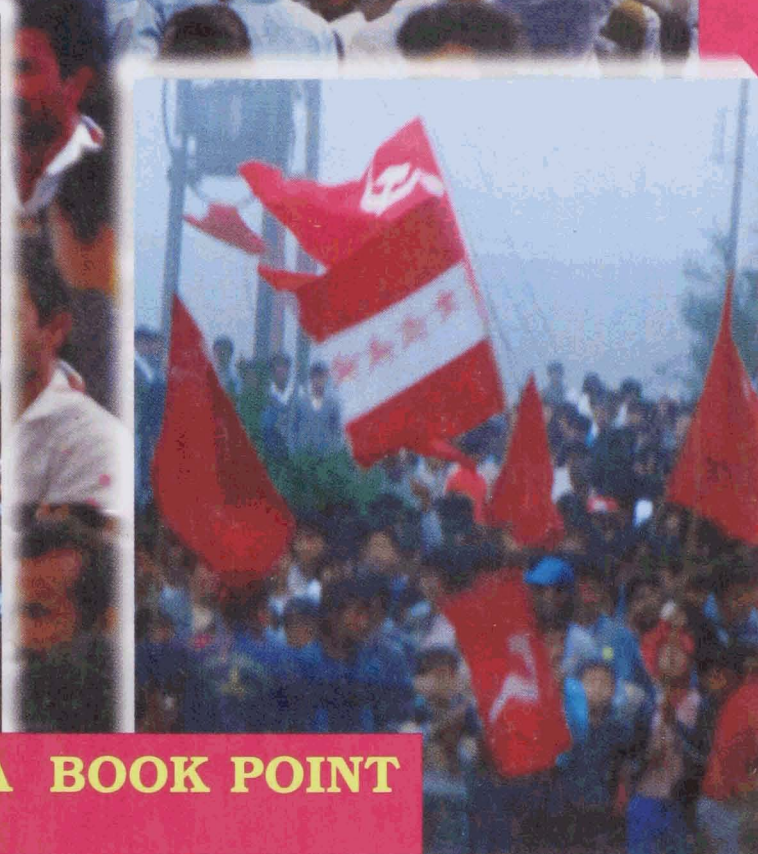
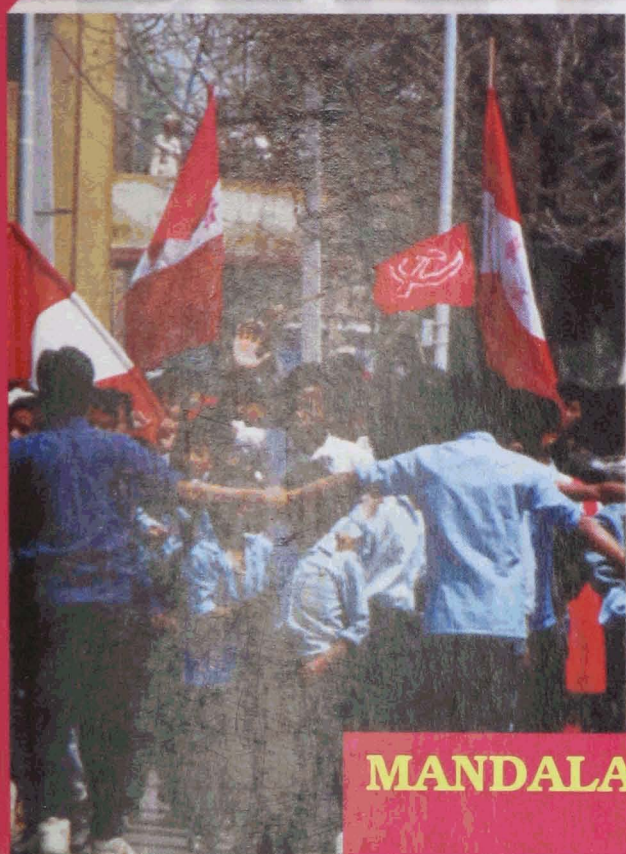


# PEOPLE POLITICS & IDEOLOGY

Democracy and Social Change in Nepal

Martin Hoftun, William Raeper and John Whelpton



MANDALA BOOK POINT



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*Martin Hoftun, William Raeper*  
*and*  
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# ABBREVIATIONS

ANRCC	Akhil Nepal Revolutionary Co-ordination Committee
BVNC	Back to the Village National Campaign
BYVY	'Build Your Village Yourself' programme
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CDO	Chief District Officer
CEDA	Centre for Economic Development and Administration, Tribhuvan University
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Research and Development, Tribhuvan University
CNAS	Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University
CPN (M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist)
CPN (M-L)	Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist)
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
DREFDEN	Development Research for a Democratic Nepal
FO	Foreign Office, U.K.
FOPHUR	Forum for the Protection of Human Rights
HURON	Human Rights Organisation of Nepal
IIDS	Institute for Integrated Development Studies
INSEC	Informal Sector Service Centre
NDP	National Democratic Party
NESP	National Education System Plan
NWPP	Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteer
PD	Nepal Press Digest
POLSAN	Political Science Association of Nepal
PPEC	Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing (Indian government's intelligence agency)
RNAC	Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation
SEARCH	Service Extension and Action Research for Communities in the Hills
ULF	United Left Front
UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
UNPM	United National People's Movement
UPF	United People's Front
VDC	Village Development Committee
VS	Vikram Sambat (official Nepalese era, commencing in 57 B.C.)

# INTRODUCTION

Democratic politics are a recent phenomenon in Nepal. The country was never a colony, and foreign influence was until 1950 kept to a bare minimum. Isolationism was the main principle of government policy from the early 19th century onwards. A few educated individuals in the capital, Kathmandu, were influenced by ideas from abroad, coming in as a small trickle during the first half of the 20th century, and a larger number had served abroad as Gurkha soldiers, but most of the population knew of no other existence than their own, governed by the strict Hindu caste laws codified by the rulers in the Muluki Ain ('Law of the Land') of 1854. The ruler, the maharaja, and his family had supreme power, and the country and its population, were legally his private property. This only came to an end with the 1951 revolution which toppled the Rana regime and at least in principle introduced multi-party democracy. Thus Nepal's modern period really starts only in 1950. The process of modernization which in India began in the late 19th century was in Nepal put into motion only towards the middle of the 20th century.

The history of democracy in Nepal, which is the subject of this study, is thus limited to the last half-century. The story begins with the opening of the country to the outside world in 1950-51 and climaxes with the 1990 revolution and the replacement of Palace rule with parliamentary democracy. The similarities and differences between these two revolutions and the changes in Nepalese society in the intervening years will provide the major focus. Though a few individuals were influenced by democratic ideas even before 1950, this was the period in which these ideas took root and democratic institutions were introduced and established in the country. In 1950, we are on the one hand confronted with a rapidly changing world order with de-colonization, democratization, and the growth of communism. On the other hand we also see a society subject to centuries of isolation and immersed in tradition. It is in the interaction between these two facets that democracy in Nepal developed.

Crucial for an understanding of Nepal's modern period is not only the development of political ideas within the country, but also its geo-political position and relations with its two neighbours, India and China. Keenly aware of the realities of Nepal's position in relation to these two giants, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler who unified Nepal in 1768,

said that his country was like a "yam ( a fruit) between two boulders"<sup>1</sup>. Just prior to the beginning of our period in 1950, both these countries had undergone dramatic changes. In 1947 India became independent and three years later it adopted full-fledged parliamentary democracy. In 1949, the communists came to power in China, and in 1950 they brought Tibet under their control. As a result of these events the interests of India and China in the Himalayan region changed. The influence of both these countries on the development of democracy in Nepal is crucial, though particularly that of Nepal's southern neighbour, India, which repeatedly tried to extend its economic and political dominance in the region.

A wide range of political forces were at work during this period, but the most important seemed to be the following three: the monarchy, India, and the newly established political parties. Most of the time these could be labeled respectively as the traditional, external, and progressive forces in Nepalese politics. Though sometimes these labels did not correspond totally; in certain situations the king could for instance seem progressive while the political parties seemed bound up in tradition. At times one of these forces would have the upper hand at the expense of the others. Generally, however, all three were present and active in Nepalese politics during the whole period.

Bound up with these forces and their interaction are three questions which this study attempts to answer. First, did the development of democracy in this period ever have any mass appeal, or was it simply a matter of a small elite trying to fulfill their political aspirations? Second, was democracy in Nepal an entity imposed by forces outside the country, or was it a genuine Nepalese movement developed from within? And third, what were the political ideas and goals of the democratic movement in Nepal and how far did these correspond to the realities of Nepalese society? To answer these questions it is necessary to look both at the roots of democratic ideas in Nepal, and at the process of democratization in the country.

A principal hypothesis of this study is thus that democracy when it was first introduced in connection with the 1950/51 revolution was almost entirely imposed from outside the country, mainly by the Indian government. Secondly, that following the revolution of 1951, came a forty year period of rapid modernization, economic development and educational expansion which fundamentally changed Nepalese society. Thirdly, that, despite significant foreign involvement in the 1990

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1 King Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Dibya Upadesh*, in Bal Krishna Pokhrel (ed.), *Panch Say Barsha*, Kathmandu: Sajha, 2043 V.S.(1986-7), p.157.

revolution this was largely a Nepalese movement and marked the beginning of mass politics in the country. This second revolution in Nepal's modern period did not only come as a result of a raised level of political consciousness. The revolution itself made the people politically conscious.

The argument is thus that democracy in Nepal developed through the combination of forces and impulses from the outside, and internal changes. In the first phase of its development, starting with the 1950/51 revolution, it was mainly the former. In the latter phase culminating in the 1990 revolution, it was mainly the latter. It is the forty years of modernization between these two revolutions that made them significantly different from each other. These forty years of rapid economic and educational development had politically mobilized the Nepalese people to a level which made the 1990 revolution possible.

Central concepts in this study will be: modernization, revolution, and democracy. Although each one of these three concepts virtually has its own sub-discipline within the social sciences, this book will, for the most part avoid theoretical discussion of the terms. However, since all three are employed throughout this study, working definitions are necessary now.

'Revolution' is used as a term to describe the two sequences of radical political change which took place in Nepal from November 1950 to February 1951, and again from February to April 1990. Many scholars would not accept this usage, since they define 'revolution' as a total re-ordering of society.<sup>2</sup> In this book, however, the term is used purely in its original meaning, that of sudden change. Modernization is used to describe gradual economic development, educational expansion, and cultural change which took place throughout the whole period. With the concept of democracy, however, a more thorough discussion is unavoidable. The literal meaning of 'democracy' is 'rule by the people', or, in other words, a political system in which ultimate authority is shared equally by all members of the community. There are differing interpretations of what this means in practice. Sometimes, especially when a community is united in a common struggle, the notion of 'people's rule' appears quite straightforward as 'the people' is seen as a single entity with an undivided purpose. In a complex society, however, conflicts of interest between different individuals and groups are the norm whilst the power to make day-to-day decisions is distributed very unequally. An alternative

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2 An attitude well-exemplified by Louise Brown's verdict on the 1990 People's Movement: 'it only mimicked a revolution' (T.Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.222.)

conception of democracy is therefore the pluralist one in which everyone is legally free to advance their own opinions and in which competition for support between different political parties aggregates the many conflicting interests. Because such a system confers equality before the law but not equality of actual power, some people argue that true democracy is a system in which everyone takes an active part in the decisions affecting their own life through discussion and, if no consensus can be reached, by voting. This is obviously more difficult to achieve in large political units and advocates of this third type of democracy are therefore often strong advocates of decentralisation and local autonomy.

In this study, when the reference is to political institutions 'democracy' will normally be used in the second, pluralist sense. It should, however, be borne in mind that, for those using the word as a rallying cry, its emotional force often derives from one or both of the other two meanings.

In the Nepalese context, all these complexities are reinforced by local factors. At a practical level a multi-party democratic system may seem to contradict the values and principles of traditional Nepalese society. With its visions of a pluralist society and with conflict and change as its basic principles the former is in conflict with traditional ideas of consensus and continuity. This may have been one underlying cause for the different interpretations of democracy in Nepal.

Democratic ideas seem to take three distinct forms in the period studied; that of parliamentary multi-party democracy, the communist idea of a people's democracy, and the concept of Panchayat democracy. The latter form was introduced by King Mahendra in 1960 and was the system in operation until the 1990 revolution.

This 'non-party' Panchayat system was introduced as supposedly a type of democracy more suited to the Nepalese situation.<sup>3</sup> But was this alternative to a multi-party system real democracy? At least officially the Panchayat system was claimed to be even more democratic than the multi-party system having its base at the grassroot level, that of the village panchayats<sup>4</sup>. It aimed at least in principle to do away with the elite democracy of the 1950s. Building on traditional ideas of consensus the Panchayat democracy was presented as a better political system for the development of the country, avoiding the rifts and conflicts of a party

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3 King Mahendra's 5 January 1961 broadcast, announcing the banning of political parties, in Grishma Bahadur Devkota, *Nepalko Rajnaitik Darpan*, part 2, Kathmandu: Arjun Bahadur Devkota, 1980, pp.699-700.

4 The *gaun panchayat*, meaning the village council, was the lowest level in the four tiered Panchayat system, explained in more detail in chapter two.

system. As a democratic system the Panchayat regime eventually failed, and in 1990 it was toppled by a popular movement demanding democratic rights. Whether or not it was ever meant to be genuinely democratic, the arguments advanced for it, like some of those for communist 'people's democracy', drew upon the notions of an undivided people and of direct democracy described above.

The conflict between the Panchayat system and the multi-party system seemed also to reflect a more general conflict in Nepalese politics throughout the whole period between nationalism and democracy. Such a conflict seemed to be based partly on the assumption that democracy could be seen as a western imposition alien to Nepalese society. More important than this, however, was the link between the introduction of multi-party democracy and Indian dominance in Nepal. As a result nationalism and parliamentary democracy, the two main poles of Nepalese politics in this period, were often at odds with each other.

The period to be studied starts with the 1950/51 revolution and ends with an account of the 1990 *janandolan* (people's movement) and of the functioning during its first six years of the democratic system established as its result. This period will be divided into three chronological stages.

The first stage - from 1950 to 1955 corresponds to the revolution of 1950/51 and the immediate aftermath. These were the years in which democracy at least in principle was first introduced and largely imposed from the outside.

The second stage from 1955 to 1989 can be called that of evolution. This was a long period of gradual modernization which radically changed Nepalese society in the economic and cultural sphere. At a political level these years witnessed the trial and failure of several forms of democracy, and rather than evolution one might talk about ideological regression or revival. The third stage from 1989 to 1995 is one of revolution once more, followed by consolidation of multi-party democracy but also, to some extent, by disillusionment.

Owing both to the nature of the subject and the length of the period studied certain limitations are necessary. The main focus will be on the two revolutions in Nepal's modern history: the 1950/51 revolution which opened the country to ideas and impulses from outside, and the 1990 revolution which marked the beginning of democratic mass politics. The latter event will be covered in the greatest detail, since it was during the fifteen months from February 1990 to May 1991 that almost all the elements of the more than forty-year-long democratic struggle in Nepal again came to the surface. Central to the analysis will be a comparison of

the later and earlier revolutions, which had so many elements in common though at the same time were fundamentally different events.

The approach taken also reflects the circumstances in which the book was written. The project was originally conceived by Martin Hoftun as a doctoral dissertation, which he planned to submit to Oxford University at the end of 1992. The study was intended to end with the 1991 election and to incorporate much of the material on the events of 1990 and 1991 which he and William Raeper had already included in their jointly-authored study, *Spring Awakening*.<sup>5</sup> That book embodied Martin's own research effort but his collaborator put the text into its final shape. On 31 July 1992, just before the publication of *Spring Awakening*, both men died in a plane crash in Nepal. The material which Martin had left behind was put in order by his father, Odd Hoftun, and handed over to John Whelpton, who had never met either Martin or William Raeper but was already working in the same field.

Before his death, Martin Hoftun had completed drafts of this introduction and of the first chapter, covering the period 1950 to 1955. He had left only a skeleton plan for the rest of the work, principally indicating where he intended to use different sections of *Spring Awakening*. In the absence of accessible archives on the Nepalese side, he made extensive use in Chapter 1 of letters sent to London between 1950 and 1956 by the British Embassy in Kathmandu and now held in the Public Record Office at Kew. For the history of the subsequent thirty years he intended, as in *Spring Awakening*, to incorporate material from interviews he had conducted in Nepal between 1988 and 1992, principally with members of the political elite. These interviews, partly in Nepali and partly in English, had usually been tape-recorded, then transcribed and if necessary translated.

In completing the project, this foregrounding of the memories and opinions of the Nepalese actors themselves has been retained. Despite their subjectivity, which Martin Hoftun himself was fully aware of, their vividness and immediacy is the best way of conveying the 'feel' of politics in Nepal. To try to provide as rounded and reliable picture of the period as possible, the interviews have been supplemented from published sources. These include a number of studies of high quality, perhaps the most authoritative still being Bhuvan Joshi's and Leo Rose's account of the 1950-1962 period in *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*. For the most recent developments (1991-95) the major sources were the *Nepal Press*

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5 William Raeper and Martin Hoftun, *Spring Awakening - An Account of the 1990 Revolution in Nepal*, New Delhi: Viking, 1992.



*Digest* and two other weekly publications, *Saptahik Bimarsha* and *Spotlight*.

The main body of the present book consists of four chronological and four thematic chapters. Chapter 1 describes and attempts to analyze the 1950/51 revolution, the factors leading up to it, and the years that followed until King Tribhuvan's death in 1955. This is followed by a description of the whole period from 1955 to 1989 in Chapter 2, showing how experiments with different democratic systems from above coincided with the gradual transformation of Nepalese society through economic development, educational expansion, and the influx of new ideas. Chapter 3 includes an amended and expanded version of the account of the *janandolan* and the 1991 election from *Spring Awakening*, while Chapter 4 takes the story up to the establishment of the Congress-led coalition government in September 1995.

The thematic chapters, like Chapter 3, take sections of *Spring Awakening* as their starting point but some of the lengthier interview extracts have been omitted and extensive new material added. The chapters still give special attention to the changes of 1990 to 1991 but now also cover the whole period from 1950 to 1995. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the development of democratic ideas in Nepal. This chapter will deal with the intellectual and ideological undercurrents in Nepalese society which finally came to the surface in the new party politics which took form after the revolution of 1990. Chapter 6 examines foreign, and particularly Indian involvement, asking how important this was for the development of democracy in Nepal. Chapter 7 looks at the key institution for most of these forty-five years, the monarchy, and at its relationship to constitutional development. Finally, Chapter 8 deals with the ethnic, religious and regional dimension in the development of democracy. This is an issue probably of less importance for the average Nepalese than for intellectuals both in and outside the country but one which nevertheless attracted much attention during and after both the 1951 and 1990 revolutions.

As with all books on Nepal, finding a totally satisfactory method of transliterating Nepali words was impossible. There is a standard system used in academic work to represent the Devanagari script in which Nepali, like Hindi and Sanskrit, is written and books not intended for language specialists often make use of this, minus its diacritics. The result is, however, inconsistent with 19th. century Romanizations still commonly employed by Nepalese themselves, who, for example, generally write `u' rather than `a' for the short vowel *a*, when this is pronounced similarly to English `u' in `sung'. This book uses `a' in such cases, but standard

academic convention has been modified in some others. In particular, `sh' is normally used to represent both **ś** and **ṣ**, whilst `s' is employed only for **s**; the three Devanagari characters originally represented palatal, retroflex and dental sounds respectively but in modern spoken Nepali are normally pronounced identically. An exception is made for the consonant cluster in words such as **raṣṭra** (nation), which is written `str'. `Ch' is employed both for **c** and **ch** (often written by Nepalese as `ch' and `chh'), but `cch' is used when these characters occur together; the two sounds are roughly those of English `ch' in `exchange' and in `change' respectively. The Devanagari character **v** is transliterated as `b' or `w' according to current pronunciation. The short vowel **a** `inherent' in a consonant at the end of a syllable is not transliterated in colloquial words if it is not heard in normal speech (e.g. `Bijay', not `Bijaya'). Finally, when citing works published by Nepalese writers in English, the spelling they themselves prefer is used.

Nepali proper names (including those of organisations and specific laws) are given in Roman type whilst other Nepali words are normally italicized, e.g. *Praja Parishad* (`People's Council' - the name of a political party), but *satyagraha* (non-violent struggle). An initial capital (`Panchayat') is used to distinguish the political system in Nepal in 1962-1990 from a local council (`panchayat') set up under that system.

The form `Nepalese' has been used throughout as an adjective and noun of nationality and `Nepali' used only when referring to the Nepali language. However, `Nepali' has been retained in proper names well-established in English, e.g. `the Nepali Congress'.

As John Whelpton was given full authority by Martin Hoftun's parents to alter the original drafts, he is therefore solely responsible for the shortcomings of the finished product. In contrast, credit for anything of value in the book belongs not just to the three authors but also to many friends and colleagues. Krishna Hachhethu, who had already helped with many specific queries, kindly agreed to go twice through the entire text even though he was busy with research work of his own. Abhi Subedi and his family provided, as usual, constant support and encouragement and also brought author and Mandala together. Odd Hoftun provided both valuable comments on the text and also help with the cost of the work. Thanks are also due to Lok Raj Baral, Krishna Ghimire, Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Harka Gurung, Kiyoko Ogura, Madhab Maharjan, Triratna Manandhar, Stephen Mikesell, Pratyoush Onta, Rishikesh Shaha, Indira Shrestha, Deepak Tamang and Nirmal Tuladhar. John Whelpton has also to thank the many Nepalese politicians and ordinary citizens who agreed to be interviewed for the book. Last but not

least, he is grateful to his wife, mother and brother and to the Subedi family for patiently putting up with so much disruption whilst work was in progress.



## CHAPTER 1

# THE END OF ISOLATION, 1950-1955.

### Introduction

On 6 November 1950 King Tribhuvan left his palace in Kathmandu on what was supposed to be a royal hunting expedition. Permission for this had been granted by the prime minister, a member of the powerful Rana family who had monopolised political power in Nepal since 1846 and kept the monarch, the traditional ruler of the Shah dynasty, as a mere symbolic head of state. The royal party, consisting of all the members of the king's family except his second grandson Prince Gyanendra, never reached their supposed destination, the king's private hunting grounds a few kilometers north-east of the city centre. Instead, the cortege of cars turned off the main road and into the compound of the Indian embassy. There, King Tribhuvan immediately applied for political asylum.

This incident triggered off the revolution of 1950/51, the event which brought Nepal's long isolation to an end and, at least in principle, introduced the country to multi-party democracy. Five days later King Tribhuvan was flown from Kathmandu to New Delhi in an Indian aircraft. Simultaneously the rebel army of the Nepali Congress, a political party formed by the exiled Nepali community in India, crossed Nepal's southern borders. The Rana rulers in Kathmandu seemingly taken by surprise immediately tried to place the infant prince Gyanendra on the throne, but failed to obtain international recognition.

Meanwhile in New Delhi the Indian government led by Pandit Nehru set to work to solve the political crisis in neighbouring Nepal. In a memorandum on 8 December to the prime minister of Nepal, Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, the rulers in New Delhi clearly spelled out their view on the situation, and their determination to press for democratic reforms in Nepal.<sup>1</sup> This was the first step towards what would later be called 'the Delhi compromise', an agreement between King Tribhuvan, the Rana government in Kathmandu and the Nepali Congress, engineered by the Indian rulers. On 16 January a cease fire was introduced between the Nepali Congress forces and the Rana government. And on 15 February King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu declaring the end of the

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1 Memoire presented by Indian Government to Nepalese representatives at the conclusion of negotiations in Delhi, 8/12/1950, FO 766/33.

Rana government and the beginning of a new era in politics. On 18 February the new coalition government consisting of members both from the Rana family and the Nepali Congress was sworn in by King Tribhuvan. The final result of the revolution was made legal with the Interim Government Act of 11 April 1951. This introduced parliamentary democracy along the lines of the Indian model, and promised elections for a constituent assembly.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will examine the events of the 1950/51 revolution, their main causes, and also the outcome of the revolution in the period from 1951 until King Tribhuvan's death in 1955. These years were characterized by King Tribhuvan's active involvement in politics, by society's first direct encounter with the ideas of democracy, and also by heavy Indian involvement in the country. An attempt will be made to answer four questions. Was this merely a palace revolution substituting one ruling elite for another, or was the 1950 revolution a general democratic revolt against the autocratic Rana regime? Was democracy in this period only a foreign imposition which never took root, or was there a real interest in genuine democratic reforms? Did the actors in this drama, King Tribhuvan, the leaders and members of the new political parties, and the Ranas, have any real say in what happened in the period, or were they mere puppets in the hands of the Indian government? Were these years an inconsequential interlude of reform just followed by the return of traditional rule by King Mahendra, or were they the beginning of real change in society?

## **The Rana Regime and its Opponents**

The Rana regime dated back to 1846 when Jang Bahadur Kunwar, later to take the name Rana,<sup>3</sup> eliminated all his enemies and possible competitors in the bloody Kot massacre. This legendary figure was not only a master manipulator and a ruthless power broker, he was also a remarkable statesman. Within a few years he was able to consolidate all power within the Rana family and create a system of government which

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2 For a summary of the Act, many articles of which were copied directly from the Indian constitution, see Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal - A Political History 1769-1955*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, vol.2, pp.251-4.

3 The Rajput name of 'Rana' proclaimed supposed descent from the rulers of Mewar, who had been champions of Hinduism against the Muslim conquerors of north India and whom the Shah dynasty also claimed as its ancestors. For a detailed discussion, see John Whelpton, 'The Ancestors of Jang Bahadur Rana: History, Propaganda and Legend' in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.14, no.3 (August 1987), p.161-191.

lasted 104 years.<sup>4</sup> This brought an end to a tumultuous period in the country's history characterized by court intrigue and political violence. Since Nepal's defeat in the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-1816, individuals and factions among a small group of influential high caste families in Kathmandu had been continuously squabbling for power. Political power had gradually slipped away from the throne, which most of these years were filled by a minor, and the country's unity established by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768 had been threatened. To check any possible contenders for political power the Rana regime restricted the highest positions to members of the Rana family itself and tightened the rules and control systems under which government servants had to work. They made thorough use of the existing *pajani* system under which all appointments came up for annual review. Officials were frequently transferred to new positions, making it very difficult for individuals to build up their own power basis.

Total control in a static society was the base of Rana rule. The two main means of maintaining this situation were the policy of isolation and Hindu social order. The creation of social codes based on the classical caste laws of Manu<sup>5</sup> had started long before Jang Bahadur Rana. But only with the Muluki Ain ('Law of the Land') in 1854, were all these rules collected and systematized into a national social code. It had hitherto been usual to refer to the country's different ethnic groups or castes (traditional usage made no distinction between the two concepts) as 'the 4 *varnas* and 36 castes.'<sup>6</sup> Now each group's allotted place in the hierarchy was spelled out clearly in the code. Grounded in the Hindu idea of ritual purity, the Muluki Ain regulated the lives of every citizen from birth to death, making social or political mobility almost impossible.

The Himalayan peaks in the north and the malarial jungle of the Terai in the south formed natural barriers to maintain Nepal's isolation.

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4 For a detailed account of the beginning of Rana rule, see John Whelpton, *Kings, Soldiers and Priests*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1991 and, for the Rana period as a whole, Adrian Sever, *Nepal under the Ranas*, New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1993.

5 The verse treatise ascribed to the legendary king Manu, the most authoritative of the *dharmashastras* (books of religious law), probably received its final form in the 2nd. or 3rd. century A.D. (A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that Was India*, Calcutta: Rupa, 1987, p.113).

6 Both *varna* and *jat* are normally translated as 'caste'. The former refers to the four-fold division of society found in the Vedas: Brahmans, Kshatriyas (from which the Nepali 'Chetri' derives), Vaishyas and Sudras. The *jats* were the smaller divisions which were and are the salient social units in Nepal and India. Different *jats* were classified as belonging to a particular *varna*: e.g. Thakuris and Chhetris both ranked as Kshatriyas.





# **PEOPLE, POLITICS & IDEOLOGY**

Democracy and Social Change in Nepal

Edited by  
Martin Hoftun, William Raeper  
and John Whelpton

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= and  
John Whelpton*

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ANRCC	Akhil Nepal Revolutionary Co-ordination Committee
BVNC	Back to the Village National Campaign
BYVY	'Build Your Village Yourself' programme
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CDO	Chief District Officer
CEDA	Centre for Economic Development and Administration, Tribhuvan University
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Research and Development, Tribhuvan University
CNAS	Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University
CPN (M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist)
CPN (M-L)	Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist)
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
DREFDEN	Development Research for a Democratic Nepal
FO	Foreign Office, U.K.
FOPHUR	Forum for the Protection of Human Rights
HURON	Human Rights Organisation of Nepal
IIDS	Institute for Integrated Development Studies
INSEC	Informal Sector Service Centre
NDP	National Democratic Party
NESP	National Education System Plan
NWPP	Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteer
PD	Nepal Press Digest
POLSAN	Political Science Association of Nepal
PPEC	Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing (Indian government's intelligence agency)
RNAC	Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation
SEARCH	Service Extension and Action Research for Communities in the Hills
ULF	United Left Front
UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
UNPM	United National People's Movement
UPF	United People's Front
VDC	Village Development Committee
VS	Vikram Sambat (official Nepalese era, commencing in 57 B.C.)

# INTRODUCTION

Democratic politics are a recent phenomenon in Nepal. The country was never a colony, and foreign influence was until 1950 kept to a bare minimum. Isolationism was the main principle of government policy from the early 19th century onwards. A few educated individuals in the capital, Kathmandu, were influenced by ideas from abroad, coming in as a small trickle during the first half of the 20th century, and a larger number had served abroad as Gurkha soldiers, but most of the population knew of no other existence than their own, governed by the strict Hindu caste laws codified by the rulers in the Muluki Ain ('Law of the Land') of 1854. The ruler, the maharaja, and his family had supreme power, and the country and its population, were legally his private property. This only came to an end with the 1951 revolution which toppled the Rana regime and at least in principle introduced multi-party democracy. Thus Nepal's modern period really starts only in 1950. The process of modernization which in India began in the late 19th century was in Nepal put into motion only towards the middle of the 20th century.

The history of democracy in Nepal, which is the subject of this study, is thus limited to the last half-century. The story begins with the opening of the country to the outside world in 1950-51 and climaxes with the 1990 revolution and the replacement of Palace rule with parliamentary democracy. The similarities and differences between these two revolutions and the changes in Nepalese society in the intervening years will provide the major focus. Though a few individuals were influenced by democratic ideas even before 1950, this was the period in which these ideas took root and democratic institutions were introduced and established in the country. In 1950, we are on the one hand confronted with a rapidly changing world order with de-colonization, democratization, and the growth of communism. On the other hand we also see a society subject to centuries of isolation and immersed in tradition. It is in the interaction between these two facets that democracy in Nepal developed.

Crucial for an understanding of Nepal's modern period is not only the development of political ideas within the country, but also its geo-political position and relations with its two neighbours, India and China. Keenly aware of the realities of Nepal's position in relation to these two giants, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler who unified Nepal in 1768,

said that his country was like a "yam ( a fruit) between two boulders"<sup>1</sup>. Just prior to the beginning of our period in 1950, both these countries had undergone dramatic changes. In 1947 India became independent and three years later it adopted full-fledged parliamentary democracy. In 1949, the communists came to power in China, and in 1950 they brought Tibet under their control. As a result of these events the interests of India and China in the Himalayan region changed. The influence of both these countries on the development of democracy in Nepal is crucial, though particularly that of Nepal's southern neighbour, India, which repeatedly tried to extend its economic and political dominance in the region.

A wide range of political forces were at work during this period, but the most important seemed to be the following three: the monarchy, India, and the newly established political parties. Most of the time these could be labeled respectively as the traditional, external, and progressive forces in Nepalese politics. Though sometimes these labels did not correspond totally; in certain situations the king could for instance seem progressive while the political parties seemed bound up in tradition. At times one of these forces would have the upper hand at the expense of the others. Generally, however, all three were present and active in Nepalese politics during the whole period.

Bound up with these forces and their interaction are three questions which this study attempts to answer. First, did the development of democracy in this period ever have any mass appeal, or was it simply a matter of a small elite trying to fulfill their political aspirations? Second, was democracy in Nepal an entity imposed by forces outside the country, or was it a genuine Nepalese movement developed from within? And third, what were the political ideas and goals of the democratic movement in Nepal and how far did these correspond to the realities of Nepalese society? To answer these questions it is necessary to look both at the roots of democratic ideas in Nepal, and at the process of democratization in the country.

A principal hypothesis of this study is thus that democracy when it was first introduced in connection with the 1950/51 revolution was almost entirely imposed from outside the country, mainly by the Indian government. Secondly, that following the revolution of 1951, came a forty year period of rapid modernization, economic development and educational expansion which fundamentally changed Nepalese society. Thirdly, that, despite significant foreign involvement in the 1990

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1 King Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Dibya Upadesh*, in Bal Krishna Pokhrel (ed.), *Panch Say Barsha*, Kathmandu: Sajha, 2043 V.S.(1986-7), p.157.

revolution this was largely a Nepalese movement and marked the beginning of mass politics in the country. This second revolution in Nepal's modern period did not only come as a result of a raised level of political consciousness. The revolution itself made the people politically conscious.

The argument is thus that democracy in Nepal developed through the combination of forces and impulses from the outside, and internal changes. In the first phase of its development, starting with the 1950/51 revolution, it was mainly the former. In the latter phase culminating in the 1990 revolution, it was mainly the latter. It is the forty years of modernization between these two revolutions that made them significantly different from each other. These forty years of rapid economic and educational development had politically mobilized the Nepalese people to a level which made the 1990 revolution possible.

Central concepts in this study will be: modernization, revolution, and democracy. Although each one of these three concepts virtually has its own sub-discipline within the social sciences, this book will, for the most part avoid theoretical discussion of the terms. However, since all three are employed throughout this study, working definitions are necessary now.

'Revolution' is used as a term to describe the two sequences of radical political change which took place in Nepal from November 1950 to February 1951, and again from February to April 1990. Many scholars would not accept this usage, since they define 'revolution' as a total re-ordering of society.<sup>2</sup> In this book, however, the term is used purely in its original meaning, that of sudden change. Modernization is used to describe gradual economic development, educational expansion, and cultural change which took place throughout the whole period. With the concept of democracy, however, a more thorough discussion is unavoidable. The literal meaning of 'democracy' is 'rule by the people', or, in other words, a political system in which ultimate authority is shared equally by all members of the community. There are differing interpretations of what this means in practice. Sometimes, especially when a community is united in a common struggle, the notion of 'people's rule' appears quite straightforward as 'the people' is seen as a single entity with an undivided purpose. In a complex society, however, conflicts of interest between different individuals and groups are the norm whilst the power to make day-to-day decisions is distributed very unequally. An alternative

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2 An attitude well-exemplified by Louise Brown's verdict on the 1990 People's Movement: 'it only mimicked a revolution' (T.Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.222.)

conception of democracy is therefore the pluralist one in which everyone is legally free to advance their own opinions and in which competition for support between different political parties aggregates the many conflicting interests. Because such a system confers equality before the law but not equality of actual power, some people argue that true democracy is a system in which everyone takes an active part in the decisions affecting their own life through discussion and, if no consensus can be reached, by voting. This is obviously more difficult to achieve in large political units and advocates of this third type of democracy are therefore often strong advocates of decentralisation and local autonomy.

In this study, when the reference is to political institutions 'democracy' will normally be used in the second, pluralist sense. It should, however, be borne in mind that, for those using the word as a rallying cry, its emotional force often derives from one or both of the other two meanings.

In the Nepalese context, all these complexities are reinforced by local factors. At a practical level a multi-party democratic system may seem to contradict the values and principles of traditional Nepalese society. With its visions of a pluralist society and with conflict and change as its basic principles the former is in conflict with traditional ideas of consensus and continuity. This may have been one underlying cause for the different interpretations of democracy in Nepal.

Democratic ideas seem to take three distinct forms in the period studied; that of parliamentary multi-party democracy, the communist idea of a people's democracy, and the concept of Panchayat democracy. The latter form was introduced by King Mahendra in 1960 and was the system in operation until the 1990 revolution.

This 'non-party' Panchayat system was introduced as supposedly a type of democracy more suited to the Nepalese situation.<sup>3</sup> But was this alternative to a multi-party system real democracy? At least officially the Panchayat system was claimed to be even more democratic than the multi-party system having its base at the grassroot level, that of the village panchayats<sup>4</sup>. It aimed at least in principle to do away with the elite democracy of the 1950s. Building on traditional ideas of consensus the Panchayat democracy was presented as a better political system for the development of the country, avoiding the rifts and conflicts of a party

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3 King Mahendra's 5 January 1961 broadcast, announcing the banning of political parties, in Grishma Bahadur Devkota, *Nepalko Rajnaitik Darpan*, part 2, Kathmandu: Arjun Bahadur Devkota, 1980, pp.699-700.

4 The *gaun panchayat*, meaning the village council, was the lowest level in the four tiered Panchayat system, explained in more detail in chapter two.



system. As a democratic system the Panchayat regime eventually failed, and in 1990 it was toppled by a popular movement demanding democratic rights. Whether or not it was ever meant to be genuinely democratic, the arguments advanced for it, like some of those for communist 'people's democracy', drew upon the notions of an undivided people and of direct democracy described above.

The conflict between the Panchayat system and the multi-party system seemed also to reflect a more general conflict in Nepalese politics throughout the whole period between nationalism and democracy. Such a conflict seemed to be based partly on the assumption that democracy could be seen as a western imposition alien to Nepalese society. More important than this, however, was the link between the introduction of multi-party democracy and Indian dominance in Nepal. As a result nationalism and parliamentary democracy, the two main poles of Nepalese politics in this period, were often at odds with each other.

The period to be studied starts with the 1950/51 revolution and ends with an account of the 1990 *janandolan* (people's movement) and of the functioning during its first six years of the democratic system established as its result. This period will be divided into three chronological stages.

The first stage - from 1950 to 1955 corresponds to the revolution of 1950/51 and the immediate aftermath. These were the years in which democracy at least in principle was first introduced and largely imposed from the outside.

The second stage from 1955 to 1989 can be called that of evolution. This was a long period of gradual modernization which radically changed Nepalese society in the economic and cultural sphere. At a political level these years witnessed the trial and failure of several forms of democracy, and rather than evolution one might talk about ideological regression or revival. The third stage from 1989 to 1995 is one of revolution once more, followed by consolidation of multi-party democracy but also, to some extent, by disillusionment.

Owing both to the nature of the subject and the length of the period studied certain limitations are necessary. The main focus will be on the two revolutions in Nepal's modern history: the 1950/51 revolution which opened the country to ideas and impulses from outside, and the 1990 revolution which marked the beginning of democratic mass politics. The latter event will be covered in the greatest detail, since it was during the fifteen months from February 1990 to May 1991 that almost all the elements of the more than forty-year-long democratic struggle in Nepal again came to the surface. Central to the analysis will be a comparison of

the later and earlier revolutions, which had so many elements in common though at the same time were fundamentally different events.

The approach taken also reflects the circumstances in which the book was written. The project was originally conceived by Martin Hoftun as a doctoral dissertation, which he planned to submit to Oxford University at the end of 1992. The study was intended to end with the 1991 election and to incorporate much of the material on the events of 1990 and 1991 which he and William Raeper had already included in their jointly-authored study, *Spring Awakening*.<sup>5</sup> That book embodied Martin's own research effort but his collaborator put the text into its final shape. On 31 July 1992, just before the publication of *Spring Awakening*, both men died in a plane crash in Nepal. The material which Martin had left behind was put in order by his father, Odd Hoftun, and handed over to John Whelpton, who had never met either Martin or William Raeper but was already working in the same field.

Before his death, Martin Hoftun had completed drafts of this introduction and of the first chapter, covering the period 1950 to 1955. He had left only a skeleton plan for the rest of the work, principally indicating where he intended to use different sections of *Spring Awakening*. In the absence of accessible archives on the Nepalese side, he made extensive use in Chapter 1 of letters sent to London between 1950 and 1956 by the British Embassy in Kathmandu and now held in the Public Record Office at Kew. For the history of the subsequent thirty years he intended, as in *Spring Awakening*, to incorporate material from interviews he had conducted in Nepal between 1988 and 1992, principally with members of the political elite. These interviews, partly in Nepali and partly in English, had usually been tape-recorded, then transcribed and if necessary translated.

In completing the project, this foregrounding of the memories and opinions of the Nepalese actors themselves has been retained. Despite their subjectivity, which Martin Hoftun himself was fully aware of, their vividness and immediacy is the best way of conveying the 'feel' of politics in Nepal. To try to provide as rounded and reliable picture of the period as possible, the interviews have been supplemented from published sources. These include a number of studies of high quality, perhaps the most authoritative still being Bhuvan Joshi's and Leo Rose's account of the 1950-1962 period in *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*. For the most recent developments (1991-95) the major sources were the *Nepal Press*

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5 William Raeper and Martin Hoftun, *Spring Awakening - An Account of the 1990 Revolution in Nepal*, New Delhi: Viking, 1992.

*Digest* and two other weekly publications, *Saptahik Bimarsha* and *Spotlight*.

The main body of the present book consists of four chronological and four thematic chapters. Chapter 1 describes and attempts to analyze the 1950/51 revolution, the factors leading up to it, and the years that followed until King Tribhuvan's death in 1955. This is followed by a description of the whole period from 1955 to 1989 in Chapter 2, showing how experiments with different democratic systems from above coincided with the gradual transformation of Nepalese society through economic development, educational expansion, and the influx of new ideas. Chapter 3 includes an amended and expanded version of the account of the *janandolan* and the 1991 election from *Spring Awakening*, while Chapter 4 takes the story up to the establishment of the Congress-led coalition government in September 1995.

The thematic chapters, like Chapter 3, take sections of *Spring Awakening* as their starting point but some of the lengthier interview extracts have been omitted and extensive new material added. The chapters still give special attention to the changes of 1990 to 1991 but now also cover the whole period from 1950 to 1995. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the development of democratic ideas in Nepal. This chapter will deal with the intellectual and ideological undercurrents in Nepalese society which finally came to the surface in the new party politics which took form after the revolution of 1990. Chapter 6 examines foreign, and particularly Indian involvement, asking how important this was for the development of democracy in Nepal. Chapter 7 looks at the key institution for most of these forty-five years, the monarchy, and at its relationship to constitutional development. Finally, Chapter 8 deals with the ethnic, religious and regional dimension in the development of democracy. This is an issue probably of less importance for the average Nepalese than for intellectuals both in and outside the country but one which nevertheless attracted much attention during and after both the 1951 and 1990 revolutions.

As with all books on Nepal, finding a totally satisfactory method of transliterating Nepali words was impossible. There is a standard system used in academic work to represent the Devanagari script in which Nepali, like Hindi and Sanskrit, is written and books not intended for language specialists often make use of this, minus its diacritics. The result is, however, inconsistent with 19th. century Romanizations still commonly employed by Nepalese themselves, who, for example, generally write `u' rather than `a' for the short vowel **a**, when this is pronounced similarly to English `u' in `sung'. This book uses `a' in such cases, but standard

academic convention has been modified in some others. In particular, `sh' is normally used to represent both **ś** and **ṣ**, whilst `s' is employed only for **s**; the three Devanagari characters originally represented palatal, retroflex and dental sounds respectively but in modern spoken Nepali are normally pronounced identically. An exception is made for the consonant cluster in words such as **raṣṭra** (nation), which is written `str'. `Ch' is employed both for **c** and **ch** (often written by Nepalese as `ch' and `chh'), but `cch' is used when these characters occur together; the two sounds are roughly those of English `ch' in `exchange' and in `change' respectively. The Devanagari character **v** is transliterated as `b' or `w' according to current pronunciation. The short vowel **a** `inherent' in a consonant at the end of a syllable is not transliterated in colloquial words if it is not heard in normal speech (e.g. `Bijay', not `Bijaya'). Finally, when citing works published by Nepalese writers in English, the spelling they themselves prefer is used.

Nepali proper names (including those of organisations and specific laws) are given in Roman type whilst other Nepali words are normally italicized, e.g. *Praja Parishad* ('People's Council' - the name of a political party), but *satyagraha* (non-violent struggle). An initial capital ('Panchayat') is used to distinguish the political system in Nepal in 1962-1990 from a local council ('panchayat') set up under that system.

The form `Nepalese' has been used throughout as an adjective and noun of nationality and `Nepali' used only when referring to the Nepali language. However, `Nepali' has been retained in proper names well-established in English, e.g. `the Nepali Congress'.

As John Whelpton was given full authority by Martin Hoftun's parents to alter the original drafts, he is therefore solely responsible for the shortcomings of the finished product. In contrast, credit for anything of value in the book belongs not just to the three authors but also to many friends and colleagues. Krishna Hachhethu, who had already helped with many specific queries, kindly agreed to go twice through the entire text even though he was busy with research work of his own. Abhi Subedi and his family provided, as usual, constant support and encouragement and also brought author and Mandala together. Odd Hoftun provided both valuable comments on the text and also help with the cost of the work. Thanks are also due to Lok Raj Baral, Krishna Ghimire, Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Harka Gurung, Kiyoko Ogura, Madhab Maharjan, Triratna Manandhar, Stephen Mikesell, Pratyoush Onta, Rishikesh Shaha, Indira Shrestha, Deepak Tamang and Nirmal Tuladhar. John Whelpton has also to thank the many Nepalese politicians and ordinary citizens who agreed to be interviewed for the book. Last but not

least, he is grateful to his wife, mother and brother and to the Subedi family for patiently putting up with so much disruption whilst work was in progress.



## CHAPTER 1

# THE END OF ISOLATION, 1950-1955.

### Introduction

On 6 November 1950 King Tribhuvan left his palace in Kathmandu on what was supposed to be a royal hunting expedition. Permission for this had been granted by the prime minister, a member of the powerful Rana family who had monopolised political power in Nepal since 1846 and kept the monarch, the traditional ruler of the Shah dynasty, as a mere symbolic head of state. The royal party, consisting of all the members of the king's family except his second grandson Prince Gyanendra, never reached their supposed destination, the king's private hunting grounds a few kilometers north-east of the city centre. Instead, the cortege of cars turned off the main road and into the compound of the Indian embassy. There, King Tribhuvan immediately applied for political asylum.

This incident triggered off the revolution of 1950/51, the event which brought Nepal's long isolation to an end and, at least in principle, introduced the country to multi-party democracy. Five days later King Tribhuvan was flown from Kathmandu to New Delhi in an Indian aircraft. Simultaneously the rebel army of the Nepali Congress, a political party formed by the exiled Nepali community in India, crossed Nepal's southern borders. The Rana rulers in Kathmandu seemingly taken by surprise immediately tried to place the infant prince Gyanendra on the throne, but failed to obtain international recognition.

Meanwhile in New Delhi the Indian government led by Pandit Nehru set to work to solve the political crisis in neighbouring Nepal. In a memorandum on 8 December to the prime minister of Nepal, Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, the rulers in New Delhi clearly spelled out their view on the situation, and their determination to press for democratic reforms in Nepal.<sup>1</sup> This was the first step towards what would later be called 'the Delhi compromise', an agreement between King Tribhuvan, the Rana government in Kathmandu and the Nepali Congress, engineered by the Indian rulers. On 16 January a cease fire was introduced between the Nepali Congress forces and the Rana government. And on 15 February King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu declaring the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> Memoire presented by Indian Government to Nepalese representatives at the conclusion of negotiations in Delhi, 8/12/1950, FO 766/33.

Rana government and the beginning of a new era in politics. On 18 February the new coalition government consisting of members both from the Rana family and the Nepali Congress was sworn in by King Tribhuvan. The final result of the revolution was made legal with the Interim Government Act of 11 April 1951. This introduced parliamentary democracy along the lines of the Indian model, and promised elections for a constituent assembly.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will examine the events of the 1950/51 revolution, their main causes, and also the outcome of the revolution in the period from 1951 until King Tribhuvan's death in 1955. These years were characterized by King Tribhuvan's active involvement in politics, by society's first direct encounter with the ideas of democracy, and also by heavy Indian involvement in the country. An attempt will be made to answer four questions. Was this merely a palace revolution substituting one ruling elite for another, or was the 1950 revolution a general democratic revolt against the autocratic Rana regime? Was democracy in this period only a foreign imposition which never took root, or was there a real interest in genuine democratic reforms? Did the actors in this drama, King Tribhuvan, the leaders and members of the new political parties, and the Ranas, have any real say in what happened in the period, or were they mere puppets in the hands of the Indian government? Were these years an inconsequential interlude of reform just followed by the return of traditional rule by King Mahendra, or were they the beginning of real change in society?

## **The Rana Regime and its Opponents**

The Rana regime dated back to 1846 when Jang Bahadur Kunwar, later to take the name Rana,<sup>3</sup> eliminated all his enemies and possible competitors in the bloody Kot massacre. This legendary figure was not only a master manipulator and a ruthless power broker, he was also a remarkable statesman. Within a few years he was able to consolidate all power within the Rana family and create a system of government which

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2 For a summary of the Act, many articles of which were copied directly from the Indian constitution, see Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal - A Political History 1769-1955*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, vol.2, pp.251-4.

3 The Rajput name of 'Rana' proclaimed supposed descent from the rulers of Mewar, who had been champions of Hinduism against the Muslim conquerors of north India and whom the Shah dynasty also claimed as its ancestors. For a detailed discussion, see John Whelpton, 'The Ancestors of Jang Bahadur Rana: History, Propaganda and Legend' in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.14, no.3 (August 1987), p.161-191.



lasted 104 years.<sup>4</sup> This brought an end to a tumultuous period in the country's history characterized by court intrigue and political violence. Since Nepal's defeat in the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-1816, individuals and factions among a small group of influential high caste families in Kathmandu had been continuously squabbling for power. Political power had gradually slipped away from the throne, which most of these years were filled by a minor, and the country's unity established by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768 had been threatened. To check any possible contenders for political power the Rana regime restricted the highest positions to members of the Rana family itself and tightened the rules and control systems under which government servants had to work. They made thorough use of the existing *pajani* system under which all appointments came up for annual review. Officials were frequently transferred to new positions, making it very difficult for individuals to build up their own power basis.

Total control in a static society was the base of Rana rule. The two main means of maintaining this situation were the policy of isolation and Hindu social order. The creation of social codes based on the classical caste laws of Manu<sup>5</sup> had started long before Jang Bahadur Rana. But only with the Muluki Ain ('Law of the Land') in 1854, were all these rules collected and systematized into a national social code. It had hitherto been usual to refer to the country's different ethnic groups or castes (traditional usage made no distinction between the two concepts) as 'the 4 *varnas* and 36 castes.'<sup>6</sup> Now each group's allotted place in the hierarchy was spelled out clearly in the code. Grounded in the Hindu idea of ritual purity, the Muluki Ain regulated the lives of every citizen from birth to death, making social or political mobility almost impossible.

The Himalayan peaks in the north and the malarial jungle of the Terai in the south formed natural barriers to maintain Nepal's isolation.

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4 For a detailed account of the beginning of Rana rule, see John Whelpton, *Kings, Soldiers and Priests*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1991 and, for the Rana period as a whole, Adrian Sever, *Nepal under the Ranas*, New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1993.

5 The verse treatise ascribed to the legendary king Manu, the most authoritative of the *dharmashastras* (books of religious law), probably received its final form in the 2nd. or 3rd. century A.D. (A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that Was India*, Calcutta: Rupa, 1987, p.113).

6 Both *varna* and *jat* are normally translated as 'caste'. The former refers to the four-fold division of society found in the Vedas: Brahmans, Kshatriyas (from which the Nepali 'Chetri' derives), Vaishyas and Sudras. The *jats* were the smaller divisions which were and are the salient social units in Nepal and India. Different *jats* were classified as belonging to a particular *varna*: e.g. Thakuris and Chhetris both ranked as Kshatriyas.

The Hindu order of the Muluki Ain regarded Muslims and Europeans as unclean foreigners, and even people returning from India had to undertake ritual baths to resume their former caste position. Kedar Man Byathit, an activist in the struggle against the Rana government before 1950, summed up the Rana social system as follows: "So this was the form of society we lived in. If you had been a Rana, we could not sit here in front of you." He further illustrated the rigidity of the caste system at that time by describing a personal experience. While he was in jail under the Rana government, Byathit received a letter from Parikchit Nar Singh, a liberal member of the Rana family who was studying at the university founded by Tagore in India. The letter opened with the words: "Respected Kedar Man Byathit." When the letter later fell into the hands of the government they summoned the writer of the letter, "and asked: 'How can you write like this to a Newar? Remember, you are a Rana.' And he was chastised and banished from Kathmandu to Gorkha."<sup>7</sup>

The policy of isolationism and the Muluki Ain's systemization of the social order were not the only props of conservatism. The government also did little to encourage, and in fact even restricted the growth of education. In 1951, apart from tutoring for male children of elite families and the classical *patshalas* in which Sanskrit was taught mainly to Brahman boys, there were only 321 primary schools in the entire country with an enrollment of only 8,500 students.<sup>8</sup> Secondary education was similarly poorly provided for: throughout the country, there were only eleven high schools in operation before the revolution.<sup>9</sup> In 1918 under the relatively enlightened Maharaja Chandra Shamsheer Rana limited provision for higher education was made by the opening of Trichandra College in Kathmandu. Even this was mainly meant for members of the Rana family though a few commoners, principally children of high ranking civil servants, also attended the college. The slow progress in education was reflected in the fact that in 1944 only five persons inside the country had obtained university degrees at Master

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7 Interview with Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988.

8 Kedar N. Shrestha, *Educational Experiments in Nepal*, Kathmandu: Tribhuvan University, Institute of Education, 1982, p.1-2. Further details of the Rana education system are given in Krishna B. Thapa, *Major Aspects of Social, Economic and Administrative History of Modern Nepal*, Kathmandu: Ambika Thapa, 1988, pp.117-127.

9 Krishna Thapa, *op. cit.*, p.127.

level<sup>10</sup>, while the 1952-54 census showed a literacy rate of merely 5.3%.<sup>11</sup>

The near paranoia among the Rana rulers against foreign influence clearly comes to light in the regulations set down for the jute mill in Biratnagar, one of the first industrial plants in the country, in 1947. The need for foreign labour is acknowledged, but foreigners, the rule states, should only be employed if they were not Christians nor politically active.

A civil servant under Maharaja Padma Shamsheer Rana in the 1930's and 1940's, Gobar Dhan Maskey, described the authoritarian nature of the Rana regime: "The Ranas were so strict they viewed us, the people, as *pauko dhulo*, the dust of their feet. They viewed themselves as gods, and we respected them as gods." Maskey had this to say about the legislative process under the Rana regime: "In those days the Ranas were so powerful that the law was at the tip of their tongue. What they said became law automatically."<sup>12</sup>

External events, however, started to catch up with the Rana regime in Nepal. The revolution of 1950/51 took place in an international setting of rapid change, change which had profoundly affected both of Nepal's big neighbours. The nationalist movement in India in the 1920s and 1930s, and especially Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India movement greatly influenced the future democratic politicians of Nepal. Not only did this have an impact on the political views of the young activists in exile in India, who all participated in the Indian nationalist movement and viewed the struggle against the Rana government in Nepal as a continuation of the fight against British colonialism.<sup>13</sup> It also influenced the small group of dissidents inside Nepal, who largely derived their political ideas from material smuggled in from India. Kedar Man Byathit expressed this as follows: "We got news from India that the people there were demonstrating in the streets against the British rulers, and we felt that we wanted to do the same against the Ranas. We knew we were not only the Ranas' shoes, we were also human beings."<sup>14</sup>

Not only the dissidents viewed the Rana regime as an anachronism, a relic of the colonial era. This was also the view of the new Indian

10 Interview with Tulsilal Amatya, 28/4/1990.

11 Central Bureau of Statistics, *Intercensal Changes of some Key Census Variables - Nepal 1952/54-81*, Kathmandu, 1985, p.55, Table 4.1.

12 Interview with Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988.

13 See the detailed account in Kanchanmoy Mojumdar, *Nepal and the Indian Nationalist Movement*, Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1975.

14 Interview with Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988.

government led by Jawaharlal Nehru after independence in 1947. The Indian constitutional advisors called in on Maharaja Padma Shamsheer's request in 1947 to help draft a new constitution for Nepal argued against the Ranas' insistence that the document should guarantee the perpetuation of their own monopoly of the hereditary premiership.<sup>15</sup> This concern was again clearly expressed by the Indian ambassador in a speech marking the signing of the new treaty of peace and friendship between the two countries in July 1950.<sup>16</sup> No direct involvement in politics, however, took place until the beginning of the revolution in November that year.

With hardly any direct consequence, but important indirectly for the course of events in Nepal, were changes in the areas north of the country's borders, both the victory of communism in China in 1949 and the Chinese assertion of control over Tibet in 1950. As will be seen later, both these events, though especially the latter, had a more important effect on the attitudes of foreign powers towards Nepal in the period after the revolution than on the revolution itself.

Despite the rigidity of the Rana regime, foreign influences started to have effects even inside Nepal's borders. Actively participating both in the 1st and the 2nd World War, the Gurkha recruits from Nepal brought news from the outside world to the rural districts of the country. Thus this institution, one of the key features of the Rana regime<sup>17</sup>, was instrumental in bringing this regime to an end. More important, however, was the formation of a very small, but active intellectual elite in Kathmandu. With the opening of high school education to non-Ranas and also the establishment of Trichandra College, a small group of individuals had obtained a certain level of education and aspirations which could not be met within the Rana system of government. As a result their activity towards the late 1930's and early 1940's slowly turned political and critical.

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15 Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal, op.cit.*, vol.2, p.183.

16 Ambassador C.N. Shah's speech on 31/7/1950, FO 766/134.

17 Recruitment of Nepalese soldiers into the British Indian army started in 1815, during the Anglo-Nepalese War, when Ochterloney enlisted deserters and prisoners from the Nepalese army. Recruitment from the hills was opposed by Nepalese governments until the Shamsheer Ranas, who ousted Jang Bahadur's direct descendants in 1885, decided co-operation was the best way of ensuring British goodwill. Recruits came mostly from the major hill ethnic groups of Mongoloid origin (Magars, Gurungs, Rai and Limbus) although some Chetris and Thakuris were also accepted. In 1947 the Gurkha regiments were divided between independent India and Britain. General accounts are provided by Byron Farwell, *The Gurkhas*, London: Allen Lane, 1984 and by Mary Des Chene, 'Relics of Empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas, 1815-1987', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1991.

To provoke the least reaction from the government this activity at first took a religious character. One of those involved, Kedar Man Byathit, explained: "At certain times of the year people would gather at different junctions in Kathmandu and listen to recitals from the religious scriptures. Once a year in Asantol (a main junction in the centre of the old part of Kathmandu) people used to gather to listen to parts of the *Mahabharata*<sup>18</sup> being read out. Shukra Raj Shastri, one of our first martyrs, made use of these occasions to read out sections from this old Hindu epic about the struggle between the people and the unjust ruler. In strictly religious terms he would speak about the conflict between the people and the state. Listening to this was what first inspired us to become politically active."<sup>19</sup> The Ranas, however, eventually brought this to an end. "To these recitals four to five thousand people came. Among them were higher government officials and even members of the Rana family who arrived in poor men's clothes so that no one could recognize them. We also had a series of recitals from the *Bhagavad Gita*<sup>20</sup> in Indra Chowk where each of us took our turns. On one day two years after we had started Ganga Lal gave the lecture. The police came and arrested him as well as many of the spectators. This brought our activity to a final end. In his lecture Ganga Lal had overstepped our rules and gone into direct political agitation".<sup>21</sup>

Many of the same people were involved in the setting up of an underground political party, the Praja Parishad, in 1935. One of the party's members, Tanka Prasad Acharya, explained the goals of the party: "We wanted democracy and constitutional monarchy along the British model. The king was a prisoner under the Ranas, just like us. We managed to establish contact with him through a middle man."<sup>22</sup> The party distributed anti-Rana leaflets in Kathmandu in 1940 and in October of that year, after one member had turned informer, those involved were arrested and charged with plotting the assassination of the Rana family. "Four of us were given capital punishment, among them Ganga Lal, Shukra Raj Shastri and myself. Being a Brahmin, however, they could not implement their punishment against me. Others were also given life

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18 A Sanskrit epic, probably dating in its present form from around the 2nd. century A.D., regarded as a sacred text by Hindus.

19 Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988.

20 This key devotional text (literally 'Song of God') forms part of the *Mahabharata* and consists of spiritual and moral counsel given by the god Krishna to Arjun before the battle between the Kauravas and Pandavas which forms the centre-piece of the epic.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Interview with Tanka Prasad Acharya, 14/11/1990.

imprisonment, like Ganesh Man Singh." In fact, Shukra Raj Shastri was in no way involved with political plots but was the target of Rana vengeance because of his role of mentor to younger members of the Praja Parishad. Tanka Prasad Acharya further explained how he had fled to Benares, but there had received a telegram saying that his father was seriously ill in Kathmandu. On his return he was met by 71 soldiers in the mountains just outside Kathmandu and brought back in chains to the capital where he spent ten years chained to the prison walls.

After this event activity increased rather than decreased, though at least in principle this was no longer of a political character. Kedar Man Byathit explained how he was involved in setting up literary symposiums in Kathmandu: "We organized the first one in 2004 BS [1947/8] where famous poets like Lakshmi Prasad Devkota, Lekhnath Paudyal and Bal Krishna Sama<sup>23</sup> read their poems. The discussion on these occasions gradually turned towards social and political issues."<sup>24</sup> On 15 August 1947 the first ever major demonstration was held in Patan in the Kathmandu Valley celebrating Indian independence. Many of the participants were immediately arrested.<sup>25</sup>

Another significant development was the movement launched in June 1947 by students of Sanskrit in Kathmandu, which is generally referred to by its slogan *Jayatu Sanskritam* ('Victory to Sanskrit!').<sup>26</sup> One of the participants, Basudev Dhungana, explained: "Already as a 15-year-old schoolboy in Kathmandu I took part in the student activities against the Rana regime together with Sahana Pradhan, Pushpa Lal Shrestha<sup>27</sup>, Rajeshwar Devkota and others. We were all members of this underground library where we expressed our unity through sharing one common 'hooka' (waterpipe). In 1949 as a result I was arrested."<sup>28</sup>

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23 The three most celebrated figures in Nepali literature. For an introduction to their work, see Michael J. Hutt, *Nepali - a National Language and its Literature*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1988.

24 Kedar Man Byathit, *op. cit.*

25 Interview with Tulsī Lal Amatya, 28/4/1990.

26 Although the students' strike is placed in July 1947 by English-language sources, the detailed account in Gobardhan Rana, *Prajatantrik Andolanma Nepal Bidhyarthi Sangha*, Kathmandu: Nepal Students' Union Western Zones Co-ordination Committee, 1994, p.14-29, gives 1 Asadh (i.e. around 16 June) as the starting date for the main protest, as does Yagyanath Acharya, *Nepalko Sankshipta Itihas*, Kathmandu: Ekta Books, 2051 V.S.(1994/5) p.304.

27 Formerly secretary of the Nepali National Congress, Pushpa Lal was the prime mover in the formation of the Communist Party of Nepal in Calcutta in 1949 (see Rishikesh Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.239 and Bhim Rawal, *Nepalma Samyabadi Andolan - Udbhav ra Vikas*, Kathmandu: Pairavi Prakashan, 2047V.S.(1990/91), p.18-22).

28 Interview with Basudev Dhungana, 7 & 15/4/1991.

Before 1951, those studying for degrees in Sanskrit travelled to India to take their main exams and in February 1947, Rajeshwar Devkota, Shribhadra Sharma and others were among the students from Kathmandu who were encouraged to take a stand against the Ranas when they met Bishweshwar Prasad (B.P.) Koirala and other activists of the newly-formed Nepali National Congress in Benares.<sup>29</sup> After returning to Nepal, they emerged as leaders of *Jayatu Sanskritam*. Rajeshwar Devkota explained the goals of the movement: "At that time the government did not let us study geography and history. We students requested that these subjects should be included in our curriculum, but the government refused. To protest the students organized a strike. This was in BS 2004 [1947/48]. After a month-long strike the government gave in to our demands. This encouraged us to continue our struggle, and we asked that our curriculum should also include social science. As a result we were expelled from the school and exiled to India."<sup>30</sup> Some of the participants were also imprisoned, like Sahana Pradhan. She recalls, "My sister and I took part in this movement, and we were arrested for 16 days - put in the barracks, not in the jail because we were women."<sup>31</sup>

The reactions of the Rana government were severe. Even within the Rana family, however, liberal tendencies resulted in an unexpected political interlude. When Padma Shamsher Rana became the new prime minister and maharaja in 1946, he was determined to introduce political reforms. Even before he became prime minister, while he was still the commander-in-chief<sup>32</sup>, Padma Shamsher Rana tried to forge links with young professionals and with students at the Trichandra College who could later help him implement his reforms and create the new society he wanted.<sup>33</sup> According to his private secretary, Gobar Dhan Maskey, on assuming office Padma Shamsher immediately met strong opposition from his younger brothers Mohan and Babar Shamsher Rana who in accordance with the rules for succession would follow him as prime

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29 Rana, *op. cit.*, p.16.

30 Interview with Rajeshwar Devkota, 31/8/1990. According to Rana (*op. cit.*, p.25-26), Devkota and other students who continued their protests were expelled from the Kathmandu Valley in November 1947 and then chose to make their way to Benares.

31 Interview with Sahana Pradhan, 22/9/1990.

32 Under the Rana regime, members of the family were given titles and functions determined by their position on the 'Roll of Succession' to the maharajship. The commander-in-chief was the current maharaja's immediate successor; despite the military title, he was actually responsible for civil administration, control of the army being in the hands of the man immediately behind him on the roll, the 'Western Commanding General'.

33 Interview with Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988.

minister. Though he was supported by most of the other political forces, the opposition, the king, the Indian government and many other members of the Rana family, Padma Shamsher Rana eventually gave in to the demands of his brothers. He resigned from his position, but not before he had announced his planned political reforms.

He was able to reveal his intentions in a speech delivered on 16 May 1947 at his Bishal Nagar palace, after the launching of a civil disobedience campaign by the Nepali National Congress had convinced even Chandra's sons that a gesture must be made.<sup>34</sup> Padma's tone in making this announcement and at the promulgation of the new constitution in 1948 was a patronizing one.<sup>35</sup> The rationale seemed to be that of a father wishing to educate his children in political participation to meet the responsibilities of the modern world rather than that of a statesman granting the people their democratic rights. The constitution contained provisions for an indirectly-elected national assembly with gradually extending powers, elected local governing bodies (panchayats), an independent judiciary, and free education. The political power granted to these elected bodies, however, seemed very limited. But the significance of this whole act lay in the fact of it being the first ever written constitution for the country granting the people certain limited political rights, freedom of speech and assembly. What, then, were the long-term political goals of the maharaja? Although the constitution provided for the premiership to remain a Rana monopoly indefinitely, his secretary claimed this was not his real intention: "Padma Shamsher's idea at this time was that if parliamentary democracy was introduced, the Ranas would still hold the post of prime minister for perhaps another twenty years, but the parliament would be elected by the people and slowly they would learn to take on the responsibilities of running a government."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, politician and writer Rishikesh Shaha, who was also well-acquainted with Padma, believes that the maharaja himself would have accepted the Indian suggestion for a reference to 'responsible and representative government' as the final aim of the reforms but that this was vetoed by Chandra's sons.<sup>37</sup>

Padma Shamsher's goals were never brought to fruition. In April 1948, he abdicated and left for India. His hard line younger brother,

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34 See Rishikesh Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.2. p.175. See p.19 for the formation of the the Nepali Rastriya (National) Congress.

35 Extracts from the 16 May speech are reprinted in Sever, *op.cit.*, pp.364-5 and the main provisions of the constitution are summarised in Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.2, pp.184-6.

36 Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/88.

37 Shah, *op.cit.*, p.183.



Mohan Shamsher, became the prime minister. Though the constitution of 1948 was never publicly disavowed, its provisions were never implemented. A Village Panchayat Act was introduced on 5 October 1949 formalizing the system of village and town panchayats, but these were only set up for solving local legal disputes. They had no governing authority. Possibly as a result of external pressure Mohan Shamsher Rana tried to create the impression of wanting political reforms, and in September 1950 he did set up a parliament, but this consisted of Ranas and their supporters and was purely an appointed body rather than the partly elected one prescribed by the 1948 constitution.<sup>38</sup> The work of this 'parliament' came, of course, to an abrupt end with the revolution.

Rather than events inside Nepal it was the activity in the exile community in India which was of more significance for the genesis of that revolution. Benares and Calcutta were the main centres of this activity. Benares was both the centre for religious pilgrims from Nepal and, from the early days of the Nepalese state, the main destination for people exiled for political reasons.<sup>39</sup> As in Kathmandu the activists were largely students, and they made up most of the members of the All-India Nepali National Congress set up in October 1946 at Benares.

In January 1947 this group merged with the Calcutta-based Gorkha Congress and with another Benares organisation, the Nepal Sangh, to form the Nepali National Congress.<sup>40</sup> The leadership included B.P. Koirala and Dilli Raman Regmi. Other influential members were Krishna Prashad Bhattarai, Matrika Prasad (M.P.) Koirala, and Ganesh Man Singh. Ganesh Man had recently escaped from Kathmandu, where he had been imprisoned for his involvement with the Praja Parishad. Almost all the members of this new party had had their political education through involvement with the Indian independence movement.

At first the new party's activity mainly consisted in issuing statements condemning the Rana regime. Then, inspired by Ghandi's Quit India movement, they supported a strike by workers at the jute mill in Biratnagar and a subsequent *satyagraha* (civil disobedience movement). After a month B.P. Koirala was put in prison, and most of the other

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38 Bhuwan Lal Joshi & Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*, Berkeley: University of California, 1966, p.71.

39 Interview with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, who was himself born in Benaras.

40 Anirudha Gupta, *Politics in Nepal 1950-60*, Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 1993, p.165-6. Parmanand, *The Nepali Congress since its Inception*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1982, p.14, makes the formation of the All-India Nepali National Congress the direct consequence of a call for action against the Ranas made by B.P. Koirala earlier in October 1946.

leaders escaped to India. These repressive measures by the Rana government were, however, followed by Maharaja Padma Shamsher's announcement of limited reforms on 16 May 1947 and Congress responded at the beginning of June by formally calling off the movement. Koirala himself was finally released from jail to return to India in August after a personal appeal from Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>41</sup>

In autumn 1948, when it had become clear that Padma's successor, Mohan Shamsher, did not intend to carry out meaningful reforms, a new political party, the Nepal Praja Panchayat, was formed in Kathmandu and launched a new *satyagraha*. In the meantime there had been a split in the Nepali National Congress, because Dilli Raman Regmi, who had been acting president during B.P. Koirala's 1947 imprisonment, refused to hand back the leadership to him. Kedar Man Byathit, recently exiled from Nepal, claims credit for persuading B.P. Koirala to go back to Nepal. "So B.P. Koirala and his people sat in India and cried out against the Rana regime... I protested against this and said: 'This is just like lying inside a mosquito net and complaining about all the mosquitos outside.' In Patna I finally convinced them that we should go into Nepal. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, B.P. Koirala and myself crossed the border together on small paths in the mountains so that nobody could find us and started our activity inside the country."<sup>42</sup> Arriving in Kathmandu in October 1948 they found the internal dissidents somewhat wary of them, partly because they did not want to become involved in the dispute within the Nepali National Congress between the Koirala and Regmi factions.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst his companions evaded capture, B.P. himself was arrested within a month of his arrival and kept in prison for eight months. In May 1949 he commenced a hunger strike and, under pressure from Indian leaders, his wife and mother were allowed to travel to Kathmandu to appeal to the maharaja for his release. In 1943, B.P.'s father had himself died in prison in Kathmandu after his arrest for supporting the 'Quit India' movement. Nevertheless, his mother, Dibyadevi Koirala, chose to confront Mohan Shamsher rather than beg for mercy. She defiantly told him: 'I consigned my husband's body to the fire [*viz.* funeral pyre] and I have come to put my son's body on fire.'<sup>44</sup> B.P. was finally released shortly after ending his hunger strike on 28 May.

41 Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal, op.cit.*, vol.2, p.175.

42 Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/88.

43 Shaha, *op. cit.*, p.204.

44 Kiran Mishra, *B.P. Koirala - Life and Times*, New Delhi: Wishwa Prakashan, 1994, p.25.

The Nepali National Congress's political achievements had been limited, although their activists had been provided with their first practical experience within Nepal. They now looked for more effective means of continuing the struggle.

### **The Course of the Revolution**

On 9 April 1950 the Nepali Congress was formed in Calcutta by a merger of the Nepali National Congress and the Nepal Democratic Congress. The latter party had been formed two years previously with financial backing from Subarna Shamsheer and Mahabir Shamsheer Rana. Subarna and Mahabir were so-called C-class Ranas, i.e. of illegitimate descent, usually from low-caste mothers, and therefore excluded from succession to the premiership.<sup>45</sup>

The Nepali Congress Party put aside the principles of non-violence which the Nepali National Congress had previously adopted and agreed that in the fight against the Rana regime only violent means would succeed. The party elected the Nepali National Congress's M.P. Koirala as their president and planned an armed revolt for September 1950. Thus the road was paved for the 1950 revolution.

The party's immediate plan was thwarted with the arrest in Kathmandu on 24 September of armed Nepali Congress volunteers and also of a number of officers in the army, and the actual trigger for the revolution was only provided six weeks later by King Tribhuvan. How far did Tribhuvan's flight to the Indian embassy on 6 November 1950 come as a total surprise, and to what degree was it a move planned with one or more other parties? To answer this question we need to look in more detail at the actual events of the 1950-51 revolution from the king's flight till his return from India on 15 February 1951 and the subsequent swearing in of the new Nepali Congress-Rana government. While the drama started in Kathmandu with the actions of King Tribhuvan, once the king had been flown out to India, the centre of activity moved to New Delhi. Simultaneously the Nepali Congress rebel forces crossed the southern border of Nepal into the Terai, and on 11 November reports

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45 The systematic division of the Rana family into A, B and C categories was the work of Chandra Shamsheer, maharaja from 1901 to 1929, but it was only in 1934 that Maharaja Juddha Shamsheer removed from the roll of succession C-class Ranas previously included on it and exiled them from Kathmandu. Subarna and Mahabir were recalled by Padma in 1945 but their private property in the capital was reconfiscated after his abdication and they withdrew to Calcutta. For detailed discussion, see Shaha, *op. cit.*, vol.2, pp.58-61 & 91-103 and Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, 1966, pp.47-50 & 68-69.

reached Kathmandu of their attack on the district headquarters at Birganj. What then happened in Kathmandu after 6 November, apart from a few sporadic demonstrations in the city centre, was the gradual accommodation of the Rana rulers to the new situation.

There is conflicting information about the king's motivation in initiating the chain of events. Some sources seem to indicate that his main motivation was not political, but personal. The Rana government's negotiators in New Delhi during the crisis, Generals Kaiser Shamsheer and Bijay Shamsheer, told the British ambassador in Kathmandu in December that King Tribhuvan after reaching New Delhi showed no "inclination of continuing his activity as a king, but rather that his period as a king was over."<sup>46</sup> Two months later, in February 1951, the British ambassador himself referred to King Tribhuvan's repeated requests to the Rana administration for permission to abdicate and leave the country.<sup>47</sup> As late as January 1954, another British ambassador was claiming that during the revolution the Indian government had forced Tribhuvan to return to Nepal against his own will.<sup>48</sup> Both the Ranas and the British seemed to believe that the king personally had no strong political convictions to guide his involvement in the revolution.

Tribhuvan was a complex character and, in the words of Erika Leuchtag, who probably knew him better than any other non-Nepalese, "deliberately .. chose to be an enigma."<sup>49</sup> At times he did indeed appear to want a quiet life and to accept passively decisions made by others. Despite this, the picture of him as a man without a political agenda of his own is hard to accept. If he had really wanted just to escape from the confines of the royal palace, he could have remained in India in 1947 when the Ranas allowed him to travel incognito to Calcutta.<sup>50</sup> If he did indeed raise the issue of abdication after his return to Nepal, this may have been nothing more than a ruse: both he and the Ranas were well aware that King Rana Bahadur Shah had used "retirement" into India as a springboard to recapture power in Kathmandu in 1804 and that King Rajendra had attempted the same manoeuvre in 1846. And, above all, the king's earlier actions had shown that he did indeed want to challenge the Ranas' monopoly of political power.

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46 G. Falconer, note of conversation with Kaiser and Bijay, 15/12/1950, FO 766/34.

47 G. Falconer, report on the constitutional crisis in Nepal 21/2/1951, FO766/37.

48 Ambassador Hayes, annual report, 2/1/1954, FO371/11226.

49 Erika Leuchtag, *Erika and the King*, New York: Coward-McCann, 1958, p.111.

50 Bhola Chatterji, *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics*, Calcutta: World Press, 1967, p.38.

King Tribhuvan's involvement with the opposition, the newly established political parties, had started long before 1950. Establishing contact with him had been a key part of the Praja Parishad's political strategy in the late 1930s and this was probably first achieved in December 1936 by Dharmabhakta Mathema, one of the 'Four Martyrs' who were executed in 1941.<sup>51</sup> Tribhuvan actually gave Mathema written proof of his support: 'Consider me a member of the Praja Parishad.'<sup>52</sup> Tribhuvan's opposition to the Ranas went beyond mere discussion with dissidents: also during the 1930s he organised military training for a small group of family members and aides and plotted unsuccessfully to assassinate Juddha Shamsheer and other members of the Rana family.<sup>53</sup> Tribhuvan escaped harsh punishment mainly because of Rana apprehension of adverse reaction from the British but became a virtual state prisoner in his royal palace.

After the founding of the Nepali National Congress in 1947, contact was established between the king and this new organisation. Tulsilal Amatya gives a detailed account of an early meeting with the king, which appears to have occurred after 28 May 1949, when B.P. Koirala was released from jail in Kathmandu for the second time. Describing how he was approached by Tribhuvan while he was an underground worker for the Nepali Congress, Amatya says: "Then Tribhuvan sent a message asking whether I would like to see him. I said all right, and of course we had to see the king without letting the Ranas know. I had to climb the high wall around the Narayanhiti Palace and on the other side were some bamboo shoots which I grabbed hold on and climbed down. I crossed some distance out of view, and there I met the king. This I did on several occasions.... In my talks with King Tribhuvan my proposal was that there should be democracy in Nepal as in England, British-style democracy with the king as a constitutional monarch. At that time he promised before me: 'Here is a Brahmin; I am bowing, touching the hand of that Brahmin [so] that I shall never forget.'<sup>54</sup> That was his promise to me. I further proposed that

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51 See the discussion in Rajesh Gautam, *Nepalko Prajatantrik Andolanma Nepal Prajaparishadko Bhumika*, Kathmandu:the author, 2046 V.S.(1989/90), pp.76-81.

52 *Ib.*, p.189.

53 Yami, Dharmaratna, *Nepalko Kura*, Kathmandu: Yami Prakashan, 2014 V.S. (1957/8) p.190-191, cited in Gautam, *op. cit.*, p.52. See also Pratyoush Onta, 'Rich Possibilities: Notes on Social History in Nepal', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.21, no.1 (1994), p.15-17.

54 The spiritual supremacy role of the Brahmin and his role as a legitimator of secular power is a key component in the ideology of Hindu kingship (see below, chapter 7). The king's Brahmin *guru* was officially styled *Shri Cha* ('Six Times Illustrious') whilst the king himself rated only five and the Rana maharaja three.

he should give one of his sons to the Nepali Congress, but he wondered how we should get his son to India....Then the king asked: 'What if I myself come to India?' And I agreed that would be better. In this way the proposal of the king going to India was made."<sup>55</sup>

Although Tribhuvan did thus discuss with a Congress representative the idea of flight to India, the timing of the king's action in November 1950 came as a surprise to the party.<sup>56</sup> In an interview he gave thirty years later, B.P. Koirala himself confirmed the more usually accepted account that Congress's own plan at this time was to abduct Tribhuvan and his family to Palpa in western Nepal.<sup>57</sup> The king himself adopted a different course, probably because of fear for his own safety and unwillingness to sign death warrants for some of the conspirators arrested on 24 September.<sup>58</sup>

It was with India rather than the democratic opposition that Tribhuvan must have co-ordinated his escape. In 1948, he had established direct contact with the Indian ambassador with the help of a Swiss physiotherapist, Erika Leuchtag, who had been brought to Kathmandu to treat the senior queen.<sup>59</sup> Although in November 1951, the Indians denied that they had known beforehand of the king's intention to seek asylum with them, few were convinced. The Indian ambassador in Kathmandu, C.P.N. Singh, in a letter to the British embassy referred to Tribhuvan's arrival as "so entirely unexpected." The British embassy, however, believed from the start that the whole incident was planned by India and B.P. Koirala also thought that the suggestion had come from the Indian side.<sup>60</sup> In a report to the Foreign Office in February 1951, the British ambassador stated that the issue of medical treatment for King Tribhuvan in India, which the Indian letter gave as the reason for his arrival in the embassy, was a lie. Several incidents, he claimed, proved this. Among them was the fact that the Deputy Inspector General of the Indian police, Waryam Singh, who was at lunch in the British embassy only hours after King Tribhuvan's flight, pretended he had forgotten the matter.<sup>61</sup> There is

55 Tulsi Lal Amatya, 28/4/1990.

56 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.45-6.

57 Bhola Chatterji, *B.P. Koirala - Portrait of a Revolutionary*, 2nd. ed., Calcutta: Minerva, 1990, p.80

58 Joshi & Rose, *op. cit.*, p.71-2. In 1941, Tribhuvan had bowed to Rana pressure and sanctioned the execution of leading members of the Praja Parishad, even though he had himself been in effect their co-conspirator.

59 Leuchtag, *op. cit.* Her account was also published as *With a King in the Clouds*, London: Hutchinson, 1958.

60 Indian to British ambassador, 8/11/1950, FO 766/34.; Chatterji, *loc. cit.*

61 Report by Ambassador Falconer, 21/2/1951, FO 766/35.

further evidence of Indian foreknowledge in a government intelligence report of two embassy cooks arriving from Delhi just the day before.<sup>62</sup>

Whatever India's role in planning King Tribhuvan's initial movements, King Tribhuvan definitely became a vitally important figure to the government of India once the revolution had started. Both the Indian government and the democratic forces led by the Nepali Congress seemed to have realized the symbolic importance of King Tribhuvan, and both parties seemed to use the full potential of this factor. This fact, together with the later propaganda needs of the Shah dynasty, explains why the revolution has sometimes been presented solely as King Tribhuvan bringing democracy to Nepal.

Besides Tribhuvan's action, another important factor in the 1950-51 revolution was the armed campaign of the Nepali Congress. This military effort was in the end probably less crucial than the stance taken by the Indian government: the Ranas' decision to yield to Indian pressure had already been taken by 2 January, but the defection to the rebels of the Palpa garrison, which was probably the key turning-point in the military struggle, did not take place until the two days later.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the early success of the Congress rebel army was certainly impressive.

Almost simultaneously with the king's arrival at the Indian embassy, the Nepali Congress forces crossed into Nepal's southern region, the Terai. Even though King Tribhuvan had pre-empted the Congress's own plan, their volunteers were already poised for action. Some hours before King Tribhuvan was flown to Delhi, the district head quarters at Birganj<sup>64</sup> fell into the hands of the Nepali Congress following a surprise attack from across the border. The government garrison was quickly compelled to surrender to the Mukti Sena ('Liberation Army'), as the Nepali Congress armed volunteers were styled.

What explains this surprising success of the Nepali Congress, an *ad hoc* rebel army with little equipment and led by twenty-year-old activists with no military experience? Obviously the Nepali Congress had the advantage of easy communications, having their bases just across the border in India only a few hours away from the scenes of conflict. The Rana forces on the other hand depended on orders and reinforcements from

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62 Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.209.

63 Shaha, *op. cit.*, vol.2, p.233 (for events in Delhi); Bhaveshwar Pangeni, *Palpama Prajatantrik Andolanka Say Din*, Palpa: Nima Pangeni, 2049 V.S. (1992/3), p.38 (Palpa).

64 Nepal's border town on the main trade route between Kathmandu and India. The fullest published account of the operation is in Prem R. Uprety, *Political Awakening*, *op.cit.*, p.149-51.

Kathmandu, separated from the Terai by two days' journey on foot over the hills. As important seems to be a certain moral superiority among the Nepali Congress activists. The Rana government was on the defensive in Kathmandu, and a lack of confidence and morale seemed to have spread even to their administrators and police forces in the districts. In contrast the Nepali Congress had been preparing for armed struggle ever since the inaugural meeting in Calcutta in April 1950 at which the party decided to abandon their policy of non-violence. Their initial plans for a coup or uprising in September were thwarted, but preparations were renewed at a conference at Bairgania in Bihar on 26-27 September, at which M.P. Koirala was appointed to the post of military "dictator,"<sup>65</sup> and the main leaders of the party were made generals, each one responsible for a different region of Nepal. Gobar Dhan Maskey recalls: "During the revolution of 2007 (i.e.1950/51), B.P. [Koirala] went to Biratnagar, Subarna to Birganj, Mahendra Bikram Shah to Nepalganj as well as myself and Rajeshwar Devkota, ... and we were responsible for the far west in the armed struggle."<sup>66</sup> Describing the strict regime within this military structure of the Nepali Congress, Yog Prasad Upadhyaya claimed "We were disciplinarians par excellence."<sup>67</sup>

A large proportion of the rebel army, the Mukti Sena, were ex-Gurkha servicemen dissatisfied with the ruling regime.<sup>68</sup> The nucleus of this force had been formed by the Nepal Democratic Congress before the 1950 merger with B.P. Koirala's party. They had recruited a number of officers who had served in the British Indian army but subsequently joined Subhas Chandra Bose's 'Indian National Army' (INA) to fight alongside the Japanese against the British. From an internal report in the British embassy, however, one gets the impression that the Nepali Congress fighters mainly consisted of mercenaries: "The report of the 50-60 Sikhs in the force at Taplejung throws an interesting light on the composition of the Nepali Congress forces. They are probably out of work "goondas" ('thugs') from Calcutta, where I have no doubt a large proportion of the Nepalese are also enlisted."<sup>69</sup> This British attitude was clearly influenced by information supplied by the Rana government, since a December 1950

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65 Rishikesh Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.207.

66 Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988. According to Parmanand ( *op.cit.*, p.44), who gives the fullest account of the distribution of commands, Subarna was in overall command of the Mukti Sena, whilst B.P. and Mahendra Bikram Shah were in charge of the eastern and western fronts respectively.

67 Interview with Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, 9/4/1991.

68 Joshi and Rose, *op.cit.*, p.68, and Shaha, *Modern Nepal*, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.206.

69 Internal report, British embassy, 12/1/1951, FO 766/35.



report by the district governor (*bada hakim*) of Birganj described the Congress force which took the town as mostly mercenaries.<sup>70</sup> Eight months later, however, an embassy official was writing appreciatively of the officers of the Raksha Dal (a militia which was largely a continuation of the Mukti Sena), comparing them favourably with the regular Nepal army and recommending that serving British Gurkhas cultivate friendly relations with them, even if they were former members of the INA.<sup>71</sup>

Whatever the composition of the Nepali Congress forces, it seems fairly clear that the party viewed their armed rebellion only as one way of pressuring the Rana government. The Indian government was viewed as another and possibly more important factor in the drama. From an interview with Gobar Dhan Maskey,<sup>72</sup> however, it appears that the Nepali Congress were not only excluded from the first round of talks in New Delhi. They hardly knew about the existence of these talks. From this perspective it was only natural that some of the rebels found it difficult to respect the 16 January cease-fire imposed by the participants in these negotiations.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast to the Nepali Congress the role of the third party in the conflict, the Rana rulers in Kathmandu, was a passive one: the slow acceptance of defeat and the gradual accommodation to new realities. From correspondence between the maharaja, Mohan Shamsheer Rana, and the Indian government during the revolution we can study this process in detail. In the course of the conflict the tone of the Rana government turns from that of friendly assertiveness to humble submissiveness.

The first desperate act of the Rana regime, the appointment of the infant Gyanendra as the new king, seemed to reflect a total lack of understanding by the Ranas of the new situation. In a private letter from the maharaja to the British ambassador on 7 November the former defends his government's action stating that Tribhuvan had breached the law, and referring to the traditional idea that "The next rightful heir should forthwith be proclaimed king in order to ensure peace and tranquility in the realm."<sup>74</sup>

The Rana government obviously relied on support from their old ally, Britain. But during the conflict they soon realised that apart from a few sympathetic statements, the British were no longer willing to get

70 1951 correspondence from British embassy, Kathmandu.

71 R. Proud, note of 7/9/51 (with ambassador's endorsement) and letter to Major-General, Brigade of Gurkhas, 26/9/1951.

72 Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988.

73 Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, 9/4/1991.

74 Mohan Shamsheer Rana to Falconer, 7/11/1950, FO 766/34.

involved. As a result no other options were left than to capitulate to Indian demands, though the Ranas obviously tried to secure as much as possible of their old position in the final political settlement.

"India only supported our movement from behind. They never came into the country. There was never one Indian soldier in Nepal during the revolution," said Gobar Dhan Maskey about Indian involvement in 1950-51.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, founding member of the Praja Parisad, Tanka Prasad Acharya, said: "The revolution was totally Indian. They forced Nepal to accept their demands."<sup>76</sup> Supporting this last statement another activist in the revolution, Dilli Raman Regmi, emphasized how the Indian government pushed the young Nepalese politicians right to the top long before they had reached maturity.<sup>77</sup>

Though views varied greatly on the nature and degree of Indian involvement in the revolution, everybody seemed to agree that India played a crucial role in the event. Correspondence between the rulers in New Delhi and the Rana government in Kathmandu largely seems to support the allegation that India presented Nepal with a diktat. The tone of the Indian communication seemed also to change during the period, from sharp and almost offensive to overbearingly patronising. The former seemed usually to come from the high-powered Indian Ambassador in Nepal, C.P.N. Singh. Answering a letter from Mohan Shamsher Rana, the Indian ambassador wrote the following in early November 1950: "The government of India regards the tone of his communication to me as unfriendly and it may lead to serious consequences unless there is a more rational approach to the situation.... We wish to maintain good relations with Nepal but will not suffer insult."<sup>78</sup> The tone seemed to turn milder when letters started to come directly from New Delhi.

An internal note in the British embassy as late as April 1952 seems to imply that India was actively involved even inside Nepal in the disturbances during the revolution. Mr. R. Proud at the British embassy referred critically to the Indian ambassador's secretary, a Mr. Sinha, "whom we know was actively concerned in stirring up trouble in the bazaar, and who the Maharaja insisted to be removed from Kathmandu after he came to terms with the Congress."<sup>79</sup> Such impressions gathered by the British do not, however, prove that the staff at the Indian embassy

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75 Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988.

76 Interview with Tanka Prasad Acharya, 14/11/1990.

77 Undated interview with Dilli Raman Regmi.

78 C.P.N. Singh to Mohan Shamsher Rana (without date, but evidently a reply to the maharaja's letter of 9/11/1951), FO 766/33.

79 R. Proud, internal embassy note, 25/4/1952, FO 766/37.

in Kathmandu were involved in such activity and it is even more unclear whether this kind of involvement was encouraged or approved of by the rulers in New Delhi.

What was in fact the role of India in relation to the two other main actors and instigators of the drama, King Tribhuvan and the Nepali Congress? Rather than staging the revolution India seemed to take over what had already been started by King Tribhuvan and the Nepali Congress, and direct the events towards its own goals. Whatever India's initial role, the outcome of the revolution, the Delhi compromise, was definitely engineered by the Indian government.

There is little doubt that at least initially the Indian government was in close alliance both with King Tribhuvan and with the Nepali Congress. On several occasions the Nepali Congress asked for assistance from the leaders in New Delhi, many of whom were close personal friends. Their relationship however, was not without problems. During the course of the revolution one gets a strong impression that both King Tribhuvan and the Nepali Congress were consciously used and manipulated by New Delhi. Perhaps partly against his will, the king was pushed forwards as the vital national symbol of freedom. The Nepali Congress seemed at times more of a necessary evil than a close ally to the rulers in New Delhi. In supporting the Nepali Congress the Indian leaders proved their credibility as patrons of democracy. The political activists based in India at times proved a liability to the Indian government, which therefore wavered between full-fledged support and conscious neglect of them. This is clearly illustrated by several episodes before and during the revolution. Kedar Man Byathit described in an interview how he together with Ganesh Man Singh and another companion were imprisoned by the Indian government in spring 1950 at the request of the Rana government in Nepal. They were preparing to commence activities inside Nepal when police attempted to arrest them just outside an Indian border village and in order to escape Byathit had shot and injured one of the policemen. Following a personal plea from B.P. Koirala, Jawaharlal Nehru refused to give in to Rana demands for extradition.<sup>80</sup> A similar ambivalence was displayed by the Indian government in their handling of the Nepali Congress's full-scale armed insurrection in 1950. The leaders in New Delhi refused to sell arms to the Nepali Congress but they overlooked the purchase of arms from Burma by Mahabir and Subarna Shamsher,<sup>81</sup> and

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80 Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988.

81 Bhola Chatterji, one of the Indian socialist politicians who brokered the deal with Burma, has provided a detailed account in *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics*. Calcutta: World Press, 1967.

did not interfere in the establishment of military bases on the Indian side of the border. Ganesh Man Singh has claimed that Nehru was reluctant to go even this far but was persuaded by the Indian Socialists whose political support he needed at the time in a dispute with a rival Indian National Congress leader, Sardar Patel.<sup>82</sup> However, the clearest indication of the attitude of the leaders in New Delhi towards the Nepali Congress was the long delay before including the latter in the Delhi talks.

Not only India, but also the British government played an important though indirect role in the events of 1950-51. To understand why the revolution took place at just this point in time we need to understand the attitudes of these two foreign powers. Britain wanted no political change in Nepal. Their loyalty was totally on the side of the Rana regime, and at least in word they seemed to support the Ranas even during the revolution. Therefore while the British still ruled in India political change in Nepal was impossible. With Indian independence in 1947 the situation changed drastically. The new leaders in New Delhi clearly wanted change in Nepal, and remarks from these leaders even before the revolution suggest that they were only waiting for the appropriate time to get involved. Thus the revolution came in 1950 and not earlier.

The internal forces opposing the Ranas, that is the Nepali Congress and King Tribhuvan, did not seem to have any clear political programme other than the simple goal of toppling the existing regime. A party manifesto written by B.P. Koirala in 1950<sup>83</sup> and a leaflet dropped by the Nepali Congress from an aircraft over the Kathmandu valley at the very beginning of the revolution<sup>84</sup> emphasize the promise of radical social reforms and loyalty to the king. Apart from a brief reference to constitutional monarchy and democracy "as in the West", hardly anything is mentioned about the party's long term political goals and the nature of the system of government after the revolution. Tribhuvan's own political goal at this time, if Erika Leuchtag understood it correctly, was similarly general: "he saw himself as a constitutional monarch some day, a projection of George VI in the mountains of Nepal."<sup>85</sup>

The one actor in the revolution with the most clearly defined goals and interests seemed therefore to be India. Already on 17 March 1950 in a speech to the Indian Parliament Jawaharlal Nehru had said the following

82 Interview with Ganesh Man Singh, Kathmandu, 15/8/1993 (JW).

83 B.P. Koirala, *Manifesto of the Nepali Congress*, 1950, -reproduced by the *Rastra Pukar* weekly, Aswin 28 and Kartik 24 2039 (1982).

84 *Ishitar* (notice) of the Nepali Congress dropped from an aircraft over Kathmandu on the evening of 10/11/1950.

85 Leuchtag, *op. cit.*, p.112.

about India's position on political reforms in Nepal: "In the inner context of Nepal it is desirable to pay attention to the forces that are moving in the world -the democratic forces, the forces of freedom - and to put oneself in line with them, because not to do so is not only wrong according to modern ideas but unwise according to what is happening in the world today."<sup>86</sup> Nehru's speech in the Indian parliament on 6 December 1950, whilst the Rana government's delegates were still in Delhi for talks on the crisis, seems to suggest the possibility of India planning and possibly even staging the revolution in Nepal. "We wish to treat Nepal as an independent country and at the same time, we saw that unless something was done in the internal sphere there, difficulties might arise."<sup>87</sup>

Whatever the degree of prior Indian involvement, India certainly viewed the situation in the light of its own security interests as Nehru made clear in the same speech: "Now we have had from immemorial times a magnificent frontier, that is to say the Himalayas. ... Now so far as the Himalayas are concerned, they lie on the other side of Nepal ... Therefore as much as we appreciate the independence of Nepal, we cannot risk our own security by anything going wrong in Nepal which either permits that barrier to be crossed or otherwise weakens our frontier." Nehru mentions here for the first time his "middle way" which was to be the principle of India's policy towards Nepal in years to come: "We have tried to find a way, a middle way, if you like, which ensures the progress of Nepal, the introduction of some advance in the way of democracy and at the same time a way which does not uproot the old completely."<sup>88</sup> Nehru also mentions the Chinese invasion of Tibet which had made the situation even more urgent.

The importance of this last factor comes out even more clearly from a report of a conversation between General Bijay Shamsheer Rana and C.P.N. Singh, Indian ambassador to Nepal, on 17 November 1950, in which the latter stated that the Tibetan crisis was the main reason for India's current interference in Nepal.<sup>89</sup>

The immediate outcome of the revolution was the Delhi compromise, the agreement between the Rana government, King Tribhuvan, the Nepali Congress, and the Indian government. This resulted

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86 Speech by Nehru to the Lok Sabha, 17/3/1950, referring to the recent visit by the Maharaja of Nepal to India.

87 Jawaharlal Nehru, speech to the Lok Sabha, 6/12/1950 (Parliamentary Proceedings, India).

88 *Ib.*

89 Note by Bijay Shamsheer Rana, 17/11/1950 (included in documents handed over to British embassy - FO 766/33).

in the establishment of a Rana-Congress coalition government in Kathmandu and was fundamentally on Indian terms. At the beginning of the negotiating process India had simply put forward all their demands in the memorandum of 8 December to the government in Nepal. In the speech of Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer Rana a month later on 8 January we clearly see that he had given in to all Indian demands. To reach their goals the Indian government seemed willing to regard the interests of the Nepali Congress as dispensable. General Bijay Shamsheer Rana's report of his meeting with Girija Shankar Bajpai, one of the Indian negotiators, on 27 December stated that India was not willing to press the issue of the Nepali Congress's inclusion in the new coalition cabinet: "The Indian government of course didn't intend that exiled Ranas or extremists should be included in the coalition cabinet."<sup>90</sup> 'Exiled Ranas' refers to Subarna and Mahabir Shamsheer, and by the label, 'extremists', the writer was thinking particularly of Ganesh Man Singh, a founder member of the Praja Parishad.<sup>91</sup> In the end, the Ranas did, of course, have to accept both Subarna and Ganesh Man as cabinet partners, but India ensured the Nepali Congress settled for less than the total overthrow of the old regime which had been their proclaimed goal.

In as much as there ever were true negotiations, the main points of conflict were: the position of King Tribhuvan versus "King Gyanendra", the inclusion of Nepali Congress representatives in the interim coalition cabinet, and whether the political reforms should be announced by the prime minister, i.e. Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer Rana, or by King Tribhuvan. With the establishment of the Rana-Congress government on 18 February compromise between the Rana government and the Nepali Congress seemed to have been reached. However, from the Indian government's point of view this could hardly be called a compromise. Keeping in mind Nehru's "middle way", the Indian leaders got exactly what they wanted.

Another point of conflict between the Rana government in Nepal and the rulers in New Delhi had been the way in which these political reforms should be presented; as the continuation of earlier developments or as a total break with the past. In the proclamation of Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer Rana on 8 January 1951 the changes brought about by the revolution were presented as the result of a long process of political

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90 Report by Bijay Shamsheer, 28 December 1950, FO 766/34.

91 See above, p.11.

reform, referring especially to the 1948 constitution.<sup>92</sup> As well as accepting Indian proposals for a constituent assembly, the formation of a cabinet half made up of individuals representing 'popular opinion and enjoying the confidence of the people' and the restoration of Tribhuvan to the throne, Mohan announced an amnesty for armed opponents of the government who had not committed serious crimes and who were willing to abandon violence. Gradual political evolution and continuity formed the main themes of the proclamation. Even on this account however the Indian government seemed to have all their demands met. The final result of the revolution, the Interim Government Act of 11 April 1951, which legalized the political changes in Nepal, came as a total break with the past.<sup>93</sup>

This first written constitution ever implemented in Nepal seemed totally in conflict with Nepal's traditional society. While the Muluki Ain based on the Hindu universal order was legally still Nepal's civil code, the Interim Government Act introduced freedom of religion as well as the abolition of caste. The local panchayats, though not abolished, were robbed of all political significance. The 1948 constitution was cancelled, and according to an unsigned comment by a British diplomat in Kathmandu,<sup>94</sup> the Interim Government Act was totally based on the Indian constitution with only minor alterations to fit Nepal.

Thus the conflict between political change and an extremely traditional society was manifested. The Interim Government Act may seem the final proof of India imposing its own system of democracy on Nepal. In this perspective the revolution of 1950-51 may purely be seen as an Indian takeover. With the formation of a new regime in Kathmandu culminating in the Interim Government Act the Indian government reached its final goal, the installation of a compliant regime. Enough political change had taken place inside Nepal to open the country for Indian influence and dominance.

But were these events of 1950/51 therefore not a democratic revolution? The term revolution usually implies sudden and often violent change as well as a degree of mass involvement. The violence was present, though fairly limited. Apart from reports from the British embassy of unrest in Kathmandu on 25, 26 and 27 December 1950<sup>95</sup> and

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92 Mohan Shamsher's Proclamation of 8/1/1951, FO766/35; Nepali text reprinted in Grishma Bahadur Devkota *Nepalko Rajnaitik Darpan*, vol.1. Kathmandu: Dhruva Bahadur Devkota, 1979 (3rd.ed.), pp.40-45.

93 See above, p.2.

94 Unsigned comments on the 1951 Interim Government Act, Foreign Office Records.

95 Ambassador Falconer's report on the constitutional crisis, 21/2/1951, FO766/35).

involvement of the Newar community in the Kathmandu Valley, as well as an uprising among the Limbus in East Nepal<sup>96</sup>, the sources give little evidence of a mass uprising. Small bands of Congress volunteers were able to drive out small, and generally ill-trained army garrisons from various hill towns but, though there were anti-Rana demonstrations in some places outside the Valley and the Terai towns, large numbers were not generally involved. One can, moreover, rightly question whether the revolution did result in genuine political changes. One might argue that the events only resulted in one political elite being substituted for another.

Is it then totally incorrect to talk about a Nepali struggle for democracy in this period? To the contrary, this was exactly what was happening during the initial stage of the drama. King Tribhuvan's flight to the Indian embassy served as a signal for the rebel forces of the Nepali Congress to cross the borders to liberate the country from the Rana regime. Whether King Tribhuvan and the Nepali Congress could have succeeded in establishing democracy on their own is questionable. However, India got involved in the conflict and very soon took charge of events. With less interest in democracy than stability they forced the conflicting parties, including the Nepali Congress to accept their demands, and the revolt was brought to an end. Thus what probably started as a genuine democratic struggle, turned into an aborted revolution.

### **After the Revolution: 1951-1955**

The real outcome of the revolution only became evident in the years that followed - 1951 to 1955. This was a period of political confusion and instability. The country had been opened, political freedom introduced, and parliamentary democracy announced. But what did this mean in practical terms? How should democracy be built with a population and even political leaders with no prior experience? What seemed to follow was a power vacuum which invited unrest and revolt and which Nepal's powerful neighbour India exploited to increase her influence. While governments came and left and the promised elections and reforms were repeatedly

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96 The Newars, the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, had been politically subordinate to the Nepali-speaking Chetris and Brahmins since Prithvi Narayan's conquests of the old Newar kingdoms in 1769. The British embassy saw the anti-Rana movement in Kathmandu as largely Newar communalism. The Limbus of eastern Nepal, long the most independently-minded of the hill ethnic minorities, staged a rising in 1950 more on their own account than in support of Congress or the king (c.f. R. Proud, note of conversation with Keharman Limbu, 30/7/1951, FO766/35).



postponed, general disillusionment and political reactions set in. Gradually politics turned back to the traditional centres of power.

So marked was the growth of Indian influence during this period that at times it came close to total political and economic domination. At a public meeting in Kathmandu in June 1951 during his visit to Nepal Jawaharlal Nehru said: "If some of you feel that India wishes to interfere in your affairs, then that would be a wrong notion."<sup>97</sup> The rest of Nehru's speech, however, seemed totally to contradict this statement. In a patronizing manner he lectured the Nepali people on how they should build democracy and develop their country.

The real weight of Indian involvement in Nepal was felt only in the following year, 1952. According to the annual political report from the British embassy King Tribhuvan visited India six times during this year, the main purpose being to consult the government in New Delhi on political matters in Nepal. This was also the year which saw the arrival of the Indian military mission to help build up the Nepalese army, the civil service mission to assist in strengthening the bureaucracy, and a considerable loan which according to a British embassy report was due to pressure from India in order for Nepal to cover Indian expenses in the country.<sup>98</sup> The central Indian figure in Nepal during the first part of the year was the Indian ambassador C.P.N. Singh. According to the British embassy report, C.P.N. Singh was partly responsible for King Tribhuvan replacing a party government with a period of direct rule through an advisory council, and Singh had made sure that: "The Indian advisor [Gobinda Narayan Singh] attended all councils, replacing the Nepalese secretary (and was in a position to ensure that Indian wishes were followed)."<sup>99</sup> The suggestion for the council was in fact made directly by Nehru to the ambassador in Delhi.<sup>100</sup> An internal note in the British embassy in June 1952<sup>101</sup> hints at Indian involvement at almost every level of politics and government in Nepal. One example of this interference seems to have been the position of Bhadrakali Mishra, a member of the Nepali Congress, and also regarded as a Terai spokesman, as minister in the government. According to this note there was strong opposition to

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97 Nehru's speech at Kathmandu, 17/6/1951, *The Hindu*, 18/6/1951, quoted in Uprety, *op.cit.*, p.176.

98 Ambassador Summerhayes, Annual Political Report for 1952, 28/11/1953, FO 371/10685.

99 *Ib.* Summerhayes's comments are quoted extensively in R. Shaha, *Modern Nepal*, *op.cit.*, vol.2, pp.285-6.

100 Report of Acting U.K. High Commissioner to Commonwealth Relations Office, FO 371/101150-1, quoted in Shaha, *op. cit.*, vol.2, p.272.

101 British embassy internal note, 2/6/52, FO766/38.

Mishra's position in the cabinet, possibly even from the prime minister, Matrika Prasad Koirala, himself, but it seems that Mishra's appointment was supported by India and that India even forced the prime minister to keep him in position. Furthermore, the note referred to a conversation with B.P. Koirala where the latter insisted that an extensive strike among the civil servants was organized by India to divert popular attention from Indian interference in political squabbles within the cabinet.

Other sources confirm an Indian hand behind Bhadrakali Mishra's prominence. A Brahmin from the eastern Terai and a former associate of Mahatma Gandhi, Mishra had been included in the Rana-Congress coalition in 1951 even though he had not previously been a member of the Nepali Congress nor taken any part in the revolution. According to some reports, he owed his position to C.P.N. Singh,<sup>102</sup> and another Terai politician, Kashi Prasad Shrivastava, claimed that Singh selected Mishra at the request of Indian president Rajendra Prasad, who was a friend of Mishra's father-in-law. Mishra himself told people he had been appointed because of a personal initiative from Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>103</sup>

As important as India's political involvement in Nepal during this year was their strengthened economic activity in the country and their construction of the first road link with Kathmandu. The Tribhuvan Rajpath was opened on 11 December 1952. This road, which was constructed at great speed by the Indian army, became vitally important for Nepal's economic development and the further consolidation of Indian influence.

It is also interesting to note that towards the end of 1952 the British finally seemed to accept Indian dominance in Nepal. They now saw their own role as guiding the Indians rather than getting directly involved in Nepal<sup>104</sup>, thus accepting, so to say, a transferral of colonial rights.

The first five years after the revolution may best be described as a period of broken promises and personalized politics which resulted in popular disillusionment. The government was usually run by members of the newly founded political parties, but with all their political squabbles and rifts King Tribhuvan gradually gained a more direct say even in the

102 Joshi and Rose, *Democratic Innovations*, *op.cit.*, pp.86-87; Shaha, *Modern Nepal*, *op.cit.*, p.250,

103 Parmanand, *Nepali Congress*, *op.cit.*, p.81. In May 1952 Mishra formed his own break-away Congress faction. He merged this in 1955 with Tanka Prasad Acharya's Praja Parishad and Balchandra Sharma's faction of the Rastriya Praja Party and finally rejoined the Nepali Congress in 1961 after Mahendra's abolition of parliamentary democracy (Joshi & Rose, *op. cit.*, pp.136, 147, &457-8).

104 Summerhayes, Report to Foreign Office, 18/12/1952, FO 371/10666.

day-to-day running of the government. This gradual shift was also encouraged by India whose declared interest in Nepal was that of stability.

The coalition between the Ranas and the Nepali Congress was doomed from the first day. Not only did these former arch enemies find it almost impossible to cooperate, they daily had to face immense pressure from the outside. In April 1951 the general unrest climaxed in an attempted coup against the government, and three times during the year the government had to ask assistance from the Indian army to suppress revolts in the Terai.<sup>105</sup> In July the two main parties outside the government, the Praja Parishad and the Communist Party formed the United Front accusing the coalition government of cooperating too closely with India. Finally in October 1951 the Rana-Congress coalition collapsed and was replaced by a pure Nepali Congress cabinet led not by B.P. Koirala, but by his brother, M.P. Koirala, who was more acceptable both to the king and to India. During the anti-Rana revolution the Indian ambassador C.P.N. Singh had formed a preference for M.P. Koirala as the latter was more amenable to accept Indian advice than was B.P.<sup>106</sup> Singh's own background as a collaborator with the British in India during the Second World War probably also predisposed him to sympathise with the relatively conservative M.P. Koirala rather than with B.P. Tribhuvan himself told Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the then general-secretary of the Nepali Congress, that he would impose direct royal rule if the party did not accept M.P. Koirala rather than B.P. as prime minister.<sup>107</sup>

Facing opposition from B.P. and his supporters within Congress, as well as from other groups, the new cabinet did not last much longer than the previous one, and in August 1952 King Tribhuvan took power into his own hands. Thus followed a year of direct royal rule through the advisory council which the Indians had suggested as an alternative to the party politicians. In June 1953, M.P. Koirala was given a second chance and invited to form a government of his own Rastriya Praja Party,<sup>108</sup> which he had formed in April after the failure to achieve a reconciliation with his brother and the Congress majority. In February 1954 the government was expanded to include three minor parties, Tanka Prasad

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105 In February and July against K.I. Singh (see p.30 below) and in April to put down other disturbances (Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.54).

106 Bhola Chatterji, *People, Palace and Politics*, New Delhi: Ankur, 1980, p.85-6, and *A Study of Recent Nepalese Politics*, Calcutta: World Press, 1967., p.145.

107 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.67

108 Literally 'National People's Party', but often referred to as the 'National Democratic Party'. The name was chosen to be suitable if there was a complete merger with Tanka Prasad Acharya's Praja Parishad and Dilli Raman Regmi's Nepali Rastriya (National) Congress (Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, p.291).

Acharya's Praja Parishad, the Nepali National Congress and Bhadrakali Mishra's Nepal Jana (People's) Congress.<sup>109</sup>

Among the political parties competing for power during this period, three main groupings may be considered significant. Most influential was the Nepali Congress with its splinter parties, which had its origin in India and was formed solely for the purpose of toppling the Rana regime. A second group were the former dissidents and political activists from the Kathmandu Valley who had not joined the Nepali Congress. Their party was the Praja Parishad which had also been formed to fight the Rana regime, but which had been re-launched by its founding president, Tanka Prasad Acharya,<sup>110</sup> on his release from prison in 1951 and now represented a more nationalistic line than the Nepali Congress. On the far Left of the spectrum was the Communist Party of Nepal, which was the only party with a clearly defined programme.

These three categories alone, however, do not explain the extremely complicated and intricate state of affairs in Nepali politics during these years. One reason for the confused situation was probably the delayed elections. As long as no party had proved its relative strength in an electoral contest, all of the parties could claim they represented the majority and even individuals could claim that they had a larger mass appeal than others. As a result politics turned into factionalism. A general trend seemed to be that parties and coalitions fell apart once they were in power. While out of power new coalitions were formed among the opposition to fight the existing government, often using nationalist and anti-Indian slogans.

In this scenario individual conflicts continuously came to the forefront. No wonder the following description of the political situation could be found in a letter from Mohan Shamsher's eldest son to a former British ambassador in late January 1953: "The Nepali Congress has exposed their leaders as a band of self-seekers without character and integrity and as such they have lost all backing from the people."<sup>111</sup> Mohan Shamsher's family were hardly impartial observers, and some Congress leaders did retain widespread respect but similar criticism was voiced even by active participants in the fight against the Ranas and

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109 Dilli Raman Regmi's Nepali National Congress had split from B.P. Koirala's party of the same name in 1949 and retained that name when Koirala merged his organisation with the Nepal Democratic Congress to form the Nepali Congress in 1950.

110 Tanka Prasad Acharya had escaped the death penalty in 1941 only because he was a Brahman.

111 Major-General Sherada Shamsher to George Falconer, 31/1/1953.

members of the political parties. Gobar Dhan Maskey said: "In the time that followed only B.P. Koirala and Subarna worked. All the rest wanted to enjoy life just like the Ranas. I was disgusted, and I left the Congress Party."<sup>112</sup>

Intrigue and power politics also led Kedar Man Byathit to leave Congress. In April 1952, together with Balchandra Sharma and Bharatmani Sharma, he issued a `Democratic Socialist Manifesto for the Nepali Congress.<sup>113</sup> They left the party when this document was rejected by the Congress conference in May. He himself explained what happened: "Our faction was supported by a big group of party cadres both from western and eastern Nepal. But despite this the rest of the party used all possible means and managed to defeat us. The members belonging to our faction were not even allowed to vote in the presidential election. As a result I created the Leftist Nepali Congress."<sup>114</sup>

The most serious and damaging of the personal political conflicts in the period was the one between the two half-brothers M.P. Koirala and B.P. Koirala, which at times seemed to threaten the very existence of the Nepali Congress. To many observers intrigue and personal rivalry seem to have become the main ingredients of party politics. Some could also draw lines back to the Nepali tradition of court intrigue, pointing to the fact that almost all these new leaders were members of the traditional high-caste elite.<sup>115</sup>

But could the blame for the failure of democratic politics in the period be put only on the party politicians? One must remember that all of them were relatively young and that they lacked political experience. As mentioned earlier, they were pushed to the top by the events of the revolution. Only a few had higher education, and the only point of reference for many of them was traditional Hindu society under the Ranas where party politics was a totally alien concept. The main failure among this new elite, Madan Mani Dikshit pointed out, was the lack of clear-cut political objectives, a weakness which could explain their inability to handle the situation after 1951. "All these democratic forces were never sufficiently organized and united. Apart from doing away with the Rana regime there were no clearly defined political goals apart from a vague

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112 Interview with Gobar Dan Maskey, *ib.*

113 Devkota, *op.cit.*, pp.178-181

114 Interview with Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988. In August 1953, Byathit resigned from the Leftist Congress in protest against Balchandra Sharma's decision to merge with M.P. Koirala's governing Rastriya Praja Party (Joshi & Rose, p.136, 141).

115 This theme is developed at length in the conclusion to Joshi & Rose, *op. cit.*

goal of democracy."<sup>116</sup> Dikshit further points out: "Another major lack among the parties was that they had not thought clearly about the role of the monarchy. The monarch was re-instituted as a result of the revolution. How should the king's rule then promote democracy and development? Unfortunately this was not properly understood either by the king or by the political parties." This last statement seems to indicate that neither the political parties and their members nor King Tribhuvan took the full responsibility for establishing democracy, and neither had a clear idea of how this vague goal of democracy should be reached. This might be one important reason for the repeated postponements of political reforms and elections.

To show his democratic intent, King Tribhuvan first in 1952 and again in 1954 convened an advisory assembly as a consultative body for the government. This innovation was first decided on in the May 1951 negotiations between the Congress and Rana sides of the government held in Delhi to resolve the crisis caused by the Gorkha Dal incident.<sup>117</sup> In a royal proclamation on 2 October 1951 the king announced nominations to the assembly, presenting it as a way of incorporating "the majority of the people" more directly in the running of the government in the interim period before elections for a constituent assembly could be held.<sup>118</sup> Because of the collapse of the Rana-Congress coalition in November 1951, legislation for the advisory assembly was promulgated only in April 1952, and one clearly notices all the limitations on the power of this body. The assembly could not pass motions of no confidence against any member of government or the cabinet as a whole, and all bills passed by the assembly had to be approved of by the king. Limits were even imposed on the issues that could be raised in the assembly, excluding controversial foreign affairs issues, and matters dealing with the king and members of the royal family. One must also remember that the primary condition for a democratic body, the public election of its members, was lacking. All members were nominated by the king, though to some extent in consultation with political leaders. Thus in reality King Tribhuvan's advisory assembly was merely a democratic facade.

Despite its lack of truly democratic attributes the advisory assembly did provide a forum for the new politicians of Nepal to gain experience of parliamentary procedures. An opposition bench was even formed with

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116 Undated interview with Madan Mani Dikshit.

117 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.89.

118 Joshi & Rose (*op.cit.*, p.150) suggest that Tribhuvan's main motivation was actually to strengthen the hand of the Congress, from whose ranks most of his nominees were drawn.

Rishikesh Shaha, Kedar Man Byathit and four others as members. Both men recall how they tried to work as best they could along the lines of a democratic opposition.<sup>119</sup>

More worrying for the development of democracy in this period than the showpiece nature of the assemblies introduced by King Tribhuvan, was the continuation of human rights abuses. In an interview Rishikesh Shaha describes how he and others were imprisoned for the mere offence of disagreeing with members of the coalition government. "So I was gaoled by this government. I especially had differences with B.P. Koirala at that time. I was gaoled ... under the Public Security Act along with so many others - Tanka Prasad Acharya and others - all of us were behind bars."<sup>120</sup> Shaha and Acharya had been among eleven opposition leaders arrested on 24 September 1951 under the Security Act passed in April. Their parties, the Nepali National Congress and the Praja Parishad were then allied with the Communists and had organised a strike in the Kathmandu Valley demanding the release of the Nepali National Congress leader Dilli Raman Regmi and others already detained.<sup>121</sup>

Mathura Prasad Shrestha had similar experiences. He describes the lack of political freedom even after the revolution as follows: "After that, of course, the king manipulated the Delhi agreement in his own terms, and they introduced many acts against human rights. For example we did not at that time have 44 clauses in the constitution [i.e. the Interim Government Act], but they used 144 clauses to suppress the people. I went to jail briefly once at that time in 1951 or -52. ... Even after the Rana regime."<sup>122</sup>

Thus in some ways it seemed as if the revolution had achieved little, and the short term result of the changes seemed only a replacement of Rana autocracy with Nepali Congress oligarchy. The unrest in this period appears to have been partly a popular reaction just against this new high-caste elite in Kathmandu. Describing the situation, Dilli Raman Regmi said: "There were lots of anti-India, anti-Brahmin, anti-Chettri feelings during those days. The Gurungs and the Magars thought the Brahmins were alien. There was a Limbu revolt in East Nepal, and at the same time Kathmandu was faced with political trouble from other sources."<sup>123</sup>

119 Interviews with Rishikesh Shaha, 30/8/1990, and Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988. Shaha has also included an account of their activities in *Modern Nepal, op.cit.*, pp.280-81.

120 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, 30/8/90.

121 Shaha, *Modern Nepal, op.cit.*, vol.2, p.261.

122 Interview with Mathura Prasad Shrestha, 15/10/1990.

123 Undated interview with Dilli Raman Regmi.

This statement clearly sums up the lack of stability and the many conflicts coming to the surface during the first couple of years after the revolution. Reports from the British embassy seem to indicate that the unrest could be seen as a general ethnic and regional conflict between the hill population, mainly consisting of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups like the Gurungs, Magars and Limbus, and the newly politicized population of the Terai and Kathmandu. Writing in May 1951, a British diplomat seemed to view this as a potentially serious conflict which could possibly lead to "civil war".<sup>124</sup> The letter tells how this conflict was found even inside the coalition cabinet, with the Nepali Congress working for the interests of Kathmandu and the Terai, and the Rana members of the cabinet strengthening their traditional links with the hill people. Such a clear-cut distinction, however, seems not to fit with the actual events of this period and might be partly coloured by the British interest in preserving their links with the hill people, the potential recruits for the Gurkha regiments. The actual incidents of unrest during the period, and especially the two attempted coups, seemed of a much less well-defined nature. Only the Kiranti independence movement in the eastern hills had an unambiguously ethnic and regional character, though such factors were also part of the explanation for other disturbances.

An immediate challenge to the Kathmandu government's authority had been posed by K.I. Singh, a commander of the Mukti Sena in the western Terai during the armed struggle in 1950-51, who had refused to accept the ceasefire agreed as part of the 'Delhi compromise'. In February 1951, only a few days after it had taken office, the Rana-Congress coalition requested Indian assistance against him. The Indians were called in again when he escaped from Bhairawa prison in July. Singh was finally recaptured and brought to Kathmandu.<sup>125</sup> The Indian army also had to help deal with a peasant revolt in another section of western Nepal.

The unrest reached the capital twice in the form of attempted coups, the Bir Gorkha Dal revolt in April 1951 and the Raksha Dal revolt in January 1952. The former seemed more like a disorganized roadside robbery than a real coup. The belief that this newly-established organisation was planning to overthrow the government led to the passing of a Public Security Act on 11 April, and, even before this had technically become law, B.P. Koirala, as home minister, ordered the arrest of its secretary-general, Bharat Shamsheer, and some other members. Bharat was the grandson of Babar Shamsheer, one of the Rana ministers, and his

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124 R.Proud to Major-General, Brigade of Gorkhas, 30/5/1951, FO766/35.

125 Gupta, *op. cit.*, p.54.



organisation was thought to enjoy the sympathy of other Rana members of the government. On 12 April a mob of Dal members stormed Kathmandu prison to release their colleagues and then attacked B.P. Koirala's own house, dispersing when B.P. himself shot one of them. The Dal was then formally banned, the king took over direct command of the army from the prime minister, and the Congress used the incident as an excuse to retain its Mukti Sena under the new name of 'Raksha Dal' ('Protection Group'), while Babar was eventually forced out of the cabinet.<sup>126</sup>

There is considerable doubt over how real this threat to the government actually was. Rishikesh Shaha claims B.P. Koirala admitted to him that he had moved too hastily in ordering the original arrests because of pressure on him from Tribhuvan and from Subarna and Mahabir Shamsheer.<sup>127</sup> Bharat Shamsheer himself later denied he had intended to mount a coup.<sup>128</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, the Security Act remained on the statute book and was unfortunately also to be used against political opponents.<sup>129</sup>

The Raksha Dal revolt in January 1952 was of a more serious nature, and the then prime minister, M.P. Koirala, quickly pleaded for Indian assistance, a move which the defence minister, Kaiser Shamsheer Rana, claimed to have opposed at the time and which was certainly greatly criticized after the event.<sup>130</sup> The Indian ambassador did in fact ask his government to send 2000 troops, but New Delhi refused, both on political grounds and because the rebels were then in control of the airport.<sup>131</sup> The Nepali government thus had to cope on its own with the revolt, which had been caused principally by dissatisfaction within the Raksha Dal. This dissatisfaction had been fanned by 'revivalist' Rana elements and other opposition politicians but ethnic grievances amongst Rai and Limbu members of the militia were also important. The rebels freed K.I. Singh from detention and asked him to be their leader. They also released from prison Agni Prasad Kharel and Ram Prasad Rai, recently detained leaders of the secessionist Kiranti organisation, the Rastriya Mahasabha. Though suppressed by the government forces on the second day the rebels had managed to disconnect the power supply, seize arms at the Raksha Dal

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126 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.88.

127 Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.254-5.

128 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.61.

129 The Act allowed for detention without trial for up to twelve months of anyone regarded as a danger to public safety (British Embassy Note, 11/4/1951, FO 766/35).

130 R. Proud, British Embassy Report, 25/1/1952, FO 766/37.

131 Shaha, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.274-5.

depot at Singha Durbar<sup>132</sup>, and occupy important government buildings in Kathmandu. K.I. Singh, abandoning his negotiations with the government, escaped with a few followers and eventually made his way to Tibet. The immediate consequences of the revolt were the banning of the Communist Party and the Rastriya Mahasabha, the demobilising of most of the Kiranti section of the Raksha Dal and police, and the decision to invite an Indian military mission to improve the army's effectiveness.<sup>133</sup>

Although he was not always himself the prime mover, the name of K.I. Singh, later prime minister, is repeatedly encountered in connection with unrest during this period. In contemporary sources he is described as an almost legendary figure: a true nationalist, a ruthless power broker, a communist, and a political idealist and dreamer using "Robin Hood methods" in his movement in western Nepal. In conversation with a British diplomat a few days after the Raksha Dal revolt, a senior civil servant, Bhim Bahadur Pandey, used the 'Robin Hood' label and claimed that before the incident the government had been considering releasing him and seeking his political co-operation. He also said that King Tribhuvan was personally favourable to Singh, but that his extreme anti-Indian stance put the government in an embarrassing situation.<sup>134</sup> The following December, in a press conference at Darbhanga in India, Khadgaman Singh, one of the royal counsellors who had replaced the M.P. Koirala government, publicly described Singh as 'a patriot and a nationalist.'<sup>135</sup>

Though the unrest during this period could not be described as an ethnic or regional uprising, sentiments of ethnic, regional as well as a nationalistic character certainly played an important role. In an attempt to appear more representative of the country as a whole, M.P. Koirala's November 1951 government included a Rai and a Gurung, the latter being an ex-British Gurkha who the British ambassador had recommended to Mohan Shamsheer in May as a possible minister.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless the perception of domination by the higher castes and by Kathmandu and the

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132 The maharaja's palace which has housed the government secretariat since 1951.

133 Shaha, *loc.cit.*, Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.100-101, Devkota, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, p.61-63. Shaha argues that Singh was uncomfortable with the position the rebels had thrust upon him and really concerned only to make sure he and his followers were able to escape. As a political activist, Shaha had himself spoken out in support of Singh in April 1953 (Devkota, *op.cit.*, p.73).

134 British Embassy Internal Note, 1/2/1952, FO 766/37.

135 Devkota, *loc.cit.*

136 R.Proud to Major-General, Brigade of Gurkhas, 30/5/1951. Nar Bahadur Gurung's was one of three names recommended by the ambassador when Mohan told him he wanted to bring a 'Gurkha' (i.e. a member of one of the hill 'tribes') into the cabinet.

Terai remained and the hill people were a natural constituency for a new party, the Gorkha Parishad. This was formed in February 1952 under Rana leadership as a successor to the banned Gorkha Dal and combined both 'tribal' activists and ex-army people with a strongly anti-Indian posture. Thus conservative, nationalistic, and ethnic elements seem to have combined in one party, and in districts where the Parishad was strong there were tensions with Congress workers. These resulted in disturbances in Pokhara in January 1953 and the arrest of the party's secretary-general, Bharat Shamsheer.<sup>137</sup>

By the end of 1952 anti-Indian sentiment had spread far beyond the groups supporting the Gorkha Parishad, and had many exponents even within the political elite in Kathmandu. The popular reaction against Indian dominance went together with general disillusion with the failure of party politics and the lack of genuine democratic reforms. During 1953 a general swing towards nationalism and socialism was evident. Thus the link was first formed between nationalism and socialism/communism which later was to play such an important role in politics.<sup>138</sup>

Describing the general dissatisfaction and disillusion among many of the political activists Kedar Man Byathit says: "Finally the black days of the Ranas were over and the workers and peasants should have been given an opportunity by the government to rebuild their society. But this never happened. Instead the new rulers acquired all the bad qualities of the Ranas. They wanted to lead the same lives in leisure and luxury. And they started quarreling and fighting with each other... All these activists who had endured hunger, sickness, imprisonment and the fear of death to fight for democracy forgot the past immediately after the revolution. They put on shirts and trousers, started smoking expensive cigarettes, and eating their meals in hotels. The conflict within the Nepali Congress Party just increased. Having worked closely together with the new leaders we knew both their weaknesses and strong points. As a result of this they recruited new people into the party to oppose us. These new members to a large degree belonged to the old elite, rich and educated. Slowly these new members together with the leaders got the majority in the party and tried to push the rest of us out. Eventually we decided to leave the party."<sup>139</sup>

Thus disappointment with the leaders, reaction against the growth of corruption (a problem virtually non-existent under the Ranas)<sup>140</sup>, impatience with the lack of genuine democratic reforms, and

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137 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.138-9.

138 See also, p.235.

139 Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988.

140 Undated interview with Dilli Raman Regmi.

dissatisfaction with the close ties between the government and India made Byathit and other members of the Nepali Congress stage an internal revolt. Though the general vocabulary of many within the party turned towards socialism there was still not room for Byathit and other disillusioned elements, and among the new parties to be formed was the Leftist Nepali Congress.<sup>141</sup>

Similar dissatisfaction led many even further to the left; to the communists. This was particularly evident among the students. One of these, Mohammad Mohsin, describes this development as follows: "To start with there was a consciousness among student activists in the Student Federation, a kind of romantic idea that we should not be involved in party politics, but in a national consensus. At that time (immediately after the revolution) it was also the case that the new politicians were quite young and inexperienced and we couldn't find them on the pedestal on which we had put them. We had a different image of the leaders - pure and perfect - because we at that time were very idealistic. We wanted to see the leaders in the ideal form which we had made in our minds and they were mortals with problems and weaknesses - when we saw that we became disoriented....Then we formed the Nepal Students' Union with the purpose of agitating purely for academic demands. Then there were talks of a merger between the students' union and the All-Nepal Students' Federation which was sponsored by the left, by the communists. It happens that when you are disillusioned with the ruling elite you go over to the other side. This was not based on our ideological accommodations - it was to oppose the government."<sup>142</sup>

Basudev Dhungana tells a similar story: "Immediately after the revolution I became involved in student activities. We established the students' union and at that time we were all together, both communists and Nepali Congress." Dhungana was abroad from 1953 to 1954 and when he returned he found that "Nepal's students' association had split into one group sympathetic to the Nepali Congress and another group sympathetic to the leftists. I became president of the latter group (which was the biggest)."<sup>143</sup>

The Communist Party was banned in January 1952 for its support for K.I. Singh and the Raksha Dal revolt.<sup>144</sup> Despite this, candidates backed by the communists managed to win the local elections (the first

141 See above, p.31.

142 Interview with Mohammed Mohsin, Kathmandu, 1/12/1990.

143 Interview with Basudev Dhungana, Kathmandu, 7/4/1991.

144 Report by R. Proud, 25/1/1952, FO766/37. The then Defence Minister, General Kaiser, told the British Embassy that the initiative for the ban had come from India.

elections in the country) in Kathmandu during the summer of 1953. This came as a significant shock to the established political leadership, and might have been one of the reasons for the growth of anti-Indian language even among the top party leaders, like B.P. Koirala. Anti-Indian slogans might be used in an attempt to recapture mass support and to fight competition from the far left. It needs mentioning though that B.P. Koirala's increased criticism of Indian involvement in Nepal also coincided with a conflict with his brother, M.P. Koirala, and his loss of political power.<sup>145</sup>

Popular disillusionment and resentment both with the government and with Indian dominance, and the resulting tilt towards communism is described in a letter from R. Proud at the British embassy on 5 February 1954: "Those of the people who concern themselves with politics - and they are not in a large proportion anywhere outside Kathmandu - are taking an unwholesome interest, at present it is not more, in communism as an alternative to the futility of the present political squabble... A close second to the government as recipients of abuse are the Indians and particularly the Indian military mission. The Nepalese are waking up to the fact that Indians are steadily consolidating their position here."<sup>146</sup> At no time was anti-Indian sentiment as clearly expressed as during the major demonstrations in May 1954. The occasion was Jawaharlal Nehru's second visit to Nepal, at which he was greeted by a big mass of defiant demonstrators at the airport waving black flags.

The seeming failure of democratic politics as well as the continued unrest and growth of popular discontent, all worked in the same direction: power and political initiative gravitated towards the traditional centre in politics, the monarchy. Somebody had to fill the vacuum left by the Rana regime, and as the new democratic leaders especially of the Nepali Congress seemed unable to do this, only King Tribhuvan was left. The Indian government seemed to support this development.<sup>147</sup> They were interested in stability in Nepal, and also in a leader they could largely control. King Tribhuvan seemed to fill both these requirements. Already in October 1951 an internal note in the British embassy had pointed out how the gradual revival of the old tradition of a person's political power being defined by his relative closeness to the king. "There was active jockeying for positions with the king between the Congress and Ranas, Congress ministers and the Maharajah paying him a number of visits."<sup>148</sup>

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145 See above, p.29

146 Proud to Major-General, Brigade of Gurkhas, 5/2/1954, FO 371/112227.

147 See above, p.27, for C.P.N. Singh's 1952 support for direct royal rule.

148 R. Proud, British Embassy Internal Note, 3/10/1951, FO 766/35.

King Tribhuvan thus seemed willingly or unwillingly to be pulling the strings behind the scene. In August 1952 this new reality was made clear when King Tribhuvan dismissed the cabinet and introduced a period of direct rule through an advisory council.<sup>149</sup>

As with the king's role during the revolution, it is unclear how far he was now actively pursuing his own political objectives or merely the victim of circumstances pushed unwillingly to the centre of power. Mathura Prasad Shrestha refers to how King Tribhuvan manipulated the Delhi agreement on his own terms<sup>150</sup>, implying that the king played an active role based on his personal interests. It is undeniable that during this period Tribhuvan gradually became more involved in day-to-day politics. But it seems equally clear that circumstances pushed him into this role: the need for stability, and the lack of a strong leader with wide popular support were the key factors. After witnessing the total elimination of Rana rule with the collapse of the first coalition government, India also seemed to push for a strengthening of King Tribhuvan's position.

As has already been seen, some held the view that King Tribhuvan had little or no personal interest in politics and thus made a weak king. This was probably too sweeping a judgement, but it does appear that he preferred not to become too involved in day-to-day administration if he could find others he trusted to do this on his behalf. His close relationship with M.P. Koirala whom he made prime minister twice during these years, seemed to support this assumption. In May 1953, anticipating the formation of the Rastriya Praja Party government the following month, a British diplomat commented as follows: "If M.P. Koirala succeeds in convincing the king that he has sufficient strength to form a government, I think it is unlikely that even Indian advice will succeed in making the king retain the present advisory regime. The king dislikes personal responsibility and has several times over the last months gone to India to try to gain Indian agreement to the abolition of the present system, but he has always been obliged to retain his present responsibility by the absence of any satisfactory person who could be made prime minister."<sup>151</sup>

Supporting the above statement, but emphasizing the symbolic importance of the king, the British ambassador in Kathmandu wrote as follows in a letter to the British Foreign Office on 2 December 1953: "Though such a weakling, the king remains important for Nepal, and also for the Indians who built him up so recently and have worked for him."<sup>152</sup>

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149 Above, p. 31.

150 See above, p. 33.

151 G.M. Galbraith, British Foreign Office note, 18/5/1954, FO 371.

152 Summerhayes to British Foreign Office, 2/12/53, FO 371/106866.

In the annual report from the British embassy covering events in 1952, however, Ambassador Summerhayes had already pointed out how King Tribhuvan's reliance on India has led to a fall in his popularity within the country: "His obvious reliance on India when Nepal has been used for long to manage her own internal affairs and the very fact that he has a fairly direct responsibility has cost him much of the popularity he has gained recently as the declared champion of people's rights. There is also a wide suspicion that he has no deep patriotism, and his frequent trips to India for rather undignified relaxation do not help."<sup>153</sup> The latter statement seems to be coloured by personal contempt for both India and King Tribhuvan. Evidence for the allegation of a decline in the king's popularity, however, is also to be found in a letter from the British embassy on 5 February 1954. Describing the return of King Tribhuvan to Nepal after a tour abroad, the letter states: "Neither in numbers nor in enthusiasm did they (the people at the airport when the king arrived) compare with those who welcomed Tensing, as it seems that in even in a backward country filmstars and Everest heroes are supplanting royalty for the first place in public favour."<sup>154</sup>

Behind the growth of royal power in the period there was also another important external factor. The fear of communism in Nepal grew steadily during these years, partly related to the general Cold War scenario but more importantly triggered by Chinese actions in Tibet. Particularly the British, but also the Indians felt that Nepal needed a strong leader to fight the threat of communist expansion. In 1954, for example, the British ambassador reported that the Indian government had raised no objections to Tribhuvan's limiting the powers of the Supreme Court because they believed his personal power provided Nepal's only bulwark against communism.<sup>155</sup> The Americans perhaps also had similar feelings.<sup>156</sup>

The fear of communism was probably one of the reasons for the British change of attitude towards Indian involvement in Nepal in the period. It seems that this fear, at least from the British point of view, gained importance mainly after the revolution. This was partly directed

153 Summerhayes, annual political report, 28/1/1953, FO 371/106865.

154 R. Proud to Major-General, Brigade of Gurkhas, 5/2/1954, FO371/112227.

155 Summerhayes to Foreign Office, 3/3/1954, FO371/112227.

156 American involvement in Nepal was not yet extensive, but diplomatic relations had been established in 1947, an agreement for economic assistance in January 1951, and a U.S. Technical Co-operation Office set up in Kathmandu in February 1952. See Leo E. Rose, *Nepal - Strategy for Survival*, Berkeley: University of California, 1971, p.201.

towards the activities of K.I. Singh and increased with the two attempted coups, but it was probably more linked to events in Tibet, the significance of which was only now fully coming home to the British. It is interesting to note that despite their acceptance of Indian involvement in Nepal, the British still did not have full confidence in India's ability to shoulder the fight against communism. In a letter of 16 February 1953, the British ambassador revealed that he trusted neither in India nor in King Tribhuvan to combat communist elements. In the usual vein, the king is once again described as "weak and foolish."<sup>157</sup>

Despite this expression of doubt from the British, it seems relatively clear that the views of Britain and India were totally identical on the desired objective: both countries saw a strong king and economic development as the main weapons with which to fight the growth of communism within Nepal.<sup>158</sup> Both countries expressed the need for a strong political leader in Nepal accepting that King Tribhuvan did not fill this role satisfactorily, partly due to his personality and partly to his declining health.

On 13 March 1955 King Tribhuvan died. The presence in politics of the new king, Mahendra, however had been felt long before this day. He had been a member of the regency councils set up in September 1953 and again in October 1954 when Tribhuvan left Nepal for medical treatment in Europe, and on 18 February 1955 a proclamation from Tribhuvan's sickbed in Switzerland had been published appointing Mahendra sole regent. As president of the regency council and virtual head of state in his father's place, he first presided over a major state function when he opened the second session of Nepal's second advisory assembly on 17 November 1954.<sup>159</sup> Already in this, his first public speech, it was evident that Mahendra was of a totally different character to his father, and there were perhaps the first signs of a strong political leader who could fill the power vacuum that had existed since the revolution. He strictly admonished the members of the advisory assembly to be aware of their responsibility in building the new Nepal.<sup>160</sup> His tone grew stronger in his message to the nation after assuming full royal powers on 18 February 1955: "Today it is a full four years since the arrival of

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157 Ambassador to Foreign Office, 16/2/1953, FO 371/106866.

158 Brief from Office of Intelligence Research, 26/4/1954.

159 This 113-member nominated assembly had held its first session from May to August 1954 and this had been characterised by vigorous opposition to prime minister M.P. Koirala, even though his own Rastriya Praja Party had by far the largest slate of representatives in it. See Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.116-18.

160 Devkota, *op.cit.*, p.268



democracy but we would be hard put to it to name even four achievements in that time."<sup>161</sup>

An Indian journalist writing in the leading Calcutta newspaper, *The Statesman*, on 3 December 1954, described Crown Prince Mahendra in the following manner: "Of all the persons I met in Kathmandu the crown prince impressed me the most....It was some comfort to find in Nepal one person in whom there seems to be widespread confidence. In essence the very future of kingship is at stake in Nepal. If there were a movement against the king, in which the obvious allies would be Rana interests and some of the parties now in the wilderness, the stage would be set for another revolution."<sup>162</sup> According to the journalist Nepal could not afford another revolution, nor the present governmental stalemate. He concluded that the crown prince was the only person who could resolve the political crisis in the country.

## Conclusion

A summary of the political developments in Nepal from 1950-55 may be made on the following lines. This period saw the imposition and the failure of democracy in the country. Democratic ideas were imposed by India in the 1950-51 revolution, but as a political system democracy failed to establish itself and instead this period witnessed the gradual revival of traditional power in Nepal.

But why did democracy fail in this period? The actors in the revolution and the immediate years afterwards, King Tribhuvan and the leaders of the political parties, seem to have carried much of the responsibility. The person who officially introduced democracy into the country, King Tribhuvan, never took a sufficiently close interest in politics, and seemed to have a rather limited idea of what democracy entailed. Furthermore, the leaders of the political parties, largely lacked well-founded political goals and ideas for the new society they wanted to create after the Rana regime had disappeared. It must be said, however, that most of them at least in principle wanted to establish democracy, and much of the failure must be ascribed to the repeated postponement of the promised elections, for which they were not primarily responsible. But instead of collectively pressing for the implementation of democratic reforms these new politicians seemed rather to be entangled in personal feuds and rivalry. It must be emphasized that all these leaders were young

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161 Devkota, *op.cit.*, p.282.

162 *Statesman*, 3/12/1954

and hardly any of them had any previous political experience or thorough education in democratic ideas.

The failure of democracy in this period may not be ascribed merely to internal factors. It is relatively clear that the new political system in Nepal was largely imposed from outside, from India. But how genuine was India's interest in establishing democracy in Nepal? At the base of Indian involvement both in the revolution and in the period afterwards lay Nehru's policy of a middle way, which seemed to imply that stability was more important than democratic reform. This might also explain India's support for the strengthening of monarchy in Nepal at the expense of democratic politics. A British intelligence brief of 26 April 1954<sup>163</sup> clearly identified the true interests of India and her order of priorities: the report referred to India's strengthening of her military defences along Nepal's northern border and stated that New Delhi had encouraged the government to counteract communist activity even at the expense of civil liberties.

Thus India's security interests had priority above her interests in democracy and human rights. India's professed support for democracy in Nepal in the 1950-51 revolution may therefore be seen principally as a means for strengthening India's position in the region. As a result, once the Interim Government Act was proclaimed in April 1951, legally introducing democracy in the country, India no longer seemed to worry about the implementation of democratic reforms.

At a deeper level however the failure of democracy in this period might again be linked to internal conditions in Nepal. As already mentioned the political change in 1950-51 had no mass support<sup>164</sup>. But more important than this, the society of 1950 with a literacy rate of only 2% seemed to lack a bourgeoisie and an intelligentsia.<sup>165</sup> These social strata which in most other countries stood as the guarantor for the establishment and maintenance of democracy were not yet present.

Nepalese society before the revolution seemed only to consist of the Rana family and their subjects. There were of course also a small group of dissidents, the activists of the anti-Rana struggle. But the main political

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163 Brief from Office for Intelligence Research, 26/4/1954.

164 See above, p.26.

165 Prem R. Uprety (*Political Awakening in Nepal - the search for a New Identity*, New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1992, pp.16-40) highlights the importance of a 'revolutionary intelligentsia' in Nepal, whilst Stephen Mikesell ('Cotton on the Silk Road', University of Wisconsin-Madison Ph.D. thesis, 1988) sees a determining role in the hills before 1951 for a bourgeoisie in the form of merchants. However, even if their arguments are accepted, the groups involved remained too small a proportion of the population to offset more traditional influences.

aspiration even among many of these seemed only to obtain personal political power, in other words to become like the Ranas.<sup>166</sup> The lack of a strong middle group who could consolidate and implement the political gains of the revolution, and the lack of a strong leader, paved the way for Indian manipulation and the failure of democracy.

This does not mean, however, that the revolution of 1950-51 was only an isolated episode followed by a return to the old ways. First and foremost the revolution of 1950-51 meant the end of centuries of isolation, and the opening up of the country's borders to foreign impulses and involvement. This period witnessed the beginning of modernization in Nepal, the establishment by the Indians and Americans of aid missions to implement the first foreign development programmes and the first moves towards a major expansion of education. The full force of this process of modernization however came only after Tribhuvan's death.

The social changes in Nepal in the early fifties were fundamental but slow. This was mainly due to the fact that these changes were imposed from outside rather than developed from within society. This was clearly illustrated in the contradiction between the Interim Government Act of 1951, largely dictated by the Indian government and providing for the abolition of caste, and retention with only minor changes of the Muluki Ain, the old civil code, which enshrined caste hierarchy.

This was still a very conservative and rigid society, but the fundamental change consisted in the fact that Nepal was now for the first time fully exposed to ideas and impulses from the outside. Furthermore the revolution of 1950-51 brought a certain measure of new freedom, unheard of in the old society under the Ranas. One of the activists of the revolution, Gobar Dhan Maskey said: "The walls no longer had ears".<sup>167</sup>

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166 Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988 and Kedar Man Byathit, 31/3/1988.

167 Gobar Dhan Maskey, 4/4/1988.



## CHAPTER 2

# DEMOCRACY FROM ABOVE AND GRADUAL CHANGE FROM BELOW

### Political Modernization: 1955-1960

King Mahendra was determined to play an assertive role as monarch but also committed by his father's promises to continue Nepal's experiment with democracy. It was only in 1960 that he finally decided these two objectives were incompatible, at least if 'democracy' was on the lines accepted in India and in western countries. Throughout the six years before then, though the king retained the ultimate power in his own hands and often clashed with the political parties, he nevertheless allowed the development of a party-based representative democracy. This process culminated with the country's first general election in 1959 and the installation of a Nepali Congress government under B.P. Koirala. The period can thus be seen as one of political modernization, even if the pace and completeness of the process was less than the Nepali Congress had hoped for when they launched their struggle against the Ranas.

Tension between Mahendra and the Congress was to be a recurring feature of these years but relations between them got off to a good start in January 1955. Whilst still crown prince and head of the regency council, Mahendra responded sympathetically to the *satyagraha* launched by Congress against the coalition government of M.P. Koirala. A letter from the prince supporting the party's demands for the early election of a constituent assembly and for an independent judiciary was hailed in the Congress newspaper as 'the Magna Carta of Nepal.'<sup>1</sup> Congress immediately suspended the *satyagraha*, but M.P. Koirala remained beset by arguments with his coalition partners and even within his own Rastriya Praja Party. On 30 January 1955, after his budget proposals had been voted down in the advisory assembly, he submitted his cabinet's resignation.

Congress hopes for their own early return to power were, however, belied, as Mahendra followed his father's 1952 example and ruled directly with the help of a council of royal advisors appointed in April. It became

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<sup>1</sup> *Nepal Pukar*, quoted in Parmanand, *The Nepali Congress since its Inception*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1982, p.171.

clear that the king preferred to rely on his own associates within the royal establishment and in the Rana family rather than on the new-style party politicians. Reporting to London in June, the British embassy noted rumours that the king would retain the advisors as an inner cabinet even after a party political government had been formed. The embassy also commented on the central position of the *rajguru*, or royal spiritual counsellor, Gurujyu Bhogendra Raj.<sup>2</sup> The shift was welcomed enthusiastically by the ambassador, who later looked back on 1955 as 'a year when the politicians were in the wilderness and all our friends were holding the reins of power.'<sup>3</sup>

Mahendra's conservative orientation was dictated partly by his own personality but also by his family connections. He had originally married Indra Rajyalakshmi, a grand-daughter of Maharaja Juddha. In September 1950 she died during a miscarriage and the following year he insisted on remarrying with her younger sister, Ratna. The match was strongly opposed by King Tribhuvan, who had a deep distrust of Juddha's family and referred to Ratna as a 'daughter of the Gorkha Dal.' Ironically, Mahendra turned for help in this situation to the Congress politicians with whom he was later so bitterly at odds. Both B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh appealed to Tribhuvan to give his blessing to the marriage, but the king was unrelenting and deliberately left on a trip to Calcutta the day before the ceremony.<sup>4</sup> In an interview over twenty years later, B.P. claimed that Tribhuvan had upbraided him for taking Mahendra's side and warned him: 'You don't know my son. He will make you, he will make all of you weep.'

In May 1955 Mahendra convened a conference of political groups to discuss the way ahead but this was boycotted by Congress and the other main parties because the king's consultation exercise put them on a level with groups such as the Undertakers' Union and the Home for Old Cows.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, he announced that elections would be held in October 1957 and opened negotiations with the parties on their immediate participation in government. The talks broke down over the king's insistence on a say in the selection of party representatives, but eventually in January 1956 he appointed Tanka Prasad Acharya as prime minister with a cabinet containing members of the Praja Parishad plus some independents. On the

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2 Proud to Foreign Office, 16/6/1955.

3 Tollinton to Foreign Office, 29/3/1956.

4 B.P. Koirala, interview in Bholu Chatterji, *Nepal's Experiment with Democracy*, New Delhi: Ankur, 1977, p.17; interview with Ganesh Man Singh, Kathmandu, 15/8/1993 (JW).

5 British embassy to Foreign Office, 12/5/1957.

collapse of M.P. Koirala's government a year previously, the Praja Parishad had been enlarged by the accession of Bhadrakali Mishra and Balchandra Sharma with their followers. There was friction between these two and Acharya, and since Balchandra Sharma himself and also Pashupatinath Ghose, a close associate of Bhadrakali Mishra, were both in the cabinet, the prime minister found himself in a weak position. The new government has been described as 'scarcely more than a facade behind which the king continued the direct rule system in a somewhat modified form.'<sup>6</sup>

The Acharya government's period in office (January 1956 to July 1957) saw the lifting of the ban on the Communist Party imposed for their support of the Raksha Dal uprising.<sup>7</sup> The party's legal status was restored on 16 April 1956, reportedly after meetings between King Mahendra himself and the communist leaders, who gave assurances that they would not oppose the monarchy.<sup>8</sup> Many in the party were unhappy at this compromise of their republican principles and consequently the quarrel between the 'radical' and 'moderate' wings of the party became more virulent than when it had been operating as an underground organisation.<sup>9</sup> The king himself was probably the author of the unbanning, since the communists, like the smaller parties in general, were useful to Mahendra in strengthening his hand against the Congress. However the move was a natural one for Acharya to support since he had himself formed an alliance with the communists in 1951 and even earlier, whilst imprisoned by the Ranas, he had expressed strong support for the communist ideology.<sup>10</sup>

Much greater controversy was caused by a move which Acharya made in June 1956, when he declared that 'It has not yet been decided whether the coming general election will be for a constituent assembly or for a parliament.'<sup>11</sup> In fact, the convening of a constituent assembly had been part of the deal worked out in Delhi in 1950/51 and had also been promised to the people in Tribhuvan's proclamation of 18 February 1951

6 Bhuvan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, p.188.

7 See above, pp.35-6.

8 Information supplied by Triratna Manandhar, based on a confidential interview with one of King Mahendra's then advisors.

9 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.262; Anirudha Gupta, *Politics in Nepal*, 2nd. ed., Delhi: Kalinga, 1993, p.204.

10 Letter from T.P.Acharya to Kashi Prasad Shrivastav, published in the latter's *Nepal ki Kahani*, Delhi: Atmaram & Sons, 1955, p.136-44.

11 *Gorkhapatra*, 8/6/1956, quoted in Grishma Bahadur Devkota, *Nepalko Rajnaitik Darpan*, vol.2, Kathmandu: A.B.Devkota, 1980, p.403.

and in the 1954 Representation of the People Act. For the Nepali Congress and for the party politicians generally, including many members of Acharya's own Praja Parishad, an election for a parliament under a constitution granted by the king was a denial of the principle of popular sovereignty which they believed had been established by the anti-Rana revolution. B.P. Koirala announced that Congress would not take part in any election of that sort and insisted that, far from the king being the giver of the constitution, he would only be able to retain his throne if the constituent assembly agreed to the country remaining a monarchy.<sup>12</sup> Koirala also brought a court case against the prime minister on the grounds that his statement had contravened legislation providing for a constituent assembly. The supreme court ruled in favour of Acharya, principally on the grounds that the Representation of the People Act had not been duly signed by King Tribhuvan and therefore was not legally valid.<sup>13</sup> The verdict did not end the controversy and the issue remained a highly divisive one for the next two years.

Acharya's government staggered on until the following summer, when food shortages brought demonstrators onto the streets of Kathmandu. The Praja Parishad Party executive, under Bhadrakali Mishra as president, instructed Acharya to request the king either to allow him to form a more homogeneous government or to accept his resignation. 'Homogeneity' would have meant the removal of some or all of the 'independents' who had been nominated to the cabinet by the king and whose number had been increased in February 1957. These were mostly trusted royal confidantes and the Praja Parishad must have realised that there was little or no possibility of the king agreeing to their dismissal. Mahendra accepted the prime minister's resignation on 14 July 1957 and caused another controversy by announcing that the cabinet had asked to be relieved of office because they were unable to hold the elections by the scheduled date of October 1957. This accusation was vigorously rejected by Acharya but supported by the independent members of the government.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time as announcing his acceptance of the Acharya government's resignation, Mahendra also revealed that he had invited K.I. Singh to try to form a multi-party administration. Singh had spent three

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12 Devkota, *op.cit.*, pp.576-7.

13 For a full discussion, see Triratna Manandhar, 'The Constituent Assembly vs. Parliament Issue in Nepal', *Rolamba*, vol.v, no.1 (Jan-Mar 1955), pp. 17-21.

14 Mahendra himself later admitted that the election issue had not been mentioned in Acharya's resignation letter, but the independent members confirmed that the cabinet had formally told the king of its inability to hold the election on schedule.



and a half years in self-imposed exile in China following his escape from Kathmandu after the Raksha Dal revolt,<sup>15</sup> but had been allowed to return to Nepal in September 1955. Despite his reputation as an anti-Indian firebrand, Singh had almost immediately begun calling for close Indo-Nepalese co-operation and denouncing the raising of anti-India slogans.<sup>16</sup> The United Democratic Party, which he had set up in October 1955, took a strongly populist line, but was widely believed to have links to the royal palace and to Rana circles. B.P. Koirala publicly alleged that the party was being funded by Hari Shamsheer J.B. Rana, a son of Maharaja Juddha, who was Mahendra's father-in-law and one of his trusted advisors.<sup>17</sup> Although the British ambassador expressed scepticism about such rumours when reporting them to London, they were later to be confirmed by the general secretary of the United Democratic Party, who revealed that King Mahendra himself was largely responsible for the formation of the organisation and that he had continued to finance it as a counter to the Nepali Congress.<sup>18</sup>

As K.I. Singh was unable to agree terms for members of any other party to join him, he was on 26 July 1957 appointed prime minister of a cabinet composed solely of his own followers and of royal nominees. Among the latter was the celebrated poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota as minister for education and culture. Later on, Jiv Raj Sharma, a leader of one branch of the Nepali National Congress, joined the government, but solely in his personal capacity.<sup>19</sup>

As prime minister, K.I. Singh adopted a brash and aggressive style which alienated an already suspicious political elite. Charges of massive corruption against former governments, press censorship, prohibition of contacts between officials and foreigners, dismissal of civil servants at random and the announcement of a two-year economic plan interrupting the existing five-year created alarm and hostility. The indignation expressed in a letter from the British embassy was widely shared: 'K.I. Singh has come to the chief political post in his country...from being the leader of a party in which there was no other man of comparable stature and in which his word was law....he was under the misapprehension that

15 See above, pp.35-6.

16 Joshi & Rose, *op. cit.*, p.259.

17 Tollinton to Foreign Office, 30/6/1956; Koirala also believed that Hari Shamsheer had been involved in arranging K.I. Singh's escape from jail in Bhairawa after his capture by Indian forces in 1951 (Bhola Chatterji, *People, Palace and Politics*, New Delhi: Ankur, 1980, p.105)

18 Parmanand, *op. cit.*, p.222.

19 *Nepal Press Digest*, vol.1 (1957), no.11, p.74.

he could treat all his new contacts, including the king and foreign missions, in the same cavalier manner in which he has, up to now, treated his subservient followers.<sup>20</sup>

When K.I. Singh had first been appointed, it had been widely expected that the king would make use of him to postpone the elections promised by Mahendra for October 1957.<sup>21</sup> On 4 October Singh did indeed announce that the election commission and cabinet had concluded the general election could not be held as scheduled. Most political groups reacted angrily, particularly because neither the prime minister's announcement nor a subsequent one by the king himself offered a new date. On 8 October, the Nepali Congress, the Nepali National Congress and the Praja Parishad, united against the government since August 1957 as a 'United Democratic Front', announced plans for a *satyagraha* in December, claiming that any honest government should be able to hold elections within six months.<sup>22</sup>

A week later the government was embroiled in a further controversy with the announcement that the medium of instruction in all government-aided primary and lower-secondary schools must be Nepali. This issue was a fraught one in the Terai, where many teachers were Indians and lessons were generally taught in Hindi, which functioned as a *lingua franca* for the region in much the same way that Nepali did for the hills. As many prominent politicians were either from the Terai or had long-standing connections with India, there was a storm of protest. The prime minister's own party was split, with its general-secretary, Terai-born K.P. Shrivastava, joining the protest meetings but the publicity secretary, Grishma Bahadur Devkota, enthusiastically backing the government line.<sup>23</sup> Vedanand Jha, leader of the Terai Congress, initially led the protest, but a Congress politician, Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, later emerged as chairman of a national 'Save Hindi' campaign.<sup>24</sup> In a November statement he argued that 'it was political bankruptcy and communalism to suggest that Hindi was not the language of the people of the Terai.'<sup>25</sup>

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20 Embassy report to Foreign Office, 12/10/1957.

21 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.113.

22 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.200.

23 Joshi & Rose, p.202

24 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.175. The Terai Congress had been established in 1951 and advocated regional autonomy as well as recognition of Hindi (Joshi & Rose, p.138).

25 *The Commoner*, 5/11/1957 (*Nepal Press Digest* vol.1, no.16 (1957)). For the general linguistic situation in the Terai, see John Whelpton, 'Political Identity in Nepal: State Nation, and Community' in Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton (ed.), *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997.

K.I. Singh's stormy period in office came to an end on 14 November 1957 with the announcement that the king had accepted his resignation. The news evidently came as a surprise to the prime minister himself, since one newspaper reported that he was scheduled to attend a meeting with government secretaries that afternoon and had to telephone Radio Nepal for the full text of the king's statement.<sup>26</sup> He nevertheless afterwards maintained that his resignation had been entirely voluntary and was in fact criticised by many of his own party colleagues for submitting his government's resignation without cabinet or party authorisation.<sup>27</sup> Most probably, K.I. Singh had expected that the king would refuse his offer to resign, as he had done on previous occasions.<sup>28</sup> In any case, the key issue seems to have been Singh's failure to get a free hand from the king over civil service appointments. Heads of departments continued to look to Mahendra as their real superior and the king had no wish to change this arrangement.<sup>29</sup>

Still faced with the prospect of the United Democratic Front's *satyagraha*, Mahendra convened a palace conference of the political parties on 6 December, the day before the agitation was scheduled to begin. Representatives of the election commission blamed the slippage in the election timetable on successive governments' failure to respond to its request for enabling legislation and explained that a minimum of 196 days, exclusive of the monsoon period (July-September), would be required to complete preparations.<sup>30</sup> This implied late October 1958 as the earliest possible date for polling to begin. The Front nevertheless remained insistent that only six months would be required and went ahead with their protest.

The effectiveness of the civil disobedience campaign is difficult to assess, as contemporary press accounts differ widely, reflecting the political sympathies of each paper. One report claimed that the *satyagrahis* were backed on 9 December by a crowd of 10,000, whilst another mentions only a handful of demonstrators and records how opponents of

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26 *The Commoner*, 17/11/1957 (*Nepal Press Digest*, vol.1, no.16 (1957)).

27 *Halkhabar*, no.15 (*Nepal Press Digest*, vol.1, no.15 (1957)); Joshi & Rose, p.268.

28 Singh later claimed to have submitted his resignation three times 'because of the non-cooperation of the corrupt Civil Service and other selfish elements'. (*Nepal Press Digest*, vol.1, no.16 (1957), p.139).

29 Joshi & Rose, p.230.

30 Devkota, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.553. The delays to which the commission had been subject since its establishment in 1951 are summarised by Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.140. B.P. Koirala later claimed that the election commissioner had told him privately that a six-month timetable was possible if the political will was forthcoming (Chatterji, *People, Palace and Politics*, New Delhi: Ankur, 1980, p.109).

their action garlanded Congress leader Mahendra Bikram Shah with eggs and chicken feathers.<sup>31</sup> At any rate, a determined effort was certainly made to prevent government employees reaching their offices, and the police resorted to water hoses and tear gas to control the demonstrators.

The political parties outside the United Democratic Front, including K.I. Singh's United Democratic Party, the Gorkha Parishad and a number of smaller groups, had accepted the election commission's arguments and on 9 December they issued a statement calling for elections on 12 February 1959. On 15 December, Mahendra himself formally proposed that elections begin on 18 February, the anniversary of King Tribhuvan's appointment of the Congress-Rana coalition in 1951, which is still celebrated in Nepal as 'Democracy Day'. The Front immediately accepted the king's proposal and called off their action, which was in any case losing impetus by this time. B.P. Koirala explained this change of heart on the grounds that the figure of six months had been merely a 'symbolic demand'.<sup>32</sup> On 1 February 1958, King Mahendra set the framework for the elections with a proclamation proposing the setting up of a constitution drafting commission, the convening of a third advisory assembly and the formation of a government of party representatives and independents without a prime minister. Although this meant the final abandonment of any hope for a constituent assembly, Congress, followed by all other parties except the Communists, announced their acceptance of the royal proclamation. This acquiescence was partly due to the limited support gained by the *satyagraha* and to the Front's poor showing in Kathmandu municipal elections held in mid-January.<sup>33</sup> Arrangements for the advisory assembly were announced in March but the body was not convened until November and dissolved after only 37 days. The council of ministers was established in May, and remained in office until after the elections. The Congress representative, Subarna Shamsher, was appointed 'interim chairman', though it was unclear what authority this gave him over the other members, viz. Dilli Raman Regmi of the Nepali National Congress, Chandra Bhushan Pandey of the Praja Parishad, Ranadhir Subba of the Gorkha Parishad and two 'independents' chosen by Mahendra.

Whilst the council of ministers went ahead energetically with preparations for the election, the drafting commission prepared the constitution under which the elected politicians would do their work. Party representatives on the commission included Congress general secretary, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya; another Congressman, Hora Prasad

31 *Ujyalo*, 9/12/1957 and *Halkhabar*, 9/12/1957 (*Nepal Press Digest*, vol.1, no.16).

32 *Nepal Pukar*, 19/12/1957 (*Nepal Press Digest*, vol.1, no.17).

33 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.272.

Joshi; and Ranadhir Subba, the president of the Gorkha Parishad. A British expert on constitutional law, Sir Ivor Jennings, who had already lent his expertise to other new Asian democracies, acted as consultant to the commission.

The constitution was finally promulgated on 12 February 1959, only six days before the start of voting. It provided for a bicameral legislature, with a directly elected lower house (the Pratinidhi Sabha, or House of Representatives) of 109 members and an upper house (Mahasabha or Senate) of 36 members, half to be elected by the House of Representatives and half appointed by the king. The constitution distinguished very carefully between powers the king could exercise on the recommendation of his ministers and those within his own discretion, and the balance of power was set very firmly in favour of royal authority. It was stated explicitly that executive authority rested with the king, and 'shall be exercised by him *either directly* or through Ministers or other officers subordinate to him'.<sup>34</sup> The king was given the power to determine the relationship between himself, his ministers and other government employees and could also veto bills presented to him by parliament for his assent.<sup>35</sup> He was also entitled under articles 55 and 56 to declare a state of emergency, enabling him to over-ride all organs of government except for the Supreme Court.

In effect, the 1959 constitution provided for a dyarchical form of government with two loci of power, one in the royal palace and the other in the Civil Secretariat.<sup>36</sup> This was far from what the Nepali Congress ideally wanted, but the palace was in a strong enough position to insist that its wishes prevailed. The struggle over the constitution had now to be put on one side and the parties prepared for the first time to put themselves to the test of public opinion.

The Nepali Congress entered this contest as the party with the highest profile. Like other political groupings, its core was made up of students, ex-soldiers and professional politicians. Until 1956 its only mass support base was amongst the peasantry of the eastern Terai; in the hills, it retained the support of former Gurkha soldiers who had fought for it in 1950-51 but the influence of Indian-style mass activism was obviously much less there, and it had lost most of its membership in the

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34 Article 10(2), emphasis supplied. The English text of the 1959 constitution has recently been republished in S.K. Chaturvedi, *Nepal - Internal Politics and its Constitutions*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1993, pp.283-322. For the Nepali version, see Devkota, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.713-752.

35 Articles 16(2) and 42(2).

36 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.289..

western Terai when the Indian army was used to suppress K.I. Singh and his followers.<sup>37</sup> The party's own reported membership figures -almost 600,000 in 1956 and 200,000 in 1960<sup>38</sup> - suggest the organisation reached a peak in the mid-fifties and then declined, but the statistics are highly suspect, both because of laxity in record-keeping and reporting and because at this time anyone could become a party member by making a once-and-for-all payment of one rupee and without being necessarily involved in party work.<sup>39</sup> In fact, from 1956 onwards, whatever the number of its active supporters, the party was opening new branches throughout the country and greatly expanding its influence.<sup>40</sup> This process was made easier by the existence of a support base amongst ex-members of the Indian army, especially in Gandaki zone.<sup>41</sup>

Precisely because Congress was the most prominent party in the country, ambitious individuals were likely to join as a means of self-advancement rather than because of commitment to the ideals of 1950-51, whilst older members might look to it for a reward for their earlier sacrifices. Gobar Dhan Maskey's condemnation of the resulting atmosphere of opportunism was quoted in the previous chapter,<sup>42</sup> and in their report to the 1956 Birganj conference, the party's general secretaries had voiced similar complaints.<sup>43</sup> In December 1957, B.P. Koirala himself addressed the issue in a letter to a party worker in Baglung district: 'You hear so many Congressmen voicing the shameful words, "If Congress does not give me a ticket in the election, I'll stand as an independent." If anyone dares to make Congress into a vehicle for pursuing self-interest, we must expel them. We must all take a vow to serve selflessly.'<sup>44</sup> However, no amount of indignation could ensure that a party contending for power remained a moral crusade.

The crusade B.P. called upon his colleagues to devote themselves to was one for 'democratic socialism', which had been officially adopted as

37 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p170-71 & 185. Congress was helped in the eastern Terai because Biratnagar was the Koiralas' home town. In May 1953, B.P. attracted a crowd of 30,000 peasants there to hear him urge a no-rent campaign (Parmanand, *op.cit.*, pp.170-171.) Krishna Hachhethu (personal communication) believes that the ex-Gurkhas in the western hills were a significant factor on Congress's favour.

38 Gupta, pp.163, 176.

39 I owe this second point to Krishna Hachhethu.

40 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.185.

41 Krishna Hachhethu, personal communication.

42 Interview with Gobar Dhan Maskey, Kathmandu 4/4/1988.

43 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, pp.140-41.

44 B.P.Koirala to Om Prasad Thakali, 10 Paush 2013 (c.25 December 1957), published in *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 11/11/1994.

the party's goal in November 1955. In May 1957, after a year as president of the party, Subarna Shamsher relinquished the post in B.P.'s favour, acknowledging him as the man most capable of leading the party successfully through an election campaign. The party subsequently adopted B.P.'s more strongly socialist draft manifesto in preference to the one which Subarna had prepared with Surya Prasad Upadhyaya and Rishikesh Shaha.<sup>45</sup> The document described the party's goal as the establishment of a socialist society in which 'the social injustices arising from the distinction between rich and poor are done away with and the whole nation is like one family.'<sup>46</sup> It was admitted, however, that this could only be a long-term objective and the party's concrete promises were to introduce land reform, with redistribution of holdings in excess of a still-to-be-specified limit, and to begin the industrialisation of the country. The manifesto called for the encouragement of cottage industries, the development of medium-scale enterprises by private entrepreneurs, and for the state to bear the responsibility of establishing heavy industry, with the participation of foreign capital if necessary. B.P. later made clear that this foreign capital would preferably be from India.<sup>47</sup>

The Gorkha Parishad, which in 1953 claimed a highly improbable 800,000 followers,<sup>48</sup> appeared to present a strong ideological contrast to Congress. It was much more traditionalist, stressing the role of the king at its 1956 conference and the following year supporting K.I. Singh when he announced the postponement of elections.<sup>49</sup> The party favoured economic development through private enterprise with a major role for foreign investment, and Ranadhir Subba, the Gorkha Parishad representative in the 1958-9 council of ministers, caused controversy in July 1958 when, without consulting the other ministers, he issued a statement of government policy embodying these principles.<sup>50</sup> The party had originally been more or less a continuation of the outlawed Gorkha Dal, with Babar Shamsher and his father Mrigendra key figures, and a following among old dependents of the Ranas. Its appeal to the hill people to stand up against Congress and its alleged Indian leanings could

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45 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.262. S.P. Upadhyaya's family were the hereditary priests for Subarna's and both were by instinct rather more conservative than B.P. Rishikesh Shaha's section of the Nepali National Congress had parted from Dilli Raman Regmi in 1952 and then linked up with the Nepali Congress until 1956.

46 Nepali Congress, *Chunav-Ghoshana*, Kathmandu, n.d., p.5

47 B.P. Koirala, interviewed in Bhola Chatterji, *Nepal's Experiment with Democracy op.cit.*, p.87-88.

48 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.189.

49 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.236.

50 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.236.

nevertheless reach beyond this circle and Ranadhir Subba, the party president, was himself a Christian who had taught at Darjeeling.

The Communist Party claimed around 5,000 members in the fifties, with 500 being full-time party workers. In contrast to other parties, they operated a cadre system and only admitted applicants to membership after careful screening.<sup>51</sup> There were also, however, many sympathisers belonging to various fronts or associated bodies, which had played an especially important role during the period when the party was illegal. Most important of these was probably the Akhil Nepal Kisan Sangh (All Nepal Peasants' Union), which claimed 143,000 members in 1954.<sup>52</sup> After the lifting of the ban on the party in April 1956, there was continuing tension between those such as Man Mohan Adhikari and Keshar Jang Rayamajhi who put more emphasis on working as a constitutional party and others, including D.P. Adhikari and the party's founder, Pushpa Lal, who wanted to concentrate on Maoist-style mobilisation of the peasantry. The radicals had been behind agrarian disturbances in Rautahat district in the summer of 1957, as peasants clashed with landlords who were generally Congress sympathisers.<sup>53</sup> The party agreed in 1958 to take part in the elections and issued a relatively moderate manifesto. Like both Congress and the Gorkha Parishad, they advocated land reform, but they were distinctive in calling for the end of Gurkha recruitment for the British army, the re-negotiation of the 1950 'unequal treaty' with India and opposition to American 'infiltration'.<sup>54</sup>

K.I. Singh's United Democratic Party differed from the others in drawing its leadership almost entirely from outside Kathmandu. Like the Gorkha Parishad, its main support-base was among the Chetri and Thakuri caste and less from the educated Brahmans so prominent in Congress and in the Communist Party; there were only 4 Brahmans amongst the 32 members of the party's working committee.<sup>55</sup> As might be expected in the light of the strong palace links Singh had developed, its manifesto was supportive of the throne, calling for the development of a 'real monarchical democracy'. It also took a strongly traditionalist line on religion, promising never to allow the conversion of Hindus to other religions or the slaughter of cows.<sup>56</sup>

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51 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.209.

52 Gupta, p.203.

53 Proud to FO, 11/7/1957; Gupta, p.205.

54 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.295; Bhim Raul, *Nepalma Samyabadi Andolanka Udbhav ra Bikas*, Kathmandu: Pairavi Prakashan, 2047 (1990/91), p.49.

55 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.260.

56 Gupta, p.145. Conversion was in fact banned under the recently-drafted constitution.



Also competing for the mantle of guardian of religion was Ranganath Sharma's Prajatantrik Mahasabha (Democratic Convention). Sharma, who had been a royal nominee in the expanded T.P. Acharya cabinet in 1957, had only set up his organisation in November of that year, following the end of K.I. Singh's short spell as prime minister. It was rumoured to be palace-sponsored, and had in fact been set up with finance from two members of the Rana family, Magh Raj Shamsheer and Bhakti Shamsheer.<sup>57</sup> Mahendra had certainly made use of the Mahasabha, as he did of many other small organisations, to counter the demand from Congress and its allies for early elections.

Vedanand Jha's Nepal Terai Congress also had the advantage of a distinct identity. It fought the election on its established programme of protection for the Hindi language and regional autonomy for the Terai, calling for Nepal to be turned into a federal state. Its appeal to regionalism was, however, countered by the fact that politicians with links to the Terai or to India were so prominent in Congress.

The remaining parties were more difficult to characterise. There were now two Praja Parishads, as the original party, long bedevilled by quarrels between T.P. Acharya and Bhadrakali Mishra, had finally split when Acharya set up his own separate organisation in August 1958. Both sections issued similar manifestos. Perhaps surprisingly in view of his previously-expressed enthusiasm for Marxism, T.P. Acharya's called for protection of the interests of the middle-class as the class most fitted to lead the country forward. Regmi's Nepali National Congress, perhaps reflecting its leader's scholarly interests, promised to give top priority to the development of national and regional languages.<sup>58</sup>

The elections themselves commenced on 18 February 1959. Shortage of staff meant that polling had to take place over several weeks and the last results were not declared until early in May. The difficulty of communications within the hills made the exercise a daunting one, and voters were expected to walk anything up to 28 miles in order to cast their ballot.<sup>59</sup> In the light of this, the turnout of 43% of the electorate was quite impressive.

It was widely believed in Nepal that King Mahendra had allowed

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57 Gupta, p.213. Magh Raj and Bhakti Shamsheer were a son and grandson of Rudra, a C-Class Rana who had been removed from the roll of succession by Juddha and had later helped the Tribhuvan and Congress in the struggle against the ruling Ranas.

58 Gupta, p.145. Dilli Raman Regmi is the author of several books on Nepali history.

59 INSEC, *Nepal and its electoral system*, Kathmandu, 1991, p.70.

**TABLE 2.1: 1959 ELECTIONS RESULTS<sup>60</sup>**

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	% of Seats	% of Total Vote
Nepali Congress	108	74	67.9	37.2
Gorkha Parishad	86	19	17.4	17.3
United Democratic Party	86	5	4.6	9.9
Communist Party of Nepal	47	4	3.7	7.2
Praja Parishad (Acharya)	46	2	1.8	2.9
Praja Parishad (Mishra)	36	1	0.9	3.3
Nepal Terai Congress	21	0	-	2.1
Nepali National Congress	20	0	-	0.7
Prajatantrik Mahaabha	68	0	-	3.3
Independents	268	4	3.7	16.7

the elections to go ahead in the belief that there would be a hung-parliament and that he himself would continue in effective control of the administration.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the dispersal of Congress support throughout the country and the first-past-the-post electoral system combined to give the party two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives on 37% of the popular vote (see Table). The strength of the other parties which won seats tended to be much more localised. Of the Gorkha Parishad's twenty seats, fourteen were in an area of the central hills from Gorkha in the west to Ramechhap in the east, where client-patron relationships from the Rana period were probably at their strongest. Three of the United Democratic party's five victories were scored in K.I. Singh's home ground of the western Terai, whilst two of the Communists' four were in Rautahat, the

60 Figures taken from Gupta, *op. cit.*, p.146. Full results for each constituency are set out in Devkota, *op.cit.*, vol.2, pp.99-111. Congress in fact originally won 75 seats, but lost the immediate by-election caused by Subarna Shamsher's resigning one of two seats he had successfully contested.

61 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.223. B.P. Koirala believed that this was also the Indian assessment and that India used this as an argument to persuade the king to hold elections (Bhola Chattarji, *People, Palace and Politics*, New Delhi: Ankur, 1980, p.108.).

scene of their recent agrarian agitation.<sup>62</sup> The two factions of the Praja Parishad, both of whose leaders were defeated, had three seats between them, in the contiguous districts of Sindhuli, Rautahat & Sarlahi.

The final election results were not released until 10 May, but the scale of the Congress victory was clear well before then. Subarna resigned as chairman of the council of ministers on 4 May and at a party meeting proposed the election of B.P. Koirala as head of the parliamentary party, and thus the Congress choice for prime minister.<sup>63</sup> Despite this, King Mahendra did not immediately ask B.P. to form a government. As it was widely believed that Mahendra was personally opposed to him, B.P. sought an interview with the king and told him he would be willing to stand aside if the king preferred to appoint Subarna. As B.P. told the story thirteen years later, the royal reply was forthright: 'Who told you that I am against you? Subarna Shamsheer is not very young and energetic. I want an energetic person. I am also young.... The country wants dynamic leadership, so I want you as prime minister.'<sup>64</sup> Mahendra probably did have real reservations about B.P., as Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and others continued to believe,<sup>65</sup> but in the end evidently felt obliged to appoint him and also to appear enthusiastic about it.

Once in power, the Congress administration's attempts to implement its major manifesto commitments inevitably ran into opposition from the vested interests affected. In April 1960, some of those who felt threatened by the reforms organised themselves as the Jana Hita Sangh ('Public Interest Association') and later staged a campaign of strikes in the run-up to the king's removal of the government the following December.

The first major reform measure was the imposition of taxation on *birta* holdings, which was passed in September 1959 and became law the following month, though implementation was deferred until September 1960.<sup>66</sup> *Birta* grants, a favourite device of the Ranas for rewarding their own family members and also some trusted retainers, had involved a transfer to the recipient of the state's right to the revenue from of a tract of land and by 1951 around 36% of cultivated land was under this form of tenure. The abolition of the system, which had been agreed on in principle

62 The other Communist seats were Patan and Palpa East. Gupta, *op. cit.*, p.147, is wrong in stating they got substantial support in the districts of Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Bara and Parsa.

63 Devkota, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.113.

64 B.P. Koirala interviewed in October 1973 by Bhola Chatterji, quoted in Chatterji, *Nepal's Experiment with Democracy*, New Delhi: Ankur, 1977, p.89. This version is corroborated by Ganesh Man Singh as reported in Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.225.

65 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.148-9 (fn.).

66 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.153.

in October 1951, was not necessarily of great significance to the actual cultivator, because there was by this time often an intermediate landlord between him and the *birta*-holder<sup>67</sup>, but it was regarded with apprehension both by the beneficiaries of the *birta* system themselves and by others who saw the move as the forerunner of more wide-reaching land reform. Although the Congress manifesto had stated that the party accepted 'the principle of compensation' as part of its land reform programme,<sup>68</sup> the *birta* abolition legislation did not offer any payment and opponents could therefore brand it as 'confiscation'. Their concern was reflected in a demonstration held outside the royal palace in December 1959.

Also controversial was the proposal to abolish the *rajyautas*. These fifteen principalities were incorporated within the kingdom of Nepal but their *rajyas* retained taxation and judicial powers over their inhabitants. The *raja* of Bhajang was particularly strong in his opposition and was allegedly encouraged by the Karmavir Mahamandal, a conservative Hindu grouping led by Naraharinath Yogi.<sup>69</sup> In summer 1960, following the passing of legislation abolishing *rajyauta* courts, he and his son staged a revolt and then fled to India.

A third major reform was the nationalization of the country's forests, which involved buying out the existing contractors, amongst whom were the king's own brothers. The dispute here seems to have centred on the level of compensation payable rather than on nationalization in principle.

In addition to the challenge from lobbies alarmed by these measures, Congress also faced opposition from the politicians who had lost at the polls. In 1955, a British diplomat had forecast that 'Should any one party win an outright majority in the election, it will immediately be accused by all the other parties of having both bought and bribed officials.'<sup>70</sup> In the case of some party leaders, this proved correct: Bhadrakali Mishra's Praja Parishad, K.I. Singh's United Democratic Party and Ranganath Sharma's Prajatantrik Mahasabha joined together in an unsuccessful legal

67 Mahesh C. Regmi, *Land Ownership in Nepal*, California: University of California Press, 1976, p.183-5.

68 Nepali Congress, *Chunav-Ghoshana* (Election Manifesto), p.7. A case for withholding compensation could, however, be made on the grounds that, given the way the *birta* system had evolved, the *birta*-holders were not owners in the true sense.

69 Naraharinath, also well-known as an antiquarian, is a member of the Kanphata ('Split-Eared') sect of ascetics. These are followers of Gorakhnath, a shadowy Bengali mystic who probably lived in the 11th. century A.D. and from whom the name 'Gorkha' is derived. See Gunter Unbeschied, *Kanphata -Untersuchungen zu Kult, Mythologie und Geschichte Sivaitischer Tantriker in Nepal*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980.

70 Proud to Foreign Office, 12/5/1955.

challenge to the results and the National Democratic Front which they set up in June 1959 kept up a noisy opposition to the government through street demonstrations in the capital until K.I. Singh's withdrawal from the Front in November 1960. Subjects of complaint included the 'Congressification' of the local administration through the appointment of Congress supporters as District Development Officers,<sup>71</sup> and also, of course, that hardy perennial, corruption. In foreign policy, the December 1959 agreement with India for the construction of a dam on the Gandaki enabled the Front to denounce the government for compromising Nepal's sovereignty. In the following year they were also able to accuse the government of weakness in border negotiations with China, with particular emphasis on the sensitive issue of the 'ownership' of Everest and on Mustang, where in June 1960 Chinese troops fired on a Nepalese border patrol killing one of them and taking ten prisoner.

The Communists also played a prominent role in the politics of agitation. On anti-India issues they were able to make common cause with the National Democratic Front and one success was scored in June 1960 when the government reimposed a ban on the importing of Indian vegetable oil which it had lifted amidst opposition protests the previous year. When nationalist feeling was directed against China, as over the Mt. Everest and Mustang issues, the party was placed in an embarrassing position, but its difficulties were lessened by Zhou-En-Lai's conciliatory tone when he visited Kathmandu at the end of April 1960 and by China's eventual apology over the Mustang incident.

More serious in its law-and-order implications for public security than demonstrations in Kathmandu was the tension between Congress activists and those of the Gorkha Parishad in West No.1 (Nuwakot) and West No.2 (Gorkha) districts, both of which had returned Gorkha Parishad representatives to parliament. Trouble started soon after the election in West No.1, apparently because Congress workers actively sought to undermine their rivals' position in the district.<sup>72</sup> In a reversal of the situation in the earlier Rautahat agitation, where relatively prosperous pro-Congress farmers had clashed with Communist-supported poor peasants,<sup>73</sup> Congress in Nuwakot organised poorer sections of the community against landlords and money-lenders. The conflict was at times violent and some local people left the area to seek safety, and political support, elsewhere. Disturbances continued throughout the

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71 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.339.

72 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.358.

73 See above, p.11.

Congress government's period in office and ultimately spread to West No.2.

In contrast to this tension between local activists, the Gorkha Parishad leadership seemed ready at least to offer Congress the minimum co-operation needed to make a parliamentary system work. After the election, the party leader, Bharat Shamsheer, accepted that voting had been free and fair and managed a chivalrous tribute to the victors.<sup>74</sup> All through 1959, the Gorkha Parishad maintained its customary anti-Indian stance and criticised Congress for not asserting Nepal's rights strongly enough against her Indian neighbour. Then, on 17 January 1960, Bharat Shamsheer shifted position dramatically in a speech warning against possible dangers from China and calling for a defence pact with India. This made the party appear more 'pro-Indian' than Congress, since at a press conference in India at the end of the month B.P. Koirala declared that a military alliance between the two countries would be 'worse than useless.'<sup>75</sup>

On domestic issues, whatever the reality in the districts, the Parishad's representatives in parliament were sounding quite left-wing. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, who presided over the debates as Speaker, thought that their rhetoric was more radical even than that of the Communist members.<sup>76</sup> The ideological gap which had appeared to exist between Congress and the Gorkha Parishad when they fought the election seemed to have disappeared and the Parishad's opposition now focussed on the managerial competence of the government. It was thus hardly surprising when Bharat Shamsheer, who had in June 1960 accepted the formal position of leader of the opposition with its ministerial privileges, called on 3 August for the formation of a national government.

Bharat's ant-Chinese stance appeared to be vindicated by the Mustang clash and the resulting government decision to double the defence budget to finance adequate protection for the northern border. Nevertheless his whole approach caused controversy within the party, with many members wishing to return to a more anti-India and anti-Congress line. These included Bharat's father, Mrigendra, who reportedly had the support of seven of the party's M.P.s whilst twelve backed the son.<sup>77</sup> Another dissident, Bhuwan Bahadur Bhandari, tried to set himself up as a rival

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74 *Nepali*, 1/5/1959, *Nepal Press Digest*, vol.3, no.13.

75 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.369.

76 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.192.

77 Beni Bahadur Karki, reported in Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.265. Karki joined Congress after the royal take-over and after the 1990 restoration of democracy became Chairman of the Rastriya Sabha (upper house).

party leader in the autumn.<sup>78</sup> Despite internal difficulties, the Gorkha Parishad managed to set up an alliance with Bhadrakali Mishra's Praja Parishad and Dilli Raman Regmi's Nepali National Congress in August and reports of negotiations with other parties continued into November.<sup>79</sup>

Whilst the threat to Congress at the national level from the main opposition party, was not an extreme one, the very unassailability of its position within parliament carried a risk of dissension within its own ranks. The danger was lessened by B.P. Koirala's own commanding position as prime minister, party president and acknowledged ideologue, but internal problems still occurred.

A potential source of difficulty was the presence in the cabinet as home minister of Surya Prasad Upadhyaya. His conservative inclinations contrasted with B.P.'s radicalism and the two men had been opponents in the days of the anti-Rana struggle. Upadhyaya's opposition had reportedly been one of the factors which stopped Subarna Shamsheer joining forces immediately with B.P.'s Nepali National Congress in 1948 and led him instead to set up with Mahabir the separate Nepal Democratic Congress. After failing to block the merger of the two parties in 1950, Upadhyaya helped ensure that M.P. Koirala rather than B.P. became first president of the new organisation.<sup>80</sup> He probably owed his appointment in 1959 primarily to B.P.'s wish to neutralise a possible source of opposition and this tactic appears to have worked, as Upadhyaya did not in fact try to block the prime minister in the cabinet.<sup>81</sup>

The old rivalry between B.P. and M.P. Koirala did prove troublesome. M.P., who had rejoined Congress in 1956, was not a candidate in the 1959 election because he had insisted on being nominated for the Koiralas' home constituency of Biratnagar. This constituency was instead allocated to B.P. and although B.P. himself maintained that this was not his own choice but at the party's insistence, M.P. believed that his brother had slighted him.<sup>82</sup> M.P. subsequently entered parliament as one of the members of the upper house nominated by the king and almost immediately became a critic of the government. He attacked in particular B.P.'s dual position as prime minister and president of the party, the two

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78 In October, he and his supporters were reported to have 'expelled' Bharat, Mrigendra, Randhir Subba and Beni Bahadur Karki (*Naya Samaj*, 1/10/1960, *Nepal Press Digest*, vol. 4, no. 41.)

79 Discussions were apparently held with the Terai Congress and the Karmavir Mahamandal in September (Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.159) and also the United Democratic Party in November (*Press Digest* (1960), vol.4, no.46.

80 Chatterji, *Recent Nepalese Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.51-2.

81 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.231.

82 Chatterji, *Palace, People and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.114.

brothers thus ironically reversing their 1952 roles, when it had been B.P. who had insisted that M.P. should not hold both posts. M.P. also supported the National Democratic Front's campaign against the government but nevertheless remained a member of the Congress working committee until his resignation in September 1960.

In addition to the Koirala brothers' personal duel, there were other rifts within the party. Much of this resulted from normal conflicts between different groups as each sought patronage from the centre. There was also regional tension between the hills and the Terai. This had complicated the selection of candidates for the election and also surfaced at the party conference in 1960, when some hill delegates accused the leadership of bias in favour of the plains.<sup>83</sup> Members of parliament who were neither ministers nor on the working committee were often discontented, and a group of 27 dissidents banded together under the informal leadership of Mani Ram Shastri, who accused B.P.'s brother Tarini of bribe-taking. In a confrontation with this group at Subarna Shamsher's house, B.P. reportedly had to threaten that he would form a coalition with the Gorkha Parishad if they did not fall into line.<sup>84</sup>

Despite all these problems, B.P. did manage to maintain full control of both the government and the party, and was thus in a much stronger position than M.P. Koirala had been in 1951-2. This was clearly demonstrated at the party conference in May 1960. Despite some initial argument, delegates re-elected him as party president by 5,973 votes out of 6,838 and he was entrusted with the power to nominate the working committee and to amend the party's constitution.<sup>85</sup>

The most crucial political relationship was that between B.P. and the king and, at the beginning this seemed harmonious. B.P. himself later described how in their private discussions Mahendra appeared always to agree with him, even over contentious issues such as *birta* and *rajya* abolition or forest nationalization, though the king's own brothers were amongst those seeking higher compensation for their forest rights than the government thought fair.<sup>86</sup> The king's willingness to enter into the democratic spirit seemed to be dramatically demonstrated in October 1959 when he agreed that he and his brothers should play against B.P. and other ministers in a charity football match open to the public, despite the feeling among conservatives that this demeaned the royal dignity.<sup>87</sup>

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83 Chatterji, *ib.*, p.112; Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.186.

84 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.272-3.

85 Gupta, *op.cit.*, p.183; Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.340-41.

86 Chatterji, *Experiment with Democracy*, *op.cit.*, p.98.

87 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.377.



Out of the public gaze, too, the king's behaviour towards his prime minister could be very friendly. In May 1960 B.P. was invited to spend a few days with the king and queen at the royal lodge in Pokhara. He later recalled how he `walked into the kitchen and found the queen sitting like any ordinary housewife, her saree stained with spices, busy preparing *achar* [pickles]', and also how the king talked to him about his childhood and performed for him on some of his collection of musical instruments.<sup>88</sup>

Yet this private cordiality went hand in hand from the beginning of 1960 with public criticism of the government's performance.<sup>89</sup> Joshi and Rose suggest the critical moment in determining the king's attitude was the 3 December 1959 demonstration by former beneficiaries of the Rana regime against government proposals to tax urban, land, water and houses. At the end of January, after a tour of western Nepal, Mahendra gave the Congress government a clear warning: `... the people should direct the elected government on the right path. If the people fail to do so and corruption continues to increase in the country, we shall have to take another step to fulfill our duty.... If hindrances really come in the way, I am prepared to do whatever is the need of the hour.'<sup>90</sup> Some subsequent statements by the king suggested that he was still willing to give the parliamentary experiment a fair chance, but B.P. was convinced that this was only a smokescreen. He believed that Mahendra was privately encouraging the rulers of the *rajyautas* to resist the ending of their powers and also directly funding Naraharinath Yogi.<sup>91</sup>

On 28 July, Mahendra had returned from a three-month world tour to be met on the road into Kathmandu by refugees from the disturbances in the Nuwakot area. It was probably shortly afterwards that he decided to move against the government. In any case rumours of such action were sparked by a meeting with the cabinet on 6 August at which the king reportedly demanded a full report on all that had happened during his absence.<sup>92</sup> The following month the king refused an appeal for intervention from the Jana Hita Sangh but seemed to be encouraging them to continue their agitation: `If...you initiate any good step in a democratic manner, His Majesty the King will definitely act for the equal protection and welfare of nationalism.'<sup>93</sup>

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88 Chatterji, *Experiment, op.cit.*, p.15.

89 Chaterji, *Palace, People and politics, op.cit.*, p.116-7.

90 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.378.

91 Chatterji, *Experiment, op.cit.*, p.101-2. For Naraharinath's activities, see above p.62.

92 Joshi & Rose, p.382.

93 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.383.

The king's potential allies also included some within Congress. In August, M.P. Koirala called publicly for royal intervention. The same month also saw the resignation from the cabinet of Tulsi Giri, a protege of B.P.'s, who had been minister for foreign affairs and then for village development and had reportedly had repeated disagreements with his colleagues. In 1957, Giri had been fiercely critical of King Mahendra, comparing him in a newspaper article to the Roman emperors Nero and Caligula,<sup>94</sup> but as a minister he had been in secret contact with him and disclosed details of cabinet discussions. By allegedly reporting items such as Ganesh Man's comment that there could not be 'two swords in one scabbard', he may have fuelled the king's belief that Congress itself was planning to move against the monarchy.<sup>95</sup> A similar role was played by Bishwabandhu Thapa, who remained in his post of Congress chief whip until the royal takeover. Unlike Giri, Thapa had taken a prominent part in the 1950-51 revolt, sharing with Girija Koirala the command of one of the columns which attacked Biratnagar.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, B.P. believed that his secret collusion with the king had started even before the election and that he had given Mahendra the crucial information that the party had no armed volunteers to call upon if there was a move against them.<sup>97</sup>

Mahendra initially hoped to remove the government by getting the Gorkha Parishad and Congress dissidents to combine in support of a no-confidence motion. However, when approached by M.P. Koirala, Tulsi Giri and others, the Gorkha Parishad leaders refused to oblige, and a subsequent overture to Subarna Shamsher was equally unsuccessful.<sup>98</sup> This left the option of using the emergency powers the constitution left in the king's hands. As rumours of such action were circulating from August onwards, the government was well aware of the danger and it was raised in cabinet. B.P. argued that they could do nothing except wait, as to attempt to organise a party militia at this point would simply give the king an excuse to act immediately.<sup>99</sup>

From 17 October to 9 November Mahendra was again out of the country on a state visit to Britain. During the journey Mahendra himself told Subarna Shamsher, who was accompanying him as minister-in-

94 Tulsi Giri, 'Desh, Naresh ra Janta', *Nepal Pukar*, 4/8/1957, p.4-5, cited in Lok Raj Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, New Delhi: Abhinav, 1977, p.51.

95 Interview with Prem Bahadur Shrestha, Kathmandu, 18/8/1993 (JW).

96 Chatterji, *Recent Nepalese Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.104.

97 Chatterji, *People, Palace and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.110-11 & 122. Bishwabandhu Thapa had himself been asked by B.P. to stay out of politics and organise a party militia but he had refused.

98 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.291-2.

99 Chatterji, *Experiment*, *op.cit.*, p.10.

attendance, of his decision to remove the government. Whilst still in Bombay en route for Europe, the king had telegraphed Rishikesh Shaha, Nepal's representative to the United Nations, summoning him to a meeting in Paris where he revealed his intentions to him also. Shaha had been an ally of Subarna's when his faction of the Nepali National Congress was associated with the Nepali Congress in 1952-56. 'I told the king,' Shaha recalls, 'that he'd get a bad name by doing away with the democracy which his father had introduced into the country, but I found that he was hell-bent on assuming power.... So he told me that I should talk to General Subarna Shamsheer. [Suubarna] told me the king would not act until after February. But I told the general, "Look it's up to you, I think he's in a hurry to act."'<sup>100</sup> Subarna in fact believed that Mahendra would wait so as not to jeopardise the forthcoming state visit of Queen Elizabeth. On his return to Kathmandu, the general did not tell B.P. of his conversation with the king but, when asked about the possibility of a royal *coup*, again said that he expected nothing would happen before the British royal visit.<sup>101</sup>

On 25 October, whilst Mahendra was still in Europe, police in Gorkha fired on demonstrators protesting against the arrest of workers of the Karmavir Mahamandal and seven were killed. The government claimed that a mob had threatened government offices and that the trouble had been instigated by the Mahamandal leader, Naraharinath Yogi. After his arrest in Jumla on 1 November, the yogi claimed that he had been acting with palace support and a letter was found on him from the king's military secretary which showed the king was providing him with money. B.P. himself was in India at the time of the firing, but he later released a statement including details of Naraharinath's claims. Mahendra read newspaper reports of this in London, and on his return to Kathmandu expressed anger that the prime minister had publicly involved him. While the affair was not the cause of Mahendra's decision to strike, it may well have helped persuade him to act in December rather than wait until the new year.

B.P. later revealed how he had shown the king the incriminating letter and, when Mahendra claimed he had merely made a charitable donation, he had insisted that the yogi was a known subversive and that it had been wrong to support him. 'He kept quiet for a while,' B.P. told his interviewer in 1973, 'and then said: "Look, it appears both of us cannot be contained in the same place.... Either permit me to fade out and you

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100 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, Kathmandu, 30/8/1990.

101 Chatterji, *Experiment, op.cit.*, p.11-12.

run the show as you like. Or you get out and let me rule as I think best. Both of us cannot be at the same place together."<sup>102</sup> When B.P. protested that the nation needed both of them, the king asked that he bring accusations against him in private rather than make public charges and B.P. asked that he should be treated by the king in the same manner. Finally, Mahendra shook hands with B.P. and presented him with gifts he had brought back from England.

Two days later, on 15 December, the king made his move. With the exception of Subarna, who had left on a visit to Calcutta three days earlier, the entire government was present in the Kathmandu suburb of Thapathali for the formal inauguration of the Congress youth association, the Nepal Tarun Dal. Prem Bahadur Shrestha, then a deputy-secretary in the Defence Ministry, was one of the invitees and recalls the critical moments. 'B.P. finished his speech with 'Jay Nepal, jay samajbad' [Victory to Nepal, victory to socialism] and Shribhadra Sharma, the general-secretary of the party began to speak. I saw a colonel from the palace whisper to the prime minister's ADC, take him away and disarm him. Then the chief-of-staff came in with soldiers and told all the ministers that the king wanted to see them. He told Shribhadra Sharma to carry on while the ministers were marched away with seven soldiers in front and seven at the back. Everyone else waited for three minutes to see if it was safe and then left.'<sup>103</sup>

Rightly or wrongly, B.P. himself believed he and his colleagues were in extreme physical danger. 'Till then, I was not anticipating that they would arrest us. I thought, perhaps, that they would take us to the Palace and the king would say that we had been dismissed. But then we saw that there were truckloads of soldiers, all heavily armed. It was my coolheadedness that saved the situation. The instruction must have been to kill us if there was any resistance. And Surya Prasad Upadhyaya was coaxing these people, the youths, 'Why don't you do something, why don't you shoot?' I said, no, nothing doing. For that would only give them the occasion they were waiting for.'<sup>104</sup> Though Prem Krishna Pathak recalls leading the chanting of 'B.P. zindabad',<sup>105</sup> the delegates

102 Chatterji, *Experiment, op.cit.*, p.103.

103 Interview with Prem Bahadur Shrestha, Kathmandu, 18/8/1993 (JW). B.P.'s own recollection in the 1970s was that the troops were led in by the Brigadier of the Palace Guards and the Deputy C-in-C, who was a friend of his (Chatterji, *Palace, People and Politics, op.cit.*, p.120).

104 B.P.Koirala, interviewed in Chatterji, *loc.cit.*

105 Interview with Prem Krishna Pathak, Kathmandu, 6/3/1991. Pathak was active in the Nepali Congress until the announcement of the referendum on the constitution in May 1979. He disagreed with B.P.'s decision then to accept the king's terms and call off the

took no other action and the ministers were all taken not to the king, but into custody.

At 2.30 that afternoon, King Mahendra broadcast to the nation, explaining that he had used his emergency powers to take over the administration and claiming that Congress had fostered corruption, promoted party above national interest, failed to maintain law and order and 'encouraged anti-national elements.'<sup>106</sup> No demonstrators came out onto the street and the king was, for the time being, in unchallenged control of the situation.

What was Mahendra's motive in thus ending the experiment with parliamentary democracy? The Nepali Congress answer was given in Subarna Shamsher's statement from Calcutta in January: 'the real reason for the royal take-over was the reaction from conservatives to the Congress land reforms.'<sup>107</sup> There was certainly apprehension amongst large land-owners over the government's land and taxation policies, and the army may also have been alarmed by B.P.'s reported wish to replace it with an Israeli-style citizens' militia.<sup>108</sup> However, against this is the fact that the king's regime went ahead with Congress's schemes for *birta* abolition and the ending of the *rajyautas*' special status, and that the 1964 Land Reform Act imposed a ceiling on land holdings in the Terai of 25 bighas, the same figure that B.P. claimed he himself had had in mind.<sup>109</sup> It may be argued that the king and the conservative interests saw the moderate measures in the 1959 Congress manifesto as merely the thin end of the wedge, but there is room for doubt about just how radical a reformer Congress would have proved if it had remained in office.

In September 1959 a newspaper owned by the Prajatantrik Mahasabha's Ranganath Sharma charged that 'the land reform measures of the present government have only injured those feudals who are opposed to the Nepali Congress though they have favoured the capitalist farmers who thrive on the exploitation of the poor peasants. This is natural because the rich farmers constitute the backbone of the party.'<sup>110</sup>

protest movement and joined with Ramraja Prasad Singh to establish the Nepal Janabadi Morcha.

106 Joshi & Rose, p.384-5.

107 *Asian Recorder*, 25/1/1961.

108 Parmanand, p.293.

109 For the 1964 legislation and its effects see Mahesh Chandra Regmi, *Land Ownership in Nepal*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California, 1976, p.200-13. The 25 bighas figure (about 16.75 hectares) is mentioned by B.P. Koirala in Chatterji, *Experiment*, p.87.

110 *Halkhabar*, 25/9/1960 (*Nepal Press Digest*, vol.4, no.38). For Ranganath Sharma's palace connections and the formation of the Prajatantrik Mahasabha, see above p.59.

Allowing for partisan exaggeration, and for the fact that the class basis of Congress support differed in different areas of the country, there was some truth in this. For all B.P. Koirala's socialist rhetoric, the party would have found it very difficult to launch a direct assault on the interests of many of its own backers. King Mahendra certainly took advantage of conservative fears when he moved against Congress, but it is wrong to see him as a tool of these or any other interests. His freedom of action was limited by the realities of Nepali society, but the driving force behind his decision was his own determination to play a key political role. This was partly a matter of personal ambition, particularly natural in a man who had had to chafe so long as a prisoner of the Ranas. B.P. Koirala quoted him as having once remarked, 'What is the fun of being a king when I can't rule?'<sup>111</sup> It would, however, be unfair to regard Mahendra's professed nationalism as a mere pose. In 1956, a British diplomat at the Kathmandu embassy had seen the germs of conflict in the very similarity between the king and B.P., two men of similar age vying for the role of saviour of their country.<sup>112</sup> In the words of Bhola Chatterji: 'To King Mahendra, Nepal was an idea and none but he could realise what it was destined to be.'<sup>113</sup>

### **Revival: 1960-1980**

Although King Mahendra's assumption of power faced a delayed but powerful challenge from Congress activists, he was able to face this down and for a period of twenty years he himself and then his son Birendra were able to retain full political control of the country. The period was one of 'revival' in the sense that the old patrimonial order reasserted itself, but also one in which economic and social change continued, drawing Nepal ever more closely into a modern world and preparing the way for the renewed pressure for democratisation which was to mark the 1980s.

With the arrest of the Congress government on 15 December 1960, the onus for deciding the party's response fell upon Subarna Shamsher in Calcutta. His Indian former comrade-in-arms Bhola Chatterji visited him there two days later and urged him to 'tell the people to rise'.<sup>114</sup> Subarna was at first reluctant to do this, but Chatterji's advice was reinforced by a smuggled message from the imprisoned B.P. Koirala and, above all, by meetings with Nehru in Delhi early in 1961.<sup>115</sup> Keshab Raj Pindali, one

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111 Chatterji, *Palace, People and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.106.

112 Tollinton to Foreign Office, 20/7/1956.

113 Chatterji, *Experiment*, *op.cit.*, p.110.

114 Chatterji, *People, Palace and Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.9.

115 Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p.12.

the Congress activists who took refuge in India, claims that Nehru personally advised Subarna to launch an armed campaign. Two Indian intelligence officers were assigned to ensure Congress could procure weapons without police interference, although the party was not allowed access to heavy weapons.<sup>116</sup> Subarna's instinct was still to hold back but others wanted tough action and the hawks were reinforced at the end of the year when Bharat Shamsher, the Gorkha Parishad leader, arrived in India and merged his faction of the party with Congress.<sup>117</sup>

From late autumn 1961 onwards, attacks were mounted against government installations by a Congress guerilla army. Padma Shankar Adhikari, one of the Congress commanders in the eastern hills and later an M.P., recalls learning some of his tactics from a treatise by Mao Tse Tung presented to him by Subarna. Adhikari scored no really dramatic successes but played a continual cat-and-mouse game with the security forces, retreating when necessary to the Indian border town of Jaynagar. One occasion he came close to being killed or captured in a jungle clearing with three hundred men he had just led over the Sunkoshi River. We put our weapons down beside us, wrapped ourselves in the blankets each had with us and went to sleep.... At some point during the night soldiers surrounded us on all sides. In the morning towards five o'clock I heard strange noises so I slowly raised my blanket and looked out. They were far off, but they had us surrounded. From inside my blanket I checked the man next to me and woke him and so I passed the word down the line from man to man: "When I call out, stand up and fire together in all directions!" When everyone had woken up, that's what we did. The soldiers ran off. As we couldn't stay there, we climbed the ridge and through binoculars we saw the soldiers lying in the bushes or still standing in panic.<sup>118</sup>

Over the country as a whole, Congress forces, numbering around 10,000, did not manage to establish control of any area, but kept up continuous pressure against the 9,000-strong royal Nepalese army. According to a government statement in September 1962, a total of 205 incidents, 180 launched from across the border, had cost the lives of 77 Congress insurgents, 31 members of the security forces and 22 civilians.<sup>119</sup> Indian co-operation was a vital element in the Congress

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Interview with Keshab Raj Pindali, Kathmandu, 14/8/1993 (J.W.).

Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.458. Bharat Shamsher had been kept in prison for three months after the royal takeover and on release had issued a statement supporting the king. He now claimed he had done so under duress.

*Saptahik Bimarsha*, 2/6/1995.

Baral, *op.cit.*, p.72-3.

strategy. When weapons belonging to Padma Shankar Adhikari's group were discovered by the police in Jaynagar he was able to get out of trouble simply by telling the station commander 'We are fighting in Nepal for democracy.'<sup>120</sup>

Faced with a seemingly endless struggle, Mahendra himself considered compromise. In summer 1962, the British ambassador, Spokes, was allowed to visit B.P. in prison. 'He told me,' B.P. himself recalled, 'that the king would like to come to an understanding with me. I said that I had to get certain democratic ideals. Would he agree to incorporate in the Constitution the Fundamental Rights that could be made available to the people? Then he said, "I think the king would do anything you like, but you will have to accept the Panchayat, the name of the Panchayat.... If you agree, I will put it like this: You write the book but the title will be suggested by the king."'<sup>121</sup> B.P. expressed interest but refused to give any definite reply without being allowed to communicate with Subarna and he received no further message from the king. In fact, Mahendra was probably on the verge of releasing him but was persuaded to wait a little longer by Bishwabandhu Thapa and Tulsi Giri.<sup>122</sup> Their advice was vindicated when China launched her drive into Indian territory in the eastern Himalaya on 20 October 1962. Nehru immediately asked Subarna to call off his armed campaign and Subarna complied at once. There was much subsequent criticism of this decision amongst senior Congress figures, including B.P. Koirala himself, but it is hard to see how guerilla action could have been continued without Indian support.

The military threat from Congress had been a serious one but amongst the population in general acquiescence with the king's decision was the rule rather than the exception. Although the Congress government did have some achievements to its credit, there was also impatience with what many saw as 'intraparty feuds, corruption, jobbery and administrative inefficiency.'<sup>123</sup> Even amongst the 74 Congress members of the dissolved parliament, at least 55 expressed support for Mahendra. So also did a section of the Communist Party under secretary-general Keshar Jang Rayamajhi, who initially described the royal takeover

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120 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, loc.cit.

121 Chatterji, *Palace, People and Politics*, op.cit., pp.127-8.

122 Chatterji, *People, Palace...*, op.cit., pp.19 & 129.

123 Bhola Chatterji, *Experiment*, op.cit., p.99.



as a `progressive step'.<sup>124</sup> In consequence, the king was able to rely on many former members of political parties to set up the system of `Panchayat Democracy' enshrined in the 1962 constitution.

Essentially, the Panchayat system was a return to the ideas embodied in the abortive 1948 constitution promulgated by Maharaja Padma Shamsher. In Nepal, as in India, `panchayats' (literally `councils of five') were traditional institutions which had, it was claimed, once played an important role in local government.<sup>125</sup> Their revival and strengthening was also advocated by the Nepali Congress and the Indian Congress parties, but Padma's and Mahendra's approach was distinctive in using these councils as an electoral college for the selection of representatives at district level, from amongst whom members of the national legislature were in turn selected.<sup>126</sup>

The detail of the new constitution was also influenced by foreign models such as Pakistan's `Basic Democracy' and similar structures in Egypt, Indonesia and Yugoslavia, all of which were examined by a committee of senior civil servants Mahendra set up in 1961.<sup>127</sup> In these countries, as in Padma's and Mahendra's thinking, the purpose was to allow for some popular representation in government whilst allowing the executive - whether monarch or president - to rule unhindered by the pressures of multi-party democracy.

Much of the institutional structure for the 1962 constitution was already in place when the constitution itself was promulgated on 16 December 1962. The base of the system consisted of over 3,000 village assemblies which were to meet once or twice a year with the main function of approving the annual budget and electing the village's executive council or *panchayat*. One member was elected from among their own number by each village panchayat to represent them in a district

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124 IIDS, *The Second Parliamentary General Election*, Kathmandu 1993, p.27; Bhim Rawal, *Nepalma Samyabadi Andolan -Udbhav ra Bikas*, Kathmandu: Pairavi Prakashan, 2047 V.S. (1990/91), p.52.

125 Joshi & Rose (*op.cit.*, p.397) believe panchayats were caste or judicial institutions rather than organs of local administration. For a contrary view see Dhanbajra Bajracharya and Tekbahadur Shrestha, *Panchali Shasan-Paddhatiko Aitihāsik Vivechana*, Kirtipur: CNAS, 2035 V.S. (1978-9). Whatever the panchayats' precise functions originally, it is generally agreed that they were of little or no importance during the Rana period.

126 Padma had intended the chairmen of the district panchayats and of the Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur and Birgunj town panchayats to be *ex officio* members of the Rastra Sabha (National Assembly)(Schedule A to `Constitution of Nepal, 1948', reprinted in S.K. Chaturvedi, *Nepal - Internal Politics and its Constitutions*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1993, pp.358-9.)

127 Joshi & Rose, *op.cit.*, p.396.

assembly, which also included representatives of town councils (*nagar panchayats*) within the district. The district assembly in turn elected an 11-member district panchayat and members of these together formed the zonal assembly which was the electoral college for selection of 90 members of the Rastriya(national) Panchayat.<sup>128</sup> Geographical representation in the national legislature was supplemented by a system of functional constituencies, which again mirrored provisions in the 1948 constitution. The resulting composition of the 125-strong Rastriya Panchayat is shown in Table 2.2

**TABLE 2.2: COMPOSITION OF THE RASTRIYA PANCHAYAT UNDER THE 1962 CONSTITUTION**

Elected by district panchayat members	90
Peasants' Organisation	4
Youth Organisation	4
Womens' Organisation	3
Ex-Servicemens' Organization	2
Workers' Organisation	2
Graduates constituency	4
Nominated by the king	<u>16</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>

The various 'Class Organizations' were organised from the top down and normally only active at central and district levels. Until 1972 it was only the members of each organization's central committee (numbering 150 at the most) who selected the representative to sit in the Rastriya Panchayat.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, the countries' graduates, numbering around 2,200 at the time of the first election in 1963<sup>130</sup>, elected their representatives directly.

Executive power was vested in the king, who appointed a council of ministers responsible not to the legislature but to himself. The council was originally required simply to aid and advise His Majesty in the

128 In spring 1961 the country had been divided into 75 districts which were in turn grouped into 14 north-to-south zones. The zonal assembly originally also elected a zonal panchayat, but the First Amendment to the constitution(1967) replaced this with a centrally-appointed zonal committee.

129 In 1972, the electoral college was expanded to include District Working Committee members and existing Rastriya Panchayat members for the organization but there were still under 1,000 electors involved (Shaha, *Nepali Politics, op. cit.*, p.68.

130 Baral, *Oppositional Politics, op.cit.*, p.137.

exercise of his functions.' The 1967 first amendment also gave it the duty to give general directions to, and keep general control over the country' and provided for the appointment of a prime minister rather than merely a chairman,<sup>131</sup> but the palace remained very much in charge. Although the Rastriya Panchayat could pass a vote of no-confidence in a minister, this required a two-thirds majority and the legislature's ability to act as any kind of check on the government was further reduced both by the indirect manner of its election and because its sessions were normally to be held in secret.

The system did not succeed in eliminating factional conflict altogether, despite the setting up of the 'National Guidance Ministry'<sup>132</sup> to oversee its work and regular admonitions from King Mahendra himself. 'Partylessness' was enshrined in the constitution by the 1967 amendment but those who retained membership of the banned parties continued to pose a problem, albeit not an unmanageable one and even those prepared to work within the system did not display the unity of purpose the system was supposed to guarantee.

B.P. Koirala and some of his closest associates, including Ganesh Man Singh, remained defiant. Negotiations were started through intermediaries in 1967. The situation changed dramatically in May 1968 when Subarna Shamsheer issued a statement in Calcutta, offering 'full and loyal co-operation' with King Mahendra and agreeing to accept the Panchayat constitution 'in the earnest hope of its further development under the guidance and leadership of His Majesty.'<sup>133</sup> B.P. was unwilling to directly endorse this formula as he believed that negotiations would have led to something less of a complete surrender than was Subarna's statement. However in October, when the king was convinced that B.P. and Ganesh Man would not openly repudiate Subarna, he released them. In February 1969, after a warning from prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa that his statements were putting him in danger of re-arrest, B.P. went into self-exile in India.

The Communist Party of Nepal never posed a real threat to Mahendra's plans during the 1960s, both because of factional quarrels and because of the anxiety of Moscow and Peking to remain on good terms

131 Article 25 (amended text given in Chaturvedi, *op.cit.*, p.248).

132 The National Guidance ministry was set up in February 1961 but abolished in April 1963, its executive functions being transferred to the newly-established Panchayat Ministry. A National Guidance Council was then set up but soon rendered ineffective by disputes between its members (see Shaha, *Nepali Politics, op.cit.*, p.82).

133 *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 15/5/1968, quoted in Parmanand, *The Nepali Congress, op.cit.*, p.341.

with the king. Keshar Jang Rayamajhi's policy of virtual co-operation with the royal regime was backed by a majority of the old central committee but was unpopular amongst the party's rank and file. In December 1962, the radicals held a convention in India and elected Tulsī Lal Amatya as general secretary but internal dissent continued and their organisation ceased functioning in 1965, leaving Amatya on his own with a small group of followers.<sup>134</sup> Pushpa Lal Shrestha relaunched the party at Gorakhpur in May 1968 but his group, too, soon splintered. Two other members of the pre-1960 central committee, Man Mohan Adhikari and Mohan Bikram Singh also made separate attempts to revive the party in the late 60s but their efforts were not to bear fruit until the following decade.

Whilst relying on the army to contain the security threat from 'anti-nationals', Mahendra also sought support for his new order from public opinion, and particularly educated opinion. In June 1962, after elections for village panchayats but before the other tiers of the system had been put in place or the new constitution promulgated, he convened an 'Intellectuals Conference' in Kathmandu. Delegates included former party politicians serving on the Raj Parishad<sup>135</sup>, heads of academic institutions and district representatives nominated by the government's own local administrators. Not surprisingly, the conference passed unanimously resolutions endorsing the king's dismissal of the elected government and the suitability for Nepal of the Panchayat system, and condemning armed resistance to the regime. However, one participant called for negotiations with the Nepali Congress and speeches by many others indicated unhappiness over the way things were working out in practice, including complaints over limitations on freedom of expression and (as always) over alleged corruption. There was dissatisfaction over the way in which the village panchayat elections had been held: instead of a secret ballot, there had normally been show of hands at a poorly-attended meeting and the process in some cases has amounted to nomination by government officials. Even those who had been appointed to the newly-created class organisations seemed uncertain exactly what they were supposed to be doing. 'If the Ministry of National Guidance doesn't make it clear,' complained one delegate, 'then all the class organisation representatives will go and start shouting at the Palace gates'<sup>136</sup>

134 Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), *Rajnaitik Prativedan* [Political Report], 1989, p.50.

135 The Raj Parishad ('State Council') was replaced by the Raj Sabha when the 1962 constitution was promulgated.

136 Devkota, *Nepalko Rajnaitik Darpan*, *op. cit.*, vol.3, p.465.

There was considerable controversy amongst conference participants over the proposal for a 'national organization' which Tanka Prasad Acharya and others had put forward in March 1962. They had originally requested government permission to establish a 'country-wide non-political' organization which would mobilise support for the government against the 'anti-national' elements opposed to the royal regime. The National Guidance Ministry had then made it clear that what was being suggested did, in its eyes, amount to a political organization and it could therefore not be permitted.<sup>137</sup> In his opening address to the conference, King Mahendra seemed to hold out hope that something on these lines might in time emerge, suggesting that if past differences were forgotten and all worked to remove obstacles to national progress 'the basis for a national organization will automatically be created.'<sup>138</sup> In his own speech to the conference, Tanka Prasad Acharya now explicitly advocated a 'political' organization and complained that 'innocent' political parties had been penalised for the transgressions of the Nepali Congress.<sup>139</sup>

The signs of dissent at the Conference had little practical effect, but unhappiness among the intelligentsia with the restrictions on political activity continued. From 1963/4 onwards, student union elections in the colleges of Tribhuvan University were regularly fought out between Nepali Congress ('Democrats') and pro-Peking ('Communists' or 'Progressives') factions, whilst anti-system candidates came top in the 1967 and 1971 elections for the Rastriya Panchayat graduate constituency. Opposition was also encountered even from those at the heart of the system: of the 125 members returned to the first Rastriya Panchayat in 1963, sixty percent were former party workers, of whom a third had been with Congress, and old habits died hard. From 1967 onwards, the secretariat of the Rastriya Panchayat itself implicitly recognised the importance of old loyalties by using the labels 'rightist' or 'leftist' in its files on individual members.<sup>140</sup> Even ideologues of the system such as Tulsi Giri, Bishwabandhu Thapa and Rishikesh Shaha emerged as critics in due course.

Shaha had served as finance and foreign minister shortly after the royal takeover and was generally seen as a moderate, opposing the harder line advocated at that time by Tulsi Giri. In 1963, after his dismissal from the council of ministers, Shaha used the Peasants Organization as a

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137 *Naya Samaj*, 3 & 25/3/1962, cited in Joshi and Rose, *Democratic Innovations, op. cit.*, p.460.

138 Devkota, *op. cit.*, p.461.

139 *Ib.*, p.471; Joshi and Rose, *op. cit.*, p.460-61.

140 Baral, *Oppositional Politics, op. cit.*, p.62 & 130 (fn.26).

platform to call for open sessions of the Rastriya Panchayat. In December that year he was appointed chairman of the standing committee of the Raj Sabha but soon again began criticising government policy. 'I said that the students should be left to organise their own unions .... So my fight started with King Mahendra.'<sup>141</sup> His inauguration of the Kathmandu Valley Inter-Collegiate Students Conference in May 1964 and his support in the press of the demand for a student organisation free from official control led to his dismissal from the standing committee chairmanship in July.

Shaha remained a vocal critic and in 1967 was elected to the Rastriya Panchayat as one of the four representatives from the graduates' constituency. In the autumn, he and ten colleagues put forward a list of demands for reform, including a directly elected Rastriya Panchayat meeting in open session, and the appointment of the prime minister in consultation with the Rastriya Panchayat rather than by the king alone. Mahendra responded by securing a Rastriya Panchayat motion declaring that there was no alternative to the Panchayat system. The motion was adopted unanimously, though some dissidents had first suggested that a referendum would be a better way to settle the question.<sup>142</sup> Shaha's group continued to act as an opposition bloc and in summer 1969 he protested vigorously against prime minister Kirtinidhi Bista's failure to consult the Rastriya Panchayat before ordering the removal of Indian military observers from the northern border. As a result he was kept imprisoned under the Preventive Detention Act. When sixty-four members of the Rastriya Panchayat signed a petition to the king protesting against this action, they received a reply suggesting that the presentation of the petition was itself a violation of the constitutional ban on partisan politics.

Whilst imprisonment was often the lot of those who stepped too far out of line, the regime could sometimes adopt a more flexible attitude. Students in particular were allowed a relatively free hand and the government's own student organization, which had been widely boycotted, was disbanded in 1967. The more liberal tendency was reinforced by the attitude of the Supreme Court, which often interpreted rights allowed by the 1962 constitution as generously as possible. Examples of this included the acquittal of candidates in the 1967 graduates' election who had been arrested for anti-system activities, the 1965 quashing of K.I. Singh's conviction for planning to lead a *satyagraha* and the 1970 decision

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141 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, Kathmandu, 30/8/1990.

142 Shaha, *Nepali Politics*, *op. cit.*, p.78-80.

upholding the legality of the independent student unions. It is difficult to judge how far the court acted autonomously and how far because the Palace, for tactical reasons, hinted that leniency was required.

On one occasion, Mahendra himself intervened directly to order a more liberal line than the one his own ministers had previously been taking. In 1971 the graduates' poll was topped by Ramraja Prasad Singh, a young lawyer who was a Congress supporter and had openly called for the restitution of the parliamentary system. The government at first refused to allow him to take the oath as a member of the Rastriya Panchayat but were then ordered to do so by the king. The prime minister, Kirtinidhi Bista, tendered his resignation over the affair but this was refused. In October 1971 Singh was stripped of his membership of the house after attempting to continue his anti-Panchayat campaign within the legislature.

Despite the intermittent challenges, the king remained firmly in control. Foreign aid enabled the royal regime to expand the bureaucracy so that graduate unemployment, though beginning to become a problem, was never at critical enough levels to pose a real threat to political stability. In seeking to legitimise his system Mahendra was also able to have the best of both worlds, posing as the champion of tradition but at the same time espousing the rhetoric of economic development and pursuing moderately reformist policies. In 1963, a new Muluki Ain (National Law Code) was enacted and caste distinctions no longer had legal backing. Ironically, this progressive measure opened the way for the execution of one of the king's radical opponents: now that Brahmans had lost their previous immunity from capital punishment, Durganand Jha, convicted of throwing a bomb at the king in Janakpur in 1962, went to the gallows in January 1964. Another reformist initiative was the 1964 Land Reform Act. Intended both to promote a more equitable agrarian system and to release capital for investment in the non-agricultural sector, this measure imposed ceilings on land holdings and on rents and granted registered tenants a measure of security from eviction. The legislation has been criticised for leaving intact the landlord's right to non-working ownership of agricultural land, but was the most radical measure of its kind in Nepalese history.<sup>143</sup>

King Mahendra died in February 1972 and his son Birendra, then aged twenty-six, ascended the throne. It was hoped by many that the Eton- and Harvard-educated monarch would favour a more liberal line than his father. India's recent success in sponsoring the emergence of an

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143 See note 109 above.

independent Bangladesh, and China's failure to provide anything but verbal support for Pakistan, had raised India's prestige and lessened the scope for Nepal to play off China and Pakistan against her as Mahendra had been able to do with great success in the early sixties. In addition, disturbances in the Rastriya Panchayat the previous year over the Ramraja Prasad Singh affair had highlighted discontent with the existing system.

Against this background, Surya Bahadur Thapa, a trusted collaborator with King Mahendra in the early years of the Panchayat regime and head of government from 1965 to 1969, emerged in May 1972 at the head of a group demanding liberalisation. Thapa had once been a student of Rishikesh Shaha at Trichandra College and, before dropping out of party politics, had in the 1950s been a member of Shaha's branch of the Nepali National Congress. He claimed later to have joined the party out of personal consideration for Shaha rather than any political motivation,<sup>144</sup> and now put forward an agenda for reform similar to that which Shaha and his colleagues had proposed in the 1960s. He threatened to back up his demands with a civil disobedience campaign, and denounced in particular the 'dual government' under which the palace secretariat bypassed the prime minister's office to issue orders direct to government departments. Thapa's support in the Rastriya Panchayat was extensive and in June a government-backed candidate for chairman of the house won by only 64 votes to his 'opposition' rival's 54. The same month, a motion of no-confidence was put down against prime minister Kirtinidhi Bista but prevented on procedural grounds from coming to a vote.<sup>145</sup> Thapa and three colleagues were arrested for campaigning outside the legislature and kept in prison for a year.

In the meantime colleges throughout the country were paralysed by a wave of student strikes. Specific local grievances were sometimes important but the strikers were also demanding general political concessions from the administration. The situation had returned to normal by the autumn but a high degree of politicisation remained amongst both students and academic staff. One of the authors of this study was immediately made aware of this on his first arrival in Nepal in summer 1972. One of his Nepali language instructors, a Kathmandu school teacher, spoke strongly in favour of the students at their first meeting, while at Thakur Ram college in Birganj, where the author took up teaching duties in October the same year, the faculty, like the student body, were divided into 'Democrat' and 'Leftist' factions. In casual

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144 Interview with Surya Bahadur Thapa, Kathmandu, 22/8/1995 (JW).

145 Baral, *Oppositional Politics*, *op. cit.*, p.108.



conversation, the 'Democrat' leader once remarked to him 'Of course, you're on our side.' He declined to give a direct answer, but the leading 'Leftist' got to know of the incident and warned him against attempts 'to get you involved in our dirty politics.' When transferred to a Kathmandu college the following year he found a similar atmosphere and remembers asking a more senior member of the expatriate community in genuine bewilderment, 'Is there *anybody* who actually believes in the (Panchayat) system?'

Whilst Birendra made it clear by both word and deed that he did not want to make substantial changes to his father's constitution, opposition of a more drastic kind emerged in the shape of violent action by one faction of the Nepali Congress. B.P. Koirala had become convinced that only this tactic could make King Birendra change course and he rejected Subarna Shamsher's argument that insurgency could not be effective unless India was prepared to give the kind of backing it had provided in 1961-62.<sup>146</sup> Incidents included an attack by a 100-strong force on the village of Haripur in the eastern Terai in August 1972, the June 1973 hijacking to India of a plane carrying three million Indian rupees and an apparent assassination attempt on the king himself at Biratnagar in March 1974. In the last incident, one of Birendra's would-be assailants allegedly dropped a grenade, accidentally killing the other, whilst the king's car was still 400 yards away from them. There was a good deal of alarm but the security situation never became critical and India was reasonably co-operative in checking cross-border activity.

Another security threat was posed by a group of communists in Jhapa district (in the eastern Terai), who, for a time, adopted the line of 'elimination of class enemies' practised by the Naxalites across the border in India. This 'Jhapeli group' included Radha Krishna and Chandra Prakash Mainali as well as Mohan Chandra Adhikari and Khadga Prasad Oli. They had originally worked within the Communist Party's 'Eastern Koshi Regional Committee' which Man Mohan Adhikari had revived after his release from prison in 1969. Man Mohan himself was in principle committed to 'people's war' and declared in 1970 that 'Arms should be supplied to the proletariat in order to exterminate the capitalist class, confiscate its property and render it unarmed.'<sup>147</sup> However, he was not prepared to endorse a policy of individual assassination and the Jhapa group broke away on its own.

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146 Interview with Ganesh Man Singh, Kathmandu, 15/8/1993 (JW).

147 *Samiksha*, 24/7/1970, quoted in R.S.Chauhan, *The Political Development in Nepal*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971, p.298-9.

It has never been established how much of the violence in Jhapa in the early 70s was actually the work of the 'Jhapeli Group' and many on the Left alleged that actions attributed to them by the government were in fact the work of ordinary criminals or of *agents provocateurs*. It is clear that persons who were or had been members of the group murdered a local landowner and former member of the Rastriya Panchayat, Dharma Prasad Dhakal, in 1972, but it is not certain whether the five persons arrested and subsequently shot 'while attempting to escape' were actually involved in the crime.<sup>148</sup> One of the principal activists, Radha Krishna Mainali later admitted that members of his group had been responsible for eight deaths, but the 'Jhapelis' soon abandoned their adherence to Naxalism whilst their leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Rather than any direct results of their campaign, it was the status of martyrs conferred on them by imprisonment which ensured the group's future influence. The 'Jhapelis' formed the nucleus of the Akhil Nepal Revolutionary Co-Ordination Committee formed in April 1975 and finally of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), which was established in December 1978.

On 12 December 1974, the same day that a group of Congress guerillas under Captain Yagya Bahadur Thapa were captured at their hide-out in Okhaldhunga district in the eastern hills, Birendra announced the appointment of a 'Constitutional Reforms Commission.' It was widely expected that this would result in some degree of liberalisation and when the second amendment to the constitution was finally promulgated in December 1975 some concessions to the system's critics were indeed included. The ban on publication of Rastriya Panchayat proceedings was removed and the electoral college for selection of legislators was expanded to include all district assembly members rather than just members of district panchayats.<sup>149</sup> Overall, however, the changes involved not a loosening but a tightening of the system. Representation of the 'Class

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148 The deaths took place on 4 March 1973 when the prisoners were being transferred from Jhapa to Ilam. K.P. Oli subsequently maintained that his own mentor, Ramnath Dahal, who was one of the five, had actually been arrested before the murder but that the police claimed it had been afterwards (*Saptahik Bimarsha*, 3/5/1996). Another Jhapa communist alleged that the Indian security forces and the C.I.A. had carried out terrorist attacks so that the communists would be blamed for them (*Matribhumi*, 16 Phagun 2029 ( March 1973), quoted in Nava Yuva Samuh, *Rajbandi Upachar tatha Bimochan - ek Jhalak* [Treatment and Release of Political Prisoners - a Survey], Kathmandu, 1981.

149 The District assembly consisted of the chairman and deputy chairman of each village panchayat plus one member from each ward of municipalities within the district. As before, only members of the district committee could stand for election.

Organisations' in the Rastriya Panchayat was abolished, thus doing away with the continuing embarrassment which the graduate constituency had provided for the regime. A new element of central control was added by giving a constitutional role to the central committee of the Back to the Village National Campaign ('BVNC'). The BVNC had been launched in 1967 by King Mahendra and had consisted mainly in the distribution of booklets listing key points of Panchayat ideology and calling for support for the government's development goals. In 1973-74 Birendra had strengthened it by nominating national and zonal committees and assigning them a role in the evaluation of Panchayat workers.<sup>150</sup> The national committee was now given politburo-like powers to vet candidates for elections at all levels and to nominate some of the members of village, town and district committees. The new structure is shown in Table 2.3.

**TABLE 2.3: PANCHAYAT SYSTEM AS MODIFIED BY THE SECOND AMENDMENT<sup>151</sup>**

<b>Village Electorate</b> (divided into 9 wards)	<b>Municipal Electorate</b> (divided into 9 or more wards)
<b>Ward Committee</b> (5 directly elected members)	<b>Ward Committee</b> (5 directly elected members)
<b>Village Assembly</b> (all ward committee members)	<b>Town Assembly</b> (all ward committee members)
<b>Village Panchayat</b> (one member elected by village assembly from each ward plus 2 nominated by BVNC)	<b>Town Panchayat</b> (one member elected by town assembly from each ward plus 2 to 6 nominated by BVNC)

**District Assembly** (chairman and vice-chairmen of all village panchayats plus one member from each ward of any municipality in the district)

**District Panchayat** (9 members elected by the district assembly plus 4 nominees of the BVNC)

**Zonal Assembly** (all district assembly members acting as electoral college to select district representatives for the Rastriya Panchayat from among district panchayat members)

150 For details, see Shaha, *Nepali Politics, op. cit.*, p.82-85.

151 For further details, see the discussion in Shaha, *Nepali Politics, op.cit.*, pp.219-23.

**Rastriya Panchayat** (113 members elected by the zonal assemblies plus 23 royal nominees)

One explanation for the increase in the BVNC's powers was that Birendra needed reliable men in elected office to help check a growing tendency for bureaucrats to allow special interests to block important development projects.<sup>152</sup> The change could, on the other hand, be seen as a move to crack down on dissent generally and would probably not have been made if Indira Gandhi's proclamation of an 'internal emergency' in India in June 1975 had not made the sub-continental climate safer for authoritarianism. That, at any rate, was the opinion of one of the Constitutional Reforms Commission's members, Shribhadra Sharma. 'The conservatives got the upper hand,' he recalls. 'The work of the ..Commission was rendered useless.'<sup>153</sup>

If the Indian emergency initially enabled Birendra to take a harder line against Nepalese dissidents, it was also at least partly responsible for starting a chain of events that would lead to very different changes. On 30 December 1976, with many of his friends under arrest in India, B.P. Koirala returned to Nepal. In a statement which he issued the same day he appealed for unity between the monarchy and the opposition forces. 'Today,' he argued, 'our country is in a national crisis....As a result the very national identity has been endangered....All including the king have from time to time referred to the danger....We are returning home after realizing this grave reality. We think that the lack of national unity is [the] major factor for such a major crisis as a result of which foreign elements have started to become successful in playing their dirty games and making Nepal a centre of international conspiracy..... Till yesterday, our struggle was confined to the attainment of the people's democratic rights. That's why we emphasised more on the democratic side. Today there is a new dimension added to it. A dual responsibility has befallen the Nepali Congress. This second responsibility is safeguarding the national identity.'<sup>154</sup>

The full reasons for B.P.'s return are still not clear. It has been suggested that he had received secret assurances from the Palace and that Birendra also wanted a reconciliation because of alarm at Indira Gandhi's adverse reaction to Nepalese criticism of the incorporation of Sikkim into

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152 L.E. Rose & J.T. Scholz, *Nepal. Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Bolder, Colorado: Westview, 1980, p.60-61.

153 Interview with Shribhadra Sharma, Kathmandu, 3/3/1990.

154 *Spotlight*, 29/12/1996.

India.<sup>155</sup> It was perhaps the fate of Sikkim that B.P. was hinting at in his reference to 'international conspiracy'. However, whatever understanding B.P. may have thought existed, Birendra decided that he could safely take action against him and he was arrested on arrival at Tribhuvan airport in Kathmandu.

The situation took a new turn in March 1977, with the surprise victory in the Indian elections of the Janata party. They could be expected to take a strong line on human rights issues generally and their mentor, veteran politician and social activist J.P. Narayan, had been a close friend of B.P. since the Quit India movement of 1942. Over the next fifteen months legal proceedings against Koirala were slowly carried forward, but he was twice permitted to travel at the king's expense to the U.S.A. for cancer treatment. By the end of 1978 he had been cleared of many of the charges against him and others were allowed to lapse. This leniency was probably prompted both by Indian attitudes and by the relatively conciliatory line he was now taking in his public pronouncements.

Throughout the Panchayat years, and especially during Birendra's reign, it was difficult to be sure how far actions by 'the Palace' originated with the king himself or with particular members of the 'inner circle'. This group was thought to include members of the royal family, senior aides and officials in the palace secretariat, and (to a disputed extent) ministers and other prominent officials.<sup>156</sup> It is, however, reasonably certain the handling of the Koirala issue had aroused considerable differences of opinion within the Palace and that hard-liners now argued a balancing display of firmness was needed. The consequence was the carrying out in February 1979 of the death sentences passed in February 1977 on the two Congress activists captured in 1974, one of whom had been the leader of a group of armed infiltrators arrested in Okaldhunga whilst the other had been involved in an attempt to assassinate the king.

On 6 April 1979 student demonstrators marched towards the Pakistani embassy, supposedly protesting against the hanging of former president Zhulfikar Ali Bhutto in Rawalpindi two days previously but with the Nepalese hangings uppermost in their minds. Clashes with the

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155 Parmanand, *The Nepali Congress, op.cit.*, p.382. Bholu Chatterji (*Palace, People and Politics*, p.177) reports a rumour that Birendra wanted Congress support because of a possible threat to his position from his brother Gyanendra.

156 See the analysis in Rishikesh Shaha, *Essays in the Practice of Government in Nepal*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1982, p.120-28. Shaha himself believed that the ministers had very little influence. Discussing with Pashupati Shamsheer J.B. Rana the latter's well-known aspirations to the premiership, he told him that he would have less influence on actual policy than had been enjoyed by the door-keeper of his great-grandfather, Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer (Rishikesh Shaha, personal communication).

police led to further demonstrations by both students and non-students and to strikes at campuses inside and outside the Kathmandu Valley with demands including the right to form independent student unions. On 23 April, Tribhuvan University announced the indefinite closure of campuses in the Valley and in Biratnagar and Pokhara, ordering students to vacate their hostels within 24 hours. The same day police entered the hostel at Amrit Science Campus in Thamel, just to the east of the royal palace. Although rumours of students being thrown from upper floor windows were never confirmed, the police made extensive use of their staves and there was widespread condemnation of their action in the press. Student grievances merged with more general complaints from other groups and disturbances were eventually reported from 40 of the country's 75 districts. On 27 April several people were killed when police opened fire on demonstrators at Hetauda, a town on the road between Kathmandu and Birganj. Police also opened fire at Bharatpur in Chitwan on May 8.

Faced with the prospect of unrest spreading further, King Birendra on 2 May set up a royal commission to investigate student demands and the resignation of the education minister, Pashupati Shamsheer J.B.R., was accepted.<sup>157</sup> On 21 May the government reached an agreement with the Central Students Action Committee, a body which included members of three unofficial (and technically illegal) student organizations aligned respectively with Congress, Rayamajhi's pro-Moscow group and the communist faction under Pushpa Lal Shrestha. No promises were made on reform of the Panchayat system itself but the government conceded virtually every demand relating to conditions in the University: entrance exams were to be abolished and all holders of the School Leaving Certificate guaranteed admission to the university; an independent student's union would be allowed at national level; and the Rastrabadi Swatantra Bidyarthi Mandal, a pro-panchayat student organization accused of orchestrating attacks on the strikers, abolished.

This was not sufficient for the more radical, including in particular student supporters of Mohan Bikram Singh's group and of the Marxist-Leninists. In Patan on 22 May a meeting of students and farmers condemned the student negotiators for calling off the movement without authorisation and demanded 'the restoration of fundamental rights.'<sup>158</sup> The following day, a meeting of around 3,000 students was held at Amrit Science Campus. The meeting turned upon the student leaders who had accepted the government offer, blackening the faces of two of them and

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157 He explained later that he had resigned because of interference in the handling of the situation by an inter-ministerial committee (*Saptahik Bimarsha* 19/4/1996).

158 *Samaj*, 22/5/1979 & *Nepal Times*, 22/5/1979 (PD23:22).

then parading them through the streets. The radical communists were allegedly assisted by members of the right-wing Rastrabadi Swatantra Bidyarthi Mandal.<sup>159</sup> The demonstration swelled in size to between twenty and thirty thousand<sup>160</sup> and culminated with the setting on fire of government newspaper offices and burning of vehicles outside the Royal Nepal Airways Corporation building in New Road. Since many of the Valley's police had been sent to deal with disturbances in other parts of the kingdom, troops had to be called out to restore order.

The next day (24 May 1979) King Birendra intervened directly. At 7 a.m., a time when most Nepalese are already up and busy, he broadcast a surprise decision to the nation: '...in order to understand the kind of change our countrymen desire, we shall arrange to hold a national referendum on the basis of universal adult franchise. Through secret ballot in the referendum, all eligible citizens will be asked to vote on one of two choices: whether we should retain the present panchayat system with suitable reforms or whether we should set up multi-party system of government.'<sup>161</sup>

Discussion on the wording of the king's announcement apparently went on in the Palace through most of the preceding night,<sup>162</sup> and it was rumoured that the queen mother and the king's brothers, Gyanendra and Dhirendra, were opposed to the step and believed the situation could have been brought under control without making such a major concession. The level of violence seen in the capital was indeed low compared to what frequently accompanied election campaigns across the Indian border in Bihar, but Birendra was aware that long-term consequences had to be taken into account. There was always the possibility of renewed Indian connivance with his opponents if periodic disturbances continued. The collapse of the Shah of Iran's regime a few months earlier was also a warning of the need to make concessions before being forced into it. Finally, even relatively small-scale violence in the capital had a dramatic effect on the king's thinking, as also on public opinion, precisely because life in the country was ordinarily much more peaceful than in many other parts of South Asia.

The day after the announcement of the referendum, prime minister Kirtinidhi Bista resigned and, as recommended by the Rastriya Panchayat,

159 *Samiksha*, 15/5/1979 (PD 23:22).

160 Estimate in Rishikesh Shaha, *Politics in Nepal, 1980-90* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p.51.

161 Official English translation, quoted in Shaha, *Politics, op.cit.*, p.52.

162 Information from Krishna Hachhethu, based on conversation with a senior civil servant.

Birendra appointed Surya Bahadur Thapa as his successor. Thapa himself maintains that this reflected the spontaneous decision of M.P.s meeting in their zonal caucuses.<sup>163</sup> It was probably in fact the palace which took the initiative but in any case the choice of a man who had been imprisoned in 1972 for demanding liberalisation and still enjoyed a considerable following amongst *panchas*<sup>164</sup> was a shrewd tactical move. On 25 May the controversial BVNC central committee was suspended. In December 1979, Birendra also made it clear that whichever side was victorious in the referendum, there would be a constitutional amendment making future governments responsible to the legislature and providing for the legislature itself to be directly elected.<sup>165</sup> These were, in fact, measures which the regime's more moderate critics had been demanding since the early days of the system.

Although political parties remained officially banned, they did in fact now enjoy wide freedom to campaign for the restoration of the multi-party system. In responding to the new situation, however, they were hampered not only by differences of view between parties but also by considerable internal disarray. Despite the personal stature of B.P. Koirala, the Congress party was badly divided. At Calcutta in October 1977, two days before his death, Subarna Shamsher, who had led the party in exile as acting president, had personally handed over the leadership of the party to B.P. This decision was ratified when the party's working committee, now largely composed of Subarna's supporters, elected him president. However, in February 1978, after his release from another period of imprisonment in Kathmandu, B.P. dissolved the working committee because they had challenged his right to appoint Krishna Prasad Bhattarai as acting president and his own brother Girija Prasad Koirala as general secretary.<sup>166</sup> One member of the committee, Bhakan Singh Gurung, then emerged as the leader of a separate faction which by July 1979 reportedly

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163 Interview with Surya Bahadur Thapa, Kathmandu, 22/8/1995 (JW).

164 Persons active in the panchayat system.

165 The possibility of reform on these lines, but with the Rastriya Panchayat elected by village assembly members rather than by adult franchise had already been mooted before the disturbances began in April (c.f. *Naya Samaj*, 3/4/1979 (PD23:15)).

166 Parmanand, *Nepali Congress, op.cit.*, p.405-6. The exact timing and nature of Girija's assumption of the general secretaryship is not clear. Parmanand writes that B.P. appointed 'Girija ... and Parsu Narayan Choudhry (*sic*) to look after the party with Bhattarai' and that in January 1978, whilst B.P. himself was in jail, Girija publicly claimed to be General Secretary. National Research Associates, *Who's Who Nepal* (Kathmandu: NRA, 1994), p.102, and M.R.Acharya, *Nepal Encyclopedia* (Kathmandu: Nepal Encyclopedia Foundation), p.102, record that Girija was elected to the post in 1976.



included sixteen Congress members of the 1959-1960 parliament, compared with only thirteen in the Koirala group.<sup>167</sup> After the announcement of the referendum, two other members of Subarna's old working committee, Kashi Prasad Shrivastava and Gajendra Narayan Singh, joined Bakhan Singh and in February 1980 the group was further strengthened as a rival to B.P. by a declaration of support from Surya Prasad Upadhyaya.<sup>168</sup>

B.P. himself had returned to Kathmandu after a third period of medical treatment abroad a month before the student movement began. At the beginning of April the Kathmandu zonal administration banned him from travel outside the Valley on the grounds that demonstrations occasioned by his visits were endangering law and order and for a while during the agitation he was placed under house arrest. Nevertheless, once the royal announcement had been made, he took a very moderate line. He opposed calls for a caretaker government to replace the panchayat regime, arguing that 'the system should be liquidated on the basis of the people's will, and not through a command of the king.'<sup>169</sup> In October, he was criticised by a left-wing paper for giving credit for the calling of the referendum to the king's own initiative rather than to the student agitation and in April 1980, after the declaration of an amnesty for political offenders, he declared that he did not 'have the slightest doubt that the referendum would be free and fair.'<sup>170</sup> In contrast, Ganesh Man Singh, B.P.'s close ally and companion in prison through the 1960s, stated that 'Only foolish men can believe that a free and fair referendum will be possible under Panchayat Rule.'<sup>171</sup> Ganesh Man's view was shared by B.P.'s brother Girija and even the Bakhan Singh group, which had normally taken a less militant line than B.P., wanted Panchayat organs suspended before the vote.<sup>172</sup>

The various communist factions were also unsure how to respond to Birendra's move. The two most radical groups, the 'Jhapeli' activists now

167 *Samiksha*, 20/7/1979 (PD23:30).

168 Parmanand, *op.cit.*, p.411-12. Although he had joined Bakhan Singh and his allies in signing a statement on 4 June 1978 reiterating Suvarna's line of loyalty to the crown, Shrivastava had in October that year organised a Congress group of his own at Gorakhpur in India. Gajendra Narayan Singh had worked with Bhadrakali Mishra to set up the 'Nepali Congress Purvanchal(=eastern zone)' in the Terai.

169 *Rastrapukar*, 14/6/1979 (PD23:257).

170 *Jan Jagriti*, 6/10/1979 (PD23:46); *Gorkhapatra*, 15/4/1980 (PD24:16).

171 *Nepal Times*, 19/6/1979 (PD23:26).

172 *Nepal Times*, 7/9/1979 (PD23:37). Girija Koirala returned to Nepal from India on 20 April 1980, together with Prakash Koirala, Beni Bahadur Karki and Bharat Shamsher.

organised as the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) and Mohan Bikram Singh's '4th. Convention', initially favoured a boycott but later in the campaign their attitude seemed to soften. One of the imprisoned 'Jhapeli' leaders, Mohan Chandra Adhikari, was able to release statements from jail calling for participation and eleven years later a senior party official summarised the line eventually adopted as 'neither boycott nor participation.'<sup>173</sup> In September Mohan Bikram's group joined those of Man Mohan Adhikari, Pushpa Lal Shrestha, Rohit and Tulsi Lal Amatya in launching an agitation in support of their preconditions for a fair referendum exercise: the release of all political prisoners, withdrawal of cases against political workers, the dissolution of the Panchayat system and formation of an interim government, and the reduction of the minimum voting age to 18.<sup>174</sup> Although the conditions were not met, the communists did in practice generally campaign in favour of a vote for the parliamentary system.

Those who had been active within the Panchayat system were also in disarray. Once they had recovered from their surprise at the king's decision, the more hardline *panchas* began organising to campaign for the retention of the status quo and held a National *Pancha* Convention in June 1979. There were, however, many opposition voices raised from among *pancha* ranks. Bishwabandhu Thapa, a key Panchayat ideologue in the 1960s, called for a multi-party set-up within the Panchayat system and then for the establishment of a 'Panchayat party', whilst Prakash Chandra Lohani wanted a simple return to multi-party politics and Tulsi Giri, though still strongly committed to the system he had helped set up, argued publicly that the king himself should decide between it and the parliamentary alternative.<sup>175</sup> Former prime minister K.I.Singh and Shribhadra Sharma showed their sympathies by resigning from the Rastriya Panchayat. 'A referendum would not solve the problems of Nepalese politics,' said Sharma, explaining his stance eleven years later. 'The Panchayat system was a partyless system. When there was a referendum, it was between the two systems - multi-party system and

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173 Interview with Jiv Raj Ashrit, Kathmandu, 23/8/1990 (JW).

174 PD23:38, 1979. Pushpa Lal had died in 1977 but his wife, Sahana Pradhan, and other followers continued to act in concert. 'Comrade Rohit' (Narayan Bijukche), whose main political base was amongst the Bhaktapur peasantry, had been a collaborator of Pushpa Lal's but broken with him in the late 1960s.

175 *Gorkhapatra*, 8/6/1979 (PD23:24), 30/6/1979 (PD23:27) & 3/7/1979 (PD23:28); Krishna Hachhethu (personal communication).

partyless system. The royal proclamation was creating two parties at that time. Where remained the partyless system then?<sup>176</sup>

There were also a few cases of entire panchayats coming out against the system. During the student agitation, the Lalitpur (Patan) town panchayat had already called for the dissolution of the pro-Panchayat student organisation, the Rastrabadi Swatantra Bidyarthi Mandal, and then joined with the Lalitpur district panchayat to demand the resignation of the council of ministers and of the BVNC central committee.<sup>177</sup> In Bhaktapur, where the majority of local communists had from early on favoured an 'entryist' approach to Panchayat institutions, the town panchayat decided unanimously to campaign for the multi-party side.<sup>178</sup> In June 1979 the Palpa district assembly backed the demand for the suspension of the Panchayat system until the referendum and in March the following year the government reacted by dissolving the Palpa district panchayat and replacing it with a more tractable special committee.<sup>179</sup>

When the voting took place in May 1980, the turn-out was 67 per cent out of 7,111,000 registered electors: 2.4 million opted for the yellow colour representing the Panchayat system and 2 million for the multi-party side's sky-blue. In defeat, B.P. Koirala retained his moderate stance towards the government. 'I accept the result of the referendum,' he declared, 'however unexpected and inexplicable it might be.'<sup>180</sup> In contrast, Ganesh Man Singh and many on the left accused the government of rigging the result.

Some irregularities in voting almost certainly did take place. It was strange, for example, that in some remote and backward northern districts the turn-out was higher and the percentage of spoiled ballots lower than the national average.<sup>181</sup> Nevertheless the overall result, with major towns and sections of the Terai voting for a party system and the hills generally backing the status quo, may well have reflected the true state of public opinion. Cries of 'foul' should rather be directed at the way in which that public opinion was formed. The multi-party advocates had been largely free to campaign, but the official media, in particular Radio Nepal, put

176 Interview with Shri Bhadra Shamsher, Kathmandu, 3/3/1990.

177 *Gorkhapatra*, 2/5/1979 (PD23:19); *Nepal Times*, 11/5/1996 (PD23:20). The members of the Committee later resigned *en bloc* and the Central Committee was dissolved on 29 May.

178 *Rising Nepal*, 12/7/1990 (PD23:29); Pushparaj Chalise, *Nepalko Prajatantrik Andolanma Bhaktapurko Bhumika*, Kathmandu: K.L. 'Uday', 2051 V.S.(1994/5), p.86.

179 *Samaj*, 6/6/1979 (PD23:27); *Rising Nepal*, 14/3/1980 (PD24:11).

180 *Rising Nepal*, 15/5/1980 (PD24:20).

181 Shaha, *Essays, op.cit.*, p.181.

only the Panchayat case. Thapa's government was also widely believed to have sought support in the business community by granting logging concessions and other economic favours and the finance secretary (civil service head of the finance ministry), Devendra Raj Pandey, gave this as his reason for resigning from his post.<sup>182</sup> Although King Birendra himself remained officially neutral, his pronouncements left little room for doubt that he remained personally opposed to the party system. Panchayat workers in the hills did not hesitate to tell voters that the real question was: 'Do you support B.P. Koirala or the king?'

The multi-party side were also hampered by disunity in their own ranks, and sometimes by lack of sensitivity towards the feelings of the electorate. Rishikesh Shaha admitted that some of his own political workers may have inadvertently assisted the Panchayat cause by speaking out against Gurkha recruitment into the British army when campaigning in an area where army service was highly sought after.<sup>183</sup>

Although these factors combined to produce a defeat for the multi-party side they had shown that they were too large a minority to be ignored. Their strength lay largely in the most developed areas of the country and reflected the changes which had affected Nepalese society over the past thirty years. This period had seen a growth in the links between Nepal and the wider world and a greater awareness amongst its people of alternatives to their traditional mode of life.

A Nepalese Rip Van Winkle falling asleep in Kathmandu when Tribhuvan returned in triumph from Delhi in 1951 and waking as the referendum results were announced would have been struck by widened streets outside the heart of the old city and by the traffic on the roads. There had been a few cars operating in the Valley in Rana days but they had been carried over the hills from India by teams of porters. From 376 kilometres in 1951, the road network had expanded by 1979 to 4691,<sup>184</sup> the first major construction being the Tribhuvan Rajpath which linked

182 Thapa himself admits that he solicited contributions from businessmen but denies giving specific favours in return. He also claims that Pande, an articulate and forceful development economist, actually resigned because he was unable to dominate him (Thapa) as he had done other ministers and because he did not want to work under Yadav Prasad Pant to whom Thapa was planning to hand over the finance portfolio. (interview, Kathmandu, 22/8/1995 (JW)).

183 Rishikesh Shaha, personal communication. Nationwide, there is much greater disapproval of Nepalese serving in foreign armies among the elite groups than in the general population (Ole Borre, Sushil R. Panday & Chitra K. Tiwari, *Nepalese Political Behaviour*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994, p.130).

184 B.P. Shreshtha, *An Introduction to Nepalese Economy* (4th. ed.). Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1981, p.49.

Kathmandu with the Indian border at Birganj. By the late 1960s it was also possible to drive from Kathmandu north to the Chinese border at Kodari and west to Pokhara, from where another road connected the central hills with India. Large sections of the East-West Highway, planned to traverse the whole of the Terai, had also been completed. Most Nepalese still lived in villages linked only by footpaths but it was no longer only a tiny minority who had had experience of buses and trucks.

As well as vehicles, messages and images were now penetrating the hills. Previously this process had depended largely upon the traveller on foot. Now transistor radios were found in many villages, whilst the towns all had their cinema halls, showing mainly the products of India's Hindi film industry.<sup>185</sup> Newspapers still circulated mainly in the towns but their readership was increasing.

Politically, the most potent change of all was the steady increase in the numbers within the educational system, particularly in secondary and higher education (see Table 2.4) and consequently in the overall literacy rate (see Table 2.5). The products of the schools and colleges were equipped with the means to question what they saw around them and also entertained expectations of employment commensurate with their education, expectations which, as in most developing countries, ran ahead of what growth in the economy made possible.

**TABLE 2.4: ENROLMENT IN SECONDARY (GRADES VII - X) AND HIGHER INSTITUTIONS, 1950-91**

	1950	1961	1970	1984/5	1989/90	1991/2
Secondary						
School	1,680	21,115	102,704	216,473	364,525	421,709
Higher						
Institute	250	5143	17,200	55,560	95,240	110,329

Source: *Spotlight*, 5/1/1996

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<sup>185</sup> Nepal did not start to produce its own films until the 1970s and these supplement rather than replacing the staple diet of Hindi movies.

**TABLE 2.5: LITERACY RATES (AS PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION AGED 10 YEARS AND OVER), 1942-1991**

	1942	1952/4	1961	1971	1981	1991
Total:	0.7	5.3	8.9	14.3	23.5	39.8
Male:	n/a	9.5	16.3	24.7	34.9	56.2
Female:	n/a	0.7	1.8	3.7	11.5	23.5

Sources: CBS, *Intercensal Changes of some Key Census Variables -Nepal 1952/4 - 81*, Kathmandu, 1985, p.55; CBS, *The Analysis of the 1991 Population Census*, Kathmandu, 1993, p.98; V.B.S. Kansakar, 'Population of Nepal', K.P. Malla (ed.), *Nepal -Perspectives on Continuity and Change*, Kirtipur: CNAS, 1989, p.46.

Those with a modern education were still a minority, but pressures bearing upon the mass of the people were slowly working to erode their traditional quiescence. In the hills, a burgeoning population was faced with a limited supply of cultivable land and the safety valves of migration to the Tarai or employment in India could not be relied upon indefinitely. In addition, the state's expanding activities, though carried out in the name of 'development', were often perceived by particular groups as threatening their own interests; the demonstrations at Bharatpur which led to two deaths in May 1979 had been staged by peasants displaced by construction of the Kulekhani reservoir.<sup>186</sup> The monarchy's traditional legitimacy and powers of patronage still provided the regime with some protection against popular discontent but it could expect little additional security from a 'Panchayat ideology' which few even amongst its own nominal adherents really believed in.

### **Competing Ideologies - 1979-1990**

The result of the referendum came as a keen disappointment to the party politicians and to the more politicised sections of the population, who had generally opposed the Panchayat regime. The reforms promised by the king during the campaign were in broad measure what more liberal elements working within the Panchayat system had been demanding since the 1960s but no one was quite sure how they would work out in practice. There was a widespread fear that the referendum results would only be seen by the existing government as a popular blessing of the status quo

Yet the king did act. On 15 December 1980 King Birendra announced the third amendment to the constitution. This was a moment tinged with irony, for it came exactly twenty years after his father, King

186 *Samiksha Weekly*, 11/5/1979 (PD23:20).

Mahendra, had dissolved the first and only democratically elected government in the country in 1960.

Although the king refused to lift the ban on political parties, the amendment to the constitution did, on paper, fulfill the pledges given. The Rastriya Panchayat, was to be elected on the basis of adult franchise for the first time. Future governments were to be responsible to the legislature, which now also had the right to choose the prime minister. The Rastriya Panchayat's choice of a particular individual would, however, only be binding on the king if supported by sixty percent of the members, a difficult hurdle for an 'opposition' candidate to overcome, especially as 28 of the 140 seats were to go to royal nominees. If no candidate commanded the necessary majority, the house would submit three names to the king and he would be free to choose among them. Though certain words and expressions had been altered, the king still held on to absolute power and could interfere in government at any moment. It was also difficult for supporters of the multi-party system to stand for election to the legislature or to a lower-level panchayat as in order to be eligible they had to be members of one of the six class organizations<sup>187</sup> and to take an oath of loyalty to the system.

Even more unacceptable to critics was the creation of a new and powerful committee - the Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee ('PPEC').<sup>188</sup> Ironically, this committee was set up to reform the Panchayat system as the king had promised. But in effect this body replaced the Back to the Village National Campaign central committee. The amended constitution left the king with full discretion in his use of the new body:

'The composition of the committee and the powers required to act in all matters relating to the promotion of the partyless democratic Panchayat system and its procedure should be, as provided in the rules approved by His Majesty. No question shall be raised in any court as to whether such rules have been complied with.'<sup>189</sup>

The PPEC was invested with wide powers to investigate any member of parliament and keep them within the strict bounds of Panchayat democracy. With an original membership of 21 (25 after the 1986 general election), the committee was chaired by the chairman of the

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187 A new 'Adults Organisation' was added by the 3rd. amendment to the original five listed on p.76 above.

188 The Nepali title was *Panchayat Niti tatha Janchbujh Samiti*. Although *janchbujh* normally corresponds to English 'investigation' or 'inquiry', 'evaluation' was adopted as the official translation.

189 Article 41B (2), quoted in Shaha, *Politics in Nepal, op. cit.*, p.144.

Rastriya Panchayat with the vice-chairman of the Rastriya Panchayat as an *ex officio* member. Apart from one nominee of the prime minister, all other members of the committee were nominated personally by the king. By abolishing the tight local structures of the Back to the Village National Campaign this new, toned-down version of what had been dubbed 'Nepal's politburo' might have proved more acceptable to the country as a whole. But the opposite was the case. The Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee was independent of parliamentary control and grew in power. It was seen as a sinister and efficient tool in the hands of the power elite around the palace, always available to control the government.

While the king's third amendment to the constitution seemed liberal in principle, the practice was perceived very differently. Many felt that, if anything, reactionary power in the country grew stronger. If the Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee functioned as a kind of 'politburo', palace influence could also be exerted in more subtle ways. Rather than making crude and open employment of the powers formally reserved for the crown, the establishment could rely on promises and warnings to individual members of the Rastriya Panchayat, a pattern reminiscent of the manner in which George III of Great Britain contrived to control parliament during the earlier part of his reign. When stronger measures were required, there was the innocuously named National Sports Council, which, in the eyes of its critics, organised and trained the storm-troopers of the Panchayat system. This body was reputedly involved both in election rigging and in physical attacks on dissidents.

The continuing power of the palace over the executive was buttressed by a lack of self-confidence in many ministers. After the abolition of the Panchayat system, its last home minister defended its theoretical virtues but admitted that 'some things started to go a little wrong, some things with the secretaries in the palace. This was our fault: we started to refer issues to the palace secretaries, we started to ask them what to do.'<sup>190</sup> Rather than uniting the country behind the Panchayat system, the referendum and the third amendment ushered in a period of even greater disenchantment and cynicism. The dominant image for educated Nepalese was of reactionary elements using constitutional and non-constitutional bodies to exercise their power and swarming round the king like scheming moths round a lamp. The closer to the king, the greater their power, but the degree to which the king controlled their activities remained an open question. The power clique remained hidden, behind closed doors, though,

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<sup>190</sup> Interview with Niranjana Thapa, Kathmandu, 3/12/1989.



in private conversation, the names of the king's brothers, Prince Dharendra and Prince Gyanendra, were frequently mentioned. In print, the reference was normally to the *bhumigat giroh* ('underground gang'), a term probably first popularised by Surya Bahadur Thapa after he lost the premiership in 1983 but then taken up by educated Nepalese generally. Alternatively, the talk was of 'extra-constitutional elements', 'the Palace' or even 'the Mandales.' 'Mandales' originally meant the members of the the Nepal Rastrabadi Swatantra Bidyarthi Mandal, the pro-Panchayat official student organisation disbanded in 1979, but during the 1980s the term came to be used of any conservative or reactionary member of the political system.

Despite the disillusion that had set in among the opposition, the political parties began to reorganise themselves very quickly and tried hard to adapt to the new situation. Though they were banned once again, their position was very different from what it had been before the 1979 uprising. If the parties accepted the banned label and restricted their activities to a small scale, then there was no interference. Large public meetings were declared illegal, but the parties were allowed to keep their organisation intact. Signboards were pulled down all over Kathmandu, but the parties were allowed to keep their offices and their location was an open secret. The independent press now carried much more extensive reports of party activities than had been possible previously, though the bracketed words 'banned' or 'outlawed' had to be added to the party name.

After the referendum, however, the government very quickly reintroduced press censorship. But, just like the treatment of the political parties, press censorship was very haphazard. When the government cracked down whole editions of newspapers would be seized and editors or journalists arrested. Even so, other publications were allowed to criticise the government unscathed as long as they did not write anything against the king. The situation was confusing; the methods used by the government were crude. One common way of silencing a newspaper was for the government to buy it. This was hardly effective as the same newspapers sprang up barely a week later under different names with much the same kind of critical articles as before. In 1982, Keshab Raj Pindali, a former private secretary to B.P. Koirala, began publishing a paper under the title *Saptahik Manch* ('Weekly Platform'). Initially financed by Surya Bahadur Thapa, it did not always reflect his views but it continued generally to follow his 'liberal' Panchayat line whilst also giving space to advocates of a multi-party system. The paper soon earned the displeasure of hard-line elements and went through different incarnations as *Bishwa*

*Janjyoti* ('World People's Light'), *Nepali Awaj* ('Nepalese Voice') and *Saptahik Bimarsha* ('Weekly Review').

After the third amendment to the constitution there was some cautious optimism towards the Panchayat government among broad segments of the population. These people maintained that some reforms had been implemented even if they were not significant or far-reaching. They hoped for a kind of evolutionary democracy within the Panchayat system, accepting the argument put forward by one newspaper as soon as the king announced his reform plans in December 1979: 'If the constitutional set-up as envisaged in the royal message is to be established in actual practice, the emergence of the treasury bench and an organised opposition is inevitable.'<sup>191</sup> In a June 1980 address to the Nepal Council of World Affairs, Rishikesh Shaha pointed out that it was just such a division between 'ins' and 'outs' which led to the development of the party system in Britain, though he remained unsure whether the king would allow his reforms to proceed to this natural conclusion.<sup>192</sup>

The first real test of the genuineness of the reforms after the 1980 referendum came with the elections to the Rastriya Panchayat in May 1981. These (the first direct elections since 1959) were boycotted by the main political parties but 52% of the 7.9 million registered voters actually went to the polls and even party activists were not unanimous in support for the boycott. There had been disagreement amongst B.P. Koirala's followers, and B.P. himself, though sharply critical of the third amendment, would probably have preferred participation but finally bowed to the sentiments of Ganesh Man Singh and other hardliners. Bakhan Singh Gurung's more moderate Congress faction did take part and he and two colleagues were elected to the Rastriya Panchayat. Also elected was former prime minister K.I. Singh, who had been an external ally of the Gurung group during the referendum campaign. In addition, ideological support in the Rastriya Panchayat could be expected from individuals such as Shribadra Sharma, Arjun Narsingh K.C. and Prakash Chandra Lohani who were not themselves party members but were known as supporters of the multi-party system

Some leftists also participated. Keshar Jang Rayamajhi's pro-Soviet communist faction had involved itself fully in the Panchayat system from the beginning and now reportedly put up about 50 candidates although none were actually elected.<sup>193</sup> A more radical communist group, Narayan

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191 *Nepal Times*, 23/12/1979 (PD23:53).

192 A modified version of the address is published in Shaha, *Politics in Nepal*, *op. cit.*, p.75-97.

193 Shaha, *Politics in Nepal*, *op. cit.*, p.111.

Man Bijukche ('Comrade Rohit')'s Bhaktapur-based Nepal Workers and Peasants Organization, continued its policy of 'making use' of Panchayat institutions and its candidate won the Bhaktapur seat. Seats were also won by Gobinda Nath Upreti and Rup Chandra Bista, both of whom were known leftists but not then associated with any particular group.<sup>194</sup>

The situation was further complicated by factionalism within the Panchayat camp itself. There were, in fact, two partially overlapping sets of 'official' candidates, one backed by 'the palace' and one by prime minister Thapa. Since in theory everyone was standing as an individual no lists of such candidates could be published but their identities were public knowledge and many were defeated by rivals with no such friends in high places. It was claimed by some analysts that as many as 70% of the candidates backed by Thapa failed to gain election.<sup>195</sup> 'The palace', too, had its failures, such as the defeat of ex-prime minister M.P.Koirala in Biratnagar and, for the establishment as a whole, the most striking rebuff was the victory in Kathmandu of a previously unknown woman, Nani Mainya Dahal.<sup>196</sup>

The 'surprise' results did in fact flow quite naturally from combining direct elections with a campaign lacking distinct political programmes or the mass meetings which preceded the 1959 election and the referendum. Candidates relied on personal canvassing and, rather than ideological or economic issues, ethnic and caste factors tended to be more important. This pattern was particularly apparent in the Terai, where seven seats were won by members of the indigenous Tharu ethnic group and seven by Yadavs, a middle-ranking caste which is politically influential in adjoining areas of India.<sup>197</sup> Before 1980, elections in this region had normally been won either by members of the region's own higher castes or by high-caste immigrants from the hills, mainly because under the old system of indirect elections a candidate for a Terai constituency needed votes from hill as well as plains districts to win his seat.

When the new Rastriya Panchayat convened, Surya Bahadur Thapa was the only candidate for prime minister and, despite the defeat of many of his supporters in the election, all but thirteen members of the house

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194 In the 1991 election, Upreti was elected as a candidate for the main Communist grouping, the Unified Marxist-Leninists. In 1981, the UML's main forerunner (the Nepal Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)) boycotted the election.

195 *Times of India*, 18/5/1981; Shree Krishna Jha, 'Some reflections on the 1981 National Panchayat Elections in Nepal' in *Elections for the National Panchayat in Nepal (1981)*. Varanasi, 1982, p.28.

196 Shaha, *Politics, op. cit.*, p.108, 111.

197 For the caste and ethnic composition of the Terai, see Table 8.1, chap. 8 below.

voted for his reappointment. It was widely believed that the M.P.s had followed royal instructions and that Lokendra Bahadur Chand had originally wanted to stand against Thapa but had been asked by palace not to do so. Whatever the truth in the rumours, Thapa had still become the first prime minister to lead a properly elected government within the Panchayat system. This apparent strength probably led to the government's downfall. When he became prime minister during the 1979 crisis, the 'dual government' he had denounced in 1972 had been temporarily ended, or at least greatly abated, and for some time he had been able to insist on the administration being unambiguously run from the prime minister's office. He wanted to continue this independent line and this was more than many in the king's entourage could tolerate.

Overt moves against Thapa were begun with constant opposition to his government from a small group of dissident M.P.s, including both hard-line critics of Thapa's relatively liberal line towards the non-Panchayat forces and also some more moderate individuals. The campaign reached a climax in summer 1983 with an open-air rally in Kathmandu against alleged corruption and mismanagement, but there still seemed to be only minority support in the House for the no-confidence motion which was now tabled. Local election results had suggested that Thapa's position amongst *panchas* remained strong generally,<sup>198</sup> yet it now suddenly crumbled: most members of the government resigned, claiming it was 'morally impossible' for them to remain in the government and when the vote was taken in the Rastriya Panchayat on 11 July, Thapa went down decisively by 108 to 17. Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who had moved the censure motion, was then elected prime minister in his place.

Surya Bahadur Thapa himself later explained how just before the vote the king had told him that there was a tradition of no prime minister remaining in office for more than two years and had asked him to resign. 'I said I would go if the king wanted me to but I wanted to face the house first. If I didn't have the courage to do that, people would say that the referendum had been a fraud.'<sup>199</sup> As in 1981, the M.P.s voted according to Palace orders, which were apparently conveyed by telephone or in personal interviews with Prince Dharendra or Prince Gyanendra. In this way the old guard of the Panchayat regime secured another victory, despite the power the Rastriya Panchayat had theoretically obtained under the third amendment.

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198 Shailesh Sharma, 'Nepal: Rajnaitik Asthirta ka Naya Daur', *Saptahik Hindustan*, 17/6/1984, p.10.

199 Interview with Surya Bahadur Thapa, Kathmandu, 22/8/1995 (JW).

Immediately the new government had been installed, a group of M.P.s including some of Thapa's hard-core supporters emerged as an 'opposition'. Thapa publicly blamed his downfall on 'unconstitutional pressures' and on 'the new *bharadars*', *bharadar* being the term used for leading courtiers in Rana and earlier times. In a definite break with pre-1980 tradition he continued to campaign against the Chand group across the country and he retained the allegiance of a significant number of *panchas*. Keshar Bahadur Bista, a Thapa supporter and long-time advocate of liberalisation, summed up the situation: 'We did not call ourself a party but it was like a party.'<sup>200</sup> To some extent, the third amendment was beginning to fulfill its potential. The regime's critics could, however, point out that the promise of a government responsible to the legislature was not being fully kept, since Thapa's attempts to bring a motion of no-confidence six weeks after his ouster and again in August 1984 were disallowed by Marich Man Singh, the Chairman of the Rastriya Panchayat and Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee.

The death of B.P. Koirala in July 1982 deprived the anti-Panchayat camp of its single most prestigious figure, but the tens of thousands who followed his funeral procession provided testimony not only of his personal standing but of the strength of the cause he represented. Leadership of the Nepali Congress now passed to what became known as the *troika* - Girija Prasad Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. They were divided on how confrontational a line to take towards the regime, but Girija, who favoured a more conciliatory approach, eventually fell in with his colleagues' plan for a *satyagraha* against the ban on political parties. This was finally launched in May 1985, and a coalition of leftist groups (followers of Man Mohan Adhikari, Krishna Raj Varma, Tulsilal Amatya, Narayan Bijukche ('Comrade Rohit') and Nirmal Lama) launched their own, similar programme four days later.<sup>201</sup>

The campaign of public protest was interrupted dramatically on 20 June 1985 by a series of bomb explosions in the capital. Two devices went off at a gate of the royal palace, three reception staff were killed by another blast at the nearby Hotel de l'Annapurna, which was owned by the king's sister, and two people, including one M.P., were killed at the Rastriya Panchayat Hall in the Singha Darbar complex a mile to the south-east. During the following couple of days more bombs went off in other parts of the country. Altogether seven people were killed and dozens were injured. Nothing like this had ever happened before in Nepal and

200 Interview with Keshar Bahadur Bista, Kathmandu, 3/9/1990.

201 Pushparaj Chalise, *Nepalko Prajatantrik Andolanma Bhaktapurko Bhumika (1997-2047 V.S.)*, Kathmandu: K.L. 'Uday', 2051 V.S.(1995/6), p.77.

everyone was deeply shocked. As a response, the Nepali Congress called off their *satyagraha*, which had resulted in the arrest of hundreds of their members but no concessions from the government.

On 22 June in Delhi, the Janabadi Morcha (Popular Front), an extremist party founded by Ramraja Prasad Singh, admitted responsibility for the explosions and announced they marked the start of a campaign for the abolition of the monarchy and of private property. Singh had been a Congress activist when elected to the graduates' constituency in 1971 and had been imprisoned for using the Rastriya Panchayat as a platform to oppose the Panchayat system. He had been released from jail after the king's announcement of the referendum in 1979 and had then started taking a much more radical line. He was tried *in absentia* by a one-man tribunal established under the Destructive Crimes (Special Control and Punishment) Act which the government rushed through the legislature in August. In August 1987 death sentences were passed on him and on three colleagues.

Almost immediately after Singh's admission of responsibility, however, rumours began to circulate in Kathmandu that those really responsible for the bombs were safe inside the Palace - including another of the king's brothers, Prince Gyanendra. Rumour had it that Prince Gyanendra and his henchmen had been intent on stopping the Nepali Congress *satyagraha* campaign and that they had paid Singh 300,000 rupees to take the blame. What bolstered these rumours was the mysterious murder of Baidyanath Gupta, a close colleague of Ram Raja Prasad Singh's. Gupta had denounced Ram Raja's admission as a lie and had been killed two days later. The case of the bomb explosions has still not been satisfactorily solved, although Singh himself was later amnestied and returned to Nepal to participate in the 1994 general election. Whoever was behind the explosions, they did indubitably give a new gravity to the political situation in Nepal.

Chand resigned as prime minister in March 1986, and there was speculation that the power elite in the Palace, who had once thought him a safe choice, now felt that even he was too independent for them.<sup>202</sup> Nagendra Rijal served as a caretaker prime minister until after the second direct election of the legislature in May 1986. As in 1981, there was no contest either for prime minister or for chairman of the House: Marich Man Shrestha and Navaraj Subedi were the only nominations and were

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<sup>202</sup> Another interpretation, however, was that Chand's removal was intended as a gesture to Congress, who had been demanding an interim government as a precondition for their own participation in the forthcoming elections (Krishna Hachhethu, personal communication).

duly elected. It was rumoured, however, that Rajeshwar Devkota, had wanted to stand for prime minister but was told by Rijal that the king did not want him to do so.<sup>203</sup> Devkota himself felt that his unwillingness to follow instructions from Palace figures was probably the reason he was passed over.<sup>204</sup> In contrast, many people felt that the man actually selected, Marich Man Singh Shrestha, was prepared to do exactly as he was told.

The proceedings of the Rastriya Panchayat had little influence on the day to day life of the people of Nepal. Everyone knew that it had little real power. People ignored it - at least until the middle of the 1980s when a series of corruption scandals shook the government. A few ministers were forced out of their posts, but it was widely believed that corruption was more rampant than the government dared admit. Rumours flew round Kathmandu and articles in certain banned newspapers suggested that the royal family itself was implicated in smuggling drugs and gold. These rumours gained strength as important official posts were handed out to members of the royal family other than the king. The king's brothers, whose reputations were at best shady, were given the chairmanships of several important trusts. More important than this, the queen was head of the National Social Services Coordination Council established in 1977. The queen had become a public figure in her own right and it did not help alleviate suspicion that she came from Rana stock. All aid money from private agencies was to be channelled through the National Social Services Coordination Council and it was feared that a substantial amount of cash would disappear into Palace pockets.

During this period one person more than anybody else managed to uncover the truth about the rumours concerning corruption and abuse of power at the top levels of government. Ironically this man, an experienced politician and journalist called Padam Thakurathi, had himself once been a 'Mandale' in the original sense of the word: in 1967 he became founding president of the pro-Panchayat students' organisation, Nepal Rastrabadi Swatantra Bidyarthi Mandal. During much of the 80s he was guest editor of *Saptahik Bimarsha*, which had well-known connections both with 'liberal' Panchayat forces and with the multi-party camp.<sup>205</sup> He said: 'My main political goal was to attack the power elite. As a journalist, I wanted to expose the activities of the so-called "unconstitutional elements", this gang of hooligans and smugglers in the Palace, who actually run the politics of Nepal. So I made investigations and uncovered one story after

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203 Shaha, *Nepali Politics, op. cit.*, p.40.

204 Interview with Rajeshwar Devkota, Kathmandu, 31/8/1990.

205 See above, p.99.

another about the activities and dealings of these people - both in money and in politics. They mainly wanted to control politics in order to continue their dubious businesses undisturbed. I also brought the illegal acts of the royal family to light knowing that I broke the law in doing so.' After a long series of threats there was an attempt on Thakurati's life in the late summer of 1986. 'It was a warm night,' he recalled, 'so my wife and I slept just under the open window in our bedroom. In the middle of the night my wife was woken by a gunshot.' Pointing to a deep hollow in his forehead and damaged right eye, Thakurati said: 'The bullet hit me here. They thought they had killed me, but amazingly I survived.'<sup>206</sup>

The attempted murder of Padam Thakurati led to one of the most spectacular court cases in the history of Nepal in 1987. Several top officials were convicted of the crime in a military court, including Col. Bharat Gurung (A.D.C. to the king's brother, Prince Dharendra), Rastriya Panchayat member Bhim Prasad Gauchan, and the latter's brother, Jagat Gauchan, who was a martial arts expert with the National Sports Council. Bharat Gurung and D.B. Lama, a former Inspector-General of Police, were also convicted of drug-trafficking and other offences. The accused were all given severe prison sentences. There was speculation that tensions within the royal family were partly behind this dramatic development: Prince Dharendra was believed to be seeking a separation from his wife, a sister of the queen. Shortly after the convictions, Prince Dharendra left the country after renouncing his royal title and privileges. This top-level clearing-up job by the regime came as a surprise to everybody. But it came too late to swing public opinion in favour of the government. Rather, the trial confirmed popular suspicions about corruption and some people even claimed that worse crimes had been committed and gone undetected. Meanwhile the scandals continued, including allegations that the government had permitted the import of powdered milk contaminated by radiation from the disaster at Chernobyl.

Towards the end of the 1980s the political struggle in Nepal intensified. The banned political parties increased their activities and the government cracked down further. In the 1986 elections for the Rastriya Panchayat, the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), which had replaced Mohan Bikram Singh's group as the most dynamic force on the Left, decided to put up candidates for the first time. Party members won four seats (in Kaski, Chitwan, Ilam and Jhapa) and a sympathiser (who later deserted to the Panchayat camp) was elected in Tehrathum. The communist member for Bhaktapur in the 1981 legislature had allegedly



succumbed to the blandishments of Prince Dhirendra but his former comrades in the 'Rohit group' now successfully put up a new candidate. Two independent Leftists were also elected -Padmaratna Tuladhar, a populist leader and cultural activist, who won a resounding victory in Kathmandu, and Rup Chandra Bista, who retained the Makwanpur seat he had won in 1981. Finally, Bhim Bahadur Shrestha, a former member of the executive of Keshar Jang Rayamajhi's pro-Soviet group and a member of the pre-1980 Rastriya Panchayat, also returned to the House. These Leftists sometimes remained quiet, as when Marich Man Singh Shrestha was elected unopposed to the premiership, but at other times openly opposed the ruling system. As a result, they shuttled back and forth from prison to parliament. The Nepali Congress took its cue from the Communists and entered the local elections of 1987 -but with less success. Nepali Congress candidates did become mayor (*pradhan panch*) and deputy mayor in Kathmandu, but the Mayor's term of office was short-lived. He refused to take part in the official celebrations of Constitution Day and was promptly dismissed.

In 1987 international attention was fixed on human rights offences in Nepal when Amnesty International published a special report on the country.<sup>207</sup> Amongst the most serious abuses were the 'disappearance' of persons arrested in connection with the 1985 bombings and the use of torture in prison. The report also highlighted the arrest and detention from October 1986 to April 1987 of Keshab Raj Pindali, the 71-year-old editor of *Saptahik Bimarsha*, and of Rastriya Panchayat member Rup Chandra Bista over the re-publication in the paper of 'Beware', a poem by Bista originally circulated during the May 1986 election campaign:

'The Rastriya Panchayat's main task  
 Is to make laws for the country,  
 But to prevent laws being made  
 A clique of 28 is enrolled  
 Defrauding the Panchayat system  
 Turning it into a honey-pot  
 Making an anti-people constitution.  
 People are brought over by any means  
 By billions of rupees too.  
 The sinner by prospect of gain, the greedy by expectation,  
 The frightened by fear and the foolish by error.  
 Controlling and organizing

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207: Amnesty International, *Nepal: a Pattern of Human Rights Violations*, London, 1987.

Licensed to commit any offence  
 Destroyer of the country, destroyer of the poor, the clique  
 Does not only lord it over the people  
 But gaining victory through their outrages  
 They have been elected M.P.s also.  
 Free people who refuse  
 To praise the life-destroying clique  
 Will not even escape with their lives.  
 Beware! Beware! Beware!!<sup>208</sup>

Both men were charged under the Treason (Crime and Punishment) Act, ostensibly because the '28' were the members of the Rastriya Panchayat nominated by the king and the poem could therefore be interpreted as an attack on the king himself.

The government's sensitivity over criticism of the royal family got *Bimarsha* into trouble again later in 1987. Keshab Raj Pindali and his assistant editor, Harihar Birahi, were detained for publishing an interview with Yogi Naraharinath, in which the veteran ascetic/politician criticised the king for letting the queen have too much influence.<sup>209</sup> A similar case had resulted in the imprisonment in 1986 of Gobinda Upreti, a communist who had won a seat in 1981 but been defeated in 1986: his offence was insisting on retaining the names of the king's brothers in a court petition alleging that voting had been rigged in his Khabre constituency to allow the victory of Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya.<sup>210</sup>

Whilst lashing out periodically at its opponents, the Shrestha government also appeared weak and ineffective at times and this weakness became even more apparent in 1988. That year was characterised by two disasters which both developed into political scandals. There was a stampede at the main sports stadium in Kathmandu in March because of a hailstorm and around 100 people were killed. According to rumours, the National Sports Council was really in large part to blame for the injuries. Instead of a proper investigation, the government response was merely to suppress a proposed no-confidence motion before it could be debated and to reshuffle the cabinet. The education and culture minister, Keshar

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208 Rup Chandra Bista, 'Beware', translated in *ib.*, p.21-22.

209 Shaha, *Politics in Nepal, op. cit.*, p.154. Naraharinath, who had been financed by King Mahendra as a counter to the Congress government in 1960, was not himself arrested.

210 *Ib.* Upadhyaya, a prominent politician and himself a former Communist, became Foreign Minister in the Shrestha government after the election.

Bahadur Bista, had to resign and other 'liberal' *panchas* felt he had been made a scapegoat.

Then, on 21 August 1988, a major earthquake hit Nepal. Most of the 721 deaths occurred in the east of the country but there was also quite extensive damage in the city of Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley. Five days later the former M.P. for the area, Karna Bahadur Hyoju, was accused of improper distribution of relief supplies and lynched in the street by an angry mob. Many local communists alleged that plain-clothes police or 'Mandales' were involved in the attack as part of a government plot to implicate 'Comrade Rohit's' Nepal Workers and Peasants Organisation, which had long dominated Bhaktapur politics.<sup>211</sup> However it is more likely that some communist sympathisers had in fact intended to 'teach Hyoju a lesson' and that the attack then got out of hand.<sup>212</sup> After the event, the government certainly did make political use of it. Although there was no real evidence connecting the local communist leadership with the crime and Rohit himself had been at home all day, he and some of his close colleagues were arrested and charged with the murder before a specially established tribunal. Amongst those detained was the current member of the Rastriya Panchayat for Bhaktapur, Govinda Duwal, and the mayor (*pradhan panch*) of Bhaktapur, Asakaji Basukala. They remained in prison until the victory of the democratic movement in 1990. The Bhaktapur Town Panchayat was dissolved and replaced by a special committee.

In response to the increased government repression, Rishikesh Shah founded the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal (HURON). A preparatory meeting was held in August 1988, just after the arrests of Rohit and his colleagues, who had been due to attend it. HURON was formally launched in December and within the first month its office had been raided by police on the grounds that it had not applied for registration under the Organization and Association Act. Government harassment did nothing to hinder its rapidly increasing membership. In just a few months it became one of the largest organizations opposing government policies.

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211 An elaborate version of this conspiracy theory is presented in Chalise, *Nepalko Prajatantrik...*, *op. cit.*, p.80-83. He alleges that Hyoju was under attack for about four hours, that at an early stage he was removed by police but then returned to the crowd and that attempts by Hyoju's brother and by members of Rohit's group to call for police help went unheeded. Rohit himself claims that junior police officers told him they saw some of the attackers also participating in Hyoju's funeral procession, which turned into a pro-government demonstration (interview, Bhaktapur, 19/8/1990 (JW)).

212 Personal communication from Krishna Hachhethu, a Nepalese political scientist born in Bhaktapur and still living there at the time.

Although opposition grew towards the government during the late eighties, the 1990 revolution might never have taken place had it not been for the unexpected events of 1989. What weakened the Panchayat government more than anything and strengthened the opposition was the Indian trade embargo imposed on Nepal in March 1989.

Nepal is a landlocked country and the vast majority of its imports come from India or at least have to pass through India. When the trade and transit treaties between the two countries expired on March 1st, 1988, the Indian government demanded that Nepal revert to the old arrangement of a single treaty to cover both issues and that an agreement also be reached for the control of unauthorised trade. Nepal had long argued that the two subjects should be treated separately as trade arrangements depended on mutual agreement but a landlocked state was entitled to transit facilities as of right. India allowed two six-month stand-still periods and then, in an aggressive show of political muscle on 23 March 1989 closed all but two of the border points. Everything in India's power was done to make the transit through India of goods for Nepal as difficult as possible. In just a few weeks traffic dropped by half in Kathmandu because of the fuel shortage and endless queues of Nepalese sprang up all over the capital, waiting patiently for their weekly ration of kerosene.

What probably came as a surprise to the authorities in New Delhi was the Nepalese government's resolve. A massive propaganda campaign was launched to make the international community aware of Nepal's position. This campaign especially emphasised the danger to Nepal's environment, which many believed already on the verge of ecological catastrophe. Strict austerity measures were announced inside the country and a new economic policy was launched to diversify Nepal's business and make the country less dependent on India.

At first the crisis seemed to strengthen the Panchayat government. The government declared the situation a national crisis and all Nepalese were called on to unite patriotically to resist the foreign aggressor. But as the crisis continued without any apparent solution and as prices climbed in the shops, attitudes began to harden against the government. The population started to lose patience and show discontent. This was largely an urban phenomenon but there was some effect in the villages, too, especially because kerosene was soon in short supply. Cigarettes were also regarded as a necessity by many male villagers, and when these rapidly became unavailable, real anger could be generated. One village headman in the western mid-hills, who had previously always supported government programmes, vented his feelings: 'See, this is *bikas* (development). There is *bikas* on Radio Nepal. Every day the radio

broadcasts that Nepal makes its own cigarettes, but we now cannot buy even a packet of cigarettes. Cigarettes do not come from India, so why have they disappeared? *Phataha Nepal* (liar [government of] Nepal).<sup>213</sup>

The opposition, which had been quiet as no one wanted to be seen supporting India, began to criticise the government more boldly. Anger that had been directed solely against India was turned closer to home. The Nepali Congress held a 'Political Awakening Week' in September 1989, resulting in the arrest of and brief detention of some 3,500 members.<sup>214</sup> There was talk of launching a movement for 'the restoration of democracy and human rights' and the party's central committee announced a definite date for a party conference the following January. Furthermore, during the early autumn, the Nepali Congress and the communists began to form tentative links with the prospect of joining forces against the Panchayat government. In the past, the more moderate communist factions had in fact taken part in Congress-originated protest programmes but it now seemed possible that formal co-operation might be achieved.

Opposition to the Shrestha government and its handling of the Indian trade embargo did not only come from the banned political parties. Criticism within the Panchayat system grew louder and more bitter as the year progressed. Votes of no confidence against Shrestha were quashed and this only added to the frustration. Describing the last of these no-confidence motions one member of parliament, Shribhadra Sharma, said: 'In the last session of the Rastriya Panchayat, we, 53 members, passed a resolution that the prime minister should resign. But we were not allowed even to discuss the resolution. We were told that at this parliamentary crisis the king did not want to change the prime minister. This just shows that the constitution has never had a fair trial.'<sup>215</sup> The disaffected members of the Panchayat simply wanted the Panchayat system to adhere to its own principles. They also wanted new reforms to be implemented within the framework of the existing constitution.

The end of 1989 saw more and more open rallies organised by members of this opposition. Many of these politicians had been victims of the Panchayat system in some way, including the former prime minister

213 Kamal Adhikary, 'The Fruits of Panchayat Development', *Himalayan Research Bulletin*, vol.15, no.2 (1995), p.2.

214 Niranjana Koirala, 'Nepal in 1989: a Very Difficult Year', *Asian Survey*, vol. XXX, no.2 (Feb 1990), p.137.

215 Interview with Shribhadra Sharma, Kathmandu, 3/3/1990. Although a proper debate was not possible in the Rastriya Panchayat, 55 members issued a joint public statement criticising the government's handling of relations with India (Niranjana Koirala, 'Nepal..', *op. cit.*, p.139).

Surya Bhadur Thapa, and Rajeshwar Devkota. These voices from within the Panchayat system condemned both the government and the party-led opposition. The government was warned that unless it found a speedy remedy to the crisis with India it would play straight into the hands of the anti-Panchayat groups. The government found itself wedged between growing criticism from inside and outside the Panchayat system. It was clear that something would have to change. What really prepared the ground for the 1990 revolution, when it did come, was not one isolated incident, but the gathering discontent among the population which the trade embargo brought to a climax.

The educated middle class in the cities were vocal in their condemnation of the prevailing state of affairs. One university professor as early as February 1988 complained: 'There is a national crisis in Nepal of immense proportions. It is political, economic, moral and cultural. I see no solution. Our people are suffering a collective psychological crisis. We are totally confused, and the responsibility for our confusion rests with our political leaders.' Other voices joined the swelling chorus of complaint. One engineer stated: 'In many ways the government has already missed the chance of developing the country. Thanks to its shortsightedness, the government has lost the overall aim of development.... The situation has not changed since the Rana regime of the 1930s. The role of a government officer is still to maximise his income from the land and the people. With such officials in charge, the king cannot handle the present situation...' People felt that while bureaucracy was on the increase, efficiency was on the decrease. Moreover, corruption was spreading. Most seemed to agree that development in Nepal had failed owing to a lack of political rights and freedoms. A teacher of history at the university put it succinctly: 'Since 1960 we have had economic modernization without political modernization. This is like fitting a square peg in a round hole, and is the crux of Nepal's problem. We have exposed the country to the modern world in every area except that of democratic politics. That is the only instrument which would show what people wanted and what they did not... Only with political modernization would the people be in control of society and be able to decide what kind of development they want. We need the fundamental principles of democracy: human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of association, and equality before the law. These are fundamental human rights and cannot be dismissed out of hand simply by calling them Western.' Many people remarked that Nepal's Panchayat politics had had a detrimental effect on the ethics of Nepalese society as a whole. An administrative officer said boldly: 'Our whole society is sick. To be moral

is only a disadvantage. Corruption is widespread and nobody really seems to care.'

At the root of the moral crisis was another - a religious crisis. Several critics charged that Hinduism, which ought to exist to provide the people with moral guidance, had become a corrupt political tool in the hands of the governing elite. King Birendra stood at the head of his country as an incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu - but faith in his divinity and in his character was on the decline. Everything seemed to be in disarray - education lagged behind and the university was in the doldrums. Literature and art seemed on the wane, constricted and warped by the difficult political situation. Some poets, however, claimed that honest opinions could be expressed in their work and that often the government was too stupid to understand what they were actually doing: 'The government has not been able to stop us writing poetry... It is through our poetry that we Nepalese manage to express our true feelings and honest opinions. More and more people are now able to read what we write, and they understand what the government misses.'

In the spring of 1989 there was a feeling of crisis everywhere, but this feeling was mingled with the strong conviction that political change would come. Nearly everybody hailed change, but did not know what kind of change they wanted. Most, however, seemed to agree on the following: 'The only hope for Nepal is to have a popular democratic government. Our society has been through a bad time. The politics of the past twenty years have only caused us grievous injury. It is high time to change this. The process will, of course, be a long and difficult one, but it has to start soon...'

That autumn, people in Kathmandu could follow the revolutions in Eastern Europe taking place in front of them on TV, introduced to Nepal only five years earlier. They watched regime after regime fall. Many also watched the serialised version of the old Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, from Indian TV. In front of their eyes they saw the age-old principles of a just Hindu ruler presented to them, and vivid pictures of how people in other parts of the world were toppling their undemocratic governments. The effect of such images on many people's thinking was graphically expressed in a poem published early in the following year, on the day the democracy movement was launched:

Once fists are clenched,  
 Even the Berlin Wall falls down;  
 Once fists are clenched,  
 The events of Tiananmen Square take place,

Once fists are clenched,  
Even Mandela is freed...  
Why are we the only ones  
Who do not seek to clench our fists,  
And seek to be prisoners of history?  
Has the man inside us died?<sup>216</sup>

Constitution Day and the King Mahendra Memorial Day, on the 1st of the Nepalese month of Poush and in the Nepalese year of 2046, fell on 16 December 1989. People hoped that King Birendra would announce reforms. This seemed to be his last chance to save the Panchayat system. For the banned political parties had planned to launch a democracy movement against the government. The festival day was celebrated in the usual way with processions and speeches, but as the king saluted the existing order he kept his mouth firmly shut. No reforms of any kind were announced and many began to talk of revolution rather than reform.

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216 Vinay Raval, 'Once Fists are Clenched', translated by Michael Hutt, 'The Nepali Literature of the Democracy Movement', in Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1993, p.90-91.



## CHAPTER 3

# THE JANANDOLAN AND AFTERWARDS

### Diary of a Revolution

It had been clear to all for some time that the Panchayat regime could not maintain its grip on the country indefinitely. Dissension split its own ranks and the government was continually harrassed in public by the banned political parties. Change of some kind was now regarded as inevitable.

The first few months of 1990 witnessed a complete turn-around in the politics of Nepal. The revolution took place; the Panchayat regime fell; an interim government was established, committed to the introduction of multi-party democracy. Finally the king, for so long an absolute ruler, freely handed over his powers and became a constitutional monarch. At the time this series of events was hard to trace in the day-to-day chaos and bewilderment which gripped the country. The outcome always seemed far from certain. There were rallies, arrests and torture. There were allegations and suppression. Opinion swung back and forth - and the ordinary citizens of Kathmandu, where most of the major incidents of the revolution took place, often did not know from hour to hour what was going to happen next. The few turning-points of the revolution emerged only with hindsight, along with the reasons for the opposition's success. The opposition's triumph was due partly to its unity, but also to the unexpected and overwhelming support it received from the majority of the urban population. This support cut across all castes, classes and ethnic groupings - and included the very youngest to the very oldest.

There had been a long history of mutual suspicion and distrust between the Nepali Congress Party and the communists. Yet, after many years of in-fighting, these two groups succeeded in bridging their differences and worked together effectively. From the outset of the movement the opposition gained a powerful and united platform from which to launch the democracy campaign.

From early December 1989 rumours began to circulate in Kathmandu that the banned political parties had issued an ultimatum to the king. Either he was to introduce major political reforms before 18 January 1990 or else a non-violent movement, aimed at toppling the Panchayat regime, would be set in motion. The reforms the opposition called for were simple, but sweeping. These were the restoration of a multi-party

democratic system and the formation of a broadly-based interim cabinet to guide Nepal towards free and fair elections. That these demands had been issued jointly by the Nepali Congress Party and the communists created an atmosphere of expectation and suspense in Kathmandu. This expectation was fuelled further by the realisation that the Panchayat regime was tearing itself apart - and in public. Daily meetings and mass rallies were organised by important Panchayat politicians. They stood up and loudly demanded the resignation of their own prime minister. While this was going on the official government newspapers continued to praise the achievements of the Panchayat system. Yet the louder the praise, the deeper suspicion and expectation grew amongst the population as a whole. Most people anticipated change, though no one was sure what form it would take.

The opposition had led a tolerated, if shadowy, life since the referendum of 1980 which had endorsed the Panchayat system. The parties began to come further out into the open and criticise the government more publicly. The scope for collaboration between the different parties had been widened when the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), the Leftist group with the most effective network of cadres,<sup>1</sup> held its August 1989 conference and voted for accepting a parliamentary system as an interim goal and for a tactical alliance with Congress. The CPN(M-L) wanted an agreement between the communist factions first,<sup>2</sup> and this was achieved with the creation of the United Left Front ('ULF'), announced on 15 January. Besides the CPN(M-L) itself, six other groups were involved: the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist) of Sahana Pradhan and Man Mohan Adhikari, Rohit's Nepal Workers and Peasants' Organisation, Nirmal Lama's 4th. Convention group and the small factions headed by Tulsi Lal Amatya, Vishnu Bahadur Manandhar and Krishna Raj Varma. Sahana Pradhan, one of the first women ever to obtain a degree in Nepal, was to act as chairman. Congress, represented by its senior leader Ganesh Man Singh had already identified common ground with these Leftist groups in December, and the understanding was now formalised with the establishment of a 'Joint Co-ordination Committee', which was made public on 1 February.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The group claimed to have networks in place in 50 of the country's 75 districts at this time (Dhanendrapurush Dhakal, *Jan-Andolan: 2046* (People's Movement 1990), Lalitpur: Bhupendrapurush Dhakal, 2049 V.S. (1992/3), p.195.

2 Interview with Jivraj Ashrit (CPN(M-L) Central Committee member), Kathmandu, 23/8/1990.

3 Pushparaj Chalise, *Nepalko Prajatantrik Andolanma Bhaktapurko Bhumika (1997-2047V.S.)*, Kathmandu: K.L. 'Uday', 2051 V.S. (1995/5), p.11.

Finally, on 18 January 1990, the day which had been mentioned as the deadline for the king, the Nepali Congress opened its convention in Kathmandu. The impact of this event was electric. This was the first public party meeting held in Nepal for ten years. Although the law constrained mass gatherings, several thousand people gathered outside the home of the veteran Congress leader Ganesh Man Singh. Liberal Panchayat politicians, representatives from the communist parties and foreign politicians were spotted in the crowd. While this open and naked defiance of Panchayat authority was shocking enough, the sensation of the convention was undoubtedly the speech given by Chandra Shekhar, a leader of the Janata party, which had been in government in India since the November 1989 elections. An able and influential politician (and later India's prime minister for a brief period in 1991), Shekhar amazed his listeners by openly stating his support for Nepal's democracy movement. He added that this was not just his own personal view, but the view of all the Indian political leaders. Despite the controversy Shekhar stirred up, the police did not interfere, although they had been put on alert. Instead, the government responded promptly through its own media. Radio Nepal repeatedly condemned 'aggressive foreign elements' and 'terrorists inside the country' who wanted to destroy 'our glorious king, nation, and Panchayat system.'

The Nepali Congress convention ended on 21 January 1990 with the pledge that unless the king met the opposition's demands within a month, the democracy movement would be launched on 18 February. This was to coincide with the official celebrations of 'Democracy Day', the anniversary of King Tribhuvan's appointment of the coalition government in 1951 which marked the fall of the old Rana regime.

In response to such a clear political challenge from the Nepali Congress, the government responded by organising a series of public meetings all over Nepal. These culminated in a mass rally in Kathmandu on 28 January. The government hoped to draft in enough supporters to voice their belief in the Panchayat system and help quell the rising opposition. In fact most of those who attended the rally in Kathmandu were paid two hundred rupees each and bussed in from outlying districts. The entire cabinet turned out for the event. Several prominent politicians, including the prime minister, held speeches roundly condemning the 'anti-nationalist elements' and praised the 'true democracy' - that is, Panchayat democracy - in the country. However, important *panchas* who had openly criticised the government such as Surya Bahadur Thapa, a former prime minister, and Rajeshwar Devkota, were noticeable by their absence. While the official news agency claimed that 200,000 had taken part, opposition

papers put the figure at only 20,000 and the event was deemed a failure.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Panchayat government had failed signally to demonstrate that it commanded the support it had claimed for itself.

The government was clearly worried that the opposition would stir up the people, and an opinion survey conducted by Tribhuvan University and focussed particularly on the middle class showed that this was indeed likely: 73% of respondents expressed sympathy for the proposed movement and 25% said they would themselves participate.<sup>5</sup> The first open manifestation of this wider dissent came about on 4 February when Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu began a new term. The students made their support for the democracy movement public. Around the various campuses in Kathmandu slogans declaring 'Live or Die for Democracy' were daubed boldly on the walls. Shortly afterwards, both the University Teachers' Association and the Bar Association also declared their support for the democracy movement.

The government's first response to this challenge was to close down the two most important independent newspapers in Nepal - *Saptahik Bimarsha* and *Nepali Awaj*. Amidst worries that the government might be about to crack down hard, another newspaper, the left-wing *Samalochana*, was surreptitiously handed out to pedestrians on the street in the centre of Kathmandu before it could be confiscated. This newspaper, issued on 11 February, announced the two point programme for the planned uprising which had been agreed on by the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front. The paper stated that the Nepali Congress would be responsible for the demonstration on 18 February, Democracy Day, against the Panchayat regime and for a general strike on 19 February. After that the United Left Front would organise a 'black day' on 25 February and a second general strike on 2 March. Government action was swift. Behind the scenes, it was rumoured, the government was actively expanding the capacity of the jails in preparation for a large number of political arrests.

At 6 a.m. on 14 February, Sahana Pradhan, the president of the newly-formed United Left Front, was arrested at her home. All telephone lines to the top leaders of the democracy movement were cut and three days later the veteran leaders of the Nepali Congress, Ganesh Man Singh, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, and Girija Prasad Koirala, were placed under house arrest. Singh had just rejected a proposal from the Panchayat regime by declaring there was no longer room for compromise. The Panchayat system had to go, he said, and though the government had resorted to its

4 *Daily Diary* 29/1/1990, *Dristi* 29/1/1990 (PD34:6).

5 Unpublished CNAS survey, January-February 1990.

time-tested tactics to stall the opposition, its efforts had proved fruitless. Also on 14 February, a number of radical communist groups, including Mohan Bikram Singh's Masal and `Prachand's Mashal,<sup>6</sup> announced the formation of another alliance - the United National People's Movement ('UNPM') - and said that they would participate in the anti-Panchayat campaign with activities of their own.

As Democracy Day began, the streets of Kathmandu were lined with riot police armed to prevent the spread of just that. The heaviest concentration of these was found around the open, dusty parade grounds in the city centre, close to the Palace. Police officers spent most of the morning tearing down democratic slogans and party flags which had appeared in profusion in the dead of night.

The Panchayat government was determined to show its strength and announced that this year's celebration of 'National Democracy Day and King Tribhuvan Memorial Day' was to be the biggest ever. The annual procession through the city had been made compulsory for all government employees in order to marshal support. However, that same morning the opposition were provoked further. The king's speech, broadcast by Radio Nepal, made no mention of the hoped-for reforms. Instead the king admonished the Nepalese people to respect the `verdict of the majority' given to the Panchayat system in the referendum ten years earlier.

That same afternoon a large, excited crowd began to build up outside the Royal Nepal Airways building in the city centre. The people tried to spill into the parade grounds, but the police prevented them. So, slowly, the packed column began to move down the main, modern shopping street, New Road. About 10,000 people carried party flags, shouted slogans and distributed leaflets to bystanders. Suddenly, white puffs of tear gas rose and began to drift into the thick of the crowd as police tried to head off the demonstrators and wielded their batons freely. Several people were injured, but the police were outnumbered and could not disperse the crowd. Every time they beat the front row back, waves of new people

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6 The CPN(Masal) had separated from the 4th. Convention in 1983, and, after a split in 1985, one section continued under that name and another became known as `Mashal'. *Masal* and *mashal* are alternative spellings of the same Nepali word, meaning `torch'. The `s' and `sh' represent Nepali consonants which were originally pronounced differently but are now indistinguishable in most people's pronunciation. When giving the spelling orally the words *patlo* (thin) and *moto* (fat) are used to distinguish the two letters. Hence Mohan Bikram's group is often referred to in conversation as *patlo masal* and Prachand's as *moto mashal*. Other groups in the UNPM were Rup Lal Bishwakarma's Proletarian Workers Association, Krishna Das Shrestha's Nepal Marxist-Leninist Party and factions led by Shambhu Ram Shrestha and Nand Kumar Prasai.

emerged from the side streets to take their place. While this was going on, the demonstrators collided with the official Democracy Day procession and began throwing stones. At one point, the government ministers leading the procession had to flee for safety.

For the rest of the day clashes between police and demonstrators erupted periodically all over the capital. That evening Radio Nepal reported that 'extremists' had tried to disrupt the Democracy Day celebrations, not only in Kathmandu, but all over the country. There had been casualties. In the town of Hetauda, vehicles had been set on fire and a policeman had died. There were also reports of several deaths from police firing at Narayanghat in Chitwan, when a crowd of 5,000 tried to secure the release from arrest of Jagrit Prasad Bhetwal and Bhim Bahadur Shrestha, the communist Rastriya Panchayat members for the district.<sup>7</sup> The revolution had begun.

The opposition's intention was that the protest on 18 February should be followed by a general strike on 19 February. This went according to plan. On 19 February all shops in Kathmandu closed. Furthermore, in a city normally clogged with heavy traffic and reeking of fumes nothing moved except the trolley bus service and the government owned 'Sajha' buses. Later that same day reports of a serious and spontaneous uprising in Bhaktapur reached Kathmandu. Bhaktapur, close to Kathmandu, is an old medieval town of narrow streets and striking temples, populated almost entirely by Newars. It is also the stronghold of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party and feelings against the regime had been running particularly high over the detention of Narayan Bijukcche ('Comrade Rohit') and other leaders since August 1988.<sup>8</sup> Eyewitnesses claimed that police and 'mandales' had stoned and lathi-charged crowds of protestors and that at about 9.30 a.m. the police had opened fire without warning, killing four and wounding 21.<sup>9</sup> Clashes had continued into the small hours of the following day. The whole population, it was claimed, had taken part in the battle including women and children. Even old ladies had dropped bricks and flower pots from the roof tops onto the police officers hurrying below. There were reports, denied by the government, that army personnel had been deployed in the town in the afternoon. Later the Nepal Medical Association alleged that the police had used 'dum dum' (fragmentation) bullets in Bhaktapur. These have been banned in Europe since the First World War because they can cause a slow, agonising death.

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7 *Samaj*, 20/2/1990 (PD34:9). Bhetwal was a member of the CPN(M-L) and Shrestha of the CPN(Manandhar).

8 See above, p.109.

9 Chalise, *op. cit.*, p.114.

There were also serious clashes in Kirtipur, another Newar town in the Kathmandu Valley, and violence broke out in the south of Nepal, the Terai. Demonstrations took place in most of the major towns in the region, but at Jadukha, 8 miles east of Janakpur and close to the Indian border, Radio Nepal claimed that three people had been killed and seven wounded when a 'mob of anti-social elements' attacked the local police force. Independent sources the next day claimed that five people had been killed and twenty wounded.

The violence had come as a direct challenge to the government, but a greater threat to the government's authority was posed by the professional organisations in Kathmandu. One by one, they threw in their lot with the opposition. The Lawyers' Association called a nationwide strike on 20 February. On 23 February the whole staff of the Maharajganj Teaching Hospital organised a strike to protest at government violence. One eyewitness reported: '...the police were stealing dead bodies from the hospitals... So the medical staff at least took photographs of those people who were admitted and preserved them... The bodies of three persons who died after they had been brought to the hospital were put in the mortuary. About two or three hundred police arrived to steal the bodies from the mortuary. The nurses came first and lay down on the ground in front of the cars carrying the dead bodies, and the doctors, and even the patients and their relatives surrounded the police vehicles. So the police were forced to negotiate.' This same person went on to say: 'The police used to bring the wounded, and as soon as they were treated they would take them to the jail. So we doctors and nurses helped them escape from the hospital grounds. We made the police stop taking the injured away and we hid the injured in the community.'

Meanwhile in Kathmandu the University went on strike and illegal party flags could be seen flying outside all the campuses in the Kathmandu Valley. Tension ran so high that soldiers practising salutes on the Parade grounds in the middle of Kathmandu caused people to run and shops to close. The whole city was on edge.

The world by now was also beginning to interest itself in what was happening in Nepal. This was awkward for the Panchayat government, which now had to defend its actions before an international audience. In a BBC interview, the minister of home affairs, Niranjana Thapa, insisted that Nepal respected all fundamental human rights. He swept aside all objections, and stated that the demonstrators had left the police no option but to open fire.

By Thursday 22 February the movement seemed to have spread to most of the country. Reports of demonstrations had come in from even

remote districts. There were further protests, including women's demonstrations, in both Kathmandu and Biratnagar. Forty members of the Rastriya Panchayat, strongly condemned the use of violence by the government, while prisoners, newly released in Kathmandu and Chitwan, told of torture in Nepalese jails. This fuelled public concern. The following Saturday, a delegation of human rights activists led by Dr Mathura Prasad Shrestha had a two-hour-long audience with the prime minister. Shrestha recalled what happened: 'The prime minister first refused to talk to us. Then after he agreed we gave him our evidence of human rights violations and ultimately he agreed that he would investigate, and he said that none would be arrested. They didn't arrest us, and I remember the prime minister came up to the gate to see all of us off. But they arrested me between ten thirty and eleven the same night in my house.'<sup>10</sup>

The previous evening had been Shiva Ratri ('the night of Shiva'). Kathmandu had been bulging with thousands of Indian pilgrims who had come to wash and purify themselves at Pashupatinath, one of the holiest of all Hindu shrines, on the banks of the Bagmati river. That night, as ceremonial bonfires burned in the streets and vermilion powder was scattered in ritual, it seemed that Shiva, the god of creation and destruction, was waiting to strike. Yet, though the government had been shaken it had still not fallen.

Sunday 25 February had been dubbed 'black day'. Major demonstrations had been planned by the opposition and protestors carrying black flags were due to file through the centre of Kathmandu in protest at government oppression. All supporters of the democracy movement had been asked to wear black arm bands. In the event, the government succeeded in quashing the planned demonstrations. Radio Nepal warned that taking part in any of the protests would lead to 'serious repercussions'. The streets of Kathmandu swarmed with riot police who raided the centre of Kathmandu around New Road. Normally New Road is a bustling place full of shops and traffic and crowded with people. Now any pedestrian who even stopped and glanced round was arrested. Shops were closed and public transport suspended.

There were some outbreaks of violence in the Terai and in Kathmandu police had used batons to disperse a crowd of about a thousand people, west of the city centre. Overall, a thousand people were arrested including Hari Bol Bhattarai, the Congress ex-mayor of Kathmandu, and Padma Ratna Tuladhar. Commenting on the police excesses, Padma Ratna

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10 Interview with Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Kathmandu, 15/10/1990.



Tuladhar said: 'In Kathmandu all the arrested students and youth leaders were tortured in police custody, but not people like me because of our status. I was not tortured in police custody or jail - though there was a kind of psychological torture. I was taken from place to place late at night, even outside Kathmandu.'

On 26 February the employees at Bir Hospital, the main hospital in Kathmandu, staged a one hour strike. The following day students protested all over the country. The opposition leaders were worried and Ganesh Man Singh urged the supporters of the democracy movement not to resort to violence as this would only strengthen the Panchayat camp.

On the 27 February, an Indian newspaper carried an interview with former prime minister Kirtinidhi Bista, who called for the dismissal of the government and for dialogue with the opposition. This was significant as Bista had always been very much a trusted royal servant rather than a factional politician.<sup>11</sup>

If the 'black day' of 25 February had been a failure from the point of view of the opposition, the second planned general strike on 2 March was deemed successful, as it spread beyond the Kathmandu Valley. There were reports of clashes in Dharan, in eastern Nepal. Kathmandu itself was quiet except for a few sporadic cases of arson.

There were more protests from professional associations. In particular, two hundred doctors belonging to the Nepal Medical Association issued a joint statement condemning the government.<sup>12</sup> They were especially critical of the alleged use of fragmentation bullets against demonstrators at Bhaktapur.

On 5 March, 500 members of Nepal's Bar Association organised a political strike against the Panchayat system. In courts across Nepal, including the Supreme Court, barristers and solicitors waved black flags and banners demanding human rights. They offered their services, free of charge, to all political detainees and there were 59 arrests during the day. That same day 50 of Nepal's most famous writers, led by Kedar Man Byathit, former minister and chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, sent an open letter to the government asking for a review of human rights in Nepal. The Nepal Paramedical Association sent a similar petition.

Radio Nepal's continuing assurances that life was normal throughout the kingdom suggested that the government was not too perturbed by the situation and remained confident. But by now Nepalese knew that this

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<sup>11</sup> *Times of India*, 27/2/1990 (PD34:11).

<sup>12</sup> *Samalochana*, 5/3/1990 (PD34:11) claimed 1,200 doctors backed the statement.

meant quite the opposite. They knew that life had been seriously disrupted the length and breadth of the country.

The government responded to the opposition quite simply - with force. In Kathmandu, people claimed that the government had drafted in several thousand 'Mandales' - thugs trained in different fighting techniques by the National Sports Council. These men, it was rumoured, were patrolling the streets in addition to the regular police force. Many of those in police uniform, it was suspected, were actually soldiers. Bodies were found dumped in public places. These showed signs of severe beatings. Most people believe they were the corpses of political detainees - left to frighten the people. The government, however, claimed that they had been killed by the opposition.

Radio Nepal continued its propaganda campaign by reading out statements made by released prisoners. These statements declared that in view of the recent violence these prisoners had lost faith in the democracy movement. Non-government sources, however, said that the government was merely torturing people till they confessed to crimes they had not committed. Or else they were forced to sign statements condemning the Movement.

On 9 March, Radio Nepal announced that an assistant minister, Keshab Kumar Budathoki, had been asked to resign from his post in the Shrestha administration on the grounds of improper conduct. The same broadcast also reported that D.P. Adhikari had been permitted to resign from his seat in the Rastriya Panchayat. He was the second royal nominee to resign in protest at the actions of the government. Before his dismissal, Budathoki had strongly condemned the government's handling of the situation in a newspaper interview: 'The people have not yet been able to exercise any democratic rights provided for in the Panchayat system. Those in power are themselves violating the constitution. There was no need to resort to firing. The country cannot be run with 'Mandale' brutality, which is the main factor behind the violent incidents that are occurring in the country.'<sup>13</sup>

Demonstrations continued throughout the day and effigies of Panchayat figures were burned in several places. In the Sunsari district of the Terai fighting broke out between police and demonstrators.

By 10 March an uneasy truce had been reached. The pro-democracy movement had temporarily fallen back in the face of police repression and some observers felt that support for protests was abating.

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13 *Gorkha Express*, 11/3/1990 (PD34:12).

Nevertheless, unrest finally spread to government employees. On 13 March workers at the Agricultural Development Bank organised a one-hour sit-down strike in favour of the democracy movement. Though a short strike, it did show how far dissent had spread. The following day, 14 March, there was the third planned general strike. Again, Kathmandu was filled with police and this time there was little violence although a few buses were damaged by people throwing stones. While Radio Nepal announced that the strike had been a failure, the BBC World Service said that, on the contrary, it had been a success. In fact, it had had an effect though not such a dramatic one as earlier protests.

What had been happening in the Palace all this time was far from clear. The king, who had been based at Pokhara and visiting different parts of western Nepal since the movement began, was inaccessible and was surrounded by a small group of his closest associates. In his first public message since he had been placed under house arrest, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the acting president of the Nepali Congress, told the king that he could maintain his own integrity and position and avoid further violence by announcing reforms in his speech at the Panchayat rally in Pokhara on 16 March. In fact, the king made no use of this opportunity to announce reforms, but instead restated what he had said earlier about the 1980 referendum and the legitimacy it had conferred on the Panchayat system. He did, however, leave open the possibility of change: 'Any political system by itself is not an end but a means by which people's rights, interests and potentials are realized.... In the past three decades, we have instituted reforms as called for by the changing needs of the time, and taking account of the Nepalese aspirations this process will continue.'<sup>14</sup>

During the following two weeks conflict increased within the Panchayat system and even inside the government itself. Liberal *panchas* such as Shribhadra Sharma were criticised by hardliners for abusing their positions. More importantly, former minister Pashupati Shamsheer Rana, an influential member of the opposition within the Panchayat system, openly criticised the government and called for the two sides to start negotiations immediately.

As internal strains grew, popular protests took new forms even though some of the earlier tactics were becoming less effective. Now, students, medics and industrial workers staged strikes in different parts of the country. Teachers held a successful strike and even housewives planned their own demonstration outside Padma Kanya Campus in

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Shaha, *Politics in Nepal 1980-1990*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, p.196.

Kathmandu. On 16 March, writers and artists again staged a demonstration in Kathmandu. More than 200 of Nepal's best writers and artists sat down outside Trichandra College in the city centre. They tied black scarves across their mouths to symbolise how they had been gagged by the government. Reliable sources claimed that 158 were arrested, but most were released later that day.

On 20 March, a large meeting was staged in one of the biggest auditoriums at Kirtipur University Campus in Kathmandu by some of Nepal's leading intellectuals. They met to discuss the political crisis. Half way through the meeting there was a police raid and seven hundred people were arrested. Most were released that evening, but Devendra Raj Pandey, acting president of the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal, was held under a three-month-detention order. This action against a peaceful gathering rebounded on the government as its effect was to strengthen, not weaken, disaffection amongst the educated and the event was seen by some as a turning point in the struggle.<sup>15</sup>

While rallies in support of the Panchayat system continued to be organised in different parts of the country, *pancha* rhetoric was growing weary and events were rapidly moving towards a climax.

The university campuses continued to be racked by demonstrations. Some of these became more violent than before. The police resorted to tear gas and batons once again, while the students retaliated with stones and bricks. Many were arrested and injured, including some children who had been caught up in the fighting. According to eyewitnesses, the police had pushed five students over the edge of the roof of Amrit Science College in the centre of Kathmandu while they stormed the building. Outside Bhanu Bhakta Memorial High School in Kathmandu, demonstrators set fire to six government vehicles before police could disperse the crowd. The government responded by closing down all the campuses involved without prior warning on 30 March.

From the end of March onwards protest acquired a new vigour. The whole of Kathmandu and neighbouring areas were plunged into darkness periodically as the result of a the opposition's call for a blackout. Between 7.00 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. the streets of Kathmandu echoed to the cries of youngsters running and shouting: *Batti nibhyau - panchayat byabastha murdabad!* ('Turn off your lights - down with the Panchayat system!'). Many people considered that this tactic marked a crucial turning point because, at a time when the police were generally maintaining control of

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15 Krishna Hachhethu, personal communication; Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.122.

the streets in daylight, it emboldened people to come out of their homes under cover of darkness.

The next decisive stage in the revolution, however, took place in Patan, Kathmandu's twin city, across the other side of the Bagmati river in the Kathmandu Valley.

The other major Newar towns in the Kathmandu Valley, Bhaktapur and Kirtipur, had already seen heavy clashes with the police while Patan had remained relatively quiet. Irritated by Patan's lack of resolve, rumours stated that Bhaktapur and Kirtipur had sent bracelets and necklaces to the town, implying that the people of Patan had only the courage of women. It is still unclear if the story was true or if, as some people in Patan suggest, it was simply concocted by party activists to incite the citizenry.<sup>16</sup> In either case, the rumour possibly helped spark off a tense situation in Patan. Shops and offices closed and normal life ground to a standstill. On 30 March there were protests in the centre of town and police opened fire on protesters, killing two or three and injuring others. RSS (the official news agency) reported forty-five arrests.

Despite Radio Nepal's warnings of 'grave repercussions' for those who took part in strikes and demonstrations, violence in Patan continued. On March 31 police raided homes and looted several of them. As the young men were taken away, women and girls came out to protest and were met with teargas and staves. In response to this the people organised themselves, block by block. They bought radios and tuned into the police frequencies so that they could warn people when the police were coming and where they were going to raid. A blackout was organised and in the darkness barricades erected and trenches dug across roads leading into the town. Finally, the people of Patan drove the police back to the main temple square and penned them up there for three days. One person involved in this incident says that there were 185 police involved. For the first day they were not allowed anything to eat or drink and were reduced to drinking sewerage. Afterwards they were allowed to drink and some people brought them food. It took three days, however, for all of them to be released safely.

Eyewitnesses claimed that more than 50,000 people had turned out to demonstrate in Patan and slogans had appeared, not only against the Panchayat system, but against the monarchy too.

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16 David Gellner, 'Caste, Communalism, and Communism: Newars and the Nepalese State', in Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997. In other versions of the story, a sari was among the items sent or it was the men of Patan that sent the items to Kathmandu.

At the top level of government, the minister of foreign affairs, Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, resigned. His real reason may have been to buy time when Nepal was being pressed by the Indian government to sign a new treaty with terms highly favourable to India,<sup>17</sup> but the resignation was publicly presented as in protest at Prime Minister Shrestha's policy of repression and he called for immediate negotiations with the opposition. On 3 April the famous poet and politician, Kedar Man Byathit, resigned in protest from his post in the State Council, the Raj Sabha.

The Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee ('PPEC') asked influential opposition *panchas*, including three former prime ministers, for advice on how to handle the crisis. All three replied in unison that Prime Minister Shrestha should be thrown out of office. Shortly afterwards, on 31 March, the PPEC announced a national Panchayat convention for 18 April.

On 1 April, there was a cabinet reshuffle involving 18 members of the cabinet and seven assistant ministers. Four new ministers refused to take up their posts because of the situation. Those left in the cabinet were all known to be loyal to the prime minister. This seemed to prove that Shrestha still had the ear of the king. In other words, the government did not appear willing to change its tack in the midst of the mounting crisis.

To add to its problems, the government had completely lost control in Patan. On 1 April, 20,000 people gathered for a mass meeting in the city centre. By now the population had taken the law totally into their own hands by placing guards on every street corner. The lowest estimate was that four people had been killed and six seriously injured since the upsurge in Patan had begun.

2 April saw yet another general strike called. Kathmandu was once again full of police in riot gear. Medical staff all over the country continued to strike and the staff of RNAC, the national airline, launched a three hour strike wearing black scarves in defiance of government threats.

Barricades now blocked the main road into Patan. As many as 80,000 people demonstrated and the police could no longer force their way into the city. The entire population had surged out into the streets. There was another blackout that evening and demonstrations continued through the night in nearby Bhaktapur.

By 3 April the centre of Patan was totally cut off. Deep trenches had been dug in all the streets leading to the city centre and local guards

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17 Krishna Hachhethu, personal communication; see also chapter 6, below.

carrying *khukris* and spears seized from the temples stopped the police from entering.

At a mass meeting in central Patan, the leftist leader Siddhilal Singh Shrestha and the Nepali Congress leader Omkar Lal Shrestha said that the time had come for the king to declare himself: 'Is he for us or against us?'

The next day, 4 April, Ganesh Man Singh, who had been taken into hospital with a urinary problem on 27 March, issued a statement praising the people of Patan and Kirtipur (another Newar settlement) and comparing Patan to Timisaora in Romania.<sup>18</sup>

The same morning, crowds gathered at all the major Hindu and Buddhist temples in the Kathmandu Valley to mourn the dead and pray that their political leaders be granted wisdom. Police were present, but did not intervene. At Pashupatinath, the temple holy to Shiva, worshippers carried banners declaring 'Ram is truth, the Panchayat system is deceit' and were stopped just outside the temple area. At Swayambhunath, the major Buddhist stupa in Kathmandu, worshippers were chased by police with batons just after prayer had ended.

Demonstrators blocked the main road into the Kathmandu Valley and fighting lasted in Kathmandu for more than four hours. The RNAC went on strike again and flights were cancelled. By now the town centres of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur resembled war zones. There were road blocks everywhere. Debris littered the streets, fires blazed and the shells of overturned, burned-out vehicles lined the roads.

Five former prime ministers from within the Panchayat system declared that the National Panchayat convention planned for 18 April was useless now and would not solve the crisis, which had been deepened by the continued shooting of unarmed civilians.

The climax of the revolution came between 6 and 9 April. The alliance of the most radical communist groups, the United National People's Movement, had announced three weeks previously that they were calling for a Nepal Band (country-wide strike) on 6 April. On its own, the UNPM's call would probably have had only a modest effect, but an address to the nation by King Birendra on the morning of that day aroused rather than dampened the spirit of protest. The result was the most comprehensive strike of the campaign, affecting many different parts of the country and including both government workers and airport staff.

At 6.45 a.m., the king issued a royal proclamation broadcast by Radio Nepal. King Birendra announced the formation of a new cabinet

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18 Gellner, *op. cit.*, citing Dhanendrapurush Dhakal, *Jan-Andolan: 2046*, Lalitpur: Bhupendrapurush Dhakal, 2049 V.S., p.104.

under the leadership of Lokendra Bahadur Chand. There were only three other ministers: Nain Bahadur Swarn, who had served as a minister under Surya Bahadur Thapa until 1983; Pashupati Shamsheer Rana, long a critic of the previous government; and Achyut Raj Regmi, an ex-Congress politician who had served in Chand's previous government. This was a last-ditch move as Shrestha had failed to establish law and order. According to the king, the main tasks of this new cabinet were to begin talks with the leaders of the banned parties, conduct an enquiry into the killings, and establish a constitutional amendment commission. Later that same day, RSS announced that all persons detained during the movement were to be released unless they could be brought before a court on specific criminal charges.

After the king's speech, the populations of Kathmandu, Kirtipur and Patan poured out into the streets. The crowd was estimated at between 200,000 and half a million, the largest ever gathering in Nepal's history. They were buoyant, feeling that victory was imminent.

Though the town was full of police, they did not interfere, but let the demonstrators assemble peacefully for a mass meeting at Tundikhel. The mood changed dramatically in the afternoon. One section of the crowd headed south along Putali Sadak (the road running towards Singha Darbar) and on the way attacked property belonging to Sharad Chandra Shah, the chairman of the much-hated National Sports Council. Others began to edge up Durbar Marg towards the Palace chanting slogans against the king and queen. One particularly popular chant was *Birendra chor, desh chod* ('Thief Birendra, leave the country!') When the demonstrators had reached King Mahendra's statue, senior police or military officers apparently believed the Palace itself might come under attack and, having failed to halt the crowd's advance with teargas, ordered troops stationed on the roof of Woodlands Hotel to open fire.<sup>19</sup> Panic and confusion swept through the demonstrators. Some people were even gunned down in the back while running for shelter. The BBC reported in the evening that at least fifty had died as a result of this incident. The exact number of deaths is still not known for certain, and after the end of the Panchayat regime the government was able to establish the names of only 63 persons who had been killed during the whole course of the *janandolan*.<sup>20</sup> But whatever the

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19 Durga Bhandari, in 1990 Director of the Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, claims that he overheard a junior police officer reporting to his superior that the situation was out of control and receiving the order to open fire (interview, Kathmandu, 22/7/1990 (JW)).

20 T. Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.148.



true casualty figure, the Durbar Marg shooting without doubt turned the whole course of events.

After the massacre, demonstrations broke out with new force all over the capital and the police opened fire in several instances. No one knew how many had been killed or injured that day. The mood had changed to one of horror and the voluntary blackout that evening seemed more an act of deep, crushing despair than defiance.

That evening of 6 April, a curfew was imposed on Kathmandu and Patan inside the modern ring road round the cities. During the following morning this was extended to a twenty-four hour total curfew and then again extended for a second twenty-four hours.

The new prime minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, tried to meet Ganesh Man Singh, but Singh said that he would only agree to talks after the Panchayat government had officially announced the introduction of a multi-party system. Padma Ratna Tuladhar, an independent communist representing Kathmandu in the Rastriya Panchayat, described what happened to him that day: `Finally on the 25th of Chaitra (7 April), the day after the massacre in Durbar Marg and in the middle of the curfew, I was brought from Chautara jail to the prime minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand's residence. He said to me: "I have arranged for the leaders of the movement to negotiate with the king. Now you have to help."<sup>21</sup> Tuladhar was sent by government car to reassure the communist leaders, who were still in hiding, that they could come out without fear of reprisals. Devendra Raj Pandey, the human rights activist and former finance secretary, was similarly asked to mediate between government and opposition.<sup>22</sup> Chand himself visited Ganeshman Singh in hospital while the other ministers approached Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and other leaders, and detainees were quietly released and brought to their homes.<sup>23</sup>

On Sunday 8 April the curfew, which had now been extended to Bhaktapur and other cities in Nepal, of the population, was lifted in Kathmandu for two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon to allow government employees to get to work and to let everyone buy food. People hurried out into the streets to queue at the shops and were subdued. They whispered nervously to one another. They were worried that the curfew might go on and on and that a political solution to the crisis was further away than ever. One tourist had been killed in the shooting on 6 April. Many others tried to leave the country afterwards, found that they could not and panicked.

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21 Padma Ratna Tuladhar, interviewed in Dhakal, *op. cit.*, p.202.

22 Krishna Hachhethu, personal communication.

23 Dhakal, *op. cit.*, p.128.

According to Padma Ratna Tuladhar, there was now tension within the multi-party side. Whilst the leftists were discussing their response to Chand's overture they heard a report that Congress leaders had unilaterally agreed terms for a meeting with the king and were ready to call the movement off in return for the rescinding of the ban on political parties. It was claimed later that the United Left Front still wanted to hold out for the total disbanding of the Panchayat structures but felt they had now to go along with the proposed negotiations.<sup>24</sup> In fact, it was not just a matter of Congress forcing the ULF's hand, as the ULF chairman, Sahana Pradhan, was herself now ready for a compromise.<sup>25</sup>

On 8 April, Lokendra Bahadur Chand again went to the Bir hospital, but Ganesh Man insisted there could be negotiations only with the king and that these could take place only after the movement's demands had been met. Later in the day, Chand took the other leaders of the Movement to consult with Ganesh Man and it was agreed that a delegation, not including Ganesh Man himself, would meet the king if they were first given an indication that a multi-party system and an interim government would be conceded.<sup>26</sup> Chand left to consult again with the Palace and returned with the necessary assurance.

The communists argued at Ganesh Man's bedside that the demand for the abolition of the whole Panchayat system should still be pressed with the king. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai expressed his opposition with a characteristic quip - 'If we do everything today, what will be left for tomorrow?' - but Ganesh Man endorsed the proposal: 'This can be raised as well. After all that has happened, why should the king not accept it?'<sup>27</sup>

Every individual involved would doubtless have different recollections of what followed, but a Marxist-Leninist leader, Radha Krishna Mainali, has provided the most detailed account:

Before we were brought to the Palace, we were taken to the prime minister's residence at Baluwatar. There the prime minister [Lokendra Bahadur Chand]... said slowly to Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, 'Bhattaraiji, it would be best not to raise the dissolution of the Panchayat system.' Then Krishnaprasadji said something slowly in English - I think it was: 'We'll raise the issue, but we won't press it.' Afterwards Lokendra said, 'Then it's settled.'

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24 Padma Ratna Tuladhar, interviewed in Dhakal, *op. cit.*, p.202.

25 Brown, *op. cit.*, p.135.

26 K.P. Bhattarai, interviewed in Dhakal, *op. cit.*, p.186

27 Padma Ratna Tuladhar, interviewed in Dhakal, *op. cit.*, p.203.

From the prime minister's residence, we four representatives - Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Sahana Pradhan, Girija Prasad Koirala and me - were brought into the palace through the West Gate.... We were taken into a drawing room. The four members of the cabinet sat on one side and we four on the other. The king sat in the middle, to make discussion easier. I think the ones meeting the king for the first time were Krishnaprasadji, Sahanaji and me.<sup>28</sup>

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai started the discussion. He did it very well, putting everything to the king as we'd discussed among ourselves. Afterwards Sahanaji asked for<sup>29</sup> the dissolution of the [Chand] government and of the Panchayat [system]. Then I spoke. I said that since the people's anger was more against the Panchayat system than the king, trying to find an excuse to save the Panchayat system would not take the country forward. We were there as representatives of the movement and would have to go out and report to the people, so I stressed we were asking at least for the dissolution of the Panchayat [institutions]. I repeated this four or five times, and Kishunji and Sahanaji made the same point two or three times.

At one point, Sahanaji whispered in Krishnaprasadji's ear, 'We should say the government must be dissolved', but Bhattaraji said, 'Don't raise that now.' We put emphasis on the need to dissolve the Panchayat system rather than the government, but the king said, 'Now we have this agreement, so let it be enough for today. What you ask for will be done in the near future.' Personally, I feel that if Bhattaraji had insisted, the Panchayat system would have been dissolved that day. Girijababu said nothing at all, Bhattaraji quivered and said nothing, and I was a Leftist (*ma left pare*) and a Marxist-Leninist - what notice would they take of us?<sup>30</sup>

Very late that evening at 11 p.m., after most Nepalese had gone to bed, Nepal TV announced that the king had lifted the ban on political parties in the constitution and that a commission would recommend further changes. This was a sudden turn-around. Pictures of the four leaders who had gone to the Palace flashed on the screens. Asked about the result of their audience with King Birendra, Bhattarai replied surprisingly: 'Our demands have been met and our movement is clearly and

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28 G.P. Koirala had already met the king on several occasions, starting when he was involved in negotiations for his brother, B.P. Koirala's release in 1968.

29 The Nepali expression used is *mag garnu*, which is closer to the English 'request' than 'demand', though sometimes translated as the latter in a political context.

30 Dhakal, *op. cit.*, 197-8.

categorically called off.' All the opposition leaders rallied in support and praise of the king. Bhattarai went on to say: 'He has a deep and sincere concern for the Nepalese people.'

Sadly six people were killed during the night while celebrating the news. They were shot in the streets by soldiers who had not been informed that the curfew and the revolution were over.

The following morning, when the news was repeated on Radio Nepal, huge crowds immediately took to the streets. They sat on top of buses and trucks waving party flags, chanting slogans and scattering vermilion powder in celebration on passers-by.

The crowds gathered at Tundikhel for a mass meeting where the Congress and communist leaders, just emerged from prison, gave speeches. The leaders declared that the door to democracy had now been opened, but there was still a long way to go to build a fully democratic society in Nepal. The true democracy movement was only just starting, though the first stage in the streets was now over. The general secretary of the Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala, struck a conciliatory note, saying that this was the victory not just of political parties, but of the whole people, including even the *panchas*. Many objected to this last point, but Koirala's main message was fully in tune with his audience's feelings: 'Our goals are the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and a constitution based on the will of the people. Our history is full of broken promises from the king, therefore we will now make sure the promises are fully implemented. Only through continued unity may we reach these goals.'

Koirala's words signalled that the old regime had finally come to an end. Yet, though the democracy movement had won in principle, it still had to put its victory into practice. Celebrations continued in Kathmandu and across the country for several days, but gradually people began to realise that the introduction of multi-party democracy was far from ensured. All that the king had agreed to was the omission of a small paragraph in the Panchayat constitution and the Panchayat politicians still sat in the seat of government. Unease changed into dissatisfaction. On Tuesday 10 April the UNPM, the alliance of the most radical communist parties, held an open air meeting at Tundikhel. They criticised the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front for giving up the struggle for democracy too quickly. About 10,000 people attended the meeting.

If anything, Ganesh Man Singh was in agreement with these communists. He complained that the democratisation process was going too slowly. He further stated that if the king did not dissolve the

Panchayat government and establish an interim government quickly, the people would soon be out on the streets again.

The following day on Radio Nepal the prime minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, announced the second round of talks with opposition leaders. Chand believed, or claimed to believe, there had been an understanding that an 'interim government' could be formed by broadening his own cabinet to include leaders of the political parties.<sup>31</sup> The opposition, however, clung to their position that they would negotiate with no one except the king. Pressure on the democracy leaders for new action began to increase substantially. More and more groups demanded fully-fledged democracy on the terms of the democracy movement. These included the Forum for the Protection of Human Rights (FOPHUR), which was led by Mathura Prasad Shrestha, as well as the extreme 'Masal' and 'Mashal' communist groups, and some within the United Left Front and the Nepali Congress. The leaders of the pro-democracy movement realised that they had to act.

On Thursday 12 April the leaders of the United Left Front and the Nepali Congress held a meeting at the house of Ganesh Man Singh. At a press conference after the meeting, the leaders explained that eight clear demands had been presented to the king. The most important of these were: the immediate establishment of an interim cabinet (including both Congress and communist members), the dissolution of the Panchayat system at all levels, and the release of all political prisoners.

The following day all remaining political prisoners were released. But still the king did not act. In his message for the Nepalese New Year on Saturday 14 April, he merely announced that he would establish a Commission for the Amendment of the Constitution with members from all political groups. Ganesh Man Singh complained bitterly: 'The whole political situation of the country has changed, but the style of the king remains the same.'

What the opposition was invited to were talks organised by Prime Minister Chand. The political parties spent hours deciding whether they should attend. In the end they sent only second-rank leaders: Yog Prasad Upadhyaya and Daman Dhungana for Congress, Nilamber Acharya and Krishna Raj Varma for the ULF. The Panchayat government was represented by the prime minister and by ministers and liberals who had no real power: Pashupati Shamsheer Rana and Achyut Raj Regmi from the cabinet and two ex-ministers, Keshar Bahadur Bista and Padma Sundar

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31 Lokendra Bahadur Chand, in Dhakal, *op. cit.*, p.188-9 claimed Bhattarai had proposed this to the king and that Ganeshman later endorsed the idea. Radha Krishna Mainali (*ib.*, p.198) denied any such proposal was made at the palace on 8 April.

Lawati. The prime minister opened the proceedings, but then tried to leave. However, the numbers outside the Academy Hall where the talks were taking place had swelled rapidly, partly at least because Girija Prasad Koirala had summoned student sympathisers to join the demonstration outside the Academy building.<sup>32</sup> The crowd refused to allow the prime minister to leave. They even padlocked the entrances into the hall. From early in the afternoon until after midnight thousands chanted outside the Academy Hall: 'Give us what we ask for or resign!' The opposition leaders went out periodically to calm the crowd and the police did not interfere.

Talks continued until 3 a.m. the following morning, 16 April. There was apparent deadlock but the prime minister had in fact undertaken to put the opposition leaders' demands to the king. Allowed out of the building by the remaining demonstrators, he drove straight to the palace to hand in his resignation. This spelled the final capitulation by the Panchayat regime.

Later that morning a royal proclamation was broadcast by Radio Nepal. It was announced that the king had dissolved the Rastriya Panchayat itself, the Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee and the six class organisations. In other words, the entire Panchayat system had been removed at one fell swoop. In addition, the king announced the suspension of some clauses of the constitution to make the formation of a new government easier. He asked Lokendra Bahadur Chand to continue in his post until an interim government could be formed. The government dissolved all village, town and district panchayats two weeks later on 27 April. The two remaining institutions of the old regime, the National Sports Council and the fourteen zonal commissioners were formally abolished on 7 May.

On the afternoon of 16 April, the king met with Ganesh Man Singh. The opposition leaders, particularly the Nepali Congress, had hitherto been suggesting that the king himself should head an interim coalition government. He was unwilling to do this and instead asked Singh to become prime minister. Singh refused on health grounds, but suggested Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. According to the statement released by Ganesh Man Singh, the king had accepted his view that in future he should act only as the constitutional monarch of a parliamentary democracy.

On his return from the palace, Ganesh Man Singh immediately convened a meeting of the United Left Front and the Nepali Congress. At

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32 Interview with Girija Prasad Koirala, Kathmandu, 25/8/1995.

a press conference afterwards Bhattarai announced that he had accepted the task of heading the new interim government. This would consist of members of the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front plus royal nominees and independents. The priorities of the government would be, first and foremost, to alleviate economic hardship in Nepal and, secondly, hold elections on the principle of one adult one vote from the age of eighteen and over. A third, but highly important, task for the interim government would be to solve the trade dispute with India which had been dragging on for over a year.

On 18 April 1990, Bhattarai's list of cabinet members, with three other Congress ministers, three from the ULF and two independents, was handed to the king, who added two more of his own. The heavyweights in the cabinet were Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, a Congress veteran from Janakpur in the Terai, Sahana Pradhan, chairman of the ULF, and Jhalanath Khanal, former General Secretary of the CPN(M-L), who had worked 'underground' until his appearance at the victory rally on 9 April. The two independents were prominent human rights activists as well as specialists in the fields for which they had ministerial responsibility. The king's nominees, Keshar Jang Rayamajhi and Achyut Raj Regmi, had communist and Congress backgrounds respectively but had long been identified with the Panchayat system.

This interim government was sworn in the following day, Thursday 19 April 1990. Breaking with traditional procedure, only the prime minister gave his oath to the king at the Palace. The rest of the cabinet were sworn in at a public meeting at Singha Durbar, the government secretariat building.

Ganesh Man Singh gave the main speech during the swearing-in ceremony. He told the interim cabinet that the responsibility for implementing the democracy movement's eight demands now lay with them. The new government hoped to announce a new constitution within ninety days, and hold elections within a year. Now the interim cabinet had to begin to steer Nepal towards a new future.

The new government's first task was to re-establish law and order in the country. This meant more than clearing away the litter of revolution lying in the streets. The army were still loyal to the king and suspicious of the new political leaders. Furthermore, elements of the old regime actively opposed the new government. In many places the people's own 'guards' still patrolled the streets instead of the police. The government first had to win the confidence of the people, and then impose their authority.

A series of violent incidents were rocking Kathmandu, bringing the city to the brink of emergency, but no one knew if they were wanton acts of hooliganism or a planned attempt at a 'counter-revolution' by disaffected reactionaries. This violence sent shock waves of uncertainty through the capital and showed how fragile the position of the new interim government actually was.

One incident occurred on 16 April when a group of thugs attacked the Bishwajyoti Cinema Hall in Kathmandu and set fire to it. Several of these arsonists were recognised as 'Mandales' -the *panchas* enlisted by the National Sports Council as a kind of 'secret police' for the old regime. There were also reports of men in police uniforms carrying out acts of sabotage and burglary. People were afraid that sections of the old regime were trying to strike back with terror. Girija Prasad Koirala, general secretary of the Nepali Congress, appealed to the public to form security committees to guard against extremist acts. One of these committees caught several important members of the National Sports Council a few days later on 22 April in the worst night of burglary, looting and theft in Kathmandu. This had come about after a spate of sleepless nights in Kathmandu when homes and shops had been attacked and plundered.

On Monday 23 April, after the worst of these incidents, the leaders of the Nepali Congress met to discuss the difficult situation. By then the people had taken matters into their own hands. In Kalanki, another part of Kathmandu, five police officers without identity cards were taken prisoner by a crowd. A few hours later, the minister of home affairs, Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, and the general inspector of police, arrived to try and secure the release of these men. Rather than giving in, the crowd held the general inspector prisoner too and led him in a procession to Tundikhel, the old parade-ground in the middle of Kathmandu. In an open air meeting, the general inspector of police promised to dismiss within a week all police who had been found abusing their position.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the day processionists walked through the centre of Kathmandu parading wounded and dead police officers and shouting slogans against the king. Tear gas and batons were used to control them - now ordered by the new interim government. In Hanuman Dhoka, the central temple square of Kathmandu, police standing on the roof of their headquarters opened fire, killing two of the demonstrators and wounding several more.

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33 According to Shaha, *Politics in Nepal, op. cit.*, p.221, it was the minister who promised that he would dismiss the police chief!



A rumour spread round Kathmandu that three cars full of armed men had tried to enter the government buildings at Singha Durbar at midday with the intention of kidnapping the cabinet. However, they were turned away at the entrance. Still wilder rumours circulated on the situation within the palace, including even a claim that the queen had shot the king.<sup>34</sup>

Violence continued in the afternoon. A crowd gathered outside the office of the Bagmati zonal commissioner and his office and some government vehicles were set alight. Police opened fire. A crowd also set fire to the house of Mandale leader, Sharad Chandra Shah, in Dilli Bazar.

The new prime minister, Bhattarai, met with the king and later that day made an appeal through Radio Nepal for everyone to remain calm. He said that reactionary elements were plotting against the new interim government and that the people should fight back, but in a wise and careful manner. The people's demands would be met, but the government needed time, at least two months, to begin the democratisation process in earnest.

To bring the security situation under control a night-time curfew was imposed in Kathmandu and then also in Patan and Kirtipur. This was enforced by the army and maintained in Kathmandu until 9 May and in Patan until 14 May.

On 25 April, in a message from the Palace, the king asked the people to give their full support to the new government. This was a clarification of the king's position and showed the police, the *panchas* and the military where the king's sympathies now lay. Many people believed that the king's announcement came as a result of Bhattarai's visit to the palace two days earlier. It was alleged that Bhattarai had threatened to resign if the king did not throw his full support behind the new interim government.

Even after this categorical declaration of royal support, there were still some signs of disaffection amongst the police. One paper reported that on the 25th, 300 policemen had marched in procession shouting slogans against the new government and the home minister.<sup>35</sup> The following day police personnel protested at Bir Hospital, claiming that the staff had refused to treat injured policemen. The prime minister asked the army to intervene and army officers succeeded in persuading the police to leave the hospital peacefully. Four days later, the chief of police reminded

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34 *Ib.*

35 *Daily Diary*, 26/4/1990 (PD34:18).

his force that their responsibility was to maintain law and order no matter what the political system in the country.<sup>36</sup>

As violence in the capital subsided, the democratic leaders could focus their attention on securing their political position. On 27 April, all village and town panchayats were dissolved and the post of anchaladhis (zonal commissioner) was subsequently abolished. On 6 May, the general secretary of the Congress Party, Girija Prasad Koirala, reportedly gave the king the following ultimatum: either he must transfer full authority to the new government or else the whole cabinet would resign. According to Radio Nepal, the king gave in gracefully and unconditionally to all of Koirala's demands, though the formal assignment of the dissolved Rastriya Panchayat's legislative and executive powers to the council of ministers did not take place until 22 May.<sup>37</sup>

Koirala's meeting with the king was the last turning point. Though curfews continued in Kathmandu for a short while and there were incidents and outbreaks of violence, the interim government had survived. The movement's leaders had consolidated their gains, had averted a possible 'counter-revolution' and were now in a more secure position from which to govern.

### **Reflections on the *janandolan***

For a month after the commencement of the revolution on 18 February there was blanket censorship in Nepal of a kind not seen since the days of the Ranas. Even *Newsweek* and *Time* were confiscated the moment they arrived at the airport and virtually all of the private newspapers had been banned. What newspapers remained printed subversive news and attacked the government, but in such a manner that it was impossible for the government to strike back. Such writing was a renaissance for the indirect style of political writing which had become so developed under the Ranas. Nepalese passed information by word of mouth and circulated leaflets and illegal newspapers. This ensured that everyone knew where protests and demonstrations were to take place. Last, but not least, foreign news broadcasts in Nepali played an important role. A surprisingly large percentage of the population tuned into All India Radio, the BBC and the Voice of America. These foreign radio stations were the only platform available for the opposition leaders - though they were able to smuggle out messages and directives from house

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36 Shaha, *op. cit.*, p.223.

37 Michael Hutt, 'Drafting the 1990 Constitution,' in Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*. New Delhi: Sterling. 1994. n.35.

arrest to a limited extent. Thus Nepalese were able to take the news printed next morning in the government papers with a pinch of salt.

The party leaders were locked up and could not act publicly. Those who did act were the students who bore the brunt of the police violence. One student leader in Kathmandu said proudly: 'We have been the most important political force in Nepal. We are the people who have suffered the most in the fight for democracy, not the party leaders. The students have been imprisoned, beaten, tortured and some even killed.' These words proved prophetic also for the 1990 revolution. When the campaign entered its most critical phase at the end of March activity first started up on the various university campuses in Kathmandu which the government then promptly shut down.

As has been stated, the professional organizations also played a vital role in galvanising people and bringing them out onto the streets.

In order to co-ordinate all the demonstrations and protests, it had been necessary to develop an elaborate underground network of communication. Kamala Pant, a young student leader in Kathmandu, described this network as follows: 'When many of the leaders were arrested and the rest went underground. I also went underground on that day and remained there until the end of the movement. Almost all our planning and work was done over the phone, even recruiting people to take part in our demonstrations and protests. For example, when we organised the major women's demonstration, I phoned different key persons, women I knew, and asked them to take along whoever they knew, and we always knew each other's phone numbers even though almost all of us were constantly on the move. When too many people and police in uniform or civil dress arrived I would be hurried off to a new place. And it continued like this. At all political meetings and demonstrations and other protests I would be present, but the rest of the time I would stay underground. I would be transported back and forth in the back of a tempo, a motorised rickshaw, so that nobody could see me. I would arrive late and leave early and there would always be a planned escape route for me through a back door which I used several times when the police arrived. I always had bodyguards, other students, around me.'

Apart from a few minor incidents, the demonstrations throughout the revolution appeared to adhere to a strict code of conduct. Many were afraid that the movement would turn violent. However, the Gandhian position of non-violence proclaimed by the major leaders of the democracy movement held firm and fears of bloodshed were largely unfulfilled.

Though the revolution was organised, it was not controlled. The whole movement would have failed without the mass support it did

receive, but this very support introduced an unstable element into the whole proceedings. The opposition leaders had to rely on the crowds to bring about any political change at all. However, these same crowds were capable of turning the whole movement into something quite different from what the opposition leaders had initially planned. Though the end of the revolution brought about a result which the opposition leaders had been dreaming of for decades, the method by which this was achieved and the extent to which this was achieved came as a surprise. The supreme leader of the Nepali Congress, Ganesh Man Singh, said just after the movement had come to an end: 'We thought our movement would get support, but we had never expected that we would get the kind of mass support we did get'. Similarly, Padma Ratna Tuladhar, the independent leftist, said: 'There was a suspicion, you see, among the leaders that the people of Kathmandu would not participate in the movement. But on 18 February the participation of the local people was so extensive that the leaders became extremists. Even myself, when I went into the street on that day saw so many local people, shopkeepers, businessmen and others. So this made us convinced that now the people would come. Of course, there were also some negative points like the government suppression from the very first day.'

It was clear that the extent of the mass support for the revolution came as a surprise to the opposition leaders as much as to the Panchayat government. So what had the leaders of the revolution initially hoped to achieve through the democracy movement?

Most of the leaders had been confident that this would be the strongest movement in Nepal's history. Even so, the numbers of protesters on the streets, at least in the urban areas of the Kathmandu Valley, far exceeded their wildest expectations. At best many of the opposition leaders had thought they might attract enough support to force through some sort of political compromise. They had not expected a full-scale revolution. Yet this is what took place in the Kathmandu Valley during the first days of April 1990. The uprising swiftly brought about a situation in which the opposition, backed by the people on the streets, were able to dictate totally the terms on which the government and the king surrendered to them.

Yet while there had been steady support for the movement from 18 February onwards, it was far from being a mass uprising. The popular revolt came at a much later stage and did so as a reaction to police suppression and violence. Padma Ratna Tuladhar explained: 'The people became very angry at this suppression. They saw that innocent people were arrested and tortured. The police opened fire unnecessarily. So the

people actually retaliated against this kind of suppression. In this way the government played a positive role for the movement.'

This violence was totally beyond the control of the opposition leaders. The Panchayat government's initial response to the democracy movement seemed to be to try and turn Nepal into a police state overnight. The government suddenly introduced new repressive measures. Just picking up a leaflet from the pavement or watching a demonstration was now enough to land a person in police custody. The government actively encouraged citizens to inform on one another. What angered the population more than anything was the arbitrary way in which the government acted. People were arrested for no apparent reason and at night police could swoop down on a neighbourhood and arrest all the young men and boys.

Many lost their final respect for the Panchayat government when the Mandales, government sponsored thugs, were set loose in the Kathmandu Valley. This brought about the impossible. People who had held back because they believed King Birendra would step in now threw in their lot with the democracy movement. The long suffering people of Nepal finally lost their patience. Even old women and young children, who normally would have taken no interest in politics, saw what was happening outside their own doorsteps and took to the streets.

Government violence was further inflated by its own censorship. With most of the private press shut down and government papers dishing up obvious lies, people relied on rumours for information. These rumours blew the violence out of all proportion and this merely acted to bring more people out into the streets.

In Eastern Europe the revolutions appeared to happen as much on TV as in the streets. The media did not play this crucial role in Nepal. One Nepalese investigative journalist claimed, however, that the Nepalese media did help prepare the ground for the movement: 'Over a long period the shortcomings of the system were exposed to the people both through the programmes of independent reporters especially on TV and in government media, but mainly in the private press. In this way people slowly understood that the system no longer had anything to offer. Though in addition came the coverage by Nepal TV of the revolutions in Eastern Europe. You know, the Nepalese government never practised any censorship on international news as in China or Burma.' He pointed out that TV did play an indirect role during the revolution, even during the first period of total censorship: 'Everybody who works in TV knows how fatal over-exposure is. The movement began just at the time the king and queen made their annual tour of the western region. As usual TV and radio

covered their movements daily. This, however, did not work for their benefit. The people were daily confronted with how bad the political system was and then they had to watch the queen every evening on TV, which made their resentment grow even further.'

While in general the government media kow-towed to government censorship, Nepal TV went its own way. In a programme covering the unrest in the Kathmandu Valley, the broadcast called for a dialogue between the government and opposition. Leading opposition *panchas* were interviewed and B.P. Koirala's picture was shown for the first time ever on Nepal TV. Nepal TV had always enjoyed more freedom than other sections of the government media as its director, Nir Bikram Shah, was a relative of the king. Even so, this programme went too far and both the journalist involved and his boss were asked to resign. But by now it was too late. The revolution had gathered momentum. Nepal TV, having broken the government ban once, continued, unabashed, to report events as they happened.

One feature of the revolution which also took the opposition leaders by surprise was the imagination displayed in some of the protests. On Saturday 3 March artists sat down outside Trichandra College in Kathmandu with black scarves tied around their mouths in silent protest at the Panchayat government. On Saturday 31 March a large number of housewives gathered outside the gates of Tribhuvan University's Padma Kanya Campus in Kathmandu and raised a din by banging pots and pans together. Most remarkable, however, were the voluntary blackouts which began in Narayanghat in the Terai. They spread quickly to Kathmandu and the other towns in Nepal. For one hour every evening Nepal's towns were plunged into darkness. One of the leaders of the revolution said: 'It was during these evening hours we finally knew that a victory was imminent.'

Two events in two different places were vital to changing the whole course of the revolution. These took place in Bhaktapur and Patan, former principalities and now towns in the Kathmandu Valley. What happened there took the form of a local revolt. On 19 February the people of Bhaktapur turned against the police making the protests of the previous day seem timid by comparison. A battle raged in the streets of Bhaktapur throughout the day and several people were killed. Rumours spread that the government had even sent in the army. While that was not true, the police did use dum dum bullets against the crowds and this created an uproar amongst the medical profession in the country. The revolt in Bhaktapur showed the government that the people meant business and that it would be no easy task to restore the status quo. Later, what happened in

Patan pushed the revolution into its most critical phase and showed that the defeat of the government was just a matter of time.<sup>38</sup>

Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur all lie within easy reach of one another. Patan and Bhaktapur, however, are quite different in some respects from Kathmandu. Bhaktapur is inhabited almost entirely by Newars. Despite its distance of just 10km from Kathmandu it is relatively undeveloped and unchanged. The longstanding grievances resulting from this state of affairs meant that the Panchayat system never took a strong hold there. That is possibly why one organisation, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Organisation, led by one charismatic leader, Narayan Man Bijukchhe, amassed such widespread support from the community. This organisation was the guiding hand behind events there on 19 February 1990.

Patan, being to all intents and purposes part of the capital, has a much more heterogeneous population. While the people of Patan were more educated and politicised than the people of Bhaktapur they had no corresponding binding force such as a common political party. The uprising in Patan on 30 March started after a clash between police and demonstrators in Mangal Bazar, the centre of Patan, which left several dead. Although the protestors in Patan acted more spontaneously and the revolt continued longer, there was some similarity with what happened in Bhaktapur six weeks earlier. Almost everything took place in the city centre which, like Bhaktapur, was inhabited almost entirely by Newars. United action seemed to spring from close-knit communities who saw their neighbourhoods, families and friends threatened. Two young activists described what happened. 'During the night we went from *tol* to *tol*, block to block, telling the people that they should defend their brothers and sisters, daughters and sons, some of whom had already been killed and injured by the police. The people came out with knives and rods and whatever else they could find in their household, both women and men, old and young. The activities really started at Chyasan Tol where the people all belonging to the same caste which practised intermarriage were the most unified block in Patan. But from there it spread to all the other tols and areas.' A similar pattern of events was repeated in nearby Kirtipur, a smaller settlement than Patan but also overwhelmingly Newar.

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<sup>38</sup> This was Martin Hoftun's personal impression as a resident of Kathmandu during the *janandolan*. Krishna Hachhethu (personal communication) and some other observers would, however, give less emphasis to the role of Bhaktapur and more to protests by the intelligentsia, in particular the meeting at Tribhuvan University's Kirtipur campus on 20 March and the subsequent arrests.

All revolutions find success or failure in the interplay between the revolutionary leaders and the general population. This was certainly the case in Nepal. The leaders planned the democracy movement and called for action. Ordinary people responded, but their response made the movement theirs and took the initiative away from the opposition leaders. The opposition leaders were forced to adjust and then make a concerted effort to regain control of the movement.

While the opposition leaders were in prison or under house arrest, it was the demonstrators who pushed the revolution to its climax on 6 April after the king's broadcast. The crowd flocked out into the streets in good spirits, but their mood suddenly changed.<sup>39</sup> Their intentions as they moved towards the palace remain something of a mystery. The security forces clearly believed they were likely to attack the palace but one eyewitness who fell back just before the shooting began believed they would merely have wrecked King Mahendra's statue and then gone around the palace shouting slogans.<sup>40</sup> Everybody must have known that any threat to the king would bring about severe reprisals. Did activists from the extremist United People's National Movement incite the crowd or, more sinisterly, were Mandale thugs at work? Or, as others believed, did members of the crowd listening to the radio think they had heard the police being given orders not to attack? Did this encourage the crowd to go too far? What was evident was that the king's speech had worked against him. While the actual physical threat posed to the regime by the crowds on the street may not really have been that great, the belief that such a threat existed conditioned subsequent decisions both by the king and by the opposition leaders.<sup>41</sup>

The crowd seemed again to take over and dictate events on the night of 15 to 16 April, after talks had finally started between the opposition leaders and members of Lokendra Bahadur Chand's government. 'Unfortunately,' as a minister in Chand's cabinet, Achyut Raj Regmi, also a member of the interim cabinet, said, 'the venue for the negotiations had been officially announced.' Because of this, thousands of people gathered outside the Royal Academy Hall in the centre of Kathmandu where the politicians were meeting. At 3 a.m. a defeated Prime Minister Chand walked past the remaining crowd into his car and drove directly to the

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39 This is Martin Hoftun and William Raeper's personal assessment of the popular mood. Other eye-witnesses have suggested that people were angered rather than elated by the king's broadcast (see Michael Hutt, 'Drafting the 1990 Constitution', in Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994, p.29, fn.3).

40 Interview with Mohan Prasad Khanal, Kathmandu, 30/7/1990.

41 Brown, *op. cit.*, p.134-35.



Palace. There he tendered his resignation. He also asked that all the major bodies of the Panchayat system be dissolved and asked the opposition to form a new government. There was, however, a question mark over this whole critical episode. Had it been an example of spontaneous 'People Power' or was it, as Girija Koirala himself claimed, the result of a politician's tactical decision?<sup>42</sup>

Looking back on the revolution as a whole it was clear that no one person or groups was able wholly to dictate the outcome of the movement. Although Congress and the seven parties in the United Leftist Front did co-ordinate strategy, the various national leaders were also pursuing their own separate agendas. The same applied, of course, to local-level leaders who were directly organising street protests, whilst the more radical communists in the UNPM were at all times working on their own. It was difficult to know how far a crowd was really taking on a will of its own and how far responding to direction of some sort.

Given this context, the revolution appeared to develop through three distinct stages. The first stage might be called the "build-up". This consisted of the two parallel processes of a situation building up which was favourable to the democracy movement combined with the opposition leaders' own well-laid plans. This period covers the events both before the launch of the movement on 18 February and the first part of the revolution up to 30 March.

The second stage of the revolution, which could be termed the "climax", began when the crowds erupted into the streets. Such support for the democracy movement was more than the opposition leaders had dreamt of. The sheer size of the crowd rendered the opposition leaders temporarily impotent. They had to act quickly to regain the initiative. During this period it was the mood of the crowd or of local-level activists, not the timetable of the opposition leaders, which dictated events.

The third and last stage of the revolution might be referred to as the "step back". In order to regain control the opposition leaders had to calm the crowd and ensure that they would be satisfied by a specific set of demands. The opposition leaders began doing this on 8 April when they called off the movement in response to the king's decision to lift the ban on the political parties.

Regaining the reins of the revolution did not prove so easy. The communists in the UNPM appealed to the people to disobey the revolutionary leaders. They claimed that they had betrayed the movement. The UNPM's call gained little support, but nevertheless some initiative

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<sup>42</sup> See above, p.136.

remained with the crowd. The opposition leaders could not tolerate this and, as a further calming action, allied themselves with some of the elements from the old Panchayat regime. In other words, they sought to draw the king and the armed forces onto their side. As a result the moderate elements in the revolution, especially the Nepali Congress, succeeded in stabilising the situation at last and found themselves once more at the helm. But at some cost. The communists did not agree with Congress's tactics and there was almost a split. Padma Ratna Tuladhar described what happened: 'At that time the Nepali Congress wanted to make a settlement with the Palace as soon as possible. They were afraid the movement was getting out of hand, and they wanted to stop it. In this way they were also ready to accept a negotiated settlement based on compromise.'

The communists still wanted the government and Palace to surrender totally. But they were in a dilemma. They couldn't afford a split with the Nepali Congress, as that would damage the whole base of the popular movement. They were forced to accept compromise, but only after the Palace had given into their minimum demand, the dissolution of the Rastriya Panchayat.'

What the opposition leaders tried to do during the third stage of the revolution was to maintain their own position. They also wished Nepal to return to the normalities of everyday life. The euphoria of late March and early April had infected people to such an extent that their usual concerns were quite forgotten. It was only weeks or months later that people seemed to shake their heads as though waking from a dream and ask "What really happened?" In the aftermath of those seven momentous weeks, that was not an easy question to answer. The most elementary facts proved elusive. The most glaring example of was the actual death toll. Even the prime minister maintained for several months afterwards that between 500 and 1,000 people had died. Yet the Home Ministry could only verify 63 deaths.

Turning from what happened to how people had actually perceived the revolution also proved confusing and contradictory. The Nepali Congress and the communists liked to give the impression that the movement had enjoyed large support from the very first day and that it had affected all the districts and villages of the country. The conservative *panchas*, however, scorned the idea that there had been any movement at all. According to them the king had freely given away his powers to the people. There were also others, dyed in the wool Nepalese nationalists, who saw India behind the whole revolution and the opposition leaders as no more than stooges of Delhi.

The consensus view was that there had indeed been a popular movement and that this movement had brought about radical political changes in the country. That established, the true story of the revolution was still hard to determine. One important question left hanging was: what went on behind the scenes during those seven weeks, especially inside the walls of the Palace? As long as the royal family sheltered behind their immunity this crucial information would remain unrevealed. Most people felt, however, that the end of the revolution had brought about the end of secret politicking and intrigue within the Palace. From now on Nepalese politics would be conducted out in the open to an extent it never had been before.

It is of interest historically to compare the 1990 revolution in Nepal with the earlier one of 1950/51 which had brought Rana rule to an end and irrevocably opened Nepal's borders to the world. There were obvious parallels. In 1951 and 1990 internal and external factors were at work to make change within Nepal possible. The 1951 revolution occurred during a period of rapid decolonisation only three years after India had gained her independence. The 1990 revolution took place in the midst of a democratic wave which had already changed the face of Eastern Europe and was now moving beyond. The role of India, too, was crucial in both revolutions, though probably more directly so in the 1951 revolution. It is also true to say that many of the leaders who took up the struggle to open Nepal in 1951 were still leaders forty years later in 1990. In both cases the power vacuum caused by momentary political instability within Nepal led to similar forms of unrest.

It is true to say, however, that similarities between 1951 and 1990 were not just a matter of accident. The veteran opposition leaders seemed to exploit any similarities they could find between the two events and in some cases even created them. When the Nepali Congress leaders gathered for an emergency meeting on the morning of 23 April to discuss the worrying violence and unrest still simmering in Kathmandu the repeated comment was made: 'This is just like the Gorkha Dal and the Raksha Dal revolts in 1951 and 1952 and we will have to deal with this accordingly.'<sup>43</sup>

One significant difference between the Nepalese revolutions of 1951 and 1990 was that the 1990 revolution enjoyed mass support whereas the 1951 revolution did not. There had been street demonstrations in 1951 but these were on a much smaller scale than in 1990 and they had had little effect on the final outcome, which was decided by the actions of armed

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43 See above, p.34-36.

revolutionaries and by the Indian government. In contrast, what happened in 1990 was a popular uprising - at least in the Kathmandu Valley.

It is, however, insufficient to let the matter rest with a simple contrast between 1950 and 1990 because, as two scholars have recently pointed out, 'an undifferentiated notion of the "masses" will not be useful for a comprehensive understanding of the [Jan] Andolan.'<sup>44</sup> By spring 1990 feeling against the Panchayat regime was strong amongst many sectors of Nepal's population, but it was particular individuals and groups whose anger actually motivated them to take to the streets and the degree of commitment also differed from one group to another. To attribute collective agency to 'the people' or 'the masses' is thus generally an oversimplification of a complex reality.

In Nepal, as in other societies, the rhetoric of democracy, whether liberal or Marxist, frequently employs such simplification, the term *janandolan* being itself a case in point, and there are several reasons for this. The first is perhaps simply a linguistic one. Languages do generally possess collective nouns such as 'people' and these can be used in a similar way to nouns referring just to one individual. It is therefore tempting to make statements such as 'The people overthrew the Panchayat regime' and to regard this as precisely similar to those such as 'King Mahendra abolished the parliamentary system', as if 'the people', like the king, were an entity with a single mind and will. A second reason (discussed in detail in chapter 5) is the tendency in many societies to think in terms of collective identities, whether familial, communal or national and to see power and rights as accruing to groups rather than individuals; this aspect of 'traditionalism' has then often been reinforced by Marxist theorising, which may deconstruct 'the people' in the broadest sense into different social classes, but frequently then treats an entire class as a single agent. Finally, there is the fact that in certain restricted circumstances large numbers of people can indeed feel that they are one in their aspirations and actions. This can be particularly true when crowds take to the streets, and the feeling can even extend to those following events through the media as well as to those actually present.

Something of the psychological processes involved emerges from this account by a student of his own experiences on 6 April 1990:

All the groups were to meet in front of King Mahendra's statue in Darbar Marg and then move towards the palace. I was walking along with my friends from college. We saw other friends and asked them to join the

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44 Pratyoush Onta and Mary Des Chene, 'Whither Scholarship on Nepal in the Nineties?', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.22, no.2, July 1995, p.214.

procession. Everybody was excited. Even the observers got excited and joined the procession.

When we arrived in front of the cinema hall, the police stopped us.... This discouraged our morale, and the excitement disappeared but when we saw more and more people coming from behind this helped to restore our excitement.

We decided to move forward. We just didn't care about police bashing.... The people... pushed the police aside and moved on.<sup>45</sup>

Similar feelings, this time reported by a foreign observer, united a crowd in Nanjing in June 1989, as it moved against a policeman trying to remove broadcasting equipment set up by supporters of the Beijing students' movement.

Now again, in this renewed threat to the loudspeaker on the square, a roar swelled from the crowd as it gathered itself up and propelled the officer backward. The crowd, as a supra-individual body, gloried in the sense of its own power. As rumors spread that army tanks were ringing the city, this elation was guaranteed to be short-lived. But for a moment, the crowd had the giddy experience of confronting - and overpowering - its own fetishized presence in the uniformed authority of the state.<sup>46</sup>

Who formed the crowds which took the *janandolan* to its successful conclusion?. This is a question which requires further detailed investigation, but, predominantly, those involved were city-dwellers, with a preponderance of young over old and students to the fore, as they had been in every political movement since the 1940s. Protest had a more middle class flavour earlier on, but wider strata of the population were on the streets at the end, and the solidarity of the Newar communities in Bhaktapur and Patan an important factor. Louise Brown's account of the *janandolan* shows awareness of these complexities, though she does sometimes herself slide towards making 'the poor' into a single actor on the national stage.<sup>47</sup> It was the urbanised poor who were involved in the protest and this meant that, even if more radical elements had emerged in control at the end of the movement, the bias in resource distribution in

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45 Quoted in Vivienne Kondos, 'Jana-Sakti (People Power) and the 1990 Revolution in Nepal: Some Theoretical Considerations', in Michael Allen (ed.), *Anthropology of Nepal: Peoples, Problems and Processes*, Kathmandu: Mandala, 1994, p.278 (emphasis supplied).

46 Anne Anagnost, 'Socialist Ethics and the Legal System', in Wasserstrom & Perry (eds.), *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992., p.199.

47 T. Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996.

favour of the Kathmandu Valley and against poorer regions of the country would most likely have continued.

The fact that those poor by Kathmandu standards may still be well-off compared with the poor in other parts of the country serves as a reminder that the 'elite' v. 'masses' contrast is also to some extent an over-simplification. How poor is poor, how elite is elite? The inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley do, on average, have certain advantages over other citizens of the country, and, to a lesser extent, this is true of the inhabitants of the country's smaller administrative centres and of villages within easy reach of them.<sup>48</sup> Town dwellers are themselves much more likely to be literate than are villagers and, most crucially, their children's opportunities for education are greater. In the Kathmandu Valley, agriculturalists not only have the advantage of particularly fertile land but also of tenancy reform legislation in the 1960s which was generally more effective than in other parts of the country and which led to significant increases in welfare.<sup>49</sup> The urban poor are, of course, themselves economically stratified and this has political consequences: the Newars belonging to the lowest castes in Bhaktapur, for example, generally support the UML in opposition to Comrade Rohit's Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party which they see as representing the generally more prosperous Jyapu cultivator caste.<sup>50</sup>

By and large, however, by the end of the *janandolan* it is possible to see the population of the Kathmandu Valley as broadly united in opposition to the old regime. The role of the Kathmandu Valley cities in 1990 contrasts with the situation in 1950 when the efforts of the Congress guerilla army in the countryside and India's stance were the crucial factors. This is in harmony with a world-wide secular trend: despite Mao Tse-tung's prescription for using the countryside to surround the city, it is the cities themselves which are the key to the survival of regimes and to the success or failure of those who challenge them. A government's writ may not run in large areas of its countryside but, provided it retains control in the city, and with that control, maintains its lines of international communication, it can generally stay in power. Eric Hobsbawm cites the example of the pro-Soviet Afghan regime surviving

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48 The advantages conferred by town connections is a central theme of Lionel Caplan's *Administration and Politics in a Nepalese Town: the Study of a District Town and its Environs*, London: OUP, 1975.

49 Narayan Bijukche (Comrade Rohit), personal communication.

50 Kiyoko Ogura, personal communication. See Table 8.1 for the Newar caste hierarchy. The caste name 'Maharjan' is generally preferred to 'Jyapu' in Kathmandu and Patan.

in Kabul for several years after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and of Saddam Hussein, still secure in Baghdad despite the restrictions imposed by the American-led Coalition on his use of his armed forces in northern and southern Iraq.<sup>51</sup> For an opposition based originally in the countryside to win control it must either persuade substantial sections of the urban population to defect to it or it needs the strength to mount a direct attack on the city, and the superior technology normally available to an urban-based regime renders the latter task extremely difficult.

The countryside still remains important, however, as a reservoir of support for a beleaguered regime. In 1980 the Panchayat regime was able to use its entrenched position over most of village Nepal to offset the electoral advantage enjoyed by the multi-party side in the more developed areas. Regimes in many countries protect themselves from urban unrest with security forces largely recruited in rural areas. This was illustrated in Beijing in 1989 and in Rangoon in 1990. In the Chinese case it is particularly significant that the Beijing garrison appeared reluctant to be used against demonstrators and the major role in suppressing the protests was taken by the 27th. Army, drawn from western China.<sup>52</sup> The Nepalese government could in theory have continued to use the army, largely recruited from the hills, to contain the protests of 1990. In practice, even supposing it had been willing to do so, its dependence on the goodwill of the aid-giving community made such a course of action impossible.

### **The Interim Government and the 1991 Elections**

Power had now been transferred to the interim government in principle, but the government still had to build up a new political system and the spring promise of a society based on democracy and justice now seemed further away than ever. There had been a sharp increase in prices and the economy had sunk even further into depression. There was also a general sense of crisis in law and order which undermined people's personal security. Political freedom had come, of course, but this new freedom seemed intangible in a society which had known authoritarian rule for so long.

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51 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes - the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London: Abacus, 1994, p.459.

52 The commander of the Chinese 38th. Army, General Xu Qinxian, was court-martialled for evading orders to enforce martial law, whilst the deputy commander of the Beijing military region was relieved of his post shortly after 4 June 1989 (Richard Baum, 'The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s', in Roderick MacFarquhar (ed.), *The Politics of China 1949-1989*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.453).

The Nepalese people and their democratic leaders were faced with two overriding questions which would determine whether the new order would survive. First of all, how should the new democratic system be built on the remains of the old Panchayat structure? Even more importantly, how should new democratic freedoms be handled? For democracy to prove viable it was vital that people should be able to exercise their rights within a framework of discipline and constraint.

What many of the new democratic leaders had not reckoned was how the Panchayat system had stifled a seething mass of conflicts and resentments. With the Panchayat regime gone, these conflicts were likely to rise to the surface and burst out into the open. In the days immediately following the revolution that is exactly what happened. New movements sprang up overnight. Demands were put forward and protests launched. The ensuing upheaval touched parts of Nepalese society which had never been affected by such unrest before. These conflicts were of a social, economic, cultural and even religious nature. Though challenging and difficult, this period of disruption was probably a necessary transitional stage between a closed society and an open one.

With the dissolution of the local panchayats and the dismissal of the zonal commissioners the last of the Panchayat system had disappeared, and the interim government now hoped they would gain tighter control over the country. In fact the opposite happened. The removal of these institutions meant the centre now had less, not more power in the districts. A long period of chaos followed and many months passed before law and order was restored satisfactorily. Although the government's authority had been successfully imposed in the Kathmandu Valley yet in many other places unrest, bordering on anarchy, continued for the whole of the interim government's time in office. The government tried to restore some semblance of order through the village development committees. These consisted mainly of local civil servants. Unfortunately, people were appointed to these committees in a rather arbitrary fashion and many degenerated into squabbling gangs of Congress members and communists with some *ex-panchas*. The new committees certainly did not function as the smooth-running organs of local government that the central government sorely needed.

The unrest during this period took two distinct forms. First of all there was a marked increase in crime. The root of this problem was in the loss of morale suffered by the police force following the revolution. Ordinary police officers no longer knew who to obey. Experience now told them that one set of rulers could quickly be replaced by another - with an entirely different set of orders. They had been praised by *panchas* and



blamed by democrats. Furthermore, the police had soiled their reputation during the revolution. Some had even taken part in burglaries, looting and violence. People felt they could no longer trust the police and neighbourhoods had set up their own security committees. Many complained that democracy had brought only disorder and crime.

As the days passed, the unrest in the country began to take on a more sinister form. Incidents of political violence broke out. Old grievances merged with fights between various political groups - and the 'Mandales', the former Panchayat thugs, reared their heads once again. The police were also involved more often than not. These incidents had one common factor and that was it was difficult to establish the truth of what had happened. On 15 May one person was killed and several seriously injured when police opened fire at a public meeting at the district headquarters of Baglung in West Nepal. Reports stated that the police had first ordered the crowd to disperse - but people had begun throwing stones and the police had responded with gunfire. This, at least, was the official version. Similar incidents occurred in many places during the following months. The most serious of these was a clash at Krishnanagar in the central Terai in August, and another again at Baglung in November. This violence became more and more political as time passed. On 11 November 1990 a public meeting organised by the newly-established National Democratic Party (Chand) ended in a clash where several of the politicians were injured. These included the former Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Rajeshwar Devkota. Several people were also injured the following day at another meeting in a neighbouring district. On 13 December, former *pancha* Surya Bahadur Thapa organised a political meeting at Banepa, a town just east of the Kathmandu Valley. Six people were injured, one of whom died later from his wounds. These incidents became more frequent as the election campaign gathered momentum during the first months of 1991.

Much of the violence, however, arose merely out of local disputes. It was a time when law and order was slack and old scores could be settled. A typical example of this occurred in the eastern hill district of Ramechap towards the end of September 1990. A large crowd of people moved their district headquarters by force to another locality. The crowd moved everything including all the official papers and documents. This led to fighting between different groups in the area and the police had to call in reinforcements.

The unrest in the Terai, which was bad enough, was made worse by the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. In India the city of Ayodhya had become a flashpoint of national conflict as Hindus sought to build a

temple on the site of a mosque, which they claimed stood on the spot where Ram had been born.<sup>53</sup> Some of this sectarian violence spread over the border into Nepal. On 8 August houses were set on fire in a village in the Sarlahi district of the eastern Terai. Fighting broke out between Muslims and Hindus and several people were severely injured. On 16 September Hindu reactionaries placed a dead cow in a Muslim village to inflame the inter-religious conflict and two months later two Muslims were killed in clashes in the eastern Terai.

Former *panchas* pointed to the new government's failings. Law and order, they claimed hardly existed and where it did there was rule by force, not rule by law. One former *pancha* minister complained: 'In the name of democracy, mob-ocracy has been established!' He described the present state of affairs by saying: 'If a group forms in a village and suddenly decides, "This is a bad man, so let's go and burn his house," they are left to do it. Nobody feels secure any longer, not even in the villages or the remote districts. These days a young woman cannot walk alone. People cannot wear their jewellery or other valuables. You are afraid to walk in the streets and people no longer let the traffic pass easily. And there is rampant destruction of the forests in the name of the political parties.'

The ex-minister exaggerated the difficulties for obvious partisan reasons, but unrest during this period was a real problem and not only caused by mobs or reactionary elements from the old regime. It also reflected genuine social conflicts which now were allowed to come out into the open. Such an incident took place on 4 February 1991 in Nawalparasi in the central Terai. The *sukumbasis*, landless people who squatted on government land, tried to block the main road between Butwal and Narayanghat. Their protest developed into a fight between police and demonstrators in which three people were killed and several wounded. This was the official story. However, Chandra Bahadur Gurung, President of the Landless People's Organisation of Nepal and organiser of the demonstration, gave another version: 'The whole thing started on 30 January when we spread our pamphlets in the districts stating our simple demands for citizenship and land rights. The next day we surrounded the chief district officer ('CDO')'s office. When this had no effect, on the evening of 4 February we put up a road block across the main road between Butwal and Narayanghat, stopping all the traffic. The road block lasted until the next morning when the CDO told us that the prime minister would arrive before 6 o'clock in the afternoon to answer our

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53 On the background to this dispute see G.J. Larson, *India's Agony over Religion*, Albany: State University of New York, 1995, p.266-74.

demands. The afternoon passed and no prime minister turned up. Heading back to put up our road block we clashed with the police just as we entered the main road. About 200 policemen tried to chase us with batons, but they had to give up. We surrounded the police station and after three rounds of tear gas they opened fire. People were falling all around. As I tried to drag somebody with me another person was hit just behind me. In the end three people were killed - two on the spot and one at the hospital - and many were wounded. We also know that three others were killed, but the police would not give us their bodies.<sup>54</sup>

The problems of the *sukumbasis* had a long history which was closely linked to the Panchayat regime. Unauthorised settlement on government land in the Terai had begun after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s but had increased in scale after 1961, when King Mahendra had legalised the holdings of many squatters in Chitwan to wean them away from sympathy for the Congress insurgents. The problem had escalated in 1979, when the government was eager to win support in the forthcoming referendum and an assistant minister had announced that anyone who had occupied government land and tilled it would be granted title to it. Although this assurance was later qualified by the prime minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa, there was a massive influx of landless (or purportedly landless) families, many of whom were later evicted.<sup>55</sup>

Chandra Bahadur Gurung explained it this way: 'People sold what little land they had and moved to the Terai. Arriving there they settled down on government land and cleared bushes and forests. But the Panchayat politicians forgot what they had promised and the land was never officially given to the settlers. Instead these new farming communities on government land were seen as illegal squatter settlements and the government did everything it could to evict us. The police arrived reading out statements saying that we must leave and they would set fire to our village. But we had nowhere to go. Our land in the hills no longer belonged to us and we had no money to buy new land. Instead we rebuilt our houses as best we could and planted our rice and other crops on the lush, beautiful land surrounding us - and waited patiently for the next round-up.' Gurung further pointed out that the problems of the *sukumbasis* were not only landlessness and poverty: 'We *sukumbasis* are non-citizens in Nepal. It is almost impossible for us to get a passport. The government will ask for our landholder's certificate or the name and address of our employer and we have nothing to give them.' Gurung

54 Interview with Chandra Bahadur Gurung, 1/3/1991.

55 Nanda R. Shrestha, *Landlessness and Migration in Nepal*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990, p.227-40.

explained that the coming of democracy had spurred the *sukumbasis* to organise themselves for the first time and put forward their demands for land and citizenship.

The *sukumbasis*, whose numbers were well into six figures, were only one of the many underprivileged groups in Nepal who emerged with a set of demands in the months following the revolution. When direct action failed they took their grievances directly to members of the interim cabinet. But little happened. Chandra Bahadur Gurung related how he had spoken to the prime minister and home minister in Kathmandu after the incident at Nawalparasi. The home minister had been dismissive. Two people killed was not enough to make an impression. As a last resort, Gurung and others went on hunger strike, but their protest went largely unrecognised.

Hunger strikes, strikes and demonstrations occurred continually. A new feature of the revolution were the *gheraos* which took place frequently. *Gherao* means the surrounding of buildings or employers by a crowd as a form of protest. Nepal was racked by serious labour unrest. The Panchayat government had set such strictures on the workplace that natural relations between bosses and workers were impossible. The time had now come to change this situation - and to settle old accounts. Unfortunately, the workers wanted all their demands met at once. As a result, both the government and private sectors were stalled by strikes during the year of interim government. Whether the demands put forward were reasonable or unreasonable, it was generally impossible to meet them owing to the desperate economic situation of the country. The Indian trade embargo and the revolution had crippled business to the extent that wage increases were out of the question. But the workers were not demanding just more money. Their demands had now become political. The communists and Congress competed for the support of the workers and they became politicised in the process. These two major political groups really wanted to exploit the volatile situation for their own ends and use the workers as a lever. Often the real goal appeared to be to create disturbances. What followed, as former *pancha* Keshar Bahadur Bista pointedly said, was a crisis in discipline: 'Nobody is working. You go to some offices and people come only once a week to do their attendance and get their pay. The lower staff isn't obeying the senior staff. The senior staff cannot handle the situation and find it impossible to give orders. Everywhere employees bang tables against their own chiefs. The workers are always on strike - even if the government has decided a minimum facility and wage. If a group of workers go on strike today, things will be settled today and they will go back to work today. But tomorrow again

another group of communists or rightists or leftists or extremists or whatever they are will get out and organise a strike again.<sup>56</sup>

All manner of professional groups - whether teachers, civil servants or journalists - organised protests outside government offices to put pressure on the interim government. Faced with such a battery of demands, how did the interim cabinet cope with the situation?

On 24 June 1990 the education minister, Keshar Jang Rayamajhi, brought a hunger strike organised by the Nepal Teachers' Association to an end by promising that all their demands would be met. He spoke at the open-air theatre in the centre of Kathmandu. On 13 August the prime minister visited a group of journalists who were staging a hunger strike. He told them that their demands would be looked into within the next month. The government was criticised for being harsh or lenient by turns. One thing was clear - the interim government was not willing to use repressive methods to suppress the strikes and unrest. Yet many claimed that the interim government's shilly-shallying in half-encouraging, half-punishing the strikers actually invited the unrest.

Just as the revolution had begun on the university campuses, so the university was the first institution to experience the new wave of unrest after the revolution was over. On 11 May professors and lecturers demanded the removal of their vice-chancellors because of their allegiance to the old Panchayat system. The government gave into these demands on 26 May and a new, Congress and communist leadership was appointed at Tribhuvan University and the Nepal Sanskrit University. On the same day most of the members of the Royal Nepal Academy, a palace-sponsored research institute, were forced to resign as a result of popular pressure.

Within the university itself, the library was one of the places to be hit by strikes and disaffection. The Chief Librarian, Shanti Mishra, gave her own account of events: 'My only offence was that I worked hard and I wanted my staff to work hard. A few days after the revolution had come to an end, I was told about the University Employees' Ad Hoc Committee which had been formed without my knowledge. This body, which was engineered by the Marxis-Leninist Communist Party [i.e. CPN(M-L)], slowly, with the help of two or three infiltrators among my library staff, managed to turn members of staff against me. Through various lies and conspiracies they spread the rumour that I had run the library as a dictator. They who were themselves Mandales called me a Mandale and accused me of such political activity - I who had always kept aloof from politics and had criticised anything which I thought was wrong even in the old

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Keshar Bahadur Bista, 3/9/1990.

system! They forced me into a situation where I eventually voluntarily relinquished my position, saying that I could no longer work with my staff.'<sup>57</sup>

Shanti Mishra's experience was one common to many people at this time and it was often difficult to tell how much of the conflict stemmed from ideological differences and how much simply from 'office politics.'

The most serious threat to the government came from the civil servants. One member of the interim cabinet said: 'Unfortunately, the civil servants became directly involved in the movement for democracy. Thus those who should be neutral government servants became politicised - and this is why we had problems, problems with the civil servants' agitation after the revolution.'

Soon after the revolution the lower level civil servants formed their own illegal organisation. They pressed for a rise in salary and for the firing of corrupt bosses. They staged various protests and organised direct actions in government offices. The government negotiated a compromise, but this settlement lasted only a few months. The civil servants went on strike again at the beginning of December 1990. This time their campaign attracted much more support - even from out in the districts. The government again succeeded in bringing the civil servants' agitation to an end by setting up a commission to look into their demands. Once again, however, all the government achieved was to postpone facing the real issues. As a result, the third and most serious civil servants' dispute became the main challenge to the new Congress government after the general election in May 1991.

In practice the civil servants' disputes meant that all government offices came to an effective standstill during the interim period. Decisions were simply not taken and while corruption may have been rubbed out at the highest political level, it increased dramatically at a lower government level.

The corruption, more than anything else, was what disillusioned the Nepalese people during the autumn months of 1990. Government corruption, after all, was one of the main reasons why the previous regime had been swept away. Yet now people saw corruption continuing and even increasing.

Doing away with corruption was one of the main goals of the new democratic leaders. Several of them had admitted that this would take a long time and would be no easy task. Communist leader Tulsi Lal

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57 Interview with Shanti Mishra, Kathmandu, 19/3/91. Shanti Mishra has since published a longer account of this episode in her autobiography, *Voice of Truth: The Challenges and Struggles of a Nepalese Woman*, Delhi: Book Faith India, 1994, p.403-414.

Amatya said: 'We are the leaders. We have to show the people how to behave and slowly our incorruptibility will trickle down.'<sup>58</sup> This method would obviously take years to bear any fruit. The Nepalese people did not seem willing to wait for a slow change to be brought about. What caused most resentment was that government officers retained their jobs - unpunished - even if they had acquired very bad reputations during the Panchayat period. In September 1990 a former prime minister expressed what by then had become popular opinion: 'These new rulers talk about corruption. Let them do whatever they want to do. When they are talking about property, family property, and this or that, they must start searching for this property among people. Why don't they? They can easily come and check how much a house, a car, or some furniture would have cost and where the money came from. But instead they just make speeches.'

The disillusionment which had spread amongst the citizens of Kathmandu was markedly different from the enthusiasm they had shown six months earlier. People were bitterly disappointed that the interim government had not fulfilled its promises. One highly-educated Kathmandu citizen said: 'The main failure with the interim government is their style of thinking. They promised so many things, even impossible things, during the time of the movement. So the hopes and aspirations of the people were raised too high. Now they are in power they have to face the backfire from those things - what they promised the people. You see, people are expecting so many unlimited things, so how can a government like ours in a poor country fulfil the people's aspirations overnight? Even in remote places people think that they will get a private car and a house. Poor people thought they would get a lot of land after the revolution.'

The most immediate cause of popular resentment was the steep increase in prices. The new democratic leaders had promised a cut of as much as 35% once they came into power. Instead inflation increased steeply. The Indian trade embargo and the revolution were the main reasons for this - but these reasons were not appreciated by ordinary Nepalese citizens. The communists used the price rise to criticise the Nepali Congress and public protests against rising prices became more and more frequent as autumn passed.

Yet what had people expected? What did ordinary Nepalese really believe that democracy, a multi-party system and human rights would actually bring?

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Tulsi Lal Amatya, Kathmandu, 28/4/1990.

First and foremost people associated democracy with freedom. Freedom spelled freedom of speech, but also freedom of action. A Kathmandu taxi-driver hailed down by police as he drove the wrong way down a one-way street retorted: 'Don't you know that we have human rights now?' People were generally more restrained. There was, however, a widespread feeling that more was possible and permissible than before.

Outside Kathmandu and the other major Nepalese towns, there was not much developed understanding of the *bahudal byabastha*, or multi-party system. Many villagers believed the new political system to be the harbinger of disorder and crime. Even so, there was an underlying optimism that the general situation would improve. People did genuinely believe that democracy would improve their lot and bring the end of poverty and exploitation. One influential member of the old regime had this to say about the Nepalese people and their attitude towards democracy: 'People's understanding of democracy is like the blind person describing an elephant - one said it's a pillar, another said it's a wall and a third person said it's a tail. Nepal does not seem ready for democracy. The best illustration is to be found in the streets. The streets are always a good sign of how a people can govern themselves. Now the streets are dirtier than ever.'

Was the chaos following the revolution merely a sign that the Nepalese people were not, in fact, ready for democracy? Was the interim government to blame for the confusion in the country? Everyone agreed that the interim government had a tough job on their hands - but everyone also seemed to agree that their performance was not quite up to the mark. One senior civil servant said: 'This is the most powerful government since Jang Bahadur Rana. They have all the powers. Nothing can stop them. Why have they not done anything? The army and the police excluded, why have they not been able to manage and control their civil servants? The whole university is in a mess. Everybody is on strike. The same might soon happen in Singha Durbar [the main government offices]. The government are the ones who have established the internal ad hoc committees in the ministries and these have again turned themselves against the ministers who have lost control over them.'

Four months after the revolution one former *pancha* minister said of the interim government: 'The basic minimum achievement of the interim government turned out a complete failure. Even then I don't oppose this in public because the situation has been exceptional and these people are very inexperienced. They do have thirty years experience in organising an underground movement. They know how to oppose and how to criticise, but they don't know how to run a system or a government.'



As most of the new democratic leaders took office straight from jail or house arrest it was undoubtedly true that they did lack experience in running a government. Some of the veteran Congress members had held office in B.P. Koirala's government a generation earlier, but thirty years had passed and Nepal had changed dramatically during that period. What added to the interim government's difficulties was that they had to take up the reins where the Panchayat regime had left off. In other words they had to take over the running of a system whose practices they had opposed and which they wanted to change. The home minister in the interim government, Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, said: 'I could not be satisfied with our achievement. Of course, much could have been done had there been ordinary circumstances and had we inherited a machinery undisturbed by political turmoil. Because we had to inherit the administrative set-up - the law enforcing agencies, for example, which were geared for a different purpose than we intended - we had to change things gradually and this meant we lost a lot of time.'<sup>59</sup>

Yet the interim government not only had to change Nepal's political system, it also had to change many of the basic attitudes of the Nepalese people. Yog Prasad Upadhyaya observed: 'It's a question of psychological adjustment!' The long period of dictatorship had come to an end - now working conditions for democracy and pluralism had to be created. The interim government was sworn to act only by the tenets of democracy, but many people grew impatient with what they saw as stalling. Yog Prasad Upadhyaya said: 'The people want us to do this or that, but they do not understand that in a democracy the political leaders do not have unlimited power.' Many Nepalese seemed trapped in the contradiction of having high expectations of democracy while at the same time urging the interim government to use non-democratic means to be effective.

The interim government's task was made even harder by the fact that the cabinet was hardly a homogeneous group. It consisted of three very different political groups whose views and interests rarely coincided - the Nepali Congress, the communist members of the United Left Front, and the two royal nominees. Even so, Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, the home minister, expressed a general satisfaction with how the cabinet worked: 'I am happy that most of the ministers have very strong common sense and that has compensated for their inexperience, if any at all. Our finance minister is an experienced administrator himself<sup>60</sup> and, for example, the prime minister is a great organiser who knows human weaknesses and

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, Kathmandu, 9/4/1991.

<sup>60</sup> Devendra Raj Pandey had been secretary of the Finance Ministry before his resignation in 1980. See above, chapter 2, p.43-44.

strengths. He has guided us more than anything else to stabilise and maintain a certain continuity in the administration, and it is because of his views that we have been able to work as a team. With all these different elements in the government it is a miracle that it has worked!

As prime minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was deluged with demands from all sides but somehow he coped. He dealt with the pressure and the seemingly impossible conflicts and proved himself adept at handling human relations. Yet these very qualities were what was perhaps wrong with the interim government. Bhattarai's continual patching up of conflicts led to the interim government being criticised severely for the lack of a clear-cut policy. The interim government's publicly stated aims were to build a new democratic order in Nepal and hold elections. How did they go about this?

Of crucial importance was the framing of a new constitution, which is discussed in detail in chapter 7. This process became a trial of strength between the government and the Palace and also between the different parties themselves. After a great deal of manoeuvring and bargaining the finished document was finally promulgated in November.

Aside from written blueprints for the future, the practical functioning of the new system would condition later developments. There were two options open to the interim government. Either they could do away with the old system and build democracy from scratch - or they could somehow transform the old Panchayat structures into a new democratic form. What seemed to be the case was that the communists wanted a complete break with tradition while the Nepali Congress wanted some continuity. During the period of interim government, however, this choice never seemed to be made. If it was made, it was certainly never publicly stated and a certain confusion and dissatisfaction resulted.

The king's decrees of 16 and 27 April 1990 did away with all the old Panchayat institutions overnight but the official political bodies of the Panchayat regime had never actually been the channels through which political activity had been organised. Power had been exercised primarily through the Palace and so removing the Rastriya Panchayat had not done away with the real power structure of the old regime. Furthermore the interim government had to take over an administration which had been built up and run by the old system. This included the civil service, police, army - and even the formerly powerful Palace secretariat.

Working with the old system was, to some extent, a matter of conscious choice by the interim government. The moderates in the cabinet were in favour of some continuity with the old system. Moreover, the whole cabinet agreed that they needed the civil service to enact new

democratic policies, despite its long-standing reputation for inefficiency and corruption. The interim government hoped to win the loyalty of the civil service by slow degrees and therefore win control of the whole government administration. The interim government was also bound to respect the legal system set up by the Panchayat system - at least until new laws could be passed and a new constitution brought into being. Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, the home minister, explained his dilemma: 'Ours is a government by law. It has got to run by law. We are challenged in the law courts. Never before have government actions been so seriously challenged in this country. And we are functioning with the same old laws. Even when the new constitution comes, the old laws will have to be amended and we have got to stick to some law. We cannot function arbitrarily. The people want us to function as generals, but we are against this despite the powers that we have.'<sup>61</sup> According to him the problem was that many Nepalese did not seem to understand this.

The police and the army certainly posed a visible challenge to the interim government. A former close aide to the king said: 'The army is totally loyal only to the king personally. But the army is mainly inactive. The police is 100% under the interim government, but the police force is utterly demoralised. They do not dare to do anything. They remember what happened just after the revolution when several police were injured and police were even refused medical care. They are constantly worried that the power balance might tip once again, and that once again they might find themselves on the wrong side.'

It was clear to all that the police force needed a thorough purge. Corrupt officers needed to be retired or brought to court. Yog Prasad Upadhyaya claimed that this was not a task for the interim government, however: 'Restructuring the police? We can't do that, you know, unless we pass a law. We are engaged in framing a constitution and in maintaining law and order within the existing framework. So we have no time. We were planning to have a police commission to look into the matter and the government is still considering that. Perhaps this government or the next will form a police commission which will review the position and advise the government on what sort of fair police force one should have and what powers should be given to them... But we have not been able to correct the situation. It would entail a very big burden on our government. As you know this is the only sphere, the ministry of home affairs, which is not under any foreign aid or any foreign group. We have to do everything on our own.'

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61 Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, 9/4/1991.

The interim government's dealings with the police and army were not only a matter of reorganisation. According to Mathura Prasad Shrestha, minister of health in the interim government and communist activist, it was also a matter of loyalty and control: 'We have power - but the law enforcing forces, the police and the military, are not entirely under our control. For this reason, you see, despite our commitment to human rights, the police still commit atrocities and human rights violations.'<sup>62</sup> There was also an uneasy feeling in the air that the police, army and Palace might combine to mount a coup - at least, there was the feeling that was possible. This threat made the interim government cautious. It may have been that a certain wariness on its part in dealing with the old regime was seen publicly as a lack of resolve.

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and his cabinet were committed to changing Nepalese government and Nepalese society. Strong democracy meant both rule of law and accountability. Now even the government would be responsible for its own actions and, if necessary, cabinet members could face trial and imprisonment. In order to bring about this new situation, the government had to deal with the past. Most of the interim government agreed that members of the old regime should be investigated and tried where necessary. The interim government, however, did not appear willing to do this. Certain half-hearted measures were taken, but nothing actually happened. This apparent lack of resolve led to a great deal of criticism. Basudev Dhungana, Chairman of the Bar Association of Nepal, said in April 1991, almost a year after the interim government had taken office: 'The government could have done one thing. It could have removed the people who had tried to suppress the movement. These people even continued in the administration. This way the masses were not satisfied. After all, many people were killed and then these people just continued in their jobs.'

The government stalled partly because of internal dissent. The radical communists had posted hit lists on walls and buildings in Kathmandu during the final days of the revolution. They mentioned so-called culprits by name. In contrast some of the more moderate communists and the Congress members, including the Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, openly preferred reconciliation to recrimination. The two royal nominees in the cabinet were not clear about their preferred course of action.

What the interim government did about this pressing matter during its period of office was quite simple - it did nothing. The first

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62 Interview with Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Kathmandu, 15/8/1990.

commission formed to investigate what happened during the movement was actually set up by Lokendra Bahadur Chand during his brief fourteen day ministry before the interim government even came to power. This commission was headed by Supreme Court Justice Prachandra Raj Anil. The interim government appointed two new members to this commission, but they soon resigned in protest saying that the members of the commission had been too involved personally in the old regime. As a result, the commission was dissolved. The Malik commission, headed by the chief judge from the Eastern Regional Court, was put in its place. The new body's brief was to investigate what had happened during the revolution and find out who had been responsible for violence, loss of life and damage to property. At the same time another commission was set up to look into the question of missing persons during the Panchayat period from 1960-90.

Both commissions faced an uphill struggle. One member of the commission investigating missing persons, Prakash Kaphley, explained: 'Our commission was formed for three months. We conducted our work for six months, however, because we needed more time to get information out of the police. The police were not co-operative. We asked the government many times to do something because when the police did not give any information, how were we to get hold of material and conduct our investigation? When we asked, Bhattarai said that the police were not even co-operating with the government, so how could we expect them to co-operate with the commission?' Even so, Kaphley said: 'The commission managed to trace the cases of more than 100 people who had gone missing. Many of those responsible held high positions in the police force and government. For fear of antagonising the police, Bhattarai and his government did not take any further action.'<sup>63</sup>

The Malik commission found itself in a similar position. The police did not co-operate and the interim government shied away from giving the commission too much direct assistance. Despite its difficulties, the Malik commission did present its report on 31 December 1990. It put the death total during the *janandolan* at only 45, contrasting with the figure of 63 announced by the home ministry in October.<sup>64</sup> It did, however, clearly state the names of those it believed legally responsible for the atrocities

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63 Interview with Prakash Kaphley, 8/10/1991.

64 T. Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.148. Narayan Prasad Shivakothi, *Jan-Andolan ra Sahidharu* (The People's Movement and the Martyrs), Kathmandu: Bishma Kariya, 2047 V.S. (1990-91), gives biographical details of 60 who died during the Movement and its immediate aftermath, but only 43 of these died before the formation of the Interim Government.

committed during the period of the democracy movement. These included people in the administration and the police force. It also included politicians such as Marich Man Singh Shrestha, the former prime minister, ex-home minister, Nirajan Thapa, and the old chairman of the Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee, Navaraj Subedi. The commission recommended that the rank and file government workers and police officers be dealt with in terms of the framework of the administration. As regards the politicians, the Malik commission recommended strongly that criminal charges be filed against them and that they be brought to trial. Despite advising the interim government on such a direct course of action, the Malik commission brought no legal proof against those it accused, nor did it refer to the actual laws which these people were supposed to have breached. Instead, the commission argued that evidence should be presented in court proceedings.

On 1 February 1991 the government did finally act. Five high-level government officers, including the chief cabinet secretary, were dismissed. Furthermore the passports of all the ministers in the Shrestha and Chand governments were confiscated pending investigation. Lokendra Bahadur Chand took legal action and the court ordered the return of the passports.

That same day the government announced that no action would be taken against individual police officers or civil servants until after the elections. This was quite different from what Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had announced at a public meeting in Janakpur just a month earlier. Then he had assured his listeners that strong action would be taken against the culprits with no mercy. In an interview nine months later Bhattarai defended his decision not to prosecute. 'I did not want to take action because the election was the target. I did not want to antagonise the police and therefore to disturb its fabric by punishing them on fictitious or - in certain cases - real grounds. I also did not want to antagonise the civil service because they were the people who would hold the elections.'<sup>65</sup>

There seemed however, a real fear on the part of the interim government, especially the Congress members, of acting against members of the old regime - and this went further than purely practical considerations. The Malik Commission's report was kept secret. It was then sent to the attorney general, Motikaji Stapit, for study and for further recommendations to be made to the government. Stapit replied that the report lacked the legal proof and legal references necessary to accuse the so-called culprits. He added that the government's decision not to prosecute police officers and civil servants rendered further investigation

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65 Interview with K.P. Bhattarai, Kathmandu, 10/8/1991.

impossible. Naturally, the interim government's inaction on this issue led to vocal opposition. Demands for further investigation and trials grew daily. These came mainly from the communist parties.

There was, however, a major problem. How could government officers or even cabinet members be held responsible in a political system where the real power lay in the Palace? Every person interviewed by the Malik Commission replied almost in unison that they had only obeyed orders from above. The word for this, *mathi* was repeated over and over again. Even Achut Kharel, the man believed responsible for the fate of many missing persons - persons last heard of within the walls of the Police Training Centre in Northern Kathmandu - shrugged and answered that he had only 'followed the order of the *mathi*.' Needless to say, none of these orders had ever found their way into print. It would be fair to say, therefore, that the greatest hindrance to people being brought to trial was probably the Palace. One human rights activist complained: 'No political force is interested in confronting the Palace.' Because of that, he insisted, it was impossible to find out the truth and who the true culprits were.

This situation begged the question: why were politicians unwilling to confront the Palace after the king had given up all his power? What was there to fear? One political activist stated: 'It is a question of balance among the three political forces left over by the revolution - the Nepali Congress, the communists and the Palace. The Congress is now trying to bring the Palace nearer to them.'

During the summer and autumn of 1990 two distinct trends became obvious as the interim government continued: the Nepali Congress's quest for normalisation and communist dissatisfaction. Ex-*panchas* flocked into the ranks of the Nepali Congress from the very first day after the revolution. Some people even claimed that within six months the ex-*panchas* outnumbered the original Congress members. At the same time, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai continued to steer a course of tolerance and reconciliation. Many people objected to this - especially the communists. They wanted action against the old centres of power such as the Palace and certain sections of government administration. The communists had a double complaint. They complained that they had been allotted a minor role in the interim government and they complained that the prime minister was not being tough enough. Several communist parties began organising public protests - even though these same parties were still involved in the interim government. It was clear by now that a split between the Congress and the communists would come sooner or later.

Padma Ratna Tuladhar pointed out that this split was inevitable. It was already apparent in the settlement which brought about the end of the

revolution. 'The communists wanted the government and the Palace to surrender totally, but they were in a dilemma. They couldn't afford a split with the Nepali Congress which would damage the whole base of the popular movement, the people's movement. They were therefore forced to accept compromise and, as a result of this unhappy settlement, we still have many problems.' Unfortunately this split when it came meant the end of consensus and the beginning of open political rivalry. One student leader expressed her frustration: 'Before, the Congress student association worked openly and the communist groups worked underground - but we always took part in each other's activities. This is not the situation any longer. Instead the communists and the Nepali Congress at the university constantly fight each other. The communists boycott every initiative coming from the Nepali Congress and vice versa. But who can blame us students? Even in the cabinet the Nepali Congress and communists are fighting each other. The present government has not been able to do anything, because there is a virtual stalemate in the cabinet between the Congress, the communists and the Panchayat ministers.

This political stalemate was probably what made the political vacuum after the revolution so apparent. What happened was that all kinds of social, political, economic and cultural groups suddenly came out into the open to battle for their own cause. The government, with its hands tied, left these groups undisturbed to fight. This fighting, which went on and on, remained a disruptive element in the normal functioning of Nepalese society. The long-awaited announcement of the new constitution on 9 November 1990 brought a final end to the uncertainty which had surrounded the revolution. The king had now accepted his new position as a constitutional monarch and there was no longer any fear of a coup or 'counter-revolution' headed by the royal family or forces from inside the Palace. Though the old elite still existed (and still wished to restore the old Panchayat order), it had to accept defeat - at least for the time being. The new democratic system was now an established fact. Political activity henceforth had to take place within the framework of the new constitution.

The major political struggle during the drafting process had focussed on the king's future role, an issue to be discussed in chapter 7 below. As finally promulgated, it provided for a bi-cameral, parliamentary system with a British-style 'first-past-the-post' electoral system. Two other crucial points had involved a tussle between Congress and the communists. Congress had been successful in entrenching the basic principles of constitutional monarchy, multi-party democracy and popular sovereignty through a provision allowing only amendments not



'prejudicing the spirit of the preamble', but it had to accept that major agreements with foreign countries affecting the country's natural resources would require ratification by a two-thirds majority in parliament.<sup>66</sup> This put an obstacle in the way of a future communist government which might want to abolish the monarchy, or discard 'bourgeois democracy', whilst a Congress government would probably need communist support to conclude any agreement with India on the harnessing of Nepal's rivers.

The change in the political climate brought about by the promulgation of the constitution also meant a change of emphasis for the interim government. Having fought off the prospect of a Palace coup, the cabinet was now able to turn its attention to the day-to-day running of government and the strengthening of democracy. The immediate task was to organise the general election. Only when this election had taken place could the interim government claim that they had properly established democracy in Nepal.

Life returned to normal very quickly in Nepal. The daily struggles became once again those against poverty and bureaucracy and the festive spirit predominant at the end of the revolution was forgotten. The interim government, steered by the Nepali Congress in the forefront, seemed even to adopt hints of the old Panchayat government and was praised in the same glowing terms in newspapers and on radio and TV. One main difference was that now the royal family were firmly out of the limelight.

The media reports did distort the situation somewhat as the interim government did not have total control. Law and order was far from restored the length and breadth of the country. Violence and unrest continued and in several incidents the social upheaval which had come in the wake of the revolution was clearly evident. Fights broke out at public meetings and local members of different parties tried to settle their differences with fisticuffs. This new unrest was no longer organised by the Mandales, the Panchayat thugs, who wished to re-establish the old political system and do away with democracy. The Mandales, as a group, had melted away and infiltrated the political parties. Now, in a new disguise, they set about trying to disrupt normal life. Whether it was a strike in a private factory or a government office, whether an outbreak of violence at a political meeting - such as occurred at a meeting of the National Democratic Party

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<sup>66</sup> Articles 116 & 126; for a discussion of the Constitution's main features and the official English-language version, see Ter Ellingson, 'The Nepal Constitution of 1990: Preliminary Considerations' and 'Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal VS 2047 (1990)', *Himalayan Research Bulletin*, vol.9, nos.1-3, p.1-17 & 19-68. The drafting process is discussed in detail in Michael J. Hutt, 'Drafting the 1990 Constitution', in Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994.

at Banepa - or even political murder as happened in Pyuthan - there always seemed to be one or two of these former Mandales pulling strings behind the scenes. As the Mandales had become even more shadowy than before, an official investigation was almost impossible.

At the other side of the political spectrum, some on the radical left changed tactics. In March 1991, there was a split in the Masal group, whose leader, Mohan Bikram Singh, had decided to boycott the election.<sup>67</sup> Young members of the party, including Baburam Bhattarai, had decided that they wanted to contest the elections. The dissidents joined the Unity Centre, which had been formed in November 1990 by the merger of Nirmal Lama's 4th. Convention and the Mashal group, themselves the product of earlier splits among Mohan Bikram's followers. Bhattarai and his colleagues did not support the parliamentary system, however - far from it. Their aim was to gain power, expose parliament from the inside and replace it with their own democratic structures. The Unity Centre was to remain at least partly 'underground' and, for electoral purposes, there was an 'umbrella organisation': the Sanyukta Jana Morcha or United People's Front ('UPF'). Bhattarai was chosen as 'co-ordinator' of the UPF on 10 March, but was only one member of a collective leadership.

The staking out of ideological positions did not hide the truth of the position: politicians of all shades were scrambling after power. The prospect of power, not the commitment to a political ideology, was what appeared to motivate many. Even three of the most wanted of the Panchayat old guard, Marich Man Singh Shrestha, Niranjana Thapa, and Navaraj Subedi, emerged like ghosts from the sidelines and filed their nominations for the election as independent candidates.

The general election was announced for 12 May 1991.<sup>68</sup> As soon as this was known the new political leaders of Nepal began to behave like politicians in any democracy. Those who had suffered years of harassment and imprisonment to bring about a democratic system now concentrated

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67 For the earlier history of Mohan Bikram Singh and the radical wing of the Communist Party, see below, chapter 5, p.237. On the Unity Centre and the United Popular Front see also, R. Andrew Nickson, 'Democratisation and the Growth of Communism in Nepal: a Peruvian Scenario in the Making?', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol.30, no.3 (1992), p.358-86; also, Pancha N. Maharjan, 'Role of the Extra-Parliamentary Political Party in Multi-Party Democracy: a Study of the CPN-Unity Centre', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.20, no.2 (1993), p.221-227.

68 Detailed accounts of the election are provided by Frederick Gaige and John Stolz, 'The 1991 Parliamentary Elections in Nepal', in M.D. Dharamdarshani (ed.), *Democratic Nepal*, Varanasi: Shalimar, 1992, and John Whelpton, 'The General Elections of May 1991', in M.J. Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994.

on winning as many seats as possible for their party in the election - and securing a post for themselves in the new government. Overnight politicians turned from declaring their similarities with the other democratic parties to emphasising their differences. The inevitable result was a split between the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front. Though this only became official during the Nepali Congress Party national conference in January 1991, the general trend had pointed in that direction for the previous six months.

Radical members of the United Left Front had attacked the Nepali Congress continually throughout the autumn. More than anything else they criticised the admittance of former *panchas* into the party and the Congress attitude towards the new constitution. At the same time, moderate communists in the United Left Front urged unity and the need for the two democratic blocks to fight the election together. Congress's decision to fight the election alone was probably made jointly by all three of its leaders but, in keeping with his conservative image, it was left to Girija Prasad Koirala to make that decision known. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, trying to keep together the coalition government he headed, initially took a softer line in public but openly criticised the communists at the party conference. He declared that the Nepali Congress would fight the election alone - and win a two thirds majority in parliament. The Nepali Congress conference was held in the main football stadium in Kathmandu and drew 20,000 supporters.

The United Left Front also split at this time. In December, the four members of the Front not represented in the interim government, (Comrade Rohit's Nepal Workers and Peasants Organisation, the Tulsi Lal Amatya and Varma factions and the Maoist 4th. Convention) complained that their interests had been disregarded. Now they declared their support for a broad coalition of leftist forces to fight the election. Such a coalition, they demanded, should include all leftist parties, including those which had not joined the United Left Front. They wanted all these parties treated on equal terms. In practical terms this split brought all hopes of leftist unity to an end. This became even more apparent a few weeks later when, on 8 January 1991 two members of the United Left Front, the Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist) and the Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist-Leninist), merged to form the Communist Party of Nepal(Unified Marxist-Leninist). This surprising alliance between the moderate Marxists, led by Sahana Pradhan and Man Mohan Adhikari, and the radical Marxist-Leninists, led by Madan Bhandari and his colleagues, seemed to many to be no more than a marriage of convenience. As the two most important communist parties in the country, this merger

seemed to be a tactical move towards creating a single communist party strong enough to form a government without the help of the other, small communist parties.

In contrast to the communists, the strength of the Nepali Congress was its unity. Even here, however, a united party could not be taken for granted. The announcement of which candidates had been chosen to represent Congress in the election severely strained party unity. The Marxist-Leninists maintained a strong whip and chose candidates from above. The former *pancha* parties simply rounded up candidates who had previously represented different geographical districts. The Nepali Congress Party, however, plunged into bitter feuding that threatened to tear the party apart.

On 25 March, when the election board, dominated by the old guard of the Nepali Congress such as Girija Prasad Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, finally announced the roll of names chosen the nominations came as a shock. To many outside the party headquarters and in the country as a whole it seemed that the old guard had staged nothing less than an internal coup. What caused the harshest reactions to the board's decisions was that Ganesh Man Singh's wife and son had both been chosen to represent two prime Kathmandu constituencies. The party was in uproar. Party members who had not been nominated threatened to stand as independents. There was even talk of launching a second Congress party. Protests were staged outside the homes of Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Bhattarai, president of the Nepali Congress, defended himself by saying that the three main criteria for choosing candidates were as follows: one, that they should have suffered for the cause of democracy, two, that they should stand a good chance of winning and three, that they should be capable of taking on a political role. The fact that competence was relegated to number three on the Congress's list left many party hopefuls grinding their teeth in disappointment. However, this tricky period soon passed. The possibility that internal fighting might lead to electoral defeat drew the Congress together to cover over its inner conflict and discontent.

By the beginning of April it was clear that the adoption of the British parliamentary model with one-candidate constituencies meant that only the big parties and coalitions would survive. Almost overnight Nepal's voters were left with only three main political options. Out of the 44 political parties which had been registered by the election commission on 23 January 1991, 20 were to take part in the election. Out of this still-large number only six were expected to capture seats in parliament. The principal options open to the Nepalese people were, therefore: the Nepali

Congress as the biggest single party, the communist parties with the Unified Marxist-Leninists ('UML') to the forefront, and the *ex-pancha* parties, the National Democratic Party (Thapa) and the National Democratic Party (Chand), led respectively by Surya Bahadur Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand. Members of the smaller parties who had not yet given up the fight spent their time bargaining with other parties and trying to clinch deals. In particular, the other leftist parties and the UML realised that ideally there should be only one leftist candidate per constituency - *ek tham ek bam* - but, although arrangements were arrived at in a few constituencies, the UML's insistence on a clear-run in 180 of the 205 seats prevented any comprehensive agreement.

On 8 April 1991 Krishna Prasad Bhattarai officially opened the election campaign of the Nepali Congress. Kathmandu had already been covered in election slogans and party symbols for several weeks, with the Congress tree and the UML sun by far the most conspicuous. The main topic of conversation from wayside teahouses in the capital to remote mountain villages was the same - the country buzzed with the party nominations and the elections. Just as during the last phase of the revolution, everyday concerns seemed to melt into the background and on street corners, in homes and in shops, the talk was only political.

After the official opening of the election campaign government policy seemed to postpone all action until after the election. Even the most minor decisions were frozen. In the new, heady atmosphere students demanded a one month holiday to travel back to their home villages to take part in the campaign. They were granted this immediately. The election commission seemed to take the place of government. Its decisions and achievements were announced daily over Radio Nepal. Election Day was declared a national holiday and special rules and regulations were issued to deal with the period around the election.

During the year which had passed since the revolution, countless Nepalese citizens had metamorphosed into amateur politicians. From children to old women, they all discussed the rights and wrongs of democracy and the Panchayat system - were things better or worse - and what was the best solution to Nepal's manifold problems?

But how did the majority of the Nepalese people view the coming election? Though many were excited, the thrill of the previous year's revolution had subsided. Initial celebration had given place to long months of rising prices and instability. The realisation that turning out onto the streets would not alter everything at once had finally sunk home. Opinions differed. Some people said that if the communists came to power everyone would become rich immediately; others declared that if the

communists won there would be civil war. Many whose main interest was whether the rain came on time in order to plant their maize saw the election as just another burden to bear. One old Newar woman sighed: 'We Nepalese have to endure many hardships. First came the problem with India, then the revolution - and now the elections!' Rumours sprang up anew in Kathmandu saying that the curfew would be reimposed and that in the inevitable violence the streets would run with blood.

The politicians were hard-pressed to garner votes in this volatile situation. Party programmes and manifestos were published during February, but the politicians knew that these did not count for much in a society like Nepal. The foreign journalists and Nepalese intellectuals who waded through these lengthy documents were struck mainly by the similarity of their contents. All the parties promised social equality, economic development and stability. The differences between the parties lay more in minor details. For example, the Nepali Congress promised free education up to tenth grade, while the Nepal Peasants and Workers Organisation advocated free education up to degree level. The communist parties devoted many paragraphs to their ideological basis - something which appeared completely lacking in the Nepali Congress programme. The National Democratic Parties emphasised national integrity and independence more than the other parties and published a separate programme for agricultural village development. Both the National Democratic Parties and the communists made a great deal of Prime Minister Bhattarai's supposed sell-out to India. Both groups condemned the "common rivers" policy which Bhattarai had advocated and made this an election issue.

The conflicts which shook the Nepali Congress Party to its very roots were soon forgotten after the start of the election campaign. Despite its organisational weaknesses, the Congress managed to field candidates for 204 of the 205 constituencies during the four weeks of the campaign.<sup>69</sup> The knowledge that theirs was the only party to cover the entire country gave the Nepali Congress leadership renewed self-confidence. Returning by helicopter from his election tour of the westernmost parts of Nepal, Ganesh Man Singh said: 'The question is not whether we will get a clear majority. The question is whether we will be able to get the two-thirds majority in parliament which we think is necessary for us to be able to run the government.' This remarkable self-assurance stamped Congress's entire campaign. Congress's methods.

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69 No candidate was put up in Baglung-3 constituency; the independent who won the seat subsequently joined Congress in parliament.

however, were less inventive than the communists. They concentrated mainly on mass meetings and door-to-door canvassing. Their message was the same everywhere: the Nepali Congress was the only true democratic option flanked by the Panchayat kind of dictatorship (represented by the National Democratic parties) on the one side, and communist dictatorship (fast disappearing in the rest of the world) on the other. Congress referred continually to the party's history. Party workers stressed their democratic tradition and reminded the people that they had formed the only previously democratically elected government in the country's history. They pointed to how they had fought against dictatorship and tyranny for forty years since the days of the Ranas.

The communists aimed a different message at their supporters. They called for equality and justice. They claimed that they and they alone were capable of clearing up the mess left by the previous regime and they and they alone could banish exploitation and oppression. Was it right that a few were rich and many were poor? Was it right that these few lived in ease and luxury while the masses suffered and toiled? The communists staged cultural programmes with political songs. These mixed with vigorous political speeches drew large numbers of people. Most active was the United People's Front which grouped some of the most radical communists. Their intention was to use the elections to stage a people's revolution. Their group was the second largest of the communist parties, fielding 69 candidates.

The largest of the communist parties, the UML, with 177 candidates, had departed from their conciliatory tone. Now they hammered home the faults of the Nepali Congress at every public meeting. They laid the blame for the shoddiness of the interim government solely on the Nepali Congress. Patrolling the crowds at their public meetings were the young party cadres with red headbands and stout sticks.

A more moderate image was presented by some of the smaller communist factions, such as Rohit's Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic),<sup>70</sup> the Tulsi Lal Amatya and Varma groups, and a few individuals such as Padma Ratna Tuladhar. They openly admitted the communists' weaknesses and commented on their differences and lack of unity. Tuladhar said: 'There are those communists who only want to exploit the elections as part of their own strategy. These aren't truly democratic. Our main aim must be to prove to the rest of the world that we are truly democratic and as communists we only intend to win power through elections and maintain democracy after we

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<sup>70</sup> The new name adopted by the Manandhar group before the election.

come to power.' He went on to admit that the communists would have a hard time even after they came to power: 'We don't only need to prove that we are democratic, we have to be very careful with economic reform as the rest of the world is very suspicious towards us.'

The third main option, the *ex-panchas*, had still to contend with hostility against them for their role in the old order, and the disruption of Pashupati Shamsher Rana's canvassing in his Sindhupalchok-3 constituency was highlighted on the BBC World Service. For the most part, however, they forgot all fears of reprisals and openly took part in the campaign. They stressed national integrity and law and order. The leaders of the two National Democratic parties said: 'True prosperity and stability can only come through us because we are the only ones experienced in running the government.'

New features in Nepalese politics during this election were the regional and ethnic parties which had been able to operate openly since the Movement. The new constitution included a ban on separatists or communalist organisations being registered by the election commission and two parties, Gopal Gurung's Mongol National Organisation and Khagendra Jang Gurung's Rastriya Janajati Party (National Ethnic Communities Party) were accordingly denied registration, whilst Bir Nembang's Limbuwana Liberation Front boycotted the election. However, if a party did not make its regional or ethnic nature too obvious in its name and constitution, the ban could be evaded. Consequently, the Sadbhavana Party (Nepal Goodwill Party), founded during the Panchayat period as 'The Nepal Goodwill Council' and the Rastriya Janamukti Morcha (National People's Liberation Front)<sup>71</sup> were both registered by the commission. Sadbhavana was the creation of Gajendra Narayan Singh, a former Congressman and former member of the Rastriya Panchayat, and championed the rights of the Terai population. The National People's Liberation Front was mainly concerned with the problems of ethnic minorities in the hills; it was led by a Magar, Ghore Bahadur Khapangi, but had its main support base in Rai and Limbu territory in the east of the country.

The nagging question still remained as to whether a party system could really be established in Nepal. Thirty-one years had passed since the last, brief multi-party government had been dismissed by the king. In the meantime, partylessness had been the main principle of Nepalese politics. Though recognisable factions had developed inside the Rastriya Panchayat,

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71 The name was changed to 'National People's Liberation Party' before the 1994 election.



these were largely centred on personalities and not political programmes. The election symbol, so important in a country with a high percentage of non-literate people, had become connected to an individual. Now the symbol represented a party.

In fact, this major shift was not felt too strongly by the average Nepalese on account of the electoral system adopted. In each constituency every party had only one candidate. This meant that at a local level the party symbol was still only connected to an individual. There was no doubt, therefore, that even in the 1991 election, the individual would play a vital role, just as under the previous Panchayat system.

The National Democratic parties hoped to gain seats because of this. They aimed to field tried and tested candidates who were well-known in their home districts. These candidates had all held positions in the Rastriya Panchayat and had made their political careers through local patronage in their own constituencies. One such person was B.P. Shrestha in Dhulikel, a small town thirty kilometres west of Kathmandu.

As an important merchant Shrestha had been able to use some of his resources for local development. He had also been able to attract foreign aid agencies to invest in the district. In this way he had built up a successful political career and had served for several terms in the Rastriya Panchayat. His popularity was undisputed. Largely due to this and his own charisma, the demonstrations and protests which had disrupted daily life during the revolution never reached Dhulikel. According to one citizen in Dhulikel, Shrestha was a genuine liberal and democrat. Consequently, he became a member of the Nepali Congress straight after the revolution. Unfortunately he was not chosen to represent his constituency and the only option left for him was to throw in his lot with one of the National Democratic Parties -although he did not agree at all with Surya Bahadur Thapa, its leader. The voters of Dhulikel now had the choice of starting from scratch with a new Congress candidate or voting for Shrestha, even though he was representing a reactionary party. It did not help, according to the young man from Dhulikel, that the Congress and UML candidates were both dubious characters.

This dilemma did not occur in Constituency No. 1 of Bhaktapur. Here the populist leader was Narayan Man Bijukche, Comrade Rohit, who had long enjoyed a wide following. His campaign was characterised by open dialogue with the citizens of his constituency. In the early morning, before the sun began to scorch the heads of his listeners, Rohit would be speaking on street corners in the centre of Bhaktapur. Carefully and straightforwardly he would tell the people how their grievances against local and central government would be solved. He would go on to urge

that together they could create a society of prosperity and equality based on self-reliance without dependence on foreign aid. After he had finished speaking he would be ready to answer questions. The rest of the day would be spent door-to-door canvassing and speaking at large meetings in the afternoons.

This personal interaction between candidates and voters typified the campaign. Large numbers, reminiscent of the final days of the revolution, turned out to hear the politicians' attempts to woo them. These large numbers did cause some anxiety as many feared that the election campaign would erupt into violence, despite the eventual deployment of around 62,000 civil servants and about 70,000 regular and temporary police personnel. The radio and TV, which had spent the previous months informing listeners and viewers as to the technicalities of the election and how to go about casting a vote now reassured the public that law and order was secure. The army had already been called out to oversee the election in certain areas of the Terai and in the strongholds of Mohan Bikram Singh's Masal party in Gorkha and Pyuthan in west Nepal. Even this, however, did not make the election officers less nervous. In Pyuthan, the Masal grip was so strong that party activists had been able to stop Girija Prasad Koirala from campaigning locally and to intimidate the workers of an American-financed voter education programme into moving to another district.<sup>72</sup> Until the very end of the campaign there were few who believed that a totally fair and peaceful election would actually take place.

There were frequent accusations of parties obtaining or using funds improperly. In particular, there was clear evidence of vote-buying in three districts and strong suspicion in several others. Several parties were apparently involved but the National Democratic Party (Chand) figured frequently in the accusations.<sup>73</sup> Sahana Pradhan and Jhalanath Khanal were said by their opponents to have used their positions in the interim government to gather money for their party's campaign. Rival communist leader Tulsi Lal Amatya accused the UML of fomenting strikes in industrial concerns and then privately informing companies that a return to work could be arranged in return for a donation to party funds.<sup>74</sup> Amatya also claimed that he himself had turned down an American offer of financial support, and from the UML side there were accusations that

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72 SEARCH, *Strengthening Democratic Processes in Nepal -Voter Education Program*, Kathmandu, 1991, p.87-88.

73 SEARCH, *Strengthening Democratic Processes in Nepal -General Election Monitoring Program*, Kathmandu, 1991.

74 Tulsi Lal Amatya, interviewed in *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 19/7/1991.

national and international reactionary forces' had tried to aid the smaller communist parties so as to help Congress by splitting the leftist vote.<sup>75</sup>

On the eve of the elections most people still found it impossible to give any precise forecast. There were no polls to give any indication as to who would form the new government. Most of the parties had never taken part in a democratic election before. As such they had no track record to show to persuade people to vote for them. Nepalese society had changed so much in the thirty-one years since the previous general election that what had happened then could give no guide to present events.

Nepal TV and radio were faced with a flurry of parties competing for air-time. The way this was allocated was according to the number of candidates fielded by each party. This, of course, gave no real indication of the party's support country-wide. It did seem, however, that the Congress would win. Yet nobody dared rule out the chances of a surprise communist victory. There was also the unknown factor of the National Democratic Parties - the old liberal *panchas* in a new guise - who might pull in a sizeable number of votes and even compete with the communists; there were many who thought that the Chand faction, widely regarded as 'the king's party', might do well in the less-developed western parts of the country.

Early on 12 May, election day, long queues began to form outside the polling stations all over the country. Some of the queues in the Kathmandu Valley stretched for more than a kilometre. People wanted to make an early start before the heat made waiting stifling and the atmosphere on the streets suggested more a holiday than an important political event. There was a hush throughout Kathmandu as the city emptied of vehicles. Voters had turned out in their best clothes. Now with their demands for democracy finally realised, the scene was the opposite from the tension and demonstrations of a year previously during the height of the revolution. The predictions of widespread violence were not fulfilled. There were reports of only a dozen people killed during the entire campaign - obviously a dozen too many, but a low total by South Asian standards. There were cases of 'booth-capturing' and other irregularities in some constituencies, and the need for some repolling, whilst intimidation (as well as some genuine support for Masal's boycott policy) probably lay behind the low turn-out (36%) in Pyuthan district. However, overall the election passed off peacefully and was pronounced a fair test of public opinion by the various national and international observer teams.

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75 *Ib.*; Kharel, Balmukhund, 'Nepalko Am Nirvachan 2048 ra Bam Ektako Prashna', *Jhilko*, 16 (1991), p.47.

During the evening reports began to come in from the rest of the country. As many as 65% had taken part in the election, the highest turnout in the country's history and an extraordinarily high figure for a country like Nepal with a literacy rate of less than 40%.<sup>76</sup>

The first results came from the Kathmandu constituencies and were something of a shock - especially to the Nepali Congress. The communists swept the board in Kathmandu and even defeated the interim prime minister himself. Against all the odds, Madan Bhandari, the leader of the UML had won both in Kathmandu-1 constituency against Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and in Kathmandu-5 against Haribol Bhattarai, the successful Congress candidate in the 1987 local elections. Another Congress member of the interim government, Marshal Julum Shakya was defeated in Patan-2. The party had in fact paid the price for taking the electorate in the Valley for granted whilst the communists, as the junior party in the coalition, were able to escape blame for the interim government's failure to meet the high expectations of April 1990. These first shock-waves subsided as other results began to come in. Nepal's geography made a quick count impossible, but it gradually became clear that the Congress had won a substantial majority and could form a government. Congress had not, however, gained the two-thirds majority that it had aimed for and faced a strong opposition: the UML came behind the Congress with 69 seats whilst other communist parties also succeeded in having candidates elected. The most surprising communist victor was the United People's Front, the most radical of the parties standing, with 9 seats. The other leftist groups which gained admittance to parliament in the election were: the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party and the Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic), which secured 2 seats each. The left as a whole had gained 82 seats and, had it managed to agree on a single candidate for each constituency, it could have won an additional 14.<sup>77</sup>

The main surprise of the election, however, was the complete crushing of the two National Democratic parties. They won only four seats in the whole country, although they had between them secured about 12% of the popular vote. This result spelled a wholesale rejection of the old Panchayat system by the Nepalese people. The only other party to

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76 The 1991 figure compares with 42.24% in the 1959 multi-party election, 52.27% and 60.38% in the 1981 and 1986 non-party elections and 61.16% in the 1980 referendum (Anand Aditya, 'The Multiparty Resurgence II: the Emerging Quadrangle of Vote', *Spotlight*, 31/3/1991, p.8).

77 Kharel, *op. cit.*, p.50, Table 3.

gain parliamentary representation was the Nepal Sadbhavana party, the Terai regionalist party.

As the map on p.185 shows, the Congress and the communists drew their support from different regions. The communists' stronghold turned out to be the Kathmandu Valley and eastern Nepal - in other words, the most politicised parts of the country. The Nepali Congress was returned mainly from the western region and more remote areas.

**TABLE 3.1:1991 ELECTION RESULTS**

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Per Cent of Total Seats	Per Cent of Total Votes
Nepali Congress	204	110	53.66	37.75
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)	177	69	33.66	27.98
National Democratic Party (Chand)	154	3	1.46	6.56
National Democratic Party (Thapa)	162	1	0.49	5.38
United People's Front	69	9	4.39	4.83
Nepal Sadbhavana Party	75	6	2.93	4.10
Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic)*	75	2	0.98	2.43
Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party	30	2	0.98	1.25
Nepal Rastriya Janamukti Morcha	50	0	—	0.47
Communist Party of Nepal (Varma)	36	0	—	0.23
Janata Dal (Social Democratic)	15	0	—	0.08
Nepal Rastriya Jan Party	4	0	—	0.08
Communist Party of Nepal (Amatya)	14	0	—	0.07
Rastriya Janata Party (H)	28	0	—	0.06
Rastriya Janata				

Party Nepal	9	0	—	0.06
Nepal Conservative Party	6	0	—	0.04
Bahujan Janata Dal	1	0	—	0.03
Janabadi Morcha Nepal	14	0	—	0.02
Akhil Nepal Sarbakshiya Rajnitik Ekta Party	1	0	—	0.00
Dalit Majdur Kisan Party	1	0	—	0.00
Independents**	291	3	1.46	4.17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1416</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

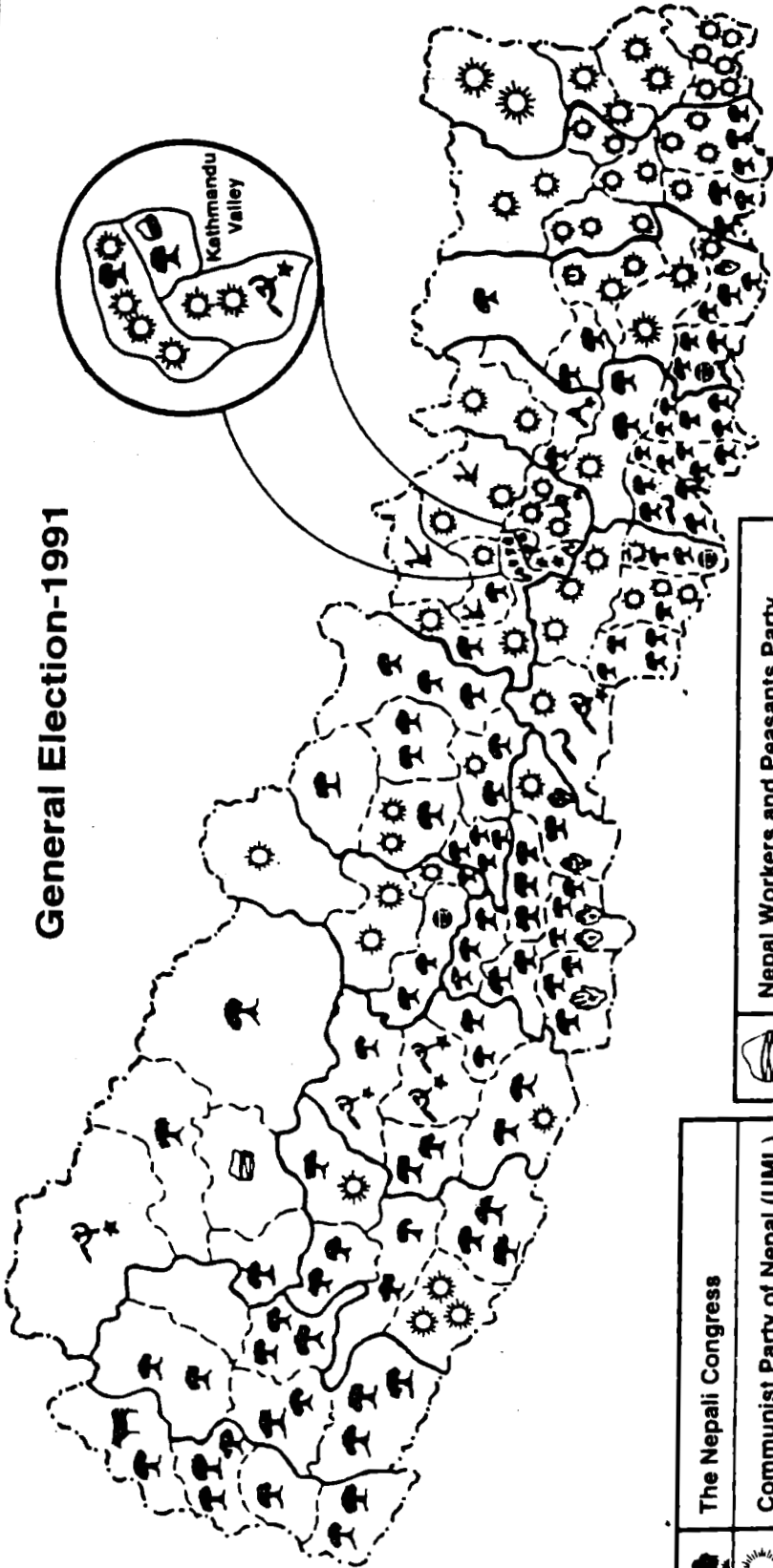
Source: Adapted from Whelpton, 'The General Elections of May 1991' (op. cit.), p.78.

Notes: \* formerly known as the CPN (Manandhar), this group merged with the Varma and Amatya groups two months after the election to form the CPN (United).

\*\* The three independent members joined the Nepali Congress in June 1991.

The general election brought the revolution to a final end. The election was solid proof that the *janandolan* had brought democracy to Nepal and effected a real change in the political system. The strong communist support showed many Nepalese people did not only want to sweep away Panchayat political order - they wanted radical changes in their society.

**General Election-1991**



	The Nepali Congress
	Communist Party of Nepal (UML)
	United People's Front Nepal
	Nepal Sadbhavana Party
	The National Democratic Party

	Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
	Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic)
	The National Democratic Party (Thapa)
	Independent





## CHAPTER 4

# ELECTED GOVERNMENTS 1991-95

### Congress in Power: 1991-1994

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai announced his resignation as prime minister a few days after the declaration of the result in his constituency and on 23 May 1991 the Nepali Congress selected Girija Prasad Koirala, leader of the Congress in the House of Representatives, as his successor. He was the third Koirala brother to attain that office.

This government, albeit under a conservative leader, promised to be more active than the interim government. The general election had brought a year of dramatic upheaval and change to an end. Now the Nepalese people wanted stability and peace and looked to their newly-elected government to work towards this end.

In fact, stability was to prove elusive. Almost immediately on coming into office, Koirala was faced with a third round of agitation from the civil service. He took an extremely firm line and a number of employees linked to the UML, which had sympathised with the action, lost their jobs. This was to become a running sore in relations between Congress and the main opposition party, since members among lower-ranking public employees had long been an important part of the UML's support base.

There were also continuing problems within Congress itself and disputes between Koirala and Bhattarai over government appointments continued after the election. Ganesh Man Singh initially held the ring between them, but was soon at odds with Koirala himself: in the autumn he accused Koirala of appointing too many Brahmans to high positions and of disregarding the wishes of the party organisation. He threatened resignation from his post of 'Supreme Leader', but was appeased by a central committee resolution promising that 'decisions should be taken by consensus among...the *troika* on all major issues appointments to high ranking posts such as secretaries, general managers, ambassadors etc.'<sup>1</sup> Ganesh Man's own moral authority had been damaged by the unsuccessful candidature of his wife and son in Kathmandu constituencies, but the

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<sup>1</sup> *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 20/9/1991, quoted in Krishna Hachhethu, 'Nepali Congress: Issues of Inner Party Democracy', in Lok Raj Baral (ed.), *South Asia - Democracy and the Road Ahead*, Kathmandu: POLSAN, 1992, p.101.

dispute, together with continuing lack of progress on the economic front, damaged the party's standing in the country.

At the end of 1991, Koirala dropped six of his original ministers and brought in 13 new ones. Five of those dismissed were members of the party's central committee, including Sheikh Idris, veteran of the 1959 parliament, Basudev Risal, the party's assistant general secretary and Taranath Ranabhat, who was to become an articulate opponent of Koirala's within the party. Both Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai expressed unhappiness over the reshuffle and the prime minister's failure to consult with them beforehand, although Koirala himself later maintained that both men had actually been given a list of the names two weeks previously.<sup>2</sup> A major reason for the dismissals was in fact Koirala's belief that those concerned had been taking instructions from Ganesh Man. Ill-feeling was heightened because, in an echo of King Mahendra's practice in the 1950s, the ministers themselves were not informed of their dismissal before it was publicly announced.

The Nepali Congress held a convention (*mahadhiveshan*) at Jhapa in February 1992, at which Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was unanimously re-elected president. Ganesh Man, who had intensified his criticism of the government's record, announced he would withdraw from the leadership of the party but was persuaded to stay on in return for a promise that Bhattarai would resolve his complaints against the government within three months. The convention ended without taking a final decision on proposals by Koirala and his supporters which would have reduced the powers of the party president, in particular providing for the election of half the members of the party's central committee, which under the existing constitution was wholly nominated by him. The issue was left for a future meeting of the party's general council (*mahasamiti*) to decide. Overall, the outcome reflected an understanding between Koirala and Bhattarai that the former would be allowed a relatively free rein in running the government whilst the latter retained his grip on the party organisation. However, failure to specify precisely the roles of government and party left ample room for future disagreement.<sup>3</sup>

Intra-party squabbling was now for a while overshadowed by renewed confrontation with the left. There had been growing numbers of clashes between the workers of different parties and in April, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai made a controversial call for the Congress-affiliated Nepal Students Union to organise a 'Peace Army' to help maintain order.

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2 Interview with Girija Prasad Koirala Kathmandu, 25/8/1995 (JW).

3 See the discussion in Hachhethu, *op. cit.*, p.104-9.

The Congress government's economic policy had largely followed the neo-liberal policies advocated by international financial institutions<sup>4</sup> and this included letting prices rise to the market rate. Depending on which contending set of economists one chooses to believe, this might or might not be the correct prescription for long-term progress but it was naturally unpopular with the consumer. Taking advantage of this situation, in February 1992 the radical Unity Centre/United People's Front ('UPF') joined Moham Bikram Singh's Masal and two other small groups in a Joint People's Agitation Committee to organise a programme of protests.<sup>5</sup> This was to culminate in the observance of April 6 (anniversary of the climax of the pro-democracy demonstrations in 1990) as 'People's Movement Day'. The Unity Centre also called a *Nepal band* (general strike) for the same day.

The protests turned violent on the evening of 5 April 1992, when groups of activists attacked cars outside the Bir Hospital and then tried to enforce a 'lights-out' call throughout Kathmandu: the organisers had originally called for only a half-hour blackout but many citizens, fearful that their houses might be attacked, dared not turn on their lights at all. On the morning of 6 April, there were clashes when a police station at Pulchok, just outside Patan, was attacked and two demonstrators were shot dead. The most serious incidents occurred in Kathmandu itself, where all the parties in the Agitation Committee had called a mass meeting at the open-air theatre on the Tundikhel.<sup>6</sup> The government deployed police to prevent demonstrators entering the venue and the crowd then became violent, attempting to set on fire the Nepal Telecommunications Building and other public facilities. A number of demonstrators and on-lookers were killed in police firing, one victim being a seven-year-old boy shot through the head as he watched the scene from a window. The government put the total at 7 whilst a report by the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal claimed the figure was 14.<sup>7</sup>

The government maintained that the situation had justified the use of lethal force, though it also admitted that police training might not be adequate and that there was a lack of appropriate riot control equipment,

4 Brown, *op.cit.*, p.178.

5 The other two groups were the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) and the Nepal Communist League.

6 The Tundikhel is a grass-covered, open area in the centre of Kathmandu and was the exercise-ground for the army in Rana and earlier times.

7 HURON, *2048 Chaitra 24ko Ghatnako Prativedan* (Report on the Events of 6 April 1992). Kathmandu, 1992, p.8. The report listed names for 12 people killed in the Kathmandu Valley and one at Dhangadhi in western Nepal.

such as rubber bullets and water canon.<sup>8</sup> It was alleged, however, that dum dum bullets had been used, as in 1990, whilst some police officers themselves admitted that individual policemen might have wanted to take revenge for the killings of policemen in April 1990.<sup>9</sup>

The violence put the main opposition party, the UML, in an embarrassing position, since they wished both to disassociate themselves from the extremism of the UPF but also to maintain their own radical credentials. The party condemned the police action and called for the resignation of the home minister, but it refused to join the ultra-leftist groups in demanding the resignation of the whole government or in calling a second general strike for May 3. It attracted further criticism from these groups at the end of April by signing an agreement with Congress, providing for a commission of enquiry into the April 6 incident, and the setting up of joint committees to ensure the peaceful holding of local elections at the end of May.

In these elections Congress candidates were elected as mayors in 22 of the 36 municipalities and as deputy mayor in 21, whilst gaining 331 (=55.8%) of the seats on the municipal committees and just over 50% of the seats on village development committees ('VDCs'). Successes included the victory of Ganesh Man's adopted son Prem Lal Singh in the contest for mayor of Kathmandu. Control of a majority of VDCs subsequently enabled Congress to gain 65% of the seats on the indirectly-elected district development committees. Negotiations between the UML and the other leftist parties for a comprehensive seat sharing agreement in the elections had been unsuccessful though, as in the general election, adjustments were made in some localities. The UML gained the post of mayor in only 6 of the 36 municipalities (Bhadrapur, Damak, Hetauda, Bidur, Birendranagar and Dharan), that of deputy mayor in only 5, 119 (=20%) of the seats on municipal committees and around 26% of the seats on VDCs.

The United People's Front contested the elections in an alliance with five other groups, including Masal and Rohit's Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party<sup>10</sup>, which had also agreed to support it in continuing the

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8 Nepal Government, 'Human Rights in Nepal 1992', position paper provided to Amnesty International, October 1992.

9 HURON, *op. cit.*, p.4; Amnesty International, *Nepal - Human Rights Safeguards*, London, 1994, p.12.

10 The other parties were: the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist), which had itself earlier been part of the UPF; the Communist Party of Nepal (15 September 1949), a group which had split from the UML and was later to revive the old name of Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist); and the Nepal Communist League.

anti-government agitation. The UPF gained only one deputy mayorship, 8 (= 1.34%) of the seats on municipal committees and around 5% of the seats on VDCs. In Kathmandu its candidate for mayor attracted only 3.4% of the vote, compared with 52.2% for Congress and 44.4% for the UML. This poor showing indicated that observance of the Front's May 3 day of action had been the result of frustration at continuing economic difficulties or of simple intimidation rather than reflecting widespread popular enthusiasm for the radical Left.

There was certainly some misuse of the administration to support Congress candidates and many irregularities in the election process,<sup>11</sup> but this was not the decisive factor that some opposition parties claimed. Despite continuing discontent over economic difficulties, the bulk of the electorate appear to have felt that Congress administrations at local level would be in the best position to obtain development finance from the centre. Particularly in the Kathmandu Valley, electors also clearly placed the main blame for the recent violence on the various communist factions.

In July the spotlight turned again on Congress's internal woes. The agriculture minister, the prime minister's niece Shailaja Acharya, felt obliged to resign when, without consulting her cabinet colleagues, she admitted to the House of Representatives that there was widespread corruption in her own and other ministries and invited the house to set up a commission of enquiry. The incident was seen as a setback for Koirala himself, since she was her own niece and a trusted political ally. Her portfolio was taken over by the local development minister, Ram Chandra Paudel.

Later in the year, there was an outburst against the prime minister by Kuber Sharma, a close associate of Bhattarai's, and more moderate criticism from general secretary Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, who had been appointed by Bhattarai and was seen as his ally. Bhattarai himself acted as a conciliator in the ensuing controversy but was criticised by Koirala supporters over the composition of the new, 27-member central committee which he appointed in December 1992. There were particular objections to the inclusion of Kuber Sharma and Bharat Shamsheer (the one-time Gorkha Parishad leader), another strong opponent of Koirala. Bhattarai also retained the five who had been sacked from their ministerial jobs a year previously: Taranath Ranabhat, Dhundi Raj Shastri, Chiranjibi Wagle, Sheikh Idris and Basudev Risal. There was also

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<sup>11</sup> See DREFDEN, *Report on the Study and Research on the Local Elections in Nepal 1992*, Kathmandu, 1992.

controversy over whether Bhattarai was entitled to use his power of nomination under the party's 1960 constitution whilst amendments to it were still to be decided.

A fresh crisis in relations with the opposition was brought on by the ever-sensitive issue of water-resource sharing with India. In 1982, in connection with a hydro-electric project at Tanakpur on the Mahakali, which forms Nepal's western boundary, the Indians had constructed an 'afflux bund' (retaining embankment) on the Nepalese side of the river. The 'incursion' was legalised by G.P. Koirala and the Indian prime minister, Narasimha Rao, on his December 1991 visit to India and the situation clarified (with emphasis that the area remained under Nepalese sovereignty) when Rao visited Kathmandu in October 1992. The opposition parties alleged that the agreement did not allow Nepal an adequate share either of the electric power generated by the project or of the water available for irrigation and this was one of the issues that figured in the spring protest campaign by the Unity Centre and its allies. In September 1992, a parliamentary committee with a Congress majority endorsed the government's view that the arrangement made with India was a mere 'understanding' rather than a treaty and therefore did not require parliamentary ratification. However, in a dissenting report opposition members argued that it was a full treaty and required ratification by a two-thirds majority at a joint session of both houses of parliament. Article 126 of the Constitution required that treaties affecting the nation's natural resources must be approved in this way, unless 'of an ordinary nature which does not affect the nation extensively, seriously, or in the long term.' In the latter case, ratification by a simple majority in the House of Representatives was sufficient.

The matter was then referred to the Supreme Court by a private advocate, Bal Krishna Neupane. In December 1992 the court decided that the agreement did need ratification but did not rule what kind of majority would be required. Ganesh Man Singh had said several times during the autumn that the premier must resign if the government lost the case, whilst Koirala had countered with the threat to call mid-term elections, but the Congress central committee opted instead for consultations with other parties. These took place against a background of a vigorous campaign of protest both inside and outside parliament by the UML and three other communist groups (United People's Front, Nepal Workers and Peasant's Party and Masal). The communists declared a willingness to discuss the problem with the Congress party organisation, but called for Koirala's resignation and boycotted functions which he attended. After inter-party negotiations proved inconclusive, the government appeared

ready to table the agreement in the house and ratify by a simple majority but was blocked by opposition from Ganesh Man Singh and the Speaker, Damannath Dhungana (a Congress M.P.). Further discussions between the parties eventually ensued but the issue remained unresolved when the Congress government lost office in November 1994.

In April 1993, Jagannath Acharya, who had been the subject of accusations of allowing improper transfers of land to his relatives, resigned as minister of land reforms, charging that he had not been allowed to implement real changes, and was replaced by his assistant minister, Siddha Raj Ojha. Two days earlier, Ganesh Man Singh had publicly called for a complete recasting or even replacement of the government.

In May 1993, the UML's General Secretary, Madan Bhandari, and the party organiser, Jeevraj Ashrit, died when the jeep they were traveling in swerved off the road into the Narayani River at Dasdhunga. The alarm was raised by Bhandari's driver, a long-time member of the UML, who said that he had himself jumped clear at the last moment. Bhandari's party colleagues, and the left generally, refused to believe this and suspected an assassination plot. When a government enquiry concluded in June that the crash had been an accident, the UML called strikes in the Kathmandu Valley and country-wide in late June and early July, demanding both a fresh enquiry and Koirala's resignation. The campaign was supported by six other leftist groups: the UPF, the NWPP, Masal, Communist Party of Nepal (Amatya), Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) and Nepal Communist League. There were clashes with the police, who opened fire on several occasions; the government admitted a total of sixteen deaths, whilst an Amnesty International report put the figure at 24 and criticised the failure to hold an independent enquiry into the shootings.<sup>12</sup>

Negotiations between Congress and the UML had already begun before heavy flooding in southern Nepal in July caused a winding down of the movement. An agreement was signed on 17 August 1993, including a promise of a renewed investigation of the Dasdhunga incident,<sup>13</sup> continued discussions on Tanakpur, and the setting up of working parties to examine the cases of dismissed leftist teachers and civil servants. Leftist leaders maintained that there had also been a secret understanding that the

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, *Nepal - Human Rights Safeguards*, London 1994.

<sup>13</sup> The new enquiry reported just after the UML itself had taken office in the autumn. No evidence of foul play was discovered. However, the driver of the jeep, Amar Lama, was retained in 'protective custody' (Rishikesh Shaha, personal communication).

prime minister himself would soon resign, though no specific details were released until UPF co-ordinator Baburam Bhattarai alleged on 16 September that Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had promised to remove Girija within one month.<sup>14</sup> The UPF and three other groups rejected the arrangement as inadequate and Baburam Bhattarai referred scornfully to K.P. Bhattarai 'whispering a *mantra* into some leaders' ears.'<sup>15</sup> The radicals continued the protest campaign for some time on their own but it eventually petered out, though by November the UML's new general secretary, Madhav Nepal, was complaining of failure to implement the agreement and threatening 'the final struggle' if Koirala did not resign after Bhattarai's return from medical treatment in the U.S.A.

Congress leaders did not confirm whether any undertaking about the prime minister's future had been given, but *Punarjagaran*, a newspaper normally reflecting Ganesh Man's views, insisted that it had been.<sup>16</sup> In public statements, Ganesh Man himself continued his criticism of the government but insisted that it could not be removed under opposition pressure. For their part, UML leaders canvassed the possibility of removing the constitutional requirement for the prime minister to be a member of the House of Representatives, presumably to allow Krishna Prasad Bhattarai to succeed Koirala without fighting a by-election. Evidence of the state of nerves within Congress was given by the reaction to a trivial incident in September: the failure to provide a chair for the prime minister at a reception for the king and queen in the parliament building led to accusations that the speaker, Damannath Dhungana, was colluding with anti-democratic forces!

In November 1993 it was finally agreed that Bhattarai, who had previously claimed he was resisting pressure from both Ganesh Man and Koirala to take over the premiership, would be the Congress candidate in the by-election caused by Madan Bhandari's death in May. Newspapers sympathetic to Koirala attacked Bhattarai's decision and when campaigning started some of Bhattarai's supporters made it clear to voters that their ultimate objective was to replace the prime minister. Koirala himself initially made some brief criticisms of Bhattarai's tactics, including in particular his playing of the anti-Indian card. Then, on 30 January 1994, he issued a long statement explaining that he had initially advised Bhattarai not to stand and that, although he would have liked to support his candidacy, he could not now do so as Bhattarai's campaign was attacking rather than defending the government's record. By

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14 *Samaj* 17/9/1993 (PD 37:38).

15 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 27/8/1993.

16 *Punarjagaran*, 31/8/1993 (PD37:36).



confronting the issue directly Koirala and his allies had risked precipitating an outright split in the party, and Finance Minister Mahesh Acharya, who helped draft the statement, was reportedly in tears over the prospect.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the gamble paid off as Bhattarai and Ganesh Man now both hastened to express their loyalty to the government.

In addition to confusion over whether he stood with or against the government, Bhattarai's chances in Kathmandu-1 were probably reduced by the UML's choice of candidate: Vidya Bhandari, the widow of Madan Bhandari, could expect a considerable sympathy vote. When the electors went to the polls on 7 February 1994, Bhattarai was defeated by 41,490 votes to 43,319, though the Congress won the former UML-held seat in Jhapa (16,194 to 13,337).<sup>18</sup> Bhattarai's supporters staged rowdy demonstrations in Kathmandu, parading a shoe-garlanded portrait of the prime minister and accusing him of sabotaging the by-election campaign.<sup>19</sup> However, Bhattarai himself called for calm and ensured the defeat of a UML no-confidence motion later in February by issuing written instructions for all Congress M.P.s to vote for the government.

Although he was still in office, Koirala remained beleaguered. His own health became an issue as he collapsed during the no-confidence motion debate in February and again in April, though tests in the U.S.A showed he was only suffering from exhaustion. Both the general secretary, Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, and an ever-more-strident Ganesh Man Singh were calling for his resignation. Within the parliamentary party, a group of 36 M.P.s, led by ex-ministers Taranath Ranabhat and Chiranjibi Wagle, continued their open defiance and their absence from the chamber for a vote on a government bill in March 1994 left the Opposition with a temporary majority. Bhattarai was entrusted by the central committee in April with full authority to settle the intra-party dispute but he continued to temporise.

There was also controversy over a draft constitution for the parliamentary party which Koirala hoped would assist him in maintaining party discipline and which the 36 dissidents were unwilling to endorse. The rebels may have been unhappy with provisions such as the one allowing the Congress M.P.s to elect their leader without reference to the party organisation but their public position was simply that a decision on the parliamentary party's constitution should await the amendment of the

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17 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 4/2/1994.

18 This second by-election had been caused by the death from cancer of veteran UML politician Drona Prasad Acharya.

19 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 11/2/1994.

one for the whole party.<sup>20</sup> Bhattarai, too, wanted to delay, but in the summer Koirala defied his opponents by getting the parliamentary party to adopt the document.<sup>21</sup>

Intra-party tensions were compounded by other embarrassments. In March armed Indian police in search of a fugitive raided two houses in the Kathmandu suburb of Baneshwor and there was intense public protest despite the suspension both of the Kathmandu Valley police chief, who had agreed to the operation, and of the Indian policemen involved. In June a report from the Public Accounts Committee suggested Koirala had acted improperly over the appointment as R.N.A.C.'s European General Service Agent of a new company with Indian connections. The government was also discomfited by a report from Amnesty International appearing to endorse charges of unjustified killings by the security forces during the Leftist agitation the previous summer.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the UML also announced that they would recommence agitation against the government because of its non-compliance with last year's agreement.

At the end of June 1994, Koirala's supporters were heartened by Bhattarai's decision that no action would be taken against those who 'sabotaged' his by-election campaign. Relief was short-lived. Koirala offered to take six of the dissidents into an expanded cabinet but agreement on names and portfolios was not reached.<sup>23</sup> Then, on 10 July, despite an earlier undertaking from Bhattarai that he would ensure they turned up, the 36 Congress dissidents engineered a government defeat by staying away from the House of Representatives during the 'vote of thanks' for the king's speech outlining the forthcoming legislative programme. Some of Koirala's advisors, including Rishikesh Shaha from outside the party,<sup>24</sup> had already urged him to settle the long-running dispute by going to the country and he now acted on that advice. Later the same day, he went to the palace and presented the king with a letter in which he both submitted his resignation and requested that parliament be dissolved and mid-term polls held in November.

Birendra accepted the resignation at once but delayed a decision on dissolution whilst he held consultations with legal experts and other politicians, including Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and the UML president, Man Mohan Adhikari. Bhattarai had asked Koirala not to seek a dissolution and probably wanted the king to invite Mahendra Narayan

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20 Krishna Hachhethu, personal communication.

21 *Deshanter*, 17/7/1994.

22 See above, p.193.

23 Interview with G.P. Koirala, Kathmandu, 25/8/1995 (JW).

24 Rishikesh Shaha, personal communication.

Nidhi to form a new Congress administration. However, Koirala had pre-empted such a move by securing a signed statement of support from 74 of the 113 Congress M.P.s. The UML tried to form an alliance with the 36 rebels, but the dissidents were interested only in replacing Koirala with another Congressman, not in forming a coalition. The UML, who themselves had 69 M.P.s, then asked the king to let them form a minority government, but Birendra decided on 11 July to dissolve parliament and re-appoint Koirala as caretaker prime minister until elections in November.

Koirala's action and the king's decision were regarded as unconstitutional both by the communist opposition and by Congress dissidents. They argued that it had been wrong for the king to dissolve the House of Representatives on Koirala's recommendation after the latter's resignation as prime minister, that Koirala should not have used his prime ministerial prerogative against the wishes of his own party organisation, and that he could not be trusted to hold free and fair elections.<sup>25</sup> Supported by the Communist Party of Nepal (United),<sup>26</sup> United People's Front (Vaidya), Unity Centre, Masal and Nepal Communist League, the UML then launched an agitation for Koirala's removal and the formation of an all-party government. Initial protest actions included torchlight processions and a one-day Nepal Bandh on 20 July 1994 in which there were minor clashes between demonstrators and police but no violence on the scale seen the previous summer. Much of the protest seemed more of a ritual performance than a full-hearted confrontation. Groups of youths and squads of police moved along streets largely clear of motor-traffic, except for jeeps carrying human rights observers, who wore sashes proclaiming their umpire-like status. On Kantipath to the north of Bir Hospital, one burly individual ripped up railings undisturbed either by the police or by Madhav Kumar Nepal and a small group of UML supporters who marched past him two or three times shouting slogans. Most people on the street at the time appeared to be onlookers rather than demonstrators and an enterprising Madheshi ice-cream vendor was doing a brisk trade.<sup>27</sup>

25 Concern over Koirala's commitment to fair elections was also increased by the dismissal of the production team of a popular radio current affairs programme (*Ghatma ra Bichar*) which had been seen as critical of him.

26 This party had been formed just after the 1991 election by the merger of Vishnu Bahadur Manandhar's Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic) with the Varma and Amatya groups. Varma and Amatya and their followers broke away the following year, but Manandhar retained the name adopted at the time of the merger.

27 Personal observations by John Whelpton whilst cycling around the city centre on 20/7/1994.

Koirala's action enraged his opponents within the party and Taranath Ranabhat likened him to Jang Bahadur Rana, who gained the premiership through a massacre of his opponents in 1846.<sup>28</sup> The Congress general secretary Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, almost certainly acting with Bhattarai's prior approval, called upon the king to dismiss the prime minister and then made a joint appeal with the leaders of the six-party leftist alliance for the reconvening of parliament. Hari Prasad Nepal, a dissident Congress M.P. was among those who petitioned the Supreme Court on 26 July to quash the dissolution of parliament.

Meanwhile, Koirala had responded by summoning to Kathmandu the delegates to the party convention and general council, amongst whom he had majority support, but there was no attempt to hold a formal session of the general council, even though some of Koirala's allies were urging him to do this in order to formalise the split in the party.<sup>29</sup> Koirala himself later claimed that he had summoned the delegates only as a safeguard against his opponents using their majority on the central committee to expel him from the party and also to break the alliance between them and the communists.<sup>30</sup>

When the central committee met on 27 July 1994, it in fact accepted a compromise proposal from Shailaja Acharya under which Koirala's opponents would abandon their opposition to the dissolution of parliament, Bhattarai would reconstitute the central committee, and neither Koirala, Bhattarai nor Nidhi would stand in the forthcoming elections. This formula had apparently been floated some days earlier by the 36 dissident M.P.s in informal talks with Koirala's group and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai may have instigated it. Despite Koirala's formal acceptance of the deal, three of his closest allies on the central committee (Sushil Koirala, Bhubikram Nemwang and Surya Bhakta Adhikari) entered a 'note of dissent' to the decision. Many of his supporters waiting outside party headquarters were also unhappy. There was obvious hostility not just against the publicly-declared dissidents but also against Shailaja Acharya and ministers Sher Bahadur Deuba and Ram Chandra Paudel. These three had avoided aligning themselves fully with either faction and,

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28 See above, p.2-3.

29 From a technical point of view, it might have been difficult to do this since the party's constitution provides only that the central office (viz. Bhattarai in his capacity as president) *may* summon the council on application of one third of the delegates (Nepali Congress, *Nepali Kangresko Bidhan* (Constitution of the Nepali Congress), Kathmandu, 1960, clause 12B) (emphasis supplied).

30 Interview with Girija Prasad Koirala. Kathmandu, 25/8/1995 (JW).

as the most prominent members of the party's 'second generation,' had most to gain from the old guard stepping aside.

Why had Koirala settled on a compromise only a few days after seeming intent on a show-down with his opponents within the party? Two reasons that have been suggested are advice from his associates that a split would be fatal for the party's electoral chances and doubts about the attitude of the Palace after Birendra used his powers under Article 43 of the constitution to ask for information on 'matters relating to the existing state of affairs, peace and security in the country'.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the true explanation, the whole episode raised grave doubts about his political judgement.

Yet, despite this, Koirala's position within the party now seemed to strengthen. In mid-August Bhattarai removed nine members from the Central Committee, including three fierce opponents of the prime minister - Bharat Shamsheer, Kuber Sharma and Bal Bahadur K.C. - and added three Koirala supporters: Khum Bahadur Khadka, Bhim Bahadur Tamang and Mahanta Thakur. In mid-September, the new committee rescinded the 27 July decision that neither Koirala, Bhattarai nor Nidhi would stand in the election and left them free to decide for themselves. Koirala was subsequently nominated for two Terai constituencies, as in 1991. Bhattarai and Nidhi did not contest, but Nidhi's place as candidate for Dhanusha-4 (including Janakpur town) was taken by his son, Bimalendra.

On 12 September, the day before the meeting was held, the judges of the Supreme Court rejected by 7 votes to 4 the petition challenging the legality of the dissolution. This was consistent with the line taken by most constitutional experts throughout the controversy, though observers also pointed out that the votes of individual judges corresponded with their known political allegiance. The UML, which, unlike its smaller leftist allies, already seemed tired of street protests, criticised the decision but now concentrated fully on its election campaign.

Four days after the court decision, Ganesh Man Singh resigned his membership of the Congress Party and on the 24 September he called for the defeat of pro-Koirala candidates in the elections and, angered by Bhattarai's compromises, condemned the latter as 'the biggest traitor and political criminal in the history of Nepal'.<sup>32</sup>

31 L.R. Baral, 'The 1994 Nepal Elections: Emerging Trends in Party Politics', *Asian Survey*, vol.35, No.5, May 1995, p.429-30. Koirala himself (interview, Kathmandu, 25/8/1995 (JW)) now maintains that the palace request was a natural one given his status as caretaker premier and did not give him any special concern.

32 *Kantipur* 24/9/1994 (PD38:40).

The 204 Congress candidates, around two-thirds of whom were reckoned Koirala supporters, included 91 of their 114 ex-M.P.s. Official Congress nominees faced opposition in many constituencies from disaffected activists, either standing as independents or in one of the various Congress splinter groups which were formed immediately before the election. It was claimed that 160 dissident candidates responded to Ganesh Man Singh's call to oppose Koirala,<sup>33</sup> but many in fact withdrew their nominations before polling day. Congress expelled the most persistent rebels, including long-term Koirala-opponent Durga Subedi, who was standing against the prime minister in Morang, and Umesh Giri, a party activist who had been accused of using intimidation in past election campaigns and who was now standing for one of the splinter groups, the Nepali Congress(Bishweshwar). In the words of one veteran analyst of Nepalese politics, 'the 1994 elections were conspicuous by the absence of both national and international issues.'<sup>34</sup> This was especially so in the case of Congress: Koirala had called the elections on the issue of his own control of the party, but was now campaigning alongside the very same dissidents who had threatened that control. The party was now simply asking for a vote of confidence in its ability to rule and for endorsement of its economic policies, including its privatisation programme.

Whilst better-disciplined than Congress, the UML also had to contend with some internal difficulties. Madhav Kumar Nepal, who had taken over as general secretary on Madan Bhandari's death, was, like his predecessor, a member of the party's 'hard-line' faction. Some years before the *janandolan*, Bhandari and his allies had gained the edge over 'soft-liners' such as C.P. Mainali. After the restoration of democracy, both sides elaborated different ideological positions. Bhandari advocated *bahudaliya janbad* ('multi-party people's democracy') and Mainali a modified version of *naulo janbad* (new people's democracy), the line the party had followed before 1990. Bhandari's line had been adopted by the party's central committee in 1991 and endorsed by a full convention in 1993, after which the labels 'majority' and 'minority' often replaced the now inappropriate 'hard-liners' and 'soft-liners'. The theoretical aspects of the dispute are treated in chapter 5, but in terms of practical politics, the 'minority' were more sympathetic to long-term accommodation with other leftist groups and also with Congress, whilst the 'majority' wanted UML to aim for power on its own, but were ready to make tactical alliances

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33 *Punarjagaran*, 4/10/1994. This newspaper was funded by Ganesh Man Singh.

34 Lok Raj Baral, 'The 1994 Nepal Elections', *op. cit.*, p.433.

where necessary, even if this was with the palace or the former *panchas*. Jhalanath Khanal and other 'moderates' generally tried to play a balancing role, but there was constant friction between the two groups, and Mainali and his followers now complained of discrimination against them in allocating party tickets for the elections.

Although, as in 1991, it proved impossible to agree an electoral alliance amongst all the leftist parties, the UML withdrew in six constituencies in favour of Masal, the UPF (Vaidya) and Ramraja Prasad Singh's Nepal Janbadi Morcha. The party nominated candidates for 196 seats, including 48 of its 68 former ex-M.P.s. The party president, Man Mohan Adhikari, stood in two Kathmandu constituencies and Tulsī Lal Amatya, who had joined the UML in 1993 after losing many of his own former followers, was nominated to contest the Congress-held seat of Rautahat-3.<sup>35</sup>

As was the case with Congress, there was little new in the platform on which the UML fought the election. Outlining their policies in October, Madhav Nepal and Man Mohan Adhikari called for a 'review of unequal treaties' with India 'regularisation of the open border ... and Nepal-India talks on the work-permit system'<sup>36</sup>, and a reduction in the ceiling on land holdings was later promised. Whilst emphasising that it saw an important role for the private sector, the party was also committed to halting or at least slowing the Congress government's privatisation programme. On 18 October, Madhav Nepal wrote to the president of the World Bank requesting postponement of a loan agreement for the Arun-3 hydro-electric project until after the election; the project, the largest ever planned for Nepal, now had the enthusiastic backing of the Congress government but had been criticised by others as less appropriate for Nepal than building a number of smaller dams with a greater role for Nepal's own engineers. The finance ministry secretary subsequently announced that the loan agreement would be left for the incoming government to sign.

After many months of internal tension, the second-largest communist party in parliament, the United People's Front, had finally split in May 1994. One faction, consisting largely of former 4th. Convention members and enjoying the support of most of the UPF M.P.s, was led by Niranjana Gobinda Vaidya, whilst the ex-Masal and ex-Masal elements continued with Baburam Bhattarai as convenor. The Front's main component, the Unity Centre, had similarly divided into a

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<sup>35</sup> Amatya lost the election but was subsequently appointed as ambassador to China.

<sup>36</sup> *Gorkhapatra*, 8/10/1994 (PD 38:41).

group under Nirmal Lama, the former 4th. Convention leader, and another led by 'Prachand' (Pushpa Kumar Dahal), who had headed Mashal before the creation of the Unity Centre in 1990. Prachand and Baburam Bhattarai called for a boycott of the November elections, but the UPF(Vaidya)<sup>37</sup> contested 49 constituencies, including 5 of the 9 held by the UPF in the previous parliament. Vaidya's group was recognised by the election commission as the continuation of the original organisation and was therefore allowed to retain the hammer and sickle election symbol used in 1991.

In contrast to Baburam Bhattarai, who participated in the 1991 election but boycotted that of 1994, Mohan Bikram Singh's Masal reversed their 1991 boycott policy and took part in 1994. As Singh still preferred to operate 'underground', Masal backed a number of nominally independent candidates rather than registering itself as a party with the election commission. The party also entered into an alliance with the Nepal Janabadi Morcha of Ram Raja Prasad Singh, the former Congressman who had claimed responsibility for the 1985 bombings.<sup>38</sup>

The separate *ex-pancha* factions which fought the 1991 election under Surya Bahadur Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand had combined in February 1992 to form a single National Democratic Party (Rastriya Prajatantra Parti). Having itself earlier called for fresh elections, the party welcomed the dissolution of the House of Representatives in July 1994, although it supported the Leftist demand for a multi-party interim government to ensure free and fair elections. The party put up candidates in 202 constituencies, a higher number than any other party except Congress.

In policy terms, the National Democratic Party, like Congress, emphasised the role of the private sector. Its main hope for the election, however, was that popular disillusionment with both Congress and the communists would make the electorate ready to trust those with experience in government during the Panchayat years.

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37 In this book, the two factions of the UPF are always qualified with the name of their leader. However, even after May 1994 'UPF' on its own was frequently used in the press and generally referred to the Baburam group, even though the election commission's decision meant the name should strictly refer to Vaidya and his followers. There was a similar problem for some months in distinguishing the two factions of the Unity Centre, but in February 1995 the Prachand group re-christened itself as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

38 See above, p.103-4.



Voting in the elections, which involved public expenditure of 630 million rupees,<sup>39</sup> took place on 15 November. The turnout was 62.01%, compared with 65.15% in 1991. The day after polling, the UML issued a statement accepting the elections as fair but later, as its strong early lead was cut back, it accused the government of rigging in the 79 polling stations where re-balloting had been ordered by the election commission. It was also later alleged that recounts had been used to deprive the UML of victory in 18 constituencies.<sup>40</sup> Congress supporters countered with the argument that in the majority of booths where recounts were ordered, the result had gone against them.<sup>41</sup> Overall, Nepalese and foreign observers reported that although the elections were generally free and fair, there were numerous irregularities, and it was Congress, as the party controlling the administration, which had the most opportunities to distort the electoral process.

Instead of the renewed mandate which Koirala had hoped for, the elections resulted in a hung parliament. The detailed results are set out in the table below:

**TABLE 4.2: 1994 ELECTION RESULTS**

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Per Cent of Total Seats	Per Cent of Total Votes
Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)	196	88	42.91	30.85
Nepali Congress	205	83	40.49	33.38
National Democratic Party	202	20	9.76	17.93
Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party	27	4	1.95	0.98
Nepal Sadbhavana Party	86	3	1.46	3.49
United People's Front	49	0	--	1.32
Rastriya Janamukti Party	82	0	--	1.05
Nepal Janabadi Morcha	41	0	--	0.43
Communist Party of				

39 Bharat Mohan Adhikari, Finance Minister in the incoming UML government, gave this figure, and claimed the provision made by Congress was only 320m. (*Kantipur*, 27/12/1994, PD 39:1).

40 Chitra K. Tiwari, 'Post-Election Analysis II: Nepal Under UML', distributed on Nepal Network (Internet), December 1994.

41 Interview with Krishna Khanal (T.U. Political Science Dept.), Kathmandu, 16/8/95.

Nepal (Marxist)	49	0	—	0.39
Communist Party of Nepal (United)	34	0	—	0.38
Nepali Congress (Bishweshwar)	10	0	—	0.16
Rastriya Janata Parishad	28	0	—	0.12
Janabadi Morcha (Nepal)	3	0	—	0.05
Prajatantrik Lok Dal	10	0	—	0.04
Nepal Praja Parishad	7	0	—	0.02
Rastriya Janata Party	7	0	—	0.02
United People's Party	9	0	—	0.02
Nepali Congress (B.P.)	2	0	—	0.01
Nepali Congress (Subarna)	4	0	—	0.01
Janata Dal (Social Democratic)	1	0	—	0.01
Sanyukta Prajatantra Party	1	0	—	0.00
Nepal Janahit Party	1	0	—	0.00
Radical Nepali Congress	1	0	—	0.00
Liberal Democratic Party	1	0	—	0.00
Independents*	385	7	3.41	6.18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1442</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>96.84</b>

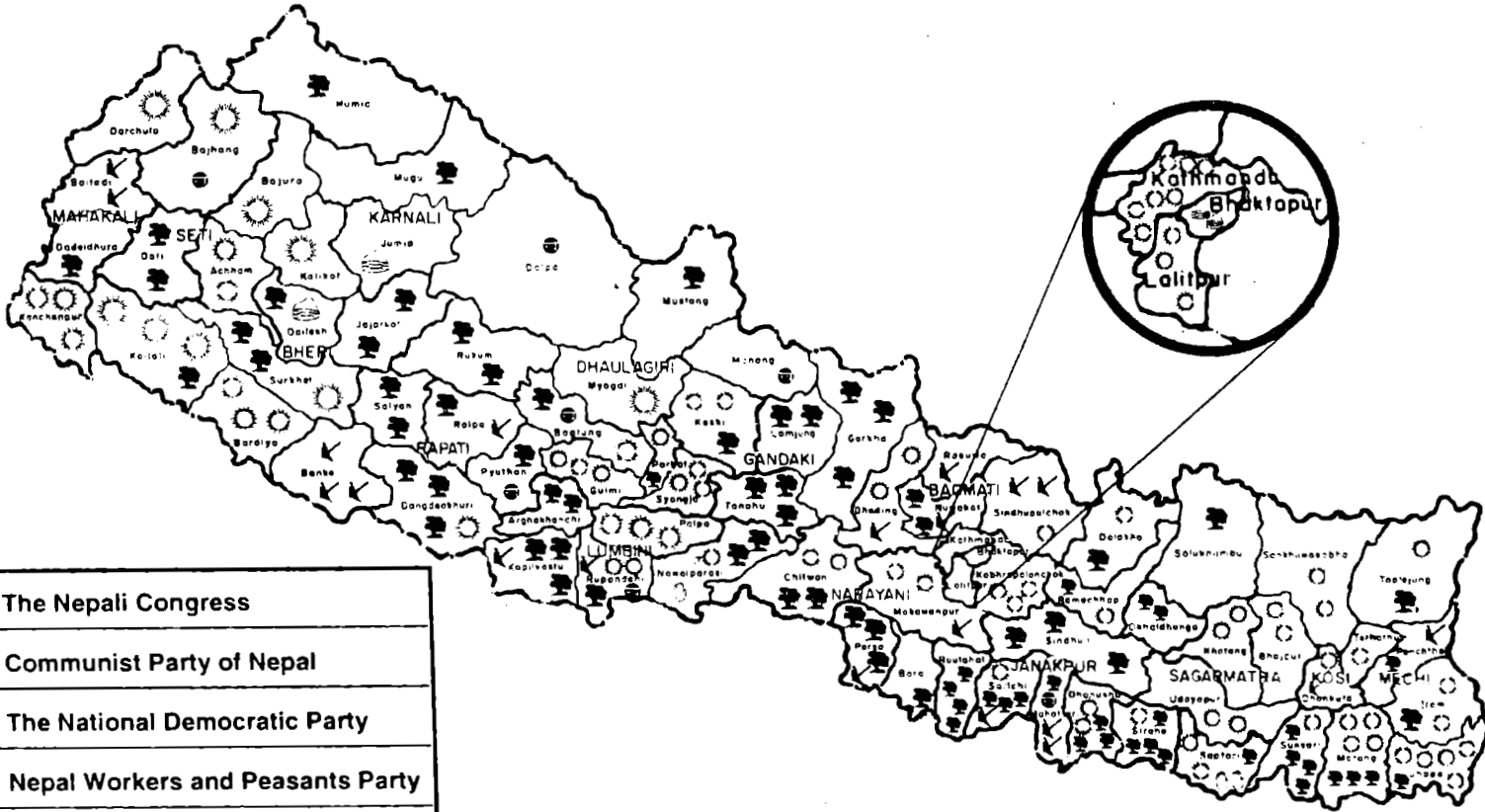
Source: Adapted from Election Commission, *House of Representative(sic) Election 2051: Election Result*, Kathmandu, n.d., p.3.

Note: \* Four of the independents were Congress rebels, and one a National Democratic Party dissident. The latter, and three of the former Congressmen joined the parliamentary Congress party after the election. The two other independents were backed by Masal.

The UML emerged as the largest grouping in parliament (88 seats to Congress's 83) and made gains in far-western Nepal, which had been a Congress preserve in 1991. Its share of the popular vote rose from 28% to 32%. However this was still less than the 33.4% who voted for Congress, whilst seats gained and lost by the two parties in eastern Nepal were roughly equal. Over the whole country, the UML lost 20 seats it had held previously, including one in the party's birthplace of Jhapa district. This suggested there was some truth in reports of discontent amongst party workers because they felt they were being neglected whilst national-level politicians concentrated on their power struggles.

Electoral support for Congress declined to 33.4% from 37.8% achieved in 1991. Although there were few unambiguous cases of rebel Congress candidates letting the opposition in by splitting the Congress

# General Election-1994



	The Nepali Congress
	Communist Party of Nepal
	The National Democratic Party
	Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
	Nepal Sadbhavana Party
	Independent

vote, dissidents standing as independents defeated the official candidates in four constituencies. Elsewhere the fact of Congress division clearly eroded popular support and the result was affected in around 30 seats. The party lost the only two seats it had held in the Kathmandu Valley (including that of the former speaker, Damannath Dhungana), and also all nine constituencies in the districts of Syangja, Palpa and Gulmi south-west of Pokhara. Other prominent casualties included the prime minister's close aide Sushil Koirala (Banke-1) and two of his bitterest critics, Taranath Ranabhat (Kaski-1) and Kuber Sharma (Saptari- 4).

The two rival National Democratic Parties which contested the 1991 election had between them obtained 11.9% of the popular vote. As a single party, they increased their share to 19.9% and won 20 seats, establishing themselves as a credible third force both in terms of votes and parliamentary strength. The party's main strength remained in the central region, where it now held ten seats, but gains in the west included Lokendra Bahadur Chand's double victory in his native district of Baitadi. Surya Bahadur Thapa lost in Sarlahi-2 but won on his home ground of Dhankuta-2. Nine seats were won from Congress, four from the UML, two from Sadbhavana and one from the CPN(United). The one loss was in Darchula district in western Nepal, where the UML took the new single constituency formed by the amalgamation of Darchula-2, the sole seat won in 1991 by the NDP(Thapa), and Congress-held Darchula-1. The former Darchula-2 M.P., who was not renominated for the new constituency, had weakened the party's chances by standing as an independent.

The smaller parties represented in the 1991-4 parliament generally fared badly. The United People's Front (Vaidya) failed to win a single seat; of the nine the UPF had previously held, six went to Congress, two to the UML and one to the National Democratic Party. Also completely eliminated was the Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic), whilst the Terai-based Sadbhavana party was reduced from 6 to 3 seats and saw its share of the vote decline from 4.1% to 3.5%. Sadbhavana had been weakened by desertions, and one of the constituencies it lost was in fact retained by its own former M.P., who was now a member of the National Democratic Party.

One minor party which bucked the trend was Rohit's Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party, but this was only by a fluke of the electoral system: its share of the vote went down from 1.25% to 0.98% but it doubled its parliamentary representation to 4, winning the second Bhaktapur constituency and Dailekh-2 (in western Nepal) from Congress. For practical purposes, another Maoist group, Masal, was now also

represented in parliament, though, as explained above, the two successful candidates it had backed were technically independents. Like the NWPP, Masal benefitted electorally from the geographically-concentrated nature of its support-base.

### **The UML Government: 1994-95**

After the election results were announced, Girija Prasad Koirala resigned as prime minister and called for his party to go into opposition and allow the UML to form the government. This line was backed less publicly by Mahendra Narayan Nidhi and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, but Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ram Chandra Paudel and Shailaja Acharya, the main contenders to take the place of the old guard, wanted to try for a coalition government. There are conflicting reports of the intensive inter-party negotiations, but Paudel appears to have tried to get the UML to enter a Congress led-coalition, whilst the UML wanted a coalition with itself as the senior partner, and Bhattarai, backed by Ganesh Man's supporters, favoured letting the UML hold power alone for one year.

After a Congress central committee meeting on 23/24 November showed that feeling among party workers was strongly for remaining in government, the emphasis switched to discussions with the National Democratic Party. Sher Bahadur Deuba, who had already been in contact with the NDP, was well-placed to conduct these negotiations as the son-in-law of a prominent NDP politician, Pratibha Rana. He also had a link with Lokendra Bahadur Chand as both were Thakuris from the same area in western Nepal.<sup>42</sup> Despite rumours of western and Indian pressure for an agreement, these negotiations also were unsuccessful. One reason was the NDP's belief that Congress was too disunited for any agreement to stick. Another may have been a division of opinion within the NDP itself: since Surya Bahadur Thapa was reportedly leaning towards Congress and Lokendra Bahadur Chand towards the UML, remaining aloof from both may have seemed the safest course.

Although most of the UML's efforts went into seeking an arrangement with Congress, informal discussions with the National Democratic Party did take place, despite an earlier declaration by Man Mohan Adhikari that the party would never enter such an alliance. The National Democratic Party's own preferred option seems to have been a national government with each party holding ministeries in proportion to its parliamentary strength, but this was unacceptable to the UML. When

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<sup>42</sup> Deuba himself maintains that this, rather than the (recently established) family connection, was the crucial factor.

it was clear that neither of the other two parties was prepared to reach an agreement with it, the UML opted to form a minority government as the largest single party in parliament and Man Mohan Adhikari was sworn in as prime minister on 29 November.

Adhikari had usually been regarded as a figurehead party leader and this situation was reflected in the structure of his government. Unlike Girija Prasad Koirala, he did not take control of the foreign and defence portfolios, which went instead to Madhav Kumar Nepal.

The new government was in no position to introduce radically new economic policies, even supposing it really wanted to, since it depended on abstention by the main opposition parties both to obtain a vote of confidence when parliament assembled and also to pass its programme. It did, however, introduce some consumer subsidies, financed by an increased budget deficit. The previous government's plans for further privatisation were frozen and commissions was set up to make recommendations on land reform and to tackle the *sukumbasi* (squatter) problem.<sup>43</sup> As centrepiece of the programme, there was the 'Build Your Village Yourself' (BYVY) scheme, under which a grant of Rs. 300,000 would be made to each of Nepal's more than 4,000 village development committees. Use of the funds was to be overseen by the centre and monitored by specially-formed committees representing the political parties and the electorate.

Although the opposition parties allowed the plans through parliament in December, they were increasingly critical of them during the UML's nine months in office. The essential problem was not so much any hostility on ideological grounds as alarm at the strengthening of the UML's patronage networks at the expense of those of the other parties. The monitoring mechanism for the BYVY scheme was seen as an attempt to undercut the authority of the largely Congress-controlled village development committees elected in 1992. There was also criticism that the 53,000 families eventually granted titles to land by the Landless People Problem Resolution Commission had been selected for their connections to the UML rather than on grounds of need.

Patronage was also a central issue in the controversy surrounding government appointments and accusations of 'UMLification' were levelled at the government, just as those of 'Congressification' had been at his predecessor. The government moved quickly to recall most ambassadors who had been appointed by Girija Koirala from outside the

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43 See pg.156-158, above for details of the *sukumbasi* problem. The Land Reform Commission reported in June 1995, after the dissolution of parliament, but the contents were not made public.

diplomatic service, but retained three Newar ambassadors who were believed to have been given their positions in response to Ganeshman Singh's protests against 'Brahmanism'. There were also large-scale replacements of chief district officers and of heads of government corporations.<sup>44</sup> In making civil service appointments the government was both rewarding some of its own supporters and also making sure it would have reliable supporters in the bureaucracy both to implement its policies and to prepare for new elections which might come at any time.<sup>45</sup>

Another immediate priority for the incoming government was to establish a working relationship with the Indian government, a task made more difficult because of the UML's past anti-Indian rhetoric and India's known preference for Congress. Adhikari had himself accused Indian Ambassador Bimal Prasad of being too close to Girija Prasad Koirala, whom the Indians had tried to assist in the power-struggle within Congress.<sup>46</sup> Following a preparatory visit by Madhav Kumar Nepal in February, Man Mohan Adhikari visited New Delhi in April 1995. Both men publicly restated the demand for the revision of the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty and India agreed that this could be discussed at working level. The Tanakpur issue was also discussed and the idea of a 'Mahakali Package' - ie. an agreement covering both the Tanakpur issue and other projects - emerged, though it was unclear which side had first proposed this. Whilst no spectacular breakthroughs were made, the government was in fact quite successful at spelling out its wish for complete neutrality between India and China, whilst at the same time respecting Indian sensitivities: Madhav Nepal gave an assurance that there would be no immediate introduction of a work permit system for Indians in Nepal, whilst Adhikari undertook to consult India before importing arms from third countries.

In general relations with Nepal's aid-donors were also smoother than some had predicted, and some donors reportedly began to feel the new government was showing more dynamism than its predecessor.<sup>47</sup> In May 1995, the UML also received endorsement of record on democracy and human rights in an interview given by the US ambassador.<sup>48</sup> However, there was a major embarrassment for the government in August, just before it fell from office, when the World Bank cancelled the proposed

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44 Brown, *op. cit.*, p.198.

45 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 17/2/1995.

46 Rishikesh Shaha (personal communication) reports being requested by the Indians to help Koirala against Bhattarai and Ganesh Man.

47 Brown, *op. cit.*, p.197-8.

48 *Rising Nepal*, 15/5/1995.

loan for the Arun-3 hydro-electric scheme. The government had itself requested a delay in signing the loan agreement whilst it reviewed the project but had finally indicated its willingness to go ahead even though the Bank refused to make some modifications it had requested.

Allegations of corruption continued to be a major political issue. The Public Accounts Committee investigation into Koirala's role in the Dhamija affair had lapsed with the dissolution of the previous parliament. In March 1995, Adhikari's government cancelled Dhamija's contract as R.N.A.C.'s general service agent in Europe and set up a commission under Gajendra Mani Pradhan to investigate alleged malpractice in the original awarding of the contract. Girija Prasad Koirala was summoned before the commission but defiantly challenged its status and refused to answer detailed questions. In particular, he alleged that the chairman, a senior civil servant compulsorily retired by the Congress government, could not be impartial. Shortly afterwards the Supreme Court ruled that the commission had indeed been set up irregularly. The original commission was dissolved and a new one, under a district court judge set up in May. At the beginning of September, just before the UML government was voted out of office, this reported that both Koirala and the then managing director of R.N.A.C. had abused their authority. The entire episode was probably politically counter-productive for Man Mohan Adhikari's government as the attacks on Koirala brought the other members of the *troika* closer to him. In April, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai for the first time called for the removal of the UML government and suggested an alliance with the NDP. Though still remaining estranged from Congress, Ganesh Man issued a statement in May backing Girija's objection to the choice of Chairman for the commission.

Allegations of improper relations with businessmen were also made against the UML government itself. Chandra Prakash Mainali, minister for supply, was questioned in the spring by the Public Accounts Committee about the award of a licence to Pearl Trading Co. to import sugar from India for sale at an allegedly excessive mark-up. Mainali had apparently believed that Pearl would be able to obtain sugar at the subsidised price at which India had earlier supplied Nepal rather than at the open market price on which the Indian government was now officially insisting.<sup>49</sup> He allegedly explained to the committee that the end-price offered to Pearl had to be sufficient to cover bribes to Indian officials. In

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49 See the interview with PAC chairman Hriyadesh Tripathi in *Saptahik Bimarsha* (19/5/1995).



the end, however, the deal had not gone through and no money had changed hands.

Despite the care usually taken by the Nepalese left not to offend religious susceptibilities, the government was embarrassed in March 1995 when Padma Ratna Tuladhar suggested that the ban on cow slaughter violated the human rights of beef-eating minorities.<sup>50</sup> Vigorous protests were mounted by Hindu groups, and the opposition parties also extracted the maximum political mileage from the incident. In May, Man Mohan Adhikari made an apology for the remarks and a statement was issued reaffirming government support for the cow's special status in Nepal.

Like its Congress predecessor, Man Mohan Adhikari's government also had intra-party problems. As communists, the UML politicians accepted in theory that the government must obey the party, but conflict arose over the powers in the hands of particular individuals. There was friction between party 'advisors' and the ministers to whom they were attached, but controversy centred particularly on Madhav Kumar Nepal's position: he was generally regarded as *de facto* head of the government, but still retained his powers as general secretary, whilst he and Man Mohan jointly headed the new 'central secretariat' established in a party reorganisation in December. Opposition to this arrangement was headed by Bam Dev Gautam and his pressure yielded results in February, on the eve of Madhav Nepal's visit to India. The central committee transferred Nepal's party management responsibilities as general secretary to Gautam and reorganised the central secretariat to include Gautam and exclude Nepal and Adhikari.

There was also the long-running problem of friction between the 'majority' and 'minority' factions of the party. This surfaced in the May 1995 'Sugargate' affair, already referred to: Chandra Prakash Mainali maintained that he had consulted Madhav Kumar Nepal before awarding the supply contract to Pearl Trading, but Nepal himself flatly denied this. Possibly even more serious in its implications for the party's future were further signs of disillusionment amongst its cadre base. In the same month, a newspaper sympathetic to the party reported dissatisfaction amongst many party workers over the wealth owned by some senior leaders and a demand that half the assets of ministers be handed over to the party.<sup>51</sup>

The Adhikari government was now in a crucial situation, since there were growing signs that the opposition would unite against it. At the end

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<sup>50</sup> The exact words are disputed, but this was the clear implication.

<sup>51</sup> *Dristi*, 3/5/1995 (PD39:19).

of May, the party's central committee, agreed to a proposal from Madhav Nepal and his allies that a coalition could be formed even with the National Democratic Party if this was necessary to save the government. This was opposed by about a dozen members, including C.P. Mainali, Jhalanath Khanal and Sahana Pradhan.<sup>52</sup> The UML were unwilling to meet the NDP's conditions, but discussions were still continuing when on 8 June King Birendra agreed to a request from Congress for a special session of parliament to consider a no-confidence motion. The following day, carrying out an earlier threat, Man Mohan asked for a dissolution of parliament and the holding of another mid-term election.

In contrast to the situation when Girija Prasad Koirala had made a similar request a year previously, there was now an alternative government in waiting. The National Democratic Party and Sadbhavana reacted to the UML move by registering support for the no-confidence motion and agreeing to join a coalition under Sher Bahadur Deuba, the leader of the Congress Party in parliament. Nevertheless, after a round of consultations as before, the king agreed on 13 June to the holding of fresh elections and these were scheduled for 23 November. Again as had happened the previous year, the opposition parties appealed to the Supreme Court, and there were street protests. The latter were curtailed when violence erupted during a strike organised by the Nepal Students Federation on 19 June.

The budget promulgated by royal ordinance on 11 July 1995 was geared to the forthcoming election. Development spending was boosted by almost 40% compared with the revised estimates for 1994/95 and the projected deficit increased from 12.9 to 15.7 billion rupees. Provision was made for increased food subsidies and for pensions to the over-75s, taxes were reduced generally, including the abolition of the wealth tax, and the amount received by each village development committee under the Build Your Village Yourself programme was increased to 500,000 rupees.

Tension continued between C.P. Mainali and the 'majority' faction, who had recently obliged him to disband BYVY monitoring committees packed with his own supporters. This culminated in his dismissal from the government on 14 July. In a statement published the following day, Mainali claimed that he had not been told of the decision until he heard the news on the radio. He condemned 'totalitarian elements' within the leadership and called for the setting up of a 'parallel central committee'. A split was, however, averted at a central committee meeting on 27-28 July. C.P. agreed to withdraw his charges against the leadership and

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52 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 26/5/1995; *Spotlight*, 2/6/1995.

provide a written acknowledgement of his errors and, in return, he was appointed head of the party's Intellectuals and Investigation Dept. while disciplinary action was dropped against all who promised to abide by party decisions in the future. This agreement, in which C.P.'s brother R.K. Mainali had played a mediating role, again disappointed some of his followers, some of whom had clashed with supporters of the 'majority' faction outside party headquarters during the meeting. It probably reflected a realisation that forming a splinter party would only result in his own political marginalisation.

On 14 August the helicopter carrying Man Mohan Adhikari and other senior officials back to Kathmandu after a visit to flood-affected areas crash-landed in western Nepal. Although not seriously injured, he was still in hospital when on 28 August 1995 the Supreme Court announced its decision (by 8 votes to 3) that the dissolution of the House of Representatives had been unconstitutional. They ruled that clause 53(4) of the constitution, allowing the prime minister to recommend a dissolution, could not be invoked when the process of summoning a special session of parliament under article 53(3) was already underway, and that it was wrong to dissolve the house when there was a clear possibility of forming an alternative government. They also rejected the government's argument that it was impossible to form a new government under clause 42(1) of the constitution (a combination of parties representing a majority of the house) if one had already been formed under 42(2) (a government by the party with a plurality in the house). Finally, they criticised the government for issuing an ordinance budget introducing new policies rather than just ensuring the availability of funds for existing programmes.<sup>53</sup>

Man Mohan Adhikari and Madhav Nepal issued statements criticising the verdict but also emphasising that the UML did not want to hang onto power by unfair means. Anger amongst UML activists prompted demonstrations calling for the hanging of Chief Justice Bishwanath Upadhyaya and the party later made an unsuccessful attempt to impeach Upadhyaya and his most senior colleague. There was a symbolic attempt to prevent M.P.s from entering the parliament building on 5 September but opposition M.P.s were bussed in and on 10 September the no-confidence motion tabled by the Congress, NDP and Sadbhavana parties was passed by 107 votes to 88.

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53 A detailed UML critique of the judgement issued on 1 September (*Gorkhapatra* 2/9/1995 (PD 39:36)) argued this was inconsistent with the Court's 1994 quashing of a writ challenging the Congress government's ordinance budget.

## Coalition

On 11 September Sher Bahadur Deuba was appointed prime minister and an interim five-member cabinet was announced two days later. Deuba himself held most of the portfolios, whilst law, justice and parliamentary affairs went to the National Democratic Party's Kamal Thapa, supply to the Sadbhayana leader Gajendra Narayan Singh and industry and local development to two of Deuba's Congress colleagues. The postponement of other ministerial appointments was seen as a device to avoid dissension before the government had to face a vote of confidence in the house. This was done successfully on 18 September, the coalition again receiving the support of 107 M.P.s. Deuba, who had been unanimously elected head of the parliamentary Congress party after the 1994 election, now had to govern whilst balancing the interests of three parties and also those of the factions within his own party. It was to prove a hard task but one which arose naturally from political divisions in the country. Voting patterns since 1990 suggested that both Congress and the UML could each count on the continuing support of around 30% of the electorate but that remaining voters would either switch between the major parties or opt for one of the smaller ones. In that situation future politics were often likely to be the politics of coalition: Nepal's politicians would have to try to build up through bargaining and negotiation the consensus between different factions which the Panchayat system had vainly sought to impose from the top.

# CHAPTER 5

## THE ROOTS OF DEMOCRACY: VALUES AND PARTIES

### Old and New

Both in 1950/1 and in 1990, the aspirations for democracy in Nepal can readily be seen simply as a response to outside influence. Nepalese living outside the country, and then also those remaining within it, were increasingly exposed to new concepts originating in the West: the idea of democracy itself, and concepts of equality, individual freedom, pluralism and so on. This process has been frequently analysed and discussed, and its earliest stages are thoroughly treated in P.R. Uprety's monograph.<sup>1</sup> However, important as this outside influence was, the reception of new ideas depended to a large extent on how they fitted into a frame of reference already provided by Nepalese society. New political values are normally most readily accepted when they appear to expand and enhance older ones. Knowing this, would-be reformers may sometimes stretch the evidence to discover parallels between their preferred innovations and traditional ways of doing things, but some parallels are indeed genuine ones.

Demands for equality and for political participation represented a radical challenge to the old order in Nepal when considering society as a whole. However, Nepalese were already familiar with such concepts inside smaller units, normally based on real or fictive kinship. These could be an extended family, or, in some cases, members of the same clan, ethnic group or caste living in the same neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> One (staunchly anti-

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<sup>1</sup> P.R. Uprety, *Political Awakening in Nepal - the Search for a New Identity*, New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The distinction between caste (*jat*) and ethnic group (*jati*) is made by educated Nepalis but many speakers still use *jat* indiscriminately for both. See the discussions by several of the contributors to Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka & Whelpton, *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), particularly N.J. Allen, 'Hinduization, the Experience of the Thulung Rai'. A caste is best regarded as a set of lineages accepting each other's equal ritual status, and hierarchical relations between castes are frequently contested ones: the appearance of a single, agreed hierarchy is normally the result of state regulation of the system or of accepting a particular Brahmanic viewpoint as definitive (see Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.)

communist!) Newar highlighted this situation when he remarked that a traditional, multi-generational Newar family operated on communist principles, as property is managed jointly and resources allocated to individuals on the basis of need. Kinship structure does in itself impose restrictions on individuals, for members of pre-industrial societies are generally controlled by their own relatives even if not by the state,<sup>3</sup> and there are marked inequalities based on age and on gender. However, these have normally been less resented than the inequalities of power and wealth between one descent group and another. Nepalese, like South Asians generally, are very much aware of this contrast between the relatively egalitarian world of a kinship circle and the much less friendly world outside it. The use of kinship terms such as *dajyu* (elder brother) or *bahini* (younger sister) to address strangers represents one attempt to bridge the gap between the two spheres symbolically. New ideologies advocating equality in society seemed to many to hold out the promise of bridging the gap for real.

It was the response to new, foreign influences and the longing for the harmony of an idealised family life that brought Kedar Man Byathit into political activism in the late 1930s. As with so many other Nepalese, it was also the Indian example that had the most immediate effect. 'In India at that time,' he recalled, 'Mahatma Gandhi was leading a major struggle against British rule. We were inspired by this. We were also inspired by what we read about Lenin's revolution in Russia and there was of course the French Revolution which inspired all this, and all over the world things were changing. All this inspired us towards democratic struggle.... I imagined a society where everybody could share each other's pain and joy. If you have a nail in your foot, I want to share in your suffering. This was the society I wanted, a society where the members carried each other's burdens and helped with each other's problems, just like a family.'<sup>4</sup>

This link between modern egalitarianism, in particular socialism or communism, and one element of traditionalism can be paralleled even in societies where the central role of kinship in social organisation had become just a historical memory. A left-wing advocate of Scottish nationalism appealed directly to it in 1920: 'The communism of the clans must be re-established on a modern basis.... The country must have but one clan, as it were.... We can safely say, then: backward to communism

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3 Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994, p.8

4 Interview with Kedar Man Byathit, Kathmandu, 31/3/1988.

and forward to communism.<sup>5</sup> The writer gave an unduly rosy picture both of Scotland's past and of the potentialities of 20th century communism, but the ideal could be an attractive one, and even more so in a society like Nepal's. Little wonder, then, that the Nepali Congress manifesto for the 1959 election gave as the party's long-term goal a socialism in which the whole country would be 'like one family'.

The attraction of new ideas was also enhanced by the element in traditional religion which stressed solidarity and unity of feeling between all people. Hinduism in Nepal is, of course, intimately linked with the dominance of 'higher' over 'lower' castes, but there are still many passages in the Hindu scriptures that can be interpreted as proclaiming the brotherhood of human beings in general: the masthead of the government's principal newspaper, the *Gorkhapatra*, still today carries a Vedic prayer for universal welfare. Buddhism, like all other religions, has in practice often been used to legitimise a highly inegalitarian social order and caste has played an important role in traditional Newar Buddhism,<sup>6</sup> but the 'universalist' aspect is more central to Buddhist than to Hindu theory. For this reason, and because Buddhism has not enjoyed the state patronage afforded to Hinduism, it has been more easily married with radical social and political ideas. In the 1820s, a pioneer scholar of Nepalese Buddhism, Brian Hodgson, then a junior official at the British Residency in Kathmandu, was presented with a text by a Buddhist author ridiculing the notion of caste superiority. He published an English translation, also noting that a Brahman who had been helping him interpret it gave up in disgust when he realised the nature of the contents.<sup>7</sup>

Nepalese leftists with a Buddhist background have made full use of the radical potentiality of their religion. In the mid-1970s, a journal published by a communist faction carried an article asserting that the future of both Maoism and Buddhism in Nepal could only be assured by a synthesis between the two. The faction concerned subsequently split, with one group denouncing 'Bodhisattva Maoism', but more moderate claims for common ground continue to be voiced.<sup>8</sup> Whilst such arguments may

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5 John Maclean, *A Scottish Workers' Republic*, quoted in Jack and Adam Lively (eds.), *Democracy in Britain: a Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p.224.

6 A full account of the practical functioning of the system is provided in David Gellner, *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

7 Brian Hodgson, 'A Disputation respecting Caste by a Buddhist', in *Essays on the Language, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*, London: Trubner, 1874, Part 1, p.126-133.

8 'Ashok', 'Nepalko Sandarbhma Buddha ra Mao' (Buddha and Mao in the Nepalese Context), *Buddha Pravaha*, vol.1, no.1, 1975, quoted in Bhim Rawal, *Nepalma*

appear paradoxical in view of Karl Marx's own views on religion, the quasi-religious nature of Marxism itself has often been commented on. Marx's characterisation of the proletariat as a class 'which can...redeem itself only through the total redemption of humanity' would strike a natural chord with a follower of any religion promising eternal salvation.<sup>9</sup>

Democracy in the sense of political pluralism, rather than economic egalitarianism, is perhaps less easy to see as a natural development of some aspects of traditionalism. Nevertheless there are parallels here, too. Traditional Nepal was used to arbitrary rule by *hukum* (the king's peremptory command) but it was also used to large areas of social life remaining outside state control. Taxes had to be paid and the basic rules of the caste system observed but otherwise a high degree of autonomy remained and this enabled a multiplicity of castes and ethnic groups to maintain their own separate languages and customs whilst acknowledging the formal superiority of their high-caste Hindu rulers. There was thus a potential conflict between tradition and any strongly centralising state, whether a modernising monarchy as in Europe's 18th century 'Age of Absolutism' or the 'democratic centralism' which was part of the legacy of the French Revolution. There was, in contrast, some common ground between the old order and a democracy stressing diversity and the rights of minorities, just as the highly pluralist American constitution, with 'dual government' by Congress and the presidency, reflects an older European order with a balance between monarchy and local interests.<sup>10</sup>

Traditional pluralism operated not only in the hill villages where most of the population lived, but also in the Kathmandu Valley itself, where state authority was at its strongest, whether wielded by the Newar kingdoms before 1768 or the conquerors from Gorkha after that date. In the Newar period, there was in practice a fluctuating balance of power between the king and the city nobility,<sup>11</sup> but there was some recognition that, though the king had formal precedence, each 'estate' of the realm must have its claims taken into account. When Ranjit Malla of Bhaktapur also became king of Patan in 1762 he issued a decree that, if either the king, nobility or people committed an injustice, the other two should act

*Samyabadi Andolan: Udbhav ra Vikas*, Kathmandu: Pairavi Prakashan, 2047 V.S. (1980/81), p.71.

- 9 Karl Marx, Introduction to *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, quoted in Antony Flew, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, 2nd. ed., London: Thames and Hudson, 1989.
- 10 Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1968, p.98-108.
- 11 C.f. Luciano Petech, *Medieval History of Nepal*, 2nd. ed., Rome: ISMEO, 1984, p.188-93.



as a check against it.<sup>12</sup> This practice was paralleled under the Shah dynasty, with the king's counsellors (*bharadars*) able collectively to impose some restraints on the monarchy. The system was seen in action in 1842, when King Rajendra was compelled to agree to curb the wild behaviour of the Crown Prince and to recognise the rights of Queen Rajyalakshmi.<sup>13</sup> The dominance established by the Rana family after 1846 reduced the importance of the *bharadari* but since 1951, ideological needs have led Nepalese scholars to emphasise 'democratic' aspects of the old order: apologists for the monarchy wished to contrast the 'dark night' of Rana rule with enlightened Shah rule before and after it, whilst both nationalists and Newar activists were in search of a glorious past. But whether fully justified or not, belief in indigenous democratic traditions made the ground more fertile for democratic influences from elsewhere both in 1950 and in 1990. And in 1990 there were many more Nepalese able to see in new ideas a possible answer to old longings.

### Social Change and Ideology

The average westerner was unaware of this complex interaction of tradition and modernity in Nepalese society and so, as the crowds poured out into the streets of Kathmandu in spring 1990, the picture that many still had of Nepal as a remote, isolated Himalayan kingdom was abruptly changed. This potent picture had been created and maintained for many years by tourists and journalists and even by some foreign scholars and aid-workers with longer experience of the country. These westerners wanted to believe in Nepal as a society of peace-loving people living in one of the most stable societies in the world. It was true that poverty was part of this picture - but it was a gentle, persevering poverty - not a condition which would lead to violence and upheaval. Furthermore, poverty and hardship were often linked in westerners' minds with religion and an inner (and coveted) spiritual equilibrium derived from Hinduism and Buddhism.

Anthropologically speaking, the main factor of social stability in Nepal was reckoned to be the caste system. The Thakuris, Chetris and Brahmans stood at the apex of an elaborate and intricate social system

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12 Pushparaj Chalise, *Nepalko Purano Itihas ra Sabhyata*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2053 V.S. (1978-9), p.409. The text of the decree (published in Nepali translation, *ib.* p.691) provides for the nobility (*bharadar*) and people (*duniyam*) to 'petition' (*binti garnu*) the king and for the king to 'deliberate' (*bichar garnu*) with either of the other two.

13 John Whelpton, *Priests, Soldiers and Kings: Nepalese Politics and The Rise of Jang Bahadur Rana*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1991, p.19-20 & 116-20.

which kept any possible conflicts at bay. In such a controlled society a political revolution in the traditional sense of the word was simply unthinkable and, as a result, what happened in 1990 came to many as a shock.

The stereotype many had entertained did, indeed, have some validity in parts of rural Nepal, though even here it was an over-simplification. In the more politically conscious areas, above all in the towns, it was grossly inaccurate, as the 1979 disturbances had already shown. For those familiar with urban Nepalese society the revolution may have come as a surprise, but not as a shock. Forty years had passed since Nepal had first opened its borders to the outside world and in that time Nepalese society had changed drastically. Just a few kilometres from Kathmandu the mountain villagers appeared to live in a timeless medieval era, but the country had, in fact, undergone a profound social revolution. Old social constraints had gone and ordinary Nepalese now had new horizons and new demands. They were also increasingly aware that these demands could not be met by an unyielding political system ruled by an absolute monarch. Therefore, while the timing and extent of the revolution were unforeseen it had already been clear for several years that some kind of political change would have to come. Under the Panchayat facade forces and ideas had gradually developed which eventually undermined the whole regime. In effect, two factors were at work: the long cumulative growth of discontent within Nepal itself and the sweeping democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 which provided the catalyst for such radical change.

The Panchayat regime had many faces. It was usually criticised on account of the limits it imposed on Nepalese society and personal and political freedom were in fact substantially restricted. On the other hand there were other aspects of Panchayat policy. The Panchayat government's avowed goal was sweeping social and economic change and, although it failed to achieve economic 'take-off', it did engineer profound changes in Nepalese society.

The most obvious and far-reaching of these changes was the dramatic expansion of education. In 1942 the literacy rate in Nepal was only 0.7%. By the late 80s it had reached close to 40%.<sup>14</sup> During that same period the population of Nepal had leapt from 8m to 20m and yet schooling had more than kept pace with this colossal increase.

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14 See above, Table 2.5, p.96.

**TABLE 5.1: PRIMARY EDUCATION, 1951-1992**

	1951	1961	1970	1985	1992
No. of schools	321	4,001	7,256	11,869	19,498
Enrolment (in '000)	9	182	449	1,812	3,034

Sources: R.K. Joshi, 'Education and Polity: a Historical Perspective', *Education and Development 1989-90*, Kathmandu: CERID, 1990, p.133; T.B. Manandhar, 'Educational Development, Population and Literacy', in *Population Monograph of Nepal*, Kathmandu: CBS, 1995, p.358, Table 1A.

While education had been a priority with the pre-Panchayat governments of the 1950s, an increased effort to boost and guide its expansion had been made with the National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971. As crown prince, Birendra had been personally involved in this project, which was a central part of the Panchayat regime's development strategy. Schools were brought under government control and the use of Nepali as the medium of instruction was made compulsory, despite the fact that in Nepal, as in India, better-off parents preferred private, English-medium education. A standard, national curriculum was introduced, including subjects relating to national culture and history. The aim of this was to further integration between Nepalese belonging to different communities and different social classes. The Plan also sought to tackle a problem common throughout the developing world: the production of too many students with an arts-orientated education irrelevant to the country's practical needs. Instead there was to be an emphasis on vocational education and selection for tertiary education was to be more rigorous.

Some of the NESP's objectives were admirable in theory and had already been foreshadowed in the 1955 report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in its actual implementation, the NESP proved a failure. The government lacked the capacity to manage the whole education system effectively, and the state take-over often had the effect of making local communities feel the

<sup>15</sup> *Education in Nepal*, Kathmandu: College of Education, 1956. The NESP is set out in Ministry of Education, *The National Education System Plan for 1971-76*, Kathmandu, 1971 and is discussed in detail in Dharam Vir, *Education and Polity in Nepal*, New Delhi, Northern Book Centre, 1988. The impact of NESP on one Gurung village primary school is described in Tod A. Ragsdale, *Once a Hermit Kingdom: Ethnicity, Education and National Integration in Nepal*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1989.

schools were no longer their own. There was particular resistance amongst students to the changes in higher education which were seen as blocking their chances of upwards social mobility; the scheme was derided as *shiksha niyojana* (education limitation) rather than *shiksha yojana* (education plan).<sup>16</sup> The abolition of the new university entrance exams was one of the demands of the student agitation in 1979 and by 1981 almost all of the 1971 structure had been dismantled.

The NESP did, however, have one positive result: an explosion in the numbers of children receiving a primary education. Between 1974 and 1980 the average annual increase in enrolment was 16.2%.<sup>17</sup> While critics pointed out that this growth was often quantitative rather than qualitative, the fact remains that by 1990 two-fifths of the Nepalese population were able to read and write and, of course, the figure for urban areas was very much higher than that average. The restriction of literacy to a small elite is often seen as a major reason for the very low degree of mass political participation in agrarian societies and the linked expansion of towns and of literacy in the 17th and 18th century helps explain the pressures building up for democratisation in western Europe.<sup>18</sup> A similar transformation was now occurring in Nepal.

The contradiction between encouraging education while at the same time constraining political activity became evident to many Nepalese intellectuals during the 1980s. A young Nepalese engineer said, just a year before the revolution: 'If I were a Panchayat politician I would be worried about the expansion of education. If our leaders want to maintain the Panchayat system they should immediately shut down all institutions of education.' It is unlikely that senior figures within the Panchayat system were unaware of the danger but any attempt to slow down educational expansion would have been politically impossible. They could only hope to use the lesser educated section of the population as a bulwark against the intelligentsia, as had effectively been done in the 1980 referendum, and to contain political discontent amongst the educated by expanding economic opportunities. Their failure on the latter score doomed the system, as Mohammad Mohsin, a key Panchayat ideologue, later acknowledged.<sup>19</sup>

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16 The word *niyojana* is used to translate 'planning' in the Nepali phrase for 'Family Planning'.

17 Manandhar, *op. cit.*, p.360, Table 2.

18 This is a major theme in Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost - Further Explored*, London: Routledge, 1983 (3rd. ed.).

19 Interview with Mohammad Mohsin, Kathmandu, 1/12/1990.

Yet the field of education was not the only area in which the Panchayat government was digging its own grave. At a deeper level the government's repeated emphasis on economic development and growth also led to its undoing. The Ranas, who had ruled Nepal for over a century, whilst realising they needed to promote a rise in living standards, were wary of the threat economic development might pose to their own interests: a member of the family writing a report on industrial development in the 1930s cautioned that 'we cannot possibly take steps which in any way may be subversive of our autocratic authority.'<sup>20</sup> The Panchayat regime, in contrast, had to portray itself as totally committed to *bikas* (development) as King Mahendra had justified his 1960 takeover as providing Nepal a better opportunity for progress than would have been possible under the parliamentary system.

Foreign aid began to flow freely into the country and this new money totally changed the outlook of Nepal's urban population. Nepalese began to adopt the values of western consumerism and Kathmandu began to take on the trappings of a modern, western city. Coke signs appeared, TVs were installed and cars took to the streets. Though this materialism only affected a tiny percentage of the population, it was precisely this percentage which was close to the centre of Nepalese life. These were the people who had the dynamism and ability to translate their aspirations and ambitions into action. These people found that their material lifestyle had been improved, but might still feel themselves disadvantaged in comparison with others who had done even better. Moreover, they still lacked the civil liberties and political freedoms often associated with a modern society. Increased materialism, therefore, led only to increased political discontent. A professor at the university in Kathmandu said, just before the revolution: 'This regime which has been in power for the last 25 years, what good has it done anyone really? It has not prevented the privileged few from leading a fully western consumer lifestyle in the name of modernisation, but it takes away the rights of people to say "No" to it.'

Material change and social change thus fed one another. The caste system had been the strongest social institution in Nepal but in 1963 the new Legal Code had outlawed discrimination on grounds of caste. Of course, as a deeply ingrained tradition sanctioned by religious values, the caste system could not be done away with overnight but the legal change accelerated a slow erosion of traditional values evident in Nepal from 1951

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<sup>20</sup> Singha Shamsher J.B. Rana. Report on the Addas and the Industrial Development of Nepal', quoted in Daniel Edwards, 'Patrimonial and Bureaucratic Administration in Nepal: Historical Change and Weberian Theory', Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1977, p.233.

onwards. By the end of the 80s this process had amounted to nothing less than a social revolution. Even in remoter areas the public deference once shown by members of lower castes to higher ones through language and gesture had largely disappeared.<sup>21</sup> The old rigid rules of pollution and purification between castes were now laughed at by many people. Inter-caste marriage was still unusual, but no longer unheard of. Similarly, the concept of love-marriage had gained noticeable acceptance - although the large majority of young Nepalese were still married off by their families. In addition, a small, but growing group of educated women were now filling important jobs in the towns.

This social revolution, which had reached furthest in Kathmandu, also had its negative sides. Ethical, moral and religious values which had previously held people in check now began to lose their grip. Traditionally none of the higher castes who wore the sacred thread - Brahmans, Thakuris and Chetris - were allowed to touch alcohol, and *matwali* ('alcohol drinkers') was used as a distinguishing term for the hill 'tribes' immediately below them in the state-sanctioned hierarchy. In Rana days, economically privileged Thakuris and Chetris had already begun to ignore the ban but the Brahmans had adhered strictly to it. Now Brahmans suffered from a growing alcohol problem. The growing social malaise was perhaps summed up by young Nepalese stealing idols from temples in the Kathmandu Valley and selling them to tourists from the West.

What seemed to be happening was that the urban, modernised and educated elite were in search of new values and a new identity. Naturally ideas had flowed into Nepal along with aid and the ideologies of India, China and the West caught the imagination of the newly-educated segment of the population, just as they had done with the much smaller educated elite of fifty years before. Nepal had emerged from isolation with the end of Rana rule but enough of the old ways still remained for Nepalese to look on newer ideals with a sense of excitement. Nepalese intellectuals experienced an intoxicating freedom in trying to pick and choose an ideology which would fit their own way of thinking and, for reasons already explained, this was often likely to be Marxist or communist ideas in some form or other.

The way for the 1990 revolution had been paved by accelerating change in the previous decade. The 1980 referendum had been a watershed. Since the Panchayat government had defeated the multi-party camp by

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21 Kamal R. Adhikary, 'The Fruits of Panchayat Development', *Himalayan Research Bulletin*, vol.15, no.2, 1995, whilst stressing the failure to improve villagers' economic conditions, describes a radical change in social inter-action between Brahmans and Magars in the mid-western hills, where he did fieldwork in the late 1980s.

only a narrow margin, Nepal had become a different country in many respects. The 1980s saw yuppies ascendant in the west. Closer to home, Rajiv Gandhi's economic reforms in India created a 200m-strong middle class. It was during this same decade that modernisation in Nepal was felt most strongly. A liberal *pancha* pointed out that 300,000 new people were given a proper education in Nepal during these ten years: enough to offset the margin by which the electorate had rejected the multi-party system in 1980. The ranks of the educated young were swelling and their sympathies did not lie with the Panchayat regime.

This group was now so large that the government was no longer able to placate it. In the past educated people were automatically given jobs in government service as a means of neutralising them politically. People now outstripped jobs in this, the fastest growing bureaucracy in the world. Fears grew that there might be large scale white collar unemployment as in India. Fortunately, for the time being at any rate, many who did not find government jobs did find employment in the growing private and semi-private sector which had increased due to foreign aid. A particular feature of the period was a mushrooming in the numbers of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) which offered their services to overseas agencies for survey and project management tasks.<sup>22</sup>

This professional middle class were a totally new feature of Nepalese society and formed the backbone of the democracy movement in 1990. Ironically, it was this group who had largely enjoyed the limited measures of freedom brought about by the third amendment to the Constitution after the referendum in 1980.

The early 80s also saw other freedoms develop. There was a considerable expansion of the independent, Nepali-language press and in particular the launching of weekly newspapers such as *Nepali Awaj* and *Saptahik Bimarsa*. These newspapers, as well as many of the older ones criticised the Panchayat system openly. This criticism stopped short of the king, but the royal family did not escape reproof between the lines.<sup>23</sup> In dealing with this phenomenon the government seemed to swing unpredictably between suppression and tolerance. They intermittently banned newspapers, confiscated issues and arrested journalists and editors. These attempts caused personal hardship but they seemed to be half-heartedly applied. Newspapers were generally left to write what they wanted, and when a newspaper was banned it would mysteriously resurrect itself just a few days later under a different name. The end result may well

22 See the discussion in Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, 'Vestiges and Visions: Cultural Change in the Process of Nation-Building in Nepal', in Gellner *et al.*, *op. cit.*

23 See above, p.99.

have been to enhance rather than inhibit the flow of information (and rumours!) to the public. As one analyst put it, 'state repression aimed not at the control of private minds but at the public expression of the private.'<sup>24</sup>

Another feature of the new freedoms of the 80s was the continued semi-tolerance of the political parties. Though the political parties were officially banned after the 1980 referendum they were allowed to carry on with their activities within certain limits. As long as they did not organise demonstrations or public meetings it was, more or less, business as usual.

These small measures of freedom came nowhere near appeasing the new educated middle class of Nepal. Rather, the taste of freedom encouraged people to press for more. Gradually the lack of full political freedom and civil liberties became unbearable, and, combined with disgust at corruption in public life and the gap between 'development' rhetoric and performance, it finally galvanised the population into action.

In addition, new form of politics began to emerge towards the end of the 80s. Previously political opposition had been the monopoly of the banned political parties. Very quickly, however, a number of formal and informal organisations sprang up through which the new class of intellectuals expressed their dissatisfaction with their lot and the government. Most prominent amongst these were the human rights organisations. The best known was the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal (HURON) led by Rishikesh Shah. HURON was founded in 1988 and quickly attracted a large following among the urban educated population. HURON worked closely with Amnesty International and other human rights organisations. It tried patiently to expose all the human rights abuses committed by the Panchayat government. A similar organisation, but more closely identified with the political left, was FOPHUR (Forum for the Protection of Human Rights), which had been established in Birganj in 1984 and with which Mathura Prasad Shrestha was associated.<sup>25</sup> Though the government imposed some limits on these new organisations, they were largely left to their own devices.

More important to the final outcome of the 1990 revolution were the professional organisations and intellectual forums which now sprang up. The professional organisations such as the medical, engineering and university associations were vital to the democratic struggle throughout the revolution. The intellectual forums, for their part, acted as a more

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24 Richard Burghart, 'The Political Culture of Panchayat Democracy', Michael Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994, p.8.

25 INSEC, *Human Rights Yearbook 1992*, Kathmandu, 1993, p.14.



subtle force in the period just before the revolution. These forums were composed largely of the same people and appeared and disappeared with bewildering rapidity. One central member of this group explained: 'The same group of people were active in the name of different forums. Sometimes organising meetings for religious unity, sometimes organising forums to propagate democratic norms and concepts of equity among the people and against exploitation and many other things. So we did not form specific formal groups. Just for some time, for example, we formed the forum for religious unity. If it continued many people would be arrested, so we just formed another forum and the whole thing was very fluid.' Because of this there was a large number of people already politically active even before the democracy movement officially began.

It was partly due to pressure from these groups and from the new intelligentsia that the Nepali Congress and communists joined together in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. Unity among the opposition parties, which had proved so elusive in the past, now came about as a direct result of the demands of Nepal's new middle class.

Former home minister Nirajan Thapa pointed to one of the main failings of the Panchayat system when he stated: 'We failed to forge links with the intellectuals and obtain their sympathy.' The reason why this new class could not be accommodated within the Panchayat system has its roots in the main principles and ideology of the whole Panchayat enterprise.

When King Mahendra staged his royal coup in 1960 he argued that Nepal was not yet mature enough for multi-party democracy. Instead, he claimed, he would introduce a new form of democracy more suited to the needs of Nepal. While King Mahendra's coup came as a shock to the politicised elite of the time there was very little actual opposition. A small group of party leaders, either in prison or in exile, did protest, but the large bulk of educated people, many of whom had been party members, quickly accommodated themselves to the new regime. One reason for this was quite obvious: amongst those who had felt themselves excluded from power under Congress rule, there was the simple hope that they would stand a better chance under royal patronage. Members of smaller political parties had been able to play a larger role before 1959 because Mahendra saw them as a useful counterweight to Congress. These people had been disappointed, as had King Mahendra himself, when the general election gave Congress an absolute majority in parliament.<sup>26</sup> But

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<sup>26</sup> Ishwar Baral, 'Shifting Elite Loyalties', in S.D. Chauhan (ed.), *Nepal - an Assertive Monarchy*, New Delhi: Chetana, 1977. makes a scathing attack on opportunism of this kind

there were also more complex factors at work and to understand why the transition from democracy to royal dictatorship went so smoothly, one has to understand the Nepalese society of that time.

In 1960 Nepal's modern history was only ten years old. The educated segment of the population was still pitifully minuscule. The vast majority of the population lived in remote villages and did not even know that a change of government had taken place -and when they did, they hardly grasped its importance. It is also true that while many intellectuals did not approve of the king's action, they were not strongly against it. There were several reasons for this. The 1950s had been an unstable period of successive governments racked by rifts and squabbles. Even after the Nepali Congress came to power in 1959 with B.P. Koirala as prime minister the problem of law and order in the country remained. Educated Nepalese had come to realise that democracy could not solve all their economic, social and political problems at once. Not a few lost faith in democracy and began to believe that it was not best suited to Nepalese society. As one ex-pancha, involved in the Panchayat system from the beginning stated: 'Democracy actually seemed to strengthen the traditional power structure. It did not transform and change the fundamental social structure. Most of the political parties were managed and headed by upper caste people and they were only interested in giving lip service to the political aspect of democracy: liberty, fraternity, and equality. There were very few and only half-hearted attempts to transform those idioms and concepts into economic change to make an effort to alleviate poverty.'<sup>27</sup>

There was also the uncomfortable feeling that the whole of the Nepalese democratic system had been imported from India and was being managed by India. All party leaders had connections with Nepal's southern neighbour and many Nepalese believed that political decisions affecting their country were made in Delhi rather than in Kathmandu.

This was the mood in Nepal when King Mahendra introduced the Panchayat system. Thus the Panchayat emphasis on economic development, nationalism and gradual democratisation based on village councils or Panchayats, appealed to many who had been discontented with the previous system.

Yet the Panchayat system was not unique. There seemed to be an international movement amongst the post-colonial Third World countries against multi-party democracy as a palliative to their ills. A former Panchayat Prime Minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa explained: 'Throughout Asia and other Third World countries there was a wave. Two types of

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27 Interview with Mohammad Mohsin. Kathmandu, 1/12/1990.

democracy were introduced. One, guided democracy: the second, basic democracy. The name was different, but it was the same thing. The Panchayat system was also such a system introduced as a result of this international movement.' The twin goals of these systems were, as he went on to say: first, build democracy slowly and gradually: secondly, promote economic development. These new systems were introduced by way of a solution to a general problem which Third World countries had to deal with. 'The problem was that these countries had to catch up with a process of democratisation and economic development which in the west had taken a hundred, two hundred, even up to a thousand years. There was the industrial revolution in Britain and the political revolution in France... and so many other revolutions. We had to catch up with all these dramatic changes in a very short time. The global, economic and political scenario was changing so fast that we felt we had no time left. Our question, then, was how to synchronise all these changes and make them happen simultaneously.'

As Surya Bahadur Thapa and Mohammad Mohsin's comments indicated, supporters of the Panchayat system did have the rudiments of a coherent ideology with which to justify itself. Interestingly enough, it had some elements in common with the case made by some communists for dispensing with 'bourgeois' parliamentarianism. In a backward, highly inequalitarian society, free competition for votes, like free competition in economic activity, is likely to perpetuate existing inequalities and, unless the privileged see immediate advantages for themselves in measure which promote all-round economic growth, it may also perpetuate existing backwardness. A theoretical solution is for a political elite to supervise the process of change, overriding the vested interests of the wealthy in the interests of the poor and of economic progress. This, essentially, was the programme of classic, Leninist communist parties, though the issue was normally confused by their rhetoric stressing rule 'by', rather than 'for' the 'People' or 'proletariat'. Such attempts, however, have not been restricted to communists. The American military administration in Japan and the Kuomintang forces who crossed to Taiwan from the Chinese mainland were both able to impose radical land reform on local traditional elites whose opposition would have been very difficult for unaided local reformers to overcome.<sup>28</sup>

For radical reformers not backed by military resources from outside their own society, the task is harder. They must secure the consent of the

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28 c.f. Huntington, *op. cit.*, p.386, cited in B.P. Shrestha, *Nepalese Economy in Retrospect and Prospect*, Kathmandu: Himalayan Booksellers, 1990, p.125.

governed by an appropriate mix of conciliation and coercion and they must maintain their own discipline and cohesion without becoming merely a club for the perpetuation of their own privileges. The history of the Soviet Union is among examples suggesting that, in the long run, this is an impossible assignment though it can sometimes be managed for a limited period, with some positive results but also at a cost.

In Nepal's case, the Panchayat system initially had some hope of winning consent with its promise of an evolutionary process leading towards democracy. The system's supporters agreed with King Mahendra that the people of Nepal in the 1960s had not reached a level where they were able to cope with a multi-party democracy. They did believe, however, that with the growth of education and the passing of time, full democracy would be introduced into Nepal. Gradual political reforms, therefore, were seen as the main characteristic of the Panchayat system. A former *pancha* minister described how a kind of political evolution had taken place within the Panchayat system during its thirty year history. 'The initial Panchayat was nothing. Members of the parliament, the Rastriya Panchayat, were not elected, they were chosen - and they were only asked to raise their hands. When a representative was to be elected, a high administrative official would come to the local district panchayat and ask who they wanted to be their member in parliament. The first person who raised his hand would automatically become the representative. The Panchayat system started that way, but within its lifetime it changed a great deal. And when the third constitutional amendment came it was very clear that it was heading towards the multi-party system.'<sup>29</sup>

There was, however, a growing frustration among liberal minded *panchas* that the government had deliberately tried to check this process of reform. Even more, there was a feeling that the system's proclaimed objectives were not being met, though some claimed that things had started off on the right foot. A former member of the Rastriya Panchayat said: 'In 1970 the vested interests set in. Up till then there was some enthusiasm - building a new system, trying to set up a new structure of democracy.'<sup>30</sup>

The main practical difference between the Panchayat system and parliamentary democracy was the principle of "partylessness". Political parties were banned - supposedly to strengthen unity and national identity. However, "partylessness" could not prevent factions and groups developing within the system and as no other political identity was legal.

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29 Interview with Keshar Bahadur Bista, Kathmandu, 3/9/1990.

30 Interview with Mohammad Mohsin, Kathmandu, 1/12/1990.

elections were often fought on a communal basis. The ever widening gap between liberal and conservative *panchas* did, in effect, give rise to two or more political parties within the no-party system. From early on, prominent *panchas* came out as critics of the system and sometimes found themselves in prison. This *de facto* pluralism within the non-party system perfectly illustrates the wide gap between ideals and realities within the Panchayat regime: it was beset with the factionalism it was supposed to do away with, yet did not allow full political freedom. What was worse, after thirty years of Panchayat rule, general economic conditions in the country had deteriorated. The poor became visibly poorer and the middle class, whilst making some small gains, could see the palace circle amassing wealth on a vast scale. Corruption was widespread and reached to the palace itself.

It is natural to ask whether King Mahendra's Panchayat vision was ever genuinely intended. It was obviously in Mahendra's interests to do away with the Nepali Congress government in 1960 in order to maintain his own position. Thus the Panchayat system might be seen only as a tool to retain power for the King and his immediate circle. Royal self-interest may have been the most important factor, but monarchs may be genuine in their desire for reform even if not successful in implementing it. It should also be remembered that Panchayat luminaries such as Pashupati S.J.B. Rana and Mohammad Mohsin were themselves amongst the first to voice concern at the system's failure to uplift non-elite groups in Nepalese society.<sup>31</sup>

Undoubtedly, however, the bulk of those active in the system did not demonstrate the conviction and determination necessary in an effective modernising elite. Mohsin himself put the blame on the system's over-reliance on 'the dynamic leadership of the king' and on the palace secretariat instead of developing a body of dedicated cadres as he had hoped could be done through the Back to the Village Campaign machinery.<sup>32</sup> As it was, the *panchas* did not in any way transcend the forces of traditional Nepal but continued to pursue power, status and wealth for themselves and their families on time-honoured lines.

Mohsin insisted that the Panchayat system 'was not either fascist or authoritarian - it was an inefficient system'. Its weakness was graphically demonstrated in the collapse of the National Education System Plan in

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31 See, for example, the introduction to Pashupati S.J.B. Rana & Kamal Prakash Malla (eds.), *Nepal in Perspective*, Kathmandu: CEDA, 1973, and Pashupati S.J.B. Rana & Mohammad Mohsin, *A Study Report on the Pattern of Emerging Leadership in Panchayats*, Kathmandu: Home Panchayat Ministry, 1967.

32 Interview with Mohammad Mohsin, Kathmandu, 1/12/1990.

1979-80 and in the working of the education system generally. An American researcher witnessed this scene at a High School in Pokhara during the 1974 School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams:

...examinees from various parts of western Nepal sat shoulder to shoulder in the examination rooms passing answers they received through open windows from youths outside. These well-wishers approached the examination rooms through a cordon of disinterested police supposedly stationed around the school to protect the integrity of the examination. Nervous and embarrassed proctors tried vainly to maintain an appearance of propriety despite the obvious and open cheating. A teacher informant later explained that Gurkha drop-outs from the Indian army had sat as private candidates in the 1966 examination with knives and grenades, and since then no one had dared bother the students from certain schools.<sup>33</sup>

This is a particularly dramatic instance, but anyone who worked in a Nepalese educational institution at this time will have witnessed the *de facto* official toleration of cheating. The Panchayat system could be highly authoritarian in certain circumstances, but for most foreigners in Nepal, as in so many other Third World countries, it was state weakness rather than state repression which formed the dominant image.

The Nepalese urban middle class were aware of this ineffectiveness but had come to accept it as a fact of life. It was the rampant corruption within the Panchayat system and even within the palace itself that caused the educated population to become deeply disillusioned with the political system.

In addition, the aching lack of political freedom made many turn their attention to other systems, ideologies and possibilities. Many knew that better forms of democracy existed elsewhere in the world. Unlike their parents and grandparents, the newly educated class listened to radio and watched TV and even travelled. What the media disclosed were reports of how people in other parts of the world had revolted against the regimes oppressing them.

The 1986 revolution in the Philippines made a strong impression on many in Nepal. The uprising against Marcos gave many in Nepal heart that something similar might come about. The student protests in China and the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 also challenged Nepalese, even though these events were hardly covered by the Nepalese media owing to the country's delicate relations with China. What finally

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33 Ragsdale, *op. cit.*, p.170.

galvanised the Nepalese people into action, however, were the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989. The revolution in Romania struck home particularly. All these revolutions appeared to be striving for the same goals: the introduction of multi-party democracy, political freedom, and a respect for human rights. These were the same stated objectives of the democracy movement in Nepal. The Nepali Congress and communist parties had already before the Movement began agreed a minimum common programme which included these points. But what did these vague political goals actually mean in a society like Nepal where democracy had flourished for only 16 months thirty years before?

A teacher at the university in Kathmandu said a year before the revolution: 'It doesn't matter what you call it as long as there are basic freedoms and human rights.' People may have wanted democracy because to them it spelled freedom, but they did not know what kind of democracy they wanted. A natural model would have been the Indian political system - but India was too close and Nepalese were only too well aware of India's political shortcomings. Moderates, especially within the Nepali Congress, favoured the British political system. The British combination of constitutional monarchy with parliamentary democracy firmly set in tradition seemed like a suitable system for Nepal to adopt.

Democracy, most importantly, meant freedom but 'freedom' could be interpreted in different ways. Some Nepalese understood it in the sense of individual freedom - one person's right to differ from those around him or her - and were attracted by the ideology of liberalism and pluralism. But these were not developed notions within Nepalese society, even though the plurality of communities and cultures was an everyday reality. More to the point, they were hard ideas to translate into political slogans which would appeal to ordinary citizens. As has already been seen, traditional values made many more receptive to the idea of freedom as something collectively enjoyed. In this they had something in common with many Chinese dissidents, for whom 'democracy' (*minzhu*) had connotations of citizens feeling and acting in unison rather than individuals each finding their own way.<sup>34</sup> This was one of the reasons why, even though the 1990 upsurge was partly precipitated by the overthrow of communist regimes elsewhere, many of the protestors were motivated by communist or socialist ideas.

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34 J.W. Esherick & J.N. Wasserstrom, 'Acting Out Democracy', in J.N. Wasserstrom & Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.) *Popular Protest & Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1992, p.30-31.

## Nepalese Leftism

The attraction of communism or socialism had been an important element in Nepalese intellectual life since 1951. Both ideologies appealed to the demands in Nepalese society for equality. Equality itself was not a new concept but the possibility of its application to society as a whole was an intoxicating, even an explosive, political idea for people living in a society still in the shadow of caste hierarchy and feudal structures. When asked to define the nature of Marxism, communists and socialists alike from the Maoist radicals to the Nepali Congress Party all declared firmly that it was 'the new idea of equality'.

Marxism had been part of the intellectual atmosphere imbibed by the Nepalese intellectuals who had spent time in India towards the end of the Rana period and taken part in the Indian nationalist movement against British rule. B.P. Koirala was for a time a probationary member of the Indian Communist Party but found communism insufficiently humanist and was particularly repelled by Stalin's treatment of Trotsky.<sup>35</sup> He retained a belief in 'historical materialism' - the Marxist account of the development of human society - and subsequently joined the Congress Socialist Party, a 'ginger-group' within the main Indian Congress. After 1951, he used his position within the Nepali Congress to ensure a party commitment to socialism. He was not in power long enough to show what that commitment would amount to in practice, but did initiate an important land reform measure.<sup>36</sup> Koirala's political philosophy, expressed through his fluent pen was criticised by many as over-theoretical and later Congress leaders, who lacked his charisma and status as an ideologue, often appeared less enthusiastic, but 'socialism' has always remained party policy. Although, following an international trend, Congress no longer advocates large-scale public ownership, the emphasis on equality remains. Interviewed just before the *janandolan* began, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai explained the party's goal of 'democratic socialism' as 'equal opportunities for all.'<sup>37</sup>

Unlike Congress, the communists did not have a taste of real political power in Nepal until the 1990 revolution. They remained a marginal force during the 1950s but were able to build up some support during the Panchayat years. This was partly because the royal regime was for a long time more concerned with the threat from Congress and so, for example, school teachers were more likely to be dismissed on account of

35 Kiran Mishra, *B P Koirala - Life and Times*, New Delhi: Wishwa Prakashan, 1994, p.12-13.

36 See above, chap.2, p.14-15.

37 Interview ith Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Kathmandu, 1/2/1990.



Congress sympathies than leftist ones and many junior government officers had received their education from teachers with communist leanings.<sup>38</sup>

The identification of the Nepali Congress as the main enemy also made it natural for the regime to seek an accommodation with the communists. The Panchayat system's emphasis on nationalism and in particular the rejection of Indian hegemony also chimed with the sentiments of many communists. On this basis, the regime was successful to a certain degree with men like Keshar Jang Rayamajhi and Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya. Rayamajhi's 'accommodationist' wing of the pre-1960 Communist Party was prepared to work closely with the government and he himself accepted appointment to the Raj Sabha (State Council). His orientation as a communist remained pro-Soviet and his conciliatory line partly reflected the policy of co-operation with non-communist Third World regimes which Moscow was promoting. Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, in contrast, had become disillusioned with Soviet policy before 1960 and his gravitation towards the palace was purely a personal decision. Both men had been involved since the early days of the Nepalese communist movement and both became active *panchas*.

In the early years of the Panchayat system many other communists did feel that the best way to realise their goals was to work within the system. Although the Panchayat system stressed class co-ordination in place of class struggle, the communists themselves advocated an initial alliance between different classes under the leadership of the proletariat (meaning, of course, the communists themselves). There were even certain practical features of the Panchayat system which appealed to them. One was the launching of the Back to the Village National Campaign ('BVNC') in 1967, inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China. It involved sending young academics, students and other members of the elite out into the countryside to understand the problems facing the villages. Unlike its Chinese prototype, the campaign did not actually damage the economy, but it had no positive results, largely due to the critical weakness identified by Mohammad Mohsin: a lack of dedicated cadres to implement it. As part of the National Education Plan introduced in 1971, students about to embark on graduate level studies were actually required to spend a year in a rural community and to produce a 'Village

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38 Fred Gaige and John Stolz, 'The 1991 Elections in Nepal', in M.D. Dharamdasani (ed.), *Democratic Nepal*, Varanasi: Shalimar, 1992, p.58-9.

Study', but for most participants BVNC activities amounted to no more than a 'jolly picnic in the countryside.'<sup>39</sup>

Communist involvement in the BVNC came to an end when the campaign became corrupt and was seen as yet another tool for the political puppeteers to control local elections. Many disillusioned activists turned to those communist factions which operated underground since Mahendra's coup in 1960 and which regarded Rayamajhi and his followers as traitors. After the 1979 student movement and the referendum, disillusionment with Raymajhi's 'palace communism' became widespread within his own faction. A group under Vishnu Prasad Manandhar broke away in 1981 and in 1983 Rayamajhi was expelled from his own organisation when the General Secretary, K.R.Varma, gained a majority on the party's National Council.

By 1990 the communists who had never been prepared to compromise with the Panchayat system were themselves divided into many different factions. Splits were sometimes the result of purely personal factors but generally reflected differing attitudes towards the international situation after the Sino-Soviet split and, even more importantly, the line to be taken towards the Panchayat system and towards Congress. Pushpa Lal Shrestha had throughout favoured an immediate alliance with Congress and, although ideologically closer to Beijing than to Moscow, he was not prepared to take sides against the Soviet Union. Bhaktapur's Narayan Man Bijukche (Comrade Rohit) was unhappy on both scores and their differences were widened when Pushpa Lal endorsed the Soviet line of support for India's military intervention in East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). A formal split between the two men came in 1975-6<sup>40</sup>.

Other members of the pre-1960 central committee were also organising. Man Mohan Adhikari, who had been released from prison early in 1969, worked with a group based on the united party's old eastern regional committee. Adhikari played a cautious game, issuing a statement soon after his release promising co-operation with the king, but was re-arrested in 1970 for opposition activities. He was again released in 1971 and tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the 'Jhapeli' group from the policy of 'elimination' of class enemies they had adopted earlier the same year. The Jhapelis went their own way and, after their abandonment of terrorism, emerged in 1978 as the Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist-Leninist).

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39 I.D. Mishra, *Understanding a Political System: with Reference to Nepal*, Varanasi: Vijayshree Enterprises, 1985, p.48, cited in T. Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.47.

40 Interview with Narayan Man Bijukche, Bhaktapur, 19/8/1990 (JW).

Adhikari had for a while been able to work with other members of the old central committee, including Mohan Bikram Singh, in what was hopefully called 'The Central Nucleus', but they were unable to achieve a reunion with Pushpa Lal's group. Adhikari and Singh soon developed differences. Exactly what points were at issue is disputed, but the problem may have been Adhikari's unwillingness to adopt a totally Maoist and anti-Soviet line and his opposition to Mohan Bikram's old demand that the communists press for a constituent assembly.<sup>41</sup> In 1974, Mohan Bikram set up his own '4th. Convention' group, which was probably the most effective of the communist organisations by the time of the referendum and enjoyed a reputation for uncompromising radicalism.

Singh's group was soon, in turn, beset by factionalism. In 1983 there was a formal split between followers of Nirmal Lama, who retained the '4th. Convention' label, and those still loyal to Mohan Bikram, who became known as the Communist Party of Nepal(Masal). Tension between the two sides erupted into violence at a village in Siraha district and one of Singh's supporters was killed.<sup>42</sup> In 1985 there was a second split: Singh was expelled from his own party and had to organise a new central committee. He continued to use the name 'Masal', whilst his opponents became known as 'Mashal'.<sup>43</sup>

Man Mohan Adhikari had aligned with the Maoists in 1971 in condemning India's intervention in East Pakistan/Bangladesh,<sup>44</sup> but in general he tried to steer a middle line between Russia and China. This gave him a link with Pushpa Lal's group, which, after Pushpa Lal's own death in 1978 was led by his widow, Sahana Pradhan. In 1987, the two factions finally merged to form the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist).

This summary has included only the principal communist factions and it is proof of the inherent attraction of communist ideology for many in Nepal that a movement so riven with division could still command considerable support. In fact, by 1990, the fissive tendency had been partly checked and the communist movement was stronger than ever before. More significant than the combining of the Sahana Pradhan and Man Mohan Adhikari groups, was the growth of the Marxist-Leninists, who had absorbed a number of other splinter groups<sup>45</sup> and, on the eve of

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41 See Rawal, *op. cit.*, p.74.

42 Rawal, *op. cit.*, p.78.

43 See above, p.119, n.6.

44 L.R.Baral, *Oppositional Politics in Nepal*, New Delhi: Abhinav. 1977, p.89.

45 Rawal, *op. cit.*, 83-4; Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist-Leninist), *Chautho Rastriyu Mahadiveshandwara Parit Dastavejharu - Rajnitik Prativedan* (Documents Approved

the movement, had networks of activists in 50 of the country's 75 districts.<sup>46</sup> They had also followed the example of some of the smaller communist factions by combining an 'entryist' approach to Panchayat politics with their older strategy of 'underground' organisation. In 1989 the Marxist-Leninists (or 'Malehs' as they were popularly known) held their own '4th Convention' (not to be confused with the one organised by Mohan Bikram Singh in 1974!) at which they paved the way for co-operation with more moderate Leftist groups by formally abandoning Maoism and also indicated their willingness to combine with Congress in a joint struggle against the Panchayat system.<sup>47</sup>

The need for greater unity was very clear to communists themselves. Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the killings during the Tianamen square protests and the revolutions in Eastern Europe had all left their mark. The communists desperately needed to defend an ideology which was manifestly dying elsewhere in the world and show that it was still politically viable for Nepal. At the same time there was a realisation that much could be achieved if only the communists could unite and overcome their past differences.

Except for small, Soviet-aligned groups, the communist factions all agreed on the goal of 'new people's democracy' (*naulo janbad*). Based on ideas developed by Mao Tse-Tung during the Second World War, this would involve not the classical Marxist 'dictatorship of the proletariat' but an alliance led by the proletariat and including peasantry, petit-bourgeoisie and 'national capitalists', viz. entrepreneurs seeking to set up productive enterprises within Nepal rather than 'comparador capitalists' who merely acted as agents for foreign capital.<sup>48</sup> The different communist groups also agreed that conventional multi-party democracy could be a stage on the road to achieving *naulo janbad*. The disagreement was over how to travel along the road and on how pluralist the political institutions of *naulo janbad* would be.

Far-left groups, in particular the present and former followers of Mohan Bikram Singh, believed that even under a parliamentary democracy

by the 4th. National Convention - Political Report), Kathmandu, 2046 V.S. (1989/90), p.56.

46 Radha Krishna Mainali, interviewed in Dhanendra Purush Dhakal, *Jan-Andolan: 2046 V.S.* (People's Movement: 1990), Lalitpur: Bhupendra Purush Dhakal, 2049 V.S. (1992/3), p.50; by the time of the 1991 merger with the CPN (Marxist) the number had grown to around 60 (Khatri, *op. cit.*, p.26).

47 Interview with Jeevraj Ashrit, CPN(M-L) Central Committee member, Kathmandu, 23/8/1990.

48 For a fuller discussion, see Whelpton, 'The General Elections of May 1991', *op. cit.* p.55-56.

the transition to *naulo janbad* could not be made by constitutional means. Some such communists did later contest elections in 1991 and 1994, but they did so to 'expose' the inadequacy of the parliamentary system, not to seek a parliamentary majority. In line with this attitude, representatives of these groups still supported the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' for countries where, unlike Nepal, there was a large industrial working class. They continued to speak text-book Marxism and viewed Marxist ideology as a waterproof system of thought which could come up with answers to any question. They explained away the events in Eastern Europe merely as a popular uprising against revisionism. Baburam Bhattarai, who coordinated the alliance of far-Left groups (the United National People's Movement) during the *janandolan* and himself turned to armed revolt in 1996, had this to say in 1990 about the collapse of so many communist regimes: 'Communism has not failed. Some experiments have failed, but that does not mean that the whole science itself has failed. A machine based on scientific theories may sometimes fail, and even break down, but that does not mean the whole science has broken down. Similarly, Marxism is a social science, a tool to change society, to change the whole of history. That a few experiments in Eastern Europe and China failed does not mean that failure is forever.'<sup>49</sup>

Baburam Bhattarai went on to explain why a full revolution was essential. 'In a parliamentary democracy,' he said, 'you don't redistribute the property, you just advocate free competition. Free competition among unequals is naturally in favour of the more powerful ones. When we perform this new democratic revolution we will immediately redistribute property. We will confiscate all landed property and redistribute the wealth among the poor. The political institutions may be the same. We believe in political freedom. We will have elections, but the elections so far have only been dominated by money.'

These radical communists were also distinguished from the rest in two other main ways. First, they were unwilling to compromise on their demand for the abolition of the monarchy and the calling of a constituent assembly to draft a republican constitution. Baburam Bhattarai was one of those who believed that the *janandolan* should have been continued till that objective was achieved and the election manifesto of the United People's Front, which included Bhattarai's followers with Mashal and the 4th. Convention, reiterated the demand for a republic.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, though they were willing to countenance a system in which 'popular forces' (but

49 Interview with Baburam Bhattarai, Kathmandu, 8/9/1990.

50 Rishikesh Shaha (personal communication); United People's Front, Nepal, *Chunav Ghoshana Patra* (Election Manifesto), Kathmandu, 1991, p.8.

not 'capitalists' or 'exploiters') would have freedom to set up different parties, they still seemed attached to the idea of a one-party state.<sup>51</sup>

The Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), also had a background of extremism but it had steadily distanced itself from its origins in the Naxalite-inspired Jhapeli movement. One of the party members explained: 'Our extreme thinking and violent movement had to change. The situation of the country was no longer favourable to an armed revolution, so we changed ourselves and reformed our thinking. Previously we emphasised armed revolt. We attacked landowners and police and snatched their guns. But now we left the idea of an armed revolution and started mass politics. We still agitated for the implementation of the Land Reform Act and the protection of tillers' rights. But we now also turned our eyes to exploited workers in the cities as well as demanding increases in wages.'

He explained this radical change of policy as follows: 'The fundamental theory of Marxism is dialectical materialism. This is a moveable process. To every action there is a reaction. This makes society go ahead. There are many types of thinking in society and also in the party. If such a dialectical situation does not exist in the party, how should it survive and how should it at all be able to rule the country? The true and actual thinking of Marxism is therefore the same as democracy.'

Political exercise should be encouraged. Every party should have inner party democracy. Only then can we give democracy to the people. And this will help us to finally reach a stage where we can find communism.'

Before the *janandolan* the Marxist-Leninists did not directly endorse competition between different parties and may well have envisaged a continuing inter-party united front, rather like the the alliance which still exists in China between the Chinese Communist Party and a number of nominally independent parties. However, the principle of competitive elections was formally approved in November 1990 and was included both in the joint programme issued when the Marxist-Leninists merged with the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist) in January 1991 and in the party's election manifesto.<sup>52</sup> By summer 1991 party leaders were arguing

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51 Lilamani Pokhrel, a member of the 4th. Convention and subsequently of the Unity Centre/United People's Front), interviewed in *Nepalipatra*, 14/6/1991; Nirmal Lama (4th. Convention leader) condemned as a retro-grade step the setting-up of multi-party systems in socialist countries (*Saptahik Bimarsha*, 15/6/1994).

52 CPN(M-L), *Vartaman Paristhiti ra Partiko Dayitwa* (The Present Situation and the Party's Responsibility), Kathmandu, 1990; UML, *Nepal Kamunist Parti (Ekakrit Marksbadhi ra Leninbadhi) ko Ghoshana-patra* (Manifesto of the Communist Party of

on the lines of the previous paragraph that competition between parties exemplified the Marxist dialectic and that the one-party system adopted by communists in other countries had actually been a perversion of Marxism.<sup>53</sup>

In October 1991, the commitment to pluralism was seemingly underlined when the Central Committee of the UML adopted 'multi-party people's democracy' (*bahudaliya janbad*) in place of *naulo janbad* as the party's official line. This decision was ratified at the party's convention in 1993. The change was resisted by the 'soft-line' or 'minority' group under Chandra Prakash Mainali, but this did not in fact mean that he and his followers were opposed in principle to competitive politics. They believed, however, that as democracy was not fully consolidated in Nepal, it was preferable in present circumstances for parties to co-operate. This co-operation should in the first place be with the other communist parties but could extend in principle to the more progressive elements in Congress. This tactical stance was underpinned by an analysis of Nepalese society that stressed the growth of capitalist elements within the 'semi-colonial and semi-feudal' society communist theoreticians had originally diagnosed, and which saw Congress as partly representative of those elements and therefore a more 'progressive' force than the 'feudal' National Democratic Party.<sup>54</sup>

Both before and after the official switch from *naulo janbad* to *bahudaliya janbad*, statements by party spokesmen suggested that the right to organise freely would not be extended to 'reactionaries'.<sup>55</sup> However, the eagerness the party showed after the 1994 election to seek an arrangement with the *ex-panchas* of the National Democratic Party showed that such considerations would not effect their choice of friends and enemies in day-to-day politics.

The tactical acceptance of the monarchy which the Marxist-Leninists displayed at the time of the *janandolan* also showed signs of evolving into long-term accommodation. Republicanism was reaffirmed as an official party goal at the party's 1993 convention but in December 1995 the

Nepal (Unified Marxist and Leninist), Kathmandu, 1991; UML, *Nepal Kamyunist Parti (Ekakrit Marksbadī ra Leninbadī) ko Chunav Ghoshana Patra* (Election Manifesto of the UML), Kathmandu, 1991.

53 Modnath Prashrit, *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 21/6/1991; Madan Bhandari, interviewed in *Nepalipatra*, 19/7/1991.

54 This analysis of C.P. Mainali's position is based mainly on that of Mahesh Mani Dixit ('EMALEko Saidhantik Sangharsh ra Mainaliharumathi Karbahi', *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 8/10/1993 and '"Madan Bhandari Bichar"ko Postmartam', *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 20/5/1994) and on a short conversation with C.P. Mainali himself in August 1995.

55 Whelpton, 'The General Elections...', p.56-7.

general secretary, Madhav Nepal, implied in an interview that this line had 'already been contradicted.'<sup>56</sup>

The flexibility already displayed by the Marxist-Leninists made possible both the formation of the United Left Front on the eve of the *janandolan* and also the subsequent merger with the Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist). The leaders of this group, Man Mohan Adhikari and Sahana Pradhan, belonged to the old generation of communists who had founded the party in 1949 but they had been even more willing than the younger generation to change their views. Sahana Pradhan, who had led the Front, explained how it had been possible to unite on a platform which seemed more social democratic than communist: 'We all said "let's agree for the time being" - and we all agreed with constitutional monarchy. The world is changing and we shouldn't be dogmatic. In Russia there is *glasnost*; in China, modernisation. All these things are happening, so at this time we, too should think in different ways. We decided it was better to join hands with the Congress and say we believe in constitutional monarchy and the multi-party system. For these things we believe that peaceful methods should be used. We no longer believe in violence.' Sahana Pradhan went on to comment: 'We believe in this now. It's tactical now. We said republicanism might come later. First let us bring democracy. Let us have some fundamental rights. Unless we have some political freedom how can we go any further and take the next step?'

By the eve of the *janandolan* the majority of communists were willing to accept multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy as their immediate goals. As the trends since then have borne out, it was possible that this stance would evolve into a long-term accommodation. Could these people still call themselves communists? Populist leader and 'independent communist' Padma Ratna Tuladhar claimed that he still believed that communism was the only possible solution to Nepal's many problems. 'Marx said that society should give according to the individual's needs and demand according to their ability. This should be the guiding principle of our government.' He readily accepted that no country had yet reached this utopian position, though he believed stoutly that that was no reason to give up communist principles.

Others also stressed a commitment to basic moral principles rather than specific political formulae. Radha Krishna Mainali, a leading member of the Marxist-Leninist Party, said: 'Communism works for the sake of the poor and lower class people. Gandhi said that the poor person is the first person. This first person is the basis of society. These people

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56 *Spotlight*, 12/1/1996.



are discriminated against and Marxism is essential for their betterment. The real goal of Marxism is to help the poor and the labourers. It is in this sense that we are communists, and we accept that the joy of the poor cannot be brought by a single man. Therefore we embrace communist ideology.'

This expressed the core content of Nepalese communist ideology: liberation for the poor, downtrodden and exploited in society. Transforming the lot of the poor was what the communist leaders gave as their main motivation. Narayan Man Bijukche, Comrade Rohit, said this of his first encounter with Marxism: 'Then I got to know about the new principle for Marxism to serve the poor.'

Communism appealed to Nepalese idealists who wished to do something good for society. It had the advantage of seeming new and radical yet at the same time chiming with the old Hindu and Buddhist principles of compassion, charity and equality which also appealed strongly to them. Veteran communist leader Tulsi Lal Amatya explained what he thought communism actually was. 'What is communism?' he asked. 'In our ancient days our Rishis (Hindu Sages) used to recite a *shloka* (verse) which was like this: "Let us live together, let us eat together, let us work together, let our intellect grow and let us not be envious of each other. Let us live together like friends as a family." And this conception is what we mean by communism. What we oppose in capitalism is that in those countries, however rich they may be, a section of the people always suffers. Only the upper class of the people enjoy the whole fruit of civilisation. What we think is: let nobody suffer under the system because they are all human beings - they must also have a right to enjoy life, but this can only be done with the communists, through communism.'<sup>57</sup>

In making this connection, communists were able to counter the common charge that under a communist regime people would be deprived of religious freedom, but for many communists it was not just a question of tactical convenience: they did feel a strong link between their political beliefs and the traditional ones they had been brought up with. 'Real Hinduism,' continued Amatya, 'is communism itself. In ancient times Hindu Rishis talked of equality for everybody. They thought that every human must be happy. I even think that communist philosophy lagged behind the philosophy of Hinduism. Think of Krishna's philosophy, for instance, or that represented by the Upanishads. Krishna does not say that there is any god above the humans. God is in the heart of all people and in the heart of the poor. What is the difference between us and the poor

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57 Interview with Tulsi Lal Amatya, Kathmandu, 28/4/1990.

boy suffering on the road? We are all one. This philosophy teaches us that I must feel your problem as my own problem. Hinduism and communism can go together completely with identical views. But today Hindu philosophy doesn't talk about these things. They are suppressing the poor and exploiting the workers.'

In Nepal, Buddhism was not compromised by official patronage and it was even easier to link with radical ideas than was communism. A sample survey of public opinion taken immediately after the 1991 election showed 54% of Buddhists identifying themselves with the UML.<sup>58</sup> The Kathmandu Valley was not included in the sample, but Newar Buddhist supporters of the communists there were convinced of the compatibility of the two belief systems.<sup>59</sup> Comrade Rohit, whose communist group dominated the politics of Bhaktapur, spoke in terms reminiscent of the 'Boddhisattva Maoism' of the 1970s: 'The aim of religion has always been to reform society. Therefore religion went through various developments in the different ages or *yugs*. Every time a new injustice became rampant in society a new religion would come forward. In this way socialism came to Europe in the form of a religion when economic exploitation of the workers had reached its most extreme, just as Buddhism came to India in the age of slavery to give the oppressed liberation.

Communist idealists emphasised the importance of creating a Nepalese form of communism. 'The same ideals were preached both by religion and communism. It was because of this that we slowly became communist and tried to develop a Nepalese form of communism.' Another radical communist also said: 'First we thought we could have a revolution along the lines of the Soviet revolution. Then we thought we wanted a Maoist peasants' revolution, but now we have reached the conclusion that we need our own Nepalese form of transition to communism.'

An attempt to formulate a specifically Nepalese form of communism granted the freedom to alter unwanted aspects of communism found in other countries. 'Communism contains quite a lot of impractical elements. That is why in Eastern Europe the people have tried to purify socialism through the recent revolutions. Consequently, there must always be a multi-party system in socialist countries. The people must be allowed to encourage the progress of science and technology and there must be freedom.'

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58 Ole Borre, Sushil R. Panday, Chitra K. Tiwari, *Nepalese Political Behaviour*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994, p.69.

59 See David Gellner, 'Caste, Communalism, and Communism: Newars and the Nepalese State', *op. cit.*

Communism's appeal rested both on its resonance with traditional culture and on the promise of building a radically new society which would transcend the limitations of the old one. The rhetoric of social transformation was, of course, shared with other ideologies, including that of the Panchayat system itself, but communism was perceived as by far the most radical. In an opinion survey conducted in ten of the country's 75 districts immediately after polling day in May 1991, 55% of voters associated the UML with 'new ideas' and only 6% linked it with 'tradition'. In contrast, Congress was seen as a party of tradition by 30%, of new ideas by 20% and as 'in between' by 23%.<sup>60</sup> Both UML radicals and Congress moderates had, however, to reckon with obstacles to change which were still strong within Nepalese society.

### The Burden of the Past

It must be remembered that the modern history of Nepal dates back only forty years. Speaking about the development of his country, the distinguished geographer and ex-minister, Harka Gurung, pointed out: 'Political change in Nepal will be slow because we are not talking about a long history. Changes have to be measured only after 1951 and the fall of the Ranas.'<sup>61</sup>

There had been far-reaching changes since 1951 but much of the old order remained. Although a large educated class had indisputably appeared the basic Hindu-Brahmin attitude towards education had remained unchanged. A university degree still conferred a certain social status instead of indicating a basic level of expertise. Degrees often served as entrance tickets to secure positions within the government bureaucracy and not as a preparation for any kind of useful work.<sup>62</sup> While the caste system had been formally abolished, the old social system still remained. The coincidence between caste status and economic ranking was not complete - for example, a Brahman family might be tenants of a wealthier Gurung one - but there was a rough correlation. Moreover, at the centre of power Nepal's elite were still composed largely of Brahmans and Chetris with a number of high caste Newars thrown in for good measure. Hill

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60 Borre *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.52. The sample was reasonably representative of the whole country in terms of region and ethnicity but was biased towards male, educated voters.

61 Interview with Harka Bahadur Gurung, Kathmandu, May 1989.

62 This argument is advanced forcefully by Dor Bahadur Bista, *Fatalism and Development*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1991; see also Horace B. & Mary J. Reed, *Nepal in Transition: Educational Innovation*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968.

Brahmans (*bahun*s), Chetris and Newars are together about 36% of the population of Nepal but in 1989 they accounted for 87% of civil servants of secretary rank (i.e. those acting as permanent heads of government departments).<sup>63</sup> The same groups have normally provided over 60% of the nation's legislators, whether elected under the Panchayat or multi-party system, and their predominance actually reached its highest ever level (67.7%) in the 1994 general election.<sup>64</sup>

Because the Brahmans were especially predominant amongst the intellectuals and in the leadership of the political parties, they come in for particularly heavy criticism, even from members of other 'elite' groups. One Newar, a senior government official, shrugged and said: 'Whether they are *panchas*, members of the Nepali Congress Party, or communists, they are all Brahmans.' The high percentage of Brahmans in powerful positions is probably more a result of their traditional emphasis on education rather than of outright caste favouritism. It is nevertheless true that the new economic and political upper class of Nepal is overwhelmingly drawn from the old upper castes, whilst caste ideology itself still has influence in the more backward areas.

In the classical Hindu outlook, which had been central to Nepalese society before 1951, the caste system was linked logically with a cyclical world view. Hinduism stated that every individual was born into the caste which he or she deserved. An individual could only hope for better in the next life. Underlying this view was a cyclical or repetitive understanding of history. The person died only to be reborn, but this pattern was also traced in society which went through different cycles. First came *satya yug* or the "age of truth". From this golden age life slowly deteriorated through four different ages until the last, *kali yug* or the "age of darkness". After the age of darkness was completed the whole process began over again. From this perspective there was no room for a modern understanding of development based as it is on a linear or progressive view of history. Neither could the individual change history. Fate was all encompassing and human beings could do little to improve their lot.

Fatalism is not, of course, unique to Hinduism and similar attitudes are widely typical of agrarian societies. In Nepal, as in other places, the causation did and does work both ways: traditional social structures encourage a certain set of attitudes and the attitudes themselves help preserve those social structures. Considerable controversy was therefore

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63 Ananta Raj Poudyal, 'Nepal: Ethnicity in Democracy', in L.R. Baral (ed.), *South Asia - Democracy and the Road Ahead*, Kathmandu: Polsan, 1992, p.141.

64 Harka Gurung, 'Representing an Ethnic Mosaic', *Himal*, May-June 1992, p.20 and (for 1994) *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions*, Chap. VII.

caused when a leading Nepalese academic, Dor Bahadur Bista, published a book arguing for the determining role of attitudes: he put the major blame for the failure of 'development' on traditional values, which he termed *bahunbad* ('Brahminism').<sup>65</sup> Even Bista's critics would, however, agree that traditional ways of thinking are one of the obstacles to any programme of reform.

As important as the Hindu view world in its influence on modern Nepalese politics was the political legacy of Nepal's traditional political system and in particular of the Rana regime (1846-1951). Until 1951, the government of Nepal had been the personal rule of the maharaja. The maharaja sat at the centre of an intricate web of rituals and ploys in order to maintain his autocratic rule. Government servants were transferred constantly from post to post so that they could not build up their own power base. The Nepalese political elite (*bharadari*) had to continually demonstrate their loyalty to the maharaja or they would fall out of grace. The institutionalised method of doing this was called *chakari* ('paying court') and principally involved constant personal attendance upon the person whose patronage one enjoyed or hoped to enjoy. The system survived the Rana regime and was embedded in the new government bureaucracy. The old idea of personal rule remained alive and well in government departments where even minor decisions would be referred up the long hierarchy to ministerial level. In the post-Rana years, powerful politicians, such as the prime minister and members of the cabinet or Palace secretaries would have crowds of individuals gathering outside their homes before office hours. These people turned up and waited to ask personal favours or just show submission and loyalty.

Not just the institution of *chakari* but the whole pattern of personalised politics persisted throughout the experiment with a multi-party system in the 1950s.<sup>66</sup> With ideological politics formally outlawed, it naturally continued to flourish during the Panchayat years. It could hardly, therefore, have been expected to disappear with the return to parliamentarianism and it has in fact provided the major dynamic of politics since 1990. Issues like the Tanakpur agreement and the government's privatisation policy might be used as weapons in the struggle, but the internal feuding which brought down the 1991-94 Congress administration was perceived by most observers as a fight for

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65 Bista, *op. cit.* Alexander Macfarlane ('Fatalism and Development in Nepal', in Michael Hutt (ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994) provides a sympathetic review while also summarising critics' arguments.

66 Bhuvan Lal Joshi & Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal*, Berkeley: University of California, 1966.

jobs and patronage. Ganesh Man Singh himself seemed to confirm this when he said in August 1993 that his disagreement with the government was not about fundamental policies but only 'working style'.<sup>67</sup> The argument over *bahudaliya janbad* versus *naulo janbad* in the UML had slightly more ideological conduct - though cadres at village level were not very clear what it was<sup>68</sup> - but again appeared to many primarily a tussle for power between different factions, especially after the clashes in 1995 over appointments to the committee overseeing the party's 'Build Your Village Yourself' programme. The pattern was still clearer in the intermittent negotiations between the UML and the National Democratic Party from 1994 onwards, and in the NDP's own internal tensions. Not surprisingly, therefore, the problem for Sher Bahadur Deuba's Congress-led coalition government was not the difference in ideological outlook between the partners but rather the need to include an ever-increasing number of National Democratic Party members in the Cabinet so that the party would not succumb to a rival bid from the UML.

The primacy of the personal over the ideological also often remained strong at grass-roots level. One village would often vote for a particular candidate simply because another village to which they were hostile was aligned with the candidate's rival.<sup>69</sup> Vote buying could also be significant, as witnessed by an anthropologist doing fieldwork in 1991 in Rasuwa district on the Tibetan border, one of a block of constituencies won by the National Democratic Party (Chand): 'The amount of money offered to villagers by representatives of the successful party was.. in the region of 100 to 150 rupees.... Few villagers expressed much sense that the multi-party elections were different in kind from those held under the panchayat regime. Elections in general were perceived as 'world turned upside-down' occasions when the poor, briefly, could expect to be wined and dined by the powerful. The idea that the festive ritual might change people's normal lives was not entertained.'<sup>70</sup>

The personal factor was clear in four constituencies where Congress Party members, denied the party nomination in 1994, stood against and beat the party's official candidate. On the southern border, in the constituency including Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini, the tradition of the 'local boss' flourished in the person of Mirja Dil Sad Beg, who reportedly admitted to involvement in violence but claimed to have acted as a

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67 Interview with Ganesh Man Singh, Kathmandu, 15/8/94 (JW).

68 Stephen Mikesell, personal communication.

69 Gaige and Stolz, *op. cit.*, p.50.

70 Ben Campbell, 'The Heavy Loads of Tamang Identity', in Gellner *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p.229.

protector of the local community against criminals from India.<sup>71</sup> Elected on the Sadbhavana platform in 1991, by 1993 he was denouncing his party as communalist and claiming to have Congress sympathies. In 1994 he retained his constituency standing as a National Democratic Party candidate.

The evidence of such examples was perhaps reinforced by a September 1994 opinion survey which asked voters in Gorkha, Dang and Siraha districts what factors were important for them in deciding who to vote for in local elections. Fifty-eight percent said they would be influenced by whether the candidate was *aphno manche* ('one of one's own'), i.e. a relative or friend, forty-seven percent would be swayed by caste considerations, forty-five percent by the offer of a development project and only ten percent by party ideology.<sup>72</sup> Actual voting patterns in 1992, when Congress took control of most local government bodies suggests, however, that the prospect of development projects was the most important factor: voters most likely believed that Congressmen would have the best chance of extracting money for local development from a Congress government at the centre. Party labels would, of course, matter more in a general election and this difference was cited by communist activists to explain their poor performance in the 1992 local elections in the Kathmandu Valley;<sup>73</sup> *aphno manche* considerations would still be important, but the chance of an individual voter having a close connection with one of the candidates would be less at constituency than village level.

Another continuity between the Panchayat era and the multi-party system was complaints over corruption, which actually increased rather than lessening after 1990. Proof in particular cases was hard to come by, but there were constant allegations of ministers taking commissions from contractors or improperly steering business to their own family or friends and malpractice was believed to be rife throughout the bureaucracy.

The issue of corruption is a complex one, not only because of problems in obtaining evidence but because in Nepal, as in most traditional societies, behaviour that would now be classified as corrupt was accepted as normal.<sup>74</sup> In Rana Nepal, the maharajas made no

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71 Mirja Dil Sad Beg, interviewed in *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 27/8/1993.

72 SEARCH, *Public Political Opinion Survey in Nepal*, Kathmandu, 1994, p.91. Percentages total to more than 100% as respondents were not restricted to a single option.

73 David Gellner, 'Caste, Communalism, and Communism: Newars and the Nepalese State', in Gellner *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.174-5.

74 Huntington, *op. cit.*, p.60

distinction between the public purse and their private wealth and simply pocketed the surplus national revenue. There was less scope then for the much smaller civil service to divert funds for their own use, but in society generally there was an expectation that those with power used it to help their family and friends and that those needing help from the powerful should provide 'presents'. Such practices in traditional Nepal could be viewed as 'integrative corruption', since it served to 'link people and groups into lasting networks of exchange and shared interests.'<sup>75</sup> Social and political change, the rapid expansion of government activities and the influx of funds from abroad since 1950 have all combined to increase the temptation and opportunity to use public funds for private gain but also to render such activity no longer acceptable in the eyes of those not directly benefitting from it.

Devendra Raj Pandey, finance minister in the interim government, has suggested that one factor increasing corruption in recent years is the individualistic values encouraged by neo-liberal economic policies, which he believes legitimate selfishness. He also blames an imported, 'consumerist' culture. He argues that, in contrast, traditional Hindu values did not foster a climate of corruption because they taught that the community should be put above the individual.<sup>76</sup> 'Consumerism' may deserve some of the blame but, while Hinduism stressed the importance of community, the community involved was frequently a much smaller unit than the nation state.

Like corruption, the patron-client system which permeates Nepalese politics is partly the result of the disproportion between the resources in state hands and the opportunities for advancement elsewhere. This was partly a legacy from the Rana era but was also reinforced by the provision of foreign aid; the latter meant that Nepalese seeking funding had to win the favour of the local representatives of foreign governments or international organisations, just as an earlier generation had sought advancement from the Rana maharaja. Congress in 1991-4 and the UML in 1994-5 appointed their own supporters to positions in the bureaucracy and in state corporations not just to ensure their policies were executed faithfully but because supporters looked to their party for concrete, individual benefits. The system went right down to the lowliest posts: in March 1995 a young man who had got a job as a trolley-bus conductor on

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75 R. Baum (ed.), *Reform and Reaction in Post-Maoist China: the Road to Tiananmen*, London: Routledge, 1990, p.125, cited in Anne Kent, *Between Freedom and Subsistence: China and Human Rights*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.173.

76 Devendra Raj Pandey, 'Combating Corruption', *Spotlight*, 7/4/1995.



the recommendation of a Congress activist was reportedly about to lose it because of the change of government.<sup>77</sup> With demand for employment in the towns far exceeding supply, it was unlikely any political party would forego the opportunity to reward their own supporters.

The politicisation of civil service appointments fed doubts about the administrative machine's ability to hold elections fairly. Just as the Panchayat regime had been accused of vote-rigging in the 1980 referendum, Congress was accused by other parties of malpractice both in the 1992 local elections and in the 1994 mid-term elections. As well as possible official tampering with the polls, it is common knowledge in Nepal that where any party has a strong majority in the area around a polling booth its activists may use their superior numbers to intimidate both election officials and supporters of rival candidates. As with examinations, respect for an abstract standard of fairness takes second place to the question of winning or losing. It should also be noted, however, that international observers pronounced both the 1991 and 1994 elections reasonably fair and free and that abuses are less serious in Nepal than in many developing countries.

The functioning of multi-party democracy has been marked by rampant factionalism within the political parties. The problem is not so much its mere existence, but rather that party structures have seemed too weak to regulate and contain it. This has been particularly obvious in Congress where lack of a clear demarcation between the roles of the party president and the prime minister bred conflict between Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala, and then again between Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba, just as it had between B.P. and M.P. Koirala in 1951-52. There was no such difficulty during the 1959-60 Congress administration when B.P. Koirala combined both roles and both Girija and Sher Bahadur Deuba had acknowledged before their own clash that, in principle, combining the posts of president and parliamentary leader would be the ideal arrangement.<sup>78</sup> As Deuba also pointed out, whether party members would accept such a concentration of power is, of course, a different matter.

Congress problems were compounded by a relative lack of intra-party democracy. The 1960 party constitution, approved when the party had last been in power, allowed for election of the president by the party convention but generally left him with a free hand in running the party and in particular with the right to nominate the central working

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77 *Saptahik Bimarsha*, 17/3/1995.

78 Interviews (JW) with Sher Bahadur Deuba, Kathmandu, 20/8/1995 and Girija Prasad Koirala, Kathmandu, 25/8/1995.

committee. The top-down pattern was reinforced by the party's years as a movement in exile and both Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala had been initially nominated to their positions by B.P. Koirala. In the 1991 general election, the selection of candidates was carried out primarily by the central committee, with less say for local activists than in other parties.<sup>79</sup> Too much reliance on charismatic leadership and too little on strengthening the party's base risks consequences similar to those seen in India, where growing malaise in the political system is often linked to 'institutional decay' particularly marked under Indira Gandhi's highly personalised leadership.<sup>80</sup>

At least in the 1991 election, the UML allowed more say to its local activists in the selection of candidates,<sup>81</sup> but intra-party struggles have put the mechanism linking leadership and cadres under strain. C.P. Mainali's faction have alleged that they may be 'the minority' only because of manipulation of delegate-selection for the party's 1993 convention, which endorsed Madan Bhandari's *bahudaliya janbad* line. The party also has the task of preserving the discipline and cohesion of its cadres, the factor which gives it an advantage over the more loosely organised Congress. In the South Asian context, this aspect of a nominally revolutionary party may make it more capable of carrying out reformist, social democratic policies than an avowedly reformist party and Atul Kohli has argued that this has enabled the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to provide relatively effective government and achieve some alleviation of rural poverty in West Bengal.<sup>82</sup> The situation of the Nepalese party is similar to that of the Indian one, since the constraints upon Nepal as a highly donor-dependent country are hardly less than those on West Bengal as part of the Indian Union. The UML party president, Man Mohan Adhikari, made it clear in a celebrated interview that he has no trouble with the required change of mission: 'We keep [the 'communist' label] because it is a well-known trademark.... In another country we would be social

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79 Ram Kumar Dahal, 'Electoral Campaign: Candidate Selection Process of Political Parties', in POLSAN, *Political Parties and the Parliamentary Process in Nepal*, Kathmandu, 1992, p.105.

80 This argument is developed in detail in Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

81 Dahal, *op. cit.*, p.105. However, Krishna Hachhethu (personal communication) believes that in practice nominations were decided by the *troika* (Singh, Koirala and Bhattarai) for Congress and by a few influential members for the UML.

82 Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: the Politics of Reform*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

democrats.<sup>83</sup> The problem is that for much of the party rank-and-file enthusiasm is still dependent on the original utopian vision and may be lost if realisation of this is to be postponed indefinitely, particularly when the party leadership is also seen locked in endless power struggles.

Another obstacle to the institutionalisation of parliamentary politics has been the persistence after the *janandolan* of what might be termed an 'andolan mentality.' As experience in many other societies confirms, once street agitation has succeeded in removing an authoritarian regime the same methods may be used again by any group aggrieved by the actions of a newly-established, elected government. The 1991 POLSAN opinion survey showed that 66% of those questioned regarded protest marches and demonstrations as an acceptable way of expressing displeasure with government policies while acceptance was 56% for organising a general strike. Both types of activity are within the bounds of legality in a democratic society but in western democracies the percentage of the population actually approving of them is considerably lower.<sup>84</sup> The temptation to take to the streets again was hard for opposition parties to resist, especially since the left, excluded from power after the 1991 election, knew that it had majority support in the Kathmandu Valley, which had decided for the whole country in 1990. By 1994, however, there were signs that enthusiasm for such activity was beginning to wane and much of the protest in July against the dissolution of parliament had a ritualised air to it.

The continued political in-fighting and the failure of democracy to bring improvements in people's everyday lives inevitably brought widespread disillusionment. The 1994 SEARCH opinion survey of Dang, Gorkha and Siraha revealed 46% of respondents believed they had been better-off under the Panchayat system and only 43% considered they were better off now.<sup>85</sup> In Kathmandu one columnist offered 'the epitome of all that's bad about Nepal' as her definition of 'politician' and another described the political parties as 'full of alcoholics, womanizers and school drop-outs.' It seemed a very long way from the heady enthusiasm of 1990.

Yet there were also some signs that the multi-party system was beginning to take root and that, with all their faults, the parties were to some extent playing the role of interest aggregation which political theory assigned to them.

83 *Newsweek*, 9/8/1993.

84 Borre *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.158-9.

85 SEARCH, *op. cit.*, p.21.

First, the rules set down in the 1990 constitution were being successfully operated. Where disputes arose, as over the 1994 dissolution of parliament and the attempted dissolution in 1995, the Supreme Court adjudicated and its decisions were accepted, albeit usually under protest. Suspicions of the Palace's ultimate intentions remained strong in some quarters but Birendra had so far stuck scrupulously to his constitutional role.

Secondly, a relatively stable party system could be emerging. Although factionalism pervaded all parties, full splits were confined to the minor ones. The larger parties - Congress, the UML and the National Democratic Party - could lose a few individual members but electoral self-interest tied the main body together. A streamlined party system was emerging in parliament as the Chand and Thapa factions merged to form a united National Democratic Party and the 1994 election saw the elimination of two small parties. In contrast, there was only a small change (about four percentage points) in the share of the vote that went to Congress and to the UML, suggesting that both parties could count on the steady support of around a third of the electorate. The readiness with which the different parties considered a deal with yesterday's enemy naturally heightened general cynicism about politicians but it also signified that all major political forces in Nepal now had a real stake in the system. Despite 'party ideology' coming so low on the list of factors influencing voters, there were also signs that electors were at least aware of the general stance of the main parties. As already mentioned, respondents to the 1991 POLSAN survey were able to identify the UML as a party of 'new ideas', the two National Democratic Parties as tradition-orientated and Congress as in between.<sup>86</sup> At general elections, voters were obviously expected to be swayed by party programmes, since rival politicians thought it worthwhile to spread inaccurate rumours about those of their opponents: in Rasuwa in 1991 many people simply sold their vote but a story was also passed around that the communists would not allow people over 60 to continue working.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, the basic legitimacy of the system in public eyes is probably more secure than the widespread signs of disillusionment seem to suggest. Cynicism about politicians is common even in the stablest democracies and not incompatible with support for the principle of democracy. Whilst a plurality of respondents in the 1994 survey thought they were worse-off after 1990, 70% of those with secondary education

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86 Borre *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.52.

87 Campbell, *op. cit.*, p.235, fn.23.

thought life was better under democracy and a majority of all voters expected life to be better for their children.<sup>88</sup>

So far, the one real incontrovertible improvement to have flowed from 1990 is the increase in individual freedom: 63% of the respondents in 1994 said they now felt more comfortable when expressing their political views.<sup>89</sup> It is probably the greater value placed on this freedom by those with education which explains their much higher sense of satisfaction with the new order. For the uneducated and the hungry, an improvement in their material conditions is doubtless more important, and even among the educated the appeal of 'democracy' was partly its association with western affluence. Continued economic failure could therefore, as a recent study has suggested, eventually undermine the legitimacy of multi-party democracy,<sup>90</sup> but that would require a substantial section of the Nepalese elite to be convinced that there was an alternative, non-democratic system able to deliver prosperity. Failing that, poverty plus freedom is likely to be preferred to poverty plus authoritarianism.



## CHAPTER 6

# THE FOREIGN FACTOR

### The impact of the outside world

Throughout most of the Rana period, Nepal maintained regular diplomatic relations only with British India and with Tibet. The country had also been required under the terms of a 1792 peace treaty to send a tribute-bearing mission to Beijing every five years, but this obligation lapsed with the 1911 revolution in China. The Treaty of Sagauli concluded with the East India Company in 1816 barred Nepal from employing citizens of any European or American state without the permission of the government of India. In addition, the Nepalese government itself felt that the best chance of preserving its independence lay in barring outsiders from its territory except under special circumstances. There was free movement for Indians into the Terai, where they were welcome to open up land for cultivation, but access to the Kathmandu Valley was strictly controlled. The British had at first pressed Nepal to allow easier access, but later, as they found themselves allied with the more traditionalist forces in South Asia against the rising tide of Indian nationalism, they, too, saw in Nepalese isolationism a welcome barrier against destabilising influences.

This pattern began to shift after the First World War, in which 100,000 Gorkha troops saw service in the Middle East and in Europe. Casualties had been heavy but those who returned now had a knowledge of the outside world, a taste for foreign goods and, for a time, money with which to pay for them. A second Treaty of Sagauli, signed in 1923, recognised Nepal's total independence from British control but also permitted the import of goods from third countries free of Indian customs duties, which resulted in a flood of Japanese imports and a collapse of cloth production and other cottage industries.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig F. Stiller, *Nepal - Growth of a Nation*, Kathmandu: Human Resources Centre, 1993, p.159-60. According to Stiller's account, based principally on British Residency records, an import flood passed through Kathmandu (as required by the 1923 agreement) and then out into the hills. Stephen Mikesell, 'Cotton on the Silk Road', unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988, relying on merchants' records from a market town in the central hills, suggests that local traders brought goods directly from India.

Closer integration into the world economy was followed more slowly by a widening of diplomatic contacts. In 1934 a Nepalese legation was opened in London, underlining the fact that her relations were now directly with the British government and not just the colonial administration in India. However, it was only after the Second World War, in which up to 200,000 Nepalese troops saw service in India and beyond, that the Ranas sought diplomatic relations with other countries. A treaty of friendship and commerce was concluded with the U.S.A. in 1947 and full diplomatic relations established early in 1948. Shortly afterwards, Maharaja Mohan Shamsheer announced Nepal's willingness to establish diplomatic relations with every friendly country and to accept development assistance. In 1949, Mohan attempted to join the United Nations but this was vetoed by the Soviet Union, which argued that Nepal's dependence on British India meant she was not a fully sovereign state.<sup>2</sup>

After the 1951 revolution the pace of change accelerated. diplomatic relations with China and membership of the UN were achieved in 1955. Ties were established with an increasing number of countries, which either established a residential embassy in Kathmandu or chose to have their ambassador in Delhi concurrently accredited to Nepal. The key relationships were those with India, China, the U.S.A. and with Britain and the political implications of these will be discussed separately below.

In terms of direct impact on the lives of ordinary Nepalese, it was probably as providers of foreign aid that these and other countries were most important. Between 1951 and 1995 Nepal received US\$3.7 billion in grants or concessionary loans. This is a higher per capita rate than for any other South Asian state and in 1993/4 the inflow amounted to 6.5% of the country's GDP. Aid has throughout this period financed a large proportion of the government's development budget.<sup>3</sup> This assistance has not brought about the hoped-for self-sustaining rise in living standards for the whole population, but it has had a profound effect on certain sectors of the economy and is important as a source of employment opportunities, particularly for the more highly educated. Although funds have also gone

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2 Rose, *op. cit.*, p.180. The Soviet action was a tactical move as part of a wider dispute with western countries on representation within the General Assembly.

3 Bikas Joshi, 'Foreign Aid in Nepal: What do the data show', *Himal South Asia*, 10(2), 1997, p.70. For a concise, non-technical discussion of the economic effects of aid, see Sriram Poudyal, *Planned Development in Nepal - a Study*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1983. Narayan Khadka's more-detailed, *Foreign Aid, Poverty and Stagnation in Nepal*, Vikas: New Delhi, 1991, takes a similarly critical approach, whilst IIDS, *Foreign Aid - Sifting the Statistical Evidence*, Kathmandu, 1996, gives a slightly more favourable evaluation.



into agricultural extension and integrated rural development schemes, the most visible results are large infrastructure projects, in particular roads and dams. The most dramatic impact has perhaps been through the provision of medical services or public-health measures. In particular, the American programme of DDT-spraying in the Terai greatly reduced the incidence of malaria and opened the way for the large-scale shift of population from hills to plain over the last generation.

Aid projects have also entailed the presence in the country of large numbers of foreign personnel, and this, together, of course, with tourism, has brought even Nepalese who do not themselves travel abroad into contact with different cultures. Like tourists, the more senior aid workers do not usually learn much Nepali and can thus communicate directly only with Nepalese fluent in English. However, those working long-term in the country for non-government organisations such as the Church-funded United Mission to Nepal usually operate at least part of the time in a local language. The same is true for those serving for two to five years with the U.S. Peace Corps, Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas or the Japanese Overseas Co-Operation Volunteers. Over the last thirty years, Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have become particularly well-known for their fluency in Nepali, achieved partly because they are often posted to remote areas where few if any know English well. Japanese volunteers, even when working in Kathmandu, also acquire Nepali rapidly since they are often themselves uncomfortable speaking English.

Whilst the presence of foreigners in large numbers in Nepal is a post-1951 phenomenon, Nepalese migration in search of better economic opportunities has been going on since long before then and those who have served in British or Indian Gorkha regiments are only a small proportion of the total involved. Exact numbers are difficult to determine and are also the subject of political controversy, as is also the case with Indian immigration into Nepal. However by the 1980s, several hundred thousand Nepalese may have been working for all or part of the year in India.<sup>4</sup> More recently Nepalese have travelled legally or illegally in search of work in the Middle East, Japan and elsewhere.

An increasingly large number of Nepalese have also left the country in pursuit of education. Again, India has been the major destination and

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4 Calculation is difficult as census data does not differentiate clearly between temporary migrants and persons of Nepalese descent who are now permanently settled in India. See the discussion in Michael Hutt, 'Being Nepali Without Nepal', David Gellner *et al.*, *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997, and also Dilli R. Dahal, 'Lies, Damn Lies and Numbers', *Himal South Asia*, 10(1), 1997, p.26.

one informal estimate is that the amount of money sent to India for that purpose is now 300 million rupees each year, equivalent to over 60% of Nepal's education budget.<sup>5</sup> Smaller in number, but enjoying even higher prestige, are those who have received a university education in a western country. Here foreign aid is of direct importance as for all but the wealthiest families the expense involved is too great to shoulder and it is necessary to secure one of the scholarships offered by donor countries.

Because of the status and economic opportunities that come with fluent English and a western-style education, the demand for English-medium education within Nepal has also risen steadily. As seen in chapter 5, the government's attempt in the 1970s to insist on all students being educated in Nepali-medium was a failure. Since then, the older, elite English-medium schools such as St. Xavier's and St. Mary's have been supplemented by less expensive establishments which claim to teach in English. In the Kathmandu Valley and elsewhere where there are roads there has been large-scale desertion of state schools. The hope is that a private education will enable a child to compete for jobs in the 'international sector' of the Nepalese economy, i.e. in tourism or in a foreign-funded or foreign-run organization. It will also of course stand the student in good stead if an opportunity to move abroad comes later.

The net result of all these developments is to create multiple linkages between ordinary Nepalese and the outside world. It is against the background of these that Nepal's dealings with foreign countries on a government-to-government basis have to be understood.

## Nepal and India

Amongst Nepal's relationships with foreign countries, by far the most important is that with India. Geographically, economically and culturally - at least as far as the Hindu State culture was concerned - Nepal is a part of the Indian sub-continent. The border of this region follows the main peaks of the Himalayas, and this same border forms India's argument for supremacy in this region. There was also a historical precedent for India's fatherly, some might say bullying, regard for Nepal. When India became independent in 1947 the new government entered into the same kind of relationship with Nepal as the British had done. This development appeared to be what the British had wanted, judging by the correspondence between the Foreign Office in London and the British

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5 David Gellner, personal communication. The government's spending on education in 1991/2 was 473 million rupees (Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Pocket Book - Nepal*, Kathmandu, 1995, p.188.)

resident in Kathmandu at the time. It was also a natural consequence of India's taking over half the Gorkha regiments, Britain's closest link with Nepal.<sup>6</sup>

The government in Delhi, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, soon became even more involved in Nepal than the British. India and Nepal signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950. On paper this was fully reciprocal, allowing, for example, nationals of each country to enter and work freely in the other's territory. However, the colossal difference in size between the two countries gave India the upper hand. At the same time, Nepal also indicated that it would continue to be part of independent India's security sphere as it had been of British India's: although this did not become public until some years later, the conclusion of the treaty was accompanied by an exchange of letters committing both countries to 'consult and devise effective counter-measures' in case of an attack by a third country upon either.<sup>7</sup> A further complicating factor was that this treaty was signed with the Rana government which was swept out of power shortly afterwards. As a result the 1950 treaty gradually came to be seen as a symbol of Indian domination.

More important than the 1950 treaty was India's role in the 1950/51 revolution. Though the revolution came about as a result of several forces, the final settlement between the Rana government and the Nepali Congress was engineered by the government in Delhi. This opened a period of close co-operation between Kathmandu and Delhi. Many Nepalese did not like Indian interference in their country to this extent and when Nehru visited Nepal in 1954 he was met by a mass of black flags.

Indian influence over Nepal began to wane in the late 1950s. This was mainly because King Mahendra proved far more politically-minded than his father King Tribhuvan and wished to steer his country on an independent course but also because of single-minded Nepalese prime ministers such as Tanka Prasad Acharya and the democratically-elected B.P. Koirala. Special relations between Nepal and India continued in principle, however, right up until the royal coup in 1960. The coup brought relations between India and Nepal to a very low ebb indeed. India

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6 For an account of the 1947 division of the Brigade by a British Gurkha officer, who believed Britain should have retained all the regiments, see Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves*, London: Cassell, 1950, p.624-40. Mary Des Chene, 'Relics of empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas', unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1991, chap.5, gives a critical account of British attitudes.

7 Shree Krishna Jha, *Uneasy Partners: India and Nepal in the Post-colonial Era*, New Delhi: Manas, 1975, p.37-39. The existence of the letters was revealed by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1959.

was a democracy and had to react negatively. Though the Indian government gave no official support to the now-outlawed democratic forces, it did allow, and perhaps even encourage the Nepali Congress to conduct armed raids across the border into Nepal.<sup>8</sup> What complicated the political situation from India's point of view, however, and rendered the climate very different from that of 1951, was the growing conflict between India and China. India needed Nepal as a loyal buffer state and so needed the support of King Mahendra. Now Nepal - at least King Mahendra - had a lever of power to use against India. When war broke out between India and China in 1962 King Mahendra found himself free to act.

The Nepali Congress raids were swiftly brought to an end by the Indian government for fear of antagonising Kathmandu and the Panchayat government led by King Mahendra began a policy of 'balanced dependence' on India and China. Playing one country off against the other, which is in effect what King Mahendra did, had also been Nepal's strategy in the early decades of her existence as an independent state.<sup>9</sup> This strategy became impossible to sustain later in the 19th century, as British power in India grew and China became progressively more enfeebled, but was feasible again when a strong Chinese government had asserted its authority over Tibet. The usefulness of this approach was somewhat reduced when India's victory over Pakistan in 1971 demonstrated her military pre-eminence in South Asia and the limited value of Chinese support. However, balancing each of her giant neighbours against the other remained one goal of Nepalese foreign policy right up to the revolution in 1990. Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, who resigned as foreign minister shortly before the climax of the *janandolan*, defended this policy: Any government in this country will always face one problem. India is a big country. There is no reason to pick a quarrel with India. It doesn't help Nepal to be an enemy of China either. Now there is a school of thought in India which wants Nepal to break with China. We say no. We are an independent country. We will not permit our soil to be used against India or against China. Generally India feels that Nepal should not side with China. I think we have to give India that type of assurance. Similarly, the Chinese have to feel comfortable as far as our borders are concerned. So this is not the pride of Panchayat. It is the pride of a nation, a nation that doesn't want to take sides.'

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8 See above, p.73-4.

9 The best study of this aspect of Nepali history remains Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, Los Angeles & Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

Yet the true picture was more complicated than this. Whilst at one level clearly trying to avoid alignment with either side, King Mahendra himself was also ready to co-operate with India on security matters as and when he thought it necessary. After the outbreak of hostilities between China and India and India's reining in of the Nepali Congress guerillas, there was close consultation between the two countries as Nepal, alarmed at the ease with which China had overrun the disputed territory on its frontier with India, sought to build up its own defences. In 1965, an agreement was signed under which Nepal agreed to seek any arms it required from India, and to import from Britain and America only if India was unable to meet its request. Nepalese officers would continue to train at Indian staff colleges.<sup>10</sup> Both before and after this accord, large numbers of Nepalese citizens continued to serve in the Indian Gurkha regiments along the border with China, their recruitment and conditions of service still governed by the 'Tripartite Agreement' reached between Britain, India and Nepal in 1947.

Nepalese policy was seemingly to maintain a basic understanding with India on defence matters but also to maintain a high degree of freedom to manoeuvre between Delhi and Beijing. Priority shifted from one objective to the other, both to provide Nepal with a bargaining chip in negotiations with India on other matters, and also, when necessary, to boost the Panchayat regime's nationalist credentials. In 1969, the pendulum swung again with a request to India to withdraw Indian 'technical personnel' stationed on Nepal's northern border. Details of the 1965 agreement, which had hitherto not been published, were leaked to the Indian press, and this provoked an angry outburst from the then prime minister, Kirtinidhi Bista, who declared that Nepal would not accept any limitation on its sovereignty 'for India's so-called security.'<sup>11</sup> He argued that India's failure to consult with Nepal over the outbreak of hostilities with China in 1962 and of war with Pakistan in 1965 showed the 1950 treaty was inoperative and also announced that Nepal regarded the 1965 agreement as cancelled. The dispute was smoothed over and the technicians withdrawn in 1970 but the fundamental ambiguity in Nepal's relationship with India remained and the government stopped short of actually requesting the abrogation of the 1950 agreement.

In 1975, in a speech to dignitaries from around the world attending his coronation, King Birendra proposed that Nepal be declared a 'Zone of

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<sup>10</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, p.273.

<sup>11</sup> *Rising Nepal*, 25/6/1969, cited in Rishikesh Shaha, 'Nepal's Foreign Policy: Focus on Nepal-India Relations,' in Dhruva Kumar (ed.), *Nepal's India Policy*, Kathmandu: CNAS, 1992, p.38.

Peace.<sup>12</sup> This was a rather vague proposal and the government preserved the ambiguity by stressing that such an arrangement would not interfere with Nepal's adherence to existing agreements for as long as they remain valid.<sup>13</sup> From the Indian point of view, however, Nepal seemed again to be calling into question undertakings she had given in 1950 and 1965, and this suspicion was strengthened when China swiftly endorsed the proposal. India's unwillingness to accept the formula was interpreted by many Nepalese as revealing a thirst for power tainted with paranoia.

At about the same time that King Birendra made his proposal, an Indian diplomat who had previously worked on the Nepal desk in New Delhi and was now first secretary at the Indian Embassy in Laos, shared his thoughts on Nepal with the British military attache. The Briton recorded the conversation in his memoirs: 'He... told me, sincerely if a little drunkenly, that, by the year 2000 AD, Nepal would be part of India for all intents and purposes. He proceeded to tell me... weak points about all levels of Nepalese administration that India would rectify.'<sup>14</sup> This is scarcely reliable evidence for intentions at the highest level in the Indian government, and, in contrast to their own attitude to Kashmir and China's towards Tibet, most Indians do not regard Nepal as part of their own national territory. The diplomat's remarks do, however, illustrate the mindset of some Indian officials, which, when brought together with the prejudices of many Nepalese, compounded the problems created by differing strategic perceptions and national goals.

Madan Mani Dikshit, editor of the Nepali newspaper *Samiksha* said: 'The Indian government is completely opposed to the Peace Zone proposal of our King, because in their perspective this goes against the provision of the 1950 treaty. Secondly, they do not want Nepal to maintain their relations with China on the same conditions as with India. Our government policy over the last thirty years has been seen by some analysts as one of equi-distance between China and India. I don't think it should be described that way, but India thinks this is a policy of equi-distance and they reject it. They want us to have the same relations to China as they have, ignoring the fact that we have a completely different

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12 Rishikesh Shaha, *Nepali Politics: Retrospect and Prospect*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978, p.162. The king had foreshadowed this proposal in a speech to the Non-Aligned Summit in Algeria in 1973, which referred to Nepal's wish 'to be enveloped in a zone of peace.'

13 The phrase was included in an elaboration of the proposal by prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa in February 1982 (S.D. Muni, *India and Nepal - a Changing Relationship*, Delhi: Konark, 1992, p.66-67.)

14 J.P.Cross, *The Call of Nepal*, London: New Millennium, 1996, p.123.

history and have had completely different relations with China over the last thirty years.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the diplomatic pose Nepal might adopt, she remained almost entirely dependent economically on India throughout the Panchayat period. A deliberate policy of trade diversification reduced the Indian share of Nepal's exports from 96% in 1957/8 to 38% in 1988/9 and the corresponding figure for imports from 95% to 33%,<sup>16</sup> but virtually all goods had to travel through India on their way to or from Nepal. Quarrels between India and Nepal over trade and transit were frequent and intensified when the trade and transit treaty between the two countries came up for renewal. India wanted to use Nepal's vulnerable economic position to pressurise the country; Nepal wanted to retain as much independence as possible. Usually a compromise was reached, though usually the compromise tended to be in India's favour.

In 1978 the Janata Party government in India, which had come to power in a wave of democratic enthusiasm after Indira Gandhi's 'Emergency', did agree to the Nepalese government's long-standing demand for separate agreements on transit and on trade; Nepal maintained that transit facilities for a land-locked state was an entitlement under international law and should, therefore, not be bracketed with trade arrangements, which were fully negotiable. However, when the agreements were due for re-negotiation in 1988, India insisted on returning to a single, comprehensive agreement. No compromise had been reached when a one-year standstill period expired on 23 March 1989 and India then imposed a virtual trade embargo on Nepal.

India's move came as a sharp shock to the Panchayat government in Kathmandu. A large proportion of the country's trade simply disappeared overnight along with essential supplies of fuel and medicine. These now had to be imported at a much higher cost from a third country. Traffic in Kathmandu vanished from the streets and kerosene and sugar became difficult to obtain. The Panchayat government did its best to import goods from third countries, but price rises were inevitable. As a result Nepal's weak economy was weakened even further.

In principle goods from third countries could still proceed through Indian territory, but India put obstacles in the way of transit. All but two of the official border crossing-points were closed to goods traffic. Calcutta was the only Indian harbour used for Nepalese goods and it was closed several times during the embargo period for "construction work".

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15 Interview with Madan Mani Dixit, 16/2/1990.

16 Ram P. Rajbahak, 'Nepal's Foreign Economic Policy: An Alternative Framework for Economic Relations with India', in Dhruva Kumar, *op. cit.*, p.104.

Nepalese nationals working in India were not allowed to carry their salaries back over the border. Even Nepalese planes were not allowed to refuel at Indian airports.

India's actions seemed extreme, though India had been dissatisfied with the government in Nepal for a long time. India's main complaint was that Nepal did not respect India's security interests as they had agreed to do in the 1950 treaty. The Indian government were particularly annoyed over Nepal's 1988 decision to import arms from China. New Delhi also claimed that Indian nationals living in Nepal were not being treated fairly. The Indians especially disliked Nepal's new system of work permits, introduced in 1988, which were technically a breach of the 1950 treaty. It has been claimed that, until these irritants arose, negotiations between the two sides had actually been making good progress.<sup>17</sup> There was a general feeling amongst Nepalese, however, that India had exaggerated these complaints and was merely flexing its muscles as a regional superpower. India now possessed the world's third largest army and was already involved politically in several of its neighbouring countries.

Unfortunately for Nepal, relations between India and China had been gradually improving. This was manifest in Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988 which signalled the end of almost three decades of Sino-Indian conflict. Nepal's policy of balanced dependence, which had been declining in effectiveness for some time, was now becoming obsolete. It seemed India might soon be free to impose its will on Nepal once again and return to the dominant position of the 1950s. Indian involvement in Sri Lanka and the Maldives suggested to many that this was exactly what Rajiv Gandhi's government wanted to do.

All the signs were there that India wanted to take some action against Nepal to force the country into line. Yet these signs were ignored or simply not taken into account by the Panchayat government, or, rather, by the Palace itself. 'I had a long conversation with Narayan Prasad Shrestha,<sup>18</sup> one senior diplomat recalled later, 'and warned him they shouldn't get into a confrontation with India, but the king was obdurate.' King Birendra, or his advisors, underestimated the Indian determination to push for a settlement on India's terms and overestimated the support Nepal would get from elsewhere, and so Nepal overplayed its hand.

Plain bungling was also a factor leading to the trade embargo crisis. Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, who was then foreign minister, said: 'Well,

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17 Lok Raj Baral, 'Nepal-India Relations: Continuity and Change', Dhruba Kumar, *op. cit.*, p.68.

18 The king's principal private secretary.



I think at the political level there would have been no problems had this process been going on honestly. But even the foreign minister of India used to say that there were things he understood, but then he could not move without the approval of the higher authority. In my country, of course, it was so that everything had to be cleared by the Palace. And Palace secretaries could play dirty games - and they did play dirty games, so had it just been for me to get clearance with His Majesty perhaps it would have been much easier. But, you know, whatever I felt, whatever went to His Majesty from me went in a distorted form and similarly His Majesty's views came to me in a distorted form. It was very difficult to negotiate on these terms.<sup>19</sup>

Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya went on to blame the Nepalese government for the resulting crisis: 'It was not handled in a proper way. We have to face the fact that India is a big country. We cannot afford to displease India. We have to think about what is helpful to India and not harmful to Nepal. This should be the basis of our foreign policy. But unfortunately it was not so at the time.' The Panchayat government's initial austerity measures had met with a good deal of popular support, but people's patience wore down as the situation worsened throughout the autumn and winter of 1989. Public opinion in Nepal swung further when the Panchayat government was unable to reach a settlement with the V.P. Singh government in India which took office in November 1989, pledged to improve relations with Nepal.

Anti-Indian feeling was still strong, and the Indian trade embargo had caused unrest inside Nepal. What *panchas* feared was that the Indian trade embargo was actually a camouflage and that what the Indian government really wanted was political instability within Nepal and the end of the Panchayat system.

India's involvement in Nepal's 1990 revolution was certainly significant - if not consistent. At first it seemed that Indian support for the success of the democracy movement would be as crucial as in 1951. Chandra Shekhar, a leader of the Janata Dal Party in India and later prime minister, spoke at the Nepali Congress convention in January 1990. He openly declared his support for the democracy movement, and stated that this was the view of all Indian political leaders. Furthermore, in an interview on 1 February 1990, the president of the Nepali Congress Party, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, said that although the Indian government had not given any official support to the democracy movement 'privately they have assured us that they will put on all sorts of pressure'. Bhattarai even

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19 Interview with Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, 31/8/1990.

claimed that the Indian leaders had gone as far as to promise that no new trade and transit treaty would be signed 'until there is an understanding about democracy in Nepal'.

Pressure from India did come. On 15 February 1990 All India Radio announced that the Indian government would close all the remaining border crossings with Nepal on 18 February, the day the democracy movement was due to start. Then on 21 February the Indian government expressed concern about the Nepalese government's reported use of the military to quell the uprising at Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley.

On 23 February 1990 the Indian prime minister, V.P. Singh, publicly stated that his government had no intention of interfering in Nepal's internal affairs - but the Panchayat government had felt Indian pressure and Singh's statement was quite acceptable to the Nepalese opposition as a compulsory diplomatic move. What worried people was that rumours had begun to circulate that the Indian government wanted to take advantage of the Panchayat government's weak position and push through all their demands in negotiating a new trade and transit treaty. These rumours were confirmed by the Nepalese newspaper *Navaras* on 28 February. This newspaper revealed that liberal *panchas* had taken the government to task for being too lenient with India during the previous round of talks in Delhi. The newspaper stated that the Nepalese delegation had even agreed to a renewal of the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty which the same Nepalese government had roundly condemned just a few months earlier. These rumours were further confirmed by Rishikesh Shaha, the human rights activist, who was in New Delhi to monitor support for the democracy movement in Nepal. On 2 March 1990 he used his forceful personality to criticise the Indian government for its recent dealings with Nepal. Any deal with the Panchayat government, he stated, would be a deal against the people of Nepal. Accordingly, he urged the Indian government not to negotiate with the Panchayat government and not to exploit its weak position to Indian advantage.

Meanwhile, resentment was mounting in Nepal against India. Nepalese felt let down by the Indian leaders, but most importantly they felt confused. No one seemed to know if India was playing a game or not. It was unclear if India was trying to rush through a new treaty or if the Panchayat government had simply become more lenient. Shribhadra Sharma, a liberal *pancha* and member of the Rastriya Panchayat explained the apparent change of heart in the Panchayat government's attitude towards India on 3 March 1990: 'Previously, during the whole last year it was the strategy of the government in its dealings with India to bargain for two treaties of trade and transit rather than one and argue against the

1950 treaty. They said that this treaty was out of date and Nepal could not accept it without fundamental changes. That was the view of the government then. But later on the government found that it was fighting two fronts simultaneously: one internal against the multi-party system, the other international against the Indian government. It finally reached the conclusion that fighting on two fronts was not possible, so there were only two options - either to reach an understanding with the supporters of a multi-party system inside the country and strengthen their position for bargaining with India, or to get India's sympathy by giving them some concessions and then crush the multi-party people within the country. Between these two options the government had preferred the second. They are now surrendering their sovereignty to India and at the same time crushing the multi-party movement inside the country. The government has already accepted the 1950 treaty and not only that, it has accepted India's conception of their own security perception. I have never had a clear idea of what this security perception entails, but whatever it means, the Nepalese government has accepted it. This was the outcome of the Nepalese delegation's recent visit at secretary level to New Delhi.' Commenting on India's strategy, Shribhadra Sharma said: 'I don't know what the opinion of the Indian government is, but as far as I understand India will first make the Nepalese government sign the treaty and take all the concessions from the Nepalese government. Then they will support the democratic opposition to maintain their international image.'

Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, who was Nepal's foreign minister at the time told a different story. He claimed that he knew nothing about any Indian attempts to exploit the weak position of the Panchayat government. On the contrary, after his visit to New Delhi in January 1990 Upadhyaya was of the opinion that India had begun to understand Nepal's position. 'I came with a great hope,' he said, 'so if there was any type of negotiation going on, it went on behind my back.' Upadhyaya had little faith in Marich Man Singh Shrestha, then prime minister of Nepal. He could not rule out that such negotiations might have taken place: 'Well, the prime minister is more of a conspirator than a politician,' Upadhyaya commented, and so were many of the people in the establishment. So I cannot rule out that something like this happened. I have heard it from several sources. I was even told this from Indian sources. After I left the ministry some people said that these things had taken place.'

It did in fact become clear that India had indeed submitted a draft agreement to the Panchayat government at the end of March, following talks between the secretaries of the two foreign ministries in Delhi

during February. This reaffirmed the 1950 agreement on security and on the free access of each country's nationals to the others' labour market. Nepal was to undertake not to import arms, or enter into any military arrangement with another country without India's agreement and was to give India priority in the development of its water resources. Trade, transit and control of unauthorised trade were all to be dealt with as sections within this one, comprehensive agreement. Despite the pressure it was now under from the critical domestic situation, the Panchayat government did not sign the document, perhaps because the Indian demands were more severe than they had expected. Whatever Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya did or did not know, his resignation on 2 April provided a pretext for delay and the draft was soon overtaken by events.<sup>20</sup> There was, thus, little doubt that India was playing an ambiguous - some might say dubious - role in Nepal during the 1990 revolution. Indian leaders repeatedly supported the democracy movement and called for an end to the violence instigated by the Panchayat government. Yet the Indian government tried to pressurise the Panchayat government into accepting the provisions of the 1950 treaty - a treaty repugnant to most Nepalese who thought it only showed the Indian wish to dominate.

India itself was divided and its ambiguity towards Nepal may have been partly as a result of this. Chandra Shekhar and V.P. Singh were both competing to lead the country and seemed also to use the issue of the Nepalese democracy movement to bolster their own political positions. On 1 March 1990 three members of the Indian cabinet - the ministers of finance, railways and textiles - all pledged their support for the democracy movement within Nepal. By 30 March the situation in Nepal had grown more serious and tempers rose in the Indian parliament when the matter was discussed. Janata Dal leader Chandra Shekhar said that a treaty signed with the Nepalese government now would be a treaty signed against the Nepalese people. Shekhar was supported in his statements by Congress senior leader, Vasanta Sathe. Countering this opinion, the Indian foreign minister, I.K. Gujral, who was responsible for negotiating the new treaty with Nepal said: 'Even though we support democracy in Nepal, we will not interfere in another nation's internal affairs.' Chandra Shekhar retorted that it was the duty of the Indian government to give Nepal's democracy movement all the support it asked for. The Indian parliament remained

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20 Dhruba Kumar, 'Asymmetric Neighbours', in Kumar, *op. cit.*, p.6-8. Extracts from the Indian draft are given as an Appendix to the volume. Kumar believes the document was brought to Kathmandu on 31 March, whilst Krishna Hacchethu ('Mass Movement in Nepal', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.17 no.2 (1990), p.196), who also summarises its contents, states it was handed over on 2 April.

divided. Only on 9 April when King Birendra announced the multi-party system did the Indian government at last officially declare its support for democracy within Nepal.

If official Indian support was lacking, this was not true of unofficial Indian support. The close ties between the Nepalese opposition, Congress and communist politicians alike, ensured that many Indian politicians were deeply involved in supporting the democracy movement. Chandra Shekhar was one of many. As the revolution continued, individual Indian political parties began to pledge their collective support. This support came from all quarters, including even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the growing Hindu communal party which had strong links with the World Hindu Federation and had always supported the monarchy in Nepal and the Panchayat system. The BJP's instinct was still probably to support Birendra, as shown on 27 March when 80 of their M.P.s signed an appeal to the Indian government to 'expedite and sign an accord with Nepal as soon as possible.'<sup>21</sup> However, the BJP could not afford to appear antidemocratic and on 7 March the party's general secretary had issued a statement declaring that 'we in India fully wish that a multi-party democracy would come to prevail within constitutional monarchy in Nepal.'<sup>22</sup>

In addition to political support from New Delhi, there was a good deal of local support from the areas of India next to Nepal. This was especially true of the Indian state of Bihar. Indian politicians organised a series of demonstrations of support for the democracy movement. On 9 March 1990 Indian communists and Janata Dal workers blocked the main border station at Raxaul for more than six hours. Then on 14 March Indian politicians halted the railway to the Nepalese town of Janakpur in the Eastern Terai in order to show support for the general strike in Nepal on that day.

Indian involvement, therefore, was mixed in its intentions and effect. At best Indian politicians genuinely supported the cause of democracy inside Nepal; at worst the Indian government appeared to be calculating to infiltrate and gain control of Nepalese society.

It was Panchayat policy throughout the revolution to accuse both liberal *panchas* and opposition leaders of being manipulated from the outside - especially by India. Shailendra Kumar Uphadyaya explained why: The assessment of the prime minister and his followers inside the cabinet was that this movement would not get widespread support from the

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21 Kumar, *op. cit.*, p.8.

22 Hachhethu, *Mass Movement, op. cit.*, p.197.

people. They thought that the nationalist sentiment of the people would not go against the system which was being harrassed by India because of the blockade.' Upadhyaya explained how Indian participation in the Nepali Congress convention in January 1990 had given the Panchayat government more leeway to criticise the opposition: 'You might recall that following the statement by Chandra Shekhar at the Nepali Congress convention, a demonstration was organised by so many *panchas* to ask Chandra Shekhar to leave the country. And there was a day to oppose this foreign interference and there was a mass meeting in which many, including the prime minister, spoke.'

Panchayat politicians believed they had evidence the democracy movement was manipulated by India and this view may have held more than a grain of truth. Former prime minister Marich Man Singh Shrestha said in November 1990 after the revolution was over: 'Of course the recent movement was totally engineered and manipulated by India. I can show you lots of proof. Just look at the records of the Nepal Rastra Bank (the National Bank of Nepal). Until the third week of Magh (i.e. first week of February) there was a general deficit of more than 20,000,000 rupees. Then suddenly there was a surplus of 50-60,000,000 rupees. Where did this money come from? There is no doubt that it came from India, infused into Nepal to support various political forces in order to destabilise the political situation.' Describing India's attitude to Nepal during the last two years of his ministry, Marich Man Singh Shrestha said: 'Because of the relaxation in superpower tension, the Indian government saw that the time was right to take action in Nepal. They wanted to force us to accept the provisions of the 1950 treaty and their total domination. At first they imposed the embargo. Then they started the recent movement inside the country. The Indians destabilised the political situation inside Nepal in order to weaken the position of the king and government to accept their total demands. The Indians first tried to instigate student unrest at the same time as the embargo was imposed, but we managed to avert this. Then they launched the movement. Look, even B.P. Koirala's family and his main adviser warned the Nepali Congress leaders not to launch the movement because it was a trick from the Indian government to force the Nepalese nation into submission.<sup>23</sup> In the middle of the recent political crisis, when the Nepalese government was in a weak position, the Indian government even tried to force us to reassert the 1950 treaty.'

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23. Presumably this is in part a reference to Girija Prasad Koirala's supposed reservations about launching the *janandolan*.

Grishma Bahadur Devkota, Nepalese historian and member of the State Council, the Raj Sabha, during the Panchayat period, was even less generous than Marich Man Singh Shrestha in describing the involvement of India during the period of the 1990 revolution: 'India had the following two interests or goals: the main interest was to make Nepal part of their own security sphere. In the same way as the Chinese controlled Tibet, the Indians wanted Nepal as part of their area of influence and they wanted to control Nepal in the same way. They wanted to create a state of unrest inside Nepal. Their first method to reach this point was to impose an economic embargo last year. They first created a situation of economic hardships for the Nepalese people and then they went on to step number two, the creation of a political movement inside the country.' Devkota admitted that the democracy movement had been initiated by the Nepali Congress, but he pointed to the close links between the Nepali Congress Party and Indian politicians: 'The movement really started last year when Nepali Congress leaders took part in a programme in Kathmandu to celebrate the birthday of the late Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. On this occasion a Nepali Congress leader said that Nepal is not a fully sovereign nation, adding that sovereignty had been given to Nepal by India. If we look back at history, even before the Nepali Congress was established, the Nepali National Congress existed. In their first programme it was written that Nepal was a branch of India. The argument was that every aspect of Nepalese society, culture, religion and so on originated from India.' Devkota seems to have had in mind a statement issued by B.P. Koirala on 26 January 1947, the day after the inauguration of the Nepali National Congress. B.P. had said: 'In fact India and Nepal are not two separate nations. Nepal is a part and parcel of India both in racial and economic terms. The contradictions and diversities which we see in our political arena are nothing but the deceptions of our diplomats and politicians with vested interests.'<sup>24</sup>

Returning to recent events, Devkota finally pointed out that when the movement officially started with the Nepali Congress convention in January 1990: 'The Congress Party invited a number of foreign political leaders for the meeting, but only Indian leaders arrived.' Clearly, Devkota was convinced that the whole democracy movement had been completely controlled by India.

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24 Quoted in Gopal Man Gurung, *Hidden Facts in Nepalese Politics* (4th.ed.), Kathmandu: the author, 1994, p.35. Slightly different wording is given in Prem R. Uprety, *Political Awakening in Nepal (The Search for a New Identity)*, New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1992, p.94.

There was undoubtedly a great deal of intimacy between the Nepali Congress party and Indian politicians. The Congress veterans had largely been educated in India and had first become politically active there. Many had lived in exile in India and had enjoyed the patronage of Indian politicians who supported their cause. It was natural enough that Nepali Congress politicians had forged close friendships with Indian politicians such as Chandra Shekhar. Ideologically, too, the Nepali Congress Party drew much of their inspiration from India. B.P. Koirala's brand of socialism was allied to the socialist movement in India led by Jaya Prakash Narayan. Later, however, B.P. had adopted a much more nationalist line and even Marich Man Singh Shrestha admitted that Nepali Congress politicians were genuine Nepalese nationalists. Shrestha's opinion was that it was blindness and ignorance rather than anything else which made these politicians naive about India's intentions in Nepal.

In contrast to the Nepali Congress politicians, the Nepalese communists' ardent nationalism was not tempered by any identification with India, which they viewed with deep suspicion as a regional superpower and a threat to Nepal's independence. The communists too, however, had close ties to India. Their communism was more Indian than Chinese and many of the factions and groups within Nepal were linked to sister parties in India. Like the Nepali Congress politicians, many Nepalese communists had fled to India during the Panchayat period. These communists had also built up an organisation inside India as well as an underground network inside Nepal. Ram Raja Prasad Singh, the Congressman turned Marxist who had accepted responsibility for the 1985 bombings, had operated training camps on Indian territory and even in 1990, some reports claimed that Nepalese communists were still training activists in camps inside India. On 1 March the BBC Nepali Service reported that communist leaders such as C.P. Mainali were giving military training to activists in India. The West Bengal communist government was, apparently, giving covert support to these activities and supplying the communists with arms.

India was either friend or threat depending on which political camp you belonged to. This conflict of opinion surfaced again immediately after the revolution. After his appointment as prime minister of the interim government, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai said at a press conference on 16 April 1990 that one of the most important objectives of the new interim government would be to solve the trade dispute with India in a way which best served Nepal's interests. On 24 May Bhattarai announced that he would be leaving for New Delhi in two weeks. Bhattarai was



known for having spent a long period in India and for being friendly with various Indian politicians and many Nepalese expressed unease before he left.

The Nepalese delegation, which included minister of industry and president of the United Left Front, Sahana Pradhan, and the minister of finance, Devendra Raj Pandey, visited India from 7 to 11 June. The first report made by the delegation was fairly straightforward. The Indian government had agreed to the restoration of the status quo ante between the two countries. It was decided a new treaty would wait until there was a properly democratically elected government in Nepal.

Opinion in Nepal changed later when it was discovered that Bhattarai had held secret negotiations with Indian leaders of which not even Sahana Pradhan was aware. Bhattarai gave in to a wide range of Indian demands and this was reported by several Nepalese newspapers. The two prime ministers issued a joint communique at the end of the visit. This communique stated that Nepal would fully respect India's security concerns and would not allow any activities on its soil prejudicial to Indian security. Furthermore, the two countries would consult with the aim of reaching a mutual agreement on defence-related matters. What caused an outcry in Kathmandu, however, was a speech made by Bhattarai in New Delhi where he mentioned that India and Nepal should work together on developing a policy to exploit the resources of their "common rivers".

The Nepalese communists accused Bhattarai of selling out to India even though they themselves formed part of the interim government. The *ex-panchas* soon followed suit. The leaders of the new National Democratic Parties (which were largely composed of *ex-panchas*) roundly condemned Bhattarai's common rivers policy. These nationalist reactions were hardly alleviated when Indian Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral, visiting Nepal in early August 1990, mentioned the possibility of establishing a common currency for Nepal and India. When Chandra Shekhar visited Nepal again in 1991, this time as prime minister of India, he behaved in a much less provocative manner. Yet both the communists and the *ex-panchas* had now turned Nepal's relationship with India into one of the burning issues of the coming general election.

Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya gave a balanced, if still nationalistic, account of Bhattarai's negotiations in Delhi: 'No, I don't agree that it is a total sell-out,' he said. 'I would say that the prime minister in order to appease India has overlooked some of the phraseology and communiques or maybe he has not been advised properly by his advisers, so there are some phrases which will create difficulty for any succeeding government

for future negotiations with India. When it is said that both countries should engage in consultation to reach an agreement on security, one has overlooked the recent experience we have had of India flexing its muscles. Knowing this, it will be difficult for any future government to consult with India, unless it is a very strong government backed by the people, which can resist all items in an agreement going against Nepal's own interests. The so-called similar perception of security is so wide and encompassing that it could be a threat to Nepal. For India, China is an enemy still - for us, China is a friendly state. If we accept Indian perceptions the Chinese might not tolerate this attitude and this would be a dangerous game inviting China's anger. We know from experience that India's security interest views all territory south of the Himalayas as part of their sphere of influence and this perception will naturally give problems to Nepal's government. Similarly, the prime minister's mentioning of common rivers will create big difficulties for a future government. The recent agreement with India was therefore not a total sell-out, but the prime minister did make several concessions which in the long run may not lead to a better understanding with India.<sup>25</sup>

With hindsight it is clear that foreign influence, overwhelmingly Indian influence, played an important role in determining the outcome of the 1990 revolution in Nepal. The long term effects of this influence, especially in regard to Nepal's relationship with India, remained uncertain. Many Nepalese intellectuals and politicians, especially *ex-panchas*, worried that democracy would actually strengthen India's hand in Nepal. Some even worried that Nepal's independence might be fatally undermined. Ex-prime minister, Marich Man Singh Shrestha explained in an interview in 1990 the extent to which he believed India was involved in Nepalese affairs: 'You must understand that the RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) of the Indian government, the equivalent of the KGB and the CIA, is active all over Nepal. Because of their strength and resources, India has a flexibility to do whatever they want to, to further their interests in Nepal. At the same time they support opposing political forces inside the country to ensure that there will never be a strong and stable government here. They want no party to obtain an absolute majority so that there will always be weak coalitions. Look, even the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party is a total creation by India and this is an Indian move to weaken the Nepalese monarchy.' Shrestha tried to emphasise the extent to which Indian forces had penetrated Nepal: 'You must have a long political experience as I have to understand how

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25 Interview with Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, 31/8/1990.

important and powerful these foreign political forces are in Nepal. It is not that the new political leaders do not have experience, not that they are not nationalists, but they lack the full understanding and will to assert Nepal's independence.' It was not only hardline *ex-panchas* such as Marich Man Singh Shrestha who expressed such views. Liberal members of the old regime and some communists also worried publicly about India's involvement in Nepalese affairs especially through the Indian intelligence service - the RAW.

In the years following the *janandolan* Nepal's relations with India continued to generate fierce domestic controversy. Because Congress was seen as the party closest to India, Girija Prasad Koirala came under constant criticism for not taking a firm enough line, particularly, of course, over the Tanakpur agreement. He was said to be too close to the Indian ambassador, Bimal Prasad, and was even criticised for being too ready to speak in Hindi when in India or receiving Indians in Nepal; many nationalistically-inclined Nepalese wanted to stress their linguistic independence by using English, rather than Hindi, as the language of communication with India, even though Hindi, which stands in a similar relationship to Nepali as French to Italian or Cantonese to Mandarin Chinese, is much easier than English for a Nepali speaker to learn.

Relations with India not only divided Congress from other parties but also were a subject of contention within Congress itself. The anti-Girija faction also criticised the prime minister for excessive reliance on India and Bhattarai himself, despite (or perhaps because of) his own earlier reputation, tried to play the anti-Indian card in the 1994 Kathmandu by-election.

In this situation, the Indians themselves would probably have been wiser to distance themselves from the various factions, but almost certainly tried to use their influence in Kathmandu in Girija's favour in the critical period before the 1994 dissolution of parliament.<sup>26</sup> Some Nepalese actually saw Koirala's decision to go for mid-term polls as part of an Indian/Western plot to obtain a two-thirds majority in parliament for him. This appeared to be a case of Nepalese rather than Indian paranoia, for could even the greenest of RAW or CIA agents, let alone seasoned diplomats, have felt confident that a divided Congress with a lack-lustre record could get the two-thirds majority which had eluded the united party in 1991? However it was India's own actions which had been steadily feeding Nepalese suspicions.

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26 See above, p.209.

Under the UML government of 1994-95 and the Congress-NDP-Sadbhavana coalition which replaced it, there was no dramatic change in the day-to-day relationship. Whilst the Indian government accepted the UML request for discussions on possible changes to the 1950 agreement, this was a long-term exercise and it was clearly in India's interest to let discussions spin out as long as possible. No matter what government was in power in Kathmandu, India refused to be drawn into the dispute between Nepal and Bhutan concerning the status and eventual return or resettlement of the Nepali-speaking refugees from southern Bhutan whilst Nepal was careful not to involve itself in the affairs of the ethnic Nepalese of the Darjeeling area and the UML government banned a proposed visit to Kathmandu by Subash Ghising, the most prominent of the Darjeeling leaders.

On the vexed question of water resources, there was some real progress, culminating in an agreement in January 1996 which seemed to enjoy the support of all the major parties. Ratification by the Nepalese side, however, was placed in doubt later in the year, partly because of internal differences in the UML. The search for consensus both between Nepal and India and among the Nepalese themselves was proving to be a long one but the chances of success appeared a little better now than they had been before.

Five years after the *janandolan*, it could be seen to have made little difference to the basic pattern of relations between India and Nepal. The fundamental ambiguity - the reality of Nepalese dependence upon India versus Nepal's pride in her formal independence - remained unresolved and looked set to remain unresolved for the foreseeable future.

### China's Role

The relationship between Nepal and China, traditionally seen by Nepal as a possible counter-weight to that with India, is of a rather different nature. There are racial and cultural links between China and ethnic groups in Nepal which speak Tibeto-Burman languages and China has sought at times to capitalise on these. Zhou En-Lai referred in 1957 to 'blood ties between Nepal and China,' whilst the Chinese Buddhist Association invited Nepalese Buddhists to China and funded the construction of a Buddhist hostel in Kathmandu.<sup>27</sup> The Tibeto-Burman speakers (mainly sections 2 and 3 in the table of ethnic groups on p.323) are, however, less numerous than the groups speaking Indo-Aryan

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27 Shashi Bhushan Prasad, *The China Factor in Indo-Nepalese Relations 1955-72*, New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1989, p.176-7.

languages and many of them have been partly or wholly assimilated into the dominant Indian-orientated culture. The links are, in any case, with Chinese minority groups rather than with the dominant, Han Chinese and, above all, the border between Nepal and Tibet is sparsely populated and difficult to access, in stark contrast to the Terai plains bordering India. As the UML prime minister acknowledged in a visit to Delhi in April 1995, relations with India are 'more intimate at the people's level' than those with China.<sup>28</sup>

There is some ideological sympathy for China amongst the communists, but for Left and Right in Nepal, the main importance of China is simply that of a counter to India. This emerges very clearly in discussions with Nepalese communists on the Tibetan question. Whilst all major parties accept Tibet's status as part of China, the communists are especially strong in their support for the Chinese central government and condemn any tolerance in Nepal of 'Free Tibet' activities. Since linguistically and culturally the similarities between Nepal and India are much greater than those between Tibet and China, they are sometimes asked how they reconcile this stance with their passionate insistence on Nepal's own freedom from Indian domination. Their off-the-record answer is that, whatever the merits of the case, Nepal must retain a common border with China so that China can continue to act as a counter-weight to Indian influence.

In the confrontation with India which followed Mahendra's 1960 take-over, China did indeed come to Nepal's assistance. In October 1962, the Chinese Foreign minister made the celebrated remark that 'in case any foreign army makes a foolhardy attempt to attack Nepal... China will side with the Nepalese people.'<sup>29</sup> It was not, however, brave words, but rather China's offensive against India, launched in the latter half of the month, which transformed the situation in the Himalayas in King Mahendra's favour.

Although, as already seen, the strategy of balancing India against China had grown more difficult to implement after the 1960s, the Palace may well have expected more help from China during the trade blockade than actually materialised and it has been alleged that, in anticipation of this, the government handed back to China two dissidents who had been involved in the Tiananmen Square protests and twenty fugitive Buddhist monks.<sup>30</sup>

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28 *Gorkhapatra*, 12/4/1995 (PD39:16).

29 Quoted in Rose, *op. cit.*, p.248.

30 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, Kathmandu. 28/7/1990 (JW).

Such hopes were in vain. Before the blockade began, China had already warned Nepal that it could not be a substitute trade partner for India.<sup>31</sup> The distance from the Nepal-Tibetan border to China's major manufacturing centres and the difficulty of the terrain rendered trade in bulk prohibitively expensive and when buses were provided to Nepal as part of a Chinese aid programme in the 1970s they had been sent to Kathmandu via Calcutta.

It has also been suggested that, after the suppression of the student movement, Beijing was reluctant to offend the west further by intervening in the Himalayas.<sup>32</sup> A more fundamental reason may simply be that China has no interest in intervening in South Asia except when, as in 1962, she considers that India is threatening her own vital interests: whatever the legal merits of the dispute over Aksai Chin which led the two countries to war, the area is of crucial importance to China because of the link it provides between Singkiang and Tibet. In the Himalayan region China and India seem to have one fundamental aim in common: strategic primacy on their own side of the Himalayas. China achieved this (and more) in 1962 and her present objective in South Asia is simply to maintain a good working relationship with all the countries of the region but not at the expense of relations with New Delhi.<sup>33</sup>

### Western attitudes

Nepal's relations with western countries are not so crucial in geostrategic terms as those with India and China but they are of vital economic importance, because it is the developed countries which provide most of the foreign aid and loans on which the Nepalese government is heavily dependent. Assistance is generally provided either directly from government to government, or, more importantly in recent years, through international agencies such as the UNDP or World Bank. A third arrangement, which has also grown significantly since 1980, is for a government, or non-governmental organisation, to channel funds to a Nepalese NGO. This process was carefully regulated through the Social

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31 Garver, J.W., 'China-India Rivalry in Nepal: The Clash Over Chinese Arms Sales', *Asian Survey*, vol. 31 no.10 (1991), p.959, cited in Brown, *op. cit.*, p.110.

32 Garver, p.965, cited in Brown, p.110.

33 Leo E. Rose, 'Impact of Sino-Soviet-US Normalisation' on South Asia in the Eighties', in Shelton U. Kodikara (ed.), *External Compulsions of South Asian Politics*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993, p.99. China does not, of course, have control over the section of Nepalese territory which lie north of the main Himalayan range, but this area is too small to affect the general argument.

Services Co-ordination Council before the *janandolan*, but is now much less controlled.

In 1950/51 and the years immediately following, American policy, like that of other western nations was mainly influenced by Cold War considerations, particularly in the light of China's assumption of control in Tibet.<sup>34</sup> The Americans were willing to follow the British lead in reacting to King Tribhuvan's flight to India but in the 1950s they emerged as a major aid donor, mainly acting on the belief that economic development was necessary in Nepal to forestall communist subversion. Indian assistance, too, was partly undertaken for the same reason, but India was jealous of her own pre-eminent position in Nepal and there was considerable rivalry between the two aid programmes.<sup>35</sup> With the general acceptance by the great powers of Indian pre-dominance in South Asia and the winding down of the Cold War, Nepal became a less urgent priority. America maintains a bilateral aid programme but now ranks relatively low in the table of donors, compared with second place (after India) in the 1950s. and 1960s.

Because, like China, America is unwilling to jeopardise its relationship with India, she maintained a low profile during the embargo in 1989-90. Once the *janandolan* had commenced the U.S.A. was caught between the need to maintain traditionally good relations with the Panchayat regime and the wish to be seen on the side of democracy. Members of Congress wrote to King Birendra protesting against repression of the Movement, but, until events were reaching a climax, the State Department seemed to be leaning more to the government side and to accept the argument that the 1980 referendum had given the Panchayat system itself some democratic legitimacy. In a statement on 6 March, an Assistant Secretary of State, John Kelly, said that 'we were very pleased to see that government security forces exercised restraint in handling disruptions during demonstrations on February 18-19... Nepal has its own system of government which certainly has many attributes of

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34 Depending on the sympathies of the writer, this event is often described as either a 'liberation' or an 'invasion'. Whatever view is taken of China's legal and moral rights in Tibet, the country had in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century been a Chinese protectorate rather than an integral part of China and Tibet had been a *de facto* independent state from 1913 to 1950. For a non-partisan treatment, see Mervyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951; the Demise of the Lamaist State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

35 See Eugene B. Mihaly, *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: a Case Study*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965, for rivalry in the early years. Murlidhar Dharamdasani, *Political Economy of Foreign Aid in the Third World: a Case Study of Nepal*, Varanasi: Konark, 1984, also covers developments up to the early 80s.

democracy.<sup>36</sup> When challenged by Stephen Solarz, one of the signatories to the letter to King Birendra, Kelly explained that whilst the U.S. government certainly supported parliamentary democracy, 'as to the organisation of the party system certainly there has to be room around the world for flexibility and countries have to decide their own path.'<sup>37</sup>

What went on behind the scenes was, of course, a different matter, and the American ambassador in Kathmandu, Julia Chang Bloch, was probably active in urging the king to reach a compromise with the Movement's leaders. There was also a feeling both amongst some Nepalese and elsewhere in the diplomatic corps that she had perhaps pushed herself forward as a mediator a little too forcefully.

The British attitude to democratic development in Nepal had much in common with that of America though also with distinctive features arising from long involvement in South Asia. Whilst the British system of democracy under a constitutional monarchy had often seemed an attractive model to Nepalese reformers, the attitude of the British government in 1950-51 was governed mainly by strategic calculations and in particular by the need to ensure a continued supply of Gurkha recruits for the British army. As was seen in chapters 1 and 2, this led them to give their support to the Ranas and then to the monarchy against their radical opponents. It also meant that much of the British aid effort was geared specifically to areas from which Gurkhas were recruited, particular examples being the agricultural research and extension centres at Lumle in mid-western Nepal and at Pakrabas. However, with the British withdrawal from 'East of Suez' at the end of the 1960s, this factor became less important. Rather than Whitehall worrying that it would not be able to recruit sufficient soldiers in Nepal, the Brigade of Gurkhas was worried that Whitehall might decide to axe the Brigade altogether instead of just continuing to reduce its size. The need not to jeopardise recruitment arrangements was nevertheless cited by one diplomat in 1990 as the reason Britain had been unable to speak out the way some other European countries had done during the *janandolan*.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the wish to maintain good relations with existing friends meant that the British government remained sympathetic to the Panchayat government rather than to the forces opposing it.

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36 Quoted in Rishikesh Shaha, *Politics in Nepal 1980-1990*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, p.194.

37 Hacchethu, 'Mass Movement..', *op. cit.*, p.195.

38 Statement by Michael Hilton, First Secretary, British Embassy, Kathmandu, 2/5/1990, cited in R. Andrew Nickson, *Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy: the Case of British Aid to Nepal*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1992, p.34.



During the trade dispute in 1989, it was rumoured that the British had initially encouraged the Palace to stand firm against India.<sup>39</sup> The British ambassador claimed that he had personally warned them to avoid a confrontation, but he admitted that the high profile of the 'Nepal lobby' in the U.K. could have misled the Palace into expecting more support and that the Nepalese government felt it had been let down. He also stressed that, although the British avoided any overt criticism of the regime during the *janandolan*, they had consistently advised moderation and had tried to keep open channels of communication to the opposition.<sup>40</sup> There was nevertheless a feeling amongst many supporters of the movement that Britain had identified itself too closely with an unpopular regime.

Whilst the American and British governments had thus been reluctant to break with the Palace, informed opinion within these countries, as in the western world generally, had played a different role. As early as 1 February 1990, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai declared that the democracy movement had received promises of support from several other countries. This support, he stated, would make it morally impossible for the Panchayat government to suppress the movement once it had started. Individual politicians in the United States and Britain did in fact pledge support for the democratic cause from an early stage. This gave the opposition politicians a degree of self-confidence that they would succeed.

In addition to declarations of moral support, the leaders of the democracy movement hoped that foreign governments would exert direct pressure on the Panchayat government. Everyone was aware, for example, of the Panchayat regime's total dependence on foreign aid. A threat to this income would cause the Panchayat system to topple overnight. Knowing this and knowing that Western governments were increasingly linking aid to human rights, the opposition leaders asked foreign governments to withhold aid until the political situation in Nepal had settled. Foreign response to this request was cautious. Only West Germany stated publicly (and four weeks after the movement had started) that unless the suppression of the democracy movement and the violation of human rights came to an end, the country would consider freezing all aid. Other countries considered a move, but no one acted until the revolution had come to an end.

Though the Western governments did not act, the obvious sympathy in their countries for the democracy movement was enough to frighten the Panchayat government. To try to counteract this sympathy, it continually

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39 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, Kathmandu, 28/7/1990.

40 Interview with Richard Burgess-Watson, British Ambassador in Kathmandu, 1/8/1990 (JW).

reiterated that the recent unrest had been led by a few extremists who did not respect the political system of the country - a system which had been backed by the majority of Nepalese citizens in the referendum of 1980. The government media in Nepal also accused the BBC, All India Radio and the Voice of America of lying and wilfully misrepresenting what was happening inside the country.

This foreign pressure from mainly the Western democracies achieved two ends. Firstly, the opposition in Nepal were encouraged to continue their struggle. Secondly, foreign support for the democracy movement alarmed the Panchayat government which was already demoralised over a number of other issues. Above all, for a government so dependent on financial support from abroad, the climate of international opinion meant that, even if those in authority had wanted to resort to it, the 'Tiananmen option' - crushing the movement no matter what the cost - was simply not open to them.

After the victory of the movement and the emergence of the UML as a partner and then major rival to Congress, the question arose of what attitude Western countries, and the international financial organizations they funded, would take towards a communist government in Nepal. There can be little doubt that western governments felt more comfortable with a Nepali Congress administration but, with the Cold War over and relations between India and China improving, the prospect of communists in power in Kathmandu was much less alarming than it would have been a generation before. The withdrawal of the World Bank's offer to fund the Arun-III hydro-electric project was seen by some as evidence that the UML could expect less help than a Congress government, and occasioned scarcely-concealed delight from right-wing commentators and indignation from the left. The factors behind the Arun decision were complex, however, and, even if government policies were a factor, it was the policies themselves, not the communist 'label' which most likely influenced decision makers in Washington. The issue will not be put to a full test until a majority UML-government is elected, but it seems at present that those with money to lend will look at the actions rather than the composition of Nepalese governments. Western preferences will therefore, to some extent constrain Nepal's options, as is the case with small countries everywhere, but are less likely to affect who is returned to power within the country.

# CHAPTER 7

## THE MONARCHY AND CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### **The Monarchy and the Political Process**

The central pivot of Nepalese politics during the modern period has been the king. All major political events in the country since the revolution of 1951 have to some degree centred on the role of the monarchy. This was also true of the 1990 revolution. Basdev Dhungana, Chairman of the Bar Association and veteran politician pointed out that the leaders of the democracy movement and the masses who took to the streets had one main aim in mind -the end of 'Palace rule'. 'In every field the Palace was the centre,' he said, 'and people wanted to get rid of that.' Dhungana stated that the real starting-point of the democracy movement was the speech Ganesh Man Singh made on 14 November 1990 at a function at the Indian Embassy to celebrate Nehru's birth. In it he compared King Birendra to the Roman emperor Nero. Ganesh Man Singh's speech gave people courage. Many began to criticise the Palace openly and the democracy movement gained strength. The democracy movement, Dhungana claimed, was profoundly a movement against the Palace. An acceptable settlement could only be reached if and when the monarch changed his role.

The king, therefore, was crucial. His role was a determining factor in the old Panchayat system and it had to change if democracy was going to be introduced into Nepal. Sushil Pyakurel, a human rights activist, had this to say: 'Though the role of the king changed in Nepal's modern history, he was always there. If you try to write anything on Nepal, you have to try and write something on the Palace and what happened in the Palace. What happened in the 1951 revolution? King Tribhuvan exposed himself as pro-people, but he tried to manipulate everything. He said he was even ready to declare this country as a republic - but he never did. And what did King Mahendra do - he just played with various politicians. What happened when he imposed the Panchayat system? Did he sincerely want to overthrow the Nepalese government to defend democracy? And again, what did King Birendra do in 1979? He said he would recognise the so-called minority in the referendum, but did he ever do this? In the same

way, we need to find out what the king actually did in this 1990 movement and what his attitudes were.<sup>1</sup>

There has indeed been endless discussion on how far what was done in the king's name truly reflected the king's will as an individual. Constitutionally, and also morally, the position was very clear: from 1951 to 1990, except for the brief interlude of parliamentary government in 1959-60, the ultimate power of decision was in the king's hands, and it was on his desk alone that Harry Truman's famous sign - 'The buck stops here' - rightfully belonged. But court politics down the ages has shown that an autocrat's power is always in danger of slipping from his hands into those of his advisors. In the case of Nepal over the last forty-five years, it is generally agreed that King Mahendra was very much his own man and the driving force of the system. Doubt remains over how far Tribhuvan and Birendra were in the same position.

A close aide to king Birendra described the position of the king during the Panchayat regime: 'The king is like a computer. His understanding of any situation will reflect what information the people around him have fed in. During the recent movement he was mainly fed information by people who wanted to conceal the realities, though this does not mean that the king was not warned. He was told on several occasions that unless he did something the situation would become grave. But he didn't listen to these warnings.'

Whether the king knew the situation was serious or whether he simply did not want to believe it is hard to know. During the demonstrations of 1979 the king only announced the national referendum when he actually saw the angry crowds on the streets. It could have been the case that news was kept from the king and that his isolation in Pokhara, where he remained from 10 January until shortly before the climax of the movement rendered him ignorant of what was happening in Kathmandu.

When the king finally did return to Kathmandu he acted swiftly by lifting the ban on the political parties and opening negotiations with the opposition - so perhaps there is something to be said for this version of events. It is important to remember that King Birendra was the inheritor,

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1 Interview with Prakash Kaphley & Sushil Pyakurel, 8/10/1991. Krishna Hachhethu (personal communication) has suggested that in Nepal in the early 1950s 'republic' was understood as equivalent to 'democracy', and therefore did not imply the absence of a monarch. However, Tribhuvan would probably have been aware of the discussion surrounding India's adoption of a republican constitution in 1950, which ended its former status as a dominion of the British Crown, and most probably did understand the full meaning of 'republic'.

not the creator, of the Panchayat system. Many believed that Birendra had never been happy with his position as political autocrat. Some went as far as to say that the king's transferral of power to the interim government in May 1990 actually came to him as a relief.<sup>2</sup>

The popularity of such interpretations certainly owes something both to a broadly-felt psychological need to believe in the essential goodness of the king and also to a calculation by politicians that the monarchy has a useful role to play and that its prestige should therefore be preserved. Moreover, King Birendra himself has explicitly stated that he was not deceived about the state of affairs during the *janandolan*.<sup>3</sup> This does not, however, mean that we have to go to the opposite extreme and see King Birendra as coolly and deliberately planning every move. There is some reason to think that, throughout his reign, his preferred method has been to stand back and allow his advisors the freedom to implement a particular line of policy, only intervening himself if he judged it absolutely necessary. As for his feelings towards the Panchayat system, his commitment to it may well have been less than that of his father. It was to be preserved if that were feasible without paying too great a price, but could be readily jettisoned when the time came.

Whatever the king's personal involvement, monarchy as an institution played a crucial role. Throughout the period of this study it remained a role conditioned largely by Hindu philosophy and tradition. King Birendra, the current monarch, was the direct descendant of King Prithvi Narayan Shah. The Shah dynasty had ruled Nepal, at least in principle, since the unification of the nation in 1768. This did not mean that the Shah kings had exercised political power during this whole period. Power had actually begun slipping out of their hands in the early nineteenth century and into those of the ambitious courtiers who were ready to seize any opportunity to advance themselves. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Rana family were effectively the rulers of Nepal and the king had become no more than a figurehead. Even so, the idea that the monarch in a Hindu kingdom was an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu, a Hindu god, remained and was even cultivated by the Ranas. This may seem strange. The idea of the god-king, after all, has a place in many cultures, and is usually associated with one individual wielding absolute power in both religious and temporal spheres. The concept of Hindu kingship, however, is much more intangible than this. It was not the case

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2 This theory is very tentatively suggested by Rishikesh Shaha, *Politics in Nepal 1980-1990*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, p.227.

3 *The Independent*, 8/1/1992, cited in Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.126.

that the king's politically subordinate role under the Ranas conflicted with the basic ideals of Hindu kingship. If anything, the Ranas used the ideal of Hindu kingship for their own ends, as been done before them by Bhimsen Thapa, the powerful minister who dominated the court from 1806 to 1837.

The king's position in relation to his subjects is an elaborate and complicated one. In the religious sphere, the king is subordinate to any Brahmin even though he is the incarnation of a god. A Hindu scholar in Kathmandu said: 'The king as a member of the second caste,<sup>4</sup> the Kshatriyas, must bow down in front of a Brahman.' This apparent inequality is balanced by the fact that the Brahman's superiority is limited to the religious sphere and that even in the religious context it is not an unambiguous superiority.<sup>5</sup> The Brahman is dependent on the king, who is a member of the warrior caste, to exercise worldly power. Furthermore, the king's divinity was open to several interpretations. At one level, this divinity derived from the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. In the *Ramayana*, Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu, comes to earth to build a kingdom of justice and prosperity, known as *Ramrajya*. In some interpretations the king can only be accounted a true incarnation of Vishnu if his deeds show him worthy enough. There are also some scholars who believe that the king, because he comes from the right caste, sub-caste and lineage, is an incarnation of Vishnu in respect only of his title and not of his person. This situation is said to contrast with that of the Khmer rulers of South-East Asia who were believed by their subjects to be full *avatars* (incarnations) of the deity.<sup>6</sup>

Traditionally in Nepal therefore, the idea of Hindu kingship had little to do with wielding political power. A more enduring mark on Nepalese society has been made by the strong sense of personal loyalty which was

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- 4 Caste' here refers to the larger *varna* unit rather than the smaller *jat* one. Both the king's Thakuri *jat* and the large Chetri *jat* belong to the Kshatriya *varna* (see chap.1, p.3, fn.6 and Table 8.1).
- 5 See Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and Richard Burghart, 'Hierarchical Models of the Hindu Social System', *Man*, vol.13 (new series), no.4 (1978), p.519-36. Burghart argues that the king, the Brahmin and the ascetic have each adopted a perspective on Hindu society which assigns himself the highest position.
- 6 Gérard Toffin, 'Dieux Souverains et Rois Dévots dans l'Ancienne Royauté de la Vallée du Népal', *L'Homme*, vol.26, no.3 (1986), p.71-95. For further discussion, see John Whelpton, *Kings, Soldiers and Priests*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1991. p.9 to 13 and, with specific reference to the *janandolan*, Bert van den Hoek, 'Does Divinity Protect the King? Ritual and Politics in Nepal', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.17 no.2 (1990), p.147-155.

expressed to the ruler - whether that ruler was a Rana or a Shah king. Such loyalty buttressed a purely personal power exercised from above, from ruler to ruled. Although the concept of loyalty to the state rather than to an individual did exist amongst the Nepalese elite,<sup>7</sup> the personal element was normally more in evidence and this principle enabled the Rana Maharajas to rule Nepal and its inhabitants as their personal property. This same principle enabled King Tribhuvan, and later King Mahendra, to consolidate and build up their own personal power after the 1951 revolution, despite repeated promises of democracy.

During the 1950s King Tribhuvan did function, at least in principle, as a constitutional monarch. The 1960s brought King Mahendra into a professedly active role in Nepalese politics. His Panchayat system ushered in a new royal ideology which defined and buttressed the position of the king. The two main pillars of this Panchayat ideology were national development and patriotism. The king was proclaimed as a unifying figure and all-important symbol of nationhood. He was the Father of Development, guiding his people and country without respect to any political party or group. The Panchayat system, after all, was introduced to bring 'partylessness' to Nepal. The principal private secretary to King Birendra, Chiran Shamsher Thapa, gave his own view of the Nepalese monarchy and the role of the king: 'The contribution of the monarchy is important, and I think people expect this contribution to continue. The king is a unifying force and acceptable to the vast majority of the Nepalese people. One cannot be specific about unity, national values and nationalism. It is as much emotional as intellectual. But I think these are important facts and it is important to have a single focus and this is what the monarch should be.'

Towards the end of the Panchayat period the monarchy had lost a good deal of its credibility. In a bid to legitimise its power, the Palace turned strongly once again to religion. The queen's involvement in the World Hindu Federation and the Pashupatinath Development Trust was widely publicised - and in connection with repeated references to Hindu kingship. But Hinduism was open to diverse interpretations and in a modern society religion alone was not an adequate source of legitimation. To many in recent years the Hindu kingdom had simply become synonymous with corruption and oppression. No ideology could paint over the intrigue and abuse of power inside the Palace. There was a long history of court intrigue, but the disclosure of scandal after scandal was

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7 See Whelpton, *Kings, Soldiers and Priests*, *op. cit.*, p.25.

quite shocking and was a powerful factor in bringing the crowds out into the streets during the revolution.

Much of the corruption within the Palace was not blamed on the king personally, but on other members of the royal family. As has already been seen, even during the last days of the Panchayat regime the king was still seen by many as a victim of the system and not a manipulator. The king himself was something of an elusive figure, quite unlike his father King Mahendra. According to the prime minister of the interim government, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, King Birendra showed two distinct sides. On the one hand he was a shrewd power broker. After the United Left Front split while the interim government was still in office, the king gave Bhattarai this advice: "Why don't you kick them out on their backs, since four parties out of seven have come out of the alliance? Why not kick them all out?" Bhattarai went on to say: "The king, as an old Etonian, said this to me in English. I said, "You are a clever fellow. I know you also want to kick me out." Despite their sparring Bhattarai was warm in his praise of the king. Bhattarai called him a "thorough gentleman - He was very kind to me and very respectful and I had no cause for showing him disrespect."<sup>8</sup>

Even so, after the movement started the king bided his time and only agreed to negotiations with the Democracy Movement leaders after the Panchayat system seemed about to collapse. The king's principal private secretary, Chiran Shamsher Thapa, pointed out that the reason for this was that events had moved at a much more rapid pace than anyone could have foreseen: "Hindsight is not always a good guide. I think many people expected the movement to last much longer, maybe fifty weeks, but in fact it was over in fifty days." At best this could only be a partial explanation. What most people came to feel during the period of the democracy movement was that the king simply would not listen. This impression could not be confirmed as the workings of the Palace remained cloaked in mystery. Sushil Pyakurel, the human rights activist, felt that the Palace's very inaccessibility was a screen which hid the truth and the Palace remained a possible threat which even the revolution had not been able to remove: "It is a matter of saving the Palace. The Palace is involved in everything. If you try to isolate the Palace it is impossible. If you talk about democracy the king must admit his mistakes and say what the Palace has done and then say "From this day on I will do nothing." You cannot just create an illusion and tell the people a fairy story."<sup>9</sup> In the

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8 Interview with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Kathmandu, 10/10/1991.

9 Interview with Prakash Kaphley and Suresh Pyakurel, 8/10/1991.



event, the king offered no explanation of his behaviour. Moreover, many people came to believe after the revolution was finally over that the king had not yet come to terms with the new political situation.

### **Making the 1990 constitution**

By the beginning of May 1990 the interim government was firmly in place and the entire Panchayat structure had been dissolved. Furthermore, the king had expressed his support for a constitutional monarchy in Nepal. Yet, as long as the old Panchayat constitution still existed, the king was still free, in principle, to act as he wished. Obviously a new constitution had to be drawn up in line with the new political situation in Nepal. There was also the question of the army whose loyalty was still firmly to the king. As late as October 1990, Rishi Kumar Pandey, military adviser to the king, stated: 'Like in all other monarchies the Nepalese army is totally loyal to the king.' He toned down this remark by going on to say: 'But the orders don't come directly from the king. Everybody in the army accepts that the king delegates his power. Who actually controls the army will always vary. Politics are continually changing. Political leaders come and go, but the army always remains the same, being totally disciplined and loyal to whoever is in power.'

The anomaly of the king's position after the revolution remained a cause for some concern. Rishikesh Shaha commented: 'He had not given anything. He controlled the army. He had discretionary powers - and he had the right to give assent to cabinet decisions. As a political scientist and analyst, I also knew that there was royal command. There might be understanding, but the king could dismiss the government at any time he wanted.'<sup>10</sup>

The immediate onrush of freedom after the revolution temporarily blinded people to the fact that the king's position was legally unchanged. Opinion shifted slowly after several incidents occurred - incidents which made Nepalese question if the king had truly understood that he had lost absolute power. These incidents also led people to question if actual power still remained in the Palace more than with the government.

On 11 May 1990 the king announced the formation of a Constitutional Reform Recommendation Commission over Radio Nepal. Although the Palace had consulted the interim government in advance, it

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10 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, 30/8/1990. Shaha seems to have had in mind both the traditional Nepali system of rule by the king's preemptory command (*hukum*) and also the British constitutional notion of royal prerogative.

had not waited for its agreement. Everyone was taken aback. Even though the king had included liberals on the commission, including Daman Dhungana, a member of the Congress Party, and Bharat Mohan Adhikari, a Communist, the fact remained that the king had turned round and done something he was no longer supposed to do. This caused consternation. What added to the democratic leaders' irritation was that the king had set up a commission only to reform the old constitution and not draft a new one. Rishikesh Shaha maintained that the king really had not yet appreciated the profound change which had taken place in the country. He related how he had been phoned by the Palace to comment on the establishment of the king's commission and how King Birendra wished him to help draft a new constitution, just as King Mahendra had done thirty years previously. 'The king sent for me and asked me to help with the constitution,' said Rishikesh Shaha, 'but I said, "Look, this is no longer your job. It is for the prime minister and the interim cabinet to decide."' Rishikesh Shaha shook his head. 'Seventeen years ago I warned him, but he never listened to me. Instead, he gave up meeting me. And in 1985 when the bombs exploded I told the king, "You are sitting on top of a volcano." And still now, after the revolution, he behaved the same way. He was just like a robot and kept saying "Do help me to make this constitution. Do advise me."'

Reactions came swiftly to the king's announcement. That same day both the Nepali Congress and the communists issued an official condemnation. The following day they asked their own members who had been appointed to the king's commission to resign. They did so promptly and were followed three days later by the president of the commission, Chief Justice Bishwanath Uphadhyaya, even though the king himself had reportedly urged Uphadhyaya not to resign.<sup>11</sup>

The prime minister and the interim cabinet were more careful in condemning the king. In fact, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, may at first actually have agreed to let him nominate the commission members.<sup>12</sup> The government were still worried about a possible Palace conspiracy and thought the king still had a great deal of support. However, the prime minister was emboldened to take a stand when he saw the public backlash against the monarch: 'Meeting the king on 13 May, I had to resort to

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11 Krishna Hachhethu, 'Transition to Democracy in Nepal: Negotiations behind Constitution Making', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.21, no.1 (1994), p.100-101.

12 *Ib.*

threats and say I'd resign from the cabinet if the king didn't remove certain persons whom he had included in the constitution-making.<sup>13</sup>

By now the king had resolved to act in a more realistic manner. He officially disbanded the commission on 15 May. At the same time he announced that he had given the prime minister the power to repeal any laws which would interfere in the speedy establishing of a multi-party democracy in Nepal. Finally, on 20 May, the king at last began to adopt procedures suitable for a constitutional monarch when he appointed a new leadership to the university on the advice of the cabinet. Two days later he also announced that the legislative powers which had been given to the Rastriya Panchayat under the old regime were now in the hands of the interim government.

On 31 May the king proclaimed the formation of a new Constitution Recommendation Commission - only this time on the recommendation of the cabinet, and with the word "reform" left out. The new commission consisted mainly of Congress and communist members in addition to the chairman of the previous commission, Chief Justice Bishwanath Uphadyaya. The new commission was given ninety days in which to draft a new constitution.

The king had obviously learned a lesson, but his loyalty to the new democratic regime was still far from certain. This became clear when two months after this affair the king made another blunder in appointing the new attorney general and two new commissioners of the election commission on the recommendation of the old Raj Sabha, the State Council, and not the interim cabinet. These appointments met with strong reactions and criticism. The most severe criticism came from the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, who accused the king of trying to regain power by actively working against the principles of constitutional monarchy. These communists also maintained that the king was appointing former *panchas* to government posts without consulting the cabinet.

Even though the interim government had been invested with power formally, it seemed unsure of its position at this stage. Because of this, the leader of the Marxist Communist Party, Man Mohan Adikhari, warned the communists to play down their extremist attitudes and try to cooperate with the king. Even the prime minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, said in an interview with the BBC: "The king cannot be tied with a scrap of paper, for he has a 35,000 man army and the police behind him. Blood will be shed if we try to do so in the present situation. We can tie the

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13 Interview with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, 10/10/1991.

king only by framing a constitution and holding elections immediately after. We should also try to change the king's heart by reminding him of the factors that have now compelled him to hand over power to the people.'

The democratic leaders were further shaken by several other incidents involving the royal family. These incidents seemed to raise the possibility that a Palace conspiracy might be in the offing. On 11 May the queen resigned from her post as Chairman of the National Social Services Co-ordination Council which was responsible for all the private aid money coming into the country. The following day at a meeting of the committee she broke down, maintaining that she had no association whatsoever with the Mandale group. Her public penitence seemed to indicate that she had relinquished everything and made a complete break with the past. Three months later, however, the queen came to public attention once again. She was visiting Nepal's national shrine, the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu, on 23 August. This was in connection with the Tij festival, the Hindu women's festival. For some reason the queen and other members of the royal family were attacked. The official version was that extremists hiding just outside the temple entrance lobbed stones at them. The situation was brought under control only after police had fired shots into the air - and only after several police vehicles were damaged. Twenty-one people were arrested in connection with this incident. The home minister, Yog Prasad Uphadyaya, immediately expressed his concern and grief over the incident and for several days afterwards all political parties came forward to condemn what had happened to the queen. At a public meeting on 25 August, both Comrade Rohit and Rishikesh Shaha condemned the attack. At the same time they warned of the possibility of a royal plot. After all, if the queen was involved in an incident which somehow demonstrated that the interim government had lost control, then the king might be persuaded to act. The Pashupati incident showed the queen in a dubious light.

The so-called attack against the queen highlighted the vulnerability of the interim government and the growing fears that some kind of Palace conspiracy was brewing. Mathura Prasad Shrestha, health minister in the interim government, had this to say about those who had been arrested: 'We didn't support the arrests. I personally didn't and neither did the prime minister, but even so the people were arrested.'<sup>14</sup> Shrestha explained how the "attack" against the queen was not as straightforward as had first been supposed: 'There were lots of flaws when the incident happened. First of

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14 Interview with Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Kathmandu, 15/10/1990.

all the queen should have gone to the [main] Pashupati temple rather than the Guyashwori. She went to the Guyashwori temple and she took her adult son with her. No woman is supposed to take an adult son with them on this occasion. This in itself was funny. And nobody knew that she would take that road. Nobody could know this. It would be impossible. When she arrived the song programme and meeting was already over. In the main area where the people used to concentrate - from that area to where the incident occurred - takes about ten to fifteen minutes. How could the demonstrators know that she was going that way? Another funny thing is that her car stopped in the middle of the road. The car was in perfect condition - why should it stop like this? Another strange thing was that they hijacked a police car and that the car's windows were broken from the inside rather than from the outside. And after all this the queen rather than going to the Palace went to Prince Gyanendra's house. Why should she go there? Everybody knows or suspects that Gyanendra is leading the mafia gang which is trying to turn the situation backward.' Asked if he thought the queen had actually staged the incident, Mathura Prasad Shrestha replied: 'You cannot assume that, but you can neither totally reject it. Until these questions are answered people should not have taken action. Moreover, they issued a warrant against someone who at that exact time was at a political meeting at a very different location. I myself am a witness. They even issued warrants against a person who at that time was in Syangja in Western Nepal.' Mathura Prasad Shrestha was speaking six months after the interim government had come into office. He went as far as to admit that neither the police nor the army were totally under our control' and so the situation was potentially serious.

It was in this uncertain situation that the interim government had to oversee the framing of the new constitution. What that constitution had to do was embody the new democratic ideals of the country after the revolution and also restrict the power of the king. It was true that the interim government had been given more or less unlimited powers in principle and that they enjoyed a degree of public support that no previous government in Nepal had ever done. Yet the members of the interim cabinet were far from certain that their positions were secure.

What brought these fears to the surface was the wrangling surrounding the new constitution. This wrangling triggered off a situation of uncertainty and confusion which was comparable to the time of the revolution six months earlier. The stakes were high - for the new constitution would largely shape the political future of Nepal. In the troubled weeks that followed any outcome seemed possible - from another mass uprising to a royal coup.

The struggle over the new constitution was not just a matter of the new democratic regime pitted against the old. There were three main power groups involved: the Nepali Congress, the communists and the Palace. All three groups were represented on the Constitution Recommendation Commission and all three were in conflict. The Nepali Congress wanted to limit the powers of the king and secure multi-party democracy in Nepal. The Congress was driven by a desire for stability and wanted to ensure some continuity with the old regime. Because of this, Congress wanted a mutually acceptable agreement with the king. They wanted the king to remain a powerful symbolic figurehead in Nepal, but without any political power.

The communists, however, wanted a clean break with the past. Some of them saw the new constitution as only a temporary measure, just as they had seen the 1990 revolution as the first of a series of revolutions leading towards the dictatorship of the proletariat. The communists as a whole were uncomfortable with the monarchy. At the very least they wanted to ensure that the Palace would never play an active role in politics again. They also wanted it made possible in the constitution that the Nepalese people, if they so wished, should be able to abolish the monarchy.

The Palace, naturally enough, wanted to retain as much of its former power as possible. A close aide to the king said, just a few weeks before the new constitution was announced: 'The king wants to retain, say, 10% of his power and is trying to bargain.' According to veteran communist leader Man Mohan Adhikari, the royal representatives pressed for the king to be given similar powers to those in the hands of the President of India.<sup>15</sup> The Indian constitution formally vests all executive powers in the president and although he normally exercises these only on the prime minister's recommendation, he enjoys some discretion when no party holds a majority in the Lok Sabha (lower chamber) and is also empowered to dismiss an incumbent prime minister. There has, therefore, been some controversy in India itself over whether the president might in some circumstances constitute a threat to the authority of the prime minister and cabinet.<sup>16</sup> In order to preserve residuary powers for the king, the royal representatives on the Constitution Recommendation Commission needed

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15 Interview with Man Mohan Adhikari, Kathmandu, 30/8/1996 (JW).

16 See the discussion in Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence* (2nd ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.45-47 and also R.L. Hardgrave, & S.A. Kochanek, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation*, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993, p.70-71.

the support of either Congress or the United Left Front, since they themselves were only one third of the Commission's membership.

There was also the question of what the old *panchas* wanted, though they were now a weak political voice. The *panchas* complained that they had not been included in drafting the new constitution. Rajeshwar Devkota, leader of the National Democratic Party (Chand) which had been formed by old *panchas*, said: 'Only the parties who have been represented in the commission will respect the new constitution - nobody else. Neither I, personally, nor my party will respect the new constitution.' Their official complaint was that the new constitution was being drawn up improperly - either the king or a constituent assembly should forge the new constitution, not a commission.

There had been calls for a constituent assembly to be formed as soon as the revolution was over. These calls came mainly from communists and some Kathmandu intellectuals. There were fears that there might be a repeat of the 1950s. Then the elections to a constituent assembly had been postponed and postponed until finally the king himself had given the constitution.

The Nepali Congress argued, however, that there was no time to set up such an assembly. Instead democracy must be enshrined in a new constitution as soon as possible in order to off-set any possible counter-coup. Congress wanted the gains of the revolution consolidated in the constitution. The communists, who had compromised at the end of the revolution wanted a looser constitution in order to leave some room for manoeuvre later on. Congress disliked this, not just because they were suspicious of the communists but because they wanted the king's position firmly decided. The Nepali Congress was worried that the Palace might try to find an opportunity to regain power at a later date. In the light of these possible threats, the Nepali Congress urged all political groups to give their full support to the Constitution Recommendation Commission. However, although they wanted certain basic features, such as the multi-party system and constitutional monarchy, to be entrenched, they did want it made possible for the details of the new constitution to be amended at a later date by an elected parliament.

Though the proceedings of the Constitution Recommendation Commission were secret, it soon became apparent that the commission's internal conflicts and disagreements were serious. Some of these conflicts came out into the open in a fairly dramatic way. On 10 August, the people of Kathmandu woke up to find posters all over the city. These posters revealed some of the most controversial points that the Commission was dealing with - as well as some of its secret proceedings.

The source of this rather public and spectacular leak was soon discovered to be Nirmal Lama, the most radical member of the Constitution Commission. He defended his actions by saying: 'I was a representative of my party on the commission, so it was my duty to report what happened to the party high command. In this context I passed on some secret matters to the high command, but unfortunately, without my knowledge, it was leaked to the lower level party activists and they published it.'<sup>17</sup> Many, however, believed that the appearance of the posters was a simple strategy for the communists to obtain public backing for the points they wanted to push in the new constitution. Only two weeks earlier other information had been leaked from the commission making it public that the three communist members had boycotted a session. There was wide speculation as to why this had happened and the general consensus was that the disagreement had something to do with the position of the monarchy. Eventually, on 29 August 1990, the Marxist-Leninist newspaper *Drishti* revealed that the real reason for the communist boycott was, in fact, their failure to have a motion tabled to put constitutional checks on the monarchy. The problem was finally resolved through a compromise between the United Left Front and the Nepali Congress and this enabled the commission to proceed.

These disputes diminished in importance as the weeks passed. People became more and more worried instead by the long delays in the promulgation of the new constitution. This worry came to overshadow public opinion. Rumours of a planned conspiracy once again circulated in Kathmandu.

The Constitution Recommendation Commission was due to finish its work on 31 August and many hoped that the new constitution would be announced on this day. Many also claimed that the announcement of the new constitution would be accompanied by fresh violence and curfews. A large number of police on the streets on that day showed that even the government was nervous. But nothing happened. Two days later the chairman of the Constitution Recommendation Commission, Bishwanath Upadhyaya, asked the Palace to allow the commission another three days to complete its work. On the evening of 6 September Radio Nepal broadcast that the draft of the new constitution had been informally handed over to the king. The following day the Palace issued a statement saying that the draft constitution would be officially handed to the king by the chairman of the Constitution Recommendation Commission on the approval of the prime minister. Two days later on 9 September still

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17 Interview with Nirmal Lama, Kathmandu, 12/9/1990.



nothing more had happened. The communists began to lose their patience. The Marxist-Leninist Party headed by Radha Krishna Mainali and Mohan Chandra Adikhari staged a demonstration of about 10,000 people. They marched through Kathmandu brandishing slogans like: Stop Palace Conspiracy!

Finally, on 10 September the draft constitution was handed over to the king by Bishwanath Uphadyaya. This news was broadcast by both Nepal TV and Radio Nepal. The king then gave the draft constitution back to the prime minister. For the first time in public the king proceeded to give a speech which had not been prepared by a speechwriter in advance. Talking to the people he used the honorific term *tapai* instead of the lower form *timi*.<sup>18</sup> This calculated liberal gesture did little to assure the public of the king's good faith, however, as he added that he personally would receive suggestions for the new constitution. King Birendra's speech implied that he imagined he would play an active role in editing the draft constitution. After this very public display, the Constitution Recommendation Commission was extended again on 11 September. Again the communist leaders pressed for the new constitution to be announced as soon as possible.

This rather muddled and unsatisfactory situation continued throughout September and much of October 1990. The delays in the announcement of the new constitution led to an upsurge in demonstrations and protests. Meanwhile the draft of the new constitution was shuffled backwards and forwards between the Palace and the interim cabinet with minor points being adjusted each time.

In his yearly speech to mark the Hindu festival of Dasain, which began on 29 September, the king did state that the interim government would bring in a strong multi-party system under a constitutional monarchy. He used the Nepali word *antargat* for "under" which implied that the multi-party system would be subordinate to the monarchy. This, naturally enough, was a cause for some concern. He also promised that the new constitution would be announced before the end of the Nepalese month, which meant before the beginning of the next Hindu festival, Tihar. Even so, yet another announcement came a few days later saying that the new constitution would now not be announced until after Tihar.

The worry and frustration of most of the political leaders in Kathmandu was expressed by the two moderate communists, Man Mohan Adhikari and Krishna Raj Varma. On 27 October they asked that an Election Act be passed so that elections could be held even if there was no

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<sup>18</sup> The difference is approximately that between *vous* and *tu* in French.

constitution. Again, they were anxious to off-set any move that the king might make. Many were of the opinion that the king might make a move. No one was sure. Most people were confident that a counter-coup would not succeed, but they did worry that the king and the army might act against the new democratic regime.

The conflicts between the Nepali Congress and the communists continued throughout this period. At first the communists did not want any changes made to the draft constitution, but they eventually relented and began negotiating. A series of compromises was reached. The Nepali Congress wanted certain features of the new constitution to remain unchangeable. These were constitutional monarchy, a multi-party democratic system and basic human rights. Congress had lost the argument in the commission on this point partly because one of their own representatives, Mukunda Regmi, went against party instructions and supported the ULF's argument that everything in the constitution should be amendable.<sup>19</sup> During discussion in cabinet, Congress was strengthened because the ULF was itself divided: the Marxist-Leninists and the 4th Convention tried to insist on retaining full amendability, but moderates such as Man Mohan Adhikari and Nilamber Acharya were prepared to be flexible.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, the cabinet voted unanimously to change the draft and entrench the basic principles of the new political system.

In order to achieve this, however, Congress had to give in to the communist demand to retain the provision in the draft that all major foreign treaties could only be ratified by a two-thirds majority in parliament. Here, too, Congress had failed to have their way at the drafting stage because their own representatives, who were lawyers rather than party activists, were amenable to the ULF's arguments for limitations on the executive's freedom of action. As part of the final compromise in cabinet, Congress were at least able to introduce an additional clause allowing ratification by simple majority for treaties which had no serious long-term consequences. The Nepali Congress also had their own way on the number of seats in the new parliament. The prime minister of the interim government, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, said: 'The Commission had proposed 175 seats and the communists wanted to keep this number. We changed the number to 205 and said that smaller constituencies were better for the contest. We managed to convince the communists that this also was in their interests.'

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19 Hachhethu, *op. cit.*, p.103.

20 Hachhethu, *op. cit.*, p.107-8, 119.

These issues were minor, however, compared to the difference of opinion between the Nepali Congress and the communists over the position of the king. Prime Minister Bhattarai handed over the final draft of the new constitution to the king on 11 October. The Palace then issued a statement on Radio Nepal saying that the king would study this draft. This statement also declared that the king believed the new draft to contain many good points and that he would do his best to promulgate the new constitution as soon as possible. A furore resulted. This was the first time that the media had broadcast that the king wanted to play an active and independent role in framing the new constitution. Fears of a royal conspiracy grew even further.

A year later, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai related how pressure from the Palace and other conservative elements such as the army had been present during the whole period. 'One day,' he said, 'the commander-in-chief rang at eight o'clock and said he was coming at nine. He walked in in uniform and gave me a file. It said that the king's prerogatives and powers and sovereignty should all remain with him. So I said that this is not my business, it is the business of the Constitution Commission. I put it before the commission and they rejected it. Then I duly informed the commander-in-chief. Then one day I had a telephone call in the office. Some generals and the commander-in-chief wanted to see me personally. All of them came - 22 generals in uniform led by the commander-in-chief. They saluted and sat down. I gave them a cup of tea each. They gave me a file which was the same thing again. Prerogatives and private purse and all that should remain not with the people, but with the king. I replied that the political changes were the result of a very big movement. "How do you suppose that I can do these things or get these things accepted by the people?" I asked... Then the king called me one day suddenly. I said I'd come there after office hours and went there at 5pm. He called in his private secretary and the king said he didn't agree with what the commission was doing. I said it was beyond my power to change anything. I could not get it accepted by the commission or by the cabinet. There were all kinds of people involved in this, I said, communists and others - and they would become very angry.'<sup>21</sup>

By 20 October 1990, when Tihar, the Hindu festival of light, began, the situation had reached serious proportions. The leader of the United Left Front, Sahana Pradhan, declared that unless the new constitution was announced by 24 October, the interim cabinet would resign and the mass

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21 Interview with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Kathmandu, 10/10/1990.

movement would resume. Ganesh Man Singh added his voice, saying there would be another revolt if the new constitution did not appear soon.

No one, however, was prepared for what happened on 22 October. The headline news on both Nepal TV and the government-owned *Gorkhapatra* was that an entirely new constitution, completely different from that drawn up by the Constitution Recommendation Commission, had been handed over to the Prime Minister by the Palace on 20 October. The Palace claimed that the prime minister had been consulted and had approved the document. According to *Gorkhapatra*, however, the three communist members of the Constitution Recommendation Committee, led by Bharat Mohan Adhikari, had approached Prime Minister Bhattarai on 21 October to ask about this new Palace constitution. Bhattarai confirmed that he had received this document from the Palace. He explained that he had immediately rung the king's chief secretary, Revati Raman Khanal, and said that this Palace constitution was utterly unacceptable to the interim cabinet, to the Nepali Congress Party, to the Nepalese people and to himself personally. He added that he would resign at once if the Palace announced their own document as the new constitution.

This Palace constitution wanted to retain much wider powers for the king. Practically speaking, it had much in common with the old Panchayat constitution. The main points of the Palace document were that sovereignty should remain with the king and the people, and not just the people, and that all the powers and rights in the constitution should be vested in the king. Crucially, the document specified that these powers should be exercised 'by and with the advice and assistance of the Council of Ministers' rather than 'by and with [their] advice and *consent*' (italics supplied), which was the formula in the commission's draft.

The news of this new 'counter-constitution' came as a surprise. Most people wondered what was happening inside the Palace and were of the opinion that just about anything could happen. There were even rumours of an imminent military crackdown. The prevailing feeling, however, was one of disbelief. It seemed impossible that the king could turn round and announce his own constitution after his repeated support for the new regime. Former foreign minister, Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya had expressed his own opinion of a possible Palace conspiracy in an interview only a month earlier: 'If the king wants something, nobody can hold him,' he said. 'The Palace doesn't have the power to harm the king. I don't think the king can accept the new situation very well, but he has no choice. So I think it will be in his interests - it will look

good - it will restore his prestige which is very low at the moment, if the king willingly accepts democracy.'<sup>22</sup>

Many people suspected that this Palace constitution emanated not so much from the king, but from those around him who wished to hold on to as much power as possible. Many people were also worried that the Palace constitution was merely the tip of an iceberg. Behind it perhaps lay a larger plot to do away with the interim government and democracy itself. This view was held by some of the political leaders. Bhattarai himself said later that there was probably 'a lobby inside the Palace which generally doesn't like the king playing a liberal role. So they wanted him to retain most of his powers. Among these were probably members of his secretariat.'<sup>23</sup>

The situation was further confused when the Palace issued a statement that same afternoon of 22 October denying any knowledge of what Nepal TV and *Gorkhapatra* had announced. This statement condemned 'these attempts to sow discord between the Palace and the people'. The Palace tried to maintain this position. When asked about it a year later, the chief secretary to the king, Chiran Shamsher Thapa gave a dismissive shrug and said: 'You have to sift fact from fiction'.

But the Palace could not dismiss this incident as fiction so easily. The document had been leaked to the media and it later transpired that Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had himself been responsible for this. At his meeting with the communist members of the Constitution Recommendation Committee on 21 October he had handed over a copy of the document to them and, when asked if they could publish it, told them 'That is what I am giving it to you for!'<sup>24</sup> It thus became clear to everyone that the Palace had indeed circulated a counter-draft, even if the Palace itself might have argued that it was merely a suggestion and not an alternative constitution. Prakash Kaphley, the human rights activist, summed up this incident by saying: 'First the king said something, then the people demanded more and so on. Therefore the king was trying to know the people's response, what their reaction would be. In fact, there was a strong reaction both from the people and the political parties. In this way the king was trying to test the nerves of the people - how united they were.' The prime minister at this time, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, believed that the king had more than just personal motives for releasing this Palace constitution: 'He wanted to tell that group of people inside the

22 Interview with Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya, 1/9/1990.

23 Interview with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Kathmandu, 10/10/1991.

24 Krishna Hachhethu, *op. cit.*, p.110-11.

Palace, those strong people who wanted to retain all the powers in the name of the king, he wanted to show them that he had done his best.'

Bhattacharya's own role was crucial during this period. The palace draft's front page actually bore the words 'prepared in consultation with the prime minister' and on 23 October the Palace was reported as claiming it had 'been circulated after continuous discussion and consultation with the prime minister.' Bhattacharya is said to have told one person who asked him about this: 'I am not a legal expert. King Birendra read this draft in my presence. I made no objection. It is up to you to say whether I consented or not.'<sup>25</sup> However, as in the earlier controversy over the nomination of the commission's members, Bhattacharya was able to use the strength of feeling in the cabinet and among the public generally to win back ground he appeared to have conceded. He was diplomatic publicly and used all his charm and pragmatism behind the scenes in a concerted effort to reach a settlement with the king. Eventually he succeeded. On 24 October the three veteran leaders of the Congress Party, Krishna Prasad Bhattacharya, Girija Prasad Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh met the king. They told him quite straightforwardly their own opinion about what the constitution should entail and how serious they thought the whole matter had become. The following evening the Palace announced that the new constitution would be promulgated on 9 November 1990. The newspaper headlines on the morning of 26 October read: 'The Palace Conspiracy has Failed.' This was, in fact, the end of the matter. From then on the Palace did not try to act independently of the interim government.

Bhattacharya later spoke about his negotiations with the king during this time: 'He thought that he could pressurise me, but I didn't give in. I referred to my cabinet and the communists, saying that it was not for me to decide.' In fact, the end of this matter seemed to bring about a resolution in their relationship. 'After that,' said Bhattacharya, 'we had very smooth sailing.'<sup>26</sup>

The interim cabinet amended the constitution for the last time on 1 November 1990. Even so, fearing another postponement, or a conspiracy, some 12,000 supporters of Comrade Rohit's Nepal Workers and Peasants Organisation staged a 10-kilometre protest march from Bhaktapur into Kathmandu on 6 November. There were also several blackouts across Kathmandu to protest at the festivities marking the queen's birthday, which fell the day before the constitution was due to be announced.

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25 Hachhethu, *op. cit.*, p.110.

26 Interview with Krishna Prasad Bhattacharya, 10/10/1991.

Finally, at noon on 9 November King Birendra announced the new constitution. This announcement marked the end of a long power struggle. In the final rounds between the prime minister and the king, the prime minister had won. Popular power had at last triumphed over traditional power in Nepal.

Bhattarai said in an interview on the day the new constitution was announced that: 'This constitution is as democratic as the situation possibly permitted.' There was a general agreement that this was the case.

The new constitution was certainly democratic in a way the previous Panchayat constitution had never been. Sovereignty now rested with the people and the king had become a constitutional monarch. After so many years as an absolute ruler, King Birendra was now a genuinely constitutional monarch. He remained head of state, but with a democratically elected parliament representing a sovereign people, and with human rights listed in the constitution. Considering the uncertainty of the previous few months this new constitution was a major victory for the new regime.

It was also the case that certain concessions had been made to the king, some purely symbolic and others possibly of some practical importance. If he had lost his power, he had retained his position. The preamble to the constitution began with his full Sanskrit title, which covered about half a page. The royal family was declared exempt from tax, though they were barred from any involvement in business or politics. Furthermore, there were still some substantial similarities between the old constitution and the new. For example, the king retained the power to declare an emergency, though this was now subject to ratification by parliament within three months. Article 35(2) did indeed lay down that, unless it was specifically stated that a particular power was his alone, the king must always act on the advice of his ministers. However, the courts were banned from enquiring into whether or not such advice had been given. In addition, the wording of certain articles left it unclear whether or not royal discretion was retained. In particular, article 53 (4) stated that the king 'may' (*sakibaksine*) dissolve the House of Representatives and call fresh elections on the recommendation of the prime minister. Did this mean that the king was free to act on the recommendation if he chose to do so, or that the prime minister was free to make a recommendation which the king must then follow?

Interviews conducted by a Nepalese political scientist, Krishna Hachhethu, and also a draft constitution prepared separately by the ULF representatives, suggest that both in the exercise of emergency powers and in dissolving parliament the drafters' intention was that the king should

act only on ministerial advice but should retain a veto over the recommendation. Whilst the left were in general opposed to allowing real power to the monarchy, they were working on the assumption that Congress would win the forthcoming general election and preferred granting 'preventive powers' to the king rather than leaving unfettered discretion in the hands of a Congress prime minister.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the question of ambiguity, the thorny problems of religion and language had also not been solved to everybody's satisfaction. The kingdom was now defined as 'multi-ethnic' as well as 'Hindu' and every community was guaranteed the freedom to operate schools in its own language but this still fell well short of activist demands.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, apart from the far left and the new regional and ethnic parties, most groups welcomed the new constitution. At the same time, leftists in general were unhappy with the entrenchment of certain provisions. The chairman of the Bar Association, Basudev Dhungana, said: 'I'm happy in one sense. The king should be on the throne and the power should be with the people. But there are also bad things. Sovereignty in Article two, for example. Parliament has the right to amend the constitution and the king has to assent, but when you say that the people are sovereign, you cannot restrict the people from amending certain parts of the constitution. But more important, there is a lot that has to be put into practice.'<sup>29</sup>

Here Basudev Dhungana had touched on the overriding question. Would the new constitution be respected and implemented? The experience of the 1980's had been disappointing. Many people were also sceptical that the king would reconcile himself to his new position as a constitutional monarch. He was used to being political, not only ceremonial. They were not sure how he would react. Most people were sure, however, that the king would respect the new constitution in the beginning.

In fact, the Palace quickly adopted a new tone which implied that it believed democracy had come to stay. In his Dasain speech the king had tried to portray the year's political change as gradual. The Palace obviously wanted to create the impression that the king had given away his power willingly and had not been forced to do so because of a mass uprising. Chiran Shamsher Thapa, principal private secretary to the king, tried to make out that King Birendra was merely acting in the tradition of his illustrious ancestors: 'It was an ancestor of His Majesty who forged

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27 Hachhethu, *op. cit.*, p.104.

28 See chapter 8 for further discussion.

29 Interview with Basudev Dhungana, Kathmandu, 7 & 15/4/1991.



Nepal into a state in 1768. It was His Majesty's grandfather who first introduced democracy into Nepal, and now His Majesty has embraced the multi-party system and constitutional monarchy in the interests of his people. He is very conscious that his family is there to serve the interests of the Nepalese people. He is of the feeling that Nepal cannot be left behind and what changes are necessary should be made quickly. This has led to the present situation with an interim government and a new constitution.'

The Palace, then, wanted to show that the king was interested in stability and had no intention of trying to win back his power. Yet everyone knew that the situation could change. It had done so before in 1960. If the new government failed to re-establish law and order and if the Nepalese people started to lose faith in their democratic leaders then a situation might very well arise where King Birendra would repeat the actions of his father King Mahendra and seize power back again. Some people felt the king had actually lost too much power under the new constitution and that this was bad for the country. An influential member of the old regime said: 'Nepal is like a building made of bricks where the monarchy is the mortar holding the bricks together. But now the mortar is being turned into sand. The king has become absolutely powerless, a zero. Without the monarchy Nepal will fall apart. It needs a strong monarchy with certain, though limited powers, to survive.'

The new constitution needed more than the king's blessing in order to be assured of a future. It needed the backing of the Nepalese people and all of the political leaders. Even after 9 November 1990 when the new constitution was announced, some people doubted if there was enough of a political consensus in the country for the new constitution to be anything more than a well-meaning scrap of paper. Many worried that the tension of the previous months might develop into open anarchy. As Basudev Dhungana had said, whether this new constitution was stronger than the paper it was written on would depend on the spirit in which it was actually operated.

### **Constitutional Monarchy in Practice**

Over the next five years, the issue was put to the test with the 1991 and 1994 elections and with the requests for dissolution of the House of Representatives made by a Congress prime minister in 1994 and his UML successor in 1995. Controversy over the elections focussed mainly on the impartiality of the administration. With the requests for dissolution, however, interpretation was central, and the Supreme Court, whilst

allowing that there *was* some royal power of discretion, asserted its own right to judge the reasonableness of the advice offered to him.

The public debate in both 1994 and 1995 focussed not only on the precise wording of the constitution but also on custom and practice in other countries with a parliamentary system. In 1995, for example, a National Democratic Party leader, Pashupati Shamsheer Rana, who had studied political science at Oxford, cited a precedent set by George V of Britain in 1925 to argue that a request for dissolution by the head of a minority government was not binding on the king.<sup>30</sup>

Although in 1995 Congress, the NDP and Sadbhavana were ready to form an alternative government, Birendra did dissolve parliament as Man Mohan had requested. The decision presumably reflected the king's desire to avoid accusations of partisanship which would have followed if he had denied a communist prime minister what he had allowed a Congress one the year before.<sup>31</sup> When the Supreme Court eventually quashed the dissolution, there were sharp protests from the UML and also from those who believed that under a parliamentary system, the right to call early elections was a prerogative of the prime minister, whether or not he commanded a parliamentary majority. However, the opprobrium naturally fell on the court, not on the king, who was actually praised in glowing terms by the UML General Secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal: 'The king, who is the protector of the interests of the whole Nepalese people, rather than of any particular group or country, is never involved in any controversy...everybody should make efforts to enhance the glory of the constitutional monarchy.'<sup>32</sup>

Within the UML, and even more so in other communist parties, there were many who would not subscribe to such language. However the line now adopted by the strongest party on the Left reinforced the many other factors which supported the continuance of the monarchy. An opinion poll conducted at the time of the 1991 election showed that 68% of supporters of the National Democratic Parties, 45% of those supporting Congress, 30% of UML supporters and even 20% of those favouring the radical United People's Front still believed that the king was

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30 Pashupati Shamsheer J.B. Rana, 'Constitutions and Dissolutions', unpublished paper, 1994. George V did eventually act on the recommendation of Ramsey MacDonald, the head of a minority Labour government, but only after he had satisfied himself that the Conservative and Labour parties, who together commanded a majority in the House of Commons, were not willing to form a coalition.

31 Ganesh Raj Sharma and Krishna Prasad Pant, two constitutional authorities and also stalwarts of the former Panchayat regime, are believed to have advised Birendra on these lines (*Saptahik Bimarsha* 16/6/1995).

32 *Gorkhapatra* 27/6/1995 (PD39:27).

an incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>33</sup> Were these voters to be presented with the abolition of the monarchy as a *fait accompli*, they might conceivably accept the change as proving that the king's divinity had deserted him,<sup>34</sup> but in the short term no mainstream party would deprive any advantage by arguing for republicanism. Support for the monarchy has in any case always been a key plank in the Congress party programme: even at the party's conference in February 1990 which was the prelude to the *janandolan*, Ganesh Man Singh had declared that abolition of the monarchy is tantamount to the end of democracy in Nepal.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the statements of support for the monarchy are, of course, put forward for tactical reasons rather than out of conviction. However, many political leaders feel, with some justification, that, as in Thailand and Spain,<sup>36</sup> constitutional monarchy is likely to help rather than hinder the institutionalisation of democracy. At any rate, the continuance of the institution now seems more certain than most things in Nepalese political life.

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33 Borre et al., *op. cit.*, p.149.

34 C.f. the belief of some Nepalese that the ousting of the Dalai Lama from power in Tibet proved that he was in fact no longer an incarnate Lama (Vivienne Kondos, 'Nepalese Absolutism?', *South Asia*, vol.8 no.2 (1984), p.55.)

35 Quoted in Hachethu, 'Mass Movement in Nepal', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.17, no.2 (1990), p.182.

36 B.P.Koirala argued specifically that the restitution of the monarchy in Spain had aided the transition from fascism to democracy (Kiran Mishra, *B.P.Koirala - Life and Times*, New Delhi:Wishwa Prakashan, 1994, p.117.)



# CHAPTER 8

## DEMOCRACY IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

### Introduction: Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious Divisions

Nepal is famous for the variety of ethnic groups, languages and religious traditions found within its borders. Yet ever since the birth of modern Nepal in the late 18th century political power had largely been in the hands of high-caste Parbatiyas (viz. members of the Thakuri, Chetri and hill Brahman castes shown at the top of Table 8.1). It was therefore their culture which enjoyed state patronage and which was the target for imitation by socially ambitious members of other groups. Core elements of this Parbatiya culture, in particular the Nepali language and Hinduism, helped form the basis of a national identity which continued to develop slowly during the years before 1950.<sup>1</sup> With the end of the Rana regime and the subsequent advent of mass education and development of mass media, the state was in a much stronger position to inculcate this sense of identity amongst the general population. Whilst the theme of harmony in diversity was also part of Nepal's official self-image, the main thrust of policy was to promote assimilation to the dominant Parbatiya culture. This was made totally explicit in the 1955 report of the National Education Planning Commission. This recommended that children in school should be required to switch as soon as possible to the exclusive use of Nepali so that 'other languages will gradually disappear and greater national strength and unity will result.'<sup>2</sup>

Amongst some members of other ethnic groups there was evidence of a reaction against this approach from early on. Ethnically-based organisations, normally concerned with the preservation of a particular

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1 For analysis of this process, see Richard Burghart, 'The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.44, no.1 (1984), p.101-25, and David Gellner *et al.* (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom* (especially the chapters by Gurung, Sharma, Pfaff-Czarnecka & Whelpton). Pratyoush Onta, 'Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India', *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, vol.1, no.1 (1996), p.37-76, shows how this identity was strengthened amongst Nepalese in India in the 20th., century through the writing of history glorifying key figures in Nepal's past.

2 National Education Planning Commission, *Education in Nepal*, Kathmandu: College of Education, 1956, p.96-7.

group's language and culture, were established both before and during the Panchayat years but they were constricted by the limits then imposed on any activity construable as political. When the victory of the *janandolan* removed these limits in 1990, there was an explosion of activism and many people felt that a religious and ethnic revolt was threatening the very social and cultural fabric of Nepalese society.

The six-month period between the end of the revolution in May 1990 and the promulgation of the new constitution on 9 November 1990 brought the issues of language, religious and ethnic conflict to the public attention. To the dismay of the Constitution Recommendation Commission's own chairman, the vast majority of submissions received during the drafting process were concerned only with these questions.<sup>3</sup>

Warnings about this had been given even before the revolution had begun. Speaking on 16 February 1990, two days before the movement was launched, Madan Mani Dikshit, editor of the weekly newspaper *Samiksha* said: 'Restoration of the multi-party system in this country naturally will weaken the authority of the monarch. The cultural and social backwardness of Nepal is such that it might lead to internal disintegration. See, we have more than 30 - 35 ethnic groups spread around the Himalayan mountains and even in the plains. We have several languages - at least three or four major languages and more than 50 dialects. Take the Magar community, for instance. That community is asserting its rights to organise on a community basis. They want a recognition of their language. They want a recognition of their script - recognition of their worklife and economy for their community. Other groups are demanding the same thing. The argument from the partyless side has been that the people are united because the king is there. Otherwise, under the multi-party system the elections will demand that they exploit these ethnic divisions and linguistic differences inside the country as has taken place inside India.'

### **The 1990 Campaign for a Secular State**

It certainly became clear that Nepal with its thirty major ethnic groups and almost a hundred different languages might not remain satisfied with one national language, Nepali, and one national religion, Hinduism. Many Nepalese began to worry that the strife caused by communalism in India might one day spread across the border to Nepal. There was some cause for worry. Nearly every week during this unstable

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3 Michael Hutt, 'Drafting the 1990 Constitution', in Hutt(ed.), *Nepal in the Nineties*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1993, p.35.

period a new ethnic or regional party appeared, sworn to fight the political and economic domination by the high-caste Hindus. At the same time, the position of the Hindu religion in the new constitution came to be questioned. The communists naturally wanted a secular state. Minority religious groups such as Christians and Muslims suddenly became visible in public life. More importantly, Buddhists made themselves felt as a political force for the first time ever in Nepal. This emergence of a new Buddhist consciousness was quite unexpected. Previously Buddhists in Nepal had been reckoned as a kind of sect within Hinduism and their interests were seen as no different from the Hindu majority. The appearance of religious conflict worried Hindus - especially consciously orthodox Hindus who were influenced by the spread of Hindu fundamentalism in India.

What brought this new religious conflict out into the open was, strangely enough, the work neither of the communists, the Hindus nor the Buddhists. What happened was that the Nepal Christian Fellowship held the first ever public meeting of Christians in Nepal on 7 May 1990. The Christians were a small group, dating only forty years back. They were also a harassed group. Under the old Panchayat constitution, it was illegal either to change one's own religion or to seek to convert others and there were still several Christians serving prison sentences because of their religious convictions. Christians speaking at this public meeting called for minority rights in the light of the new democratic freedoms. They also called for the release of all religious prisoners and for a secular state. Besides Christians, human rights activists were present at the meeting. Also present was the Congress leader Marshal Julum Shakya, who was minister for transportation and physical construction in the interim government, and the supreme leader of the Nepali Congress, Ganesh Man Singh. All of them expressed sympathy with the Christian community. They too had been persecuted under the Panchayat regime and they, too, supported the Christian demands for religious freedom. A few days later the remaining religious prisoners were released. In the weeks that followed communist leaders and members of the interim cabinet publicly declared their belief that Nepal should become a secular state.

Many Hindus took fright at this. Reaction to the proposal was strong, especially in the press. Commenting on the release of religious prisoners, the weekly newspaper *Bimarsha* wrote on 15 June that 'the state has thus become secular even before the framing of the new constitution. Followers of the Hindu religion are now feeling frightened lest the influence of Christians should increase.' The World Hindu Federation, which had received royal patronage and enjoyed strong support

from the Panchayat regime, was scathing. In an article in *Gorkhapatra*, the Federation complained that the release of religious prisoners 'had undermined the rule of law and hurt the feelings of 95% of the Nepalese people as well as millions throughout the world.'

Thus the debate on secularism grew - though attention soon shifted away from the Christian community. More and more groups demanded a secular state and correspondingly the reactions from conservative Hindus became even stronger. One of the royal nominees to the interim cabinet, Achyut Raj Regmi, declared that if the new constitution did not include provisions to retain Nepal's status as a Hindu state then he personally would stage a hunger strike at the gates of Pashupatinath, the main Hindu shrine in Kathmandu. The moderately conservative newspaper *Motherland* criticised the interim government's inability to handle the conflict and wrote in an editorial on 26 June 1990: 'Quite obviously very strong emotions have been aroused with the government itself taking up the question of secularism when practice was that the Hindu state tolerated the observances of any religion with remarkable co-existence and a fault-free history of mutual respect.' The newspaper went on to comment about the conflict between the Buddhists and Hindus: 'It is unfortunate thus that for the first time since Shankar Acharya's epochal journey to the Valley nearly a millennium ago, Buddhism is being made distinct from Nepalese Hinduism, something that only politics can explain and not logic in Nepal.'<sup>4</sup>

Such attempts to smooth over the situation were in vain. The conflict had now spread too far. On 29 June a protest of 5-6,000 people emerged from the gates of Pashupatinath and walked silently through the streets of Kathmandu to the parade grounds in the centre of town. They held up an image of Lord Krishna in front of their procession and flourished banners with slogans such as 'Unity and Diversity - the Basic Characteristic of Hinduism' and 'We want a Hindu Nation'. The following day the largest demonstration since the revolution took place organised by the Nepal Buddhist Association. 25-30,000 people walked through the centre of Kathmandu urging 'Give us a Secular State. Buddhism is not just a branch of Hinduism.' This march, too, ended up at the open-air theatre at Tundikhel in the middle of Kathmandu. Several Buddhist

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4 Shankar Acharya was an 8th-century religious leader associated with a Hindu 'counter-reformation' against Buddhism. In Nepal, legends preserved in the local *vamsavalis* (chronicles) place him rather later and claim that he reached the Kathmandu Valley and destroyed many Buddhist monasteries (see David Gellner, *Monk, Householder and Buddhist Priest*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.86).



scholars addressed the crowd including Bhikshu Amritananda. He deplored the notion that Hinduism and Buddhism were the same and called strongly for a secular state. The speeches all emphasised how Buddhism in Nepal had been suppressed. Speakers pointed out the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism - differences such as Hindu violence and Buddhist non-violence.

The Buddhist demonstration came as a total shock. Most Nepalese politicians were Hindus and not very vocal about their religion. To them Buddhists had just appeared as another kind of Hindu. The Buddhist demonstration spurred even the moderate and rather traditional Nepali Congress to discuss secularism seriously.

On 6 July Congress stated publicly that the party had no official position on whether Nepal should remain a Hindu state or become secular. Their only demand was that the king should remain a Hindu. This compromise position did nothing to quell the mounting fervour of the conservative Hindus. On 11 August L.K. Advani, the leader of the Hindu-fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party even travelled to Nepal to pressure the interim government into retaining the country as a Hindu state. That same day Achyut Raj Regmi said: 'Any person who ignores the feelings of the Hindus, who comprise 95%<sup>5</sup> of the people in Nepal, and says that Nepal should not be a Hindu state is not only an enemy of democracy, but a despot.' At a public meeting in connection with the Hindu festival Krishna Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna, Regmi urged the Nepalese Hindus to take to the streets and fight for a Hindu kingdom. 'We must fight for the continuation of a Hindu state!' he declared.

While Regmi might seem extremist, his background was actually liberal. He had been a member of the Nepali Congress Party, but later became part of the Panchayat system, where he, in his own words, 'propagated parliamentary democracy'. The 1990 revolution brought him into the public eye. First he was part of Lokendra Bahadur Chand's short-lived ministry and then the king nominated him to the interim cabinet. Regmi was a founder member of the World Hindu Federation. He was also active in the Pashupati Development Trust. This was an organisation which served as a focus for conservative Hindus. As the queen was an active member, the Pashupati Development Trust was closely linked to the centre of power in Kathmandu. Religion, however, was more important to him than politics. The walls of Regmi's house were decked with pictures of Hindu saints and his morning *puja*, or worship, took

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5 The figure given in the 1991 census is 86.5%.

more than an hour. He tried in every way to live as a strict, orthodox Brahmin.

Regmi argued that his strong desire to see Nepal remain a Hindu kingdom had more to do with culture than with politics or religion. He argued that Nepalese culture was Hinduism. 'Hinduism and religion are different,' he stressed. 'Hinduism is a culture, a nationality. There are so many religions inside Hinduism. Jain, Sikhism and also Buddhism are all part of Hindu culture. There are so many systems of worshipping God. Even within orthodox traditional Hinduism there are so many sects - some worship Vishnu, some worship the goddess Durga, Ganesh and so many others. To declare a Hindu state does not therefore mean a religious state - it means declaring a Hindu culture. 95% of the people believe in some way or another in Hindu culture and Hindu spirituality. That's why we need a Hindu state. There was no constitution at the time of the Rana regime and Nepal was called a Hindu state. That is why if you delete the word "Hindu" from the constitution 95% of the people of Nepal will feel cheated.' When asked about the Buddhist opposition Regmi answered: 'They do not understand that if Nepal succumbs to secularism even their Buddhism will be punished.' Regmi saw secularism as something sinister coming from abroad - especially India. He believed it was espoused by politicians who were bent on destroying Nepalese culture. Regarding the communist call for a secular state Regmi laughed: 'Not even their wives support them in this.'<sup>6</sup>

Though Regmi was a religious man and genuinely believed in religious freedom his views were, to some extent, connected with political power. As a high-caste Brahman, Regmi himself was part of the elite who had occupied a privileged position precisely because Nepal was a Hindu state. If the new constitution were to make Nepal a secular country this might directly challenge the high-caste Hindus' traditional hold on power.

Yet where did opposition to the Hindus come from? According to the 1981 census only about 1 in 20 of the population of Nepal were Buddhists. Moreover, the Buddhists had a reputation for living peaceably - almost invisibly - alongside the Hindus. As has already been seen, for many Nepalese Hinduism and Buddhism were not really indistinguishable. It was a fact, however, that the official census was misleading. A very broad definition of 'Hinduism' had been adopted and thus the Hindus appeared to be in an overwhelming majority in Nepal. The governments' critics could just as readily challenge the figures by adopting a very restrictive definition. Dr. Asha Ram Sakya, a Buddhist scholar and leader

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6 Interview with Achut Raj Regmi, 15/9/1990.

of the Nepal Buddhist Association maintained: 'In the 1981 census the Buddhist population was shown as 5.3%.<sup>7</sup> This is totally wrong. Tamangs were never Hindus - the Gurungs were never Hindus, nor the Sherpas, nor the Chepangs, nor the Rais, nor the Limbus of Eastern Nepal. In addition there are minor nationalities who are all Buddhists. In reality the Buddhists of Nepal are a majority. We are more than 70% of the population. The problem was that most of the Buddhists of Nepal are not educated. When the census officers arrived they would not ask about their religion - they would ask "Do you worship Ganesh?" They would answer "Yes" and because Ganesh is a Hindu god they would be written down as Hindus. But in Nepal Hindus worship Buddha and Buddhists worship Ganesh. That does not mean that all are Hindus. It is a result of the long cultural intermingling and interaction between Hindus and Buddhists. And it does not mean that Buddhism is just a branch of Hinduism, which the previous government claimed.'<sup>8</sup>

It was in fact true that many Nepalese combined elements from both Hinduism and Buddhism in their religious practice, making it very hard to draw a clear dividing line. Amongst the Newars, for example, the distinction did hold good for the upper castes but not for the Maharjans and those below them in the traditional hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> Whether put forward by officialdom or by religious activists, statistics may thus not be very meaningful. The 1991 census did, however, show that Hindus must be in the majority, since the castes and ethnic groups all sides accepted as Hindu (the Parbatiyas and the Terai castes) together numbered 56% of the population (see Table 8.1).<sup>10</sup>

But regardless of exact numbers, and even if a majority of Nepal's Buddhists were not conscious of themselves as such, an awareness of Buddhism and Hinduism as contrasting doctrinal systems tended to grow with increasing levels of education. That awareness was probably heightened because the state had generally given its patronage to a 'high' Hinduism reflecting north Indian orthodoxy rather than to a 'folk Hinduism' more common at village level.<sup>11</sup> So now a growing group of

7 In the 1991 census the figure increased to 7.78 %.

8 Interview with Asha Ram Shakya, 20/9/1990.

9 In section 2 of Table 8.1, the traditionally Hindu castes are shown in the left-hand and traditionally Buddhist castes on the right.

10 A non-Hindu majority could be constructed by counting as Hindu only the *tagadharis* (high-castes who wear the sacred thread), but the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh, the organisation grouping together most of the ethnic groups rejecting a Hindu identity shows by excluding 'untouchables' that it regards them, too, as Hindu.

11 Pratyoush Onta, personal communication. Onta stresses the role of 20th-century writers in boosting 'high' Hinduism, but Hindu orthodoxy had already been

intellectuals like Asha Ram Sakya were attempting to reclaim their cultural and religious identity as Buddhists. These people saw Buddhism as providing an alternative ideology to the Brahminical Hinduism supported by the Panchayat government.

Sakya related how he had been born and brought up in a Buddhist *vihara* in Patan. This was a Buddhist monastery which, throughout the centuries of Hindu domination, had become a sanctuary for a separate caste of Buddhist priests. Sakya explained that the Buddhist rituals had survived in this community - only there was no one to explain them. On inheriting his duties as a Buddhist priest from his father, Sakya decided that he wanted to study Buddhism. When he did so he found that he discovered something very different from Hinduism. 'It looked like a revolt against Hinduism - because Buddha never appreciated Brahmins and the division of people into four major groups.' Suddenly, Sakya claimed, he found that Buddhism was 'a modern religion for modern man.' According to Sakya, in a way Buddha 'supported a multi party system' and said: 'Don't blindly follow - listen and analyse.' Sakya's position as a political activist and lecturer at the university in Kathmandu had also led him to believe that Buddhism was more important for Nepal's national identity than Hinduism. 'If Buddhism is taken away there is nothing. Nepal may just as well become a part of India.'

Sakya's comment on the position of Buddhists under the Ranas was: 'Under Rana rule they were repressed and subjugated. They have always been suppressed, but the Buddhists, tolerant as they are, meekly accepted what they were given. But they never accepted that Buddhism was a part of Hinduism.' Sakya totally rejected the popular view that Buddhists lived in harmony under their Hindu rulers: 'If Hindu suppression is what you call harmony,' he said acidly, 'I would rather not have it!'

Naturally enough, Sakya became involved in fighting for Buddhist rights after the revolution of 1990. He was firm in demanding Nepal become a secular state. 'All we wanted was the state to be secular,' he said. 'The state should have no religion - this is a universal law. Theocratic states have seen thousands of people being massacred every day. Look at Saddam Hussein -and you remember what Khomeni did, killing his own people in millions. And you see what has happened in Sri Lanka! It is all because of religion! Now if they don't say the constitution is secular we don't mind. But let the constitution be silent on religion. Let there be full freedom of religion.'

The communists were, of course, completely committed to Nepal becoming a secular state. Yet it was not only the communists, the Buddhist activists or the minority religious groups who believed in the benefits of secularism. In the weeks that followed the revolution all the new democratic politicians and the intellectuals in Kathmandu seemed strongly in favour of a secular state. At that stage it seemed fairly certain that the new constitution would not make any reference to Hinduism continuing as the state religion of Nepal. The succeeding months, however, brought a wind of change.

There were many strong forces at work which aimed to keep Nepal as a Hindu kingdom. While some figures, such as Achyut Raj Regmi, were public in their efforts - many of these forces worked stealthily and steadily underground. A large number of people believed that elements of the old regime were at work and that even the Palace was involved. By early September 1990 the mood in Nepal had changed to the extent that no one now believed the new constitution would be wholly secular. Many still hoped, however, that it would not prove as rigid on the question of religion as the previous Panchayat constitution had been.

Why then were the conservative Hindus able to gain the upper hand? How was it that events turned out in their favour? One reason was that Hinduism was still a potent force in Nepalese society, even in 1990. Ever since King Prithvi Narayan Shah had united the country in 1768 Hinduism had been the state religion. With the promulgation of Jang Bahadur Rana's Muluki Ain in the middle of the nineteenth century, every group in the country had been formally allotted a position within a comprehensive caste-hierarchy. Put bluntly, Hinduism was in people's blood. Even so, Rana Hinduism was never state-sanctioned fundamentalism. Furthermore, Nepal had not been explicitly defined as a Hindu kingdom until the Panchayat constitution of 1962. Then its inclusion had seemed intended purely to benefit the interests of a small elite in Nepalese society. Rishikesh Shah, one of the main advisers on the Panchayat constitution described the debate at that time: 'Then came the question of calling Nepal a Hindu kingdom. I said, look, we've already said the king is going to be a Hindu. There is no point in rubbing it in. There are Muslims, Buddhists, Shamanists - all kinds of people. We have to be modern. We have to follow this secular state policy. King Mahendra made me discuss this proposition for the whole night and I convinced him. But unfortunately his sycophants in the cabinet were saying "Oh, we must have that," and then it was put in again.' Rishikesh Shah then related how he had discussed exactly the same issue with King Birendra after the 1990 revolution: 'I told the king,' he said, 'look, do you want

religious fundamentalism? I told your father King Mahendra the same thing and persuaded him not to put this thing in even at that time. Was not Nepal a Hindu country before 1962, although there were no references to that in the previous constitutions? So why should you have this? It will only have the effect of rubbing people up the wrong way. Now you see what the Buddhists are doing and the tribals and other groups. So I told the king to keep religion separate from the state, not to mix religion with politics.<sup>12</sup> Rishikesh Shaha's insistence was to no avail. The forces at work to maintain Nepal as a Hindu state were too strong.

### **Ethnic Activism**

This religious dispute was also linked to ethnic and communal questions. The six month period between the end of the revolution and the announcement of the new constitution saw a wave of protest against traditional high-caste Hindu domination in Nepal. Ever since King Prithvi Narayan Shah's reign in the eighteenth century the Nepali speaking Hindu high-castes had dominated the remainder of the population. In order to maintain their social position the high caste groups had used two powerful tools - the Nepali language and the Hindu religion. The ruling elite successfully incorporated all the ethnic groups in Nepal into the caste system and these groups came to accept a subordinate position in Nepalese society as a direct result of this policy. It was not surprising, therefore, that members of these groups often lost out in the race to enjoy the benefits of modernization. The months after the revolution, however, gave birth to new ethnically and communally based political parties and signalled that at last these Tibeto-Burman<sup>13</sup> peoples were ready to protest against the centuries-long rule of the Brahmans and the Chetris. The president of one of these new parties, the Nepal Rastriya Janamukti Morcha (Nepal Nation People's Liberation Front) said in an interview with the *Nepali Patra* on 7 September 1990: 'In Nepal Hinduism or Brahminism has been maintaining religious, political and social domination. Hindus have maintained a respectable status as the ruling class in every situation, such as Rana rule, Panchayat rule and the democratic period - whereas the other ethnic groups have always remained exploited and repressed. The Brahmans want to restrict us within their own narrow limits. It is therefore the goal of our party to organise the

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12 Interview with Rishikesh Shaha, Kathmandu, 30/8/1990.

13 Strictly speaking, the term 'Tibeto-Burman' refers to language rather than ethnicity or race, but the expression 'Tibeto-Burman peoples' is used as shorthand for 'ethnic groups speaking Tibeto-burman languages'. The groups concerned are also often referred to in English (especially since 1990) as 'Mongols' or 'Mongoloids'.

ethnic groups who have been left backward in the political, social and religious field. The Front does not oppose any prosperous ethnic groups, although it opposes their repression.'

This new ethnic movement focused on the questions of religion and language. It started among the Newar people of the Kathmandu Valley. The Newars are a Tibeto-Burman people with a language of their own and possess the oldest literary tradition in Nepal. With their complex mixture of Hindu, Buddhist and Tantric rituals and beliefs, the Newars have maintained cultural and religious traditions which have disappeared from other parts of Asia. Some felt the Newars were more of a nation than an ethnic group. It was true that a certain stratum of Newar society had held positions of privilege in Nepal, ranking only behind the Brahmans and the Chetris. It was also true, however, that Newar culture and language had been suppressed. A movement for the recognition of the Newari language had actually started after the 1951 revolution. During the 1950's Newari, together with Hindi, had enjoyed the status of semi-official languages in Nepal. This was recognised in the daily news broadcasts in both Newari and Hindi during that period. In 1957 there was even a brief debate as to whether Newari should be made a national language of Nepal. King Mahendra's royal coup and the introduction of the Panchayat system put an end to all this. From then on Nepali was made the sole official language and the only medium of education in state schools. Newari was not banned from official use, as during the Rana period, but it was reduced to being only an optional subject at university level. Thirty years later there was a Newar resurgence in the 1990 revolution. The uprisings in Patan, Bhaktapur and Kirtipur in the Kathmandu Valley were crucial in determining the success of the democracy movement. Padma Ratna Tuladhar, the influential leftist politician and a Newar himself, pointed out that these uprisings were not communal. They were aimed at bringing about freedom and democracy at a national level. Many of the Newar political leaders, however, were active in trying to push forward the cause of the Newari language. This was not done to the exclusion of all other languages in Nepal, but rather to try and force the central government to recognise the linguistic diversity within the country. Comrade Rohit from Bhaktapur, a writer as well as a politician, said: 'Nepal is just like a garden with a rich variety of flowers. Every ethnic group and caste has its own unique culture and art. The product of this is a rich and diverse natural culture. Therefore one should encourage the development of each one of these cultures and languages as they are there to improve the quality of life for the people.' When Radio Nepal resumed news broadcasts in Newari and Hindi on 29 June 1990, therefore, political leaders like

Rohit were not satisfied. Padma Ratna Tuladhar, who was Chairman of the Newari language organisation, the Nepal Bhasha Manka Khala, had become outspoken about the need for using mother tongues in Nepal's schools. He pointed out that most of the ethnic groups in Nepal were deprived of their basic right to develop their own mother tongue, in contrast to the relatively privileged Newar community: 'So far as the Newars are concerned,' he said, 'because they are the inhabitants of the capital, Kathmandu, and they have been a very cultured race, they have such facilities as education, training and so on, and they can enjoy facilities in administration. Now, you see, we have so many ethnic groups besides these three - the Brahmans, Chetris and Newars, and almost all of these have been neglected. They have been deprived of such opportunities. So first of all now we must recognise that Nepal has so many ethnic groups, so many languages and accept that all these people are equal. And then the government should offer equal opportunities in education. We have no education system where the mother tongue is the medium. Nepali is the medium in education, even in primary education -and we have a huge population who do not know the Nepali language from the very beginning. Only when the different ethnic groups get education in their own mother tongue will they get access to other facilities - and only then can they say that all the ethnic groups have equal rights in our country - in jobs, administration posts and so on.' Padma Ratna Tuladhar continued: 'The first priority of the new government should be to solve this problem democratically and politically. I'm requesting the political parties to raise the question, because only through political and democratic means can we have an amicable solution to this problem.' He warned that: 'If this is not solved democratically and politically, the people may go communal. Once such a problem turns into communalism we may have a very bad situation in the country. We have so many instances in India where they fought each other for language, religion and so on... But in Nepal, even though almost all the languages have been deprived of democratic rights, we have had no communal riots.' Tuladhar was critical of both the communists and the Nepali Congress: 'They must understand that in a democracy the people have a right to come openly and demand their rights for languages, ethnic equality and so on. Meeting these demands must be made an integral part of our political movement. If these people can't demand their rights democratically or politically, they may go communal.' Tuladhar did not believe that the new ethnic parties in Nepal were reactionary: 'This is only the natural and healthy result of democracy.'



Despite the importance of religion and language, much of this movement was actually concerned with economic and political power. The first political party to be established after the revolution was the Nepal National People's Liberation Front, the Nepal Rastriya Janamukti Morcha. The party was established by representatives from the Tibeto-Burman hill population of Nepal. Its programme was to fight for equality for all the racial and ethnic groups in the country. On 25 June the party's general secretary handed over a memorandum to the Constitution Recommendation Commission. A more extreme party was the Janajati Party established on 19 August 1990 and led by Khagendra Jang Gurung, a seasoned politician. In addition, several other organisations sprang up all putting forward demands on behalf of the Tibeto-Burman-speaking peoples. Among these was the Nepal Tamang Ghedung, established in Kathmandu on 7 June 1990. This group demanded a special constitutional recognition of the Tamang community who lived in the hills around the Kathmandu Valley. Although the Tamangs were numerous, they were amongst the least privileged of all the ethnic groups in Nepal. Later another group, the Mongol National Organisation, at a mass meeting in Ilam District in Eastern Nepal on 6 November, declared provocatively that: 'We are not Hindus. We are determined to establish a Mongol state in Nepal.'

**TABLE 8.1: CASTES AND ETHNIC GROUPS<sup>14</sup>**

1) Parbatiyas (40.3%)		
Twice-born:	BRAHMANS	12.9%
	THAKURIS	1.6%
	CHETRI (formerly KHAS)	16.1%
Renouncers:	Dashnami Sanyasis & Kanphata Yogis	1.0%
Untouchables:	Kami (iron-workers)	5.2%
	Damai (tailors)	2%
	Sarki (cobblers)	1.5%
2) NEWARS* (5.6%)		
Entitled to full initiation:	BRAHMANS	0.1%
	BAJRACHARYA/SHAKYA	0.5%
	SHRESTHAS	1%
	Uray	0.3%

<sup>14</sup> Originally published in Whelpton, 'Political Identity in Nepal', *op. cit.*

Other pure castes:	ˆMAHARJANS (JYAPU)	2.3%
	ˆEkthariya' etc.	0.5 - 0.7%
Impure castes:	Khadgi(Kasai), Dyahla (Pore) etc.	0.3%

## 3) Other hill or mountain ethnic groups (ˆtribes') (20.1%)

MAGARS	7.2%	TAMANG	5.5%	RAI	2.8%
GURUNG	2.4%	LIMBU	1.6%	Sunuwar	0.2%
Chepang	0.2%	Thami	0.1%	SHERPA	0.6%
Bhotiya	0.1%	THAKALI	0.1%		

## 4) Madheshis (32%)

## (a) Castes (16.1%)

## Twice-born:

BRAHMANS		0.9%
RAJPUT	} (Kshatriya)	0.3%
Kayastha		0.3%
Rajbhat**		0.2%
Baniya		0.6%

## Other pure

castes:	YADAV/Ahir (herdsmen)	4.1%
	Kushawaha (vegetable growers)***	1.1%
	Kurmi (cultivators)	0.9%
	Mallah (fishermen)	0.6%
	Kewat (fishermen)	0.5%
	Kumhar (potters)	0.4%
	Halwai (confectioners)	0.2%

## Impure, but

touchable:	Kalwar (brewers/merchants)	0.9%
	Dhobi (washermen)	0.5%
	Teli (oil-pressers)	1.4%
	Kanu (oil-pressers)	0.4%
Untouchable:	Chamar (leather-workers)	1.1%
	Dushadh (basket-makers)	0.5%
	Khatawe (labourers)	0.4%
	Musahar	0.8%

## (b) Ethnic groups (9%):

Inner Terai:	Kumal	0.4%	Majhi	0.3%
	Danuwar	0.3%	Darai	0.1%
Terai proper:	THARU	6.5%	Dhanuk	0.7%

Rajbanshi	0.4%	Gangai	0.1%
Dhimal	0.1%		

- (c) Muslims (3.5%)
- (d) Marwaris\*\*\*\* (0.2%)
- (e) Sikhs (0.1%)

Source: Percentages of the total population (18.5 million) are normally taken from the 1991 census data (Central Bureau of Statistics, *Nepal Census of Population*, 1993: vol.2, Part VII, Table 25) and layout is partly based on that of Harka Gurung (Jan Salter & Harka Gurung, *Faces of Nepal*, Kathmandu: HIMAL, 1996, Table 1). The table excludes the 4.7% of the population either falling in the census category of 'Others' (the bulk of these being people of Terai origin) or belonging to groups accounting for less than 0.1% of the population. Due to roundings, totals do not tally. The census distinguishes between groups of mountain, hill, or Terai origin, but the hill and mountain category are amalgamated here. The ranking of castes in the Terai is frequently in dispute and is presented here largely as described by Marc Gaborieau (*Népal et ses Populations*, Brussels: Editions Complexes, 1978). The largest and/or best-known groups have been capitalized.

- Notes: \*
- The census treats the Newars as a single group. Figures for the main subdivisions are calculated from the estimates of the relative size of the different sub-divisions in Gaborieau (*op. cit.*, p.198-206).
- \*\* Also known as Rajbhar or Bhat. Though classified as a Terai group in the census, they are also found in the hills. Both in the Terai and in the western hills they still function as genealogists and match-makers for the other twice-born castes, though Bhat elsewhere in the hills are more usually the offspring of irregular unions between Brahmans and Chetri or Sanyasi (Gaborieau, p.180 & 217-8).
- \*\*\* Formerly known as 'Koiris'. Their new name indicates supposed descent from Ram's second son, Kusha, and thus a claim to Kshatriya status but this has not yet been accepted by other groups (Madhusudan Thakur, personal communication).
- \*\*\*\* Harka Gurung (personal communication) now treats Marwaris as a category outside the Terai caste hierarchy both because many are Jains and because they are seen as outsiders by the Terai population generally. Many do, however, claim to be Hindus and there is also a case for placing them, like the Baniya, in the Vaishya category.

These various organisations represented a spectrum of opinion ranging from the extreme to the moderate. Yet they all shared certain basic common concerns. The people whose demands they voiced were linguistically and racially different from the Hindu high-castes. Excluding the Newars, whose urban civilization and complex caste hierarchy set them rather apart, the Tibeto-Burman hill peoples made up about 20% of the country's population but had been suppressed and controlled by the

Hindu elite for hundreds of years.<sup>15</sup> The caste label for them was *matwali* meaning "the alcohol-drinking castes". They were given a position below twice-born Hindus (those entitled to read the Vedic scriptures and wear the sacred thread), but still well above the untouchables. They might have adopted some Hindu practices, but their own indigenous religious tradition was generally a mixture of Buddhism and Shamanism. They also possessed a fairly egalitarian social structure amongst themselves. Their integration into Hindu society varied greatly from group to group. The Magars, for example, reckoned themselves as proper Hindus, while the Tamangs claimed that they were Buddhists. The Limbus in far Eastern Nepal had managed to preserve large parts of their native religion and culture. They even possessed their own written alphabet. Economically speaking these groups were also very different. Many Gurungs, Magars, Limbus and Rais had prospered through serving in the Gurkha regiments. Recruitment to the Gurkhas had generally been restricted to these four large ethnic groups. The Tamangs were not eligible to join the Gurkhas and so had remained cut off from a major source of income. In addition to these were the Thakalis, who were a small group. These people had made a good living on the main trade route to Tibet. In recent years they had gone into the tourist industry with marked success.

Though they were varied, these different groups united when it came to political grievances. Ghore Bahadur Khapangi, general secretary of the Nepal National People's Liberation Front, summed up the feelings of many by saying: 'I have been deprived of all my political rights in this country just because I am a Magar. That is what I rebel against.' This ethnic issue was what forced Khapangi to break with the other political organisations he had previously been involved with - the Teachers' Association and the United National Democratic Forum. He explained: 'My main conflict with the forum and the two main parties, the Nepali Congress and the communists, had to do with the position of all the castes and tribes in the country. I said that all organisations, institutions and political parties should have proportional representation reflecting the size of various ethnic and caste groups in the population as a whole. The leadership of the political parties, however, should be elected irrespective of nationality or caste. I started raising these opinions, but nobody accepted my position. As a consequence I had to leave.' The National People's Liberation Front was founded to do something about this issue. 'Our main goal,' Khapangi went on to say, 'is to bring the exploited

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15 The ethnic minorities of the Terai, some of whom also spoke Tibeto-Burman languages, amounted for a further 9% (see Table 9.1). All these groups accepted the label of *janajati* ('ethnic community' or 'nationality').

groups of Nepal into positions of power, the so-called *matwalis*. We want to change the relationship between the high-castes, whom we call the *tagadharis* ("those who wear the sacred thread") and the other groups, the *atagadharis*. We want the two groups to work together and share power. We have no wish to throw the high-castes out and dominate them instead. The only way for us to come to power is through proportional representation and a federal type of government.' Khapangi complained that what needed to be changed was the situation of inequality upheld even by the new democratic government. 'The present government is not only a class government, but a caste government. The castes who wear *janais* (the sacred thread) rule. In other words, the Brahmans. They dominate everything: universities, governments and so on - and they form the majority everywhere.'<sup>16</sup> Khapangi noted how the democracy movement had actually been led by Brahmans and Chetris. He claimed that once in power these leaders had forgotten all about the Tibeto-Burman peoples and had even made life worse for them by 'stopping those going to Hong Kong and Singapore on business.' The government, it has to be said, called this business "smuggling".

The suppression of these groups, however, occurred at a deep level and was closely linked to religion. Khapangi stated: 'In the name of Hinduism we have lost our whole identity, language, culture - everything is theirs. Therefore all castes and communities should not be forced to call themselves Hindus. Up till 1963 our country was governed by caste laws. Those who opposed Hinduism were thrown into jail. These caste laws have destroyed our identity.'

An obvious question was why these Tibeto-Burman peoples, with a worldwide reputation for strength and bravery, had not rebelled earlier. 'The main answer to this has to do with our knowledge,' said Khapangi. 'Our people have no sense of our own history. We even lack self-respect.' Within Nepal, he said: '...we are still not accepted as proper citizens. Wherever we travel abroad we are the Gurkhas- As such we are respected and revered, and we are even awarded the Victoria Cross and the Queen of England shakes our hands. But once we come back to Nepal we are only the Matwalis, the "fools". We have absolutely no *ijjat* - respect. Even *peons* (the lowest ranking staff in an office) will abuse us.' There were aspects of this problem which Khapangi felt would take a long time to

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16 Hill Brahmans (*bahuns*) are 12% of Nepal's population but in 1989 accounted for 55% of civil service section officers and in 1990 for 41% of the teaching staff at Tribhuvan University (Ananta Raj Poudyal, 'Ethnicity in Democracy', in L.R.Baral (ed.) *South Asia: Democracy and the Road Ahead.*, Kathmandu: POLSAN, 1992, p.140-141.)

disappear: 'They call us the Magar *jati* - this means that we cannot wear the *janai*, the sacred thread, nor touch the food and water of the high castes. We are slowly trying to do away with this *jati* term,<sup>17</sup> but it will take a long time.' Khapangi also mentioned that there were certain subtleties in the relations between high-caste Hindus and these groups which were difficult for outsiders to appreciate: 'To understand us you have to understand that our thoughts, our culture, our behaviour is totally different from the Brahmans and the Chetris. If we don't agree with what you say we will just sit quiet and listen and eventually go away. We don't have the education or the vocabulary to disagree or discuss.' Khapangi finished by saying: 'My main personal political goal is to prove that even a Magar can become prime minister of Nepal.'<sup>18</sup>

Some members of the Tibeto-Burman groups, however, had enjoyed positions of privilege and status within Nepalese society. One was Khagendra Jang Gurung, president of the more extreme ethnic party, the Nepal Rastriya Janajati Party. He was an important leader from the Gurung community in Manang close to the Tibetan border. Both before and after the introduction of the Panchayat system he had served as a cabinet minister. His career had been stormy moving from government to jail to exile and back again.

Khagendra Jang Gurung had formed an especially close relationship with King Mahendra who had used him to make the first contacts with China. The Mongol groups, of which Khagendra Jang Gurung was a member, were geographically and culturally closer to China than India. King Mahendra had promised them special rights and internal autonomy as a way of forging friendship with the Chinese government. Khagendra Jang Gurung said, however: 'Promises given by the Brahmans and Chetris to our communities were not met.' He resigned in protest as a minister in the Panchayat government and was imprisoned shortly afterwards for seven years.

Khagendra Jang Gurung had always been single-minded about his political goals. 'Autonomous states for the different ethnic groups' was what he demanded. But he did not trust the government in Kathmandu: 'They promise us one thing, but they give us the opposite,' he stated. 'There is a saying in Nepali: "The tiger always kills the deer, even if it is yellow and white." This means that their behaviour is always the same,

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17 The Sanskrit loanword *jati* and its vernacular derivative *jat* are used interchangeably in colloquial Nepali but more educated speakers may reserve the former for 'ethnic group' and the latter for 'caste'. Most ethnic activists would accept the label *jati* but reject *jat* because of the latter's connotations of hierarchy.

18 Interview with Ghore Bahadur Khapangi, 22/9 and 20/10/1990.

whether they are communist, Congress or for the king. They are never genuinely interested in helping us. They only want to preserve power for themselves - for the Brahmans and the Chetris.'

The government's indifference had made Khagendra Jang Gurung confrontational. His National Ethnic Communities' Party (Rastriya Janajati Party) went much further than the Nepal National People's Liberation Front in its demands and was later denied registration by the election commission because it violated the ban in the 1990 constitution on separatist parties. According to Gurung, Khapangi's party was only interested in 'expanding the job opportunities for the Tibeto-Burman people.' Khagendra Jang Gurung spread out a map of Nepal showing the country split into a dozen ethnic regions or states. 'We want separate administration in our own areas,' he said. 'We want our own parliament, our cabinet, and we only want contact with the central government in connection with foreign policy and security. We want full freedom!' He further stated that: 'Unless our demands are met peacefully we will take up arms and start a more bloody revolution.'<sup>19</sup>

Khagendra Jang Gurung's remarks made little impression on the political elite in Kathmandu. Most of them did not take him seriously; some thought he was in alliance with reactionary elements of the old regime who only wanted to create problems for the new interim government. All agreed that Khagendra Jang Gurung was not the man to start an armed revolt or a civil war. But by ignoring him, the politicians in Kathmandu closed their eyes to important political developments outside the Kathmandu Valley, especially in the eastern part of the country. The Rais and Limbus had a reputation for being restless. They were the least sanskritised of the major Tibeto-Burman groups - that is, they had been least affected by the imposition of Hindu culture and the Nepali language: in 1991, 86% of Limbus and 84% of Rais still retained their own languages, compared with only 32% of Magars and 51% of Gurungs.<sup>20</sup> The Limbus especially had never accepted being governed by the Hindu high castes in Kathmandu. The years following the 1951 revolution had been marked by political unrest and violence in this region.<sup>21</sup> Many ex-Gurkha servicemen were involved in the incidents which took place. The period following the 1990 revolution was also

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19 Interview with Khagendra Jang Gurung, 19/9/1990.

20 John Whelpton, 'Political Identity in Nepal', *op.cit.*, p.59.

21 For unrest among the Limbus at this time, see B.B. Upreti, 'Analysis of Change in Limbu-Brahmin Interrelationship in Limbuwan, Nepal', unpub. Ph.D. thesis, U. of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975. Lionel Caplan, *Land and Social Change in East Nepal*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

disturbed - but the events which took place were more political and less violent than previously.

On 21 June 1990 Gopal Gurung, Chairman of the National Mongol Organisation, demanded that power be restored to the Limbus in accordance with the treaty signed by King Prithvi Narayan Shah and the Limbu king.<sup>22</sup> Gurung wanted the restoration of Limbuwan which had been a semi-independent principality until 1909. This demand was followed by several demonstrations and protests in Eastern Nepal.

In effect, Kathmandu ignored the Limbus. While the Limbus and Rais had made a strong impression in 1952 and 1953, their demands now merged into the welter of protests from all the other ethnic groups, castes and communities in Nepal.

It seemed that nearly every caste, linguistic group of ethnic community raised its voice in one way or another in the six months between the end of the revolution and the announcement of the new constitution. Even groups such as the Tharus in the Terai, the Tamangs and the Hindu low castes - even underprivileged groups which had never been politically active before - all now made their demands heard.

No one seemed certain whether these new organisations would go on to enjoy mass support or whether they would just wither and disappear after a short time. Nor was it clear if they had arisen as a result of a genuine popular movement, or whether they were being manipulated by a small group of individuals who wished to exploit the new democratic freedoms to build up their own power base.

## **Terai Regionalism**

Meanwhile a potentially more serious regional conflict appeared to be emerging between the Terai and the hills. There were several reasons why this particular division was more worrying than that between the Tibeto-Burman peoples and the Hindu high-castes.

In contrast to the Tibeto-Burman peoples who were spread across the whole hill region, the population of the Terai were concentrated in one well-defined geographical area, the flat land to the south which formed part of the Gangetic plain. The elite in Kathmandu still viewed the Terai as something of a hinterland, though they were well aware that the main part of Nepal's agricultural and industrial wealth was to be found there. Despite steady immigration from the hill regions in the 1970's and 80's the

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22 Gopal Man Gurung's views are set out in his *Hidden Facts in Nepalese Politics*, Kathmandu, 1994. His party, like Khagendra Jang Gurung's was denied registration by the election commission.



majority of the Terai people retained strong cultural and linguistic links with India. In some western districts, an indigenous people, the Tharus, were numerically dominant, but elsewhere the bulk of the population were identical to the inhabitants of the two neighbouring Indian states, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>23</sup> The languages and dialects used in the Terai were the same - Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Rajbanshi and Maithili - and the different groups used Hindi as a common link language. There was an open border between the two countries because of political agreements between Nepal and India. This meant that there was a continual free flow of people back and forth and inter-marriage between Nepalese and Indians was common. The closeness of the Terai region to India gave many in Kathmandu cause for concern. Some warned that if a conflict were to develop then Nepal could turn into another Sri Lanka.

The fear of a regional uprising, however, did not cause the politicians in Kathmandu undue concern. After a brief period in the 1950s when Hindi enjoyed the status of a semi-official language in Nepal, there was a clampdown. The Panchayat government recognised only Nepali as the national language and the hill Brahmans' culture was actively promoted as the dominant one within Nepal. People from the Terai were discriminated against when they applied for government jobs. Moreover, the electoral constituencies were drawn to ensure that the hill people were the majority in as many places as possible. It was claimed that the 1990 revolution did not change this situation. People like Gajendra Narayan Singh, president of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, which had been formed to represent the interests of the Terai people, argued that the 1990 revolution did not change this situation. Singh said: 'The Terai people were neglected. They have neither been treated as Hindus nor as Nepalese. We have always been called Madheshis [the inhabitants of the plains] and treated as second-rate citizens. All the Terai people, whether they are Muslims or Hindus are treated as Madheshis. The ruling people in Kathmandu have always discriminated against us. We will now fight against this and remove this social and political, economical, cultural and linguistic suppression.'

Unlike the Tibeto-Burman peoples, the inhabitants of the Terai had a tradition of regionalism, starting in the 1950s with Vedanand Jha's Terai Congress and the campaign to retain Hindi as the medium of instruction.

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23 Plains castes and indigenous ethnic groups together amount to 60-65% of the Terai population. The demographic balance is outlined in D.R. Dahal, 'Grasping the Terai Identity', *Himal*, vol.5, no.3 (1992), p.17-18. See also Whelpton, 'Political Identity in Nepal', op. cit., p.67-69 and F.H. Gaige, *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*, Delhi: Vikas, 1975.

The new movement led by Gajendra Narayan Singh demanded regional autonomy and linguistic equality: 'Our party has two main political goals,' he said. 'One is that Hindi should be recognised as an official language in the same way as Nepali, Hindi being the link language between all the groups of the Terai just as Nepali is among the hill people, and that Nepal should be divided into five provinces and federal government encouraged.' More specifically, Gajendra Narayan Singh wanted the hills divided into three provinces - the Eastern Hills, the Central Hills and the Western Hills. Similarly, he believed that the Terai should be divided into Eastern and Western Terai.

This movement among the Terai people actually started at the time of the referendum in 1980. What sparked it off was the question of citizenship rights. According to Gajendra Narayan Singh, when the Panchayat government began a campaign to distribute citizenship certificates in the Terai in 1976 conditions were such that two thirds of the Terai population were deemed ineligible. The resulting dispute forced Gajendra Narayan Singh to leave the Congress Party, which he had been active in for many years, and led him to devote all his energy to fighting for the Terai people. The Nepal Sadbhavana Parishad began as a non-political organisation set up to campaign for citizenship rights for the Terai people, In 1985 Gajendra Narayan Singh was elected to the Rastriya Panchayat on the citizenship issue and said: 'I managed to convince the government that they should show more concern about this problem and teams were sent to every village in the Terai in the late eighties to distribute new citizenship certificates.'

This question remained a burning one as far as the Terai people were concerned, so much so that the Sadbhavana Parishad was turned into a political party. Gajendra Narayan Singh became its first President and 2,000 people attended a general conference at the Terai town of Janakpur on 29 June 1990. Gajendra Narayan Singh declared: 'At least 20% of the Terai population have still not been given citizenship although they've always lived in the country. They are looked upon as Indians although they have always lived within the borders of Nepal.'

Many Nepalese still worried about the loyalty of Gajendra Narayan Singh and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party. How patriotic were they? Were they really for Nepal or for India? There were rumours that the Nepal Sadbhavana Party was financed and steered by India. Gajendra Narayan Singh, now in his sixties and clad in a *dhoti* and *kurta*, was something of a doubtful mystery. Singh himself rejected the many allegations thrown at him. 'I'm trying my best for the uplifting of the socio-economic condition of the Terai people and their ethnic languages. All these

endeavours are not digestible to the hill Gorkhali communities, so they are spinning out such untrue propaganda. Nepal is my country. I was born in Nepal. My ancestors were born in Nepal and they all died here. I've spent my whole life fighting for the development of this country. Politically I've been active since I was seventeen years of age, so I love this country a lot.' Gajendra Narayan Singh's passion dissipated and he became rather vague when asked to define his Nepalese identity in practical terms. He referred to the Nepal Sadbhavana Party and stressed that: 'We are not separatists. We do not on any account want to divide the country - rather we want to protect it. The only way this country can survive is by giving the Terai people their rightful demands through the governmental structure of a federal state.'<sup>24</sup> These sentiments did little to relieve the fears of the Kathmandu intellectuals and politicians. Most of them hoped fervently that the Nepal Sadbhavana Party would turn out to be an extremist fringe party and would not enjoy any mass support.

### Reaffirming the Hindu kingdom

The new regional, ethnic and religious movements which emerged after the 1990 revolution did come as a surprise to the political and intellectual elite in Kathmandu. Worry was mingled with genuine fear - even dread. One influential member of the old regime said: 'Everything can now happen. Nepal can become another Kampuchea, Afghanistan or Sri Lanka.' To others, however, some of the demands put forward by these movements seemed quite reasonable. Many felt that these minority groups had honest grievances and were justifiable in organising themselves politically. There was a general opinion that the new democratic government had an obligation to act and include all these groups fairly within the new political order. It seemed only sensible that Nepal's linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity should be reflected in the new democratic system. Arun Raj Joshi summed up much of this opinion when he wrote in the English language newspaper *Motherland* on 11 July 1990: 'Democracy will not be democracy if it will only continue to satisfy the demands of one segment of the population, even if that segment comprises the majority. Democracy, ideally at least, is a meta-system in which all systems, cultural and religious included, are given breathing space to explore and express their potential. In the new democratic set-up therefore, the state cannot patronise one religious system. This will not only have the negative impact on the growth and development of the favoured religion itself, but will also create a situation

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24 Interview with Gajendra Narayan Singh, 4/11/1990.

in which the state, which favours a particular religious segment, would not be trusted by many other segments who are not practising the same religion.'

Though the intellectuals in Kathmandu voiced liberal opinions and the religious and ethnic groups along with the communists pressed for a secular state, this position became a lost cause. When the new constitution was officially announced on 11 November 1990, it looked as though some compromise on this issue had been reached, -but in practice the Brahman-Chetri elite had not budged at all. One reason why conservative Hindus had been so agitated may have been a deep-seated fear they had of conversion. A flood of Nepalese to another religion, probably Christianity, would have undermined the whole base and structure of Hindu society. Padma Ratna Tuladhar argued, however, that the main reason for the Hindu victory was the simple fact that Brahmans were in the majority in all the relevant political institutions. Either consciously or unconsciously they had put their own vested interests first. Tuladhar explained what had actually happened: 'The Constitution Recommendation Commission raised this question many times, as to whether there should be a secular state. There was serious discussion, although there was no agreement, but at one stage there was a compromise agreed. So it was written that Nepal is a multi-lingual, multi-racial, monarchical Hindu kingdom. That means that the king is Hindu, but not the kingdom. Then the draft constitution was discussed in the cabinet and the problem arose again. There was a division once again, but there was a domination of Hindus. We cannot say that they were all fundamentalists. We cannot charge them like that, but they held the majority. The majority were Brahmans and the cabinet could not support the draft constitution on this issue. There was also another problem. In the draft constitution there was a provision that there could be no amendment to the constitution regarding the multi-party system and the monarchy. The communists were totally opposed to this, stating that when the constitution had accepted that sovereignty was with the people and not with the monarchy the people had every right to change any provision or clause of the constitution. So to reach a compromise on both these matters the cabinet accepted that a comma should be added in connection with the Hindu monarchy. In the previous draft there was no comma: it said that Nepal was a "Hindu monarchical kingdom" meaning that the monarchy is Hindu but not the kingdom. But because of this

political compromise they added the comma after "Hindu" and the whole meaning was changed.<sup>25</sup>

Secularly-minded ministers had in fact bowed to the pressure put on them by colleagues but also reacted against what they saw as undue pressure from foreigners. Nilamber Acharya, a ULF minister, was among a number of people claiming that westerners were urging them to remove the reference to Hinduism in the constitution.<sup>26</sup> However, the secularists had given way in the hope that this aspect of the constitution could be changed in future; since the provision on Hinduism was formally separate from that on the monarchy, it was clearly not covered by the ban on amendment of the latter.

For the time being, then, Nepal remained a Hindu kingdom. Yet in contrast to the previous Panchayat constitution, the new constitution did recognise the existence of the religious and ethnic minorities. The new constitution still had a clause concerning conversion (previously it had been illegal to change religion in Nepal) - but now it was no longer an offence to convert, only to cause someone else to convert.

There were negative reactions. Yet the instability surrounding the announcement of the new constitution probably rendered these milder than might otherwise have been the case just a couple of months earlier. On 17 November, just a few days after the announcement of the new constitution, the so-called *janajati* groups, representing the interests of the Tibeto-Burmese peoples, staged a mass meeting at Tundikhel, the parade grounds in the centre of Kathmandu. This meeting condemned the new constitution. A week later the Nepal Sadbhavana Party also held a mass meeting at Tundikhel. This degenerated into a fight and police had to intervene.

### **Ethnic and Religious Issues under Parliamentary Democracy**

Despite the apprehensions aroused in the months following the *janandolan*, the 1991 and 1994 elections showed that there was not much support among voters for ethnically- or regionally-based parties. Ghore Bahadur Khapangi's Nepal National People's Liberation Party won no

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25 According to the fullest account yet produced (Krishna Hachhethu, 'Transition to Democracy in Nepal: Negotiations behind Constitution Making, 1990', *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, vol.21, no.1 (1994), p.103-104, 107-108), the Commission's draft did allow amendment of the fundamental principles but Congress, with some support from the more moderate members of the United Left Front, managed to get this reversed when the cabinet considered the draft. Tuladhar is, however, correct to state that the original draft had no comma after 'Hindu'.

26 Krishna Hachhethu (personal communication)

seats, securing just 0.47% of the total vote in 1991 with 50 candidates though increasing its share to 1.05% when it fought 82 constituencies in 1994. Sadbhavana did manage to win six seats in 1991 but, weakened by internal disputes, it fell back to three in 1994. Although it secured a place in the Congress-led government formed in autumn 1995, it had not yet made good its claim to speak for all Madheshis.

Ethnic advocacy was generally conducted through normal political channels. Twenty-two organisations representing various individual ethnic groups also worked together within the Nepal Federation of Nationalities - the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh.<sup>27</sup> The response from the government included the provision of radio news bulletins in all languages spoken by more than one per cent of Nepal's population. In addition, almost all political parties are committed in principle to providing mother tongue education for those who want it and preliminary work on the preparation of textbooks was in progress by the end of 1995, though many doubted whether the government would give this a high priority.<sup>28</sup>

There is controversy over the principle of ethnic job quotas ('reservations'), which Ghore Bahadur Khapangi advocates. The argument for these is accepted, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, by the various communist factions but not by the Congress party. When asked in 1992 if he had any plans to introduce reservations for backward communities as has been done for many years in India, Girija Prasad Koirala tersely replied: 'We're not going to make that mistake.'<sup>29</sup> A Tharu Congress leader, Padma Narayan Chaudhari, took a similar line four years later: 'It is very disappointing that some groups are demanding reservation rights for their community... It will only divide the people and the nation. If there are reservations, they should be purely on an economic basis.'<sup>30</sup>

Whether or not ethnicity becomes an important basis for the distribution of economic benefits will depend on the tussle between left and right in mainstream politics. The future of minority languages, in

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27 William F. Fisher ('Nationalism and the Janajatis', *Himal*, vol.6, no.2 (1993), p.11-14) lists the original membership. For subsequent re-organisation, see David Gellner's introduction to Gellner *et al.*(eds.), *op. cit.*

28 Most of the effort going into publication in minority languages was provided by the ethnic communities themselves. Mary Des Chene ('Ethnography in the *Janajati-yug*: Lessons from Reading *Rodhi* and other Tamu Writings, *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, vol.1 no.1 (1996), p.97-161) provides an overview of such activity for the Tamu (Gurung) language. 'Tamu' is the Gurungs' own name for themselves and some activists prefer to use it even when speaking or writing Nepali or English.

29 Interview with Girija Prasad Koirala, Kathmandu, 10/8/1992 (JW).

30 *Spotlight*, 19/1/1996. The case against 'ethnic reservations' is also argued in Whelpton, 'Political Identity in Nepal', *op. cit.*, p.66-67.

contrast, lies much more in the hands of their speakers themselves. Nepali is now used as their main language (that is, not just as a *lingua franca*) by about a half of the population, compared with only twelve and five per cent respectively for Maithili and Tamang, the 'minority languages' with the largest number of speakers. Even before Prithvi Narayan Shah formed the modern kingdom of Nepal, the Nepali language (then known as 'Parbatiya' or 'Khas Kura') was expanding in the hills at the expense of other languages and the acceleration of this trend due to past state policies may well have made it irreversible. The decline in the percentage of Nepali speakers shown in the last census (1991) is only an apparent one. Many Nepalese switch back and forth between Nepali and their own group's original language even when talking between themselves and so the question of which language they normally use is a more complex one than it sounds. The answer given to (or recorded by) the census enumerators was therefore affected by the change in atmosphere from the assimilationism still prevalent in 1981 to the 'ethnic wave' which followed the *janāndolan*.<sup>31</sup>

Against this background, parents may sympathise in principle with the objective of preserving and enhancing their own language but, even if the option of mother-tongue education were readily available, they are likely to see Nepali and also English as more important for their children's future prospects. Newars who move outside the Kathmandu Valley have always abandoned Newari in favour of Nepali but over the last twenty years even Newars who remain in the Valley have begun speaking to their children in Nepali. This occurs not only in ethnically heterogenous Kathmandu but also in Bhaktapur, an overwhelmingly Newar town.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, even if there is little change in the percentage of Newars not reporting themselves to the census as speakers of Newari (presently 33%), the actual use of Newari is likely to decline significantly over the next generation. Tamangs, Rais and Limbus are likely to be more conservative, but, as they are sucked into growing urban centres, they may eventually move the same way. The prospects for *janajati* languages in the hills are probably less bright than the ethnic activists hope and the advocates of Nepali fear.

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31 The percentage recorded in the census was 48.7% in 1948, rose to 58.4% in 1981 and dropped back again to 50.3% in 1991. The prevalence of 'language-switching' was demonstrated to one of the authors when travelling in a taxi with three Gurung friends: he was puzzled that he understood so little of what seemed to be a Nepali conversation but then realised Gurung phrases and sentences were embedded in it.

32 Kiyoko Ogura (personal communication).

In the Terai the situation is more complex since it is Hindi rather than Nepali which is the *lingua franca*. In the minds of many in the hills, Hindi is inseparable from Indian influence and allowing a wider rule to purely local languages is actually seen as a way of keeping Hindi at bay. Matters are further complicated because Hindi, Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Maithili are closely related and dialect variation means that the spoken languages gradually merge into one another as one moves across the region. The imposition of definite boundaries between one language and the other for census or other purposes can be quite arbitrary.<sup>33</sup> With formal, written language the divisions are more clear-cut but an individual's preferred language of literacy and the label he chooses for his own speech depends on the community he wishes to identify with rather than on purely linguistic factors. For example, literary Maithili is strongly associated with the higher castes in the Maithili region, and one analyst has suggested that members of lower castes speaking slightly different dialects might in future opt to identify instead with Hindi.<sup>34</sup> In any case, Hindi is not seen as something alien by the Terai people and too strong a rejection of it by the hill elites risks provoking a reaction in its favour in the plains.

The tension over religion which emerged during the drafting of the constitution continued to make itself felt afterwards. Although it remained technically illegal to try to persuade someone to change his religion, conversion has certainly been taking place though the numbers involved are disputed.<sup>35</sup> In 1995, the president of the World Hindu Federation alleged that there was a Christian plan to convert half the population to Christianity by 2000, whilst Amnesty International claimed that Nepalese Christians were still being detained and maltreated.<sup>36</sup>

A few months later, Naraharinath Yogi, the militant Hindu traditionalist who had opposed the Congress government in 1960, showed that old age had not cramped his inflammatory style. He said at a press conference: 'Foreigners come here, show their money to simple, ordinary, poor Nepalese and teach them the Bible and the Koran. The people must

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33 See Whelpton, 'Political Identity in Nepal', *op. cit.*, p.56-58.

34 Claire Burgert, 'Defining Maithil Identity: Who's in Charge?', in Gellner *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.256-61. For the caste/class aspect of Maithili, see also Richard Burghart, 'A Quarrel in the Language Family: Agency and Representations of Speech in Mithila' in *The Conditions of Listening*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

35 The 1991 census put the Christian population at 31,280 (compared with only 3,891 in 1981) and the Muslims at 655,066. Since then figures as high as 200,000 for Christians and (even more unlikely) 3 million for Muslims have been bandied about.

36 *Dibya Darshan* 10/5/1995 (PD39:20); *Gorkhapatra* 9/7/1995 (PD39:28)).



put a stop to them, even if means taking out blunt *khukuris* (the curved Nepalese knife).<sup>37</sup>

In October 1995, just after the Tihar festival, there was rioting between Hindus and Muslims in Nepalganj in the western Terai; twenty people were injured and a dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed. The trouble started because of a quarrel between a Muslim greengrocer and a Hindu customer and because of a Hindu boy's firecracker landing in a Muslim's house but the controversy over conversions and the size of the Muslim population in Nepal had probably contributed to a tense atmosphere.

There was a distinct possibility of violence, happily averted, in the furore over Padma Ratna Tuladhar's alleged call in March 1995 for religious minorities to be allowed to kill cows for food. His reported comments naturally caused outrage amongst the champions of Hinduism and were adroitly exploited by the UML's political opponents. One Indian extremist addressing a meeting in Janakpur put a reward of 50,000 rupees on Tuladhar's head.<sup>38</sup> He was quickly expelled from the country.

There were calls for strikes in the Kathmandu Valley, with Naraharinath Yogi again at the forefront, and plans for counter-protests by the advocates of secularism. Negotiations between leaders on the two sides led to the cancellation of a strike called in May. Naraharinath's Pashupatinath Sena ('Army of Pashupatinath') did go ahead with a strike in June, but Naraharinath was detained by the police on its eve and it had little effect in the Kathmandu Valley. The World Hindu Federation disassociated itself from both strike calls, probably realising the need for restraint in a highly-charged situation. It was a welcome sign that religious tensions in Nepal, whilst they existed, remained much more manageable than in India.

Over the five years since the revolution the ethnic and religious pot had continued to bubble but had not boiled over. The sheer number of ethnic divisions in Nepal was perhaps in itself a factor for stability, since only multi-ethnic coalitions had a real chance of bidding for greater power and influence. The mainstream political parties, rather than the Nepal Federation of Nationalities, were the coalitions preferred by most politically ambitious Nepalese and most voters. It also needs to be remembered that it was the bread-and-butter issues such as drinking water, unemployment and education, not ethnicity or secularism that public opinion poll respondents cited as Nepal's most urgent problems both in

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37 *Bimarsha*, 3/5/1996.

38 *Bimarsha*, 28/4/1995.

1991 and 1994.<sup>39</sup> Yet the concerns raised by *janajati* activists cannot be wholly dismissed. At their root lay the desire for recognition by others' of one's own worth and importance which also underlies the attraction of democracy itself.<sup>40</sup> The long-term question for Nepal, as for democracies elsewhere, is whether individuals and groups will succeed in using ethnic and religious identity to obtain recognition for themselves whilst still affording it to others.

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39 Ole Borre *et al.*, *Nepalese Political Behaviour*, New Delhi: Sterling 1994, p.97-115; SEARCH, *Public Political Opinion Survey in Nepal*, Kathmandu, 1994, p.15-20.

40 This is a major theme of Francis Fukayama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, and is, of course, logically independent of the 'end of history' thesis itself.

# CONCLUSION

This study began by raising three key questions. First, how far was democratic development in Nepal driven by mass rather than merely elite involvement? Second, was it the product of internally-generated demands or of external forces? Third, what did democracy mean to those who struggled for it and how far were their aspirations consistent with the realities of Nepalese society? Preliminary answers to the first two questions were offered in the form of three hypotheses: that the 1950/51 revolution was almost entirely the work of external forces, that the following forty years witnessed fundamental change within Nepalese society and that, as a result, the 1990 revolution was principally a Nepalese movement and marked the beginning of mass politics in the country.

On the issue of mass participation, the evidence confirms the hypotheses. A small educated elite fought to overthrow the Rana regime in 1950/51 but it was the willingness of tens of thousands of ordinary Nepalese to come out onto the streets in the spring of 1990 which forced an end to the Panchayat system and the restoration of parliamentary democracy. The contrast with earlier Nepalese attitudes emerges even more strongly if the images of April 1990 are set against the characterisation of his country's politics offered in 1850 by Jang Bahadur Rana, the first Rana prime minister. He told the British officer accompanying him on his European tour that 'although revolutions often occurred [in Nepal], yet the country as a whole did not suffer more from such disturbances than England would from a change of Ministry; neither the army nor the peasantry taking any part in the disputes, and submitting without a murmur to the dictates of whichever party might emerge the victors.'<sup>1</sup> Jang's comments were not entirely justified as the years preceding his own accession to power had seen the rank-and-file of the army on the verge of striking out independently of their elite patrons, but his picture was broadly accurate: the 19th. century had seen the occasional murmur but nothing to parallel the mighty roar of 1990.

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<sup>1</sup> Orfeur Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official*, London: W.H. Allen, 1884, p.132. See also, John Whelpton, *Jang Bahadur in Europe*, Kathmandu: Sahayogi, 1983, p.121-2.

As was emphasised in Chapter 3, a simple dichotomy between 'elite' and 'mass' is misleading. The crowds on the street in 1990 were themselves only a small minority of the whole Nepalese people and, at the beginning, those participating were predominately from the educated middle class. By the end of the *janandolan*, they included a large part of the population of the Kathmandu Valley and were certainly representative of that population's sentiments but it still has to be remembered that the inhabitants of the Valley, whatever their social class, can be seen as a kind of elite vis-a-vis the inhabitants of the poorer regions of the country. Both in 1950/51 and in 1990/1 a minority made a revolution but changes over the intervening forty years, particularly the spread of education, ensured that the minority was a much larger one.

On the second question how far democratisation in Nepal was driven by internal demands and how far the result of external forces, the hypothesis of a marked contrast between the two revolutions also seems confirmed. In 1950/51, Indian attitudes were clearly the most important single factor: Indian acquiescence was essential for the Congress dissidents to launch their armed movement against the Rana regime and the Indian government then guided matters to a conclusion on its own terms. In 1990, in contrast, the attitude of the Indian government was rather ambiguous and New Delhi appeared more eager to use the crisis to extract foreign policy concessions from the Panchayat government than to support the democracy movement. However, India's partial 'blockade' of Nepal was important in paving the way for the *janandolan*, just as the stance taken by other foreign governments limited the regime's options in reacting to the protests. Both in 1950 and in 1990 internal and external factors were involved, but the external ones were more important on the first occasion and internal ones on the second.

The difference is nevertheless a matter of degree. Nepal's dependence upon India makes it very difficult to insulate Nepalese politics from Indian influence. In addition, the distinction between 'Indianness' and 'Nepaleseness', so strong and salient in some respects, becomes rather fuzzy when one considers the Terai or the socialization of many of the Nepalese leaders of the 1950/51 revolution. These factors are in continual tension with the Nepalese wish to remain free of any kind of Indian control. The net result has been that, individual Nepalese politicians have generally oscillated between denunciation of Indian interference and seeking Indian assistance. This interweaving of internal and external factors may be extreme in the Nepalese case but it has also generally occurred in revolutions in other times and places, whether 'revolution' is understood in the broad sense adopted in this study or in the more

restrictive one of a fundamental reordering of social and economic relationships.

Our third question concerned the concepts of democracy entertained by politically-conscious Nepalese and the extent to which these were realistic in the context of Nepalese society, an issue which has been discussed at length in chapter five.

The concept of democracy as rule by a singular and undivided popular will held and still holds attraction for many Nepalese. In 1950 and again in 1990 the existence of a clearly-defined enemy did give those involved in the struggle a sense of collective purpose. Once attention returned to the everyday business of government, that unity was inevitably lost but a hankering after it contributed to a widespread sense of disillusionment.

Democracy is also often seen in pluralist terms and the ethnic, caste, linguistic and religious divisions in Nepalese society make pluralism an everyday reality in people's lives. At the same time traditional ideas of harmony and consensus can make it difficult to accept the continual horse-trading and messy compromises which are part and parcel of parliamentary democracy. There is also difficulty in accepting a system in which, though all are equal before the law, differences in real power and in economic status persist. We saw that this attitude is linked to nostalgia for a life led largely within the boundaries of one's own family or clan where there is a rough economic equality, even if status varies with age and gender.

A third conception of democracy, stressing participation and full equality, thus naturally exercises a great attraction and, in different ways, both the old Panchayat system and some varieties of communism try to cater for this. Rejection of any form of subordination can also be applied to relations between one ethnic group and another and thus logically leads to the insistence by some radicals on self-determination for minorities or on an extreme devolution of power to village level.

Unfortunately, the more utopian approaches clash not only with the realities of Nepalese society but also with those of any complex society. Human beings cannot function together in large numbers without subordinating some human beings to others. It is perfectly feasible to reject the use of caste, ethnicity or gender as a basis for subordination, but the balance of power between individuals and voluntary groups still has to be determined. The ideology of harmony or equality can put certain bounds on the privileges of the more powerful but will not remove power differentials completely.

In its practical operation since 1990, Nepalese democracy has in general met the minimum requirements for democracy in the pluralist sense. Despite abuses of government power at election time and despite the rejection of parliamentary politics by a radical minority, the main political parties and the factions within them have reached compromises and the Supreme Court has been accepted as arbiter. Groups of all kinds are free to put forward their demands and, particularly in the case of ethnic associations, mainstream politicians feel obliged at least to acknowledge these. It is this freedom of expression which marks the strongest contrast with pre-1990 Nepal, even if some of the flavour of Panchayat politics remains in the day-to-day working of the system. It remains to be seen whether Nepalese will in the long-term accept these modest but real achievements as an adequate realization of the hopes and aspirations which the word 'democracy' conjured up in 1990.

In Nepal, as in many other parts of the world, the enthusiasm of 1989-90 was partly the result of a belief that democracy would bring prosperity. This reflected the fact that the oldest-established and most stable liberal democracies are generally the wealthier countries. It has therefore been suggested that if parliamentary democracy is unable to deliver real improvements in standards of living it will forfeit its legitimacy and the continuance of the system may be in question. Profound and continuing economic failure may eventually undermine any political system, but, as was argued in chapter five, there are reasons for believing that the present system of democracy in Nepal is likely to retain general support for quite some time, even if seen simply as the 'least bad' of the available alternatives.

This prediction rests on the fact that a government's legitimacy does not depend solely on its economic success, since the key question is one of belief in the government's right to rule. In the words of Francis Fukayama, legitimacy in this sense can be compared to 'a kind of cash reserve. All governments, democratic and authoritarian, have their ups and downs; but only legitimate governments have this reserve to draw on in times of crisis.'<sup>2</sup> The Nepalese monarchy has long enjoyed some degree of legitimacy in this sense, though the decline in belief in the king's divinity has weakened this. For educated Nepalese, legitimacy is now conferred on a government principally by its meeting the minimum democratic requirements outlined above. Disillusionment with party politicians is unlikely to change that situation unless some other basis for legitimacy

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2 Francis Fukayama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p.39.

emerges and it is precisely the present absence of any such alternative that prompted Fukayama to advance his 'end of history' thesis. As Fukayama himself admits, this situation might eventually change but we have no adequate base for speculation as to what the new alternative might be, in Nepal or anywhere else.

In present circumstances, the only scenario which could feasibly threaten democracy in Nepal would be a collapse of the Nepalese state itself and it is highly unlikely that the international community, and India in particular, would ever allow that to happen. Democratic forms might be rendered meaningless in certain areas of the country, as is arguably now the case in parts of India's Bihar state, but central authority will remain, and that authority will continue to rely on democracy as its means of legitimization.

Although Nepal's continuing existence as a poverty-stricken democracy is a feasible scenario, it is, of course, still true that economic and social change is urgently required so that the majority of Nepalese people can achieve reasonable living conditions. Democracy does not guarantee economic progress but may have economic effects. Under some circumstances these can actually be negative since a system which allows everyone scope to protect their own interests provides a check on the abuse of power but may sometimes actually impede economic growth.<sup>3</sup> This does not make democracy incompatible with economic success, but progress will depend principally on forces other than the political process, most probably a combination of private business initiative and a civil service insulated to some extent from partisan politics. There may, however, be a more positive role for democracy at local level where direct and continuous participation in the decision-making process is more feasible. This, at any rate, is the hope behind calls for greater decentralization and the activities of numerous NGOs in community development projects. In addition, freedom of expression and political organization may sometimes slow down decision making but it also ensures that politicians and civil servants are forced to justify their actions to the public and that alternative and possibly better policies cannot be ignored or rejected without proper consideration. The sometimes acrimonious debates on hydro-electric projects such as Arun-III are an example of this process in action.

In the end, however, it has to be acknowledged that democracy is not a solution to social and economic problems but rather provides a framework within which such solutions may be sought. It is now on the

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3 Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, London: Abacus, 1994.

success of that search, rather than on further changes to the political system, that Nepal's future will depend.



## **AFTERWORD: 1995-1997**

The two years after the fall of the UML government in September 1995 did indeed prove to be an era of coalition politics. Sher Bahadur Deuba found that a major part of his energy had to be devoted simply to keeping the Congress-National Democratic Party-Sadbhavana alliance together. The UML reached agreement with Lokendra Bahadur Chand to join a coalition under his leadership and in March 1996, believing it had the support of enough National Democratic Party M.P.s, put down a no-confidence motion against the government. With the exception of Chand himself, the potential deserters were brought back into line before the vote was taken, but Deuba felt obliged to secure the loyalty of his coalition partners by further expansion of an already very large cabinet: in May, the total number of ministers reached 48. This both angered many within the prime minister's party and also proved insufficient for the Chand faction: in December 1996 a no-confidence motion was again put down and six NDP and one Sadbhavana minister resigned from the government. There were allegations of large payments to M.P.s whose sympathies were thought to be in the balance and just before the vote the government flew five NDP ministers to Bangkok 'for medical treatment.' The opposition secured a majority of those voting but failed to meet the constitutional requirement of support from more than half the total membership of the house since at the last moment the Sadbhavana ex-minister and one of the NWPP M.P.s decided not to vote against the government.

The reprieve for Deuba's administration proved short-lived. As the government now appeared to have lost its majority it had to seek a new vote of confidence and to secure the necessary support Deuba took back into his government all but one of the NDP ex-ministers who had so recently tried to bring it down. There was a storm of protest from within Congress ranks and the decision was publicly condemned by Girija Koirala, who had become party president in May 1996. When parliament voted again in March 1997, Lokendra Bahadur Chand persuaded two Congress M.P.s from western Nepal not to attend and Sadbhavana leader Gajendra Narayan Singh announced that he would no longer support the government. Deuba was accordingly defeated and succeeded by a UML-NDP-Sadbhavana coalition with Chand as prime minister and the UML's Bamdev Gautam as his deputy. The NDP president, Surya Bahadur Thapa, remained unreconciled and, after he had won over most of his

party's M.P.s, the government was defeated in a confidence vote in October 1997. Thapa himself, who had already twice been prime minister under the Panchayat regime, formed a new administration with Congress and Sadbhavana support.

Although continuously preoccupied with political survival, the Deuba administration did have some solid achievements to its credit. In particular, agreement was reached with India in January 1996 on the utilisation of the waters of the Mahakali river and, after a heated debate within the UML on whether or not to endorse the treaty, it was finally ratified in September by the necessary two-thirds of the membership of both houses of parliament. A measure of bipartisanship could also be detected in the Deuba administration's continuation of some of the 'populist' measures introduced by the previous UML administration. In addition, the Deuba government passed legislation ending the 'dual ownership' of land by dividing up holdings under protected tenancy between landlord and tenant.

However, none of these measures offset continuing discontent amongst politically conscious Nepalese. The constant manoeuvring for power and the leverage exerted in a 'hung' parliament by two minor parties and also by ambitious individuals fed cynicism about the political system generally. During 1995/6 the economy grew by 6.14% but the fundamental problems of poverty and aid-dependence appeared no nearer to solution and the 'Human Development Index', which reflected educational levels and life expectancy as well as per capita income, put Nepal in 151st. position out of 174 countries covered. Even the Mahakali agreement with India was highly controversial, with many still seeing its terms as a sell-out to Nepal's giant neighbour. Feelings against India were strengthened by the discovery that the Indian army had for many years been occupying a small area of Nepalese territory on the north-western border.

Older problems were compounded after February 1996 when Baburam Bhattarai's radical faction of the United People's Front, also now styling itself the Communist Party of Nepal(Maoist), launched its 'People's War'. This commenced with attacks on police stations and on an agricultural development office in the mid-western hills and continued with attacks on 'class enemies' and clashes between Maoists and the police. The area most seriously affected was a relatively backward one with a large population of Kham Magars, who had been less fully assimilated than many other Magars to the dominant, Parbatiya culture. Although Baburam Bhattarai himself and a number of other leaders were Brahmans, Kham Magars probably made up the bulk of the fighters.

In January 1997 the government announced that 74 people had been killed during 1996; 25 had been victims of Maoist attacks and 49 were themselves insurgents who had died in police encounters. In strict military terms, the poorly armed Maoists were not a serious threat but their activities, concentrated mainly in Rolpa, Rukum and Jagarkot districts, created a general atmosphere of intimidation. In the local elections in May 1997 many Congress and NDP candidates withdrew their nomination papers out of fear for their own and their families' safety. There was also evidence of excessive use of force by the police and army and protests were voiced both by leftists and by human rights groups.

Both the Deuba government and its successors announced its readiness for talks with the CPN(Maoist) and, as home minister, the UML's Bamdev Gautam was said to have ordered a scaling down of police operations in spring 1997. It was difficult, however, to see how any Nepalese government could meet the demands put forward by the CPN(Maoist) just before the start of its 'People's War', since these included the repudiation of agreements with India and the adoption of a republican constitution. There were rumours of secret meetings between Bamdev Gautam himself and Maoist leaders but nothing came of these and by summer 1997 the government had decided that terrorism must be met head on. A Panchayat era 'Public Protection Act', which had been suspended in 1990, was reactivated and it was announced that parliamentary approval would be sought for the 'Terrorist and Destructive Crime Control and Punishment Act' drafted under the previous administration. The proposed new law included provision for detention without trial and also for the indemnification of the security forces for any use of force against those suspected of terrorist activity. Alarm amongst the Nepalese intelligentsia at what seemed a reversal of the human rights gains of the *janandolan* resulted in a flood of protests and introduction of the bill into parliament was postponed. It was abandoned by the incoming Thapa administration in October.

In September 1997 these and other political concerns were temporarily overshadowed by the death of Ganesh Man Singh, which came just one week after that of the first Koirala to serve as prime minister, Matrika Prasad Koirala. Although Girija Prasad remained at the helm of Congress, the generation that had made the 1950 revolution and whose story has been central to this book were passing away. It remained to be seen how a new generation would tackle the basic problems which still confronted Nepalese society.

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# APPENDIX 1:

## TABLE OF EVENTS<sup>1</sup>

- Jan Formation of Nepali National Congress.  
4/3 Commencement of Biratnagar Mill Strike.  
25/3 Arrest of B.P. Koirala and Man Mohan Adhikari at Biratnagar.  
16/5 Padma Shamsheer announces reform plans.  
June *Jayatu Samskritam* (student protest movement) in Kathmandu.  
Aug B.P. released from jail at request of Mahatma Gandhi.  
15/8 Indian Independence Day.
- 1948
- 30/4 Following Padma Shamsheer's resignation, Mohan Shamsheer Rana becomes prime minister and maharaja.  
Aug Formation of Nepali Democratic Congress.  
Sep Formation of Nepal Praja Panchayat.  
Oct Start of *satyagraha* in Kathmandu.  
Arrival of B.P. Koirala from India.
- 1949
- 28/5 B.P. Koirala released from imprisonment.  
Sept Formation of Communist Party of Nepal.
- 1950
- 9/4 Merger of Nepali National Congress and Nepal Democratic Congress to form Nepali Congress.  
July Indo-Nepali Treaty of Peace and Friendship.  
24/9 Ranas arrest Congress volunteers and army officers.  
3/11 Nepali Congress brings arms from Rangoon to Bihar.  
6/11 King Tribhuvan's flight to the Indian Embassy.  
22/12 Tribhuvan publicly supports Delhi proposals.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the entries are based on those in Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal - A Political History 1769-1955*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, vol.2, p.338-343, which provides a fuller chronology up to the death of King Tribhuvan.

23/12 Mukti Sena in complete control of Biratnagar.

1951

- 4/1 The garrison at Palpa goes over to the anti-Rana forces.  
8/1 Mohan Shamsher agrees to King Tribhuvan's remaining on the throne.  
7/2 'Delhi compromise' provides for Rana-Congress coalition.  
15/2 Tribhuvan's return from Delhi.  
18/2 Formal end of the Rana regime and establishment of coalition government (now celebrated annually as 'Democracy Day').  
11/4 Interim Government Act and Public Security Act.  
12/4 Bir Gorkha Dal revolt.  
July Praja Parishad and Communist Party form 'United Front'.  
6/11 Students killed in police firing.  
7/11 Resignation of B.P. Koirala and other Congress ministers.  
12/11 Resignation of Rana ministers.  
16/11 M.P. Koirala forms Congress government.

1952

22

- 23/1 Raksha Dal mutiny, leading to banning of Communist Party.  
Feb Establishment of Gorkha Parishad.  
Feb U.S.A. technical co-operation office established in Kathmandu.  
May Formation of Leftist Nepali Congressy.  
Aug Tribhuvan imposes direct royal rule.  
11/12 Opening of Tribhuvan Rajpath, linking Kathmandu with the plains.

1953

- 30/4 M.P. Koirala forms Rastriya Praja Party at Birganj conference.  
June Second M.P. Koirala government.

1954

- 18/2 M.P. Koirala's government joined by Praja Parishad, Nepali Rastriya Congress and Nepal Jana Congress.  
3/10 King Tribhuvan leaves for medical treatment in Switzerland.

1955

- 30/1 M.P. Koirala offers his government's resignation.
- 18/2 Prince Mahendra's assumption of full royal powers.
- 2/3 Resignation of M.P.Koirala cabinet accepted.
- 13/3 Death of King Tribhuvan in Switzerland.
- 14/4 Appointment of Council of Royal Advisors announced.
- 1/8 Diplomatic relations with China established.
- 8/8 King Mahendra promises elections for October 1957.
- 13/9 K.I. Singh returns to Kathmandu.
- 22/10 K.I. Singh establishes United Democratic Party.
- 27/11 Congress adopts goal of 'democratic socialism'.

1956

- 27/1 Tanka Prasad Acharya appointed prime minister with cabinet of Praja Parishad and independent ministers.
- Jan Subarna replaces B.P. as president of Congress.
- 16/4 Ban on Communist Party lifted.
- June T.P. Acharya raises possibility of dispensing with constituent assembly.
- Sep M.P.Koirala plus a few followers rejoin Congress.

1957

- 5/2 T.P. Acharya adds 'king's men' to cabinet.
- 2/5 B.P. Koirala replaces Subarna as Congress President.
- 14/7 King Mahendra dismisses T.P. Acharya.
- 26/7 K.I. Singh becomes prime minister with cabinet of United Democratic Party members plus royal nominees.
- 9 /8 United Democratic Front (Congress, Nepali National Congress, Praja Parishad) established.
- 4/10 K.I. Singh announces postponement of elections.
- 8/10 United Democratic Front announce plan for *satyagraha*.
- 12/10 'Nepali-only' policy for middle and high schools announced.
- 14/11 K.I. Singh government dismissed.
- Nov Formation of Nepal Prajatantrik Mahasabha.
- 6/12 Royal Palace conference - minor parties oppose Democratic Front insistence on elections in 6 months.
- 8/12 United Democratic Front's *satyagraha* launched
- 15/12 King Mahendra announces 18 February 1959 as election day.

1958

- Jan United Democratic Front do poorly in Kathmandu municipal elections.
- 1/2 King Mahendra proclaims appointment of Constitution Drafting Commission, government without a prime minister, and a nominated Advisory Assembly.
- 6/2 Congress accepts royal proclamation.
- 15/5 Council of Ministers under Subarna Shamsheer, including representatives of Nepali National Congress, Praja Parishad, Gorkha Parishad.
- Aug Praja Parishad splits into separate factions under B.K. Mishra, and T.P. Acharya.

1959

- 12/2 Mahendra proclaims the constitution.
- 18/2-3/4 Voting in general election.
- 27/5 B.P. Koirala prime minister of last interim government.
- 30/5 Cabinet reshuffle when Constitution comes into effect.
- 1/6 T.P. Acharya, United Democratic Party and Prajatantrik Mahasabha form National Democratic Front
- Sep Bill for taxation of *birta* land passed.
- 3/12 Demonstration at royal palace against tax proposals
- 4/12 Gandaki agreement signed

1960

- 17/1 Bharat Shamsheer switches to anti-China line and calls for pact with India.
- 10/4 King Mahendra leaves on 3-month world tour.
- June Bharat Shamsheer accepts ministerial privileges as leader of the opposition.
- 28/6 Chinese troops fire on Nepalese border patrol in Mustang. 28/7 King Mahendra returns from foreign tour.
- 3/8 Bharat Shamsheer calls for National Government.
- Aug Tulsi Giri resigns from the government.
- 13/9 M.P. Koirala resigns from Congress working committee.
- Sep Gorkha Parishad in alliance with Rastriya Congress (Regmi) and Praja Prasad (Mishra).

17/10

-9/11 King Mahendra in Europe.

25/10 Seven anti-government demonstrators killed by police firing at Gorkha.

12/12 Subarna leaves for Calcutta.

15/12 King Mahendra removes the Congress government and imposes direct royal rule.

1961

5/1 Ban on political parties.

Feb Establishment of National Guidance Ministry.

1962

April Constitution drafting committee set up under Rishikesh Shaha.

31/5 British ambassador sent by King Mahendra to persuade B.P. to accept the Panchayat system.

6-

13/6 Intellectuals' conference.

Sep Raymajhi's moderate group of the Communist Party expel Pushpa Lal, Tulsi Lal Amatya &amp; Hikmat Singh.

20/10 Chinese forces attack Indian positions in the Himalayas.

8/11 Subarna suspends Congress armed movement.

Dec Tulsi Lal Amatya elected general secretary of radical wing of Communist Party.

17/12 Promulgation of new constitution.

1963

Jan-

March District and National Panchayat elections

April New *Muluki Ain*

Abolition of National Guidance Ministry.

Radical communists split into Tulsi Lal Amatya and Pushpa Lal Shrestha factions.

14/4 Rastriya Panchayat holds first session.

Dec Rishikesh Shaha becomes chairman of Raj Sabha standing committee.

1964

30/1 Hanging of Durganand Jha for attempt on Mahendra's life in 1962.

July Rishikesh Shaha removed from chairmanship of standing committee of Raj Sabha.

1965

6/1 Surya Bahadur Thapa becomes chairman of council of ministers (title changed to Prime Minister the following year).

1967

Jan First amendment to the constitution.

Sep-

Oct Plea by 17 members for liberalisation (prompting King Mahendra to secure a Rastriya Panchayat resolution that there was 'no alternative' to the Panchayat system).

1968

May Pushpa Lal Shrestha establishes own communist party with 'third convention' at Gorakhpur in India.

15/5 Subarna pledges 'loyal co-operation' with King Mahendra.

30/10 Release of B.P. Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh.

11/12 Subarna returns to Kathmandu.

1969

Feb B.P. Koirala goes into voluntary exile in India.

Man Mohan Adhikari & Shambhu Ram Shrestha released from jail

25/6 Kirtinidhi Bista, prime minister, denounces defence agreements with India.

1971

Oct Ram Raja Prasad Singh stripped of membership of Rastriya Panchayat



Dec Man Mohan Adhikari, Mohan Bikram Singh, Nirmal Lama etc. set up 'Central Nucleus' to promote Leftist unity

1972

31/1 Death of King Mahendra and accession of King Birendra.

12/5 Surya Bahadur Thapa puts forward demands for reform.

16/6 Censure motion on prime minister blocked.

13/8 Surya Bahadur Thapa, Ratna Prasad Kharel, Prakash Chandra Lohani, Krishna Prasad Bhandari arrested under Security Act.

25/8 Congress armed raid on Haripur (Sarlahi District)

1973

4/3 Jhapeli group communists killed while being transferred between jails

10/6 Congress activists hijack Nepali aeroplane to Forbesgunj in Bihar.

1974

16/3 Biratnagar bomb attempt on Birendra's life by Bhim Narayan Shrestha and a companion.

12/12 Congress armed group under Yogya Bahadur Thapa captured at Okhaldhunga; King Birendra announces plan for reform commission.

1975

April Akhil Nepal Communist Revolutionary Co-ordination Committee(M-L) (forerunner of CPN(M-L)) established.

26/6 Indira Gandhi declares emergency rule in India

12/12 Second amendment to the constitution - Back to the Village National Campaign committee given 'politburo' role and class organisations lose Rastriya Panchayat representation.

1976

30/12 B.P. Koirala and Ganeshman Singh return to Kathmandu from India and are immediately arrested.

1977

- 17/2 Death sentences passed on Bhim Narayan Shrestha and Yogya Bahadur Thapa
- March Janata party wins Indian election.
- June B.P. Koirala released to go for treatment abroad at government expense.
- 8/11 B.P. Koirala returns to Nepal, after Subarna hands over presidency of Congress.
- 9/11 Death of Subarna in Calcutta.

1978

- Feb B.P. Koirala dissolves Congress working committee.
- 3/3 B.P. again goes abroad for treatment.
- 4/6 Statement by 38 Congressmen (mostly Subarna group) reaffirming 15 March 1968 statement accepting the Panchayat system. Later they establish a new working committee under Bakhan Singh Gurung.
- 31/10 B.P. has audience with King Birendra.
- 26/12 Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) established.

1979

- 8/2 Execution of Bhim Narayan Shrestha and Cpt. Yogya Bahadur Thapa.
- 6/3 After return from third medical trip, B.P. confined to the Kathmandu Valley.
- 6/4 Student protest march to Pakistan embassy.
- 23/4 T.U. announces closure of campuses; police clearing of Amrit Science Campus hostel.
- 27/4 Police firing at Hetauda.
- 28/4 B.P. Koirala placed under house arrest.
- 2/5 Appointment of royal commission.
- 8/5 Release of B.P. from house arrest and of others arrested under Security Act.
- Police firing at Bharatpur.
- 23/5 Army called out.
- 24/5 Birendra announces referendum; Kirtinidhi Bista resigns from the premiership.
- 29/5 Suspension of BVNC.

- 1/6 Surya Bahadur Thapa becomes Prime Minister.
- 16/12 King Birendra announces Rastriya Panchayat will in future be elected by universal suffrage.
- 1980
- 5/2 Surya Prasad Upadhyaya expresses support for the Bakhan Singh Gurung Congress faction.
- 2/5 Referendum
- 15/12 Third amendment to the constitution.
- 1981
- 9/5 First direct election of Rastriya Panchayat.
- 1983
- 11/7 'No confidence' motion against Surya Bahadur Thapa passed; followed by Lokendra Bahadur Chand's appointment as prime minister.
- Nov Mohan Bikram Singh sets up Masal as a communist party separate from the 4th. Convention.
- 1985
- May Congress launch *satyagraha*.
- 20/6 Bombs go off in Kathmandu.
- 22/6 Janabadi Morcha claims responsibility for explosions.
- Nov Mashal splits from Mohan Bikram Singh's Masal party.
- 16/12 King Birendra announces commitment to Basic Needs by 2000.
- 1986
- 21/3 Nagendra Rijal replaces Lokendra Bahadur Chand as prime minister.
- 12/5 General election.
- 15/6 Marichman Singh (Shrestha) becomes prime minister.
- 1987
- May Death sentences (*in absentia*) on Nepal Janabadi Morcha leader Ramraja Prasad Singh and three others for 1985 bombings.

1988

21/8 Earthquake.

25/8 Murder of ex-M.P. Karna Hyoju in Bhaktapur.

1989

23/3 India closes all but two border crossings after expiry of Trade and Transit Treaty.

Aug CPN(M-L) conference agrees to work for parliamentary democracy as an interim goal.

1990

18/1 Start of Nepali Congress Conference

15/1 Formation of United Left Front announced.

1/2 Announcement of 'Joint Coordination Committee' between Congress and United Left Front.

14/2 Announcement of formation of United National People's Movement by radical communist groups.

18/2 Start of *janandolan*.

19-

20/2 Several deaths in clashes in Bhaktapur.

9/3 Announcement of forced resignation of Keshab Kumar Budathoki from the government.

20/3 Arrest of intellectuals attending meeting at Kiritpur campus of Tribhuvan University.

30/3 Patan 'uprising' begins.

1/4 Cabinet reshuffle.

2/4 Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya resigns as foreign minister

6/4 Dismissal of Marichman Singh's government; appointment of Lokendra Bahadur Chand as prime minister; Darbar Marg shootings

8/4 Ban on political parties lifted

16/4 Dissolution of Rastriya Panchayat; Krishna Prasad Bhattarai appointed prime minister.

23/4 Lynching of suspected 'Mandales'

27/4 Local panchayats dissolved.

7/5 Abolition of zonal commissioners and of National Sports Council.

- 11/5 King Birendra unilaterally announces membership of a 'Constitutional Reforms Recommendation Commission'.
- 22/5 Legislative and executive power of the dissolved Rastriya Panchayat vested in interim government
- 31/5 King Birendra appoints new Constitution Recommendation Commission on prime minister's advice
- 30/6 Nepal Buddhist Association demonstrate for a secular state
- 23/8 Attack on Queen Aishwarya at Pashupatinath
- 10/9 Draft constitution handed to King
- 21/10 Leaking of 'palace counter-draft' of constitution
- 9/11 Promulgation of constitution
- 23/11 CPN (Unity Centre) established (includes Mashal, 4th. Convention and CPN (Peasant's Organisation))
- 31/12 Malik commission submits its report.
- 1991
- 8/1 Merger of CPN(M) and CPN(ML) to form Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist (and) Leninist) - the UML.
- 4/2 Three killed in clash between police and *sukumbasis* at Nawalparasi.
- 12/5 General Election.
- 29/5 Congress government under Girija Prasad Koirala sworn in.
- Dec Girija Koirala's cabinet reshuffle intensifies conflict within Congress.
- 1992
- Feb Congress holds Jhapa convention; Krishna Prasad Bhattarai re-elected as president Thapa and Chand factions amalgamate to form United National Democratic Party.  
Radical communist groups form Joint People's Agitation Committee.
- 6/4 Police shooting of left-wing demonstrators in Kathmandu.
- May Congress win over half the seats in local elections.
- July Shailaja Acharya resigns from the government.
- Dec Supreme Court rules Tanakpur agreement must be put before parliament.

1993

- Feb UML Conference approves *bahudaliya janbad*.  
16/5 Death of Madan Bhandari and Jivraj Ashrit in jeep accident at Dasdhunga  
17/8 After series of violent clashes between demonstrators and police, agreement for a renewed investigation into Dasdhunga incident signed by UML and Congress.

1994

- 7/2 Following intensified dissension within Congress, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai loses Kathmandu by-election.  
27/3 Raid on a house in Kathmandu by armed Indian police.  
May United People's Front splits into Baburam Bhattarai and Niranjana Vaidya factions.  
June Public Accounts Committee report suggests Girija Prasad Koirala may have acted improperly over the award of a contract by RNAC.  
10/7 After dissident Congress M.P.s engineer a government defeat in Parliament, Girija Prasad Koirala requests a dissolution.  
27/7 Congress factions agree to fight the election jointly.  
12/9 Supreme Court rules the dissolution of parliament was constitutional.  
15/11 Mid-term election.  
29/11 Man Mohan Adhikari appointed prime minister.

1995

- March Padmaratna Tuladhar sparks controversy by reportedly questioning the ban on cow slaughter.  
May C.P. Mainali and M.K. Nepal questioned about 'Sugar Scandal'.  
8/6 Congress requests special session of parliament.  
9/6 Man Mohan Adhikari requests the king to dissolve parliament and hold mid-term elections.  
13/6 Parliament dissolved.  
14/8 Prime minister Man Mohan Adhikari injured in helicopter crash.  
28/8 Supreme Court quashes dissolution.  
10/9 UML government leaves office after parliament passes no-confidence motion.

- 11/9 Sher Bahadur Deuba becomes prime minister heading Congress-National Democratic Party-Sadbhavana coalition.
- 18/9 Deuba government wins vote of confidence.





## APPENDIX 2:

# CABINET LISTS, 1990-1995

Lists are given here only for the governments formed after the return to parliamentary democracy in 1990. Details of cabinets for 1951 to 1959 can be found in B.L. Joshi & L.E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) or in A. Gupta, *Politics in Nepal 1950-60* (Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 1993).

### 1. Interim government (April 1990)

#### Congress Ministers:-

Krishna Prasad BHATTARAI	Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs Defence, Palace Affairs
Mahendra Narayan NIDHI	Water Resources, Local Development
Yog Prasad UPADHYAYA	Home, Communications
Marshal Julum SHAKYA	Supplies and Works, Transport

#### ULF Ministers:-

Sahana PRADHAN (CPN(M))	Industry, Commerce
Nilamber ACHARYA (CPN(Manandhar))	Tourism, Labour and Social Welfare Law and Justice
Jhalanath KHANAL (CPN(M-N))	Agriculture, Land Reform and Management Forest and Soil Conservation

#### Independents:-

Devendra Raj PANDEY	Finance
Mathura Prasad SHRESTHA	Health

#### Royal Nominees:-

Keshar Jang RAYAMAJHI	General Administration Education and Culture
Achyut Raj REGMI	Housing and Physical Planning

**2. Congress government (May 1991):**

Girija Prasad KOIRALA	Prime Minister, Defence, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Health, Palace Affairs
Basu Dev RISAL	Water Resources, Communication
Bal Bahadur RAI	Housing and Physical Planning
Jagan Nath ACHARYA	Land Reform
Sheikh IDRIS	Labour, Co-operatives, Social Welfare
Ram Hari JOSHI	Education and Culture, Tourism
Shailaja ACHARYA	Forest, Soil Conservation, Agriculture
Sher Bahadur DEUBA	Home Affairs
Ram Chandra PAUDEL	Local Development
Dhundi Raj SHASTRI	Industry
Maheshwar Prasad SINGH	General Administration
Chiranjibi WAGLE	Supply
Tara Nath RANABHAT	Law, Justice, Parliamentary Affairs
Khum Bahadur KHADKA	Works and Transport
Gopal Man SHRESTHA	Commerce

(Additional Appointments in July 1991.

Mahesh ACHARYA	Finance
Ram Baran YADAV	Health)

**3. Congress government after December 1991 reshuffle**

Ministers:-

Girija Prasad KOIRALA	Palace Affairs, Defence, Foreign Affairs
Bal Bahadur RAI	Housing and Physical Planning
Jagan Nath ACHARYA	Land Reform and Management
Ram Hari JOSHI	Tourism
Shailaja ACHARYA	Agriculture
Sher Bahadur DEUPA	Home Affairs
Ram Chandra PAUDYAL	Local Development
Maheshwar Prasad SINGH	General Administration, Law & Justice, Parliamentary Affairs
Khum Bahadur KHADKA	Works and Transport
Govind Raj JOSHI	Education, Culture, Social Welfare

Ministers of State:-

Ram Baran YADAV	Health
Mahesh ACHARYA	Finance
Aishwarya Lal	

<b>PRADHANANGA</b>	Commerce and Supply
<b>Ramkrishna TAMRAKAR</b>	Industry and Labour
<b>Bir Mani DHAKAL</b>	Forest and Environment
<b>Bijaya Kumar GACHHEDAR</b>	Communications
<b>Laxman Prasad GHIMIRE</b>	Water Resources

**Assistant Ministers:-**

<b>Siddha Raj OJHA</b>	Land Reform and Management
<b>Dinabandhu ARYA</b>	General Administration, Law and Justice, Parliamentary Affairs
<b>Shiva Raj JOSHI</b>	Works and Transport
<b>Surendra Prasad CHAUDHARI</b>	Commerce and Supply
<b>Hasta Bahadur MALLA</b>	Education, Culture, Social Welfare
<b>Dilendra Prasad BADU</b>	Housing and Physical Planning
<b>Diwakar Man SHERCHAN</b>	Industry and Labour

**4.UML Government (November 1994)****Ministers:-**

<b>Man Mohan ADHIKARI</b>	Prime Minister, Royal Palace Affairs
<b>Madhav Kumar NEPAL</b>	Deputy Prime Minister, Defence and Foreign Affairs
<b>K.P. Sharma OLI</b>	Home Affairs
<b>Chandra Prakash MAINALI</b>	Local Development and Supply
<b>Bharat Mohan ADHIKARI</b>	Finance
<b>Radha Krishna MAINALI</b>	Agriculture and Land Reforms
<b>Mod Nath PRASHRIT</b>	Education, Culture and Social Welfare
<b>Pradip NEPAL</b>	Information and Communications
<b>Padma Ratna TULADHAR</b>	Labour and Health

**Ministers of State:-**

<b>Ashok Kumar RAI</b>	Works and Transport
<b>Salim Miya ANSARI</b>	Forests and Soil Conservation
<b>Prem Singh DHAMI</b>	Housing and Physical Planning
<b>Subas Chandra NEMBANG</b>	Law and Justice, Parliamentary Affairs and General Administration
<b>Bhim Bahadur RAWAL</b>	Commerce, Tourism and Civil Administration
<b>Hari Prasad PANDE</b>	Industry and Water Resources

**5. Congress-NDP-Sadbhavana coalition government  
(September 1995).**

Congress Ministers:

Sher Bahadur DEUBA

Prime Minister, Home, Palace Affairs,  
Defence, Foreign Affairs, Health,  
Forestry, Information and  
Communications, General  
Administration, Commerce, Tourism  
and Civil Aviation, Finance, Physical  
Planning, Works and Transport, Land  
Reform and Management, Water  
Resources, Education, Culture and  
Social Welfare, Agriculture, Labour

Dhundi Raj SHASTRI

Industry

Khum Bahadur KHADKA

Local Development

NDP Minister:-

Kamal THAPA

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs

Sadbhavana Minister:-

Gajendra Narayan SINGH

Supply

**6. Extended coalition December (1995):**

Congress Ministers:-

Sher Bahadur DEUBA

Prime Minister, Royal Palace Affairs,  
Defence; General Administration,  
Women and Social Welfare;  
Population and Environment  
Parliamentary Affairs; Youth and  
Sports and Culture.

Khum Bahadur KHADKA

Home

Ram Sharan MAHAT

Finance

Chiranjibi WAGLE

Information and Communications

Arjun Narsingh K.C.

Health

Govinda Raj JOSHI

Education

Chakra Prasad BANSTOL

Tourism and Civil Aviation

Bijay Kumar GACHHEDAR

Works and Transport

Bal Bahadur RAI

Labour

Sheikh IDRIS

Forest and Soil Conservation

Bhim Bahadur TAMANG

Law and Justice

**Dhundi Raj SHASTRI**                      **Industry**

**National Democratic Party Ministers:-**

<b>Prakash Chandra LOHANI</b>	<b>Foreign</b>
<b>Pashupati S.J.B. RANA</b>	<b>Water Resources</b>
<b>Kamal THAPA</b>	<b>Local Development</b>
<b>Bala Ram Gharti MAGAR</b>	<b>Housing and Physical Planning</b>
<b>Buddhiman TAMANG</b>	<b>Land Reform and Management</b>
<b>Padma Sundar LAWATI</b>	<b>Agriculture</b>
<b>Fatteh Singh THARU</b>	<b>Commerce</b>

**Sadbhavana Minister:-**

**Gajendra Narayan SINGH**                      **Supply**

**NDP Minister of State:-**

**Ram Krishna ACHARYA**                      **Local Development**

**NDP Assistant Ministers:-**

<b>Sarbendranath SHUKLA</b>	<b>Water Resources</b>
<b>Prem Bahadur BHANDARI</b>	<b>Land Reform</b>
<b>Mahendra RAI</b>	<b>Agriculture</b>
<b>Rajiv PARAJULI</b>	<b>Commerce</b>
<b>Shanti Shamsher RANA</b>	<b>Housing</b>



## **APPENDIX 3:**

# **POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR INTER-CONNECTIONS**

The proliferation of political parties in Nepal during the period covered by this study can be confusing even for politically conscious Nepalese themselves. The following list is intended as a quick reference guide and includes all political parties which participated in government at any time and also the more important of the parties which remained in opposition. They are listed alphabetically under the name by which they are normally referred to in the main text. Common alternative names are given in square brackets, followed by any abbreviation and by a brief description of the party's origins and ideological stance. Fuller information must be sought by using the general index. Principal splits and mergers among non-communist parties in the 1950s and among the communists between 1960 and 1995 are shown in the accompanying charts.

### **4th. Convention [Communist Party of Nepal(4th. Convention)]**

Maoist group formed by Mohan Bikram Singh, an executive member of the old Communist Party of Nepal, in 1974. The name was retained by Nirmal Lama and his followers after they broke away from Singh in 1983 until their merger with Mashal in 1990.

### **Akhil Nepal Revolutionary Co-ordination Committee**

Maoist grouping set up 1975 by former 'Jhapelis'. Forerunner of the Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist-Leninist).

### **Bir Gorkha Dal**

Rana 'revivalist' organisation founded by Bharat Shamsheer J.B. Rana in 1950. Later refounded as the Gorkha Parishad.

### **Central Nucleus**

Short-lived leftist grouping formed in 1969 by Man Mohan Adhikari, Mohan Bikram Singh and other former executive members of the Communist Party of Nepal.

### **Communist Party of Nepal. CPN**

Formed in Calcutta in 1949 by Pushpa Lal Shrestha and others. Broke into separate factions after King Mahendra's abolition of the parliamentary system.

### **Communist Party of Nepal(15 September 1949)**

Name used in 1991-92 by a group of dissidents who left the UML. They subsequently revived the name of their old party, the Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist).

### **Communist Party of Nepal(Amatya)**

Followers of Tulsi Lal Amatya, who in 1962 led opposition to CPN general secretary Rayamajhi's collaboration with King Mahendra but later became estranged from many other radical communists. Merged with two other groups to form the CPN(United) in 1991 but broke away in 1992, Amatya and most of his followers finally joining the UML.

### **Communist Party of Nepal(Democratic)**

New name adopted by the Manandhar group before the 1991 election. Merged with two other factions to form the CPN(United) later that year.

### **Communist Party of Nepal(Manandhar)**

Faction under Vishnu Bahadur Manandhar, who broke away from Keshar Jang Rayamajhi's pro-Soviet group in 1981.

### **Communist Party of Nepal(Maoist)**

Name adopted by the more radical (Bhattarai) faction after the 1994 split in the Unity Centre/UPF. Launched a terrorist campaign in the hills in 1996.

### **Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist). CPN(M)**

Formed in 1987 by merger of followers of Man Mohan Adhikari and of Pushpa Lal Shrestha's widow Sahana Pradhan. Took a middle line between Maoist radicalism and the collaboration with the royal regime practised by pro-Moscow communists. Merged with CPN(M-L) in 1991, but the name was revived by dissidents who broke away from the new party later in the year.



**Communist Party of Nepal(Marxist-Leninist).** [MALE; the Malehs]. CPN(M-L)

Formed in 1978 as successor to the 'Jhapeli' group and Akhil Nepal Revolutionary Co-ordination Committee (ANRCC) and became the largest communist faction. Formally abandoned Maoism in 1989 and merged in 1991 with the CPN(M).

**Communist Party of Nepal (Rayamajhi)**

Pro-Moscow faction led after 1962 by Keshar Jang Rayamajhi, originally general secretary of the undivided CPN. His group was weakened by further splits and ceased functioning in the 1980s.

**Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist and Leninist).**  
UML

Largest of the communist factions, the party was formed in 1991 by merger of the CPN (M-L) and CPN(M). Formed a minority government in 1994-5 and was the strongest party in the coalition government formed in March 1997.

**Communist Party of Nepal (United)**

Formed after the 1991 election by the merger of Manandhar's CPN(Democratic) and the Varma and Amatya groups. Manandhar's followers retained the new name after the other two factions broke away.

**Communist Party of Nepal (Varma)**

Formed in 1983 under Krishna Raj Varma after a split in the faction led by pro-Moscow communist Keshar Jang Rayamajhi. Merged with two other groups to form CPN(United) in 1991 but withdrew in 1992 and afterwards ceased functioning.

**Gorkha Parishad**

Originally a Rana 'revivalist' party which formed the main opposition to Congress in the 1959 election. Its leader, Bharat Shamsheer, and many of his followers joined Congress after Mahendra's abolition of parliamentary democracy.

**Karmavir Mahamandal**

Religious traditionalist organisation founded by Naraharinath Yogi. Encouraged violent opposition to the 1959-60 Congress government.

### **Leftist Nepali Congress**

Congress splinter group formed by Kedar Man Byathit and Balchandra Sharma in 1952. Sharma and his followers joined M.P. Koirala's Rastriya Praja Party in 1953 but left it in 1955 for the Praja Parishad.

### **Masal [Communist Party of Nepal(Masal)]**

Name adopted by Mohan Bikram Singh's group after the 1983 split in the 4th. Convention. The party boycotted the 1991 election, but, though retaining its Maoist stance, backed a number of nominally independent candidates in 1994.

### **Mashal [Communist Party of Nepal(Mashal)]**

Maoist group under 'Prachand' (Pushpa Kumar Dahal), which broke away from Masal in 1985. Merged with 4th. Convention to form Unity Centre in 1990.

### **Mongol National Organisation**

Set up by Gopal Man Gurung to champion the interests of the Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups.

Denied recognition by election commission.

### **National Democratic Party [United National Democratic Party; Rastriya Prajatantra Party]. NDP**

Grouping of *ex-panchas*, originating as two separate factions of the same name, under Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa, which were formally united in 1992. Included in coalition government in 1995. 'National Democratic Party' is also used as an English name for M.P. Koirala's Rastriya Praja Party of 1953-56.

### **Nepal Democratic Congress**

Anti-Rana organisation set up by exiled C-class Ranas in Calcutta in 1948.

### **Nepal Jana Congress**

Congress splinter group set up by Bhadrakali Mishra in 1952. Merged with Praja Parishad in 1955.

### **Nepal Janabadi Morcha. [Janabadi Morcha; Nepal People's Front].**

Radical leftist faction founded by Ramraja Prasad Singh in 1980.

Participated in 1994 election. To be distinguished from the 'Janabadi Morcha Nepal', apparently set up by Singh's erstwhile ally Prem Krishna Pathak.

**Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party.** [Nepal Majdur Kisan Party; Rohit group]. NWPP

A Maoist group founded by Narayan Bijukche ('Comrade Rohit') in 1975-76 as the 'Nepal Workers and Peasants' Organisation.' Its main support base is in Bhaktapur but it also has some support in the western hills.

**Nepali Congress.** [Congress]

Formed by merger of two anti-Rana groupings in Calcutta in 1950. Led 1950 revolution and later adopted a social democratic ideology. Formed single party government in 1959-60 and 1991-94, partner in 1995 coalition.

**Nepali National Congress.** [Nepali Rastriya Congress]

Anti-Rana party set up by Nepalese dissidents in Calcutta in 1947. Split later in the year into factions headed by B.P.Koirala and D. R. Regmi. Regmi continued using the original name after the Koirala's group's 1950 merger with the Nepal Democratic Congress.

**Praja Parishad.** [Nepal Praja Parishad]

Anti-Rana group formed in 1935. Active in the 1950s under leadership of founder member Tanka Prasad Acharya. Split in 1958 into factions under Acharya and Bhadrakali Mishra. It was revived after the *janandolan* but remained a fringe grouping.

**Prajatantrik Mahasabha**

Traditionalist party founded by Ranganath Sharma in 1957.

**Rastriya Janajati Party.** [Nepal Rastriya Janajati Party; National Ethnic Communities Party]

Founded by Khagendra Jang Gurung after the democracy movement to press for division of Nepal into autonomous 'homelands' for the major ethnic groups.

**Rastriya Janamukti Party.** [Nepal Rastriya Janamukti Party; (Nepal) National People's Liberation Party]

Founded by Gore Bahadur Khapangi after the democracy movement to argue for a system of ethnic quotas in the administration and in political parties. Contested 1991 and 1994 elections. Originally known as Rastriya Janamukti Morcha or National People's Liberation Front.

**Rastriya Praja Party.** [National Democratic Party]

Formed by M.P. Koirala and his supporters in 1953 after leaving the Nepali Congress. They rejoined Congress in 1956.

**Sadbhavana Party.** [Nepal Sadbhavana Party; Nepal Goodwill Party].

Terai regionalist party, established by ex-Congressman Gajendra Narayan Singh during the Panchayat period as the 'Nepal Goodwill Council'. Partner in coalitions formed in 1995 and 1997.

**Terai Congress.** [Nepali Terai Congress]

Regionalist party of Nepali Congress dissidents, formed in 1953 by Vedanand Jha. Contested 1959 election.

**Unity Centre.** [Communist Party of Nepal(Unity Centre)]

Maoist group formed in 1990 by merger of the 4th. Convention, Mashal and a breakaway group from Masal. The name was retained by the ex-4th. Conventioneers after a split in 1994.

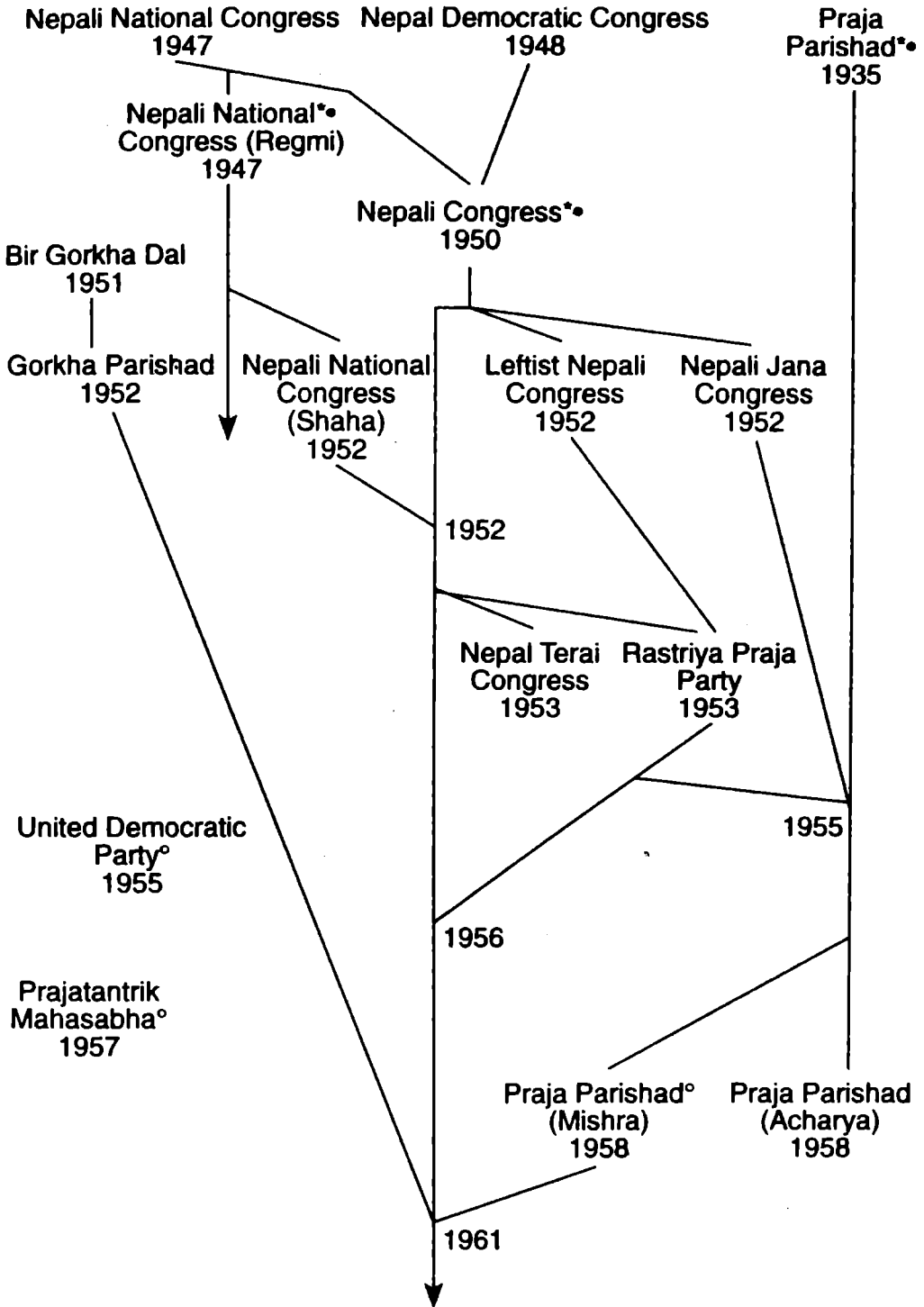
**United Democratic Party.** [Sanyukta Prajatantra Parti]

Personality-based party founded by K. I Singh in 1955. Contested 1959 election.

**United People's Front.** UPF. [Sanyukta Jana Morcha]

Electoral front set up by the Unity Centre to contest the 1991 election. Use of the name was retained by both the Baburam Bhattarai/Prachand and Vaidya/Lama factions when the Unity Centre split in 1994.

**Figure A3.1: Splits and Mergers in Centrist and Rightist Parties (1947-1961)**



**NOTES:**

- \* Collaborated in 1953 as 'League of Democrats'.
- Collaborated in 1957 as 'United Democratic Front' to press for early elections.
- ° Collaborated in 1959-60 as 'National Democratic Front' to oppose the Nepali Congress government.



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