

# INDIA MEETS CHINA IN NEPAL

by  
GIRILAL JAIN



ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE  
BOMBAY - CALCUTTA - NEW DELHI - MADRAS  
LONDON - NEW YORK

© GIRILAL JAIN

1959

954.26

J 199 I

1499

PRINTED IN INDIA

BY PYARELAL SAH AT THE TIMES OF INDIA PRESS,  
BOMBAY, AND PUBLISHED BY P. S. JAYASINGHE,  
ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY I.

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
I END OF RANA RULE	7
II EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY	27
III THE CRISIS DEEPENS	45
IV FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS	66
V INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS	86
VI CONSEQUENCES OF TIBET	102
VII NEPALESE VERSION OF CO-EXISTENCE	119
Appendix A: NOTES ON NEPAL'S ECONOMY	141
Appendix B: TIBETO-NEPALESE TREATY OF 1792	159
Appendix C: PEACE TREATY BETWEEN TIBET AND NEPAL, 1856	160
Appendix D: TREATY BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND NEPAL, 1923	162
Appendix E: TREATY OF PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL, 1950	164
Appendix F: SINO-NEPAL TREATY OF 1956	166
Index	171

## INTRODUCTION

SITUATED ON the southern slopes of the Himalayas between Tibet in the north and India in the south, Nepal occupies a key position between the democratic Republic of India and Communist China. Even more than Bhutan and Sikkim, it is the northern gateway to the Indo-Gangetic plains. Even casual acquaintance with the geography and history of this region would suffice to indicate that India's security and stability are inextricably tied up with the security and stability of Nepal, in view of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. This awareness has largely informed India's policy towards Nepal since 1950-51 when the Chinese armies rolled into Tibet thus establishing a common frontier between democratic India and Communist China. Almost simultaneously the autocratic Rana regime in Nepal was overthrown by a combination of revolutionary elements and the late King Tribhuvan.

In view of the compulsions of geography—there is no natural frontier or barrier between India and Nepal—India has considerable stakes in Nepal and consequently considerable interest in the developments in the neighbouring Kingdom. Since there does not exist any work on the developments in Nepal since 1950-51 and their significance, I have tried to the best of my ability to fill this lacuna. I started working on this project when Mr. Tanka Prasad was the Prime Minister (January, 1956, to July, 1957,) and Nepal signed with China treaties on Tibet and economic aid. Apparently at that time Nepal was drifting away from its traditional policy. Many Indians were alarmed by this shift in Nepal's foreign policy in favour of Communist China. I was one of them. That was why I began to study the subject. Since then Mr. Tanka Prasad has ceased to be the Prime Minister. He has suffered an ignominious defeat in the first General Election when he forfeited his security



deposit. It is unlikely that he will be able to rehabilitate himself politically for some years.

With the appointment of Dr. K. I. Singh, who had come to be regarded as Nepal's Robin Hood, as Prime Minister towards the end of July, 1956, Nepal's political scene underwent a sea change. Political observers and diplomats in Kathmandu and New Delhi anxiously waited for some clue which could help them determine this mystery man's political affiliations. Before these efforts could produce results, Dr. Singh ran into difficulties with the King, which compelled him to resign from office on November 15, 1957. Like the Nepalese terrain, the political scene continued to be hazardous and I suspended the work. It is my hope that the recent elections in Nepal will produce the much needed political stability. It is in this hope that I am publishing this work. In any case the chapter which opened with the overthrow of the Rana regime is over and a new chapter has opened with the General Election. It is worth our while to review developments in this period of eight years.

Here it will not be out of place to refer briefly to the geography and history of the Kingdom to provide a background for developments since 1950. Nepal, a diagonal strip of mountains and valleys, covers an area of roughly 56,000 sq. miles. It is 500 miles long and 90 to 150 miles wide. Physically, the Kingdom can be divided into four parts—the 18-mile wide, swampy, malarious low lands, known as the Terai, along the Indian border in the south, the valleys, the hills and the snow-covered Himalayan ranges in the north. Some of the world's highest peaks like Mount Everest (29,002 feet), Kinchununga (28,146 feet) and Mount Malaku (26,790 feet) demarcate her frontiers with Tibet. The people in the high hills constitute the martial communities of Nepal. The valour of Limbus, Rais, Magars and Garungs, better known amongst Nepal's martial communities, has won them renown all over the world. Outside Nepal they are all known as Gorkhas.

Among the valleys, the Kathmandu valley, picturesque in its beauty and grandeur, is the biggest in area and also the most populous. Inhabited by nearly 8,00,000 people,

the valley possesses an equable climate. Its soil is suitable for agricultural purposes. Since early times it has been the centre of Nepalese art, culture and economic and political life. In fact the history of Nepal has, by and large, been coterminous with the history of the valley. With the completion of the first General Election in Nepal's history, the people in the hills and the Terai have for the first time an opportunity to participate in their country's political life.

The modern history of Nepal has been shaped mainly by three significant events. First, the conquest of the Kathmandu valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the sixties of the eighteenth century led to the unification of Nepal under one rule. The Shah dynasty continues to rule in Nepal. Secondly, the usurpation of power by Jang Bahadur in 1846 resulted in the hegemony of the Rana family, which lasted 104 years without a break. Even today the Ranas are a significant factor in the Kingdom's social, economic and political life. Finally, the insurrection of 1950-51 not only ended the hegemony of the Rana family but also released forces of somewhat incalculable character.

Before the rise of Prithvi Narayan Shah, Nepal was divided into several independent and warring principalities. The Kathmandu valley itself had been carved out into three states. The jurisdiction of the Shah dynasty, believed to have been founded by Drabya Shah in 1559 A.D., was limited to Gorkha district in Western Nepal. In those good old days, there was hardly a demarcation of frontiers between what are today India and Nepal. The Shah dynasty is believed to belong to the Rajput stock of Chittor (Rajasthan, India). The story goes that the ruler, Bhupati, and members of his family, had to flee to Ujjain following a siege of Chittor by Muslim rulers of North India. After the death of Bhupati, his youngest son, Bhupal, took to the hills in the north. One of Bhupal's sons, Micharwan, established his rule at Nawakot, entrance to the Kathmandu valley. Generations later the emperor at Delhi bestowed on one of his descendants, known as Kul Mandan, the title of Shah. Drabya Shah was Kul Mandan's grandson. Prithvi Narayan Shah came to the throne at Gorkha in 1742. Having tried



and failed to capture Nawakot soon after coming to the throne, he patiently bided his time and set out to conquer the three principalities of the Kathmandu valley in 1767. The process was completed by 1769. He died in 1774 to be succeeded by Pratap Singh Shah, who died in 1778. As Pratap Singh Shah's infant son, Rana Bahadur Shah, succeeded him to the throne, court intrigue began to undermine the strength of the Kingdom.

During the Regency of the Queen Mother, Rajendra Lakshmi, from 1778 to 1784, Kaski and Lamjung were added to the territory of Nepal. On her death, Bahadur Shah, Pratap Singh Shah's brother, became the Regent. He pushed the frontiers of Nepal to include Kumaon-Garhwal. It was during his tenure of office as the Regent that Nepal was involved in wars with Tibet and China. In 1791, Bahadur Shah signed a treaty of trade and commerce with British India. In 1793 a military delegation, headed by Colonel Kirkpatrick, visited Nepal. Due to Nepal's anti-British policy, the delegation had to return and the treaty of trade and commerce was abrogated.

In 1794, Rana Bahadur Shah came of age and dismissed the Regent. In a headlong defiance of tradition, the King married a Brahmin girl and declared the first male issue of that marriage as the crown prince. Probably his zeal to do away with caste distinctions was reinforced by the opposition of the Brahmins to his marriage. He was enraged to the point of smashing idols. A revolt on the part of the Brahmins and conspiracies on the part of disgruntled courtiers forced him to give up the throne and assume the guise of a mendicant. In 1804, however, he was able to stage a comeback. Among his first acts on regaining the throne was to dismiss the Prime Minister, Damodar Pandey, who had signed a treaty with the British India authorities, providing for the appointment of a British Resident in Nepal. Bhim Sen Thapa succeeded Damodar Pandey as Prime Minister. Thus opened the feud between the two families of Thapas and Pandeys which was to dominate Nepal's political scene in the subsequent period. Damodar Pandey was murdered and his family property confiscated.

Under the guidance of Bhim Sen Thapa, one of the ablest Prime Ministers in Nepal's history, she followed an expansionist policy which brought her in conflict with British India. In 1814 broke out a war between Nepal and the British. The war lasted two years. In 1816, the Treaty of Sagauli was signed, which entitled the British authorities in India to appoint a Resident in Nepal and recruit Gorkhas to the British Indian Army. Despite the murder of the King Rana Bahadur, by his illegitimate brother, Sher Bahadur, and the death of the child King Girwan Juddha Vikram Shah in 1816, Bhim Sen Thapa managed to keep the ship of the Nepalese state on an even keel. The trouble started in 1833 when on coming of age King Rajendra Vikram Shah tried to assert his authority by getting rid of Bhim Sen Thapa as the Prime Minister.

Though the King was forced to recall Thapa, this did not end the intrigues against the latter. Finally he was dismissed in 1837 and put into jail where he was driven to commit suicide two years later. Complete confusion prevailed in the Nepalese court from 1833 to 1846 as rival parties struggled for power. These events leading to the Kot massacre and the rise of Jang Bahadur as the first Rana Prime Minister have been described in detail in almost all books on Nepalese history. But the Kot massacre in which nearly 500 nobles, who constituted the ruling elite in the Kingdom perished, did not end the intrigues at the court.

The junior queen, who had helped Jang Bahadur in his rise to power, tried to have him murdered when he finally refused to meet her wishes. She had been intriguing to secure the murder of the heir-apparent, Prince Surendra, and the second prince from the senior queen to pave the way for the enthronement of her own son. Another mass massacre followed. The queen was placed under arrest and ordered to leave the country. She insisted on taking the imbecile King with her. The King and the Queen were allowed to leave together for Banaras and Prince Surendra was appointed the Regent. As the King's court at Banaras became the centre of intrigue against Jang



Bahadur, the latter threatened to depose the King if he did not return to the capital. Another plot to murder Jang Bahadur was discovered and he deposed the King and placed Prince Surendra on the throne. The deposed King sought to recapture his throne with the assistance of an ill-organised and hurriedly assembled force, which was beaten back by the loyal troops. The King himself was captured in flight and interned in Kathmandu. By now the power of Jang Bahadur had been fully consolidated. The Rana family ruled firmly in Nepal till 1950.

## CHAPTER I

### END OF RANA RULE

A NEW CHAPTER opened in the history of Nepal on November 6, 1950, when 44-year-old King Tribhuvan left his Palace to take asylum in the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. The King took this desperate step to win his own and his people's freedom from the autocratic rule of the Rana family, which had monopolised all important offices since 1846 and held the Kings and other members of the Royal family as virtual prisoners after the manner of the Shogunate in Japan. King Tribhuvan was accompanied by 14 members of the Royal family. Three-year-old Prince Jyanendra, second son of the then Crown Prince Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, now King of Nepal, was the only member of the Royal family who was not with the party. He was with the family of his maternal uncle, Gen. Hari Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana at that time.

The King's decision to leave the Palace came as a climax to the struggle between him and the Rana Prime Minister, Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana. The escape had been meticulously planned with the assistance of the Royal staff. This touched off a series of developments. On November 7, King Tribhuvan twice refused to meet the representatives of the all powerful Prime Minister. The latter retaliated by announcing the deposition of King Tribhuvan and the enthronement of Prince Jyanendra. Four days later on November 11, the Royal family was flown to the Indian capital in two Indian planes in the face of protests from the Prime Minister. As the Royal family landed at Palam airport in New Delhi, insurgents under the leadership of the Nepali Congress raided towns and villages in different parts of Nepal, looting treasuries and imprisoning such local officers as refused to join them. The Government of India, which had since 1947 consistently favoured the

liberalisation and, in stages, the democratisation of the autocratic regime, refused to recognise the child King. This firm attitude on the part of the Government of India compelled the Ranas to negotiate a settlement with the fugitive King and leaders of the insurrection.

The talks opened in New Delhi in the last week of November. After procrastinations and delays, a compromise solution acceptable to the King, the Ranas and the Nepali Congress was evolved with the help of the Government of India. King Tribhuvan returned to Kathmandu in triumph on February 15, 1951, to usher in a new Government. The leaders of the insurrection enjoyed parity with the Rana Ministers in the new Council of Ministers. For the first time since 1846, the Council of Ministers was in theory as well as in practice responsible to the King.

Four factors had combined to weaken the position, and to bring about the downfall of the Rana family. These factors were : the conflict between the hereditary institutions of monarchy and Prime Ministership ; a major split in the Rana family ; the influence of the Indian freedom movement ; and finally firm attitude on the part of the Government of India towards the Rana regime following the triumph of Communism in China and the Chinese threat to occupy Tibet. The rise of Communism in China and the possibility of its extension to Tibet posed the problem of security for both India and Nepal. It was taken for granted in New Delhi that only a liberal regime in Kathmandu enjoying the support of the people could effectively resist encroachments on Nepal's freedom and sovereignty.

## ii

Following the seizure of power and its legitimisation by King Surendra, who had come to the throne with his assistance, Jang Bahadur had made the office of Prime Minister hereditary in the family without abolishing the institution



of monarchy.<sup>1</sup> He had thus created what was clearly dual sovereignty. Conflict between the hereditary office of Prime Minister and the monarchy, which was inherent in the situation, came to a head during the reign of King Tribhuvan. The personal disposition of King Tribhuvan was an important factor. He had come to the throne when he was hardly five years of age and by the time he was 30, he was fed up with his position as a prisoner of the all-powerful Ranas. He extended his moral support to the Praja Parishad soon after it was founded clandestinely in 1935 by five young men. Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya, who was Nepal's Prime Minister from January 1956 to July 1957, was one of these young men. It was a measure of the King's desperation that he allowed his name to be linked with such an insignificant organisation. It was not till 1940 that the Parishad could formally elect its office-bearers and publish a small number of posters criticising the Rana administration. Even in 1940 its total membership was less than twenty.<sup>2</sup>

The conflict between King Tribhuvan and the then Prime Minister, Joodha Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, became sharp towards the end of 1940 when a plot to murder the latter and other Rana State dignitaries was allegedly discovered. Persons close to the Palace were said to have been involved in the plot. This coincided with the publication of posters critical of the regime. Nearly 500 persons were arrested and tried on the charge of conspiring to overthrow the regime. Thirty-six of them, including Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya, were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment ranging up to 18 years. Dharam Raj Bhakt, an athlete in the Royal Palace, and Sukhraj Shastri, a reformist religious preacher, were hanged in January

<sup>1</sup> The succession to the office of the Prime Minister was not governed by the law of primogeniture. The eldest among the surviving brothers succeeded to the office on the death or retirement of the incumbent. The second seniormost among the brothers held the office of the Commander-in-Chief. Jang Bahadur had made this arrangement to ensure that no minor ever came to occupy the high office of the Prime Minister.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is made on the basis of discussions with Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya.

1941, and two young students, Ganga Lal and Dashrath Chandra, were shot a few days later on the same charge. To strike terror in the hearts of the people, the bodies of the two students were displayed in a public square.

In spite of his anxiety to force the King to abdicate, the Prime Minister could not push ahead with his plan for fear of causing disaffection in the army. Similarly the King, knowing that he had lost the first battle, found it expedient to sign the death warrants of the condemned persons. The British Government, which had a stake in the stability of the Kingdom providing 200,000 Gorkha soldiers for service in the Indian Army, was apparently interested in the maintenance of the *status quo*. But the King did not give up efforts to end the Rana autocracy. He established contact with the leaders of the Nepali National Congress, which was formed in January 1946, in Banaras (India), with the programme of establishing democratic rule in the Kingdom. These contacts were maintained during the subsequent period and led to a new crisis between the King and the Prime Minister, Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, in September 1950, when again a plot, allegedly for the murder of the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief along with the other leading members of the Rana family, was discovered in Kathmandu.<sup>3</sup> King Tribhuvan refused to sign the death warrants of the condemned persons in the face of threats of deposition. The Prime Minister tried to "persuade" King Tribhuvan to abdicate in favour of the then Crown Prince, now King, Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. The King did not lose courage and successfully put off the showdown by feigning illness during the next two months. His repeated requests

<sup>3</sup> The Nepali Congress leaders deny that they had any intention of getting the Rana Prime Minister, Commander-in-Chief and other dignitaries of State murdered. According to Mr. B. P. Koirala, a top leader of the insurrection, the Congress wanted to organise a striking force in Kathmandu so that the King could be assisted to leave Kathmandu at the right opportunity. It was planned that he would go to Palpa in Western Nepal and proclaim the formation of his Government there. The district headquarters were to be captured by the Nepali Congress with or without the help of the district officers.



to be allowed to go to India for treatment were turned down by the Prime Minister. Finally in the midst of mounting tension the Royal family took the fateful step of leaving the palace on November 6, 1950.<sup>4</sup>

## iii

Jang Bahadur, Prime Minister from 1846 to 1874, failed like other autocrats in history, to devise a system which could help avoid feuds among his successors. One major source of trouble in the Rana family was that the members were divided into three categories. Those born in wedlock were known as "A" class Ranas and they alone were entitled to succeed to the highest offices. Children born of mothers whose marriages with their Rana husbands were legitimatised after their birth were known as "B" class Ranas. They were barely half a dozen in number. Those born out of wedlock were known as "C" class Ranas. They were not entitled to succeed to the highest offices in the land. But these disgruntled and numerous "C" class Ranas possessed considerable fortunes. The clash between the "A" class and "C" class Ranas was inherent in the arrangement. It assumed serious proportions in 1934 when several "C" class Ranas, who had been illegally placed on the roll of succession by their fathers, were put off the roll and deprived of the offices they had been holding. These aggrieved Ranas, among them Mr. Subarna Shumshere, took a leading part in organising and financing the insurrection in 1950.

But this was not all. The "A" class Ranas themselves were split into several factions. The alignments in the family changed from time to time, resulting in the forced retirement of Rana Prime Ministers. Joodha Shumshere as well as Padam Shumshere were, for instance, forced to resign by the dominating groups in the family. Inevitably, the rival groups sought the support of "C" class Ranas and other

<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the insurrection, who were then in India, came to know of the King's decision to seek shelter in the Indian Embassy only a few hours in advance on November 6, 1950.



important social elements in the country, particularly in the Kathmandu valley.

## iv

The Indian freedom movement, which reached its climax in the "Quit India" movement of 1942, inevitably influenced the Nepalese people, particularly those who had stayed for long periods in India. A number of these gravitated towards the Indian National Congress. Mr. B. P. Koirala, Mr. S. P. Upadhyaya and Dr. D. R. Regmi were among the Nepalese who courted imprisonment in the "Quit India" movement. They participated in the Indian freedom struggle apparently because they regarded, rightly or otherwise, the Rana autocracy in Nepal as an extension of the British rule in India. At the end of World War II, the ranks of the Nepalese nationals in India were swelled by ex-servicemen looking for adventure. They came handy when an armed uprising was organised.

Politically conscious Nepalis in India met in Banaras in January, 1946, to form the Nepali National Congress with the support of Indian socialists, particularly Mr. Jaya Prakash Narayan and Dr. Rammanohar Lohia. The organisation held its first conference in January, 1947 in Calcutta and elected Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya, then in jail in Kathmandu, as its President. Despite a split in the organisation following a rupture between Mr. B. P. Koirala and Dr. Regmi, the Congress was able to lead a "satyagraha" campaign in Biratnagar, the only industrial town in the Kingdom, and other towns near the Indian border. In 1948, Mr. Bikram Mahendra Shah, a member of the Royal family, and a number of "C" class Ranis joined together to form the Nepali Democratic Congress with the same programme as that of the Nepali Congress. The two organisations were merged in March, 1950, to form the Nepali Congress, which led the insurrection later the same year. Mr. M. P. Koirala, who later became the first commoner to head the Council of Ministers, was elected President at its session in Calcutta in April, 1950.

A part of the responsibility for the hardening of the Government of India's attitude towards the Rana regime must be shared by Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister from May, 1948. He and his brothers, who constituted the most powerful group in the Rana family at that time, had been mainly responsible for forcing the resignation of the comparatively liberal, even though weak-willed, Padam Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister from November, 1945 to May, 1948. Padam Shumshere had leaned on the derolled "C" class Ranas to counteract the influence of Mohun Shumshere and his brothers. He had succeeded in establishing cordial relations with the Government of India in the post-independence period and had promised to introduce reforms in Nepal. As proof of his sincerity, he invited Mr. Sri Prakasa, a Congress leader from U.P., and the late Dr. R. U. Singh, of Lucknow University, to assist in the preparation of a Constitution for Nepal. A number of draft constitutions were prepared, one of which provided for a bicameral legislature with the Upper House consisting of elected members of the Rana family and leading civilian and military officers, and the Lower House comprising members elected by an electoral college. This envisaged the establishment of local bodies all over the country.

Padam Shumshere announced on February 9, 1948, proposals for the grant of fundamental freedoms to the citizens, the establishment of "panchayats" (local bodies at the village level), a bicameral legislature, induction of Ministers from amongst the people and the formation of an independent judiciary and a Public Service Commission. Simultaneously, he announced that all political prisoners would be released. These proposals provoked considerable resistance on the part of the dominant group in the Rana family and he was forced to resign. Mohun Shumshere succeeded him as the Prime Minister.

Though the Government of India favoured the democratisation of the Rana regime, it was not prepared to do



anything which would expose it to the charge of interference in the internal affairs of the neighbouring Kingdom. The Nepali leaders won whatever support they could from the Socialist Party in opposition. Among the top Indian National Congress leaders in power, only the late Rafi Ahmad Kidwai was known to maintain contact with them. The Government of India's attitude towards the problems of Nepal underwent a major change only towards the middle of 1949 when it became clear that the Communist tide would sweep China and might engulf Tibet as well. The Indian view that only a progressive and democratic regime in Nepal could resist the rise of Communism there, was part of the foreign policy assumption that in Asia only progressive nationalist regimes could meet the challenge of Communism. The peculiarities of the Nepalese situation were subordinated to this theoretical consideration.

The triumph of the Communist Party in China coincided with the expression of the Government of India's desire to conclude new treaties with the northern border States of Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal in place of the existing treaties it had inherited from the British Government as a successor Government. Apparently such a step was considered necessary to ensure that the rulers of these strategically important States were prepared to show the same sense of loyal friendship to the new regime in India which they had earlier shown to the British. This appears to be a valid assessment in view of the fact that the new treaties were modelled after the existing ones. In this series, the Indo-Bhutanese Treaty was signed first on August 8, 1949. It provided that Bhutan would continue to be guided by the Government of India's advice in respect of foreign affairs. The treaty with Sikkim was signed only on December 5, 1950, when the Chinese forces had already occupied a part of Tibet. But since Sikkim was a protectorate of India under the existing treaty, there was perhaps not much cause for anxiety in New Delhi. Nepal as a sovereign State was in a different category and suspicion in both New Delhi and Kathmandu clouded their view of each other.



India initiated talks with the Nepalese authorities on the new treaty in the latter half of 1949 after Mr. C. P. N. Singh had presented his credentials as the Indian Ambassador. The Nepalese apparently pursued dilatory tactics. Gen. Bijay Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, the Prime Minister's son and Director-General of the Foreign Affairs Department, visited New Delhi in the last week of November, 1949, when he discussed the terms of the proposed treaty with the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, and other top officials. Drafts of the proposed treaty were then exchanged between the two Governments. But the terms could not be finalised. Discussions between New Delhi and Kathmandu continued to be prolonged as Marshal Chiang Kai-shek's armies in China melted away in the face of Communist onslaught. Finally the Nepalese Prime Minister, Mohun Shumshere, was persuaded to visit New Delhi in the third week of February, 1950, for talks on the proposed treaty and the general situation created by the triumph of Communism in China.

By a peculiar logic, which was not rooted in facts, 60-year-old Mohun Shumshere, trained in the old school of diplomacy, came to believe that India was anxious about her own security and wanted assistance from Nepal to deal with the threats from both Pakistan and China. His speech in Banaras on his way to Delhi on February 15, 1950, reflected this assessment of the situation. He said: "We shall give assistance to India whenever she needs it and come to her succour when she is in danger."<sup>5</sup> In New Delhi he was given a thirty-one gun salute which might have led him to conclude that, like the British rulers, the new regime in India depended for its security on the brave Gorkha soldiers. It is common knowledge that the talks between him and the Indian leaders, including Mr. Nehru and the late Sardar Patel, revealed a sharp divergence of outlook. It is widely held that he did not appreciate the Indian view that the regime in Nepal needed to be democratised.

<sup>5</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, February 16, 1950.

The Indian press reflected the anxiety of the Government of India on the eve of these talks. Typical of such reports was the one which *The Hindu*, Madras, carried from its New Delhi correspondent on February 15, 1950, on the eve of the Nepalese Prime Minister's visit to New Delhi. It said that "the problem of the security of this small, but strategically vital, mountain State guarding the northern entry into India" would figure in the talks between the Prime Ministers of India and Nepal. The correspondent noted that India was sympathetic to the demand for a democratic form of Government in Nepal and that this problem had become urgent due to the triumph of Communism in China, adding that India had practically written off Tibet as a bulwark of Indian defence. He mentioned the possibility of subversion in Nepal and noted that "there is general hope in informed circles that the Nepalese authorities will see the signs of the times and act with speed and statesmanship to win the affection and support of the masses."

As the talks between Mohun Shumshere and the Indian leaders were about to conclude, *The Tribune*, Ambala, said editorially on February 21, "The recent developments in China and the threat, that the Chinese irredentism constitutes for Tibet and possibly to Nepal, have only served to emphasise the urgency of taking common counsel and of evolving a common policy to meet the growing menace of Communism." The paper noted the growth of political consciousness among the Nepalese people following the attainment of freedom by India and the triumph of Communism in China and said: "Communist infiltration in Nepal can be checked if the Government and democratic forces make common cause against the Communists.... The ruling authorities cannot maintain themselves indefinitely in power by coercive tactics. Enlightened interest demands that they should meet popular wishes at least half way." The last sentence seemed to reflect New Delhi's thinking accurately as shown by later developments. The proposed Indo-Nepalese treaty also could not be finalised during Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana's visit to India.



Defining the Government of India's stand on the issue in the Indian Parliament on March 17, 1950, Mr. Nehru emphasised the close geographical and cultural ties between the two countries. He added:

"Recently the Prime Minister of Nepal visited India. We welcomed and conferred with this distinguished personage and it was clear that, in so far as certain developments in Asia were concerned, the interests of India and Nepal are identical. For instance, to mention one point, it is not possible for the Indian Government to tolerate any invasion of Nepal from anywhere, even though there is no military alliance between the two countries. Any possible invasion of Nepal...would inevitably involve the safety of India.

"Freedom interests us in the abstract as well as in the guise of a practical and, in the context of Asia, a necessary step. If it does not come, forces that will ultimately disrupt freedom itself will be created and encouraged. We have accordingly advised the Government of Nepal, in all earnestness, to bring themselves into line with democratic forces that are stirring in the world today. Not to do so is not only wrong but also unwise from the point of view of what is happening in the world today."<sup>6</sup>

General Bijay Shumshere and Mr. N. M. Dixit visited New Delhi again in April, 1950, for further talks on the terms of the proposed treaty. The Government of India returned to the subject of the liberalisation of the regime. *The New York Times* (International Edition) reported on April 18, 1950, that Mr. Nehru and other influential figures in New Delhi had "argued with the Nepalese envoys that the people of Nepal must be more closely associated with the Nepalese Government." It is doubtful if the Government of India received any satisfaction in this regard. The progress on the treaty was also slow. By the time the treaty

<sup>6</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches (1949-53)*, the Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, p. 147.



was signed on July 30, 1950, Indo-Nepalese relations had come under a cloud.

Meanwhile the Nepali Congress, with the secret support of King Tribhuvan, was going ahead with its plans to overthrow the regime. It abandoned the policy of carrying on a peaceful agitation in September, 1950, and decided to take to arms. Simultaneously the Working Committee was abolished and all powers in connection with the proposed struggle were vested in the President, Mr. M. P. Koirala. On September 29, 1950, it was announced officially in Kathmandu that a plot to murder State dignitaries had been discovered. The announcement said that Sunder Raj Chalisey and his associates, who were involved in the plot, had been entrusted with the tasks by the Nepali Congress. Chalisey had earlier been associated with Hiranya Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, father of Subarna Shumshere, one of the prominent leaders of the subsequent insurrection. Hiranya Shumshere was among the "C" class Ranas to be demoted in 1934. The official statement named a number of "C" class Ranas and some members of the Royal family as having been involved in the plot.<sup>7</sup>

## vi

The Chinese marched into Tibet on October 26, 1950. The notes exchanged between New Delhi and Peking on the Tibetan issue reflected the anxiety caused in India by the Chinese invasion. The invasion came as a surprise in view of the assurance held out by the Indian Ambassador, Mr. K. M. Panikkar, that the Chinese had no intention to use force in support of their claims of sovereignty over

<sup>7</sup> January 15, 1951, issue of *Free Nepal*, edited by Mr. Shibbanlal Saksena, Indian M.P., close associate of Dr. K. I. Singh, carried an article by Capt. D. B. Rai, which said that four sons of Gen. Rudra, who had been removed from the roll of succession in 1934, came to India as they feared arrest in Kathmandu when they were recalled there from Palpa. They participated in the insurrection. According to the official announcement, Col. Torun Shumshere, and Col. Noad Bikram were arrested in connection with the conspiracy. It said that arms had been seized from the residence of Capt. Pratap Bikram Shah.

Tibet.<sup>8</sup> In that context attention was sharply focussed in India on the question of the security of Nepal. Once again the Indian press reflected this anxiety. To quote one such comment, the New Delhi correspondent of *The Hindu*, Madras, wrote on November 5, 1950, that the advance of the Communist forces into Tibet had doubtless focussed

“attention on the internal political situation in the independent State of Nepal.... Although the question of internal freedom could not obviously find a place in the Treaty between two independent countries, the Government of India did not fail to urge on the rulers of Nepal that such reforms were long overdue. While the Nepalese Government accepted the soundness of Indian advice, no concrete step whatever has been taken to carry out that advice. The Royal family as noted earlier took asylum in the Indian Embassy the next day.”

The dramatic move on the part of King Tribhuvan and the insurrection which followed it were both an opportunity and a compulsion for the Government of India to take a firm stand on the question of democratisation of the Nepalese regime. It was announced in New Delhi on November 7, 1950, that the King had sought the assistance of the Indian Ambassador to come to India for treatment against the wishes of his Government. Implicit in the announcement was the Government of India's decision that assistance would be afforded. In Kathmandu, meanwhile, tension mounted as the Ranas surrounded the “Sheetal Niwas,” then official residence of the Indian Ambassador, and threatened to remove the King and other members of the Royal family from there forcibly. The Prime Minister demanded that the Royal family be returned to the palace.

<sup>8</sup> *The Statesman*, Delhi and Calcutta on October 29, 1950, strongly criticised the Indian Ambassador, as being “principally responsible for misleading Mr. Nehru,” on the question of Chinese invasion of Tibet. On November 9, 1950, the paper spotlighted editorially the dangers to which Nepal had been exposed following the Chinese invasion of Tibet.



The Indian Ambassador, Mr. C. P. N. Singh, firmly stood his ground. The Ranas saw the error of their ways and desisted from the attempt to remove the King through the use of force. The people demonstrated in the streets in support of King Tribhuvan. To avoid an aggravation of confusion the Government of India sent two planes to Kathmandu to bring the Royal family to India.

As the King flew into New Delhi, insurgents, who had been preparing themselves for the struggle for months, struck. They secured a notable victory with the capture of Birganj, the second biggest town of Nepal, in the opening phase of the struggle. They seized the Government treasury there. Of the amount thus seized, the Koiralas brought Rs. 35 lakhs to New Delhi on the plea of making it over to the King. The Government of India, however, impounded it. With the capture of Birganj, the rebels were able to proclaim the formation of a rival Government.

The rebel forces marched up to Amlekhganj, 28 miles north from Birganj on the road to Kathmandu, on November 13, 1950. They were forced to retreat in the face of organised resistance by Government forces. The rebels then took up position at Pawanipur, six miles north of Birganj. They had to abandon the town on November 18. Birganj itself was recaptured by the Government forces two days later on November 20. In a sense, this victory of the Government troops marked a turning point in the fortune of the rival forces and it was then clear that the Government forces would be able to defeat the rebels. But almost simultaneously in eastern Nepal the warlike Kirats, who have always enjoyed a considerable measure of autonomy, proclaimed the establishment of an independent republic over an area of 6,000 sq. miles. It was an ominous development, which threatened the unity of Nepal and underscored the need for an early agreement between the King and Nepali Congress on the one hand and the Ranas on the other.

To the west of Birganj, Butwal and Nautanwa were captured by the rebels, who, however, failed to take the main town of Bhairawa at this stage of the struggle. Dr. K. I. Singh was the local commander in this area. He



blamed his failure to capture Bhairawa on the inadequate supplies of arms and ammunition. He felt that Nepali Congress leaders had denied him arms in a bid to destroy his reputation. This contention is studiously denied by the Nepali Congress leaders. The rights and wrongs of Dr. Singh's charge not with standing, this resulted in a feud between him and his associates on the one hand and the Congress leaders on the other. This dispute has been an important ingredient of the Nepalese political scene since 1950-51.

During this period the regular troops remained loyal to the regime. There were only a limited number of cases of desertion. The Ranas on all evidence had a reasonable chance of quelling the rebellion despite the handicap imposed on them by the Government of India's decision not to allow either side to use its territory. The result was that the loyal forces could not cross from one part of Nepal into another via India. The terrain of Nepal is such that it is easier to cross from one part into another through India than otherwise. In spite of this handicap, by November 21 the rebellion had nearly collapsed. *The Hindu*, Madras, said so editorially on that date. But the collapse of the rebellion did not by itself resolve the crisis. King Tribhuvan in New Delhi continued to be recognised as the head of State by the Government of India, which had no intention to revise its stand on this issue. The rebels were also preparing to launch a second offensive. The continuance of hostile demonstrations in Kathmandu against the Ranas showed that they had lost moral authority over the people.

Reaffirming the Government of India's stand in unequivocal terms in course of a speech on November 18, 1950, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Education Minister and a top adviser on foreign policy, said :

"It is amazing that in the middle of the twentieth century, naked autocracy should reign supreme in any part of the world. It is unthinkable and intolerable. There is not one Indian, who does not sympathise with the cause of the Nepalese people."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, November 19, 1950.

Four days later on November 22, the *Press Trust of India*, India's principal news agency, reported that the Government of India had informed the British Government that it would not recognise the child King as the legitimate head of State. It said :

" New Delhi feels that the restoration of ' normal conditions ' by stamping out a limited and ill-planned insurrection cannot be taken to indicate the stability of the present regime. Disaffection on the part of the majority of the people against the admittedly autocratic and feudalistic regime has by no means disappeared."

The Government of India's attitude must have influenced the British policy.

The unwillingness of the British Government to act independently of the Government of India made it necessary for the Ranas to work out a *modus vivendi* with King Tribhuvan. They were now prepared to liberalise the regime. But they were still unwilling to countenance the return of King Tribhuvan to the throne. Kaiser Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, the Defence Minister, and Bijay Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana came to New Delhi in the last week of November for discussions with the Government of India. Meanwhile, a major fissure appeared in the ranks of the Ranas themselves in Kathmandu and nearly 100 "C" class and young "A" class Ranas demanded the liberalisation of the regime and the return of King Tribhuvan to the throne. Sir Esler Denig, British Ambassador-at-large in the Far East, conferred with the Nepalese dignitaries on December 3, 1950, in New Delhi on the eve of his departure for Kathmandu to study the situation on the spot. The British Deputy High Commissioner in India, Mr. Frank Roberts, accompanied him to Kathmandu. There they were greeted by a hostile crowd at the airport. It is a fair presumption that they informed the Nepalese authorities of the British Government's position in the changed context.

Reporting on the existing situation in Parliament on December 6, 1950, Mr. Nehru made it clear that India would



continue to recognise King Tribhuvan as the head of State in Nepal and that she could not brook "any foreign interference in Nepal." He added: "Even a child knows that one cannot go to Nepal without passing through India. Therefore, no country can have as intimate a relation with Nepal as ours. We would like every country to appreciate the intimate geographical and cultural relationship that exists between India and Nepal."<sup>10</sup> The British Government could not possibly miss the reference. The Indian position is believed to have been reinforced by the unexpected support it received from Washington on this controversial issue.

In the same statement, which is cited above, Mr. Nehru further elucidated the Government of India's policy. He said:

"Three years ago we assured Nepal of our desire that she should be a strong, independent and progressive country . . . . We pointed out in as friendly a way as possible that the world was changing rapidly and that if Nepal did not make an effort to keep pace with it, circumstances were bound to force her to do so. It was difficult for us to make it clear because we did not wish to interfere with Nepal in any way. . . . At the same time we saw that, unless some steps were taken in the internal sphere, difficulties might arise. Our advice, given in all friendship, did not, however, produce any result."<sup>11</sup>

The result was the dramatic developments which had taken place during the last fortnight, he added. The Indian Prime Minister emphasised that the Himalayas lying on the northern border of Nepal had provided both India and Nepal with a magnificent frontier from time immemorial.

"India could not allow that barrier to be penetrated. . . . India had, therefore, a stake in assuring that nothing went wrong in Nepal and that the Himalayan barrier

<sup>10</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches (1949-53)*, p. 175.

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



was not crossed or weakened, because that would be a risk to India's as well as to Nepal's security. Despite this stake in the stability of Nepal, the Indian leaders had functioned in a patient way, advising in a friendly way and pointing out the difficulties inherent in the situation in a spirit of co-operation,"<sup>12</sup> [he said, adding], "we are convinced that a return to the old order will not bring peace and stability to Nepal. . . . We have tried to find a way, a middle way, if you like, which will ensure the progress of Nepal and the introduction of, or some advance in the way of, democracy in Nepal. We have searched for a way which would, at the same time, avoid the total uprooting of the ancient order."<sup>13</sup>

The Nepalese envoys, Kaiser Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana and Bijay Shumshere, called on King Tribhuvan on December 8, 1950. No agreement could be evolved because the Ranas were not prepared to accept the return of King Tribhuvan. Their talks with the Government of India also concluded on December 9, 1950. India had submitted proposals to them for resolving the crisis, which envisaged the setting up of a Constituent Assembly as early as possible to draw up a constitution for the Kingdom; the formation of an interim Cabinet consisting of popular representatives and members of the Rana family with one of them as the Prime Minister and the return of King Tribhuvan as the head of State. ✓

As the Ranas debated whether they should accept or reject these proposals, the insurgents were able to launch the second offensive. Jhapa, Bhojpur, Chainpur, Bingla and Khotang fell to them between December 15 and December 18. They were able to capture Biratnagar, the sole industrial town in Nepal, Khailali and Kanchanpur. These developments and the advance of the Chinese Army in Tibet in the face of Indian protests created a new sense of emergency in New Delhi. Mr. Nehru returned to the subject in an address to Parliament on December 21, 1950.

<sup>12</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches (1949-53)*, p. 176.

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

He said that though the Government of India had no wish to hustle the Nepalese Government, it could not ignore the fact that the world situation was growing darker. He added: "It is our firm conviction that the longer political reforms and a satisfactory solution are delayed, the greater the danger to Nepal's security and internal stability." India, he emphasised again, would continue to recognise King Tribhuvan as the head of State in Nepal because the "discontinuance of the recognition would produce many complications and may hinder a peaceful settlement." He expressed the view that "any other arrangement such as the replacement of the constitutional head of the Kingdom by a council of regency, appointed by the Prime Minister to act in the name of the child king, would make the introduction and smooth working of progressive constitutional changes difficult."<sup>14</sup> Clearly, such a proposal had been mooted by the Ranas in an effort to avoid King Tribhuvan's return to the throne.

King Tribhuvan endorsed the Indian proposals for settlement in a statement on December 22, 1950. Two days later the Prime Minister of Nepal, Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, indicated his willingness to form a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise and to include popular representatives in his Cabinet. He was still unwilling to accept King Tribhuvan back on the throne. Gen. Bijay Shumshere and Mr. N. N. Dixit came to New Delhi for fresh talks with the Government of India to find out whether the latter could recommend the Nepalese Prime Minister's proposals as a basis of settlement between the Ranas and the insurgent leaders. The talks concluded on January 1, 1951, and the Government of India remained adamant on the question of King Tribhuvan's future. A week later on January 7, 1951, the Nepalese Government accepted India's suggestions *in toto*.

The new proposals provided for elections by 1952, the formation of an interim Cabinet of 14 Ministers on the basis of parity between the Ranas and popular representatives,

<sup>14</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, January 22, 1950.



return of King Tribhuvan to the throne and amnesty for insurgents if they laid down arms. An announcement by the Nepalese Government on January 8, 1951, made it clear that it had been influenced by the refusal of all countries with which it had maintained diplomatic relations to recognise the child King. The announcement also said that the absence of King Tribhuvan had created suspense and unrest which had been exploited by "mischief makers." It added that the Ranas had deferred to the friendly suggestions of the Indian Government.

King Tribhuvan welcomed the statement made by the Prime Minister of Nepal on January 10, 1951, and Mr. Nehru appealed to the insurgents to lay down arms. The President of the Nepali Congress, Mr. M. P. Koirala, endorsed Mr. Nehru's appeal. The Congress leaders met in Patna towards the end of January, 1951, and agreed to accept the compromise solution. But Dr. K. I. Singh and his supporters refused to lay down arms on the plea that the compromise amounted to a betrayal of the revolution. Dr. Singh had nearly 300 armed men under his command at that time. It is a tribute to his leadership that they stood by him in his defiance of both authority and party leadership. Tripartite talks between the King, the Ranas and the Nepali Congress opened in New Delhi in the first week of February, 1951. The talks concluded on February 12 when an agreement was arrived at between them on the composition of the new Ministry. The number of Ministers was reduced to 10 from 14 as envisaged earlier. The Royal family followed by the leaders of the Nepali Congress returned to Kathmandu in triumph on February 15, 1951. The new Ministry was sworn in on February 18 with Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana as the Prime Minister and Mr. B. P. Koirala as the Home Minister. Thus ended the Rana family's monopoly of power. With it ended the isolation of Nepal from the rest of the world. In future it was bound to be influenced by movements sweeping the rest of Asia. The suddenness and the sharpness of the change unavoidably raised difficult problems which Nepal is still struggling to overcome.



## CHAPTER II

### EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY

THE FORMATION OF the coalition Government was an ideal arrangement, which sought to broaden the base of the regime without causing a sudden and unsettling break in continuity and tradition. It was clearly in Nepal's interest that both the administrative experience of the Ranas and the youthful energy and idealism of the Congress leaders be utilised. But the experiment was doomed to failure from the very start, for neither of the two groups in the Government genuinely accepted the compromise solution. While the Ranas were not reconciled to the loss of absolute power, the Congress leaders thought of delivering another fatal blow at the old order. King Tribhuvan failed to bridge the gap between the rival factions in the Cabinet, presumably because he had been too deeply involved in the insurrection to be able to take a detached view of the situation. This division inside the Cabinet aggravated the complications of a basically complex situation. Even a homogeneous Government would have found it difficult to make the transition to democracy a smooth affair in the given conditions of Nepal.

The basic fact of the situation was that Nepal had been pushed into an experiment for which it was ill-prepared. The old set-up had been disrupted in Nepal before the creation of a countrywide social, economic and political base, which could have supported democratic institutions. To seek to introduce the democratic form of Government in a country, which hardly possessed an administrative machinery and means of communications and transport and where national consciousness as distinct from tribal loyalties had yet to develop, was like placing the cart before the horse. To argue that in view of the obduracy of the rulers, there was no other way out is merely to beg the question.

In one sense, the march of history in Nepal was stalled in 1769 when Prithvi Narayan Shah laid the foundation for the emergence of a united Nepal. The Gorkhas sought to extend their control to areas which are now part of India. But they were frustrated by the rising power of the British. After the Treaty of Sagauli between the British and the Gorkhas in 1816, only what can be called surface changes took place in Kathmandu, the most important of them being the usurpation of total power by Jang Bahadur in 1846. This change in the personnel of the ruling group at the top did not make much difference to the social set-up in the country. Despite the subsequent friendly relations between the British Government in India and the Ranas, the Kingdom remained closed to all outside contact. Pilgrims and traders from India and Tibet, who alone visited Nepal in significant numbers, could not be the agents of spreading the philosophy of liberalism. The Gorkha soldiers in the Indian army were insulated against the impact of liberal ideas. The British Government was content to leave Nepal alone as long it could depend on the authorities there to facilitate the recruitment of Gorkha troops.

The British gave the highest priority to stability in the border Kingdom. In the result, there was no significant progress in the social, economic, cultural and political fields. The Kingdom stagnated in the feudal and even pre-feudal stages of development.

But as indicated earlier, Nepal could not be impervious to outside influences. The Terai people, who have social and cultural ties with the people across the border in India, slowly came to be influenced by the freedom movement in India. Nepalese students, who came out to study in Indian colleges and universities, imbibed new ideas. A limited number of schools and one college were opened in the country.<sup>1</sup> It was Indian educated men, who organised the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. D. R. Regmi in his *Whither Nepal*, published in Kathmandu in 1952, said that the number of high schools under the Ranas was 10 and most of them were located in Kathmandu valley. According to him, there was no reading room, library or news agency in Nepal under the Ranas. The people had not heard of public meetings or lectures.



Indian-biased movement for freedom. But this would indicate that the social base of the movement was rather small. By and large the leadership of the freedom struggle had to come from Kathmandu valley where Nepal's intelligentsia was concentrated. This concentration of the intelligentsia in the Kathmandu valley bode ill for the future of democracy particularly because the intelligentsia came by and large from one community, which had all along controlled the Kingdom's commercial life as well.

The concentration of political and economic power in a limited area and community emphasised the isolation of the capital from the rest of the country. In Nepal, geography has been an important factor in preventing the emergence of nationalism. Different parts of the country have remained cut off from one another for want of means of transport and communications. The result has been that different tribes and communities, which inhabit the different parts of the mountainous Kingdom, have lived in isolation from one another. In that context the Kathmandu valley had come to be synonymous with Nepal. Even the Ranas, who were themselves outsiders and were not acceptable as rulers to the majority community of Niwars in the valley on that account, had paid little attention to the welfare of the people in other areas.

Since the Ranas did not allow any movement to develop in the country in the early thirties—a number of persons had been sentenced to terms ranging up to three years for the crime of attempting to open a library—there was no party in the immediate post-insurrection period which could claim to possess an organised following throughout the Kingdom. A number of mushroom organisations grew in Kathmandu each claiming to be the most popular party in the land. It was easy for the powers that be to pitch one

Accused could not be represented by lawyers in the courts and Judiciary was not independent of the Executive. The caste system was strictly enforced by law. Illicit sex relations among blood relations were punishable by life imprisonment. *Nepal Today*, by "A Wayfarer", New Delhi, placed the number of graduates in Nepal in 1950 at 300. The Government spent just Rs. 6,50,000 on education annually.

against the other as long as one of them did not secure a mandate from the electorate. Inevitably politicians depended on intrigue and manoeuvre to rise to power.

Logically, what took place in Nepal was not a revolution but a restoration. The King was the leader of the struggle against the Ranas. The rebel forces had fought in his name. The Government of India had supported him. The Nepali Congress and its leaders were thus auxiliary forces of the King. He was in a position to discard the organisation and its leaders as soon as he had won access to the traditional instruments of power in the form of the army, the police and the administrative machinery. That is precisely what happened soon after the Ranas had been completely excluded from power and there was no chance of their being able to restore *status quo ante bellum*.

Nepal was not prepared to venture into the democratic experiment from still another point of view. There was no class of industrial entrepreneurs in the Kingdom. The few textile and jute mills in Biratnagar, the only industrial town in Nepal, had been financed largely by Indian businessmen. The Ranas had a share in the profits, but that did not make them industrial entrepreneurs.

Just as the division in the Cabinet was inherent in the situation, it was equally inevitable that a struggle for power would break out among the leaders of the Nepali Congress. In this struggle, the group that was prepared to come to terms with influential groups in the capital was bound to win. King Tribhuvan's personal disposition notwithstanding, as soon as he became the biggest source of power, the men in the Palace and others, who enjoyed his confidence, became the arbiters of the fate of political leaders. The idealists in the Congress, who unrealistically thought that they could reproduce the Indian experience in the post-freedom era in Nepal, lost in the struggle for power.

ii

The coalition Government ran into heavy weather on the very first day on February 18, 1951. The two wings headed



respectively by the Prime Minister, Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, and the Home Minister, Mr. B. P. Koirala, clashed at the swearing-in ceremony over the question of precedence in the seating arrangements. They were also divided on the question of the use of the King's seal on official documents in future, the Rana Ministers holding that the Prime Minister's seal should continue to be used. The dispute was clearly rooted in deep antipathies. Meanwhile, Dr. K. I. Singh and his 300 men in Western Nepal, who had refused to lay down arms, let loose a reign of terror in the area. Surprisingly enough, the Cabinet was divided even on the question of restoring law and order in that part of the country. A section of the Ranas established the Gorkha Dal in an effort to regain powers. Bharat Shumshere, grandson of the Defence Minister in the coalition Government, Babar Shumshere, was the leader of the Dal. He claimed that the Dal had large support in the country and on that basis demanded representation for it in the Cabinet.<sup>2</sup>

The law and order situation in Western Nepal deteriorated dangerously.<sup>3</sup> The Government of India agreed at the insistence of the Nepalese authorities to undertake with them a joint police action against Dr. K. I. Singh and his men. Dr. Singh was arrested with 100 of his armed followers.<sup>4</sup> He was lodged in Bhairawa jail from where he was able to escape to be arrested again and interned in the Singha Durbar in Kathmandu. It was from there that he planned the *coup* of January 21, 1952.<sup>5</sup> In Kathmandu on April 9, 1951, the Home Minister, Mr. B. P. Koirala, accused the Gorkha Dal of fomenting anarchy in the country. He ordered the arrest of its President, Mr. Randhir Subba, and the General Secretary, Bharat Shumshere, on April 12, 1951. Their followers, including army officers, raided the

<sup>2</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, May 3, 1951.

<sup>3</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, reported on February 21, 1951 that the K. I. Singh's gang had killed 64 men on February 11. The paper's account of his followers numbering 1,000 appears to this writer to be exaggerated.

<sup>4</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, February 22, 1951.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter III for a detailed account.

jail, secured their release and marched to the residence of Mr. Koirala. The Home Minister's bodyguard opened fire on the crowd killing two persons and injuring many others. The Dal was banned on April 15, 1951, following heated debates in the Cabinet.

In the midst of these raging controversies, the Rana wing in the Cabinet was considerably weakened. In disgust the Defence Minister, Babar Shumshere, left for India not to return. Two other Rana nominees in the Ministry, Mr. Nrip Jang Bahadur Rana and Mr. Yagna Bahadur Basnait, crossed over to the Nepali Congress side. The Prime Minister, Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, was thus placed in a difficult situation. The King took advantage of the opportunity and on April 16, 1951, took from the Prime Minister the functions and powers of the Supreme Commander. He dismissed 30 army officers for alleged complicity in the raid on the Home Minister's residence and ordered the arrest of some of the Prime Minister's personal bodyguards on the same charge. The private guard in the palace was replaced by army personnel. Encouraged by the King's attitude, the Nepali Congress demanded the formation of a homogeneous Cabinet. The issue was, however, referred by the two parties to the Indian Prime Minister for mediation. Talks between the representatives of the two groups opened in New Delhi on May 10, 1951, to be concluded on May 16 when it was agreed between them that Mohun Shumshere would continue to be the Prime Minister and the Ministry would be reshuffled. It was also agreed that an advisory Assembly consisting of 40 persons would be set up. The new Cabinet was formed on June 10, 1951, on the old basis of parity between the Nepali Congress and the Ranas, with minor changes in its personnel.

But the old tensions in the Cabinet continued and developed into a crisis following police firing on a procession of students on November 6, 1951. The Prime Minister condemned the action of the police and promised to hold an inquiry. This move was clearly aimed at embarrassing the Home Minister, Mr. Koirala, who resisted the demand for the immediate dismissal of the Inspector-General of



Police. He held that the police was justified in resorting to firing because the students had tried, under the influence of the Communist Party, to snatch arms from the men guarding the police headquarters. The crisis came to a head when the Nepali Congress Ministers resigned on November 10, 1951, and Mr. Koirala openly alleged that "reactionary forces" were making a bid to regain power. This left the Prime Minister with no alternative but to tender his own resignation two days later. On November 14, 1951, King Tribhuvan invited Mr. M. P. Koirala to form a new Government. The experiment in coalition between forces of conservatism and revolution had failed and was, therefore, scrapped.

## iii

In a sense the King was justified in calling upon Mr. M. P. Koirala to form the Government because he was the President of the Congress. But the King could not be unaware that Mr. B. P. Koirala was the real and acknowledged leader of the organisation. The latter felt cheated of his legitimate ambition to be first commoner Prime Minister of Nepal. It would be difficult for this writer as for any other outside observer to fix the causes that influenced the King's decision. Did he feel convinced that Mr. B. P. Koirala was too impetuous to be trusted with the administration? Did he regard Mr. M. P. Koirala as a more experienced administrator? Was he influenced by the advice of the Indian Ambassador Mr. C. P. N. Singh, as was alleged by Mr. B. P. Koirala? One can only speculate and one speculation is as good as another.

It might prove a fruitful line of inquiry to investigate whether King Tribhuvan had instinctively become aware of the inherent conflict between an absolute monarch and democratic aspirations. Was he looking for a commoner Prime Minister, who would be amenable to suggestions from him and men around him in the palace? If that was not the case, it is difficult to explain why Mr. M. P. Koirala was called upon to form a Government for the second time in 1953, when soon after his expulsion from the parent

organisation, he formed the National Democratic Party, which could by no stretch of imagination be regarded as commanding much influence among the people. In any event, the King's invitation to him to form the Government in November, 1951, accentuated the division inside the Congress. Fissures had appeared earlier in the organisation on the issue of the representation of Western Nepal in the Cabinet.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile Mr. Tanka Prasad, who had served ten years in jail, revived the Praja Parishad. Significantly enough, he formed a united front with the Communists.<sup>7</sup> The Communists were the dominant partners in the Front. Its other constituents were Communist front organisations like the Trade Union Congress, Kisan Sangh, Progressive Study Circle, Students' Federation, Mahila Sangh and Peace Committee. It could not be purely accidental that Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya lent his prestige to the Communist cause. His political outlook is discussed later in the book. A conference of the Front in November, 1951, demanded the formation of an all-party Government and the opening of diplomatic relations with other "democratic countries," particularly the People's Republic of China.<sup>8</sup>

Opposition from within the Nepali Congress and other political parties was not the only headache of the Prime Minister, Mr. M. P. Koirala. As a result of lack of firm control on the district administration from the capital and the easy availability of arms, the law and order situation remained precarious. There was lawlessness in the Terai where dacoities and murders took place in broad daylight. The authority of the central Government was hardly recognised by the Kirats living on the border of Tibet. The situation in Gorkha and Pokhara districts in Central Nepal was particularly disturbing. The sharp deterioration in the economic situation was reflected in the steady fall in the value of the Nepalese currency in terms of the Indian rupee. The morale of the army was low and Kathmandu was agog with rumours of the possibility of a *coup*. The

<sup>6</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, February 13, 1952.

<sup>7</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, February 14, 1952.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



army resented the existence of the Raksha Dal, a paramilitary force of about 5,000 men, many of whom had participated in the insurrection. This force was originally organised to serve as a counter-weight to the army, which had stood by the Ranas during the insurrection, and the army was aware of it. By the end of 1951, even the Raksha Dal men had become disaffected. The eastern wing had passed under the influence of the newly-formed Rashtriya Mahasabha, which stood for the independence of the Kirat country. The new Cabinet debated a proposal to disband the Dal.<sup>9</sup>

The people had lost faith in the ability of the Government to govern. In this atmosphere of crisis, only the extremist parties got a hearing from the people. Branches of the Gorkha Parishad, which had been formed by the leaders of the illegal Gorkha Dal, sprang up in different parts of the country. The Communist Party, which had been formed secretly in September, 1949, amassed influence, particularly among the students in Kathmandu, workers in Biratnagar and the landless agricultural workers in the Terai.<sup>10</sup> The United Front provided an excellent cover for its activities. Both the Gorkha Parishad and the Nepali Congress were openly anti-India. The situation offered an excellent opportunity for adventurism. Dr. K. I. Singh, who had come to be known as the Robin Hood of Nepal, bided his time in detention in the Singha Durbar. The detention of Mr. A. P. Kharel and Mr. Ram Prasad Rai, leaders of the separatist Kirat movement, who enjoyed the support of the eastern wing of the Raksha Dal, in the Singha Durbar, produced the opportunity for which he had been waiting.

Dr. Singh struck with the help of 1,200 Raksha Dal men on the night of January 22, 1952. For days Kathmandu had been full of rumours that the Dal would revolt. The authorities had discounted these rumours. At 11-30 p.m., on January 22, 1952, the Raksha Dal men released the three leaders from Singha Durbar. They seized the Durbar, the

<sup>9</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, February 16, 1952.

<sup>10</sup> The statement is made on the strength of discussions with leading Nepalese Communists.

treasury, the arsenal, airport and the broadcasting station and disrupted the telegraphic communications with India. The situation in Kathmandu was such that it promoted the worst form of opportunism. A number of groups and parties were anxious to get on to Dr. Singh's band-wagon. Dr. Singh selected Mr. Ganeshman Singh, then Minister of Food in the Koirala Cabinet, and Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya to act as his emissaries to the King. They were brought to the Singha Darbar to be briefed by him. They visited the Royal Palace—the Ministers had also taken shelter there—and the Singha Durbar thrice during the night in an effort to promote understanding between Dr. Singh and the King. Dr. Singh's demands were:

1. The formation of an all-party Government, including the Communists but excluding the Gorkha Parishad;
2. The establishment of diplomatic relations with other countries on the basis of equality and no special ties with any particular country;
3. An all-party conference to draw up a minimum programme to be implemented during the interim period before the elections; and
4. The formulation of a five-year plan of economic development.<sup>11</sup>

King Tribhuvan was not prepared to negotiate a settlement with the rebels. Instead he demanded that the revolt must be called off unconditionally. The army stood by the King. As it started closing in on the Singha Durbar, the outcome of the fight, if he provoked it, could not have been in doubt to Dr. Singh. He found discretion the better part of valour and decided to flee. Thirty-seven of his trusted followers accompanied him on his journey to Lhasa and then to Peking. Before he fled, Dr. Singh distributed large sums of money among the Raksha Dal men. Since he had not looted the treasury, it was apparent that

<sup>11</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, February 10, 1952. Dr. Singh denied to this writer that he demanded the inclusion of the Communist Party in the Cabinet. According to him, the Party was not in the picture then.



he received the money during the night. It is generally accepted that some influential persons helped Dr. Singh to escape. The revolt ended without bloodshed, but it exposed the weakness of the regime.

Why did Dr. Singh revolt if he did not intend to fight to the bitter end? Was he misled into believing that the army would cross over to his side? Was the episode an expression of his adventurist nature? Did he or did he not work out the implications of his actions in advance? Did he mistake King Tribhuvan to be a weak man? Or was he really such a firm believer in the institution of monarchy that he would not strike against it, as he contends?<sup>12</sup> One can only speculate on the answer to these questions. This writer found no firm clue to these questions during his discussions with the Nepalese leaders.

King Tribhuvan declared a state of emergency in the country on January 23, 1952, and armed the Prime Minister with emergency powers. Curfew was imposed in the capital and political processions and meetings were banned for an indefinite period. The Communist Party and the Rashtriya Mahasabha were declared illegal on January 25 and 27, 1952, respectively. The Raksha Dal was disbanded and some of its members were absorbed in the police force. But despite these disturbing developments, King Tribhuvan went ahead with his plan to constitute an Advisory Assembly. The 40-member body was opened by the King on July 4, 1952. The functions of the Assembly were restricted. It was not entitled to discuss Nepal's relations with other powers, the personal conduct of the King and members of the Royal family and the movement of troops. It was not empowered to pass a vote of no-confidence in the Cabinet nominated by the King.

Meanwhile, conflict, which had been brewing between the Prime Minister and the Nepali Congress leadership, broke out into the open on July 21, 1952, when the Working Committee of the Congress directed the Prime Minister

<sup>12</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, December 1, 1957. Dr. Singh told the correspondent of the paper: "In January, 1952, I had the entire capital of Nepal in the palm of my hand. But I did not dethrone the King and stage a *coup*. If I had wanted, I could have taken everything."

to resign following his refusal to reduce the number of Cabinet Ministers from 13 to 7 and accept the nominees of the Committee as Ministers. Mr. M. P. Koirala refused to abide by it on the plea that the Working Committee was not competent to issue the directive. That, according to him, was the prerogative of the All-Nepal Congress Committee, which was the supreme body of the party. On July 23, 1952, three of his senior Cabinet colleagues, General Subrana Shumshere, Mr. Ganeshman Singh and Mr. S. P. Upadhyay resigned in obedience to the party directive. In retaliation against his failure to obey the directive, the Working Committee expelled Mr. M. P. Koirala and two other Ministers, Major General Mahabir Shumshere and Mr. Mahendra Bikram Shah. The three outgoing Ministers issued a statement on July 26 charging the Prime Minister with fostering what they called "international rivalries," seeking a loan from the U.S. without reference to the Cabinet, centralising all powers in his hands and retarding the establishment of an independent judiciary and the formation of a Public Service Commission. Mr. M. P. Koirala denied these charges on August 5, 1952. But the next day he resigned his office of Prime Minister.

The King accepted his resignation on August 10, 1952. Thus ended the first Ministry ever headed by a commoner in the long and chequered history of Nepal. There was little that it could claim to have achieved during the eight months of its existence. King Tribhuvan then appointed General Kaiser Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, Major-General Mahabir Shumshere, Mr. Surendra Bahadur Basnait and Qazi Manick Lal as Royal advisers during the interim period before the formation of another Cabinet. The Advisory Assembly, which had become superfluous with the disbandment of the Ministry, was dissolved on September 4, 1952, just two months after it had come into existence.

The All-Nepal Congress Committee met on September 4, 1952, to confirm the Working Committee's decision to



expel Mr. M. P. Koirala and his supporters from the organisation. Subsequently in June, 1953, Mr. M. P. Koirala and other dissidents from the Nepali Congress formed another political organisation, the National Democratic Party. The new Party was hardly a week old when King Tribhuvan invited Mr. M. P. Koirala for the second time to head the Government. With the exception of Major-General Mahabir Shumshere, who had not joined any political party since his expulsion from the Nepali Congress, all other Ministers in the new Cabinet belonged to the National Democratic Party. In that sense, it was a wholly homogeneous Cabinet.

Once again, Mr. M. P. Koirala had been called upon to head the Government in a difficult situation. Agrarian unrest had broken out in the Terai and the Nepali Congress had launched a no-rent campaign there. Troops had to be rushed to different parts of the Terai from the capital to maintain law and order. In some parts of the Terai, the initiative for leading the no-rent campaign had been seized by the Communists. In Dhangari district on the border of Uttar Pradesh (India), 700 armed men under the leadership of Bhimdutt Pande, who was described as a Communist and a follower of Dr. K. I. Singh simultaneously, let loose a reign of terror. They seized the town of Billauri.

Meanwhile, elections to the Kathmandu Municipal Committee took place on September 2, 1953. In these first elections ever in the history of Nepal, the illegal Communist Party emerged as the strongest group. Its candidates won nearly 50 per cent of the total votes polled. It captured five seats. The Nepali Congress and the Gorkha Parishad, long regarded as the country's two most popular parties, secured only four and one seats respectively. The Praja Parishad of Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya did as well as the Nepali Congress. Four independents got elected to the Municipality, while no one belonging to the ruling party was elected. It is a fair assumption that the outcome of the elections was at least partly influenced by the anti-Indian feeling in the capital.

Though the result of the elections in the capital with its Niwar majority was not a fair indication of the strength

of the rival parties in the Kingdom as a whole, it revived the demand for the formation of a more representative Cabinet on the basis of coalition among some of the leading parties. As the outcome of the municipal elections was interpreted as a vote of no-confidence in the Cabinet, Mr. M. P. Koirala felt obliged to open discussions with the leaders of other parties in an effort to form a coalition Government. Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya, who had freed himself from his commitments with the Communists in the United Front following the banning of the Communist Party, and Dr. D. R. Regmi, President of the Nepali National Congress, agreed to join the Cabinet as the Home and Foreign Ministers respectively on February 18, 1954. Later Mr. Bhadrakali Misra, leader of the People's Congress, also joined the Cabinet.

Soon afterwards the experiment of the Advisory Assembly was repeated by King Tribhuvan in his eagerness to widen the base of the Government. This time the Assembly consisted of 112 members with a comfortable majority for the parties represented in the Government. Twelve members of the Nepali Congress and some independents were also nominated to the Assembly. The Nepali Congress members and several others boycotted the Assembly on the very opening day on May 28, 1954. The Nepali Congress organised a demonstration against the Cabinet and the Assembly. It claimed the right to form the Government and command a majority in the Assembly as the country's biggest political party.<sup>13</sup>

Soon enough it was clear that the experiment in coalition Government would fail again. By the first week of August, 1954, the Cabinet was falling apart as it were. The Prime Minister and the Home Minister, Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya, became involved in a public controversy. Allegedly at the instance of the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary issued a circular to the staff of the Ministry that they should not respect the oral orders of the Home Minister. The Home Minister reacted sharply to this circular and issued another circular to the Home Ministry staff asking them

<sup>13</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, May 30, 1954.



not to see the Prime Minister without his permission.<sup>14</sup> Mr. Koirala then tried to secure the dismissal of Mr. Acharya from the Cabinet. The King was able to avert the crisis. Simultaneously on August 5, 1954, the Ministry suffered the fifth defeat in the current session of the Advisory Assembly when the Home Minister was refused permission to introduce the Emergency Powers Bill. The defeats were caused by defections within the parties represented in the Cabinet.

By the time King Tribhuvan left for Europe for treatment in October, 1954, the atmosphere in the country was one of hopelessness and despair. There was a deep sense of frustration among the people and the prestige of the monarch himself had suffered. Save for the change at the top, the situation in Nepal had stagnated during the last three and a half years. The situation had, if anything, deteriorated after the overthrow of the Rana autocracy. The administrative services were in a chaotic state. There was practically no administration in the interior and most of the time the Bada Hakims preferred to stay in Kathmandu to doing duty at the district headquarters to be able to promote their interests. The deterioration in the economic situation was reflected in the sharp fall in the exchange rate in terms of Indian currency. The exchange rate used to be Rs. 105 (Nepalese) for Rs. 100 (Indian) at the time of the overthrow of the Rana regime. It dropped to Rs. 180 (Nepalese) for Rs. 100 (Indian) steadily. This drop in the value of the Nepalese currency hit particularly the people in the capital and the Kathmandu valley, who imported goods from India.

Corruption and nepotism had acquired a magnitude never known before in the history of Nepal. Corruption was open and everyone in the Government was believed to be involved in one racket or another. In any case, the reputation of no Government servant up to the Prime Minister himself was unsullied. The people had lost faith in the administration. There was unrestricted traffic in arms. The people were afraid to be out at night even in Kathmandu. There were no rules of business to govern the

<sup>14</sup> *The Times of India*, New Delhi, August 20, 1954.

working of the Secretariat or the Cabinet. There was no machinery which could even ensure the communication of the Government's decisions to the Bada Hakims in the districts. The administrative confusion was so complete that one Ministry did not know what the others were planning to achieve.

The police force was ill-trained and ill-equipped. It was volatile and known to have political sympathies. Even the top officials were not averse to working against the regime, should an adventurer appear on the scene with reasonable chances of success. In this confused situation, the Army whose training was being supervised by the Indian military mission, was the only factor of stability, besides the prestige of the institution of monarchy in the outlying areas and the steady support given to the regime by the Government of India.

The situation was without doubt precarious. The whole country seethed with discontent. No effort had been made to solve any of the outstanding problems in the economic field. Despite politicians' professions of concern for the peasantry, they had not taken a single step to ensure even the security of tenure to tenants, who were at the mercy of powerful landlords maintaining their own private armed men to terrorise them. The extortions by the landlords from the peasants on all conceivable occasions ranging from deaths and births to marriages in their families, the high rate of interest ranging up to 50 per cent, mass evictions, particularly in the Terai, and forced labour were rampant three and a half years after the overthrow of the Rana regime.

The crisis, which seemed to have become endemic, continued into the new year of 1955. The Nepali Congress, which could still claim to be closest to the people, launched a civil disobedience movement on January 10, 1955, and called a general strike to begin the next day. It demanded general election at an early date, the establishment of an independent judiciary, grant of fundamental rights to the people, measures to control inflation, the maintenance of law and order through a properly constituted police force



and the protection of the interests of the Nepalis abroad. The Crown Prince, who headed the Royal Council of State in the absence of King Tribhuvan in Europe, was able to persuade the Congress leaders to withdraw the agitation by promising to take effective measures to meet the demands.

The threat of agitation was, however, revived by the Communist-dominated Society for Safeguarding Civil Rights. It was an interesting phenomenon in Kathmandu during all these years that the Communists were able to run a number of front organisations despite the ban on the party. Violence broke out as the Society opened its campaign. Twenty-six persons were arrested on January 17, 1955. Among the arrested persons were the sons of the Prime Minister, Mr. M. P. Koirala, and the Foreign Minister, Dr. D. R. Regmi.<sup>15</sup> This was a measure of the influence that the illegal Communist Party commanded in Kathmandu at that time.

The split in the Cabinet, which had been temporarily healed as a result of the personal intervention of King Tribhuvan during the previous year, came to the surface again on January 31, 1955, when the supporters of the Praja Parishad and the People's Congress in the Advisory Assembly voted with the opposition to approve a cut in the Foreign Ministry's grants. The Government had no choice but to get the Assembly adjourned *sine die*.<sup>16</sup> Mr. M. P. Koirala was unable to hold together even his small following. His party split and he was forced to dissolve the Working Committee as the majority of the members had become hostile to him. A section of the dissidents, led by Mr. Balchandra Sharma, Speaker of the Assembly, joined the Praja Parishad. Many others returned to their parent organisation, the Nepali Congress. Simultaneously, the People's Congress also merged itself with the Praja Parishad.<sup>17</sup> The developments further weakened the position of the Prime Minister with the result that he was forced to resign on January 31, 1955. Instead of accepting the

<sup>15</sup> *The Times of India*, New Delhi, January 18, 1954.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, February 2, 1955. <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, February 4, 1955.

resignation, the Royal Council of State relieved Mr. Tanka Prasad and Mr. Bhadrakali Misra of their offices as Ministers on February 2, 1955. The former had been divested of the Home portfolio on January 9, 1955.

In the midst of this growing constitutional crisis, the Crown Prince visited the ailing King at Nice in France to seek powers to deal with the situation. On February 18, 1955, King Tribhuvan from his sick bed issued a proclamation dissolving the Royal Council of State and vesting all Royal powers in the Crown Prince. Probably it was clear to the King that there was little chance of recovery. It was then only proper that the would be successor should be allowed to manage the affairs of the State as best as he could according to his lights. With the vesting of full powers in the Crown Prince, who was known to be a man of determination and courage, a new factor appeared on the Nepalese political scene.

Asserting his powers, the Crown Prince divested the Prime Minister of the responsibility of managing the Anti-Corruption Department, the Central Intelligence Bureau and the Public Service Commission. He invited political parties to submit to him proposals for setting up a stable Government on February 21, 1955. He accepted the long-pending resignation of Mr. M. P. Koirala on March 2, 1955, which took the Prime Minister by surprise. The divergent views expressed by the political parties on the question of giving the country a stable Government gave him the opportunity to establish direct rule. He ascended the throne on the death of King Tribhuvan on March 13, 1955, in Europe. A new chapter opened in the history of the Kingdom with the enthronement of King Mahendra Bir Bikram Dev Shah.



### CHAPTER III

## THE CRISIS DEEPENS

THE NEW KING was not a dark horse. He had given clear indications that he visualised a more active role for the monarch than his late father. He had watched with disgust the performance of the politicians during the last four years and as such he had little respect for them. Indications were not lacking that he would seek to assume personal direction of the affairs of State. In his broadcast to the nation on the occasion of the National Day celebrations of February 18, 1955, as the Crown Prince, he had described the lack of achievement during the last four years of democracy, as shameful. He then said, "Some people say that democracy in Nepal is in its infancy. But infants do not indulge in corruption and bribery."<sup>1</sup> He made this scathing criticism when Mr. M. P. Koirala was still the Prime Minister. The speech was a clear enough indication that the days of the Ministry were numbered.

A month after he succeeded to the throne, King Mahendra on April 14, 1955, announced the formation of a five-man Council of Advisers headed by Sardar Gunjman Singh, who had been an important figure even during the Rana rule. In fact, during the Prime Ministership of Joodha Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, he was rated as being closest to him. The other advisers were also men belonging to the old order. But whatever the personal inclination

<sup>1</sup> *The Pioneer*, Lucknow, February 20, 1955. The paper said editorially on the same date: "Bribery and intrigue have been rampant on a scale undreamt of even in the old 'feudalist' Nepal. The writ of Kathmandu has ceased to be operative even in the capital itself. Law and order have met with spectacular collapse. Banditry is now almost a recognised profession. The currency has caved in as a result of manipulation by interested persons." It suggested that the Crown Prince should rid himself "of venal Ministers" and make an "incisive and deep probe into the ills that have crept into the administration."

of the King and his advisers, it was not easy to wholly restore the old order in the Kingdom. There was a persistent demand by the political parties for ending the direct rule of the King and the formation of a new Cabinet. Apparently to counteract this demand, the King called a convention of political parties and religious and social organisations from May 8 to May 10, 1955, to discuss the future set-up for the country. Organisations like the Barbers' Union, Washermen's Union and the Association for the Performance of the Last Rites were invited to attend the conference. Not without justification, four leading parties—the Nepali Congress, the Nepali National Congress, the Praja Parishad and the National Democratic Party—boycotted the convention.<sup>2</sup>

In his opening address, King Mahendra poured scorn on these parties. He said that democracy had been made a laughing stock and that he would not allow the country to be ruined in the name of democracy. "We have had all types of Governments in that period—Cabinets or one party rule, coalitions and counsellors' regime. The progress that the country made is well known to you. The Cabinets generally got into stride within three months of their appointment. The next three months they spent in mutual bickerings and in the last three months of their existence they collapsed because of these bickerings."<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously he sought to dispel the widespread impression that direct rule was to continue indefinitely by holding out the assurance that he would announce a date for the elections within the next three months.

The discussions at the convention took an unexpected turn and even the representatives of the social, religious and cultural organisations stood against the indefinite continuance of direct rule. The two other points that emerged from the convention were that the General Election should be held as soon as possible and the democratic form of Government should be preserved. King Mahendra said on the concluding day that these recommendations were acceptable to him. Two months later on July 10, 1955,

<sup>2</sup> *The Times of India*, New Delhi, May 10, 1955.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



he announced that the Elections would be held in October, 1957. Simultaneously he dissolved the Advisory Assembly which had become redundant with the acceptance of the resignation of the Prime Minister, Mr. M. P. Koirala on March 2, 1955.

Direct rule continued till January 27, 1956, when the King took the whole country by surprise by inviting Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya in his personal capacity to form a new Ministry. During this period of direct rule, King Mahendra tried seriously to reorganise the administrative machinery, to improve its tone and to introduce long overdue economic reforms. He dismissed officials on the charges of corruption and inefficiency. New men, who enjoyed his confidence, were placed in key positions in the Secretariat. He laid down precise conditions under which the district officers could exercise the powers of effecting arrests. He enacted the Police Act in an effort to define precisely the powers, duties and jurisdiction of the police force. He sought to establish a judiciary, which would not be subservient to the Executive and would not be required to perform executive functions. He implemented the recommendations of the Pay Commission. The new pay-scales ranging from Rs. 30 to Rs. 975 (Nepalese), though low, were an improvement on the previous scales.

The King promulgated the Land Reforms Act to alleviate the lot of the peasants. The Act laid down that in future the landlords would not take more than 50 per cent of the produce as their share and would not charge interest at the rate of more than 10 per cent. No cultivable land could remain fallow for more than three years at a stretch and a tenant, who had cultivated the land in question for more than two years, could not be evicted. The landlords could not receive additional payments for social and religious ceremonies. Forced labour was abolished and a graduated tax on land incomes above Rs. 3,000 a year announced. But this Act, like other similar measures, remained a dead letter in the absence of an administrative machinery to enforce it.

King Mahendra divided the country into three zones for the purpose of police administration—the western, the

central and the eastern ranges—with headquarters at Biratnagar, Kathmandu and Birganj respectively. Four to five districts were grouped together under one superintendent of police with an inspector in each district working under him. Despite the difficulties of terrain and the absence of the means of communications and transport, this scheme is known to have improved the efficiency of the police administration in the districts. In the economic field, the King got prepared a plan of development involving a capital outlay of Rs. 21 crores. On November 11, 1955, he promulgated the State Bank Act to provide for the establishment of the State Bank of Nepal, which could facilitate the circulation of the Nepalese currency in all parts of the Kingdom, fix rates of exchange, float agricultural and other loans for development purposes and provide foreign exchange to the business men. The State Bank has since been established.

Meanwhile in October, 1955, the King initiated talks with the political leaders for the formation of a new Cabinet. It is anybody's guess why the King, who had earlier shown such distrust of, and contempt for, the political leaders, made this move. One thing is clear. The political parties were not strong enough to exact such a concession from the King. However, the Nepali Congress, the Praja Parishad and the Nepali National Congress, which indicated their willingness to form a coalition Government, responded to the gesture. By the end of October, 1955, it was reported from Kathmandu that the leaders of the three parties had accepted the King's formula regarding the composition of the Cabinet. The King had proposed that there should be no Prime Minister and that he would personally preside over the Cabinet. Two Ministers were to be selected from each of these parties and there were to be two to four independents in the Ministry.<sup>4</sup> But for unstated reasons the King made a new stipulation, which did not leave the party leaders even the freedom to select their nominees for inclusion in the Government. Under the new formula, each party was required to select its two nominees out of

<sup>4</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, October, 30, 1955.



panels of three names given by the King out of the members of their Working Committees. The talks broke down on this issue.

King Mahendra promised to resume the discussions with the political leaders after his State visit to India in November-December, 1955. He kept his word. But by now the attitude of the parties had stiffened and they were not prepared to accept the King's proposal that there should be no Prime Minister. The talks finally broke down on January 21, 1956. Then in a surprise move on January 27, 1956, the King invited Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya to form a Ministry. This constituted a complete reversal of the King's earlier stand; he had insisted that there should be no Prime Minister and that the Government should be a coalition one. Also the Nepali Congress, admittedly the most influential party, was ignored. Mr. Tanka Prasad was not even the President of the Praja Parishad. It is not easy to dismiss the view that the Ministers were more or less handpicked by the King himself. Mr. Tanka Prasad was sworn in as Prime Minister of Nepal on January 27, 1956, itself. His seven-man Cabinet included four Praja Parishad men and three independents. The independent Ministers were Royal advisers during the period of direct rule and the important portfolios of Defence and Finance and Development were held by them.

Two developments of long-range significance had taken place during the period of direct rule. Diplomatic relations were established between Nepal and Communist China and Dr. K. I. Singh, easily the most controversial political figure in Nepal, was allowed to return to the Kingdom and granted amnesty by King Mahendra. The implications of these developments are discussed in subsequent chapters. It may also be noted here that Mr. Tanka Prasad's tenure of office as Prime Minister witnessed the conclusion of the Sino-Nepalese agreement on Tibet. Peking subsequently offered to Nepal assistance of the order of Rs. six crores in three years during Mr. Tanka Prasad's visit to China in October, 1956. The Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Chou En-lai, found time in January, 1957, to return the visit despite his major preoccupations.

The scope of the Five Year Plan was expanded and the estimated outlay was increased from Rs. 21 crores to Rs. 33 crores. Soon after coming into power Mr. Tanka Prasad lifted the ban on the Communist Party. It had been declared illegal in January, 1952, following the unsuccessful attempt at a *coup* by Dr. K. I. Singh. The decision to legalise the Communist Party was taken in somewhat dramatic circumstances. The leader of the underground Communist Party, Mr. Manmohan Adhikari, sent an ultimatum to the Government that his party men would defy the ban and come out into the open on April 16, 1956. The Cabinet met late at night on April 15 to discuss the ultimatum. The Communist "contact men" waited in an ante-room of the Cabinet room in the Singha Durbar. The Prime Minister asked the contact men to secure an assurance from the Communist leaders that they would work peacefully in future. According to *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi, of April 25, 1956, "The contact men appeared again at about midnight at the Prime Minister's residence with a written assurance that the Communists believed that their socialist ideology could be pursued within the limits of the Constitution. The Prime Minister, who was satisfied with the assurance, handed over to the contact men the Government's decision to lift the ban on the Communist Party. To waiting pressmen, Mr. Tanka Prasad made it clear: 'We are not lifting the ban because of fear or pressure or threat.'"

The story quoted above indicated the measure of confidence that the Communists had acquired with the installation of the new Ministry. The paper said: "A day before the ban was lifted, pressmen, for the first time, were taken through dimly lit lanes and dark alleys to an 'underground' Communist Party hide-out where Mr. Adhikari addressed, surprisingly enough, a largely attended press conference." The Communist leader felt free enough to discuss major ideological problems, including the denigration of Stalin, which had been initiated two months earlier at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. He took the Chinese line that Stalin was not solely to blame for the



development of the personality cult. Mr. Adhikari went to China a few months later and is still there.

In course of time differences developed between Mr. Tanka Prasad and the independent Ministers, who owed their appointments to the King. These differences were aggravated following the expansion of the Cabinet in the first week of February, 1957, when Mr. Arun Shumshere, the King's brother-in-law, and Mr. Kiran Shumshere, former Commander-in-Chief, were included in the Cabinet as Ministers. Simultaneously a number of Deputy Ministers were appointed. These additions to the Cabinet caused resentment among the rank and file of the Praja Parishad who found their influence in the administration had considerably waned. The situation continued to drift till the first week of July, 1957, when the ruling party demanded that the independent Ministers in the Cabinet be dropped and a homogeneous Ministry be formed. Mr. Tanka Prasad submitted his letter of resignation to the King to meet the growing demand in the party that he should do so and to exert pressure on the King to drop the independent Ministers.

In his letter of resignation, Mr. Tanka Prasad said that the aspirations of the people had not been fulfilled during his tenure of office as Prime Minister. He claimed that he had kept His Majesty informed about it, adding that his party was demanding the formation of a fully homogeneous Cabinet because "the demands of the people can be fulfilled only if more homogeneity and efficiency is introduced in the Government and the administrative machinery." He said that he could realise income tax on "feudal income," introduce land reforms and make the necessary preparations for elections only if he headed a homogeneous Cabinet.<sup>5</sup> The King indicated his inability to meet the demand. Finally he accepted the Prime Minister's resignation on July 13, 1957, which was announced in a Royal proclamation on July 14, 1957. The proclamation said that the outgoing Prime Minister had indicated his inability to hold elections at the scheduled date.

<sup>5</sup> *The Commoner*, Kathmandu, July 16, 1957, published the text of Mr. Tanka Prasad's resignation letter.

The charge was stoutly denied by the Praja Parishad and the former Prime Minister, Mr. Tanka Prasad. A resolution adopted by the party executive said that the exclusion of the independent Ministers from the Cabinet had been demanded in view of their "undemocratic approach in general and hostile attitude to elections in particular." But surprisingly enough it was not the independent Ministers or the King whom Mr. Tanka Prasad blamed for the fall of his Government. In the face of his own party's resolution and earlier statements by himself, he accused New Delhi of arranging the dismissal of his Government.<sup>6</sup> The only proof that he could advance in support of the charge was that some Indian newspapers had carried a report quoting him as having said that he could go to Peking as a teacher of the Nepali language and history. He did not deny having made the statement. But he claimed that he had said that he could go either to China or to America. The fact that the Indian correspondents in question had forgotten to mention the United States in their messages was intended to create the impression that he was a Communist in disguise, he told this writer on October 20, 1957.

He went to the extent of dubbing Dr. K. I. Singh, who had succeeded him as the Prime Minister as a "paid agent" of India. His supporters in the Praja Parishad made it known that they were convinced that the "Government fell on the issue of foreign policy."<sup>7</sup> He himself told this writer that the Government of India was opposed to his foreign policy, which, according to him, was based on the concepts of neutrality and equal friendship with India and China. He insisted that India did not like his Government's decision to accept aid from China and said that the Indian hostility to him and his Government was deepened by his decision to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This, however, was not the first time that Mr. Tanka Prasad carried on such an anti-Indian campaign. As noted earlier in 1957, he had headed the United Front with the Communists whose major plank was to whip up anti-Indian sentiment in Nepal. It is a testimony to the strength of

<sup>6</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, August 26, 1957.    <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



ties between India and Nepal that he had not succeeded in securing a mass following as a result of his outbursts against India. This was clear from the ignominious defeat he suffered in the first elections in February-March, 1959.

It must be said in fairness to Mr. Tanka Prasad that he was not solely to blame if the preparations for holding elections on the scheduled date in October, 1957, were not completed in time. The King had to amend the interim Constitution before elections could be held. The interim Constitution of 1951, which the late King Tribhuvan had given to Nepal, provided for elections to the Constituent Assembly. King Mahendra was known to be opposed to the setting up of a Constituent Assembly on the ground that there could not be two sovereign authorities in the country. The Government headed by Mr. Tanka Prasad was also opposed to holding elections to the Constituent Assembly. The Nepali Congress and the Communist Party were the principal advocates of elections to the Constituent Assembly. But it is equally true that Mr. Tanka Prasad was opposed to early elections. That was common knowledge in Kathmandu during his Prime Ministership. He appeared to be genuinely convinced that the First Five Year Plan should be implemented to prepare the country to face the elections without the danger of its unity being disrupted.

The King once again took the whole country by surprise when he invited Dr. K. I. Singh, who had remained a mysterious figure since his return to Nepal in September, 1955, after nearly three years' stay in Communist China, to head the Government. The King thus lent some indirect support to the speculation that he had been building up Dr. Singh with a view to installing him in power. The advocates of this view had contended that the King had allowed Dr. Singh to return to Nepal and granted him amnesty to enable him to head a King's party. Since Dr. Singh after his return to Nepal had consistently advocated close relations with India, the King's invitation to him to form the Government aroused a vague suspicion in the minds of some of the politicians that New Delhi had a finger in the pie. But these critics of the King and New Delhi reckoned without

the host. Once again Dr. Singh was to defy the calculations of his friends and foes alike by running into a headlong clash with the King.

## ii

Though Dr. Singh's United Democratic Party made a poor showing in the first General Election, which did not surprise discerning observers of the Nepalese scene, and he himself has been defeated, he is likely to continue to be an important figure in his country's far from settled political life. Also his career in some ways illustrates the uncertainties of Nepalese party politics. A brief account of his past life will, therefore, not be out of place.

Like many of his countrymen, he had relations in eastern Uttar Pradesh in India and started living there. He joined the Indian Army as a sepoy in the Royal Artillery and was promoted to the rank of Havildar. Subsequently he was court-martialled and discharged on charges of grave misconduct. He then went to Rangoon where he married a Burmese girl and took up a job under a homoeopath and later obtained a certificate, which made him known as Dr. K. I. Singh. He fled Burma in the wake of the Japanese conquest and settled down in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh (India). He started practising in a small town known as Nautanwa where he was initiated into politics. He was one of the earliest recruits to the Nepali Congress.

Dr. Singh's alienation from the Nepali Congress leaders, his refusal to lay down arms in January, 1951, his attempted *coup* and escape into Tibet have been referred to earlier. During his absence in Peking Dr. Singh came to be regarded as a legendary figure in Nepal. In the context of the frustrating political situation, many came to regard him as a saviour. Some influential persons, who had allegedly assisted him to make good his escape after the failure of the attempted *coup*, bided their time to get him back home. Their opportunity came with the death of King Tribhuvan. Within days of his death, a "Friends of K. I. Singh Society" was formed in Kathmandu and it opened a campaign in favour



of his being allowed to return home as a free man. On June 19, 1955, it was learned in New Delhi that he was on his way back to Nepal. The Communist Party did not participate in the pro-K. I. Singh campaign, which was somewhat intriguing in view of his long stay in Communist China and the fact that it had earlier sought to cash in on his personal popularity.

On June 29, 1955, a delegation met King Mahendra to press for amnesty for Dr. Singh. A Committee was formed to welcome him back home even before the Government had announced its decision to allow him to return as a free man. But it was already clear that he would not face trial on the outstanding charges of sedition and murder. Earlier there was an award of Rs. 15,000 on his head. With his return to Kathmandu in September, 1955, the question of Dr. Singh's political affiliations assumed importance. Whether Dr. Singh was a patriot who had been forced to take asylum in China to save his life, or a freebooter out to capture power at any cost or a Communist agent returning home with a master plan to "liberate" Nepal was debated everywhere. He himself deepened the mystery by choosing to keep silent on his experience and activities during the stay in China. All that he was generally prepared to say was that the Chinese authorities had given him the best teachers and a truckload of books on Communism, which he had studied, and that they had failed to convert him to the cause of Communism. He said Nepal was not prepared for Communism.

He broke his silence for the first time on November 30, 1957, after he had ceased to be Prime Minister, in an interview to the correspondent of *The Statesman*, New Delhi. He said that he had crossed into Tibet with 37 followers. Six of them perished in the snows. The correspondent quoted him as having said: "Not all were able to survive Communist blandishments and the luxurious living which was provided for them by the Chinese." The correspondent added: "With a wry smile Dr. Singh told me that 11 of his followers turned 'traitors.' They were, as he put it, 'won over by the Communist.' The others were now back

in Kathmandu and formed his select entourage." According to the correspondent, Dr. Singh said: "I was never happy or cheerful while in China. I am a patriot. I was always thinking of Nepal, and her destiny." To the correspondent's persistent questions about Communism, he said, "Communism has two sets of teeth," adding that Communism was dead as a theory. "Communism is failing even in Russia. Communism is only a name now. It has become another kind of imperialism. It is economic exploitation. What I want is a system where there is no exploitation of man by man," he said.<sup>8</sup>

Immediately on his return to Nepal, he caused a sensation when he said at his first public appearance that "while outside his country he had been offered military help by many foreign powers to liberate Nepal."<sup>9</sup> He did not disclose the names of these powers. Was he referring to Communist countries? It would be apparently difficult to believe that the Chinese rulers could have been willing to go that far even if they wanted to take over Nepal. Was he then dramatising the support that might have been promised to him in Peking? But he pursued steadfastly a moderate line. The main planks of his programme, endorsed by the United Democratic Party headed by him, were: constitutional monarchical form of Government; abolition of Birta and zamindari land tenure systems; nationalisation of surplus land and forests; removal of class and caste barriers to usher in a more equitable form of society; development of natural resources for the benefit of the people; establishment of an honest and efficient administration; and non-alignment with either power bloc.

This programme was not significantly different from the programme of any other democratic party in Nepal. Even the Communists switched over to the programme of establishing a Republic in Nepal only in 1957. Dr. Singh was so enthusiastic about close ties with India that he strongly opposed the Nepalese Government's policy of accepting Chinese aid. During his visit to New Delhi in October,

<sup>8</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, December 1, 1957.

<sup>9</sup> *The Indian Express*, Delhi, September 26, 1955.



1956, when he conferred with the Indian President, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, he, by implications, charged the Nepalese Government headed by Mr. Tanka Prasad with having sold out the country in return for Rs. six crores. He repeatedly expressed the view that it was wrong of Mr. Tanka Prasad to have agreed (vide the Sino-Nepalese Treaty on Tibet, 1956) to surrender Nepal's traditional privileges in Tibet without simultaneously securing the rectification of the Nepalese-Tibetan frontiers and seeking the return of areas that Nepal had been forced to cede to Tibet in 1792.

This approach on the part of Dr. K. I. Singh admitted of three diverse interpretations. First, he was a realist and as such knew that he needed the support of the King and the goodwill of India to realise his ambition of coming to power. Second, he genuinely believed in the institution of monarchy and close ties with India. Dr. Singh was himself keen to create such an impression. Third, he was a Communist in disguise, who was doing his best to disarm suspicions against him. The advocates of this last view advanced mainly three lines of argument. First, some of the well-known Communists had joined Dr. Singh's party. Secondly, he was giving away large funds of money for schools, roads and bridges to the people and to his followers. On his own admission he had spent Rs. one million during the first two years after his return to Nepal.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, he was building his party on the leadership principle so that he had only followers and no equals in the party. He would be able, they argued, to switch over his party to a new political line at an appropriate opportunity.

His personal demeanour lent itself to the interpretation that he was an extremely ambitious man, who was prepared to go to any length in the pursuit of power. His courage had never been in doubt. It appeared that the military leader was his hero. The fact that he alone among the politicians in Nepal went about with an armed guard reinforced the impression. He himself was all the time armed. He almost deliberately created the impression that he believed in

<sup>10</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, December 1, 1957.

strong dictatorial methods. A disclosure of the sources of his financial support could have shed some light on his political affiliations. But, neither Dr. Singh nor his supporters would say anything on this account. He evaded the question when the correspondent of *The Statesman*, New Delhi, tackled him on the subject. The correspondent himself had been mystified by what he characterised as Dr. Singh's "seemingly limitless funds." Dr. Singh told him: "For a good worker, there is no shortage of money. I have spent a million rupees. I have never robbed anybody. A good man need never run after money. Money will run after him. Even your Mahatma Gandhi did not fight with counterfeit rupees."<sup>11</sup> But there was no secrecy about the sources of Mahatma Gandhi's financial support.

The Royal proclamation of July 14, 1957, which announced that Dr. Singh had been called on to form a Government, left room for doubt whether the King would insist on the formation of a coalition Government. The proclamation called upon the political parties "to forget petty differences among themselves and to rise above mutual jealousies and the feelings of rivalries" and it asked Dr. Singh "to initiate talks with a view to forming a coalition Government." It affirmed that "in case the above-mentioned talks do not bear fruit, the circumstances may well be such as to compel us, despite our unwillingness to do so, to decide by ourselves the next best course in the interest of the general welfare."<sup>12</sup> Next day Dr. Singh made it clear that he would form a Government of his party men and some independents.<sup>13</sup> He told reporters that he would not include the representatives of other parties in his Cabinet. He had, however, no objection to the inclusion of Royal nominees in the Cabinet headed by him.<sup>14</sup> At no stage did he commit himself to the idea of a coalition Government.

Finally Dr. Singh was sworn in as Prime Minister on July 26, 1957, along with ten other Cabinet members.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, New Delhi, December 1, 1957.

<sup>12</sup> *The Commoner*, Kathmandu, July 15, 1957. <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, July 16, 1957.

<sup>14</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, July 22, 1957.



Simultaneously the King issued another proclamation, announcing that he would make arrangements to appoint a fully empowered seven-man National Council, a five-man body for expediting development work and removing bottlenecks and a third body to be known as the Special Five Year Plan Board. Was the King trying to hamstring Dr. Singh? But Dr. Singh made it clear that "if they are formed, they will be purely advisory bodies having nothing to do with the Cabinet. Of course, if they tender good and useful advice, the Cabinet will certainly heed it. For that matter, we shall listen to all good advice no matter from what quarter it comes."<sup>15</sup>

Two sets of developments followed the appointment of Dr. Singh as the Prime Minister. The Nepali Congress, the Nepali National Congress and the Praja Parishad saw in his appointment as Prime Minister a threat to civil liberties that had been won as a result of the insurrection in 1950-51. They formed a united front to defend the democratic rights of the people. But the more significant development was that Dr. Singh and the King "found in each other personalities of much greater strength than they had expected. The collision was headlong," leaving Dr. Singh no choice but to "withdraw from the situation" on November 15, 1957, to quote the correspondent of *The Statesman* cited earlier.

He ran into conflict with the King and the men around him as soon as he was appointed Prime Minister. He wanted to reform the entire set-up in the country and tried to make a beginning with the palace itself. He suggested the removal of two of the four principal Private Secretaries to the King. He prepared a list of officers in the Secretariat and the districts whom he wanted to be replaced by what he called "honest men."<sup>16</sup> He organised an Ex-Servicemen's Association. He set about the task of creating for himself a secret police, picking his own men for the job.

<sup>15</sup> *The Commoner*, Kathmandu, August 3, 1957, and *The Statesman*, New Delhi, September 9, 1957.

<sup>16</sup> A report in *The Statesman*, New Delhi, on November 28, 1957, put the number of officials he wanted to dismiss at 117.

It was believed that he tried to make certain changes in the armed forces; it was common knowledge that the Commander-in-Chief, Torun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, had protested to the King against the references Dr. Singh had made in an official biographical note regarding Torun Shumshere's role in capturing him after his first escape from the Bhairawa jail. Also Dr. Singh ordered the release of his own supporters and the Communists.

He invited the active hostility of all important politicians in the country by setting up a commission to inquire into the alleged misappropriation of Government funds during the last six years. He said that a sum of Rs. five crores had been misappropriated and it was likely that the figure might be found to be Rs. 15 crores. That was about the total amount that the Ministries might have spent on the administration. The business community of Kathmandu was dead set against him. He threatened to take penal action against profiteers and break their monopoly of trade by establishing distribution agencies on a regional basis. It was clear to this writer when he visited Kathmandu during the third week of October, 1957, that Dr. Singh would not last long as Prime Minister. He was himself alive to the hostility of powerful men well entrenched in the favours of the King, who was still the source of all power and prestige. He told this writer that the "minority of vested interests" manning almost exclusively the country's civil service and dominating its commercial life "has sought to sabotage every effort made by me since coming into power" to improve the lot of the common people and give them an honest administration. He did not sound too confident (despite his demeanour) when he asserted that this powerful minority would not be able to secure his overthrow because "in the democratic age, the will of the majority cannot be frustrated indefinitely." Vaingloriously he claimed: "I represent the hopes and aspirations of the vast majority of my countrymen," adding, "I do not care if the whole intelligentsia combines against me." The people had no faith in this class, he asserted, because, "It is inspired by selfish motives."



Dr. Singh did not deny that his efforts to reorganise the administration, his assurances to the soldiers and policemen that he would improve their lot, the formation of the secret police force and the Ex-Servicemen's Association and the move against the other political leaders were being interpreted as being parts of a well-laid plan to isolate the King and to establish independent sources of personal power so that he could, if necessary, challenge the power of the King himself. But he hoped to be able to break the power of the "minority of vested interests." Dr. Singh's solution was naive. He told this writer: "If the imports can be controlled and distributed properly through the establishment of regional agencies, the power of the vested interests can be substantially curtailed." He said so with the confidence of the man quoting the scriptures. He added that it was his good fortune that in Nepal there was no class of entrepreneurs to challenge his power. He made no reference to the other components of his programme except to deny that he intended to install his men in the administration. He claimed that at least 75 per cent of the replacements were to be found from within the existing administrative personnel. His own men, he said, were busy canvassing support for his party in the interior of the country and would stay there. He would not say how he proposed to break or eliminate the opposition of the men in the palace.

The Palace circles in their turn left no one in doubt that the youthful King, worshipped by his people in the hills as a God above other deities of the land, was watching these moves of the Prime Minister with shrewd suspicion. In no event, they said, would he allow Dr. Singh to replace senior officials appointed mostly by himself during the period of direct rule when he had reorganised the administration. Something more than the principle of the impartiality and the continuity of the administration was involved in the King's stand. He could not allow the base of his personal power to be tampered with if he was serious about his intention to rule as well as reign. It was common knowledge in Kathmandu that the King had turned down Dr. Singh's request for a larger bodyguard at his residence.

There was no clue to the question whether Dr. Singh was implementing a carefully worked out programme of "revolution from above." It might as well be that he was merely an impatient reformer keen on breaking the monopoly of the power of a group in Kathmandu valley. Opinions on these questions differed widely in Kathmandu. But his friends and foes agreed that he was an extremely ambitious man, who disdained democratic processes in the firm belief that the concentration of powers in his hands would be good for the people of Nepal. Acting under that impulse, he inevitably clashed with the powers that be. As a seasoned diplomat put it to this writer: "He is a candidate for dictatorship in a situation which does not admit of a dictator."

If Dr. Singh was acting to a brief or according to a plan, he clearly overshot his mark. The army and the bureaucracy were important in Nepal as in any other Asian country. While he alienated the top echelons of the bureaucracy, he had no chance to win over the former. Two thousand out of a total of 6,000 troops are permanently housed in barracks inside the royal palace itself. It is doubtful if Dr. Singh could retrieve his position in the palace even if he had come to realise that he had gone too far and exposed himself to hostile criticism. Having committed himself to certain positions publicly, he could not have gone back on them without loss of face. Dr. Singh's strength lay in the legend that he, his supporters and above all circumstances had combined to build around his name. He was regarded as a strong man. The end of the legend would have amounted to his political death.

After a detailed study of the situation, the correspondent of *The Statesman*, New Delhi, quoted earlier concluded that "Dr. Singh was not out to solve problems but to create situations." His many talks with Dr. Singh gave him the "impression that he had never expected his regime to last long. Perhaps that was never his objective."<sup>17</sup> It is not unlikely that having discovered that it was beyond him or any man to solve the outstanding problems of Nepal,

<sup>17</sup> *The Statesman*, New Delhi, November 28, 1957.



Dr. Singh wanted to create a situation which would allow him the maximum propaganda advantage in future. He might have attempted to bring into sharp focus, and accentuate, the conflict that has all along been implicit between the people in the hills and the Terai on the one hand and in the Kathmandu valley on the other. He might have calculated that the King, effectively isolated from other political parties, had no choice but to depend on him. In any event, his Cabinet fell on November 14, 1957, when the Kingdom once again passed under direct rule.

After over five months after his resignation as Prime Minister, Dr. Singh told a public meeting in Kathmandu on April 26, 1958, that America had threatened to sever diplomatic relations with Nepal if his Government did not grant a passport to a Nepalese girl to go to that country. He alleged that international pressure and conspiracy by "traitors at home" had compelled him to resign. He named a number of top men in the Nepalese Government and army who, he contended, "in league with the Americans, put up all sorts of obstacles" in his way "in implementing the popular measures" proposed by him. In an authorised version of his speech, he confirmed as having said that he had been bullied to sign an agreement regarding U.S. aid. He charged America with seeking to drag Nepal into cold war politics and with carrying on propaganda in favour of Pakistan and against India. He alleged that a conspiracy had been laid to despatch arms and ammunition from Calcutta "consigned to K. I. Singh" with a view to creating the impression that he was "bringing arms in his bid to overthrow King Mahendra." He implicated a member of the King's personal Secretariat in this alleged conspiracy. The official, he said, "was said to have had a plan to place a time-bomb under the revolving chair of the King and get it discovered later and put the blame on me."

On May 2, 1958, the Nepalese Government issued a statement dismissing these charges as baseless. Earlier, on April 28, the U.S. Ambassador to India and Nepal, Mr. Ellsworth Bunker, denied the allegation of U.S. interference in the affairs of Nepal. Dr. Singh appeared before a special

tribunal on May 29, 1958, to answer the charges against him arising out of the speech of April 26. The three specific charges against him were: (a) he incited the Army against the Commander-in-Chief; (b) he tried to disrupt the friendly ties with the U.S. and; (c) he sought to foster ill-feelings between different communities. Though he denied the charges, he did not withdraw the allegations made by him earlier. He challenged the propriety of appointing of Torun Shumshere as the Commander-in-Chief and accused him of conspiring against him when he was the Prime Minister. He added that the appointment of all officers in the Royal Secretariat from one particular community was "communalism." Apparently the Government did not pursue the matter further.

We have already noted the formation of a United Front by the Nepali Congress, Nepali National Congress and Praja Parishad on August 9, 1957, two weeks after the formation of the Government by Dr. Singh. In a policy statement on August 15, 1957, the Democratic Front charged that the King was trying to build his position "on a threat of force and undemocratic practices" and warned that "the monarchy will lose its popular and eventually political basis." It said that the setting up of the Government under Dr. Singh's Prime Ministership "when no political party offered to support it" was the "culmination of the process which had been started long ago to bypass and ridicule the democratic elements." It demanded early elections in the interest of stability. As expected, however, the King on October 6, 1957, announced that it would not be possible to hold elections on the scheduled date on October 8, 1957. The Election Commission blamed the former Government, headed by Mr. Tanka Prasad, for its failure to make the necessary arrangements. The Royal proclamation did not fix any fresh election dates. The Democratic Front reacted sharply to the announcement and decided at its conference in Birganj on October 10 to launch an agitation on December 8, 1957, in case the Government did not fix a date for elections within that period. It stipulated that the elections should be held within six months. A last minute effort by the King on



December 6, 1957, to dissuade the Front from implementing its decision did not produce any result because its leaders insisted that the elections must be held within six months. Fortunately the agitation lasted in all 10 days and was then suspended to be withdrawn later. On December 17, 1957, the King announced that elections would be held in February, 1959, a promise which he made good.

## CHAPTER IV

### FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS

TOWARDS THE beginning of 1958, it appeared as if there was no straight solution to the baffling problems of Nepal. In fact every conceivable solution seemed to have a purely negative aspect. Inevitably the progress had to be slow. Compromise and caution had to be the key-notes of all attempts to promote progress, in the interest of safeguarding the country's sovereignty and unity. But many in Nepal were convinced that the General Election held the key to the solution of many frustrating problems. The Indian press had harped on the same theme during the last seven years. Without doubt, the elections were necessary to help the people in the hills and the Terai to play their legitimate role in the shaping of national policies and to break the atmosphere of intrigue and stagnation in every aspect of national life. But the elections appeared to involve considerable risks.

Those who were opposed to the elections argued that in the absence of the physical and emotional integration of the country and the people, they might accentuate regional and communal feelings. The emergence of strong, well-knit and unscrupulous groups in the hills might lead to a demand for independence from the central authority. The apparent absence of well-organised political parties commanding allegiance and support in all parts of the Kingdom and among all communities of Nepal underscored this threat.

It was also feared that no single party might be able to command a majority in the legislature as a result of the elections. Even if a party secured such an advantage at the polls, it might prove short-lived; for, in Nepal, loyalty to the parties was not known to be a paramount consideration with ambitious politicians. The Kingdom's history of the



last seven years was full of examples of leaders placing personal interests above loyalty to their parties. The opponents of the elections rightly pointed to the absence of an administrative machinery, which could ensure that the elections would be reasonably fair. In such a situation, an organised and determined minority could frustrate the will of the people, they said, adding that strong-arm methods might come to be depended upon by the rival groups and parties in search of power.

There was the legitimate fear that the elections might add to the element of corruption in the country's political life. What was worse, in the given situation of the Kingdom, no one was in a position to guarantee that some foreign powers would not seek to influence the outcome of the elections. The massive intervention of "certain foreign embassies," to quote the Burmese Prime Minister, U Nu, in the elections in his country in April, 1956, was regarded as a foretaste of a similar attempt in Nepal. Finally, there was the doubt whether the majority party, if one emerged as a result of the elections, or a coalition of like-minded parties, if it was found possible to form one, would be able to work in co-operation with the King. The story of Dr. K. I. Singh as Prime Minister was a sharp reminder that the Palace and the Ministry might start pulling in different directions.

The case against early elections was thus strong. But the continuance of direct rule by the King or the formation of a Ministry of his choice also did not offer a way out of the difficulties Nepal faced. The King, young and energetic, was devoted to the welfare of his people. But he had to work with the machinery at hand. Like privileged minorities elsewhere, the one in Kathmandu was interested primarily in self-preservation and self-perpetuation. In that situation, the King could not but be the head of this privileged group. In any event, it was not feasible that the King should continue to rule directly for an indefinite period. The demand for popular rule had reached a stage when only a dictatorship armed with all the means of suppression and oppression could stifle it indefinitely. Interested deeply in

Nepal's stability and progress, India could not have viewed with satisfaction the existing uncertain situation.

Weighing the pros and cons of the situation, the King decided that it was necessary to hold the elections. In view of his own experience first with Mr. Tanka Prasad and later with Dr. K. I. Singh as Prime Ministers, he might have come to feel that it was not desirable to alienate the Nepali Congress and the Gorkha Parishad, which were decidedly the two major parties in the Kingdom. His own visits to different parts of the country could have left him in no doubt that these were the most popular parties. Thus in January, 1958, he once again initiated talks with political parties regarding the formation of a Ministry. The King revived his old formula that there should be no Prime Minister.

The Presidents of the Nepali Congress, Nepali National Congress and the Praja Parishad, which had earlier formed the Democratic Front, agreed to accept the King's invitation to form the Government. On January 25, 1958, Mr. B. P. Koirala, President of the Nepali Congress, met the King to convey this decision to him. On February 1, 1958, the King announced his decision to form a Ministry without a Prime Minister and to form an Advisory Assembly. Simultaneously he announced that a commission would be appointed to prepare a constitution providing for the establishment of a Parliament instead of the Constituent Assembly as envisaged under the interim constitution promulgated by King Tribhuvan in 1951. As noted earlier, King Mahendra was opposed to holding elections to the Constituent Assembly on the ground that there could not be two sovereigns in the country. The Royal proclamation of February 1 said that the Election Commission would be reconstituted.

The new Government, which was formed on May 15, was charged with the task of making the necessary preparation for the elections. In terms of the Royal Proclamation of February 1, 1958, it was required to push ahead with development schemes, to assist the King in the promulgation of the new constitution and to run the day-to-day



administration. The proclamation had made it clear that the proposed Advisory Assembly would not have the right to throw out the Government. Following the acceptance of the King's offer by the three parties of the Democratic Front, the Gorkha Parishad had also agreed to join the Government. It was represented in the new Ministry by its President, Mr. Randhir Subha. This was a significant development in two ways. First, it showed that the Gorkha Parishad was no longer to be excluded from a share in power and responsibility merely because of the prejudice against it. Also it indicated the possibility, however dim and halting, of the Nepali Congress and the Gorkha Parishad being able to work together.

Though in accordance with the Royal Proclamation of February 1, 1958, no one was named Prime Minister, the King appointed General Subarna Shumshere of the Nepali Congress to act as the Chairman. In that capacity, General Subarna Shumshere was able to secure the co-operation of all Ministers. By the time the Government was formed, the districts had elected their nominees to the Advisory Assembly. This process was spread over a period of one month. Without doubt the formation of the Coalition Government under the *de facto* if not *de jure* leadership of the Nepali Congress marked the beginning of a new and healthy trend in Nepal's politics after a lapse of several years. At last the two parties that commanded influence among the people were in the Government. It also indicated how superficial was in fact the barrier between the King and the Nepali Congress. Earlier the Nepali Congress had demanded that the elections should be held to the Constituent Assembly in accordance with the interim Constitution. The King was opposed to the demand and this divergence of outlook between the King and the Congress was in certain influential circles listed as the reason for the continued exclusion of the Nepali Congress from the Government.

But discerning observers always knew that the Nepali Congress could be persuaded to resile from its demand if the King showed an inclination to come to terms with it. Three days after the Royal Proclamation of February 1,

1958, on February 4, the supreme body of the Nepali Congress endorsed it. In a resolution justifying the reversal of its stand on the issue of Constituent Assembly versus Parliament the Congress said that it had done so to remove "reactionaries" between the King and the democratic forces by offering co-operation to him and accepting the democratic rights offered by the proclamation. On the same day the Working Committees of the Nepali Congress, Nepali National Congress and the Praja Parishad met at Birganj and called off the civil disobedience movement, which had been suspended in December, 1957.

The promulgation of the People's Representation Act on June 3, 1958, left little scope for doubt that the King was determined to hold the elections, though some of the politicians in Nepal continued to be sceptical. Those who knew that they would lose all importance if their popularity or lack of it was exposed to an electoral test tried to obstruct. But clearly the chances for the success of intrigues were limited. The new Act provided that all Nepalese above the age of 21 would have the right to vote and those above 25 years the right to contest the elections. Simultaneously a three-man tribunal was set up to settle all disputes relating to the elections and to supervise voting.

Reassured about the situation at home, the King, accompanied by the Queen, left on August 31 on a 90-day world tour, which took him to the Soviet Union, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Belgium. At the end of his official three-week tour of the Soviet Union, where he had talks with Mr. Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders, was issued a joint communique. The communique reiterated that relations between Nepal and the Soviet Union would continue to be guided by the five principles of non-interference and co-operation. It said that Nepal had accepted the Soviet offer of aid and that President Voroshilov had accepted the Nepalese invitation to visit Nepal. A Soviet technical mission visited Kathmandu in this connection in February, 1959. One wonders whether it was purely accidental that the Soviet technical mission went to Kathmandu when the elections were about to be held. Finally



on April 24, 1959, the Soviet-Nepalese economic and technical aid agreement was signed. It provided that Russia would supply designs, equipment, building material and consultants for the construction of a hydro-electric plant, and a sugar and cigarette factories. Russian experts would also carry out a survey for road construction and would give technical training to Nepalese nationals in operating new enterprises. The Soviet aid would amount to 30 million roubles. Another agreement was signed at the same time providing for Soviet assistance in building a hospital in Kathmandu and for the services of medical personnel to run it. Before the signing of the agreement, it was announced that both the Governments had decided to establish Embassies at Moscow and Kathmandu.

Though the districts had made their nominations to the Advisory Assembly by April 12, 1958, the body was formally opened only on November 26, 1958. A fortnight later it adopted a resolution demanding that the elections be postponed till the Constitution had been made public. The adoption of this resolution revived in certain circles the doubt whether the elections would be held. On February 12, 1959, however, the King gave Nepal her first Constitution. The first General Election was to be held a week later.

✓ The Constitution provided for the establishment of Parliament consisting of two Houses—the Pratinidhi Sabha (House of Representatives or the Lower House) and the Mahasabha (Senate). The Lower House would consist of 109 members elected from single-member territorial constituencies and the Mahasabha of 36 members, of whom 18 would be elected by the Pratinidhi Sabha and 18 nominated by the King. The Pratinidhi Sabha would be dissolved after five years whereas the Mahasabha would be a permanent body.

✓ The Constitution provided for a Cabinet consisting of the Prime Minister and not more than 14 Ministers, a Supreme Court and fundamental rights to ensure personal liberty, equality before law, and religious freedom. It laid down that the Cabinet would be responsible to the Lower House and except, in matters of amending the Constitution, the

Lower House would have larger powers than the Upper House. Under the Constitution the executive power of the King would vest in "His Majesty and his authority will be exercised on the recommendations of the Cabinet." The Prime Minister would be selected by the King and other Ministers appointed by His Majesty on the recommendations of the Prime Minister.

The Constitution provided for the establishment of a Rashtriya Parishad, or State Council similar to the Privy Council in England. This body would include as members all Ministers, ex-officio and former Ministers and others nominated by the King. It would be responsible for making a provision for the regency when the King was a minor or was otherwise unable to discharge his functions and also to advise the King during any period of emergency. The Supreme Court was empowered to declare invalid any law which was not consistent with the Constitution.

The King would retain discretionary powers in respect of: the selection of Prime Minister; appointment of members of Rashtriya Parishad or State Council; removal of members of Rashtriya Parishad; authorisation of a person or body of persons to exercise his functions in his absence; dismissal of Prime Minister if the King was satisfied after consulting the Rashtriya Parishad that the Government had lost the confidence of the Lower House of Parliament or that it persisted in acts contrary to the Constitution; allocation of business among the Ministries; temporary suspension of the Cabinet and the appointment of persons to assume the functions of the Ministers, who would have power to address Parliament; revocation of proclamation regarding the suspension of the Cabinet; nomination of members to the Upper House; addressing either House of Parliament or both together; giving assent to Bills in consultation with the Rashtriya Parishad and to amendments to the Constitution; and appointment of the Chief Justice.

If the King in his discretion was satisfied that a grave emergency existed whereby the security or economic life of Nepal or any part of the country was threatened by war or external aggression or by internal disturbances, he might



make a proclamation to declare that "his functions shall, to such extent as may be specified in the proclamation be exercised by him in his discretion and assume to himself all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by Parliament or any other Governmental body or authority." The proclamation of such emergency would cease to operate on the expiry of a period of 12 months but could be renewed by a further proclamation until the King was satisfied that "grave emergency no longer exists." At any time the King in his discretion might revoke the emergency proclamation.

The King would also have emergency powers in case of the failure of constitutional machinery and he would declare such emergency at his discretion after consulting the State Council. In such cases he would appoint persons to assume the functions of Ministers who would have power to address Parliament. He could suspend either or both the Houses of Parliament if in his discretion he felt it necessary. If he suspended one House of Parliament, laws would be made by a Parliament "consisting of himself and the other House." The Upper House could not, under the Constitution, delay the passage of a money Bill for more than one month, while in respect of ordinary Bills, the Upper House could hold them up for a slightly longer period. The Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament would be elected from among the candidates who were not members of Parliament. Clearly the powers of the King remained great. But in the given situation of Nepal, there was no alternative.

The Government of Britain and India acceded to Nepal's request for loan of wireless detachments to help her overcome the problems of lack of communications during the elections. Both countries made available signal detachments manned by Gurkha army signallers and the supervisory and technical staff. The detachments provided by the British Gurkha Brigade were allocated to eastern Nepal where they deployed 15 wireless stations with the central control located at Kathmandu. The Indian Signal detachments were drafted to work in western Nepal. Their job was

to provide round-the-clock communications, to clear Government traffic, to act as listening posts for the central authority and pass on directions from it to the local administration.

The other problem of the shortage of personnel to supervise the elections was solved by sending officials from Kathmandu to different parts of the country. The staff of the Elections Commission had watched the arrangements for the second General Election in India in 1957 and had thus acquired practical experience. Nearly 600 policemen were recruited on a temporary basis to relieve pressure on the regular police force, while the services of the Army were requisitioned to take up normal police duties during the election period so that the police force could be utilised exclusively for election work. The holding of mock elections, distribution of literature and holding of exhibitions and talks and lectures helped to educate the electorate in correct procedures and their rights and duties. In all there were 864 candidates in the field, 339 being independents. The Nepali Congress set up 108 candidates; the Gorkha Parishad 85; Dr. K. I. Singh's United Democratic Party 86; Nepal Prajatantrik Mahasabha 70; Praja Parishad (Mr. Tanka Prasad's founder group) 45; Praja Parishad (Mr. B. K. Misra's group) 40; Communists 48; Mr. D. R. Regmi's Nepali National Congress 22; and the Nepal Terai Congress 21.

## ii

Though the Nepali Congress reaffirmed its claim to be a socialist party in its election manifesto, it displayed sufficient realism to admit that it would take a long time to achieve the goal. It placed emphasis on a 13-point programme of agrarian reforms, which included: the abolition of "Birta" (land given by previous rulers as award for meritorious service) and vassal states (Nepal has 24 vassal states), and the zamindari system; ceilings on land holdings; redistribution of land among the peasants; adequate and phased compensation for birtas, zamindaris and vassal states; impetus to co-operative farming; establishment of



agricultural banks to be run by representatives of the people; establishment of experimental farms and provision of irrigation facilities. The manifesto said that the village economy would be the basis of national economy and the administration would be centralised to make the village the basic unit.

On the question of industrialisation, the manifesto said that the Congress would give incentive to cottage industries run on a co-operative basis. Heavy industries would be primarily state-owned and the Government would invite foreign capital. The Congress promised to undertake suitable labour legislation for the improvement of labour conditions and to promote harmonious relationship between the labour and the management. The Nepali Congress promised to end corruption and nepotism in the administration. The improvement of educational, health and communication facilities would be given the highest priority. In respect of foreign policy the manifesto committed the Congress to work for friendly relations between Nepal and other countries on terms of equality and mutual respect. It would not join any power bloc and would use Nepal's membership of the U.N. for promoting of international goodwill and peace. It would work for special and friendly relations with Nepal's immediate neighbours, the manifesto said.

Not unexpectedly the Gorkha Parishad in its manifesto expressed the view that the choice before the people was in fact between it and the Nepali Congress, which it blamed for all the country's ills. The party manifesto said that the Gorkha Parishad "represents the nationalist elements, the King and the country." The Nepali Congress "represents anarchy, corruption and anti-nationalism." The manifesto said that during its rule the Congress failed to provide even the basic amenities which it had been promising since 1951. The Gorkha Parishad manifesto reiterated the party's faith in full democracy for Nepal under the King. It laid emphasis on land reforms and promised to secure land for the Kisans; to give financial assistance to the peasants; to undertake equitable distribution of land; to abolish the birtas on payment of adequate compensation; to improve

existing health and education facilities; and to develop communications as speedily as possible. The manifesto said that if returned to power, the Parishad would seek to raise funds both from within the country and outside for the development of industries. Investments from outside would be encouraged and afforded the necessary protection. National industries would be protected and promoted and goods manufactured in Nepal would be protected against foreign competition. The manifesto promised to give high priority to hydro-electric projects so that electricity could be made available at cheap rates for the promotion of cottage, medium and heavy industries.

In foreign policy, a Gorkha Parishad Government would side with forces working for world peace. It would seek to establish friendly relations with all Afro-Asian countries and strive to maintain special relationships with India and China. It would not involve the country in any of the power blocs. The Gorkha Parishad promised to build a high school in every constituency, 200 new hospitals, 2,000 bridges in various parts of the country, extend primary education facilities to the largest number of the people, establish paper, iron, cement, sugar, woollen, cotton, jute, and leather factories and saw mills and make provision for irrigation facilities in every district.

It would thus be seen that the election programmes of the two major parties were almost identical. The manifesto of the United Democratic Party, which is led by Dr. K. I. Singh, ran along similar lines. Additionally it expressed opposition to the establishment of the Upper House and promised that the Party would work for ending communalism and the monopoly system in business. Probably in deference to the existing international and national situation, the Communist Party also adopted a moderate programme. But unlike the other parties, it made a pointed reference to what it called contravention of Article (88) of the Interim Constitution of 1951, which had laid down that elections would be held to the Constituent Assembly. It also charged that the Government had abridged the powers of the High Court. It demanded that the 10-year



pact with Britain regarding the recruitment of Gorkhas be abrogated and the trade treaty with India be modified. While professing friendship for India, it adopted an avowedly anti-American line. It pledged to work for the abolition of military pacts, banning of nuclear weapons and the handing over of Formosa and other offshore islands to the People's Republic of China. Its programme in respect of the home policy was not significantly different from those of the other parties. In fact there was a close similarity in the election manifestoes of most parties in Nepal.

On the eve of the elections, most observers gave expression to the fear noted earlier that no single party would be able to win an absolute majority. Many of them deplored the inability of the leaders of the Nepali Congress, Nepali National Congress and the B. K. Misra faction of the Praja Parishad to form a united front. These observers forgot to take due note of the fact that the following of the other parties was nominal and that their leaders demanded too high a price for co-operation from the Nepali Congress. It was generally assumed that the independents and small groups would hold the balance in the first Nepalese Parliament. The inference was drawn that the democratic experiment might prove abortive.

These fears sprang largely from the failure of political observers to assess correctly the influence of the rival parties in the countryside. Whole regions were arbitrarily assigned to one or the other party, which led to under-estimating the strength of the Nepali Congress. These fears ~~have now been~~ proved false and the Nepali Congress ~~has~~ emerged as the majority party with 74 seats in a House of 109. The party, which was primarily responsible for the overthrow of the autocratic Rana regime, ~~has been~~ entrusted by the electorate with the task of consolidating the gains of the revolution. A new chapter ~~has opened~~ in the history of Nepal.

In the post-election period, King Mahendra and Mr. B. P. Koirala will be the most significant figures on the

Nepalese political scene. Apart from being forceful personalities, they represent significant social forces in Nepal. In the nature of things, the King will continue to represent forces of conservatism. Since the popularity of the institution of monarchy cuts through geographical and communal divisions, its importance as a factor for unity cannot be over-emphasised. Mr. B. P. Koirala and the Nepali Congress which he heads as its President and unchallenged leader represent the democratic aspirations of the people. Mr. Koirala's position in Nepal has not been dependent on any official position. On the present evidence it will remain so in the years to come. It is, therefore, essential that the King and Mr. Koirala should, in spite of their differences in the past, find it possible to co-operate in making the experiment in democracy a success.

Small biographical sketches of these men will not be out of place here. King Mahendra was born on June 11, 1920, when his father, King Tribhuvan, was barely 14 years of age. Little is known of his life in childhood and adolescence. But on all accounts, it was far from being a normal life, at least partly because of the restrictions imposed on the freedom of the members of the Royal family by the Rana Prime Ministers. That his visit as the Crown Prince to Bhimpedi, just 20 miles from Kathmandu inside Nepal, at 14 with his father is mentioned in the official biographical sketch, speaks volumes. The Rana Prime Ministers looked askance at the education of the princes. The Crown Prince did not go to school and received his training from the Queen Mother. He was her favourite child and she initiated him into the traditional Hindu way of life and thought. He was more at home with the realities of the Nepalese life than his unorthodox father, who was a rebel by instinct and was known to be fond of the western way of life and gadgets. Unlike King Tribhuvan, the Crown Prince was austere by temperament. It is a common belief in Kathmandu that there was divergence in the political outlooks of King Tribhuvan and the Crown Prince. The latter lived a somewhat lonely life and learnt to be reserved.



The Crown Prince, Mahendra, showed himself to be an unusual person when he insisted on taking one wife instead of two, which had been the practice so far for Kings and princes in Nepal. He was married to Rajya Laxmi, daughter of General Hari Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, and grand-daughter of the then Prime Minister Joodha Shumshere, in 1940 when King Tribhuvan was already engaged in clandestine activities against the Rana hegemony. It is doubtful if under those circumstances King Tribhuvan could have viewed with favour the marriage of the Crown Prince in the Prime Minister's family. The fact that the Ranas after 1940 sought to persuade King Tribhuvan to abdicate the throne in favour of the Crown Prince lent some indirect confirmation to the suspicion that the marriage had been arranged for political considerations. The plan of the Rana Prime Minister to enthrone Prince Mahendra in the life-time of King Tribhuvan could have resulted in the cooling off of the relations between father and son.

The Crown Prince's first consort died in 1950 after giving birth to three princes and three princesses. In 1952 after the successful insurrection against the Ranas, the Crown Prince married her sister, the present Queen. The relations between the Ranas and King Tribhuvan were at that time bitter. The marriage apparently took place at the initiative of the Crown Prince and not the King, who was away in Calcutta (India) on the occasion. This marriage promoted in certain circles the feeling that the Crown Prince was better disposed towards the Ranas than the King. This impression persisted even after he came to throne, though there is no evidence to support the view that he was working in collaboration with the senior members of the Rana family.

It was not before the Crown Prince was 24 that he left the Kingdom for the first time along with his father. The country they visited was India. Another six years were to elapse before he left Nepal for the second time with other members of the Royal family on November 11, 1950, to seek asylum in India. He paid his first visit to Europe when

he went to Nice in France in February, 1955, to seek powers from the ailing King to deal with the political crisis in Nepal. He has spent months ever since he came to the throne touring difficult mountainous regions of Nepal. He has covered hundreds of miles on treacherous tracks on pony back to acquaint himself with the conditions in the interior. No Nepalese King had ever done so before. These visits have helped him to see for himself that monarchy continues to be the most popular single institution in Nepal. That may have given him a new sense of confidence and power.

A man of few words, King Mahendra is said to know his mind. But it has yet to be seen whether he is fully equipped to grasp by himself the intricacies of the contemporary national and international political scene. Lack of education is bound to be a serious handicap in our complicated age when ideas have come to play an increasingly important role even in the world of power politics. In the past he had to depend on advisers close to the Palace, who in the nature of things represented the old order. In Kathmandu this tendency among the men in the palace was accentuated as the capital itself was more or less isolated from the rest of the country. The assertion of personal power at home by the King had its counterpart in his desire to carve out for Nepal a middle position between India and China. But both were somewhat static attitudes inconsistent with the needs of the present dynamic situation.

The King has now agreed to be a constitutional head of the State. The success of the democratic experiment is likely to have repercussions in the field of foreign relations. The Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Chou En-lai, during his visit to Kathmandu in January, 1957, described him as a progressive King. Competent political observers in Kathmandu noted the importance of the observation. This indicated a recognition on the part of the Chinese that in the present context of things in Nepal it was necessary to win the King's goodwill. The Communist Party's programme of abolishing the institution of monarchy does not detract from the validity of the observation in that the Communists have always operated on two levels. It should be noted



that a section of the people in Kathmandu have a tradition of looking northward instead of southward and they continue to do so even after the absorption of Tibet into the Chinese empire.

Mr. B. P. Koirala, who played a leading role in organising the insurrection in 1950, looks deceptively gentle in his forties. He is one of the few politicians in Nepal who understand the dynamics of the complicated international situation today. He is frank and outspoken and even his opponents cannot accuse him of nursing totalitarian ambitions, though he is not always unwilling to use strong-arm methods in the pursuit of his objective. He and his colleagues in the Nepali Congress were in the wilderness in the pre-election period because they found it difficult to come to terms with the realities of the Nepalese political situation. They were the idealists of Nepal.

Mr. Koirala—he is popularly known as B. P. in Nepal—came to politics via terrorism in the early thirties when he was a student in Patna in India. His father was a Government official in Kathmandu and had fallen out with the Rana authorities. Like many of his countrymen, B. P. saw the struggle against the Ranas as a part of the larger Indian struggle against the British rule. He was drawn into the Congress Socialist Party soon after it was formed in 1934 inside the Indian National Congress. Since then he has maintained close links with the Indian Socialist leaders. The Nepali Congress is a member of the Socialist International. This connection was often sought to be exploited by his adversaries in the attempt to discredit him. Often there has been a whispering campaign that he received foreign assistance through the Socialist International.

Mr. Koirala is adequately acquainted with the nature of Communist totalitarianism and the threat that the Communists pose to the independence of his country. He is firmly opposed to Communism, though in the Nepali Congress he was known till before the elections to hold a somewhat middle position between those who advocated "special friendship" with India and others who were willing to do business with Communist China and the local

Communist Party. It is not unlikely that he was influenced by his appreciation of the line that Mr. Nehru has followed in India. It is also not unlikely that he nursed some grievances against India, which began with a public controversy between him and the then Indian Ambassador, Mr. C. P. N. Singh, in 1950-51. This controversy is referred to in a subsequent chapter.

Under his leadership, the Nepali Congress has vindicated its claim to be the most influential party in Nepal. Inside the Congress, no one has so far been able to challenge his leadership. The young cadre in the party adores him and he has undertaken extensive tours to canvass support for the party and its ideals. He has proved his ability to keep the diverse elements together in the party while it has been out of office. Whether he can continue to do so now that it is in power remains to be seen. But that is not a problem peculiar either to Nepal or the Nepali Congress.

Still another important figure in Nepal is Bharat Shumshere, General Secretary of the Gorkha Parishad. He and his family members dominate this organisation, which has emerged as the second largest party in the Kingdom with 19 members in the Lower House. In this highly political family, 31-year-old Bharat is the most dynamic personality. It was he who took the initiative to form the Gorkha Dal in 1951 after the Rana family had been divested of the monopoly of power. His father, General Mrigendra Shumshere, brings experience and maturity to bear on the impetuosity of his son.

Bharat Shumshere forfeited the support of the old Ranas after the incident of April 12, 1951, when his supporters released him from jail and marched on the house of Mr. B. P. Koirala, who as the Home Minister had ordered his arrest. The senior members of the family took the view that this episode weakened the position of Mohun Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana the Prime Minister, leading to his resignation and thus to the total eclipse of the Rana power. But he has continued to be the leader of the Gorkha Parishad. The Parishad was formed after the Dal had been declared illegal.



For four years, the youthful Bharat Shumshere provided leadership to the anti-Indian movement in Nepal. This problem is discussed at some length in the following chapter. With the dissolution of the Rana-Nepali Congress coalition Government in November, 1951, the senior Ranas gave up the hope of being able to regain power. Many of them came to settle in India. The chances of the Gorkha Parishad coming to power on the strength of an anti-Indian movement grew dim. Its leaders were, therefore, forced to undertake a reappraisal of their policies.

The leadership of the Parishad and the circumstances in which it was born determined its political character. It was intended to shore up the waning prestige and influence of the Ranas. As such it was bound to be a conservative party. Since the Ranas held India as being primarily responsible for the loss of their power, the Parishad logically pursued an anti-Indian line. The shift in the political situation of Nepal made the previous politics of the Parishad untenable. With the rise in the influence of Communist China in Nepal, the Parishad was compelled to reappraise its policies. The logical consequence was a slow reorientation in favour of India. The earlier policies of the Gorkha Parishad lost even the semblance of justification when Mr. Tanka Prasad, never known to be friendly to India, became Prime Minister and claimed that he had been successful in eliminating India's influence in the affairs of his country. The Gorkha Parishad leaders have since been trying to live down their hostility towards India.

It is generally not known that Bharat Shumshere was among the rebels in the Rana family when it enjoyed the monopoly of power. He told this writer that for some time he was confined in his grandfather Babar Shumshere's palace, known as the Babar Mahal, when he was a student in Kathmandu. He had led a demonstration of the students. He received higher education in Banaras and Bombay. For a brief period, he was associated with Mr. B. P. Koirala who was then trying to organise resistance against the Rana domination. Presumably he decided to be the leader of the Gorkha Dal and of the anti-India movement in the

erroneous belief that India wanted to "colonise" Nepal. Though conservative in outlook, Bharat Shumshere is not a reactionary. Bharat Shumshere is openly anti-Communist and regards extension of the influence of Communist China and the local Communists as a major threat to Nepal's independence. It is a measure of the change in Bharat Shumshere's political outlook that in 1957 and 1958 he was keen to emphasise his personal and his family's links with India. His mother is of Indian origin and four of his brothers are married in India, he told this writer.

No reference had been made in this discussion to either Mr. M. P. Koirala, twice Prime Minister since 1951, or Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya, second commoner Prime Minister in the chequered history of Nepal. Neither of them is today an independent political force of much consequence. Mr. M. P. Koirala is generally rated as an able politician. But he lost his position in the Nepali Congress when he got involved in a prolonged controversy with the party leadership in 1952. In 1959, he did not contest election. Mr. Tanka Prasad's Praja Parishad has a small following among the people. He himself forfeited his security in the election. Earlier, in August, 1958, he had split the Praja Parishad. The majority of the members continued to follow the leadership of Mr. Bhadrakali Misra. It was largely the result of Mr. Misra's initiative that the Praja Parishad in August, 1957, decided to join with the Nepali Congress and the Nepal National Congress to form the Democratic Front to agitate for early elections. He is known to have exercised a restraining influence on the pro-China wing of the Parishad during Mr. Tanka Prasad's tenure of office as Prime Minister.

In Nepal, politics still turns on personal factors and not much attention is paid to the platforms of the different parties. Also, in the given social and economic conditions of the Kingdom, the platforms of different parties are perforce more or less similar. The central problems in Nepal are the elimination of the antiquated land tenure systems, modernisation of the administration and the development of the country's economy so that there is enough to go round



for a fast rising population. As in other Asian countries, it is common ground among the politicians that Nepal can be economically developed only in the context of centralised planning. Since Nepal is not in a position to undertake the task of putting up heavy industries even with foreign assistance, there does not exist any serious difference of opinion on the order of priority between heavy industry and consumer industries.

## INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS

INDIA'S CONCERN over the development in Nepal is only natural. Geography is a compelling factor. The social, economic, political and historical ties between India and Nepal are so intimate that their destinies are indissolubly inter-linked. Nepal is not a natural buffer between India and China for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Tibet is not a natural part of China. Secondly, even if China's claims over Tibet are accepted as they have been by India, this does not detract from the fact that the main Himalayan ranges lie to the north of Nepal and it is the Himalayas that demarcate the frontiers in this part of the world. Nepal does not possess any natural boundary with India; the Nepal Terai runs along the Indian plains for over 500 miles. The mosquito infested jungles in the Terai have never in history deterred traders, pilgrims and common people from moving from one country into the other. There has never been a cultural movement in either country which did not make an impact on the other. Today the cultural patterns in India and Nepal are hardly distinguishable. Hinduism, the faith of the majority of the people in India, is the dominant religion in Nepal. Gorkhali, the official language of the Kingdom, is, like several Indian languages, a descendant of Sanskrit. Even the other dialects and languages spoken and understood in Nepal bear close resemblance to Indian languages. Hindi is universally understood in Nepal and Gorkhali is written in the Devnagri script.

Similarly, the economics of the two countries are inextricably interwoven. Aside from 20,000 Gorkhas serving in the Indian Army, Nepalese in lakhs come to India for jobs and over 1,15,000 Nepalese have settled in India, according to Nepalese census figures. Peasants and business men of Indian origin have settled in large numbers in Nepal. The



Nepalese in India and the Indians in Nepal do not feel that they have taken residence in a foreign country in view of the common ways of life. The Nepalese settlers in India enjoy all the rights of citizenship. Nepal buys almost all her requirements of products like cloth, salt and kerosene in India and supplies to her food grains, cereals, herbs, hides and ghee. The problem of flood control can be tackled only jointly by India and Nepal and the agreement on the Kosi project underlines the need for, and the scope of, co-operation between the two countries.

Nepal has figured in Indian mythology from times immemorial. There are allusions to the Kingdom in the *Puranas* and the epics. Hindu mythology connected a number of its personages and events with Nepal. Sita, heroine of the *Ramayana*, is believed to have been born in Janakpur in Nepal. Since not much is known about the early history of Nepal and India, it is not before the beginning of the Buddhist era that the nature of the contacts between them begins to assume a somewhat definite shape.

Lord Buddha was born in the Lumbini Gardens in the Terai in Nepal, and he visited the Kathmandu valley after his enlightenment some 2,500 years ago. There still exists a shrine 20 miles east to Kathmandu known as Namobuddha or Namura to commemorate the event of Lord Buddha preaching his message there. In about 250 B.C. Emperor Asoka is believed to have visited the valley to propagate the Buddhist faith. He raised four stupas on each corner of the city of Patan, one of the three principal cities of the Kathmandu valley. He erected pillars at Lumbini to record the fact of his visit to the sacred place in the twentieth year of his reign. Three such pillars have already been discovered. Asoka's daughter Charumati is believed to have married a Nepalese prince. During this and subsequent periods, even the boundaries between what are now India and Nepal shifted from time to time and the conflicts between them were of inter-family nature. Indian princes ruled in Nepal and the Nepalese Kings ruled over large parts of India. The ruling dynasties and the people mingled freely.