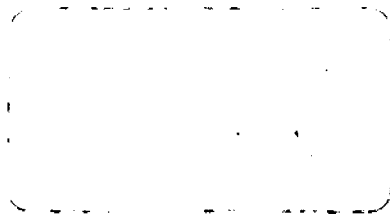


THE NEPALI CONGRESS SINCE 1960 : A PARTY IN EXILE

PAWANANAND



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THE NEPALI CONGRESS SINCE 1960 : A PARTY IN EXILE

PREFACE

PREFACE

The history of the Nepali Congress has hitherto been the history of service, sacrifice and suffering. Very few political parties in the world could be said to have achieved their objectives in such a short period. The Party was only seven months old when it succeeded in overthrowing the obsolete and anachronistic Rana regime in Kathmandu. By the strange irony of history the Party was born in a foreign soil and has been forced by circumstances to spend a major part of its existence, and carry on a major part of its activities, in a foreign soil. Since the dismissal of the Government of the Nepali Congress in December 1960, the Party has been forced to function in exile from India. No research work has so far been undertaken to evaluate its activities since 1960 and the present work purports to be a humble effort in this direction.

The present author has received immense help and co-operation from a number of scholars and friends and wishes to acknowledge his sincere gratitude and thanks to each one of them.

The present author owes a debt of incalculable magnitude to Professor Bimal Prasad, Dean of the School of International Studies (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), for the help and co-operation received from him. Words cannot adequately express his sense of gratitude.

The author also wishes to express immense gratitude to Dr. L.S. Baral, Associate Professor in the Department of

South Asian Studies (SIS) for supervising the work and giving valuable suggestions. Sincere thanks are also due to Dr.(Mrs.) Urmila Phadnis, Associate Professor in the Department of South Asian Studies (SIS) for constant help, encouragement and valuable suggestions in this endeavour.

The author also expresses his obligation to Mr. Arvind Ghosh, a reputed journalist on Nepali affairs, for the valuable help received from him.

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Mr. B.P. Koirala, the Nepali Congress leader and the first ever democratically elected Prime Minister of Nepal, and Mr. Ganeshman Singh, another Nepali Congress leader and the Transport Minister in the dismissed Koirala Ministry, for giving interviews, and Mr. Prakash Koirala, son of Mr. B.P. Koirala, for showing ways of tackling the problems discussed in the dissertation and for arranging the interviews with his father and Mr. Ganeshman Singh.

The author will be failing in his duty if he does not acknowledge his obligation to Mr. Shashi Kant Jha, Lecturer in Political Science, P.G.D.A.V. College, New Delhi, for the immense help and co-operation he provided by going through the manuscripts several times. Thanks are also due to Dr. Ganga Nath Jha of the ICSSR, New Delhi, for very patiently going through the manuscripts time and again. Miss Ela Dutt, a fellow researcher, deserves thanks for her kind help in submitting this dissertation.

The author also expresses his sincere thanks to the staff of the Sapru House Library and the various libraries of Jawaharlal Nehru University in general, and to Mr. V.K. Agarwal of the Central Library of Jawaharlal Nehru University in particular, for their help and co-operation in tracing out books and periodicals.

The author also expresses his obligation to Dr. K.C. Gupta, Principal, Rao Tula Ram College, New Delhi, for his valuable co-operation in various ways necessary for writing this dissertation.

Last but not least, the author expresses his deep sense of gratitude to his wife, Usha, who not only kept him free from domestic problems but also helped in writing the dissertation by going through the manuscripts several times. Without her co-operation in numerous ways, it would not have been possible to complete this dissertation.

The author is entirely responsible for the facts stated, opinions expressed or conclusions reached.

Jawaharlal Nehru University,
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and promotion of co-operative farming were the reforms which the Party had promised to undertake. Such reforms were understandably something far from palatable for the conservative and reactionary elements in the country. In spite of the various constraints, the Koirala Government was remarkably successful in scoring accomplishments not achieved by any previous Government in Nepal. As an elected Government commanding an absolute majority in Parliament, the Cabinet functioned in unison and cohesion. It did not also ignore short-term projects intended to solve urgent immediate problems of the country. Some of these short-term "impact" projects were reportedly drawn up with the help and suggestions of the district-level Nepali Congress leaders who seemed generally familiar with economic and social conditions in their respective areas. In the sphere of economic planning and development, the Nepali Congress Government initiated a series of pioneering attempts to mobilize indigenous resources, while reducing existing economic inequalities. Perhaps, the most debatable economic measure of the Government was the enactment of a law for the abolition of birta tenure. The Bill in this regard was approved by the House of Representatives on 17 September 1959 and became a law on 7 October to come into force only in and from January 1961.⁶

6 Joshi and Rose, n. 1, p. 346 and pp. 347, 348 and 352.

It has also been alleged that renewal of the ten-year old Indo-Nepalese trade treaty concluded in 1960 was also against the wishes of the King, for he tended to believe that the renewed treaty contained provisions which ignored Nepal's natural needs and aspirations, and hence the Nepali Congress Government had acted against national interests.⁷

The tussle that took place between the Government and the King came to the forefront when the latter indirectly indicated it at a public speech given in Nepalgunj on 30 January 1960. From the speech it was apparent that the days of the democratically elected government were numbered. The royal attitude has been commented upon in the following terms:

An oblique critique of the incumbent government of the Nepali Congress, the speech, while impliedly censuring the government, sufficiently conveyed the threat that he would take over in a given situation. Such a veiled threat was a strange example of a Head of State committed to the Cabinet form of government, considering that even criticism by the people at that juncture would have been unduly early. For the government had been in office for barely seven months and the House of Representatives had met only once.⁸

The King's line was followed by a vocal group of conservatives for fear of their interests being hampered by the policies and programmes of the Government. These elements started inciting

7 As told by B.P. Koirala to the present author in a personal interview.

8 L.S. Baral, n. 2, p. 210.

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The birth or growth of a political party in a closed and well-nigh despotic system should, if anything, be considered a phenomenon. Similar was the case with the Nepali Congress born in 1950 to challenge the autocratic Ranaarchy. Its birth was, as such, a turning point in Nepal's history. The family Rana regime, which came into existence in 1846, was characterized by a ruthless and arrogant administration. The Ranas were responsible to none but to themselves. Ever since they came to power they virtually imprisoned the Kings and ruled in their names. Prime Ministership was made hereditary and the Kings did not have any say in the appointment of any official of the State. The non-conformists were harassed, suppressed or even obliterated. The concept of fundamental rights or human rights remained alien to the Ranas throughout. They even loathed the process of modernization that had been started in other parts of the globe, including Asia.

The British, who ruled India, were little concerned about the happenings in Nepal. They treated Nepal almost like a sacred cow and showed no inclination to intervene or even suggest to the Ranas the need to bring about the country's democratization. The attitude of the British toward Nepal and vice versa stood both the British and the Ranas in good stead.

The British received the support of the Ranas to

maintain their empire. They utilized the services of the Gurkhas in curbing the nationalist uprising of the Indians ever since 1857. Although independent in dealing with its domestic affairs, Nepal was by and large treated by the British as a semi-sovereign State and was not allowed freedom in forming its foreign policy. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the foreign policy of Nepal was under the complete control of the British Government. No foreigner other than the British was allowed entry into Nepal without the permission of the British Government. After 1816 only a few non-British could enter Nepal and that too for academic purposes.

The Ranas, on the other hand, benefited from this sort of servility to the British in many ways. It gave them a sense of security against any foreign aggression-real or apparent. Any kind of political or even socio-cultural movements of the Nepalis in India could not survive for long. It has been alleged that such movements were suppressed by the British in India if, as suggested by the Ranas, they bore the slightest indication of organizing the Nepalis for a future anti-Rana system movement in Nepal.

It was against this background that the Nepalis, who had been living in India as students or otherwise, realized that the Ranas could not be deposed unless India acquired freedom from British rule. It was with this calculation that several of the Nepalis joined India's freedom movement. Quite a few

of them even suffered imprisonment during the Quit India Movement of 1942. Notable among those were, B.P. Koirala and S.P. Upadhyaya.

After the end of the Second World War, when it became increasingly obvious that the British would be leaving India soon, the politically conscious Nepalis in India realized the importance of the formation of a political organization. B.P. Koirala, by now an influential member of the Indian Congress Socialist Group, issued a statement from Patna in October 1946 emphasizing the need to organize a movement against the Rana regime. As a result, an organization, called the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Congress, was set up in Banaras on 31 October 1946, which subsequently elected Devi Prasad Sapkota as its Chairman. The organization held its inaugural Conference in Calcutta on 25 and 26 January 1947, where two other organizations, namely the Nepali Sangh of Banaras and the Gorkha Congress of Calcutta, joined it to form the Nepali Rashtriya Congress.

The main objectives of the newly formed Nepali Rashtriya Congress were to lend cooperation for the achievement of freedom for India and the establishment of a representative government in Nepal under the constitutional headship of the King after deposing the Ranas from their seat of power. The Party adopted non-violence as the means to achieve its objectives. In March 1947, it started the

Gandhian-style satyagraha (civil disobedience movement) in support of the mill workers at Biratnagar. Though it was easily suppressed with the arrest of almost all its leaders including its acting Chairman B.P. Koirala and General Secretary, Bal Chandra Sharma, the satyagraha was significant in more than one way. It succeeded in arousing considerable public sympathy for the anti-Rana struggle. It brought both popularity and cadre to the Rashtriya Congress. It also made the Ranas realize the need of some sort of political concessions to contain political unrest in the country in the future. Besides, the Biratnagar strike acted as a trail-blazer for the anti-Rana agitation in the country within an unexpectedly short period. Also, it was remarkable in the sense that not only the labour class but also the traditionally exploited landless peasants and students came to the forefront of the battle against the Rana regime.

In August 1948, yet another party called the Nepal Prajatantrik Congress came into being. Two banished 'C' Class Ranas, Suvarna Shamsheer and Mahabir Shamsheer, who had amassed considerable wealth in India through business, were mainly responsible for its formation. Surya Prasad Upadhyaya and Mahendra Vikram Shah were other important members of the Party. Like the Nepali Rashtriya Congress, it also aimed at overthrowing the Rana regime. But unlike the Rashtriya Congress, the Prajatantrik Congress believed in and preached

violence as the means to achieve its ends.

Compelled by the circumstances, both the parties merged together to form the Nepali Congress on 9 April 1950 in Calcutta. The reason for their merger is not far to seek. The Nepali Prajatantrik Congress had by then come to realize that mere violence could not achieve the objective without mass support which it lacked. The Nepali Rashtriya Congress, despite a large number of dedicated workers and mass following after its role in the Biratnagar strike of March 1947, lacked financial resources. Thus both these parties needed each other. Such a complementarity was the main reason for their merger.

Matrika Prasad Koirala was elected Chairman of the party and its head office was established in Banaras. It adopted the flag and the mouth organ, the Nepal Pukar, of the Nepal Prajatantrik Congress. Besides, the Nepali Congress also began the publication of another weekly, the Nav Nepal, in Hindi. It adopted two separate programmes. One was overt and the responsibility of its implementation was vested in the Party's Chairman, M.P. Koirala. The other was covert and the responsibility of its implementation was vested in Suvarna Shamsheer and B.P. Koirala. Overtly, it professed its faith in democratic means. Covertly, it believed in an armed revolution and began preparation for the same.

As for the leadership of the Party at the time of its formation and subsequently, it may be said that it had a pluralistic structure. Whereas B.P. Koirala and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya were Brahmins, Suvarna Shamsher was a scion of the Ranas and Ganeshman Singh a Newar-Regionwise; while Shamsher and Singh hailed from Kathmandu, Koirala hailed from the Terai. Ideologically, Koirala and Singh professed to be ultra-radicals, whereas Shamsher and Upadhyaya appeared to be moderate democrats. Thus in these and in several other respects too, the leadership of the party was pluralistic.

The membership of the party also more or less reflected its country-wide character. It represented the cross section of the Nepali society. It comprised big zamindars as well as petty land-owning or landless peasants, professionals as well as students, a larger section of the elite and the intelligentsia. Majority communities like the Rajputs, the Chhetris, and the Brahmins (whether Maithils or Kumains or Parbata), minority communities like the Tharus, the Yadavas, the Rais and the Limbus were also on its membership roll. Thus it had members from the Terai as well as from the hills. This further made the party more pluralistic.

The organizational structure of the Nepali Congress was quite in keeping with its leadership and membership structure. The most important decision-making body was its Working Committee whose membership consisted of various castes and

communities. Below it was the All-Nepal Nepali Congress Committee called the Mahasamiti. The Congress was a close-knit organization which espoused political modernization as well as national integration.

At the time of its inception in 1950, the Nepali Congress did not have branches all over the country. But over the time, the local people belonging to different regions were given charge of the party's regional or zonal branches. Within a short period it could establish its branches in almost all important places in the districts which in practice became the training ground of the local leadership. For the purpose of its organizational structure the country was divided longitudinally, not latitudinally, with an eye to bring about an emotional national integration and solidarity among the people.

The Nepali Congress was not even of seven months when it had to launch an armed insurrection against the Ranas in November 1950. It could establish control over liberated areas and took over local administration partly because of its armed wing, the Raksha Dal, and partly because of the popular upsurge in its favour. In consequence of the agreement at Delhi in January 1951 under the good offices of the Government of India, the Nepali Congress had to wind up its administration in these districts. The agreement provided for, among other things, a Rana-Nepali Congress Government meant to look after

routine administration of the country for an interim period until an election took place for a Constituent Assembly by the end of 1952 to draft the country's future Constitution.

The Nepali Congress joined the Coalition Government announced by King Tribhuvan on 18 February 1951. The Government collapsed in November because of bitter acrimonies between some of the Ranas and the Nepali Congress Ministers. But despite its short term, several of its decisions allegedly taken under the pressure of the Nepali Congress were quite ahead of time in the context of Nepal. The Interim Constitution which provided for the King-in-Council was a great achievement in the country where the kingship had been absolute till the first half of the twentieth century. Equally radical was the establishment of a Public Service Commission in order to recruit administrative personnel on the basis of merit which was not done so far. The Government also fixed the age of retirement of government officials at 60. An advisory assembly was announced by the King in order to train future parliamentarians and to give some semblance of a representative government. The system of bonded labour was abolished. The establishment of a radio station in Kathmandu could also be said to be an attainment in the socio-cultural field. The Party was also keen that its decision pertaining to the abolition of the birta (rent free land) taken unanimously on 27 September 1951 should be immediately implemented by the Government.

The Coalition Government was succeeded by the Nepali Congress Government. It consisted of eight Congress members and six independents. The King laid down several specific tasks before the Ministry including the ensurance of the rights of the people, independent functioning of the judiciary without undue interference from the executive, recruitment for government services by the Public Service Commission on the basis of merit, and expediting of arrangements for holding the general election as far as possible by the end of 1952.

But the Ministry did not last long. Because of infighting between the groups led by the two Koirala brothers - M.P. Koirala, the Prime Minister and B.P. Koirala, the Ministry came to an end in August 1952. From then on, the Party remained in the opposition fighting against all sorts of governmental excesses and championing the cause of democracy. The Congress acquired its prestige when its leader, Suvarna Shamsher, was included in the Council of Ministers set up by King Mahendra in May 1958 and was charged with expediting the arrangement for holding the general election in the country.

Although it was out of Government between August 1952 and May 1958, the Nepali Congress cannot be said to have wasted all these years for nothing. As a matter of fact, it grew in strength during this period. It concentrated on cadre-building and popularizing itself with the masses for co-operation in the struggle for democracy. It remained a force

because of united leadership. The "Big Four" among its leaders, B. P. Koirala, Suvarna Shamsher, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya and Ganeshman Singh continued to maintain their influence on the Party. It was to a very great extent because of their leadership that the Party remained a force to be reckoned with. Though it was out of power for a long period, defections from its rank and file were few. Nor was there any split in the leadership and weakness in the organizational structure of the Party.

There were other notable achievements of the Party in this period. It moulded itself in a socialist party and acquired the membership of the Socialist International. This made the Party known in other parts of the world. Besides, its election manifesto prepared during this period was also remarkable in many ways. It laid emphasis on eradication of social evils and on strengthening of panchayats as units of local-self-government, a sine qua non for decentralization of power and political modernization.

The Nepali Congress was deeply committed to the election of a Constituent Assembly as promised by King Tribhuvan. It always advocated in favour of Constitutional Monarchy and was never reconciled to the concentration of power in the hands of the King which had begun during the reign of King Tribhuvan himself. It is remarkable to note, however, that the Party never aimed at overthrowing the institution of Monarchy.

The struggle by the Nepali Congress for the realization of these objectives, many of which were quite ahead of time, and the dedication of its leaders and workers to these objectives made it popular with the masses. But at the same time, the conservative elements of the Nepali society came to dread its objectives. They found their natural leader in the King who had little problem of securing the legitimacy of leadership in a traditional society like Nepal's. King Mahendra was power-conscious and markedly assertive. Visibly afraid of the popularity of the Nepali Congress, he even endeavoured to postpone the general election as promised by his father and later insisted that the election would be held for Parliament and the country's constitution would be a royal award.

At long last, the country went to the polls in the spring of 1959. It has been alleged that King Mahendra ordered the election with the calculation that no party would be able to secure a working majority and he could as usual play his trump card for making a coalition government of his own choice and personally directing the affairs of the country at his pleasure.

But all such calculations went wrong. The Nepali Congress succeeded in achieving a spectacular victory in the elections. The electoral results compelled the King to invite its leader, B.P. Koirala, to form his Ministry in May 1959. The Ministry continued to be in power till it was dismissed

by the King in December 1960, partly because of the King's desire to rule the country personally and partly because of the betrayal of some Party members, who left the party to side with the King for the realization of their personal ends. After the dismissal of the Ministry, which was also followed by a ban on all political parties and political activities other than the official, the Party opted to function in exile in India.

A party in exile always faces a variety of constraints. The strategies and tactics directed from an alien soil do not necessarily facilitate the achievement of its goal, particularly because such activities are likely to create irritants in relations between the native government and government of the country which permits its leaders to live in self-exile. Yet another constraining factor is the problem of raising of funds to meet its expenses. The party has to arrange for its finances for covert or overt activities aimed at changing the status quo in the native country where its followers, supporters or sympathizers usually refrain from contributing to the party funds for fear of severe repression by the native administration.

It may also be maintained that the strategies of a party in exile are almost invariably designed in terms of its stated aims and objectives to regain power already lost or, failing that, to go back to the country with some leverage

at least to bargain with the incumbent government in terms of political rehabilitation. Should all this fail, it might also resort to violence or intensify propaganda through various available media in order to expose the native government's weakness, as well as to bring the people to its side. The party might employ any or all of these strategies depending upon the circumstances - domestic or external.

The strategies employed by the Nepali Congress in exile were confronted with heavy odds. First, it was forced into a situation far from congenial to its operation, partly because of progressively decreasing contact with the masses in Nepal and partly because of other international factors. Secondly, paucity of funds, especially due to the reluctance of the people to feed the opposition to the current regime also compounded its difficulties. Besides, it became a casualty of the deteriorating Indo-Nepalese relations. Moreover, the prospects of the Party's rehabilitation in the national politics were not bright, more particularly, because of the emergence of a new group in power strongly entrenched in the national body politic and behaving as the first line of defence for the status quo.

The proposed study would make an attempt to analyse the activities of the Nepali Congress from December 1960 onwards. These activities may be divided into three broad phases. The first phase began immediately after King Mahendra's take-over

in December 1960 since when the Party opted for total confrontation with the royal regime. This phase is marked by a shift in its ideology from non-violence to violence. The second phase began in December 1962 when the Party terminated its armed opposition in preference to agitational activities against the regime directed from its domestic and allegedly from Indian bases as well. The third phase began in 1968, when Suvarna Shamsher, the then President of the Party, offered "loyal" support to the King in the task of strengthening a fully democratic order in the country. As a result, its topmost leaders, including former Prime Minister B.P. Koirala and former Minister Ganeshman Singh were released from eight-year long detention in October 1968. Initially this augured well for a rapprochement between the Party and the King, which, over the time, remained as elusive as ever, more so because of the line of action adopted by Koirala in terms of violent means, believing it to be the only alternative in the event of continual denial of freedom to conduct peaceful political activities in the country.

The study would also examine the prospects of the Nepali Congress for its future role in the Nepalese political arena. This, in turn, would call for an examination of the interaction between the governments of Nepal and India vis-a-vis the Party. Important as these issues are, the direction to which the Nepali Congress has been drifting and the various strategies

its leaders have employed since 1960 in terms of the Party's rehabilitation in the national political life are equally worth investigating.

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNING OF THE EXILE : THE PARTY BETWEEN DECEMBER 1960 AND DECEMBER 1962

The Party Versus the King

It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the role of the Nepali Congress in the establishment of democracy in Nepal cannot be underrated. The Party, that came into existence in 1950 as a result of the merger of the Nepali National Congress and the Nepal Democratic Congress, was largely responsible for bringing about a historic revolution in November the same year which by the following February overthrew Ranarchy (the hereditary prime-ministership of the Ranas). Subsequently, a new democratic order was heralded under constitutional monarchy. However, no general election was held for a Constituent Assembly to draft the country's constitution as announced by King Tribhuvan. At long last, the election was held in the spring of 1959 beginning from 18 February for the House of Representatives under a Constitution given by King Mahendra on 12 February. The Nepali Congress obtained an overwhelming majority, securing 74 seats in the 109-member Lower House of Parliament.

The Government of the Nepali Congress subsequently formed under the Prime Ministership of B.P. Koirala was confronted with several problems not strange to a country like Nepal which had been moving towards democracy only since 1951.

One of the problems was derived from the Constitution itself. The Constitution had vested the King with wide-ranging powers. Perhaps frustrated at this, while speaking at the seventh general conference of the Party on 8 May 1960, Prime Minister Koirala said that the Constitution was not wholly democratic. Although he conceded that it was the best possible under the circumstances,¹ his remarks were likely to evoke sharp negative reaction from the side of the King, who, as reports had it, was determined not "to remain a mere ceremonial Head of State but the real power-wielder and authority-holder."² Moreover, the King was markedly unlike his father, as evident from the way he had expressed his impatience with democracy soon after its inception in 1951 and since then set about to define and redefine it in his own way. Even way back on 28 July 1951, when he was still the Crown Prince, he had said:

Democracy in its true sense would be possible only when people would doff their sectional interests, when they would stop going about shouting slogans and vitiating the political climate; when they would awaken their latent national feelings and divert their energies

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- 1 Cited in Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, Democratic Innovations in Nepal : A Case Study of Political Acculturation (Berkeley, 1966), p. 340.
- 2 L.S. Baral, "King Mahendra's Coup of December 1960 : Its Implications in Nepal", Asia Quarterly, no. 3, 1975, pp. 207-8.

to nation-building activities.³

Similarly, in his National Democracy Day Message of 18 February 1952, he had asserted, "Our one-year old democracy is willy-nilly lying on its death-bed."⁴ In almost identically negative terms, he had declared in his National Democracy Day Message of 18 February 1955:

It has been now almost four years since the inception of democracy in our country. But we have to search and research to find out even four achievements to our credit in the meanwhile. It is really a matter of great pity. Should we say that democracy is in a state of infancy, evil propensities like selfishness, greed and envy are very much noticeable in it, which are unnatural for an infant. Should we say that it has already grown up, it is rather unfortunate that the symptoms of growth are noticeable nowhere-- a fact which is not at all hidden from my countrymen.⁵

It also seemed that the King was chary of appreciating the Congress led by Koirala. Abolition of the landlord system, including birta (rent-free land), abolition of the Rajyas (semi-autonomous small principalities in the Western Hills), a ceiling on individual land holdings, nationalization of forests,

3 King Mahendra, Proclamations, Speeches and Messages July 1951 - December 1960 (Kathmandu: HMG Nepal, Department of Publicity Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1967), p. 1.

4 Ibid., p. 2.

5 Ibid., p. 16.

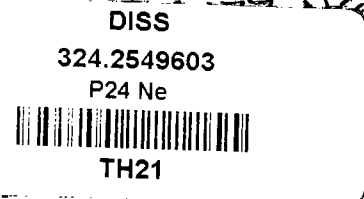
the King to dismiss the Government as soon as possible.

On top of that, relations between the King and the Prime Minister were far from cordial. On his return from an official visit to Israel in September 1960, Koirala remarked that Nepal did not need any standing army and that it was advisable to follow Israel in matters of the country's defence.⁹ The Nepalese army had been largely dominated by the traditionalist sector of society noted for its past association with despotism. Koirala's remarks were understandably enough to offend such elements who were by temperament and training predisposed to align themselves with the King against the incumbent Government.

As ill luck would have it, the Government's action in establishing law and order in certain areas, where disturbances had been occurring from June 1960 or so, was defied by some vested interests. Such disturbances mostly occurred in Nuwakot and Gorkha districts where landlords had been noted for their exorbitant exploitative practices and claiming certain traditional privileges regardless of the woes of their tenants. These landlords were provoked particularly by some persons openly advocating the revival of absolute monarchy and termination of the present political system of constitutional monarchy. However, the disturbances were controlled by the Government. Even otherwise, they were not of an alarming nature because of their occurrences only in some limited areas

9 Ibid., p. 228.

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of those two districts. But what was indeed instructive was the way they were allegedly master-minded by a yogi of the Gorakhnath sect, named Narharinath, who claimed to be a monarchist and had been campaigning for some time in the past for absolute monarchy. His involvement in those disturbances was apparently of a greater concern for the Government. It may be in order to quote here a description and implication of those disturbances, as written elsewhere:

...towards the beginning of December 1960 several landlords, allegedly instigated by him, staged a demonstration in front of district offices at Gorkha and the local authorities opened fire when demonstrators resorted to acts of violence and vandalism. Their so-called ringleader, the yogi was arrested, who, in his confession before the police, said that he had been employed by certain higher-ranking officials of the Royal Palace in Kathmandu to organize the local people's campaign against the incumbent "anti-King" Government of the Nepali Congress, while demanding reification of the absolute monarchy and to resort to violence if the Government took steps to suppress the campaign. As rumours had it in Kathmandu, the King was not only dissatisfied with the Government over the yogi's arrest but also took a strong exception to the action of the Government in which the yogi was upbraided for implicating the Royal Palace in the incidents in which he himself had reportedly been the ringleader.¹⁰

The King was abroad during those times. When the news about the yogi's involvement in the present case reached him, he was said to have been in an uncomfortable situation

10 Ibid., p. 211.

and it was then that he had reportedly given a serious consideration to a take-over scheme. It is alleged that it was with these considerations that he was anxious to feel out the reaction of Suvarna Shamsher, Deputy Prime Minister, and one of the top leaders of the Nepali Congress who had accompanied him on his tour as the Minister-in-waiting. He urged Suvarna to lend himself to the scheme while enquiring of him whether he would agree to serve the succeeding regime. But the Deputy Prime Minister reportedly did not respond to the royal wishes¹¹ and limited himself to assuring that the Government was capable of handling the present situation in the country and there was hence no point in dismissing it on grounds of failure of maintaining law and order there.

However, the King seemed determined to go ahead with his scheme. His supporters included Tulsī Giri and the latter's close associate Vishwa Bandhu Thapa, as pointed out by Bhola Chatterji who says that at an interview in June 1973 Giri admitted that he had a role to play "in the whole thing".¹²

In this connection it would be interesting to note that a section of the Indian Press believed that the King had in the meanwhile taken opposition parties into confidence for

11 Bhola Chatterji, "Nepal's Experiment with Nation Building : An Introduction", Young Indian (New Delhi), 11 April 1974, p. 7.

12 Ibid.

overthrowing the incumbent Government with constitutional means, a course to be preferred to any personal involvement in a take-over. The weekly Link maintained that "the National Democratic United Front, including the parties of Dr. K.I. Singh and Tanka Prasad Acharya, came out openly in support of this suggestion."¹³ Singh headed the United Democratic Party and Acharya led a faction of the Praja Parishad. The Indian weekly also stated that "their stand and the bitter opposition to the Ministry by the Communist Party and the Gorkha Parishad convinced the King that he could go to any length." The "exact timing" of the take-over was fixed for 15 December 1960. It was on that date that the Tarun Dal, youth wing of the Nepali Congress, was to hold a conference at Kathmandu where the "entire Nepali Congress leadership was expected to be present". The date was particularly suitable for the reason that Prime Minister Koirala was due to leave for a long tour of eastern Nepal immediately thereafter, and some other ministers were also to visit other parts of the country in the near future.

It has become now common knowledge in Nepal that the King wanted to take Suvarna Shamsheer in confidence after having won over Tulsī Giri and Vishwa Bandhu Thapa for overthrowing the Government. It was for this purpose, again,

¹³ "Nepal Royal Coup", Link (New Delhi), vol. 3, no. 20, 25 December 1960, p. 32.

that the alleged problems of law and order arising out of some disturbances in the country had to be created for providing a convincing excuse to force the incumbent Government to resign or dismiss it for its inefficiency. The most decisive factor, however, turned out to be the arrest of yogi Narharinath, which had the likelihood of implicating the royal Palace for his deeds in the recent past. For the King the question was now or never.

But when things did not happen according to his calculations, the King was left with no option than to take over.

In so far as the timing of assuming the entire reins of administration in his hands was concerned, the law pertaining to the abolition of the birta system would seem to be no less decisive. The law was to be effective from January 1961 and hence the contemplated take-over needed to be effected earlier so that the King could count upon the support of those having birta land in plenty and secure legitimacy of his action of whatever nature by postponing the implementation of the law.

THE ROYAL TAKE-OVER

On 15 December 1960, while taking over the administration of the country in his own hands after dismissing the Nepali Congress Government and dissolving Parliament, King Mahendra declared that the new order was for an interim period until

alternative arrangements were made.¹⁴ The take-over, no doubt dramatic but none the less an action planned with a precision, was supposed to be replaced with a democratic set-up. However, all such declarations were only on the verbal plane. The King's main target was the Nepali Congress which he criticized in as strong terms as possible.

Making a proclamation on the eve of his take-over, the King listed several charges against the Government. He declared:

whereas, contrary to the popular hope and belief that the representatives elected in accordance with the democratic procedure would attempt to dispel the atmosphere of misunderstanding prevailing between the government and the people and make an all-out effort to promote the progress and well being of the nation, the elected government, taking shelter behind the democratic system, set aside the interests of the country and the people, and wielded authority in a manner designed to further the party interests only.¹⁵

The King also suspended several provisions of the existing Constitution, particularly those providing for fundamental rights, parliamentary system and the cabinet form of government.

14 His Majesty King Mahendra, Pages of History : A Collection of Proclamations Messages and Addresses Delivered by H.M. King Mahendra, December 15, 1960- December 10, 1961 (His Majesty's Government, Kathmandu, Nepal), Series 1, p. 3.

15 Ibid., p. 2.

The royal take-over came with a sensational suddenness. In the morning Prime Minister Koirala was attending along with some of his Cabinet colleagues the youth conference referred to already. Royal guards accompanying a royal aide came to the conference and escorted Koirala and his colleagues from there to the Singh Durbar Secretariat, which was heavily guarded with troops armed with rifles and sten-guns. The Royal Palace was also heavily guarded and troops were posted at several places in Kathmandu. Public meetings and political activities were banned throughout the kingdom under an order issued by the Home office.

Almost all members of the Koirala Cabinet available in Kathmandu were simultaneously arrested. The Deputy Prime Minister, Suvarna Shamsher, who had left for India just one day ago, thus escaped arrest. The Health Minister, Kashi Nath Gautam, and the Education Minister, Parsu Narayan Chaudhary, both of whom were abroad, also escaped arrest. A large number of members of the House of Representatives were rounded up and subsequently put behind bars. Even leaders of opposition parties in Parliament were not spared. K.I. Singh, a former Prime Minister and leader of the United Democratic Party, T.P. Acharya, another former Prime Minister and leader of the Praja Parishad (Acharya Group), Mrigendra Shamsher, leader of the Gorkha Parishad, Rangnath Sharma, leader of the National Democratic Front, Bhadra Kali Mishra, leader of the

Praja Parishad (Mishra Group), and D.R. Regmi, leader of the Nepali National Congress, were all arrested. However, all of them were released immediately after their arrest after they pledged themselves to support the royal action.

On 26 December 1960, the King appointed a Council of Ministers. The Council was meant to help him run the administration. The five Ministers were Tulsī Giri, Vishwa Bandhu Thapa, Rishikesh Shaha, Surya Bahadur Thapa and Anirudha Prasad Singh. The Assistant Ministers were Nageshwar Prasad Singh, Khagendra Jung Gurung, Kaziman Limbu and Bhuwan Lal Pradhan. The selection of Ministers and Assistant Ministers was made on a personal basis. Three of the nine were from the Nepali Congress. Of these three, Tulsī Giri had resigned recently from the Koirala Ministry. Vishwa Bandhu Thapa was the Chief Whip of the Nepali Congress in the dissolved Lower House. Nageshwar Prasad Singh was yet another Congress member of the dissolved Lower House.¹⁶

On 5 January 1961, King Mahendra banned all political parties functioning in the country.¹⁷

Thus the quick political development that followed the royal take-over suggested the King's main aim of eliminating

16 The Statesman (Calcutta), 27 December 1960.

17 Times of India (New Delhi), 6 January 1961.

the Nepali Congress as a political force in the country. The Nepali Congress was indeed the worst hit. It lost most of its top leadership through imprisonment, voluntary exile, and subsequent desertion. With only a few exceptions, all the Party leaders inside Nepal either suffered imprisonment or pledged their loyalty to the royal regime. In the latter category were several persons who were actively associated with their erstwhile Party Government. A larger group of the Party workers promised to refrain from taking part in political activities. The purge of Nepali Congress workers was carried out with thoroughness even to the district level. Local party organizations were disbanded and the Party workers either imprisoned or hounded out if they dissented from the line of the new regime. Even government officials either appointed by the Koirala Ministry or suspected of having too close ties with the Nepali Congress were dismissed, often in contravention of the Public Service Commission's regulations.¹⁸

THE PARTY IN A QUANDARY

Immediately after the royal take-over the party found itself in a quandary. Its difficulties were confounded by a ban on political activities in the country and arrest of most

¹⁸ Joshi and Rose, n. 1, pp. 443-4.

of its leaders. For his part, the King had not made anything clear in his proclamation of 15 December 1960 and no one could say with certainty whether parliamentary democracy had been dismissed once and for all. But with the appointment of the Council of Ministers on 26 December it became clear that parliamentary democracy would not be restored soon. It was at this stage that the Nepali Congress started opposing the new regime. Having found that they could not play a meaningful role in the prevailing situation in Nepal, several of its workers escaped to India and chose it as the base of their future operation. A few influential Nepali Congress leaders who were in India at the time of the royal take-over were joined by the workers after escaping arrest in the country.

Initially, the party's opposition to the royal regime was rather mild and the means to achieve its objective, that is restoration of parliamentary democracy, was based on non-violent means. Such means included persuasion, petition and protest. In the beginning the party seemed to be busy in making a two-fold bid to achieve its objective. On the one hand, it tried to demonstrate its protest against the actions of the King. On the other hand, it made all efforts possible to strengthen its rank and file. The latter process was facilitated by a merger of various political parties with it.

The first public expression of opposition to the take-over came during a convention held by approximately 150 political

workers from the Central Terai district of Birganj who met at an Indian town Raxaul in Bihar, near the Indo-Nepalese border, in the middle of January 1961.¹⁹

By then the Nepali Congress leaders and workers who had come to live in India, numbered several hundred. They held an emergency secret convention in Patna (Bihar) on 25 January 1961. Addressing the closed door convention, Suvarna Shamsheer, Deputy Prime Minister in the Koirala Cabinet, said that the people of Nepal should not rest without re-establishing democracy, "whatever the consequences and howsoever the sacrifices needed". He added: "The coup staged by the King of Nepal has pushed the country ten years back and the people of Nepal today are in the same position as they were during the Rana regime". He further asserted that "a government duly elected by 8,500,000 people could not be summarily dismissed by an individual. The days of dictatorship had gone and the present autocratic rule of the King could not last long".²⁰

Suvarna's speech, though critical of the King's action, did not call for any violent activities for re-establishing parliamentary democracy. His demands included release of political prisoners and restoration of parliamentary democracy.

19 Ibid., p. 444.

20 Times of India (New Delhi), 26 January 1961.

A resolution passed at the same convention, obviously purported to prevent the growth of any despondency in the rank and file of the Party, appealed to the people of Nepal "not to lose heart but to hold themselves in readiness to respond to the call of the Nepali Congress when it is given."²¹

The convention was also attended by several leaders from other political parties.

The resolutions adopted at the convention may be described as mild in tone. According to the General Secretary of the Party, the convention "secretly laid down the line of action and decided to protest against the King's autocratic regime and build a resistance movement".²²

Yet another expression of its faith in non-violence is available from the reports of a press conference addressed by three Party leaders at Banaras on 30 January 1961. The three leaders -- Parsu Narayan Chaudhary, Achyut Raj Regmi and Ganesh Kumar Sharma -- told newsmen that should the King reject their demand for convening the Parliament, they would launch a satyagraha (non-violent agitation) inside Nepal. While Chaudhary was the Education Minister in the dissolved Koirala Ministry, Regmi and Sharma were members of the dissolved

21 Ibid.

22 Joshi and Rose, n. 1, p. 444.

Parliament.²³ The three leaders declared that although they had not finalized the programme, according to tentative plans public meetings were to be held at various places in Nepal and volunteers were to court arrest. They also maintained that Party workers were contacting the people in Nepal and mobilizing public opinion. They added that when they considered they had enough strength to launch the satyagraha, they would give an ultimatum to the King to reconvene the Parliament, and if he did not comply with their request, the Nepali Congress members of Parliament would "assemble somewhere in Nepal" and decide their future course of action.

Gradually, the Nepali Congress in India gained in strength as leaders and workers from other political parties came to join it even in violation of the wishes of their respective leaders.

The United Democratic party of K.I. Singh merged with the Nepali Congress following the decision of its party workers at a meeting held at Gorakhpur on 12 May 1961 under the chairmanship of its General Secretary Kashi Prasad Srivastava.²⁴ K.I. Singh, who did not attend that meeting because of certain "conditions", subsequently dissociated himself from such a merger. All the same, the merger was a fait accompli.

23 The Statesman (New Delhi), 31 January 1961.

24 The Hindu (Madras), 14 May 1961.

Another political party that followed the steps of the United Democratic Party was the section of the Gorkha Parishad led by Bharat Shamsheer, the leader of the opposition in the dissolved House of Representatives. At a Press conference in New Delhi on 13 November 1961, he vehemently condemned the foreign policy of King Mahendra and said that his party had decided to cooperate with the Nepali Congress for the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy in Nepal.²⁵

On 20 November 1961, the Party, which had been operating from its headquarters in Calcutta since January, decided "to unite with the Gorkha Parishad and proceed to pull down the present regime and put Nepal back on the path of progress."²⁶ On 28 December 1961, Bharat Shamsheer announced at a press conference in Calcutta the decision of his party to merge with the Nepali Congress and work under the leadership of General Suvarna Shamsheer for the restoration of parliamentary democracy in the country.²⁷

The Praja Parishad (Mishra Group) had already merged with the Congress. The Nepal Communist Party decided to work on its own for the restoration of parliamentary democracy in the country.

25 Times of India (New Delhi), 14 November 1961.

26 Ibid., 21 November 1961.

27 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 29 December 1961.

The merger as mentioned above boosted the morale of Nepali Congress Workers. There is no denying the fact that neither the United Democratic Party nor the Praja Parishad had a large cadre or a band of dedicated party workers, but their merger was not insignificant. Joshi and Rose are of the opinion that:

The alliance between the Nepali Congress and Bharat Shamsheer wing of the Gorkha Parishad constituted a potentially serious threat to the King since it brought a number of trained party workers in various parts of the hill areas in Nepal within the opposition camp.²⁸

Although Gorkha Parishad leaders in the capital hastened to denounce his decision of merger, there are reasons to believe that Bharat Shamsheer commanded the loyalty of several party workers outside the capital.

A political party — whether in exile or otherwise — has to design its strategies in accordance with its objectives. The main objective before the Nepali Congress was the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Nepal and its entire strategy was directed towards that end. Immediately after the royal take-over, the Party was not in a position to launch a major movement against the King, nor was the mood of the countrymen such as to generate optimism about the outcome if such a

28 Joshi and Rose, n. 1, pp. 458-9.

movement were launched. Only for a short while the party seemed to be an effective political organization, but with the merger of the political parties mentioned above, it became strong enough to build an underground movement concentrated in the Terai and far-western and far-eastern hill areas.

The strategies employed by the Nepali Congress in exile in the first phase can be categorized into various forms to which we shall now come. As the political situation in Nepal started crystallizing, the Party began to pressurize the King for the revival of the status quo ante.

It adopted peaceful means in that direction. It organized meetings inside India to gain moral support from Indians as well as from people in Nepal. Suvarna Shamsher's request to the King at the Party's Patna Convention, where it demanded the release of all political prisoners, besides demanding unrestricted exercise of fundamental rights and summoning of the parliament, would be the earliest example of peaceful means. Subsequently several of the Party leaders also threatened that they would stage a satyagraha if the King did not convene Parliament as soon as possible.

The Party also published periodicals and leaflets to pursue its activities peacefully. The periodicals were fortnightly Nepal Today in English and Nepal Ahwan in Nepali - both published from Calcutta from December 1961. They were aimed at bringing to light the activities of the Nepali

Congress in India as well as the alleged acts of omission and commission of the new regime in Nepal.

THE VIOLENT PHASE

When such peaceful means were found not to be of much avail, the party decided to resort to armed raids in the country for the achievement of its objective. The raids were begun towards the end of the autumn of 1961.²⁹ There seemed to have been some difference of views within the party on the aims of a resistance movement of this nature. A moderate faction under Suvarna Shamsher's leadership was not in favour of such raids. While the restoration of parliamentary democracy was the final aim, the moderates appeared to be in favour of it in gradual stages if the King could be persuaded to make a "few concessions in this direction -- e.g. the release of political prisoners and legalization of political parties". Joshi and Rose observe:

There was a more radical wing in the Nepali Congress in exile, however, which grew increasingly influential once it became evident that a compromise settlement with the King would not be easily achieved. This faction insisted that the Party should concentrate on preparations for a full-scale armed revolt aimed at the deposition of King Mahendra and, if necessary, the abolition of the monarchy itself.³⁰

29 Joshi and Rose, n. 1, p. 445.

30 Ibid., pp. 444-5.

The same group of writers are of the opinion that:

one of the consequences was a series of armed attacks on government installations in the hill areas and the Terai in the late fall of 1961. These tactics presumably represented a compromise between the politics advocated by the moderate and radical factions of the Congress.³¹

The relative strength of the more radical wing had increased as workers of other political parties came to join the Party. The moderates also got dejected when the King did not seem inclined for compromise. Thus the trend towards extremism on both sides - the establishment and the opposition - further crystallized.

The raids seemed to have had the limited objective of forcing the King to negotiate with the party. However, the Party's attitude was double-faced; to satisfy the more radical wing of the party on the one hand by launching an armed resistance movement, and to help the moderates on the other, disown full responsibilities for the incidents while yet claiming them to be the spontaneous popular outbursts against the regime. Thus the Party hoped to capitalize on the armed resistance for negotiations "with the palace, should the circumstances so permit".

³¹ Ibid., p. 445.

With the beginning of the armed raids a large number of government establishments were burnt, a number of bridges damaged or destroyed. At places, railway lines were torn. Demonstrations were staged in which police officials were beaten. The rebels, at times, disrupted telecommunications. Many prisoners broke away from jails at various places.

The scope and intensity of the raids increased gradually in the first half of 1962. By the summer of 1962 there were few areas of the country, except within the immediate periphery of Kathmandu or the more isolated sections of the northern border, which had not witnessed some manifestation of resistance to the royal regime.

Most of these were localized affairs of brief duration that never seriously threatened the government's authority yet did place a tremendous strain on both the administration and the military. The steady deterioration in Nepal - India relations during this period, largely owing to the Kathmandu government's suspicion that India was secretly instigating and supporting the rebels, added to this situation, a fact with far more dangerous potentialities.³²

As a matter of fact from the very beginning of 1962, the raids, though sporadic in character, had considerably unnerved the royal regime. The President of the Nepali Congress, Suvarna Shamsheer, said in Calcutta on 8 January 1962

32 Ibid., p. 446.

that :

the present armed uprising in a number of places in our country are a direct result of the insane and tyrannical repression of the King. The people have captured a number of police stations (not check-posts as reported) and captured arms and ammunition and are waging a regular resistance movement. This has already happened in a number of districts.³³

The recapture of such places by government troops, Suvarna asserted, did "not mean anything at all". On behalf of the Nepali Congress, he made it clear that "we are fighting for democracy and liberty" without which Nepal could not march towards progress and prosperity. Describing the fight as the fight "of the people of Nepal" Suvarna said that it would continue till victory was achieved.

In what may be described as the most sensational development in Nepal during this period was an abortive attempt on the life of King Mahendra on 22 January 1962. The King was on his way to a civic reception in Janakpur, a town in the eastern Terai region. A bomb, according to the official version, but a cracker, maintained by the Nepali Congress, was thrown at the King but he escaped unhurt. On 23 January, Tulsi Giri said that the attempt was a further proof that anti-national elements with bases in India were creating trouble in

³³ Nepal Today (Calcutta), vol. 1, no. 4, 15 January 1962, pp. 33-34.

Nepal.³⁴

It was reported on 9 February 1962 that Nepalese troops enforcements had been rushed to quell a violent anti-government uprising in Bharatpur in southern Nepal, about 80 miles from Kathmandu. Reports suggested that the uprising was the biggest ever faced by the royal regime and was in the nature of a pitched battle between the rebel and state forces. A Nepali Congress leader and a former Bada Hakim of Birganj, Tej Bahadur Amatya, told correspondents at Raxaul on the same date (9 February 1962) that the district headquarters of Chitwan and nearby townships of Narayangarh and Bharatpur had been captured by the rebel forces. He said that the aerodrome situated in Bharatpur and several bridges of the 52-mile-long road linking Hetaunda and Bharatpur were reportedly blasted by rebel forces to prevent the government reinforcements from reaching the rebel-occupied areas.³⁵ There were also reports that about 150 members of the Nepalese armed forces had surrendered to the rebels.

Another raid of consequence occurred in Koilabas, a town in Dang District, on 20 February 1962. One man was killed and four injured in the armed clashes that occurred

34 Times of India (New Delhi), 24 January 1962.

35 Ibid., 11 February 1962.

between the rebel and government troops. A government spokesman said that 100 armed rebels raided the town to ransack the local treasury and the post office. After skirmishes, which continued for four hours, the raiders were beaten back to the Indian border town of Balrampur in U.P. Two of the raiders were captured. Considered to be one of the major bids by the rebels, the raid failed like the earlier Bharatpur operation.³⁶

The raids got intensified to such an extent that for some time the King was allegedly prepared to arrive at any agreement with the Nepali Congress. It has been observed by a commentator in the following words:

Last occasion, that is a few months back, when I was in Kathmandu I met a very knowledgeable former Minister. He told me that in 1962, the armed struggle which the Nepali Congress had started had unnerved the Palace to such an extent that the King was all prepared for a compromise with the Nepali Congress. The King had told them that all that he was contemplating was to come to a compromise with the Nepali Congress. There were signs of troubles in the army also; the administration was cracking up, the Nepali Congress armed insurrection had put on such tremendous pressure that the King was prepared to come to an understanding almost at any cost. At that time my informant told me it was he and another Minister who prevailed upon the King not to give up, to continue it. Something would happen and fortunately for the King and unfortunately for the Nepali Congress

36 The Statesman (New Delhi) 22 February 1962.

the Chinese aggression took place.³⁷

Most of the raids were undertaken in the Terai areas, obviously because of easy movement for hit-and-run tactics generally employed by rebels during the raids. But the raids were not without serious defects. The hit-and-run tactics failed to create much impact partly because of its infrequent occurrence and partly because the rebels did not repeat the raids at the places where they occurred before. Besides, more often than not, the victims of the raids were petty government employees. Except for the Eharatpur raid, none made much impact. The momentum of these raids was not commensurable with their frequency. None the less, the net result of these raids was the creation of several severe problems for the regime in Kathmandu.

However, this situation did not last long. The border warfare between India and China that started on 20 October 1962 changed the whole course of Nepalese politics. It was in consequence of this warfare that the Nepali Congress suspended its armed resistance against the regime in Kathmandu.

Even before China had launched a massive attack on Indian territory, a development which had a significant impact

37 Bhole Chatterji, "Nepal's Experiment with Nation Building III", Young Indian (New Delhi), vol. 4, no. 20, 25 April 1974, p. 8.

on the course of the Nepalese politics was a statement of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Marshal Chen-yi. In the statement, issued on 5 October 1962 in Peking, while addressing an audience attending a banquet to celebrate the first anniversary of the Nepalese-Chinese boundary treaty, he said that "in case any foreign army makes a foolhardy attempt to attack Nepal... Chinese will side with the Nepalese people".³⁸

An observer of the contemporary Nepalese affairs is of the view that the statement of Chen-yi was of great help to Nepal. According to him;

The timing of Chen-yi's statement added to its significance. It was issued when India-Nepal relations had touched their lowest point. It also preceded the Sino-Indian conflict by two weeks. Nepal's reaction to the statement was all favourable.³⁹

On the basis of an interview he had with the Nepalese officials in Kathmandu the same observer got the impression that because of the statement of the Chinese Foreign Minister the "Kingdom heaved a sigh of relief".

In the meanwhile in a message to the nation on the occasion of Dasshara on 8 October King Mahendra expressed his

38 Cited in Leo E. Rose, Nepal : Strategy for Survival (Berkeley, 1971), p. 248.

39 S.D. Muni, Foreign Policy of Nepal (Delhi, 1973), p.122. The author also holds that "it was given to understand that the Chinese statement was in response to a Nepalese demand to that effect" (footnote 82 in this book).

displeasure with India because of the continued stay of some Nepali Congress leaders in India. Such expression of displeasure was more strident than before, and it would hence seem that in all probability it was Chen-yi's statement that had encouraged the King to criticise a neighbouring country. In the message to the nation he observed;

But it is a matter for regret that even on this day of our great religious festival I have to draw your attention repeatedly to the possibility of our age-old friendly relations with friendly country India being spoiled, despite all our wishes to the contrary, by the activities of elements engaged in obstructing the peaceful flow of Nepalese life on the strength of their having safe haven in India.⁴⁰

In the face of all that had been happening inside and outside the country, the situation for the Nepali Congress had apparently become difficult. Generally, raids by its workers along the Indo-Nepalese border had all the likelihood of being interpreted as an attack on Nepal by India. Presumably it was this belief that impelled and compelled it to suspend the armed resistance movement. Joshi and Rose think that the movement had been suspended reportedly on the advice of the Indian Government.⁴¹

40 King Mahendra, Proclamations Speeches and Messages, vol. II, December 1960-1965 (Kathmandu, His Majesty's Government, Nepal, 1967), pp. 142-3.

41 Joshi and Rose, n. 1, p. 446.

The reason for the suspension of the movement was explained by Suvarna Shamsher in a statement issued from Calcutta on 8 November 1962. While urging upon his followers to suspend it, he severely criticized both the King and Chen-yi. He maintained that Chen-yi's statement carried "sinister implications about the future of Nepal's policy of non-alignment and neutrality and probably her existence as an independent country". Suvarna Shamsher was more vehement when he accused the King of his tilt towards China:

As the Acting President of the Nepali Congress, I have to make it clear that we do not want the people's democratic movement in Nepal to be an excuse for the King to compromise our country's independence, sovereignty or territorial integrity, or to be a cover for those with aggressive designs for their expansionist ends. Pledged as we are to the task of restoring democratic rights, we assign the highest priority to our country's independence. I have, therefore, to appeal to my comrades and all those who are engaged in battle for restoration of democracy in Nepal to suspend the present movement. This step is taken to underline the gravity of the situation and the people must remain alert and vigilant.

In the grave situation with which our country is now confronted the least that the King can do is to refrain from taking any action that may undermine our country's independence, sovereignty or territorial integrity.⁴²

42 Nepal Today, vol. 1, no. 24, 15 November 1962, pp. 246-7.

Suvarna Shamsher's statement was in utter contrast to his statement issued only a month ago in which he had exhorted the people to "carry on their fight against tyranny".⁴³ So his recent statement suggested that there had taken place a qualitative change in the objective condition calling for the suspension of the armed resistance movement. If, therefore, it has been alleged that it was the Indian Government under whose pressure the party had acted to that end, it does not seem to be unconvincing. All this notwithstanding, Suvarna's latest action was appreciated in political circles in Kathmandu. However, the official reaction to the statement was not without reservations.

The decision of the Party to suspend the struggle for democracy in Nepal was generally welcomed by its former workers in Kathmandu who were still confined within limits of the Kathmandu valley. Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, Home Minister in the deposed Nepali Congress Government, welcomed the decision as wise and said: "It is a happy piece of news."⁴⁴

Suvarna Shamsher again issued a statement from Calcutta in December 1962 in which he declared that the armed resistance movement had been terminated. He said:

We feel gratified that our appeal to the people of Nepal to suspend the struggle for the restoration

43 Ibid., vol. 1, no. 21, 1 October 1962, p. 213.

44 The Times (London), 10 November 1962.

of democracy was fully heeded. The grave emergency which has arisen has since deepened and promises to be a protracted one. It has become all the more necessary for all lovers of freedom and democracy in our country to tread warily and endeavour to strengthen the force of unity and cohesion in the country. I, therefore, appeal to the people to call off the two-year old struggle which they have already suspended in response to our appeal.⁴⁵

The suspension and the withdrawal of the armed activities by the Nepali Congress against the royal regime in 1962 were necessitated by other factors also. By 1961-62, China had already consolidated its authority in Tibet and was in a position to provide countervailing weight to the support that the rebels might receive from any other source. "Another important factor was the Royal Nepali Army which, thanks to the Indian Military Mission, was better trained and equipped than the army of the Ranas."⁴⁶ Besides, owing to the lack of financial resources it was difficult for the party to carry out armed raids from a foreign soil.

The aggression by China on India exposed India's weakness to defend its territory and incapacitated the Nepali Congress to rank as a reckonable force in Nepal. After

45 Nepal Today, vol. 2, no. 4, 15 January 1962, p. 35.

46 Rishikesh Shaha, Nepali Politics : Retrospect and Prospect (Delhi, 1975), p. 122.

Suvarna's call for calling off the armed raids in December 1962, the Nepalese authorities might have realized that because of the prevailing international situation in the South Asian region the Party would not be able to take to a violent course again.

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER III
THE SECOND PHASE :

FROM WITHDRAWAL OF AGITATION TO "LOYAL" SUPPORT

The suspension followed by the termination of the violent activities by the Nepali Congress in December 1962 was generally welcomed by the people in Nepal, but the goodwill so generated did not lead to any appreciable gain for the Nepali Congress. Government leaders were still doubtful about the genuineness of the Party's motive and seemed determined to take appropriate measures if the Party resumed such activities. What was worse, the Party was apparently losing its relevance in the present political realities in the country. It was during this time when its future and fortunes were at an ebb that on 16 December 1962, King Mahendra proclaimed a new Constitution to provide for the Panchayat system, later formally designated as a "partyless democratic" system and subsequently declared to be one with no alternative to the country. The timing of the proclamation of the Constitution in itself demonstrated as to how the Nepali Congress was no longer dreaded by the royal administration.

The present Chapter purports to deal with this aspect of the Party between December 1962 and May 1968 leading to its offer of 'loyal support' to the King. The offer was a pointer to the Party's failure in the show-down with him all these years.

The show-down did not brighten the prospects of its rehabilitation in the country's politics, as the Party increasingly relied on staying in exile¹ in India, all the time endeavouring to achieve its stated goal. There were no doubt indications of some rapprochement with the King, but with the passage of time it remained wishful thinking.

The possibility of the King and the Nepali Congress drawing together had for the first time been indicated by a number of local newspapers after the Party's suspension of its armed activities. The Dainik Nepal had hoped that this, besides the prevalence of complete peace all over the country, would facilitate the release of all political prisoners.²

Regarding the suspension of violent activities as a 'wise' step, of the Party, the Swatantra Samachar asked Suvarna Shamsheer to have faith in the "large-hearted" King. Meanwhile, there were rumours that on his way to Peking Tulsi Giri, the seniormost minister in the Council of Ministers, would meet Suvarna Shamsheer at Calcutta. While hinting that some sort of understanding between the Congress and the King could not entirely be ruled out, the paper maintained that Giri's willingness to meet Suvarna augured well for such an understanding. However, Giri discounted the probability of his meeting Suvarna

1 Indian Express (New Delhi), 22 June 1963.

2 Dainik Nepal (Kathmandu), 21 January 1963.

thereby ruling out the chances of the alleged understanding.³

According to some observers;

With these dramatic developments came the speculation that the King and the Nepali Congress would seek an accommodation under which Suvarna Shamsheer and his colleagues would accept Panchayati Raj in its essentials and would, in exchange, be permitted to return to Nepal without endangering their personal freedom. King Mahendra's 'private visit' to Calcutta in January 1963 was rumoured to have been motivated by his decision to meet Suvarna Shamsheer without the publicity that would have accompanied talks in Kathmandu. But if reports are correct, the King did not meet Suvarna in Calcutta on that occasion or elsewhere during his tour of India one month later.⁴

Yet the chances of a compromise between the King and the Party did not completely fade away. There were reasons to believe that for his part King Mahendra might still have found it politically expedient to arrive at some sort of accommodation with the Party presumably to seek its co-operation for Panchayat system building, which, he felt, was not forthcoming. Some observers have been tempted to relate Tulsī Giri's resignation from the Council of Ministers on 23 December as a pre-condition to such a compromise particularly when no love was lost between

3 Swatantra Samachar (Kathmandu), 27 January 1963.

4 Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, Democratic Innovations in Nepal : A Case Study of Political Acculturation (Berkeley, 1966), pp. 446-7.

him and the Nepali Congress. It was also rumoured that Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, Home Minister in the B.P. Koirala Cabinet, was sent to India probably by the King to have a dialogue with his former Party colleagues for evolving some modalities for effecting a rapprochement with the King. But the talks he had with his erstwhile colleagues on this question, as also on the legalization of political parties, "collapsed", on the alleged grounds that the "Nepali Congress was unwilling to accept a partyless panchayat system". Probably it was the failure of the Upadhyaya mission that led to the restoration of Tulsī Giri to the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers on 27 February 1964.⁵ Thus despite all such rumours, no matter whatever their sources or seriousness, no compromise between the King and the Party in exile became a reality. Government leaders were of the opinion that inasmuch as the Panchayat system had begun striking roots, there was no point in seeking accommodation with the Nepali Congress committed to parliamentary democracy and to that extent disinclined to accept the partyless Panchayat system. In addition, those enjoying the fruits of the current policy seemed anxious to foil any such understanding, understandably for fear of losing their position of eminence and power.

5 Ibid., p. 440.

WEAKENING OF THE PARTY

(a) Desertion

The more the likelihood of compromise between the King and the Nepali Congress dissipated, the more weakened the Party became. One of the main factors that contributed to this feature was gradual desertion by a large number of Congress workers and supporters either to join the Panchayat system or shun political activity of whatever nature. However, it was the Nepali Congress which continued representing opposition within the Panchayat system.

The new Constitution promulgated by King Mahendra in December 1962 had given the country a four-tier Panchayat with a unicameral legislature, National Panchayat, at its apex. The basic tier consisted of village panchayats and town panchayats and the upper ones included district panchayats and zonal panchayats. A village or a group of villages had its own village assembly of adult villagers. The village assembly elected its executive, village panchayat, by direct voting. Provision was made for a panchayat in each town where members were similarly elected from among the residents of the town. The next tier, the district assembly, was to be composed of the chairmen of village and town panchayats of the district and which, in turn, was to elect its own executive committee known as district panchayat. The zonal assembly, the third tier, was to include all members of the district panchayats

of the zone, and it was from the zonal assemblies that elections took place to the National Panchayat, the country's legislature. Separate representation was also provided to Class Organizations and graduates. A number of Class Organizations were set up officially as interest groups of various social sectors and the country's graduates.

A large number of those Nepali Congress workers who were not jailed or were politically inactive after the royal take-over were elected to the National Panchayat in the first series of elections held between March and April 1963. It has been claimed that at the primary level (that is, the village and town panchayat level) 35 per cent of the elected were the workers of the Nepali Congress. At the district level, this figure was about 30 per cent and at the national level one fifth of the total members elected belonged to the Nepali Congress.⁶

These figures suggested that despite the depletion of its workers, the Nepali Congress was still a force in national politics and if it had allowed its workers en bloc to join the Panchayat system, it would have regained its stature. As a matter of fact, its workers were as much anxious to remain active in politics as much as to gain power within the Panchayat for its gradual democratization.

6 The Statesman (New Delhi), 3 April 1963.

All those Nepali Congress workers who had participated in the Panchayat elections had done so on their own, that is, without any guidelines from the Party leadership. Therefore, it still remains a matter of conjecture what would have happened had the Party advised its workers in Nepal to infiltrate into the Panchayat system through elections to different elective bodies and to pay back the King in his own coin.

It was not only the Nepali Congress leadership but other former parties also which had boycotted the panchayat elections. This indeed brought about significant consequences for national politics. An observer of the contemporary Nepalese political developments opines:

For his part King Mahendra, it would appear, had calculated that former political leaders would not only generally boycott the elections but also evince no interest in them and that he will be able to buy their loyalty to himself and to the new political order by giving them gainful employment and suitably diverting their political energies. He perfectly knew what they liked and dispensed favour as it pleased him. Thus neutralized altogether, they behaved virtually as he wanted them to. Those who did not fall in line either went to live in India or found themselves in gaol.⁷

Over the time, quite a few of the rank and file of the Nepali Congress were won over by the royal regime. In

7 L.S. Baral, "The First Panchayat Elections in Nepal, 1962-1963: The Emergence of a New Political Generation", International Studies (New Delhi), vol. 12, no. 3, July 1973, p. 474.

fact this process had begun as early as June 1963. More than fifty "anti-national elements" (as the Nepali Congress workers in self-exile in India were officially designated) living in Indian towns were said to be willing to tender an apology to the King and return to Nepal" in case the Government adopted a mild policy towards them".⁸

The royal regime further consolidated its position as workers of different banned parties, including the Nepali Congress, decided to support it. At a meeting held at Dang in May 1966 nearly 150 workers of the Nepali Congress, the Praja Parishad, the United Democratic Party and the Nepal Communist Party decided to join panchayats and class organizations in their respective areas.⁹

What seemed to have further weakened the Nepali Congress was the decision of one of its high command leaders, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, to join the Panchayat system in 1968. In a press statement issued on 7 January 1968, Upadhyaya disclosed that he had joined the Nepal Peasants' Organization in the belief that it not only represented the whole of the Nepali people, but also played an important role in the successful implementation of the national programme. He added, "I have

8 Hanro Desh (Kathmandu), 28 June 1963.

9 The Samaya (Kathmandu), 25 May 1966.

always believed in working among the masses inside the country. I am confident that only in this manner can I effectively serve the country, the King and the people".¹⁰

(b) Paucity of Party Funds and Fear of Loss of Workers' Property

What equally weakened the Nepali Congress was the paucity of financial resources. As a result, overt or covert activities aimed at reviving the status quo ante in the country failed to gather the required momentum. For their part the people hesitated to contribute to the Party's funds, partly apprehensive of reprisal by the existing regime, partly because of the weakened opposition and partly because of less likelihood of the Party coming to power in the existing situation.

It was generally expected that Suvarna Shamsher, who was the sole source of the Party's finance, would continue financing it. Yet, no one could say what would be the case when he was no more available for that.

Besides, many in the Party in exile were apprehensive of the loss of or damage to their own property inside the country in the absence of proper persons to manage it. Also,

10 Gorkhapatra (Kathmandu), 8 January 1968.

many feared the attachment or confiscation of their property by the new regime if they continued their oppositional activities. While they were living abroad in self-exile, their contacts with the people in the country had become rare. What was more, they seemed to suffer from home-sickness as well.¹¹

No less crucial were the deteriorating Indo-Nepalese relations because of the irritants created by the Party's activities. Cautious approach towards party leaders living in India was much in evidence in the policy of the Government of India.

(c) The Policy of the Royal Regime

The policy of the royal regime in Nepal may also be said to have increasingly weakened the Party in several respects. Finding that many in the Party in exile were only willing to support the present political system, the regime markedly adopted the policy of "divide and rule" - at once giving some concessions to a few, but at the same time being stiff to non-conformists. Such a policy was apparently supported to strengthen the new social order with an eye to weaken the party in exile. For example, Rudra Prasad Giri, a detainee since the royal take-over, and one of the oldest members of

11 As told to the author by a leader in exile after he was permitted to enter Nepal.

the Nepali Congress, was released in 1966, when he tendered his unqualified support to the Panchayat system while severely criticizing the Party. Subsequently, he was elected unopposed to the National Panchayat from Janakpur,¹² allegedly as the official candidate against Tulsī Giri, who had of late been flirting with the opposition.

In yet another effort to debilitate the already weakened Party, sixteen political detainees were released on 21 September 1966 in what may be regarded as a gesture of the regime to give a more liberal deal to former politicians. Twelve of the released belonged to the Nepali Congress. As a condition of their release, they also gave an undertaking to abide by the country's current laws.

This was the biggest batch of political detainees to be released since the royal step of 1960. Their release is said to have been the result of an initiative taken by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Surya Bahadur Thapa, to neutralize and reconcile former politicians to the present Panchayat system.¹³

However, the regime was equally anxious to convey the impression that its policy of liberalization was not due

12 Asian Recorder (New Delhi), vol. 8, no. 20, 14-20 May 1967, p. 7705.

13 Times of India (New Delhi), 22 September 1966.

to weakness and that it could resort to the stiffest possible method if so required for suppressing anti-system elements by creating among them a fear psychosis and eventually constraining them to be politically inactive on oppositional fronts.

The hanging of an eighteen-year old youth, Durganand Jha, in Kathmandu on 30 January 1964 may be cited as an example of the way the regime would deal with the rebels engaged in oppositional activities. He was arrested on alleged grounds of throwing a bomb at the King during the latter's visit to Janakpur in 1962. In the history of Nepal, he was the first Brahmin to be hanged.¹⁴ Tanka Prasad Acharya had been convicted in the early forties on a charge of sedition, but since he was a Brahmin he could not be awarded death penalty. He was, however, excommunicated in jail with the removal of the sacred thread worn by Brahmins. Durganand had been tried under the new Mulki Ain which allowed capital punishment to be given even to a Brahmin.¹⁵ There is no gainsaying the fact that it was a deterrent step taken to constrain the rebels from desisting from violence aimed at overthrowing the regime.

Had it even the slightest desire to work out an

14 Nepal Today (Calcutta), vol. 3, no. 6, 15 February 1964, p. 288.

15 Ibid., p. 281.

accommodation with the Nepali Congress, the regime would not have taken such extreme steps. With the passage of time it might have realized that any accommodation with a party already weakened so much by desertion was politically unnecessary. Thus a rapprochement between the Nepali Congress and the royal regime remained as distant a dream as it ever was. Joshi and Rose describe the reluctance of the King for any compromise with the Nepali Congress in the following lines:

Indeed, the subsequent course of events would seem to indicate that the King either lacked interest or was not inclined toward a settlement with the then much-truncated Nepali Congress. In the April, 1963, reorganization of the government every Minister or Assistant Minister who had been advocating a moderate domestic and foreign policy was excluded. The King's position was demonstrated even more graphically in the decision of the Kathmandu special court that same month, which sentenced Suvarna Shamsheer and several colleagues in absentia to life imprisonment on the charge of having instigated the transportation of explosive materials to Nepal for subversive purposes. It was assumed that the King would not have permitted this trial to continue or such a rigorous sentence to be imposed if he had been at all interested in a compromise settlement with the Congress. And, indeed, such an accommodation may have seemed unnecessary.¹⁶

PARTY BUILDING

It cannot be gainsaid that to the extent the Nepali Congress realized its growing weaknesses in consequence of

¹⁶ Joshi and Rose, n. 4, p. 447.

desertion by a large number of its workers, the King was reluctant to have any compromise with it. There was, therefore, something of an alarm created among its workers as the Panchayat system continued to be entrenched with all its orthodoxies. Perhaps these were the reasons which impelled the Party realize the necessity of strengthening its rank and file, as well as of making it a more cohesive organization, no matter whatever the constraints upon it. To that direction its leaders kept on issuing statements from time to time in opposition to the royal regime in order to boost the morale of its workers. In his Revolution Day Message issued in November 1963, Suvarna Shamsher tried to emphasize that the Party had not lost its vitality. He reviewed its activities of the past three years, while paying homage to those who had suffered in the cause of democracy and renewing the pledge to fight for the achievement of its objectives. The message read:

The international situation last year created dangers for Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity and because of this the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Nepal had to be called off. The suspension of the movement does not mean that the power of the Nepali Congress has been crushed or its faith in democracy has become lukewarm. Nothing can deter the Nepali Congress from its avowed aim of reestablishing democracy in Nepal.¹⁷

17 Nepal Today, vol. 2, nos. 23 and 24, 15 November 1963, p. 217.

In the same fashion, in the next year's Revolution Day Message, Suvarna Shamsher further laid emphasis on the restoration of democracy and democratic rights in the country. Expressing his concern at the gradually declining health of B.P. Koirala, then in prison, Suvarna Shamsher described his life as a symbol of democracy and a source of inspiration to every man dedicated to democratic values. Concluding his message, Suvarna requested his countrymen to dedicate themselves anew to the lofty ideals of unity, faith and firmness for the cause of the country and democracy.¹⁸

Besides, through its mouth-piece Nepal Today, the Nepali Congress continued criticizing the existing royal regime in comparatively mild tones. Even so, the Party was often vehement in its criticism of Tulsi Giri, a former member of the Koirala Ministry. All this showed how the Party was anxious to strengthen itself and boost the morale of its workers.

The most daring effort was a political resolution passed at a meeting in May 1967. The resolution demanded the convening of a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution for the country.¹⁹ That the resolution was passed as late as May 1967 also suggested that despite the

18 Ibid., vol. 3, no. 24, 15 November 1964, p. 463.

19 Keessing's Contemporary Archites (Bristol), vol. 17, 3-10 May 1969, p. 23330.

vicissitudes it had passed through all these years, the Party in exile was still hopefully pursuing its objectives and preventing its workers from losing their heart in the struggle in which they had been engaged.

"LOYAL" CO-OPERATION OFFER TO THE KING

The resolution for convening a Constituent Assembly passed by the Nepali Congress in May 1967 proved ineffective in the sense that the King was firm on the saddle. It was a mere verbal threat.

Several top-ranking leaders of the Party were still behind the bars at various places in the country. Besides, the call for direct action given by the Party also failed to achieve any positive political gains. It "seriously undermined the Nepali Congress within Nepal, and presumably among some of its partisans in India."²⁰ In this connection it may be recalled that there existed a "broad reconciliation between New Delhi and Kathmandu" ever since 1963 which seemed to have gone far to relieve the King's apprehensions about the likelihood of India supporting or encouraging forces opposed to his regime.

Thus in the prevailing situation, the Nepali Congress was left with no alternative but to reconcile itself to the

20 Joshi and Rose, n. 4, p. 447.

political realities in the country. The opportunity for this appeared when the King suffered a heart attack at a camp in Kanchanpur on 15 March 1968.²¹ It took some time before the King finally recovered and assumed his normal state functions. No sooner was the Nepali Congress convinced of the total progress in the King's health than it announced its offer of "full and loyal co-operation" to him. Thus 15 May 1968 became a turning point for the Nepali Congress in exile. On this day its Acting President Suvarna Shamsheer, issued a statement from Calcutta, offering his support to King Mahendra.²² The statement ran as follows:

In recent months the Nepali Congress has been watching with great concern and anxiety the growing influence and menacing activities of certain forces of subversion inside Nepal and its immediate neighbourhood which threaten the basic fabric and values of Nepal's national life. It has also carefully noted recent royal statements and official pronouncements on democracy and nationalism and the supreme need for all nationalist and democratic Nepalis, both inside the country and abroad, to stand united for achieving the orderly progress and safeguarding the unity, integrity and independence of Nepal.

In the light of recent developments including in particular the recent unfortunate illness of His Majesty, the Nepali Congress realizes the need to reorientate its policies and programmes to suit the best interests of the

21 Gorkhapatra, 28 March 1968; Asian Recorder, vol. 14, no. 20, 13-19 May 1968, p. 8310.

22 The Statesman (Calcutta), 16 May 1968.

country. In suppression of its political resolution of May 1967, therefore, the Nepali Congress reasserting its faith in democratic ideals under His Majesty's leadership resolves to offer its full and loyal co-operation for the resisting and overcoming the forces of subversion. It further resolves to extend its co-operation in the working of the present Constitution in the earnest hope of its further development under the guidance and leadership of His Majesty.²³

It may be recalled that the statement was obviously in response to an earlier statement of 11 March 1968 given by the King at Sarlahi in which he had urged upon the people who were active, conscious and had adopted the spirit of co-operation to take interest in different fields of the nation and lead it along the path of progress at a rapid pace. He had also maintained: "In every country if active and conscious people are dissatisfied and co-operation is not available from them for the system, then it cannot flourish howsoever good it may be."²⁴

The statement of Suvarna Shamsher issued on behalf of the Nepali Congress was in complete contrast with its policies pursued since it was banned by the King eight years ago following his take-over.

23 The Commoner (Kathmandu), 17 May 1968; Keessing's Contemporary Archives, vol. 17, 3-10 May 1969, p. 23330. Also cited in Tribhuvan Nath, The Nepalese Dilemma: 1960-74 (New Delhi, 1975), pp. 508-09.

24 Gorkhapatra, 14 March 1968.

The response of the royal regime to the offer of the Nepali Congress was quick and in a way favourable. Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa told newsmen in Kathmandu on 16 May 1968 that His Majesty's Government did not want to see any Nepali inactive or outside the country. He stressed that it was a matter of pleasure if any Nepali was prepared to co-operate in the development of the country under the present system.²⁵ Former Home Minister Surya Prasad Upadhyaya also welcomed Suvarna Shamsher's statement by saying that it was inspired by a realistic understanding of the need to further strengthen democracy in Nepal under His Majesty's leadership.²⁶

But all was not well with the Party. The statement issued by Suvarna Shamsher on its behalf created a lot of controversy among its workers. This was utilized by one N.B. Koirala, who issued a statement from Calcutta on 17 May 1968 spuriously claiming to be the General Secretary of the Nepali Congress. The statement said that the statement issued recently by Suvarna Shamsher, pledging support to His Majesty, was not the official decision of the Party and hence the question of supporting the alleged undemocratic Government did not arise. N.B. Koirala's statement added:

The Nepali Congress never elected Suvarna Shamsher as its acting Chairman. B.P. Koirala alone is the leader, although he is

25 Ibid., 17 May 1968.

26 Ibid.

in jail at present in Kathmandu. Suvarna Shamsher's statement has hurt the sentiments of all workers of the Nepali Congress. It has ridiculed the principles of democracy as well as the ideals of the Nepali Congress.²⁷

N.B. Koirala further claimed that at a recent meeting of the Nepali Congress Suvarna Shamsher's membership of the Party had been suspended and he had been served with a show cause notice as to why disciplinary action should not be taken against him and he should not be expelled from the Party. He concluded his statement with a pledge to continue the struggle for the revival of democracy in Nepal.²⁸

Contradicting the statement of N.B. Koirala, Parsu Narayan Chaudhary, a member of the deposed Koirala Cabinet, said that all the members of the Nepali Congress had full faith that King Mahendra would graciously accept the Party's offer of loyal co-operation in the task of national reconstruction under the Panchayat Constitution. Chaudhary further added: "So far as we know, there is nobody called N.B. Koirala in our Party, not to speak of his being the General Secretary. N.B. Koirala has fraudulently utilized the holy name of B.P. Koirala with a view to misleading the people."²⁹

27 The Arati, (Kathmandu), 25 May 1968.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

In an interview with a correspondent of the Dainik Nepal in Patna (India) Bhadrakali Mishra, General Secretary of the banned Nepali Congress, declared that its recent statement pledging co-operation to the present system being led by the King did not reflect Suvarna Shamsher's personal views but those of the entire Party. Shashi Shamsher, Assistant Secretary of the banned Nepali Congress, also expressed similar views, while pledging faith in the leadership of Suvarna Shamsher. Bhadrakali Mishra also contradicted rumours that there were differences between Suvarna Shamsher and himself. He added: "Suvarna Shamsher is acknowledged by all in our Party as leader".³⁰

All this notwithstanding, cracks in the Party had started increasing. There was a report in the weekly Arati (23 June) that Bharat Shamsher had dissociated himself from the statement of Suvarna Shamsher, contending that the latter had no authority to cancel the resolution adopted by the Nepali Congress in May 1967.³¹ The weekly, in its issue of 4 September, nevertheless expressed surprise that Suvarna Shamsher and his associates were not being permitted to come to Nepal even after so many days had passed since they issued a statement pledging

30 Dainik Nepal , 26 June 1968.

31 The Arati, 23 June 1968.

loyalty to the Panchayat system. The weekly added:

Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa welcomed the first statement issued by Suvarna Shamsher on behalf of the Nepali Congress on the ground that it was not an individual statement but reflected the position of the party. Why then does not he give permission to everybody on a collective basis to come back to Nepal? It was surprising that a person occupying the position of Prime Minister should have made such a statement without giving proper thought to the question. As a result of this, people are beginning to think that His Majesty's Government cannot be trusted. A liberal policy is not proved by mere words.³²

The weekly also criticized Suvarna Shamsher for having issued another statement claiming that the Nepali Congress had not asked for pardon. According to the weekly, that particular statement said:

We want to assure everybody that the history of the Nepali Congress has started with revolution. The Nepali Congress is prepared to dissolve itself in revolution. We can accept only a compromise which will in no way undermine our self-respect.³³

The paper accused Suvarna Shamsher and his associates of indulging in the daydream of the repetition of the Delhi agreement of 1950 and hoping that they would be allowed to form a government.³⁴ The paper added:

It is meaningless that any individual should raise question of compromise with the King.

32 Ibid., 4 September 1968.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

Moreover, they should remember that "those who are staying in India on their own accord not only need no pardon, but also no compromise, because the great saying of His Majesty that no Nepali needs any permission to come back to the country is there before all.³⁵

In the midst of such confusion, twenty-nine political workers, most of them formerly belonging to the Nepali Congress, were pardoned by King Mahendra on 19 June 1968. They had petitioned him for pardon individually. Fourteen of them were released from various jails in Nepal, while the remaining fifteen, who had been living in exile since the dismissal of the Nepali Congress Government in 1960, were allowed to come back to the country. Political observers in Kathmandu regarded the pardon as a positive response of the King to the recent statement of the Nepali Congress in Calcutta pledging loyalty to him.³⁶ At this stage it was widely believed that notwithstanding the prevailing division in the Party, some understanding had been reached between a bigger section of its leadership and the King for a new political adjustment in the country. Such a belief was further strengthened by other events that took place immediately thereafter.

B.P. KOIRALA'S RELEASE

The prospects of some rapprochement between the King and the Nepali Congress seemed to be brilliant following the

35 Ibid.

36 The Statesman (New Delhi), 20 June 1968.

release of B.P. Koirala, the Party leader and the first ever elected Prime Minister, on 30 October 1968, after eight years' long detention. Koirala's colleague, Ganeshman Singh, former Transport Minister, was also released along with him.³⁷ Thus the day became a significant event in the sense that continuous requests made to the King by various leaders and organizations - both national and international - to release Koirala had ultimately borne fruit.

Further events were equally significant. On 31 October, King Mahendra granted pardon to twenty-two persons who had submitted a petition for permission to come back to Nepal and serve the country peacefully and abide by the Panchayat Constitution. They included former Deputy Prime Minister Suvarna Shamsheer, two former Ministers Parsu Narayan Chaudhary and Kashi Nath Gautam, Keshav Prasad Koirala, a brother of B.P. Koirala and several other well-known workers of the banned Nepali Congress. Among the twenty-two persons there were quite a few of the Party workers who had been members of the dissolved Parliament.³⁸

A change of heart in the Nepali Congress leaders was apparent in the Press conference held by B.P. Koirala at his residence in Kathmandu after his release. Koirala supported

37 Gorkhepatra , 31 October 1968.

38 Ibid., 1 November 1968.

the statement issued by Suvarna Shamsher on behalf of the Party from Calcutta on 15 May 1968. He maintained that the statement was in the interest of the nation and of national unity. He added: "I have no doubt that what Suvarna Shamsher said was correct in the existing situation. As a democratic and trusted colleague I support Suvarna Shamsher's statement."³⁹

However, Koirala refused to talk about other matters, pointing out that since he had been under detention for nearly eight years, he was not acquainted with what had happened in the world. He disclosed that he would leave for India within a week for medical treatment.⁴⁰

In a written statement simultaneously issued in Kathmandu on 31 October 1968, Ganeshman Singh declared that he too fully supported Suvarna Shamsher's statement. While reiterating his faith in the democratic values of life, he added:

B.P. Koirala, our respected colleague and leader, has already expressed his views in brief on the present political situation of Nepal. I fully agree with his views. I have no doubt that Suvarna Shamsher acted as required in the changed circumstances. I fully support the statement in the capacity of a true friend.⁴¹

39 Ibid., 31 October 1968.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 1 November 1968.

A number of Kathmandu newspapers hailed the release of Koirala and Ganeshman Singh. The Rising Nepal described it as a landmark in the process of enabling every Nepali to participate in the task of national development. The paper welcomed the pledge taken by both these Nepali Congress leaders to support the leadership of King Mahendra and abide by the Constitution in force.⁴²

In the opinion of the Commoner, another Kathmandu daily, the new development marked the end of a painful political phase. Congratulating Koirala for the political wisdom he had shown by endorsing the statement of Suvarna Shamsheer pledging allegiance to the King and the present Constitution, the paper commented: "After all the King and his leadership in the national affairs is a necessity which we can ignore at our own peril".⁴³

Why did the King release Koirala after all after such a long period? Several factors might have induced the King to take such a decision. First, there was the question of Koirala's ill-health and of his survival, for Koirala was known to have been a chronic patient of cancer in the voice-box and one of his colleagues, Mishra⁴⁴ had died of cancer only after a few

42 Rising Nepal (Kathmandu), 2 November 1968.

43 The Commoner, 1 November 1968.

44 Ram Narayan Mishra, a Minister in the deposed Koirala Cabinet was released on 17 December 1966 and died on 22 December 1967 at Patna (India). He was stated to be suffering from cancer.

days of his release in 1967. There were as such reasons to believe that Koirala might die in detention. Secondly, Ram Narayan Mishra's death had aroused public opinion throughout the world in favour of Koirala's earliest release from detention. Besides, extremist elements had been raising their heads in the Kingdom and it was generally felt that one of the surest means to counter them was to have a rapprochement with the Nepali Congress. Last but not least, the Nepali Congress had been severely weakened and organizationally too shattered to be effective. Hence there was no need to keep Koirala in detention.⁴⁵

All such calculations held good only initially. On 3 November 1968, Koirala left Kathmandu for Calcutta via Biratnagar, his home town. He was to go to Bombay for medical treatment after staying in Calcutta for two days. At Calcutta he was expected to meet Suvarna Shamsher and other colleagues. In order to arrive at a decision for the Party's future action, such a meeting was indeed necessary. But before Koirala had reached Calcutta Suvarna Shamsher was reported to have said at a press interview there that no decision had yet been taken about his or his colleagues' return to Nepal and that the matter would be decided only after Koirala came to Calcutta. Suvarna

45 Pradip Giri, Nepali Congressko Samkshipt Itihas (Banaras, 1974), p. 90.

Shamsher was also reported to have said that his return to Nepal along with his colleagues was not yet certain, since 700 persons then living in India had not so far been allowed to return to Nepal and that Koirala and Ganeshman Singh had not been released. Suvarna Shamsher was further reported to have claimed that the pardon granted to him and his colleagues was either due to "public pressure" or due to the dissatisfaction of the King with the working of the present government, and that many problems of Nepal would be solved if the Nepali Congress regained power.⁴⁶

The interview attributed to Suvarna Shamsher was reported to have come in for severe criticism in Kathmandu. It was alleged to be a "rude shock" and "a total reversal" of his earlier statement of 15 May 1968. The Gorkhapatra, while expressing surprise and regret that he had changed his views so easily and so quickly remarked that that was not what the people of Nepal had expected from a person of Suvarna Shamsher's age and experience.⁴⁷ The Naya Samachar asked him to realize that the Nepali people considered the partyless Panchayat system as one that had no alternative.⁴⁸ The Swatantra Samachar accused him of trying to suppress the petition submitted by

46 The Commoner, 7 November 1968.

47 Gorkhapatra, 9 November 1968.

48 Naya Samaj (Kathmandu), 7 November 1968.

him to the King for pardon.⁴⁹ However, in a statement issued in Calcutta on 9 November, Suvarna Shamsher regretted that the report of his press interview published earlier in some Indian newspapers on 5 November did not represent his views correctly. He declared: "We have offered our loyal support and co-operation to His Majesty without any condition or mental reservation. I fully adhere to the statement I had made on 15 May 1968".⁵⁰

Accompanied by his colleague Parsu Narayan Chaudhary, Suvarna Shamsher returned to Kathmandu on 11 December 1968 after about 8 years. Speaking to pressmen at the Tribhuvan airport, he expressed gratitude to King Mahendra for the pardon granted to him and some of his colleagues. Asked if he had any immediate programme to work under the Panchayat system, Suvarna Shamsher stated that he had no such programme for the time being.⁵¹

The offer of the 'loyal' co-operation seemed to be standing the Party in good stead to some extent. The former Prime Minister and one of the most important leaders of the Party was released and others living in self-exile in India were permitted entry into the Kingdom without risking arrest.

49 Swatantra Samachar, 7 November 1968.

50 Gorkhapatra, 11 November 1968.

51 Ibid., 12 December 1968.

But on the whole, it did not contribute to the restoration of the Party's prestige shattered badly after the withdrawal of its violent agitational activities in December 1962. Now the Party appeared to be hobnobbing with the King for a compromise without giving up its basic principles. This had become quite difficult in the changed political environment as analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD PHASE : THE PARTY AFTER KOIRALA'S RELEASE

SPLIT IN THE NEPALI CONGRESS

The release of B.P. Koirala on 30 October 1968 and the return of Suvarna Shamsheer to Nepal on 11 December gave grounds for optimism regarding some understanding between King Mahendra and the Nepali Congress. Such an optimism was evident in the comments made in different sections of the domestic press. For example, writing on 27 November, the Samiksha weekly hoped that the recent release of Koirala and the pardon granted to Suvarna Shamsheer and his colleagues had opened up the prospects for the revival of the party system in Nepal through constitutional means. Criticizing those in favour of the status quo, the paper added:

However, certain elements are afraid of the atmosphere created by the release of B.P. Koirala. They are, therefore, raising the imaginary bogey of communism. At the same time, since they know that panic cannot be created among the people, they are criticizing as 'anti-monarchical' efforts to promote unity among nationalist and democratic forces.¹

However, the doctrinaire approach subsequently adopted by Koirala towards his so-called revolution belied the optimism so generated in the country. What was more, the widening

1 The Samiksha weekly (Kathmandu), 27 November 1968.

split in the core leadership of the Nepali Congress not only wrecked the much-talked about rapprochement between the Party and the King, but also affected the future and the fortunes of the Party itself.

The split in the Party had, in a way, its origin in the line adopted by Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, one of its "Big Four" leaders², ever since 1968 when he joined the Panchayat system by becoming a member of the officially-controlled Nepal Peasants Organization, and subsequently said at a public meeting on 14 February 1969 that he did not care whether his joining the Panchayat system had pleased or displeased anyone³ and that the system had come to stay. He justified his stand saying that he had joined it with the conviction that through it alone he would be able to serve the country. Upadhyaya further expressed the view that there was nothing that could be called a perfect system, and "defects in the present system can be removed and the system improved and strengthened by working from within and through the system of trial and error".⁴

Upadhyaya's approach to the question of the country's gradual democratization showed the extent to which differences

2 The "Big Four" comprised B.P. Koirala, Suvarna Shamsheer, Ganeshman Singh and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya in the heyday of the Nepali Congress.

3 The Motherland (Kathmandu), 15 February 1969.

4 Ibid.,

between him and Koirala had become accentuated. Indeed the Nepali Congress seemed no longer a cohesive political organization and in the given situation, what it obviously needed was not confrontation but co-operation with the King for reforms in the current political system. It may be recalled in this connection that expressing such a view the Nepal Taims had advised Koirala to consider the fact that the nature of the party he was leading had undergone a fundamental change because of considerable dissipation of the earlier revolutionary urge, commitment and progressive profile of its top leadership. Those who mattered in the Party leadership needed to be meaningfully inducted into national politics to promote affinity and closeness between progressive conceptions and strong features of the present system as well as of the Party. All this had the likelihood of being realized for the reason that the Panchayat system had borrowed such basic programmes of the Nepali Congress as the establishment of a society free from exploitation and the abolition of social and economic injustice. The paper also warned;

The history of Nepal bears testimony to the fact that it was always the third force which derived benefit whenever bitterness arose between the King and the people. A serious responsibility has devolved on all to put an end to would be Jang Bahadurs before they are born. It is important that B.P. Koirala and his group should realize and accept this responsibility in the context of history.⁵

5 Nepal Taims (Kathmandu), 26 November 1968.

Furthermore, it was not hard to detect how the Party was now in a quandary. The division in its leadership was further strengthened when immediately after his release, Ganeshman Singh made it explicitly clear that his views coincided with those of Koirala and that both of them would remain one in their struggle for the revival of parliamentary democracy. Commenting on the existing situation in Nepal, Ganeshman Singh said: "B.P. Koirala, our respected colleague and leader has already expressed his views in brief on the present political situation of Nepal. I fully agree with his views".⁶

For his part, Suvarna Shamsheer was reticent on what had been happening in the Party. His attitude markedly differed from that of Ganeshman Singh⁷ or even from that of Surya Prasad Upadhyaya. Until June 1969, he avoided making any comment on the recent statements of Koirala. He did not say more than that he still followed his line spelled out earlier.⁸ All this notwithstanding, he seemed anxious to bring about a rapprochement between King Mahendra and Koirala - but it was of no avail.⁹

6 Gorkhapatra (Kathmandu), 1 November 1968.

7 Ganeshman Singh and B.P. Koirala are to this date in complete agreement with each other about the present political situation in Nepal and their future course of action.

8 The Arati weekly (Kathmandu), 12 June 1969.

9 "Nepal 2 : Political Cross-Roads in the State", The Hindu (Madras), 21 March 1970.

However, any doubt whether or not he had accepted the King's leadership to work within the present political system was dispelled by Suvarna Shamsher when he said that in the present political situation, he would side with the King even if it meant losing his one-time valuable friend and colleague, Koirala. While renewing his "sincere and loyal co-operation" to the King, he once again amplified what he meant by his earlier statement of 15 May 1968, and declared;

I still stand by the views contained in that statement. Recalling the developments that took place immediately after I issued this statement, I can claim in all sincerity that it reflected not only my own views but also those of my colleagues.¹⁰

He hoped that the present atmosphere of distrust and suspicion would end and that opportunity would be provided to all without any exception to participate in the economic, social and political development of Nepal.

Nevertheless, the extent to which the split had been plaguing the Party for some time in the past unavoidably came to light following the resignation of one of its top leaders, Bharat Shamsher, from its membership. One of those awaiting royal pardon for entering the kingdom, he was still living in voluntary self-exile in India. It seemed that he was dissatisfied as much with Suvarna Shamsher for his statement pledging

¹⁰ Gorkhapatra, 9 March 1970.

unflinching support to the present political set-up in Nepal,¹¹ as with Koirala for his inability to explain his line fully.¹² For the present Bharat believes in remaining aloof from active politics.¹³

The apparently irreversible differences among its top leaders resulted in its split into three broad factions. The one headed by Koirala believed that violent revolution alone could bring about desired changes in the existing political situation in Nepal. The second led by Suvarna Shamsheer believed in "loyal" co-operation with the King at whose sufferance alone gradual reforms in the political system were feasible. The third guided allegedly by Surya Prasad Upadhyaya opted for progressive democratisation of the Panchayat system with evolutionary constitutional means. Such a split did not show any sign of being patched up in the near future.

The failure of all the three leaders, who had complimentary political styles to create an enduring relationship in the past, to minimize,

11 By implication the statement of 8 March 1970.

12 Asian Recorder (New Delhi), vol. 16, no. 25, 18-24 June 1970, p. 9605.

13 As told by B.P. Koirala's son, Prakash Koirala, at a personal interview to the author, Bharat Shamsheer still allegedly seems to hold the view that nothing concrete can be achieved in the realm of reform in the present political situation in Nepal when the army is under the control of the King and, therefore, it is advisable to keep aloof from active politics for the time being until the army is controlled by Parliament.

if not terminate their differences was symptomatic of the factional strife that the party now embodied. To the extent their differing lines vis-a-vis political reforms became increasingly sharp, particularly after King Birendra ascended the throne in 1972, intra-party disunity and distrust continued to be deepened.¹⁴

KOIRALA'S LINE

It may perhaps be necessary to give a more detailed account of Koirala's line to show how the split in the Nepali Congress had, in general terms, been irreversible for the present. Emphasis on and analysis of the line adopted by him and followed by his supporters might be justifiable partly for the reason that by the time he decided to live in India in self-exile, Suvarna Shamsher and most of his followers had returned to Nepal and Surya Prasad Upadhyaya and his followers had been living inside the country ever since 1960. Thus for all practical purposes Koirala's faction of the Nepali Congress became the party in exile.

Initially, while he was in India for a medical check-up and subsequent treatment, Koirala left friends and opponents alike guessing about his future plans. He supported the line adopted by Suvarna Shamsher, believing that he (Suvarna Shamsher)

14 L.S. Baral, "The Changing Constitutional and Political System of Nepal", Foreign Affairs Reports (New Delhi), vol. 26, no. 1, January 1977, p. 26.

would be successful "in attaining his democratic objective".¹⁵ Secondly, Koirala also refused to comment on the present Panchayat System in Nepal.¹⁶ In the course of his speeches he gave at Biratnagar, after he returned there from India, he hesitated to spell out his views towards the present regime. Even then he felt that democracy had been "murdered" in Nepal after his arrest in 1960, and he did not think that the present system was a democratic one. He believed that:

There is an atmosphere of confusion in the country. The feeling is that the people cannot be suppressed by imprisoning a few people. The feelings will then only go on swirling like the waves of the sea. Today not only my own voice but also the voice of the newspapers has been silenced. But the time is past when one could enforce one's views by means of guns. One should also be able to convince the people of one's argument. Only the people are competent to determine who is right and who is wrong. In a democracy everything must be according to the wishes of the people.¹⁷

Koirala further said, "I have been in jail for eight years and am willing to go to jail again for such a change". Declaring that he was prepared to work through non-violent means for the attainment of democratic ideals, he warned that should that method fail, other methods might become necessary.¹⁸

15 Naya Nepal (Kathmandu), 22 January 1969.

16 The Motherland, 7 February 1969.

17 Nepal Times, 7 February 1969.

18 Ibid.

Even so, Koirala was reticent about his future line. Despite his emphasis that the existing situation needed qualitative change, he seemed undecided whether he should opt for a violent change or a non-violent one. His approach towards revolution was also doctrinaire as was evident when he told newsmen at Biratnagar on 12 February 1969 that if changes did not come through non-violent means, they would come through violence, however, one might try to prevent it. He believed that revolution "is an inevitable historical process and history does not wait for anybody."¹⁹

Koirala's premises on revolution were also traceable in an interview he gave to the Himalchuli weekly, published on 21 February 1969. During the course of the interview he asserted:

I had said that there might be a revolution in case the Nepali people do not get what they want. There is nothing which might be described as "armed". However, we should not regard an "armed revolution" as impossible, irrespective of through whom it may be achieved. The march of time will not be checked even if Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala remains behind.²⁰

Koirala's emphasis on violence and his efforts to prove that it was not incompatible with the national ethos of

19 The Motherland, 13 February 1969.

20 The Himalchuli weekly (Kathmandu), 21 February 1969.

Nepal was more explicit when he stated;

We will of course do our utmost to avoid a conflict with the King, but if it is inevitable we will not fight shy of it. Such a conflict is likely to be violent, because our national ethos precludes any non-violent struggle. We have fought in the past and we shall do it again. I personally have no faith in non-violent struggle.²¹

He even declared that he was not a Gandhian because violence was justified in case non-violent means failed.

Who says I am a Gandhian? Revolution can be achieved through both violent and non-violent means. The warning that a violent revolution may happen if all possibilities of a non-violent revolution are checked does not constitute encouragement to violence. A warning is not a threat. I want a non-violent revolution. But history is a stronger force than my wishes.²²

His thought pattern was outlined in greater detail when he said at an interview with a special correspondent of the Kalpna ^a Nepali bi-monthly, published from Dharan, that:

Revolution means any major and widespread social economic and political change. The Nepali society expects a major revolution today and such a revolution is inevitable. The only question is whether it will be violent or non-violent. It will be non-violent if we have a sense of history and sufficient resilience to realize what the age demands. But in case attempts are made to check the natural course of revolution through exploitation or reluctance to relinquish

21 Ibid.

22 The Samiksha weekly, 29 March 1969.

political authority, or to insist that the existing social, economic, political system or legislation is immutable, the historical force of this revolution will explode in an extreme and violent form... We have offered co-operation to His Majesty with the objective of ensuring that revolution is achieved in a non-violent form. We desire His Majesty's co-operation in the revolution, so that it may be accomplished in a natural and peaceful manner.²³

Regarding the present regime in Nepal to be a military dictatorship, he further emphasized that democracy could be restored in the country only through arms.²⁴

From now on he continued spelling out the strategy and tactics he was going to adopt in the future. While reiterating his earlier views, he threatened that he would spearhead an armed insurrection in the country soon, if the demands of the majority of the Nepali people were not conceded immediately. Explaining the tactics of "the war of liberation", he said that unlike the civil war against the Ranas, he would not operate from India once he and his followers "go to Nepal, we will not return". He did not want to be tied down to the Indian administration, nor did he want to embarrass the Government of India. He said that he and his followers would fight from Nepal and not from any foreign base.²⁵ Thus it became clear

23 The Kalpana (Dharan) May 1969.

24 The Matribhumi (Kathmandu), 22 September 1970.

25 Indian Express (New Delhi), 20 September 1971.

that he was all for a violent revolution and there was no other alternative left to him.

It may not be incorrect to say just as his views regarding the revolution he envisaged were not initially somehow explicit, his attitude towards the King and the existing political system also changed from time to time. In the beginning he seemed to be reticent on the issue of co-operation with the King until he met the latter personally. Addressing a public meeting at Biratnagar on 3 February 1969, he maintained;

I have not yet consulted my colleagues, nor have I been able to have any meeting with His Majesty. We have given our word to His Majesty for co-operation. Only after we have exchanged opinions with His Majesty, will we draw definite programme of action. Otherwise, any programme would be impractical and futile.²⁶

However, he asserted the next day that co-operation needed democratic institutions and should be based on democratic ideals. Speaking at a gathering of intellectuals on 4 February at Biratnagar, he further tried to explain his position in the following terms;

We had actually been extending co-operation to His Majesty. But even while successfully giving effect to the provisions of the Constitution, we were unexpectedly confronted with the charges of 1960. I have not been able to understand the spirit of the present Constitution. But I am eager to learn His Majesty's intention behind the Constitution. If my aims and those of His Majesty are the same there is no need for a

26 The Motherland , 7 January 1969.

Constitution.²⁷

Emphasizing the need of a basis for him and King Mahendra to co-exist for solution to national problems on a rational basis, he explained : "This means understanding between the popular forces I represent and the King. When I refer to myself, I mean the forces I represent."²⁸ He did not believe that the tone of his recent speeches was offensive and would jeopardize rapprochement between him and the King, for "My speeches were just intended to create an atmosphere conducive to such understanding".²⁹

But with the passage of time, perhaps what with the failure of some rapprochement with the King, Koirala's attitude began to crystallize, as he felt the need on the part of the King for a change of heart. He even went to the extent of saying : "If the King cares for himself and his dynasty, he will do well to come to an understanding with the Nepali Congress".³⁰ The basic question, according to Koirala, was whether the King was prepared to share powers with the people. Otherwise, in his view, a situation was fast developing in

27 Nepal Times , 7 February 1969.

28 The Motherland, 13 February 1969.

29 The Samaya (Kathmandu), 13 February 1969.

30 "Nepal 2, The Political Cross-Roads in the State", The Hindu, 21 March 1970.

which a showdown between the King and the democratic forces would be inevitable. Quite frankly, in an interview he gave to an Indian newspaper in September 1971, he warned that the future of the Crown would depend upon the form of struggle to achieve democracy, for if it was peaceful, Nepal would have a constitutional monarchy, but in case it became of an armed nature, there would be no Kingship.³¹ Thus it would appear that when a rapprochement with the King did not become a reality, Koirala became a critic, eventually threatening him of dire consequences for failure to arrive at a compromise with him. In addition, he demanded immediate release of remaining political prisoners including the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, and two former communists, Man Mohan Adhikari and Shambhu Ram Shrestha, saying that he should have been released only after all other political detainees had been freed.³²

It may not be out of place to mention here that during this period it was Koirala's faction which raised its voice against the existing royal regime, as other factions of the Party preferred to wait and watch, expecting reforms as the King willed. With his concern for the country's progressive

31 Indian Express (New Delhi), 20 September 1971.

32 The Samaya, 1 February 1969.

democratization with the revival of parliamentary democracy, Koirala also gave a call for the unity of democratic forces inside the country, saying that it was high time for their consolidation. He asserted :

A race is on between the democrats and communists for political supremacy and time is of essence in this conflict. If during the next two years we do not consolidate, we shall lose the race once for all. If the democratic forces hesitate to lead the people, they will turn to communists. It is necessary for democratic forces to assert themselves also to protect the King.³³

In an interview with a special correspondent of the Samiksha weekly in March 1969, he contended that there existed only two political systems - democratic and non-democratic, and so the question of the Panchayat system fulfilling the needs of a third political and economic system between Communism and the parliamentary system did not arise. He added:

Undemocratic elements have come out under the garb of democrats. Is the Panchayat system consistent with the wishes of the people or not? Democracy cannot be established by taking away the fundamental rights of the people.³⁴

He also pointed out that national unity was not just a joint statement of some political leaders. It was based on institutions under whom different national elements could come

33 The Himalchuli weekly, 21 February, 1969.

34 The Samiksha weekly, 29 March 1969.

together and strengthen and activate nationalist feelings, through discussions and decisions. National unity in this sense, he added, was possible only under a democratic system. He felt optimistic about the prospects of democratic unity, and said that the experience of the past eight years had shown that such unity was indispensable for the survival of democratic forces.

At the same time he criticized those who did not fall in line with him. Thus while expressing surprise over the reports that the former Home Minister, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, had criticized his (Koirala's) Biratnagar speech, he observed, "Opportunists are merely interested in taking advantage of every situation".³⁵ But instructively enough, Koirala had no differences with Suvarna Shamsheer and asserted: "We are all united in our efforts".³⁶

What were Koirala's objective and demands? It has been said that initially his main objective appeared to be a rapprochement with King Mahendra at the earliest, but to the extent the chances for it became slim, a fundamental change in his objective was observable. He showed that while he was concerned about democracy building in Nepal and did not consider the existing Panchayat system to be democratic, he was equally

35 The Samaya, 13 February 1969.

36 Indian Express (New Delhi), 20 September 1971.

anxious for unity among democratic forces and endeavoured to remain an advocate of restoration of parliamentary democracy in the country. In fact, he emphasized that his first demand was the restoration of parliamentary democracy, for which lifting of the existing ban on the functioning of political parties was a pre-condition. He was also of the view that power must reside with the people, and that the country's constitution should be drafted by a Constituent Assembly, incorporating the systems of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.³⁷

KING MAHENDRA'S POLICY

King Mahendra was not only markedly cold to the demands of Koirala, but also seemed to be undeterred by his threats and warnings. His policy was to discredit Koirala and extol the Panchayat system by claiming that parliamentary democracy was ill-suited to Nepal, and thus precluding Koirala's line from making any impact on the people.

A clearer pointer to his attitude was provided by the King's speech at a public meeting at Birganj on 17 December 1969, saying that it was wrong on the part of anyone to attempt to undermine the faith of the people in the Panchayat system.

37 Ibid.

He was sure that no Nepali could be beguiled "now as before". Considering it to be a liberal system having the potential for solution to national problems by mutual discussion, he categorically stressed: "It does not mean that one can do what one chooses or speak one likes".³⁸ He also hoped that the people of Nepal would not take serious notice of the remarks made by "those few forced to blurt out something or other just to disprove their non-existence".³⁹

It was obvious that the purpose of the King in extolling the Panchayat system, as ever before, was to avert any likely impact of Koirala's line on the people. While pointing out the attributes of the system, the King maintained that it had instilled such virtues as nationalism, national unity, and national construction, perseverance and self-reliance among the Nepalese people and developed their political, social and economic consciousness. He maintained that necessary steps had been taken from time to time with the co-operation of the people in order to bring about suitable changes in the system while retaining its basic characteristics. He expressed satisfaction that he had been able to hand over the responsibilities of operating the system to panchas (Panchayat workers) themselves and that the Nepali people did not have to depend

38 Times of India (New Delhi), 18 December 1969.

39 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 14 October 1971.

on others in maintaining it,⁴⁰ and that the panchayat system assured the people full democratic freedom.⁴¹ He was ever loud in deprecating the attempt to undermine the faith of the people in the system.⁴²

The King missed no opportunity to drive home the fact that parliamentary democracy was not suited to Nepal, not only because the people lacked education but also because it was neither practical nor desirable from the national point of view to leave the way open for exploitation of the common people by allowing the emergence of political parties. He stressed that there would be no change from the present system and that those who would deviate from their service and work for the reintroduction of the party system would meet severe consequences. It may be that what the King had said was a sharp reaction to Koirala's "recent utterances" regarding means other than non-violent to bring about a revolution in the country's social, economic and political atmosphere".⁴³

Similarly, in a message issued to the nation on 18 February 1970, he asserted that although democracy had been introduced in Nepal nineteen years ago, democratic principles

40 Gorkhapatra, 16 December 1968.

41 Ibid., 19 February 1969.

42 Ibid., 18 December 1969.

43 "Partyless in Nepal", The Hindu, 21 February 1969.

had not permeated into the life of the people for ten years thereafter because of the Party feelings.⁴⁴

All this showed how the King's views were quite opposed to those of Koirala. Thus, as over the time intransigence on the part of the King and Koirala accentuated, the Nepali Congress in exile felt that the only means left for any change in the existing system was violence.

BIRENDRA'S STRATEGY

King Mahendra passed away on 31 January 1972 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Birendra, to the throne. Hopes were aroused that the new King educated at Eton, Tokyo and Harvard would try to make the present political system more liberal and more representative. A section of the Indian press also expressed such optimism saying that:

King Birendra is scholarly and has a good knowledge of international politics. His father had established such a political system in which he saw no room for any reform, nor did he want to have any compromise with oppositional political leaders. As a consequence, political opposition has been uprooted in the country. The Nepali people are dissatisfied with the present Panchayat system. But it was not so easy, even for Mahendra to bring reform in the system. Still, King Birendra has got new options. Under these circumstances the people have many expectations from King Birendra. Because of having studied in Britain (regarded as mother of parliamentary democracy) he appears to be liberal. There is generally a vast gap between the princely

44 Gorkhapatra , 18 February 1970.

class and the people, Birendra's contact with the people is not so significant at present. But he had been receiving the basic training of state administration.⁴⁵

Birendra was the best educated among all the Shah Kings. Though he had only his high-schooling at Eton and some preliminaries at Harvard, his education in Tokyo was supposed to make him understand how modernization and monarchy could go hand in hand. Besides, he did not have any conflict with political leaders in the country or those leaving in exile. Hence the generation of optimism for bright prospects for political liberalization under his stewardship. But such optimism did not last long.

A glimpse of the manner and style of King Birendra was provided by a new trend in his administration. What was particularly significant was his assertion that the Panchayat system was capable of revolutionary growth⁴⁶ and development and there was enough room for "suitable improvements" consistent with the changing times.⁴⁷

However, it became apparent that the new King, too, was not amenable to fundamental changes in the Panchayat system.

45 "Mahendra Ab Nahin Rahe" (Mahendra is no more), Dinaman (New Delhi), 6 February 1972, p. 31.

46 Gorkhapatra, 20 February 1972.

47 Times of India (New Delhi), 20 February 1976.

THE KOIRALA FACTION IN ACTION

What Koirala had been saying thus far amply indicated that his main intention was to pressurize the Government and extract concessions without actually taking resort to violent means, as made evident in the observation of a correspondent of the Guardian in Kathmandu:

And the danger for Nepal is that when meaningful reforms do come they will arrive as concessions extracted perhaps violently from a King too jealous of his own powers rather than as liberties freely granted by a monarch whose personal motives are beyond dispute.⁴⁸

There appears to be a time lag between Koirala's enunciation of the kind of revolution he had in mind and the violent activities his followers started. This would be clear when such activities were started only after King Birendra ascended the throne. Even the Tarun, a mouthpiece of the Party in exile, came into publication only in 1972.

The first shot was fired on 24 August 1972 when about 100 armed men alleged to be Nepali Congress workers under the influence of Koirala, reportedly raided Haripur, a village in Saptari district, in the eastern Terai, and barely 3.5 kilometres from the Indian border town Birpur. They ransacked some houses,

48 T.D. Allman, "Loneliness of an Autocrat", The Guardian (Manchester), 30 January 1973.

attacked a police post and killed a constable. According to the official version as given by the Minister for Home and Panchayat, J.M. Shrestha, the men were in military uniform and armed with rifles and sten-guns. They entered Haripur at midnight on 24 August for plunder.⁴⁹ The Minister told the National Panchayat that in an exchange of fire between the policemen of the Haripur police station and the rebels one constable was killed. The intruders were not identified, but observers believed that the incident was reminiscent of 1962 when dissident Nepali politicians took refuge in India and mounted some armed attacks across the border after the late King Mahendra abolished the party system of government in Nepal.

Another act of terrorists that got world-wide publicity was the hijacking of a plane of the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation to Forbesganj airstrip, 7 kilometres inside the Indian border, on 10 June 1973⁵⁰ and decamping with three million rupees in Indian currency. The plane was on a scheduled domestic flight from Biratnagar to Kathmandu. This was the first time that a major hijacking incident had taken place in the Himalayan kingdom. After grabbing the money, the hijackers rushed to a jeep standing near the airstrip and decamped with the booty. The incident came to be associated with violent

49 Times of India (New Delhi), 29 August 1972.

50 Ibid., 11 June 1973.

activities of the Koirala-led faction of the Nepali Congress, even though King Birendra said later that the hijacking should be deemed a criminal act without political connotations until politicians acknowledged complicity in it.⁵¹

Another incident associated with the Nepali Congress in exile occurred inside Nepal on 17 December 1973 in which two persons including a head constable were reportedly killed in two incidents involving government forces and "anti-social" elements in Biratnagar and Malangwa in Sarlahi. The Home and Panchayat Ministry claimed that an innocent pedestrian was killed on that date when anti-social elements attacked with explosives a police post in Biratnagar close to the Indo-Nepalese border. It was alleged that a head constable was killed in an exchange of fire between the police and anti-social elements at Malangwa, headquarters of the Sarlahi District, after which the anti-social elements fled to the Indian side of the border.⁵²

On 16 March 1974, an attempt, comparable to that made in January 1962 by an allegedly Nepali Congress worker on the life of the then King, Mahendra, at Janakpur, was made on the life of King Birendra at Biratnagar. The King escaped unhurt.⁵³

51 Keesings Contemporary Archives (Bristol), vol. 21, 7-13 April 1975, p. 27062.

52 Hindustan Times, 19 December 1973.

53 The Motherland (Delhi), 18 March 1974.

According to the Tarun Patra (a weekly of the Nepali Congress in exile), a bomb stronger than the one exploded at Janakpur in January 1962, exploded at 9 a.m. while King Birendra was leaving by car after inspecting the Tribhuvan Hospital at Biratnagar. The bomb exploded at a distance of 400 yards from the King's car. In an article entitled "What was the reason for and purpose of the bomb explosion at Biratnagar? Does this explosion have any political justification?", a writer named Pradip Giri compared this incident to the throwing of a bomb by Bhagat Singh on 8 April 1929 in the Indian Assembly of the day.⁵⁴

Yet another act of terrorism associated with the Party took place on the night of 5 May 1974 when Prayag Raj Singh Suwal, Nepal's Minister for Public Works and Transport, escaped unhurt when a hand grenade was thrown at his car. Three persons were injured by the blast. The incident took place in the narrow alley in the centre of Kathmandu. Police cordoned off the area and carried out a house to house search. Four persons were arrested. Two of them were believed to be from Biratnagar, a suspected centre of rebel activities in east Nepal. Reports had been appearing in the local press about the recovery of arms, ammunition and explosives from different parts of the country, especially from the east Nepal, known to be a stronghold of the banned Nepali Congress and extremist communists.⁵⁵

54 The Tarun Patra (Kathmandu), 28 March 1974, p. 1 and pp. 9-12.

55 The Times (London), 7 May 1974.

Commenting on the bomb blast, the Tarun Patra wrote that it vehemently contradicted the statement of the King that a handful of people living on the Indian border were creating anarchy, and that even Kathmandu was no longer safe.⁵⁶

The last act of terrorism occurred on 16 December 1974,⁵⁷ the very day King Birendra had announced his intention of appointing a royal commission to suggest reforms in the Panchayat system. As reports had it, an encounter took place between the security forces and "anti-national" elements in Timurebote forests in Okhaldhunga district in mid-eastern Nepal.⁵⁸ Quoting a Home Ministry spokesman, the reports said that a gang of armed "anti-national" elements reached Okhaldunga after travelling along the banks of the Kamala river. Their intention was to destroy public properties like bridges and offices, assault government officials, panchas and others participating in the Panchayat system and terrorise and rob the local people. The security forces were following the gang from the border up to Okhaldunga from where the gang proceeded to Salleri and reached Timurebote forests where it came face to face with the security forces. The gang opened fire "leaving no option to the security units but to return fire in self-defence. Consequently sixteen

56 The Tarun Patra (Varanasi), 28 May 1974, p. 3.

57 The date is given in the Tarun Patra of December 1975.

58 Hindustan Times, 24 December 1974.

"anti-nationals" were killed in the encounter. A large amount of arms and ammunition was also captured. The ring leader of the gang, Capt. Yagya Bahadur Thapa, fled after being wounded. He was later apprehended by the people and handed over to the police. Captain Thapa was also implicated in the Biratnagar bomb case of March 1974 and was wanted under court orders.

The Tarun Patra in its December 1975 issue wrote that Ram, Lakshman, Shyam Gurung, Mahesh Koirala, Padma Prakash Puri and Maila Rai and many others gave their lives while shouting slogans like "Nepali Congress Zindabad", "Long Live Democracy", and "Bir Bishweshwar Zindabad" in an encounter with the security forces.⁵⁹

A one-man tribunal on 17 November 1975 sentenced Thapa to death.⁶⁰ Thapa is reported to have stated before the Tribunal:

Peace and welfare of the general people are not possible through this Panchayat system in Nepal. The happiness and prosperity of the entire Nepali people is possible only after the establishment of democracy. Because of this I have adopted the ideal of the Nepali Congress and am also a member of the Nepali Congress. The present government cannot solve the problems of the country by hanging a person like me.⁶¹

59 The Tarun (Kathmandu), December 1975, p. 26.

60 The Statesman (New Delhi), 18 November 1975.

61 The Tarun, December 1975, Bulletin no. 7, p. 26.

REPERCUSSIONS

Acts of violence allegedly engineered by the Koirala-led faction of the Nepali Congress had some far-reaching consequences. Although they were vehemently criticized by many of those associated with the Panchayat establishment as well as by several former politicians, there was no dearth of those who started demanding liberalization in the existing polity.

In a statement issued on 13 October 1974 in Kathmandu, Suvarna Shamsher urged King Birendra to take "drastic measures" to meet the challenge faced by the kingdom in the context of the "critical economic and political situation". He said that it was the "only way Nepal can save itself". He reiterated his faith in the King's leadership and said:

We pledge full support and co-operation to any concrete measures which King Birendra might take to save the country from the gathering economic and political crisis and to preserve national independence and sovereignty and in his efforts to take the Panchayat system towards gradual democratisation.⁶²

In an obvious bid to criticize the group led by Koirala as well as those who considered themselves to be the sole champions of the Panchayat system, the former Deputy Prime Minister said that the existing situation had facilitated the activities of those

62 Times of India , 14 October 1974.

believing in terrorism and violence. He emphatically asserted that violence was a wrong path for achieving democracy.

Describing the patriots' dilemma, Suvarna said:

On the one side are ranged those who reside abroad and are cut off from the realities of the present-day Nepal and have been raising the slogan of terrorism and violent revolution. On the other are the self-seeking adventurers who claim to have the sole monopoly of loyalty to the Crown, the Panchayat system and the country.⁶³

That this statement brought Suvarna Shamsheer closer to the King is evident from the fact that the latter granted an audience to him in October 1974 where they reportedly discussed the political and economic situation in the country,⁶⁴ and Suvarna raised the issue of release of political prisoners, grant of amnesty to some as also the return of property of some of the Nepali Congress workers confiscated earlier as a pre-condition to normalization of relations between the King and the opposition.

The significance of the meeting was also accepted by Bhola Chatterjee, an observer of the recent political developments in Nepal, who wrote:

The King did not for courtesy sake choose to spend some 40 minutes of his valuable time with the former President of the now-banned

63 Ibid.

64 Hindustan Times, 25 October 1974.

Nepali Congress. It is also a safe guess that during his audience with the King, the one-time Deputy Prime Minister did not restrict himself merely to conveying his gratitude for having been granted an opportunity to meet the Sovereign. That something more substantial than this had occasioned the meeting is not difficult to comprehend.⁶⁵

Even so, Koirala severely criticized Suvarna Shamsher's statement of 13 October 1974. In an interview with the Tarun Patra, Koirala said that the statement of Suvarna Shamsher did not refer to any new or timely matter. He further asked: "He has stated that those living outside the country are not aware of the problems, but has he given the proof of understanding the situation within the country by being in the country". Koirala further asserted that Suvarna Shamsher's

argument that violence cannot be a means of achievement of democracy does not reconcile with his behaviour. He, too, had led the violent movement of 1950. Also when I was in jail in 1961, he took to arms and accepted violent means in practice. In my opinion the use of violence against a government of the people established by democratic means is not proper. But it is justifiable to raise arms against a government based on violence and established through undemocratic means.⁶⁶

Besides, King Birendra's coronation was going to take place in February 1975, and it was generally felt that it should

65 Bholu Chatterji, "Not for Nothing", Hindustan Standard (Calcutta), 6 November 1974.

66 The Tarun Patra (Janakpurdham), 20 October 1974.

be allowed to be held peacefully in exchange of some overdue reforms in the current Constitution. Perhaps, realizing the need of the hour, the King had declared his intention to appoint a Constitution Reforms Commission to suggest measures for reforms in the existing Constitution.

B.P. Koirala welcomed the announcement of the King's decision to appoint a Reforms Commission, though he was not unreserved regarding the King's intention.⁶⁷

On the other hand, Suvarna Shamsher and Shribhadra Sharma⁶⁸ welcomed King Birendra's decision to appoint a Reforms Commission and to appeal to those in self-imposed exile to return home "in a spirit of patriotism and co-operation". Suvarna Shamsher expressed the view that what the King had said recently reflected the "present needs of Nepal and the people's aspirations". In an obvious reference to Koirala, he appealed to those in self-imposed exile "to appreciate the significance and spirit of the King's speech and to return to Nepal with a clear conscience to work sincerely for national development". While echoing Suvarna Shamsher's appeal, Sharma also described the King's speech "as very timely and appropriate" and said

67 The Motherland (New Delhi) 23 December 1974, and
The Statesman (New Delhi) 23 December 1974.

68 Shribhadra Sharma was a former General Secretary of the Nepali Congress.

that it reflected the people's sentiments.⁶⁹

Commenting on the King's stated decision, Bhola Chatterji wrote that though Koirala was free to hold his views regarding the present system, it was not totalitarian, even though it was not parliamentary. Similarly, sporadic terrorist activities of the group led by B.P. Koirala were not a revolution.⁷⁰

FORMATION OF THE CONSTITUTION REFORMS COMMISSION AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

That the decision of King Birendra generated a great deal of enthusiasm in the rank and file of the Nepali Congress as a whole was evident when the Party sent feelers to ^{him} King Birendra to the effect that the proposed Royal Commission purported to suggest changes in the present Constitution should be formed with erstwhile elected representatives and the Commission's recommendations should be binding on all concerned "according to informed sources". The Congress sources felt that the Commission minus popular representation would be an exercise in futility. Moreover, the Commission itself would be "still born" if it consisted of the "King's sychophants".⁷¹

69 Times of India (New Delhi), 30 December 1974.

70 Bhola Chatterji, "Reforming the Panchayat System", Hindustan Standard, 31 December 1974.

71 Hindustan Standard, 18 January 1975.

The Nepali Congress in exile suspended its violent activities for some time. It did not try to establish an alliance with the pro-Chinese and pro-Russian factions of the Communist Party in Nepal, as the dialogue for a "national front" that took place at Varanasi between Koirala and Pushpa Lal Shrestha, leader of the pro-Chinese faction of the Communist Party of Nepal, ended inconclusively. What actually transpired between the two leaders was reportedly related to a debate on both political theory and strategy. Koirala felt that since he was not a "blood-thirsty Dracula" he would welcome if the King peacefully conceded power to the people without a revolution. On the other hand, Shrestha insisted that the thought of peaceful reforms was sheer nonsense. Shortly thereafter, he launched a tirade against Koirala through pro-Communist papers in Nepal dubbing him as a "conformist and non-revolutionary".

A seven-member Constitution Reforms Commission was announced by the Royal Palace on 9 February 1975. The Commission was to be headed by Anirudha Prasad Singh, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Dr. Mohammed Mohsin, a top-ranking civil servant, became its member-secretary, while the Chairman of the official Go to Village National Campaign was included as an ex-officio member.⁷² Its other members were former Prime Minister Kirti Nidhi Bista, known for his staunch adherence to

72 Ibid.

the Panchayat system, D.P. Adhikari, a former pro-Chinese communist, Shribhadra Sharma, a former General-Secretary of the National Congress, and Ram Hari Sharma a former Praja Parishad leader. After the formation of the Constitution Reforms Commission, the Nepali Congress in exile appeared to be adopting two simultaneous strategies to emphasize what it expected from the Government and the people of India for Nepal's democratization, and to criticize the King and the Government of Nepal through its publications presumably as a pressure tactic.

Koirala maintained that if the Government and the people of India did not strengthen democratic forces in Nepal, one fine morning they would find that "China had occupied Nepal by default". He alleged that the "pro-Chinese Communist influence in Nepal was steadily increasing and if the present state of affairs continued in Nepal, this influence would doubtless sweep the country".⁷³

Koirala also expected moral and diplomatic support from India and not arms, which if supplied by that country were welcome. He also wanted that:

Nearly 1,000 Nepali Congress workers who had taken refuge in India should not be harassed, that the ban on their entry within 50 miles of the Indo-Nepal border should go, and that no hurdles should be placed in their way of carrying on their agitation peacefully".⁷⁴

73 Hindustan Times , 27 May 1975.

74 The Hindu , 28 May 1975.

Nevertheless, he added that if India did not heed his appeal for moral and diplomatic support for strengthening the democratic movement in Nepal, he would appeal for international support.

In addition, he claimed that a "big democratic movement led by the Nepali Congress" was going on in Nepal and as reports had it, armed clashes were taking place between the military and the revolutionary groups. That besides, a "Liberation Army" of ex-army personnel had been set up in eastern Nepal. Even so Koirala was not in favour of the removal of Kingship in Nepal but was concerned for the establishment of democratic institutions and would not mind if in that process the King was swept off. The Nepali Congress, according to him, was not opposed to him but wanted him to remain only a Constitutional head.⁷⁵

The Nepali Congress in exile continued criticizing the royal regime with the usual vehemance. Former Minister Ganeshman Singh believed that the King did never do good to the Nepalese people, as all the three Kings -- Tribhuvan, Mahendra and Birendra -- had hampered democracy in Nepal" by means of "deceit and treachery". He called for armed revolution in the country, which, in his view, was the only way for the restoration of democracy in the kingdom.⁷⁶ Another Congress leader,

75 Hindustan Times , 27 May 1975.

76 Ganeshman Singh, "Rajale Nepali Janatako Kehilye Hit Garenan" (The King never did good to the Nepali People") Tanneri Swar (Kathmandu), 15 June 1975, pp. 1-2.

Girija Prasad Koirala, younger brother of B.P. Koirala, opined:

A dictatorial government only understands the language which it itself speaks. Therefore, in the context of Nepal we have been compelled to speak the same language - the language of arms. The government wishes to suppress the opinion of the people by means of arms, we have got ready to use guns to give effect to the people's will.⁷⁷

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The fear of the Nepali Congress in exile regarding the Panchayat system being more closed was realized in the sense that the predominant demands for sweeping reforms, like universal adult franchise, a government fully responsible to the people, restoration of fundamental rights, a Prime Minister elected from among National Panchayat members and open sessions of the National Panchayat,⁷⁸ were totally ignored and the second amendment to the Constitution announced on 12 December 1975 by King Birendra ensured greater concentration of power in his hands. A new status with wide powers was conferred on the "Go to Village National Campaign", under which it was endowed with sweeping powers with overall political control vested in

77 Girija Prasad Koirala, "Jankrantilai Kasaile Rokna Saktaina" (No one can prevent a People's Revolution), Ibid., pp. 3-4.

78 The Hindustan Times , 9 August 1975.

its Central Committee. Moreover, under the new dispensation the King's power to amend the Constitution was considerably enhanced. The earlier provision requiring a two thirds majority of the special committee of members of the Raj Sabha and the National Panchayat was scrapped and only a formal consultation with the special committee was substituted instead.⁷⁹

Commenting on the Second amendment to the Constitution, the Tarun in its issue of December 1975, wrote that the various amendments had completed the polarization regarding the question of democracy in Nepal. In today's Nepal, it was said, there were only two isms -- "Totalitarian Monarchism and Democracy". This polarization had not become complete till yesterday in the sense that though there was no confusion regarding the end, there was no one view regarding means of achieving democracy. The recent proclamation of the King, the journal believed, had ended the controversy regarding means. The controversy regarding democracy was whether there should be a compromise or a revolution for the achievement of democracy. This controversy had reached such an extent that no one would believe in the gradual democratization of the Panchayat system. There was but only one way to democracy ⇐ revolution.⁸⁰

79 Times of India (New Delhi), 13 December 1975.

80 The Tarun (Kathmandu), Bulletin no. 7, December 1975.

In an interview to the Tarun, B.P. Koirala vehemently condemned the amendments saying:

If the Constitutional amendments were aimed at the development of the country, they would have been on the side of democracy. The King has concentrated immense powers in his hands. The King has announced the reforms keeping his own interests above the country's. These reforms have badly damaged the national interests. The steps of the King have been anti-national.⁸¹

The Nepali Congress had always had apprehensions about the King's intention. It may be recalled here that commenting on the Constitutional Reforms Commission, the Tarun in its editorial of the August 1975 issue had written:

Last year on 16 December the King expressed his desire to appoint a Reforms Commission taking into view the increasing armed revolt, mass discontentment, economic crisis and chiefly his formal coronation. Since then discussions and dialogues are continuing in Nepal on this issue. The King has asked the Commission to suggest measures to make the system people-oriented and the Panchas active. In order to study the public opinion the King appointed a seven-man Commission. By now the members of the commission have come to know the public opinion by going to various parts of the districts. We do not have to say anything about what sort of reforms the King will effect-- whether he will accept reforms as suggested by the Commission, or the members of the Commission will communicate to the King the changed views of the people, because we have full faith in the fact that rights are derived by means of force.⁸²

81 Ibid., Bulletin no. 6, August 1975, p. 3.

82 Ibid.

Thus the hopes generated about the liberalization of the present political system in order to make it more progressively democratic were belied. The new King proved to be stronger than his predecessor. Besides, there was no moderating force between the Koirala faction and King Bireन्द्र. The international situation also seemed to favour the King to the chagrin of the Party in exile.

KOIRALA'S RETURN AND IMPRISONMENT

As has already been mentioned, the recent changes in the Constitution did not reflect what the majority of the people had expected. One wondered whether the emergency proclaimed in India on 26 June 1975 was responsible for the new constitutional changes. Such a situation also dimmed the prospects of terrorist movements led by the Nepali Congress in exile as a means to pressurize the King to come to its terms.⁸³ Other factions of the Nepali Congress added woe to the Koirala led faction of the Party when they were inclined to accuse Koirala of having taken shelter in India and of not being able to achieve anything tangible. Obviously frustrated, Koirala felt impelled and compelled to go back to Nepal even at the risk of being rearrested. Talking to reporters at Patna before leaving for

83 As told by B.P. Koirala to the author at a personal interview.

Kathmandu on 30 December 1976 Koirala said: "In what role I am there to serve the country, will be decided later". To a suggestion that he might be risking an arrest, Koirala remarked "May be" and emphasized he would still like to "make a fresh attempt".⁸⁴

Accompanied by his steadfastly loyal friend and Transport Minister in his dismissed Cabinet, Ganeshman Singh, Koirala arrived in Kathmandu on 30 December after eight years of self-exile in India. They were arrested at the Tribhuvan airport immediately after their arrival.⁸⁵

A brief news item which appeared on the last page of the official newspapers, the Rising Nepal and the Gorakhpatra on 31 December 1976 said: "These persons had been responsible for the anti-national activities and acts of violence in different zones of the kingdom".⁸⁶

84 Indian Nation (Patna) 30 December 1976.

85 Times of India (New Delhi) 31 December 1976.

86 Gorkhapatra, 31 December 1976 and Rising Nepal (Kathmandu), 31 December 1976.

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER V

AN APPRAISAL

Notwithstanding the bright or bleak prospects of the political rehabilitation of the Nepali Congress in the polity of Nepal, its contribution to the political and socio-economic developments cannot be underrated. Whether in office or out of office, the Party has always been a force to be reckoned with. The present chapter purports to discuss the Party as a political force and as a social force as also the constraints of its being in exile.

AS A POLITICAL FORCE

Very few political parties in the entire history of the world have been able to achieve their objectives so quickly after their formation in a foreign soil. Founded as late as April 1950 the Party succeeded in its most cherished objective of overthrowing of the old and obsolete system of Ranarchy, by February in the following year.

It also goes to the credit of the Party that despite being out of power between August 1952 and May 1958, it fared so well at the first ever held elections in 1959.

Between 1952 and 1959 the Party emphasized the institutions of Constitutional monarchy and the formation of Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution for the

administration of the country. It was the disunity among the democratic forces, many of which seized every opportunity to flatter the King, which prevented the Party from prevailing upon him to hold election for a Constituent Assembly as promised by King Tribhuvan.

Be it as it may, it was of great significance in a country like Nepal to have a Ministry entirely of the choice of the Prime Minister. It was because of its remarkable victory at the polls of 1959 that the King had to be amenable to the aid and advice of the Party for some time.

As reports are, the King was in a very difficult situation before the dismissal of its Ministry as also immediately after assuming the reins of the administration. Two persons of great significance in the Party, Tulsī Giri and Vishwa Bandhu Thapa, had connived with the King in the dismissal of the Ministry. It remains doubtful if the King would have succeeded in toppling the Ministry of a united Nepali Congress.

Nor did the Party lose its force entirely after the dismissal of its Government in December 1960. Quite a large number of workers and members of the Party came to stay in India and began armed struggle against the existing regime in Kathmandu to restore parliamentary democracy in Nepal. So fed up was the King with the armed raids of the Party that at one stage he reportedly decided to have a compromise with the Party in exile at any cost. However, the Chinese aggression

on India came to the rescue of King Mahendra when the Party was compelled by the existing circumstances to withdraw its armed struggle.

Even if it may appear that after the withdrawal of its armed struggle King Mahendra lost all interest in having a compromise with the Party, rumours are that he always recognized the Party as a force to be reckoned with and it was in this scheme of things that he is reported to have sent Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, Home Minister in the Koirala Ministry, to have a dialogue with his friends regarding the acceptance of the Panchayat system.

It was not unnatural that the more the schisms in the rank and file of the Party the more did the King benefit from it. It happened especially after 1969 when the three main leaders B.P. Koirala, Suvarna Shamsher and S.P. Upadhyaya, began to part ways with one another. Their unity, in all likelihood, will persuade King Birendra to realize the importance of the Party as also a compromise with it.

AS A SOCIAL FORCE

The Nepali Congress has been in no way less significant as a social force. From its very inception its main leaders have been emphasizing the socio-economic development of Nepal. In a backward country like Nepal -- socially as well as

economically — the Party and its leaders gave many slogans, designed many plans and demanded many things that were far ahead of the time.

B.P. Koirala, son of K.P. Koirala, who died in prison for demanding liberalization in the political system during the Rana regime, had been mainly associated with the drafting of the election manifestos and other political documents ever since its inception. By training and temperament, he has been a rebel and has never reconciled to the existing socio-economic situation in the country. Koirala has always emphasized that the land must always belong to the tiller. He and his supporters have always emphasized the abolition of the birta system. Even in the Ministry dominated by the Ranas Koirala and the Congress succeeded in making the Conservative elements agreeable to the abolition of the birta system. Again during its tenure in 1959-60 the Party got the Bill regarding the abolition of the birta system passed by both the Houses of the Nepali Parliament. The Bill had taken the shape of the law but the Ministry was dismissed before the implementation of this law. Similarly, the Party has always been emphasizing the abolition of the Rajyas (semi-autonomous principalities). In a country dominated by the conservative elements such radical measures were destined to be opposed. But the Party seemed to be little deterred.

In the country where a myth has been created that the King is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu (a Hindu god) any talk

of Constitutional monarchy will obviously seem to be too ahead of time. It is of great significance that nowhere has the Nepali Congress given the impression of its belief in the Divine theory of monarchy in Nepal. In fact, B.P. Koirala, told the present author in an interview that the myth of the King being an incarnation of Lord Vishnu had been exposed long long ago by the Ranas who did not treat the Shah Kings as anything other than their prisoners.

Likewise, in the sphere of religion, too, Koirala has been laying stress on reason and scientific thinking. His disbelief in idols becomes evident from the fact that he once reportedly said the fittest place for them was a museum.

Another leader of great importance, Suvarna Shamsheer, a scion of the Ranas, though endowed with all sorts of amenities in life, always co-operated with Koirala in the establishment of socialism in Nepal. It may be too simplistic to hold that Suvarna supported the abolition of Ranaarchy in Nepal because of his personal grievances against the Rana rulers. That he was genuinely interested in the socio-economic development of the country is proved by the fact that immediately after the dismissal of the Koirala Ministry he said at Patna that the action of the King had pushed Nepal ten years back in the sphere of socio-economic and political development.

Suvarna's own sacrifice for the maintenance of the morale of the Party in exile is by all means praiseworthy. He

was the largest contributor to the finance of the Party in exile till 1968 when he returned to Kathmandu.

Ganeshman Singh, a leader from the Kathmandu valley has been noted for his anti-monarchical postures and has always believed that the Monarch has never done any good to the country. At a personal interview to the present author he once remarked that all the Kings have been alike and that had King Tribhuvan been alive for a longer time, he would have dealt with the Nepali Congress more ruthlessly.

Besides, the Party has always been laying stress on industrialization in the country.

Thus on the basis of its leadership and its political ideology, it cannot be denied that the Party has been as great a social force as it has been a political force.

CONSTRAINTS OF BEING IN EXILE

Because of its being in exile for such a long time the Party has been circumscribed by various constraints. The Party seems to be suffering from some sort of orthodoxy. Because of being in India it might have been feeling that political institutions of the Indian type should also flourish in Nepal. And it was because of this orthodoxy that it could not participate in the existing system. Now even if the Party decides to participate, it would appear to be too late. The "Go to Village

National Campaign" has been armed with immense powers in selecting and even nominating candidates at the various tiers of the Panchayat system. It may not be too exaggerated to say that this might have been done to check the infiltration of the Nepali Congress elements in the existing system.

Because of its failure to participate in the current political process, and its not being in forefront, its political fortune has always suffered. Besides, its being in exile has resulted in its alienation from the public. And it is because of these factors that the Party has not been effective in confrontation with the ruling elite in Nepal.

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VI

PROSPECTS

The rehabilitation of the Nepali Congress in the present political order has so far remained a distant dream. So has a rapprochement between the authorities of the current regime and the Party in exile, particularly in consequence of the recent arrest of Koirala and Ganeshman Singh. The present chapter purports to deal with the prospects of the Party as a whole in the context of its role in the past and the qualitative change in the Indian political situation after the sixth General Election.

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Any account of the role and activities of the Nepali Congress from December 1960 would need an examination of its leadership structure. As has already been mentioned, at the time of its formation in April 1950 its leadership was pluralistic. By the word "pluralistic" here the present author means a leadership representing almost all sections of the Party. While among its leaders Matrika Prasad Koirala was considered to be a conservative, his step-brother B.P. Koirala was a known socialist. The third Suvarna Shamsher, equally famous among the Party's leaders was an aristocrat by temperament and maintained a distance between himself and Party workers. S.P. Upadhyaya, was a Brahmin of Kathmandu and most of his followers were drawn from the lower

middle class intelligentsia. There was, again, Ganeshman Singh, a Newar, a community which dominated the Kathmandu valley. Relatively less educated, he had made a name for himself with his association with the Praja Parishad and was known for his extremism. The most sober of the Party leaders was Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, a constitutionalist who believed in Gandhism and was supposed to be pro-Indian.

What was more, with the exception of Singh, the above mentioned leaders, the two Koirala brothers and Upadhyaya had also participated in India's freedom struggle and suffered imprisonment during the British rule in India. As a result, these leaders had several topmost Indian leaders as their personal friends. It may not be out of place here to mention that none of these leaders belonged to the proletariat-bourgeois democrats.

Even after the exit of M.P. Koirala from the Party in 1952, the Party continued to maintain its pluralistic leadership. The "Big Four" in the Party, B.P. Koirala, S.P. Upadhyaya, Suvarna Shamsheer and Ganeshman Singh, were complementary to each other even though they represented various sectors of society. It was this aspect of its leadership which made the Party cohesive. They held the Party in unison and cohesion from 1952 till the dismissal of the Koirala Ministry in December 1960.

Even after it went in exile consequent upon the dismissal of its Government and arrest of its numerous leaders in December 1960, the Party by and large maintained its pluralistic character

in terms of its leadership. Although because of his political and social status, Suvarna Shamsher, who had also by that time become markedly moderate, was the undisputed leader of the Party, others in the limelight countered any impression of the Party being unitary organization. Among the General Secretaries of the Party in exile at that time were P.N. Chaudhary, Education Minister in the Koirala Ministry, and Bhadrakali Mishra formerly of the Praja Parishad, who had tried his best to organize a viable opposition to the Nepali Congress when the Party was in power. Both of them came from the Terai. Also prominent in the Party in exile was Bharat Shamsher Rana, who had made an attempt on the life of Koirala when the latter was Home Minister in the Rana -Nepali Congress Coalition Government. Bharat Shamsher Rana also believed that violent means was the only alternative left for the Party for re-establishing parliamentary democracy in the country. Thus the leadership structure of the Party could be said to be pluralistic until it offered its "loyal" co-operation to the King.

After the release of Koirala in October 1968, the leadership of the Party underwent a remarkable change. While Koirala and his supporters subsequently opted to live in exile in India with the stated objective of reviving parliamentary democracy in the country, claiming to be the real vanguard of the Party, Suvarna Shamsher and his supporters preferred to return to Nepal after November 1968 and the faction led by

Surya Prasad Upadhyaya was already in Nepal. It was this tripartite grouping in the rank and file of the membership that changed the Party's leadership structure. Those who supported and followed Koirala were few in number as compared to the Congressmen in exile before 1968, but their dedication to Koirala and their adherence to his principles did not flag. It was his revolutionary zeal and charismatic qualities that guided the Party in exile. In addition, he had the unequivocal support of Ganeshman Singh, noted for his fire-brandish temperament.

At the present stage what the Party basically needs is unity among the "Big Four" without which its goal is less likely to be achieved. The failure of the different lines adopted by them has once again opened up the prospects of their unity. The prominence and sympathies that Koirala has earned after his recent arrest and the chances of a dialogue between him and the King should make the leaders of other factions realize the importance of Koirala. This should also pave the way for a compromise between the three factions.

CHANGE IN TACTICS

The Party's fortunes were equally worsted by too frequent changes in its tactics. Its main objective has always been the establishment of parliamentary democracy under

constitutional monarchy. But the means it adopted in this direction has notably changed so much so that it went back on its word in 1958 to accept a Constitution to be given by the King and not drafted by a duly elected Constituent Assembly as promised by King Tribhuvan. Otherwise, the Party, by and large, remained firmly committed to its ideals and was not swayed by opportunism as is the case of other parties.

The Party could not taste political power between August 1952 and May 1958. It was in May 1958 that Suvarna Shamsheer was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers which was to be charged with conducting the first ever elections in 1959. In the meanwhile, the governments of non-significant political parties, that could be said to be adept in the art of political expediency, were formed and dismissed. Had the Nepali Congress with its mass base and progressive image, been able to occupy the seat of power, it might have had an advantage over these parties in the long run.

While it was in power during 1959-60, it tried its best to implement the programmes promised in its election manifesto. But after the dismissal of its Government in 1960 its strategies to achieve its basic objective underwent frequent drastic changes. Had the Party tried to infiltrate in the existing system immediately after its withdrawal of armed struggle in 1962 or after its offer of loyal support even at the cost of accusation of political opportunism, the chances of its

rehabilitation as well as its effecting significant changes in the existing system would have been brightest.

In order to achieve its objective, the Party has to reframe its strategies in the changed political circumstances and care is to be taken to make them practicable.

THE PARTY AS AN IRRITANT IN THE INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS

The future and fortunes of a party in exile are governed by relations between the country where the party enjoys hospitality and where it wishes to make political changes. The strategies and tactics directed from an alien soil are more of a constraining factor in the achievement of its goal. The activities of a party in exile have the potential of irritating bilateral relations between two concerned governments.

The Nepali Congress is no exception to this general rule and it has always been a victim of the improvement of relations between India and Nepal.

Immediately after the dismissal of the Koirala Ministry and the arrival of a large number of workers of the Party in India the relations between two countries deteriorated. When the Party in exile began its raids in the Terai region, the Nepali government leaders started launching their tirade against the Government of India. They suspected India's hand in every disturbance that occurred in Nepal.

This was the reason that the Government of India reportedly advised the exiled leaders of the Nepali Congress to suspend armed struggle in November 1962 and subsequently it was called off in December the same year. In spite of this Home Minister Vishwa Bandhu Thapa blamed India in unequivocal terms on 30 September 1962 for its involvement in the border raids by the rebels (the Nepali Congress in exile).¹ Likewise, on 23 January 1962, the Nepali Foreign Minister, Tulsi Giri blamed India and "Indian inaction" for the assassination attempt on King Mahendra at Janakpur.²

However the relations between the two countries slightly improved after the Nepali Congress called off its agitational activities. The Nepali government leaders appeared to be quick enough to reciprocate as also to suggest ways for still more improvements in their relations. Commenting on the withdrawal of the armed raids by the supporters of the Party in exile, Home Minister Thapa said at a Press Conference at Kathmandu that if the rebels received no encouragement in India, Nepal would remain a friend of India at all times.³

When after Nehru's death, the necessity of strengthening ties with Nepal was felt more earnestly, Swaran Singh, India's

1 Times of India (New Delhi), 1 October 1962.

2 The Statesman (Calcutta), 24 January 1962.

3 Ibid., 16 January 1963.

External Affairs Minister, went to Nepal on a friendship mission in August 1964. During his visit to Kathmandu he assured Nepalese correspondents that within the permissible limits of Indian law and the Constitution, Indian Government would discourage hostile activities by the Nepali residents in India against the set-up in the kingdom. He added he was not aware of any such activities and at no time India did encourage or would ever encourage them.⁴

In his first ever interview with a foreign correspondent in Kathmandu, King Birendra held the view that the now banned Nepali Congress, whose leader, former Prime Minister B.P. Koirala had been threatening armed insurrection was not a force that could harm Nepal unless it received backing from outside. When asked if he had reason to believe that the Indian government was involved, he opined this was not the case and asserted, "there is now much more understanding between Nepal and India, and a lot of problems have been solved".⁵

So long as the two Governments try to improve their relations at Governmental level only and exclusively, the Nepali Congress in exile will always be circumscribed. If, however, the new emphasis on peoples' friendship⁶ enunciated by the new

4 Hindustan Times, 26 August 1964.

5 The Times (London), 4 March 1974.

6 The Statesman, (New Delhi), 8 April 1977.

External Affairs Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is any guide, the Party should become less and less of an irritant so far as the relations between the two countries are concerned. For the elite in India, aware of the political developments in Nepal, is in favour of progressive democratization of the Nepali political system and sympathetic to B.P. Koirala who has described India as his "second home".

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

There is no denying the fact that to a very great extent the prospects of the Nepali Congress in exile depend on the international situation as a whole rather than on Indo-Nepalese relations alone. China's role and interest-overt or covert- in this part of the world would be another determinant. India could exercise its predominant role during the Rana regime in 1951, mainly because China's new regime was too involved in its own domestic affairs to pay attention to political developments in this region. However, the situation changed considerably in 1960. King Mahendra was shrewd enough to utilize such a situation. With the support of China, he could risk offending India by his anti-Indian stance. A statement of Chen-yi, the then Chinese Foreign Minister, in favour of King Mahendra, was enough to act as a deterrent on the Nepali Congress when its armed activities had threatened the royal regime.

However, because of the current power struggle inside China, it may not be expected to take a very active interest in the happenings of Nepal. As a result of it, the Nepali Congress, if united completely, might expect better prospects for its rehabilitation in terms of the international situation. The improving relations between India and China might also impel China to remain neutral vis à vis Nepal. If, however, China continues to take the same active interest it has been taking so far, the international situation cannot be said to be favourable for the political rehabilitation of the Nepali Congress. This probability becomes still dimmer in the context of international politics, when one finds Bangladesh and Pakistan in no way very enthusiastic about the process of democratisation in the South Asian region.

ATTITUDE OF THE NEPALI ELITE

The attitude of the Nepali elite also seems to be proving a great impediment to the political rehabilitation of the Party in exile. Ever since the first Panchayat elections in Nepal, the authorities have been successful in creating a class of political elite which has worked as a first line of defence of the current regime. With the passage of time the membership of this class has increased. This class believes that loyalty to the Crown is the best avenue to political spoils.

An observer has commented on this class of politicians in the following words:

It would not be far wrong to infer that the new political generation, which showed itself to be extremely gullible by conforming readily to dogma and absolutism, became qualitatively and quantitatively speaking, a most reliable tool in the hands of the King in his efforts to build his own personal rule. Indeed, the King used it as the first line of defence for the system maintenance and for the perpetuation of his own supreme leadership in the administration of the country...⁷

The leaders of this class, by means of queer manipulation, are never allowed to have a mass base or a following of their own. As a consequence, their dependence on the Crown increases and they tend to have vested interests in the failure of any dialogue between the King and the Nepali Congress.

In a developing country like Nepal, the problem of political legitimacy also hampers the prospects of the Nepali Congress to the advantage of the King. Even a man of the stature of Cromwell could not acquire the legitimacy needed after the murder of Charles I. Because of the continuance of Monarchy in Nepal for centuries and because of the association of many mythological stories about the Kings, it was little

7 L. S. Baral, "The First Panchayat Elections in Nepal, 1962-1963 : The Emergence of A New Political Generation", International Studies, (New Delhi), vol. 12, no. 3, July 1973, p. 477.

difficult for Mahendra to acquire the legitimacy of leadership of the country. With little trouble the King succeeded in establishing what came to be known as his active, dynamic and supreme leadership. The Crown came to be identified with the country. As a consequence, democratic norms were shattered and an authoritarian system came to be established, strengthening the Royal Palace to the maximum. In such a situation a democratic temperament could not be expected to be generated. Whereas the Nepali Congress has so far been trying for a system which has been tasted and tried in the West and the East for centuries, the new elite in Nepal is rather allured by the short-cut to power. This has helped them concentrate great wealth in their hands.

As a result, even if the King is inclined to a compromise with the Nepali Congress, the new class of politicians would try its best to hamper any such compromise.

THE PARTY AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Whatever opportunity the Party had for infiltration into the partyless Panchayat system to wreck it from within, has been lost once and for all since the recent constitutional amendments which can at best be described as constitutional changes. The doors have been shut for any infiltration in view of the overriding powers in the hands of the King and

in the "Go to Village National Campaign" Central Committee. The latter is like a party in the partyless polity and has been loaded with immense power even in the nomination of candidates for elections to various tiers of the Panchayat system.⁸ This has resulted in the complete prevention of the continuation of the line adopted by S.P. Upadhyaya and his followers. Besides, it would not be exaggerated to say that maturity and sobriety is lacking in Nepali politics today because those enjoying the fruits of political power today did not have to struggle much for the same. But when oppression and suppression reach their height, all such constitutional safety meant for a few becomes almost futile.

8 L.R. Baral, "Party -like Institutions in 'partyless' Politics: The G.V.N.C. In Nepal", Asian Survey(California) vol. 16, no. 7, July 1976, pp. 672-681.

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

It will be very difficult to conclude categorically about the political developments inside Nepal, much less about the future of the Nepali Congress. Koirala continues to languish in prison ever since 30 December 1976. Though he was released on 26 April 1977 under the Public Security Act, he was rearrested on other charges within minutes. It may be recalled here that the Nepali government has authorized a one-man tribunal of the Janakpur Court, Additional Justice, Gobinda Bahadur Shrestha, to dispose of eight cases under the State Offences Act against Koirala.¹

At the outset it appeared that there was no future for Koirala and his supporters. But the recent polls in India which saw the Congress going out of power and the Janata Party stepping into its shoes, seems to have turned the table. The withdrawal of the internal emergency in India which was the natural corollary to the Janata Party's victory has also stood the Nepali Congress in good stead. A cross section of the Indian society has appealed to the King to release Koirala and his colleagues. Jayaprakash Narayan, who could be said to be responsible for re-establishing democracy in India, in a statement

1 The Statesman (New Delhi), 6 February 1977.

issued on 11 April 1977 described Koirala as one who "symbolizes today the democratic forces in his country"² and requested the King to release him immediately. Though this statement of Narayan came in for severe criticism in official circles in Kathmandu, there are indications that much significance was attached to his statement. Only few days after Narayan's statement, the Janata President, Chandra Shekhar, paid a visit to Nepal and had long discussions with the King. It is not known who took the initiative regarding his visit, but there are rumours that it was at the initiative of the Nepali government. The treatment that was meted out to Chandra Shekhar is also indicative of the somewhat changed attitude of the authorities.

Though government circles in Kathmandu were deriving solance from the fact that India's External Affairs Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has regarded Koirala's arrest as an internal matter of Nepal, those circles conveniently overlooked the fact that in the same statement Vajpayee had reflected the awareness of the anxiety of the people of India over the continued detention of Koirala. Yet another member of the Desai Cabinet has reportedly gone to the extent of saying that he would not hesitate to go to Kathmandu to demonstrate for Koirala's release.⁴

2 Ibid., 12 April 1977.

3 Times of India (New Delhi), 11 May 1977.

4 Isvar Baral, "Bishweswar Prasad Koirala Ki Kahani", Dinaman (New Delhi), 22-28 May 1977, p. 28.

These incidents, to mention only a few of them, are enough to indicate the restiveness of the Indian public for the release of Koirala and democratization in Nepal. It is also alleged that some Nepalis who recently met the Janata President, Chandra Shekhar, in New Delhi had tried to convince the latter that Koirala was not popular with the Nepali masses. In reply, it is alleged, Chandra Shekhar said an election was the only indicator to judge popularity or unpopularity of a political leader and the Government of Nepal could see it only after holding a free and fair election. The parley is said to have ended there.

The partyless Panchayat democracy which so far has allowed the King to concentrate all powers in his hands is having its own problems. The immense power given to the 'Back to Village National Campaign' Central Committee seems to have come to boomerang the very system to a certain extent. Recently many, including the former Prime Minister, Kirti Nidhi Bista, were elected unopposed to the National Panchayat by "Consensus". That the resentment against such elections is very great can be substantiated by the fact that even the King has criticized it and has recently replaced the Chairman of the aforesaid Committee.

It may not be exaggerated to say that all these developments tend to brighten the prospects of the Nepali Congress. If Koirala is not being released immediately, it may

be because of the fact that a place of honour for him and his Party has to be conceded immediately.

The main question is of the popularity of the Nepali Congress inside the country. Despite numerous drawbacks, the Party has continued to remain a force to be reckoned with. Though its leadership is split today, its influence on the Nepali elite is still electrifying. On the contrary, the leadership of any other political party has ceased to make any impact on the Nepali political elite. K.I. Singh, once noted for his belief in democracy and patriotism, cannot be credited for any significant political activities since 1963. He has been shifting his loyalty to and from the Panchayat system and has in the process lost his identity. Another leader, T.P. Acharya, has attracted notice in the political circles with his occasional statements. His statements have been more pronounced because of his anti-Indian or anti-Koirala contents. As for other erstwhile political leaders, almost all of them have withdrawn themselves from political activities or joined the establishment and in so doing they have lost whatever political worth they had in the past.

Of all leaders in Nepal, Koirala has suffered the most. Of all parties the Nepali Congress has been the worst hit. And yet it has never compromised on basic principles. Koirala has a radical image, a great asset for the present day leadership.

He has achieved an international recognition because of his association with the Socialist International. His mission seems to be well on the way to success.

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