

CHAPTER -V

PRELUDE TO THE NEPALESE REVOLUTION

Approaching the Cross Road

The 1944 Annual Report on Nepal takes satisfaction from the fact that there was no sign of an anti-Rana movement by the end of 1944.¹ In 1944 the Government of Nepal celebrated, in Kathmandu, "with illumination of public building and holidays for, licensed gambling as a gesture of popular rejoicing" the allied success in Africa and the defeat of Italians.²

The atmosphere was so relaxed that the Nepal Annual Report of 1944 also reported "the sensational breach of precedent in the incognito visit of the King of Nepal to India". For the first time since 1846, on November 20, 1944, the king crossed the frontier of his country. The King visited Puri, Lucknow, Agra, Delhi and Calcutta by arrangement between the British Government of India and the Maharaja of Nepal.

In 1945 the Nepal Annual Report said that nothing was

1. Nepal Annual Report 1944, India Office Library, London, NEG 9436.
2. Shah Rishikesh, Modern Nepal, Vol. II P.147.

heard of the anti-Rana movement. When World War II was over, on July 31 and on August 20, 1945, Maharana Juddha Shumsher wrote two letters to Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, congratulating him on the allied victory. Churchill, apparently, received the letters after losing office through the general election of 1945. But he wrote back to the Maharaja on October 13, 1945 conveying warm appreciation of the services of the Maharaja and the heroic Gorkhas in defeating the German and Japanese tyrants and aggressors.³ The Gurkha contingents returned by October 1945 along with modern standard equipment.⁴

On November 29, 1945, ended the benevolent despotism of Maharaja Juddha Shumsher when he abdicated, voluntarily in favour of his nephew, Padma Shumsher was founded by his critics as "the weeping Maharaja" as he had wept publicly during the hand over ceremony of November 29.

He had reasons to weep besides the emotion. His treasury was exhausted.⁵ Thousands of demobilized Gorkha soldiers had returned to Nepal having seen the world. Their expectations from a tottering ancien regime would normally

3. Ibid., pp.147-48.

4. Ibid. p.148.

5. Ibid., p.162.

make it's rulers nervous. The Nepalese youth was in ferment and the British Empire was cracking. The winds of change had started blowing in British India where negotiations for transfer of power had started immediately after the war and had been accentuated since the victory of the Labour Party in British elections.

In March 1946, the Cabinet Mission arrived in India and gave it's plan for a Constituent Assembly, comprising representatives from British India and the princely states for framing a constitution for a free India. Of course, the Cabinet Mission did not directly concern Nepal as Nepal was neither a princely state nor a part of British India. But everybody could see that the transfer of power in India would remove the protective shield of British power from the Rana regime. Everybody did also expect that the democratic forces that had thrived with direct and indirect assistance from Indian nationalist and radical movements would get a shot in the arms. The 1946 Annual Report on Nepal from G.N. Falconer, the British Ambassador in Nepal, dated 29th January 1947, noted under the heading 'Anti-Rana movement' that there were faint rumblings, towards the end of the year, mainly from the disgruntled Nepalese living outside Nepal.

On June 9, 1946, Rana Padma Shumsher's simple inaugural

ceremony was held. In that ceremony Padma Shumsher announced a few gifts to the Nepalese people. In the month of September, the same year, Dr. B.S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha visited Nepal along with his son and his personal secretary. He had several meetings with the Maharaja. He strongly denounced the Indian National Congress programme and supported the Rana regime as the guardians of the only Hindu state of the world in a public meeting at Trichandra College in Kathmandu. On the other hand, a delegation of the All India Gorkha League, led by its President, Dambar Singh Gurung, reached Kathmandu on November 26, 1946. It paid a courtesy call to the Maharaja but, subsequently, in public utterances, strongly criticised the Rana regime for neglecting the Nepalese in India.⁶

Formation of the Nepali National Congress

The first move towards the formation of a broad-based political organisation of the Nepalese to fight the Ranashahi, after World War II, was taken by B.P. Koirala. In a statement issued, in October 1946, from Patna, B.P. Koirala called upon the Nepalese youth to form a strong organisation in India for the same purpose. Following this the Nepalese youth in Banaras, mostly students, held a small

6. Ibid.

meeting and formed a new party. Thus, on October 31, 1946, the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Congress⁷ was formed. The office holders of the adhoc committee of this organisation were the following:

President : Devi Prasad Sapkota
Vice-President : Bal Chandra Sharma
General Secretary : K.P. Upadhyaya
Publicity Secretary : G.P. Upadhyaya

Subsequently, on January 25-26, 1947, a larger conference of the party was held at Calcutta to formulate the aims, objectives and programme of the party. Two other organizations - the Nepali Sangh of Banaras and the Gurkha Congress of Calcutta⁸ - joined this conference. Ganeshman Singh, the Praja Parishad leader who had escaped from Kathmandu prison on June 20, 1944, arrived at the conference.⁹ The conference received letters of good wishes from the Congress leaders, Acharya J.B. Kripalani and Mrs. Vijay Laxmi Pandit, and the Congress Socialist leaders, Acharya Narendra Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan and Dr. Rammanohar Lohia. Dr. Lohia is said to have personally

7. Bhattacharjee, G.P. India and Politics in Modern Nepal pp.25-26 and Gupta. Anirudha, Politics in Nepal pp.165-166

8. Bhattacharjee, G.P., p.26.

9. Ibid.

contributed to the success of the Conference.¹⁰

The conference renamed the organisation as Nepali Rashtriya (National) Congress after the style of the Indian National Congress. The Nepali Rashtriya Congress adopted two broad objectives.:-

- 1) to help the people of India to achieve complete national independence without which no democratic government could be established in Nepal¹¹ and
- 2) to launch a non-violent movement in Nepal for ending the Rana rule and establishing a constitutional monarchy there¹²

Two other resolutions (1) supported the cause of the Vietnamese people in their struggle against French colonialism and

(2) demanded the release of the Praja Parishad leaders rotting in the Nepalese jails since 1940.¹³

The four resolutions underline the democratic, anti

10. Ibid.

11. Bhattacharjee, G.P. India and Politics in Modern Nepal, p.26, Gupta 166.

12. Gupta, Anirudha - Politics in Nepal, pp.166-167.

13. Ibid.

colonial and internationalist spirits of the Nepalese revolution, which was but natural for a Third World Country in the middle of the twentieth century. Because of her peculiar geography and history Nepal could not dream of democracy under the shadow of a British empire in India. The resolution on Vietnam, however, not only speaks of anti-colonialism but also bears the imprint of a left ideology. Organizationally, the Conference elected an executive committee with the following office-bearers:¹⁴

1. Tanka Prasad Acharya - President
2. B.P. Koirala - Acting President
3. Bal Chandra Sharma - General Secretary
4. D.R. Regmi - Publicity Secretary
5. Gopal Prasad Upadhyaya - Member
6. Krishna Prasad Upadhyaya - Member
7. Rudra Prasad Giri - Member

The Central office of the party was set up at Banaras.

The Biratnagar Jute Mill strike

Although the Nepali Rashtriya Congress adopted a resolution planning to undertake the Satyagraha on civil rights movement, the Biratnagar jute mill strike intervened

14. Bhattacharjee, op.cit., pp.26-27.

between the resolution and its implementation. All available evidences suggest that the strike was not on the agenda of the Nepali Rashtriya Congress, Rishikesh Shaha suggests that "it was more than just a co-incidence that labour strikes and political demonstration inside Nepal occurred about the same time as the Nepali delegation was taking part in the Asian Relation Conference in Delhi. The newly formed Nepali Rashtriya (National) Congress which was agitating for democratic rights in Nepal from its base in India, took advantage of the situation of unrest in the Biratnagar jute mill in the spring of 1947. The Nepali (Rana) Government was no longer in a position to send troops quickly to the disturbed area by the Indian railways and it took a long time for the troops to be sent to Biratnagar by the long and circuitous hill route."¹⁵

According to Dr. D.R. Regmi, the strike was launched by Manmohan Adhikari, who was a member of the Communist Party of India. The Purnea Unit of the Congress Socialist Party "also intervened on behalf of the labourers in the dispute between the Marwari management and the labour hands on the questions of wage increment".¹⁶

15. Shaha, Rishikesh, Modern Nepal, Vol.II, p.174.

16. Regmi, D.R. A Century of Family Autocracy in Nepal, p.194.

It should be noted that Nepal was a very unlikely place for an organised labour movement in 1947. Virtually there was little industry in Nepal. Electricity was introduced in Kathmandu only in 1912. It was extended only in 1933. In 1936 an Industrial Board was set up for Nepal. A new Nepal Company Act was passed encouraging private management and investment in Industry. In 1934 a Bombay-based National Mining Syndicate and Trading Company was given licence to work Cobalt mines east of the Kathmandu valley. The first bank in Nepal was established in 1937. In 1947, Nepal boasted a jute mill in Biratnagar, a cotton mill at Birganj and two match factories in the two towns.¹⁷ In 1947, Biratnagar had its postal links with the Indian town of Jogbani¹⁸ which had another jute mill.

In fact, Biratnagar jute mill appears to have been a subsidiary of the Jogbani jute mill, which, according to Regmi, had 50% Indian Capital and wholly Indian labour population.¹⁹ According to Jaya Prakash Narayan, however,

17. Shaha, Rishikesh, Modern Nepal, vol. II, p.151.

18. J.P.'s file (A Letter from B.P Koirala to Jayaprakash Narayan; dated 17.9.52).

19. (The Indian owners were a Marwari family - the Chamarias - of Calcutta. The other shares were held by the Ranas) Mirsra, Kiran, B.P. Koirala: Life and Time, p.19.

80% of the jute mill workers were Indian.²⁰ This sounds more probable as, according to Shaha, Tarini Prasad Koirala, Girija Prasad Koirala, Man Mohan Adhikari, Gehendra Hari Sharma and Yuvaraj Adhikari, all Nepalese leaders of the mill workers, were employees of the mill.²¹ The strike started on March 4, 1947, on economic demands of the workers and ended on March 27, 1947, after 250 troops sent from Kathmandu, reached Biratnagar on March 23 and unleashed brutal repression.²² On March 9, B.P. Koirala, Acting President of Nepal Rashtriya Congress, and his colleagues reached Biratnagar and got involved in the strike on invitation of the said strike leaders. On March 25, B.P. Koirala, Balchandra Sharma, Gopal Prasad Bhattarai, Girija Prasad Koirala, Manmohan Adhikari, Gehendra Hari Sharma, Tarini Prasad Koirala, Yuvaraj Adhikari²³ and a member of the Congress Socialist Party of India (From Purnea, Bihar), Kapil Dev Singh²⁴ were arrested. The Indians were released, after due admonition, after a few days. Manmohan Adhikari, Yuvaraj Adhikari, Girija Prasad Koirala and Tarini Prasad

20. J.P.'s file (A letter from JP to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 9.5.47).

21. Shaha, op.cit., p.174.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. A typed statement, dated Patna, the 20th May 1947 and signed by Jayaprakash Narayan, probably delivered as a press statement (J.P.'s file, pg.129.).

Koirala were detained for two and a half years as they were Nepalese subjects along with Narasingha Narayan Singh, Secretary of the Purnea District Committee of the CSP, and Vidyadhar Tripathi, another socialist from Purnea (J.P.'s file).

Immediately after these arrests the mill owners accepted most of the demands of the workers. But the strike went on for two more days under the leadership of Matrika Prasad Koirala in protest against the arrests. On March 27 B.P. Koirala's mother, two sisters and cousin's widow were arrested.²⁵ A meeting of the Working Committee, held at Calcutta, called upon the Rana Government to release the arrested persons and stop repression by April 13, 1947.²⁶ On April 9-10 a delegates' conference at Jogbani endorsed the decision.

The Analytical Questions on the Strike

The facts of the Jute mill strike underline the complex relationship between the Nepali National Congress and the Indian Left.

25. Regmi, D.R. p.194.

26. Shaha, Rishikesh, p.174-175.

In the first place, it has to be noted that the strike was not on the N.N.C's agenda as led down in January 1947 at Calcutta. On the face of it, it was a labour agitation on purely economic ground. Jaya Prakash Narayan refers to the strike in the "two mills of Jogbani."²⁷ It is possible that the labour movement was entirely conceived in India as ¹apart of the Indian Left's strategy. It is known that, in the late forties, some of the Nepalese young men based in Calcutta were in touch with the Communist Party of India. In 1947 they were active in certain parts of Terai in organising peasants' and workers' movements.²⁸

In the second place, the question of initiatives arises, Regmi writes that the Biratnagar strike had been launched by Manmohan Adhikari, a Communist Party of India hand.²⁹ Balchandra Sharma agrees with this view. He points out that labour laws prevailing in India did not operate in Nepal. The Nepalese mill workers were encouraged by the foundation of the Nepali Rashtriya Congress.³⁰

In the third place, there is a question of timing of

27. J.P.'s letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 9.5.47, op.cit.

28. Gupta, Anirudha, op.cit., pg.199.

29. Regmi, p.194.

30. Sharma, Balchandra, Nepal Ko Aitihāsik Ruprekha p.396.

the strike "it was more than just a co-incident" writes Rishikesh Shaha that "labour strike and political demonstration inside Nepal occurred about the same time as the Nepali delegation was taking part in the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi. The newly formed the Nepali National Congress which was agitating for democratic rights in Nepal from its base in India took advantage of the situation of the unrest in the Biratnagar jute mill in the spring of 1947".³¹

This gives an impression of a 'conspiracy' of the N.N.C. to embarrass the Rana Government. On the other hand, if, according to our first contention, the strike is viewed as originating from the Indian labour movement, a different perspective opens up. The labour scene in India after World War II was quite volatile because of the depressionary pressure and the rising Communist activity since early 1947, when the Interim Government had come into being under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress party was trying to dissociate from itself the All India Trade Union Congress or to capture its leadership through the Hindustan Majdoor Sevak Sangh (In fact, in May 1947, the Congress

31. Shaha, op.cit., p.174.

decided to have a separate labour organization).³² This gave birth to a competitive radicalism in the Leftist labour movement of India. The Jogbani - Biratnagar strike can be seen as a part of this churning.

The fourth question is what role did the N.N.C. play in the strike. According to Balchandra Sharma, the strikers invited B.P. Koirala, the acting President of N.N.C. (who himself had some trade union background), to guide them in the movement.³³ The fifth question is why did the Rana Government react so violently to the strike and resort to repression. According to Shaha the difficulties of the communication led to the delay of the arrival of troops in Biratnagar.³⁴ According to Balchandra Sharma hopeful negotiations were going on during the peaceful continuation of the strike till March 24.³⁵ But the Nepal Government refused to allow the N.N.C. to entrench itself in the labour movement through the successful settlement of the strike. According to Saul Rose, "Strike action was unprecedented in Nepal. Slavery had been abolished only some thirty years

32. Saksena, R.C., Labour Problems and Social Welfare, p.92, and Chaube, S.K. Constituent Assembly of India, p.138.

33. Sharma, Balchandra, Nepal Ki Atihasik Rup Rekha, p.396.

34. Shah, op.cit., 174.

35. Sharma, Balchandra, op.cit., p.396.

before - and the Government reacted strongly".³⁶

According to J.P., violence was unleashed only after the labour leaders and the N.N.C. President demanded the reference of the dispute to arbitration.³⁷

It is possible to construct a harmonious interpretation of all those views. The labour strike was unprecedented and totally alien to the "benevolent despotism" - which had so far allowed only loyal submissions from the common people and suppressed all kinds of protest. The proposal of arbitration was a direct challenge to the self righteous autocracy. The Ranas must have decided to nip such challenges in the bud. It was, therefore, an over-reaction on the part of the Ranas. Logistic difficulties delayed the arrival of the troops. But when they arrived, the action was decisive.

To sum up, the Biratnagar strike had started as an economic struggle of the working class projected from India. The Indian Left had a very positive role in the initiation of the movement, but it remained confined to the framework of trade unionsim. This self drawn limit of the Biratnagar

36. Rose, Saul, Socialism in Southern Asia, p.71.

37. J.P.'s statement, dated 20 May 1947 (J.P.'file).

struggle was obliterated by the arrogance and panic reaction of the Ranas and the labour movement joined the mainstream of the Nepalese democratic struggle.

A Critical Negotiation

The Biratnagar strike was over on March 27, 1947. But neither the issues were settled, nor were the leaders of the strike released immediately. On April 13, 1947, the N.N.C. started the Satyagraha.³⁸ On April 24 B.P. was brought to Kathmandu. On April 30 the movement exploded into mass rallies and demonstrations at Kathmandu. On that day, Keshav Prasad Koirala, a brother of B.P. Koirala and a Government officer himself, reached Kathmandu at the invitation of Maharaja Padma Shumsher.³⁹

According to a confidential memorandum of Keshav Prasad Koirala, the Maharaja had formulated certain reform plans and placed them for consideration of the 44 reactionary Ranas who, till the time of his arrival, had not given their opinion. Padma Shumsher, therefore, had called K.P. Koirala for securing through his office the opinion of B.P. Koirala

38. Gupta, op.cit., p.30.

39. Confidential Memorandum of Keshav Prasad Koirala, nondated (J.P. file).

on his reform plan.⁴⁰ The Maharaja had already been warned by one of the powerful Ranas, Vijay Shumsher, that the NNC was out to hand Nepal over to an independent India.⁴¹

The Maharaja's plans were mainly two:

(1) There would be a Council of 28 members, 14 of whom would be elected and 14 nominated, to advise the Maharaja on matters of administration except the army and finance.

(2) He had requested Pandit Nehru for an adviser to suggest reforms.

According to K.P. Koirala, B.P. rejected the first plan outright. On the second plan B.P. wanted a public commitment from the Maharaja that the advice given by the Indian expert would be implemented in toto and without delay. The NNC would, of course, accept them.

B.P. Koirala endorsed the following suggestions of his brother on the strike.

- (1) Increase in the wages of the workers by 15%.
- (2) Union to be recognized.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

- (3) Impartial enquiry to be instituted in the firing and proper compensation to be paid.
- (4) No victimization of the strikers to take place.
- (5) All persons arrested in connection with the strike to be immediately and unconditionally released.⁴²

Conflicting Accounts of the Repression

In his letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 9.5.47, Jayaprakash reported "a large number of arrests had been made, three women were shot dead and peaceful processions were regularly lathi charged. B.P. Koirala (a friend of mine), his mother and two sisters were among them".⁴³

In the official accounts of the March incidence there is no mention of killing⁴⁴ though there is an admission of firing with a view to dispersing the workers' procession. The Nepal Government denied the allegation of killing and the torture of women. Dr. Rajendra Prasad visited the area and enquired into the matter.

According to Nehru Rajendra Prasad "could not find

42. Keshav Prasad Koirala's confidential memorandum, non-dated, J.P.'s file.

43. J.P.'s file, p.4.

44. Shah R. p.174.

any substantial proof".⁴⁵ In his letter, of 9th May, 1947, J.P. had called the Nepalese rulers "polished liars" and had alleged that the Nepalese authorities had removed the dead bodies to suppress evidence.

Even if one does not agree with J.P.'s description of the Nepalese authorities, one is flabbergasted by the double-talk of the men in power. When B.P. Koirala was brought to Kathmandu, the Maharaja Padma Shumsher informed him: "You have been brought here to help me as you did not come earlier listening to my messages sent through several persons". Maharaja Padma put the blame for fabricating the charge of "treachery against the King and the country" against B.P. Koirala on the reactionary Ranas, particularly the number 2 of Nepal, the Commander-in-Chief, Mohan Shumsher.⁴⁶

When Suryaprasad Upadhyaya asked Maharaja Padma Shumsher under what charge B.P. was arrested and "brought to Nepal when he was pleading for Government arbitration",⁴⁷ the Maharaja fell silent. Then he said that his intentions

45. Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to J.P. Narayan, dated 13th May 1947 (J.P.'s file).

46. Essential points for the present by Suryaprasad Upadhyaya", dated 17 V, 47. p.124 (J.P.'s file).

47. Ibid.

were never to arrest B.P. Koirala or "anybody else". But that he was overpowered by Mohan Shumsher and Babar Shumsher (No. 3 of Nepal).⁴⁸

On 19.5.47 made the confidential report that B.P. Koirala and his five comrades "have been treated well". They were given all kinds of personal comforts, kept unfettered and without handcuffs, in a private bungalow, given good food, books and newspapers and medical treatment and were even allowed to walk around the garden.⁴⁹

On the other hand, even though the N.N.C. called off the Satyagraha on 2nd June, 1947, B.P. Koirala and a few of his close comrades were released only in August 1947, and that too on health ground, as a result of intercession of Mahatma Gandhi.⁵⁰

The Satyagraha - 1947

The N.N.C. resolution on 10th April, 1947 raised the following points:

1. grant of civil liberties

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Shaha Rishikesh, op.cit. p.175.

2. release of all political leaders⁵¹
3. end of Ranashahi⁵²

The civil disobedience movement started on 13th April, 1947, as individual satyagrahas. On 30th April, the agitation took the form of rallies and processions, defying prohibitory orders in Kathmandu.⁵³ On that day a big procession proceeded to Bishal Nagar, the palace of the Maharaja, raising the slogan "Marna Mitana Tayyar Chalna" (ready to die). Suddenly, Nara Shumsher Rana with military forces appeared before the procession like a hungry lion. Tanka Vilas, Pushpalal, Shambhu Ram, Tilak Raj Shahi were beaten with the rifles of Narabahadur Rana. One Gaja Sundar was completely ceased by one ear.⁵⁴ Among the Satyagrahis on that day a few were women. They were Sahana Devi (wife of Pushpalal), Snehalata Devi, Sadhana Devi etc. Altogether 27 persons were arrested. It is also a surprising fact that two of them were of Rana status.

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51. The first two points are mentioned in J.P.'s letter to Jawaharlal (J.P.'s file) p.4.
 52. The first two are the original resolution of N.N.C. about the "end of Ranashahi" see Regmi, D.R. op.cit., p.195.
 53. Ibid.
 54. A letter of Comrade Sitaram to the General Secretary NNC, Raxual, dated 5th May (J.P.'s file).

On 3rd May, 1947, Satyagraha was launched by a sixteen year old girl, Priyadarshan.⁵⁵ She had just been awarded her Matriculation degree from the Darbar high school. When Priyadarshan, with other participants, proceeded to Bishalnagar, she, with four others, were arrested.⁵⁶

On 6th May 1947, a big procession (in which thousands of people participated) proceeded to Bishalnagar. They were with lathis and spears. However, 25 were arrested and taken to the commander-in-chief's palace where they were asked to stop ^{the} satyagraha on the basis of the fulfilment of their demands by the Maharaja.⁵⁷

When the satyagrahis were returning from the Commander-in-Chief's palace, they met B.P. Koirala along with his five comrades waiting outside the palace of the Maharaja. Tanka Vilas and Tilak Raj Shahi informed Koirala that Maharaja had promised them civil liberties within a few days and asked them to withdraw the satyagraha. Suddenly they were arrested and put into prison with nail and fetters under the false

55. The description of the Satyagraha is based on "a letter from Com. Sitaram to the President, N.N.C. Raxaul" (J.P.'s file).

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

charge of attempting to rescue B.P. Koirala.⁵⁸ The Maharaja was probably kept in the dark.⁵⁹ However, the Maharaja, finally proclaimed the grant of civil rights on Friday 16th May 1947. The satyagraha was withdrawn on June 2, 1947.

An Analysis of the Satyagraha

A number of features are revealed by the satyagraha. First, as D.R. Regmi notes, several Praja Parishad members had been active underground since 1941. Four of them, Tanka Vilas, Amir Bahadur, Tilak Raj Shahi and Puspa Lal organised the procession of 30th April and were arrested.⁶⁰ Puspa Lal also happened to be the brother of Ganga Lal, a martyr of 1940.⁶¹

Secondly, there was participation of at least five women in the agitation. For the first time in Nepal's history⁶² the middle class women came out on the street in protest against the regime. The procession of 3rd May, was,

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Regmi, D.R. op.cit., 195.

61. Sitaram's letter, dated 9th May (J.P. file). p.195.

62. Regmi, op.cit., p.195.

in fact, led by a sixteen-year old girl.⁶³

Thirdly, three interesting names appear in the reports of the agitation (1) Prem Bahadur Kansakar who had first returned to Kathmandu after completing his study at Patna, as the "main person behind the political activities in Kathmandu valley".⁶⁴ (2) Tilak Raj Shahi (C-class Rana), nephew of General Duman shamsher and grandson of Sher shumsher.⁶⁵ (3) Nara Bikram Rana, son of Colonal Dambar Bikram Rana (A-class Rana).⁶⁶

The satyagraha, therefore, shows a distinct widening of the base of the democratic movement in Nepal. Three different streams appear to have merged into the Satyagraha. One was the indigenous Praja Parishad group with ever widening participation. The second was the India-affiliated leftist and democratic Nepalese like B.P. Koirala and Manmohan Adhikari who had increased the speed of the movement by their participation in the Biratnagar strike. The third group was made up of India-based Nepalese students, spread from Banaras to Patna, who had in fact,

63. Sitaram's letter op, cit. 5.

64. Shaha, Rishikesh, op.cit., p.175.

65. Sitaram's Letter, op.cit. p.195.(J.P.File).

66. Ibid.

begun laying the organisational foundation of the movement in October 1946 (Devi Prasad Sapkota to Prem Bahadur Kansakar).

Sir Padma Shumsher's Dilemma

The Rana Government of Nepal had its own dilemma. Eyebrows were raised, as early as February 1, 1935, when Maharaja Juddha Shumsher attended an unofficial function organised by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, at Talkatora garden, New Delhi, in his honour.⁶⁷ Malaviya's personal interest in the Nepal Maharaja could perhaps be explained partly by his religious interest and the Maharaja's patronage to Banaras Hindu University. But there were other personalities such as Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Ansari and Bhulabhai Desai. This reception was, of course, held long before the Praja Parishad agitation in Nepal. Yet it shows a desire on the part of Maharaja to make a distinction between the Congress movement in India and the democratic movement in Nepal. In other words, where as an authoritarian Prime Minister like Juddha Shumsher could not tolerate any challenge within Nepal, he would not mind exchanging pleasantries with enemies of the British Empire

67. Shaha Rishikesh, op.cit., p.123.

outside Nepal.⁶⁸ Rishikesh Shaha has the following explanation : - "In attending this function Maharaja Juddha made a departure from the traditional policy of the Maharaj Prime Ministers of Nepal of having nothing to do with Indian politicians in opposition to the British Government. Juddha's attitude towards the Congress leaders might also have slightly changed in view of the fact that they were likely to come into power in most of the provinces after the constitutional reforms envisaged by the Government of India Act 1935 were implemented."⁶⁹

Maharaja Padma, therefore, was not the first Prime Minister of Nepal who gave the impression of riding two horses at a time. Padma Shumsher, in 1946, sent Surya Prasad Upadhyaya to Mahatma Gandhi. Upadhyaya, on behalf of Padma Shumsher, presented Gandhi with a Kashmiri shawl.⁷⁰ In 1947, Padma Shumsher helped Haraprasad Joshi and Kedarman Byathit escape to India and join the N.N.C. as his cousins were pressing him for their arrest.⁷¹

Padma Shumsher even gives the impression of not knowing

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid, Shaha, pp.176.

70. Upadhyaya's note in J.P.'s file.

71. Shaha, op.cit.p.176.

his mind while dealing with B.P. Kairala during the satyagraha. As Upadhyaya notes, on May 19, 1947 "no charge has been framed against B.P. Koirala. The camp of the Ranas is divided as to the nature of the charge to be framed against him". When B.P. Koirala was brought to Kathmandu the Maharaja's "first word" to him, through captain Maskay, was, "you have been brought here to help me as you did not come earlier listening to my messages sent through several persons".⁷² This appears plausible for B.P. at Biratnagar could have been picked up only to remove B.P. and his family from the volatile situation in Biratnagar. B.P. seems to have appreciated Padma's dilemma too. In any case, Padma communicated to B.P., through his brother Keshav Prasad, the following proposals on reform:⁷³

- 1) Budget to be declared
- 2) a council of 28 members to be appointed, 14 of whom would be nominated by him from people of Kathmandu - all officials - 14 others from hillside and Teari all zamindars. The council to advise him in the nation building activities, administration of the countries and drafting of laws. Its powers would be advisory.
- 3) The P.M. to have veto power.

72. Upadhyaya's note in J.P.'file.

73. Ibid.

- 4) The administrative system to remain unchanged.
- 5) A personal nominee of Jawaharlal Nehru - a constitutional expert whose service had been requested by the P.M. through the Indian civilian, G.S. Bajpaie - to advise on reforms.

B.P. Koirala turned down all the proposals but insisted on the grant of elementary civil rights for the present.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Jayaprakash Narayan's interaction

The satyagraha movement led by the N.N.C. on the whole got a positive response in Nepal. The direct involvement of B.P. Koirala (who was a friend of J.P.) made the movement active. The support of the socialist leaders made the movement partially successful.

The Government of India's passivity regarding the jute mill strike and satyagraha arrests made J.P. Narayan unhappy and, when J.P., Dr. Lohia and Devendra Prasad Singh expected the Indian Government's support, Jawaharlal Nehru did not respond. When J.P. wrote a letter to Jawaharlal regarding the strikers' arrest, Jawaharlal did not reply to J.P.'s letter. But Jawaharlal, intervened in Nepal politics on what J.P. considered to be the wrong side.

On 5th May, 1947, Nehru wrote two letters regarding Nepali Satyagraha, one for J.P. Narayan and the other for Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. He wrote to J.P.: "The other dayⁱⁿ the course of our talk, I mentioned Nepal. I felt then that this was not the right time for any kind of satyagraha to be offered there". In the last part of his letter Nehru wrote " I suggest Satyagraha should be withdrawn; otherwise it will come in conflict with some of our activities in regard to Nepal".⁷⁴

In reply to Nehru's letter J.P. angrily wrote "when I sent a messenger to New Delhi to meet you and the Nepalese Consul General, neither you nor the Nepalese Government could do anything. You were not even able to reply to my letter".⁷⁵ J.P. demanded the unconditional release of the workers who were arested in connection of the strike.

In the letter of May 9, J.P. alleged that women protesters had been arrested by the Rana Government and three had been killed. J.P. further alleged that these dead bodies had been removed by the Rana authorities to falsify the case.

74. Letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to J.P. Narayan dated 5th May 1947. J.P.'s file p.1.

75. A letter from J.P. to Nehru, dated 9th May 1947, J.P.'s file p.4.

The letter from Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 13th May, 1947, stated that he had sent Rajendra babu to enquire about the killing and torture of the arrested persons but he did not get any particular evidence.⁷⁶

The next point that was mentioned in that letter was that, as a foreign country, India could not interfere in Nepal's politics. For then it would be an international problem. Nehru requested J.P. not to interfere in Nepal's politics.

J.P.'s letter dated 17th May 1947 to Nehru made an important point. J.P. stressed that the Indian Government's help was necessary for the Nepalese movement. Nehru was reminded by J.P. how the establishment of the revolutionary government in Russia, without the help of Switzerland and other progressive countries, could never had been successful. Lenin had prepared the base of his party in a foreign country. J.P. Narayan hoped that India should help the N.N.C. leaders and maintain the liberal tradition of her

76. Letter from Nehru to J.P. dated 13th May 1948. J.P.'s file. - It is possible that the evidences at the possession of J.P. about strike and the satyagraha were mixed up. It is unlikely that woman workers would be killed in Biratnagar and evidences totally suppressed.

own freedom movement.⁷⁷

Nehru, J.P. and Lohia

Jawaharlal Nehru's correspondence with J.P. reveals a dilemma of a freedom fighter turned into a ruler. Whereas his heart would have sympathised with the Nepali Rastriya Congress, as the head of the interim Government of British India, he could not but feel uncomfortable at the thought that the Indian soil be used as the base of operation of a revolutionary movement in it's neighbourhood and Indian leaders, supposed to be enjoying his affection, being incitors of the movement. It is also not clear as to what impression Dr. Rajendra Prasad had brought back from Kiratnagar. Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Jayaprakash Narayan represented two polls of the Congress movement in Bihar. A note on "Essential points for the present" prepared by Surya Prasad Upadhyaya, a trusted aide of Maharaja Padma Shumsher, dated May 17, 1947, points out that in Kathmandu "everyone was given to understand that Dr. Lohia and Dr. R. Prasad had accepted contentions of the Nepal Government that the mill workers resorted to violence first and that they apologized for misunderstanding."¹ Surya Prasad Upadhyaya hoped "that the contrary fact must have gone to the head of the people of

77. Ibid.

Nepal after forceful statement by Dr. Lohia". There is, however, no statement available from Rajendra Prasad on this episode. The entry of the Congress Socialist Party in Nepal was caused by the push-factor rather than the pull-factor. Until 1943 there is no evidence of the C.S.P.'s direct interest in Nepal's politics although it is possible to argue that the C.S.P. had anticipated a role for its Nepalese recruits in the future democratic movement in Nepal. The entire correspondence of Jayaprakash Narayan with Jawaharlal Nehru presents him as the spokesman of militant Indian Nationalism. He acknowledges his debt to the Nepalese activists for support to the Indian National movement. He argues with Jawaharlal Nehru on the question of the Biratnagar jute mill strike on the ground that the jute mill had Indians constituting 80% of its workers. (In fact ^{the} jute mill was owned by Indians). He denies any role in the decision of the N.N.C. on the Satyagraha and cites the fact ^{that} _a all the persons arrested in connection of the Satyagraha were Nepalese.⁷⁸ Though he eminently justifies the satyagraha movement, he sees it as an extension of the jute mill strike. The two conditions he set for his intervention in the satyagraha are: (1) Release of all arrested persons and (2) reference of the labour dispute to impartial arbitration according to standard

78. J.P.'s letter to Jawaharlal Nehru dated 9.5.47
(J.P.'s file).

practices of labour relation. Thus Jayaprakash takes a "politically correct" position. At the same time he argues with Nehru on the point of Nepalese agitators' right to shelter in India. Nehru, inspite of his revolutionary past, was heading a Government in 1947. He could afford to extend his sympathy for the democratic movement in Nepal but could not be actively in it.

That active involvement is perceived in Dr. Ram manohar Lohia. It may be noted that Lohia was a degree more revolutionary than Jayaprakash. A Marwari from Rajasthan, Lohia operated in Bihar and U.P. His interest in Nepal was more than that of a sympathetic observer. Lohia entered Nepal in 1942 close on the heels of Jayaprakash. According to Rameshwar Singh, on May 15, 1942, Lohia had a briefing from Rameshwar on the history and politics of Nepal. And then he formulated his line on Nepalese revolution. Lohia told Rameshwar that the 'Praja Parishad' did not represent the strength of the people. It had been born out of the conflict between the king and the Prime Minister. Even if the Rana lost the fight, the Nepalese people would not get democracy. Only the Rana's authority would pass to the king. Therefore the Praja Parishad should be regarded as a palace coup. Rana Jung Bahadur Shumsher had captured power by killing 70 of his relatives. Before that Pandey had removed Bahadur Shah and the Thapa's had replaced the Pandey's clan. Such

(in India)

intrigues had taken place since the Hindu period, Lohia, saw history in terms of the people and not the royal dynasty.⁷⁹

In the subsequent period, while J.P. retained his general interest about democracy in Nepal, Lohia showed more active interest in Nepal politics. In 1947 he took active interest in the formation of the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Congress in Calcutta. There is, however, a confusion about the presence of Dr. Lohia at the Calcutta conference. Lohia's own notes on Nepal claims that the Nepal National Congress was "inaugurated" by Dr. Lohia himself.⁸⁰ Other accounts of the Conference show Lohia as absent because of his preoccupation with the Goa problem.⁸¹ There is no doubt, however, about Lohia's presence at the Jogbani Conference on April 10th 1947 where the decision to start Satyagraha with the Nepalese volunteers was taken.⁸² It may be noted here that a copy of the Jogbani resolution was sent to J.P. Narayan by the President of N.N.C.,

79. Rameshwar Singh, 'Samsmaran: Hanuman Nagar Prakashan', Young Indian, special issue on August Revolution, August 1993. pp.44-45.

80. Lohia, Rammanohar, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia's Note on a Himalayan Policy, p.8.

81. Bhattacharjee, G.P., India and Politics of Modern Nepal, p.26.

82. J.P. File, p.15 see also Bhattacharjee, op.cit.

Calcutta branch.⁸³

83. Ibid.