel, Harinandan, 20  
Political:  
    decision(s), 41, 64, 67–68  
    divisions, 3–4  
    rivalry, 65–66  
Principalities:  
    Baisi states, 4  
    Chaubisi states, 4, 45  
    Gorkha, 1  
    independent, 3, 4, 7, 44, 45  
Queen:  
    Kantavati, 9, 26  
    Lalitatripurasundari, 11  
    Rajrajyeshwari, 9, 10  
    Rajendra Laxmi, 6, 7, 45, 56  
    Subarnaprabha, 9, 10, 27  
*Rajangka*, *see* levies  
Regent:  
    Lalitatripurasundari, 11  
    Rajrajyeshwari, 11  
    Rajendra Laxmi, 6, 7, 44  
    Subarnaprabha, 11  
    *see also* as Regent under Shah,  
    Bahadur; Shah, Ran Bahadur  
Revenue, 19–20, 25–29, 49–54  
    *see also* tax  
Sardars, 41, 42, 50, 53  
*Saunefagu* tax, 23–24, 27–28  
*Sera*, *see* grants  
Shah, Bahadur:  
    as Regent, 6, 9, 56  
    conquest of Baisi and Chaubisi, 6  
    marriage of, 7  
    Tibetan invasion, 66  
Shah, Girban, 9, 27, 28, 29, 41, 56  
Shah, Narbhupal, 5, 18  
Shah, Pratap Simha, 6, 20–21  
Shah, Prithvi Narayan, 6, 7, 21, 22,  
    37–38, 39–40, 43, 44, 54, 55–56

- childhood, 20
  - austerity, 20, 21, 22, 49
  - conquests and expansion, 5, 29–30, 36, 45
  - dhungo* allegiance, 15
  - death of, 37, 55–56, 63–64, 68
  - Shah, Ran Bahadur, 6, 9, 10, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 58
  - as infant-king, 6, 43, 45, 56
  - marriage of, 9
  - assumption of power, 9, 21, 66
  - abdication, 9, 22
  - exile, 10, 26, 57
  - as Regent, 11
  - grants made by, 27, 56, 59
  - failures of, 66–7
  - assassination of, 11, 29, 45, 68
- Tax:
- illegal, 40
  - on homesteads, 20
  - tax-farming, 39
  - see also* levies; *saunefagu*
- Thapa, Bhimsen, 10, 44
- administration, 10
  - affluence of, 51, 57, 58
  - arrogation of power, 11, 44, 67, 68
  - colonisation scheme, 54
  - dismissal of, 45, 58
- Tibet, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 25, 65–66
- Treaty with, Gorkhali:
- China, 8, 66
  - East India Company, 13, 26
  - Garhwal, 7–8
- Vassal States, 6, 7, 10, 66, 67
- Wars with, Gorkhali:
- Britain, 1, 11, 13, 37, 67
  - Tibet and China, 7–8, 9, 25, 65–66
  - see also* conquests



This is an in-depth study of a crucial period in the history of the Gorkhali Empire which was the precursor of the modern Kingdom of Nepal. Mahesh Regmi meticulously chronicles the role played by the political elite, their bold initiative and tenacious campaigns to expand the boundaries of Gorkha which resulted in the transformation of a mere kingdom into a vast Empire. He also throws light on their strategies and conquests, and their unsuccessful campaigns that led to extensive loss of territories and eventual fall of the Empire.

While portraying the kings and their whims, the elite and their aspirations and the men who mattered in the Gorkhali Empire, the author attempts to examine the composition and the hierarchical structure of the Gorkhali society. Mahesh Regmi seeks to formulate a reasonable answer to the obvious questions arising from the magnificent rise and the ignominious fall of the Gorkhalis: How did they succeed? And where did they fail? He believes, and argues, that the answers are to be found in the political vision and decision-making of the ruling elite.



**Orient Longman**

REGMI : Kings and Political Leaders of  
the Gorkhali Empire 1768-1814

ISBN 81 250 0511 0  
Rs 105.00