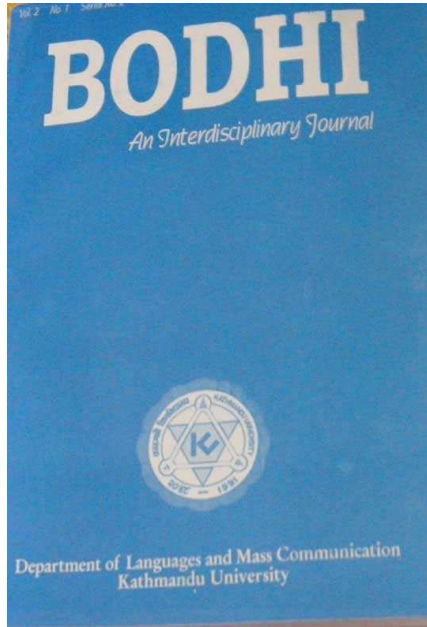


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Discourses of Biratā (Bravery) and Shānti (Peace) in School Level Nepalese textbooks

-- Deepak Aryal

Introduction

“Aap to ‘Bahadur’ nahi lagate!” (You don’t look like *Bahadur*), he seriously doubted my self-introduction as a Nepali student who wanted to go to the YMCA Guest house of Jai Singh Road from Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi. It was my third visit to India and noone asked this kind of question in my previous visits. So, I was completely confused and did not have any clue why my taxi-driver both wanted to and hesitated to understand me as ‘Bahadur’ and how I was different from the *Bahadur* whom he knows or cogitates.

There is a large body of critical literature on theories and practices of ethnic stereotypes. Journalist Walter Lippmann (1922) likened ‘stereotypes’, coined in 1798 originally referred to a printing process or reproduction, to “pictures in the head,” or mental reproductions of reality. Salinas (2003) states in his book ‘The Politics of Stereotype’ that the stereotypes are mentally constructed which are activated in an automatic, unconscious manner and affect both the stereotyping mind and the stereotyped. The social identity theory of stereotypes and prejudice agree to view the development of stereotypes and prejudice as a function of socio-cultural factors and intergroup relations. Such as ‘Jews have large Noses’ (physical appearance), ‘Negroes are stupid’ (their intelligence) or ‘Japanese are sly’ (their personality) (Rinehart, 1963).

The stereotypes, which reflect the general belief or perspective of one group that may be different from others, are as old as human culture itself. They ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting everyone with the same brush. They generalize, normalize and judge all individual people of a particular group

in terms of a singular idea, belief or knowledge. They are conventional and oversimplified concept, opinion, or image, based on the assumption which may be positive or negative in tone. The “stereotypes are sets of belief, usually stated as categorical generalizations that people hold about the members of their own and other groups” (Rinehart, 1963).

Education system may be one of the powerful institutions that can manufacture and disseminate fixed and repeated stereotypical notions using various methods. The state can use education system and enforce people to receive, understand and behave what it wants to establish about nation, culture, society or about ‘other’. The approach of production and distribution and the form of perception, reception and interpretation of knowledge in particular social and political circumstance can be strategically adapted and implemented. And, the whole process of education system and the content of the textbooks can help to sketch certain stereotypical ideas.

Nicholis Poulos (1969) discusses on the attitude of Negro people to various American textbooks where Negroes were presented in stereotyped roles, “There is discontent across the nation today among the leaders of Negro communities... [t]he content of public school textbooks, a major target being the area of the social studies which, it is felt, fails to portray the role of the Negro accurately or adequately.” Similarly, Marie Ferguson Peters (1974) notices some serious flaw of representation of Black family in contemporary research and textbooks which emphasise the concepts of deviancy, pathology or uncontrolled sexuality. He simply puts his view that “...this kind of discussion simply supports stereotypic ideas and contributes little to an understanding of the issues in interracial marriage and nothing at all to an understanding of Black families.”

Researchers from ‘Japan-U.S. textbook study project’¹ analyse the various school level history book published and used in two

¹ Grant k. Goodman, Nagayo Homma, Tetsuo Najita, James M. Becker, The Japan/United States Textbook Study Project: perceptions in the Textbooks of © 2008 Kathmandu University, Nepal. <http://www.ku.edu.np>

countries: Japan and the U.S, where they discover that the energetic political issues were included in Japanese textbooks presupposing it as the key devices with which shaping a particular vision of the future is possible.

According to Salinas (2003), contemporary theorists suggest that stereotypes are not only mental devices that ease information processing (by allowing the individual to access previous knowledge instead of incoming information), but emerge as the result of contextual factors. Then, what are the contextual factors that create or help to generate such type of stereotypical notion? How do people learn, imitate and practice such stereotypical belief in social, political or cultural context? Is it individual experience, family, friend, society, particular institution or textbooks and literary books that teach or allow thinking stereotypically? How do people perceive and believe it without any doubt and question and to what extent can a state or state mechanism play a vital role to produce or disseminate such stereotypical notion. These are some of the questions without any ready answers, but, we can assess certain historical situations where specific stereotypes are produced, disseminated, perceived, practiced and contested. The term *Bahadur* is one example which is particularly attributed to Nepali citizens.

In this paper, I discuss the production, persistence and circulation of two overarching stereotypes of Nepali people in contemporary Nepalese school textbooks; bravery and peaceable. I shall restrict myself to the language and history books.

Various stereotypes are circulating as authentic descriptions of the Nepali people in school and college textbooks of Nepal. Some of them have a long history of colonial origin and have been gradually accepted, internalized and reproduced as historical facts in textbooks. One of such very powerful

stereotypes that we frequently come across in different varieties of nationalist literature and school textbooks is that of the brave Nepali. This idealized figure of the brave nationalist warrior becomes the sole key to understand the history of Nepal. In numerous textbooks, songs, plays and movies it is repeatedly asserted that Nepal is a unique nation which was never colonized and could maintain its uninterrupted independence because of the 'brave ancestors' (Bir purkha or Bahadur).

Education System and Socio-political Background

Although Nepal was never formally colonized, the British Indian government practically controlled much of the political and economic situations of Nepal in the Rana period (1847-1950). During this period most of the writers and intellectuals of Nepal were encouraged to be educated in Calcutta or in Benaras. The first school, Durbar High School in 1892, was founded by Jung Bahadur Rana within the confines of the Rana's palace, as part of a modernization programmes initiated after a visit of France and England. It was one of the first English schools that theoretically opened to all, however, it remained open only for Rana family and the upper class students (Bista, 1991).

There were no real educational policies and the functions of educational administration which could coordinate and manage a few schools and college to all Nepali people in various regions of the country till 1950. Most of the professionals in Nepal, at that time, whether doctors, engineers, architects, teachers or bureaucrats were not the products of the Nepali educational system but the graduates of Indian schools. Apart from this, due to the lack of human resources, most of the teachers were hired from India. Interestingly, students who were in India in colonial period and people who studied in Nepal gained almost same knowledge through same British-Indian curriculum. From this education system, people from particular caste and religion emerged as policy makers, leaders, laureates, and bureaucrats. They led the political, social,

economical and educational system of Nepal after 1950's movement. As a result, the education policies and curriculums were designed and implemented with the help and active participation of those people whose academic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic background were almost same.

Despite the broad agreement in the late 1950s for the continuation of Nepali as the official language of Nepal, there was a debate on the role of regional languages in education. However, it did not happen in democratic system and the Nepal Education Planning Commission (NEPC) assumed that, if the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language then other language will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will be produced.

Consequently, Nepali education system emerged as one of the state institution, a site of political and social interest for the various post-1950 governments seeking to promote distinct visions of the Nepali nation-state (Burghart,1996; Caddell, 2005). The most of the educational policy is influenced by the ruling elite as an 'authentic represented' of the state. The education is taken as an idea of modernity, prestige, and social status (Bista, 1991; Pigg, 1992) and it is accepted as basic requirement for 'development' and developed modern nation. After 1950, it can be seen that the ideas of the 'nation', 'history', 'identity' and imagined 'modern developed nation' is portrayed and converged with cultural, social and political arena of discourses through education system (Burghart, 1996). Nepal, throughout its recorded history, has been recognized as a Hindu nation where the whole state mechanism always promoted and supported Hindu religion and Nepali language. Because of this process, the ethnic groups and non- Hindu people were affected and they came to feel an increasing pressure under Hinduisation. Although the predominant groups of people living in Nepal are Hindu, it is actually a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious society consisting of a large number of diverse ethnic populations along with Hindu.

The attempt to create a national religious identity presumably began in 1854 when Janga Bahadur Rana promulgated a law of the land, in which the caste systems of the various countries of Nepal were brought together to form a single national caste system. After the unification process of Nepal the state always imposed one language ‘Nepali’ and one religion ‘Hindu’ from the beginning but on the other hand the various episodes of ethnic protest, contest and insurgency also appeared against the whole process².

During the Panchāyat system (1960-1990), the monarchy, Hinduism and the Nepali language were considered the threesome of official Nepali nationalism. Making the Nepali language its medium, this national culture was propagated through state-owned print and radio media and through the standardization of school-level educational textbooks since the early 1960s.

After the introduction of the New Education System Plan in 1971 (Panchāyati period), the Janak Education Materials Centre (JEMC), previously known as Educational Materials Organization centre, has been producing and distributing school textbooks for use across the country³ and the Textbook Development Centre is also working with same pattern and policies under the direct control of Nepal government since

² In the late 18th century, there were Limbu and Tamang revolts. The following century experienced uprisings by the Gurung and Magar in central hills as well as those by the Rai and Limbu in eastern hills. The early half of the 20th century was marked by religious persecution targeted mainly against the Buddhist clergy. The 1950/51 political struggle against Rana regime was also accompanied by Kiranti and Tamang insurgencies. The abolition of the *Kipat* system in 1964 that ended customary rights over tribal lands was followed by violent Limbu protests in the eastern hills (Gurung, 2003).

³ The Government of Nepal : Ministry of Education and Sports, Janak Educational Materials Centre, Retrieved in June 10, 2008, from http://www.moe.gov.np/Autonomous%20Agencies/Janak_Edu_Materials.php

1971.⁴ A national education system was involved in establishing a uniform system throughout the country with trained teachers, standard textbooks, and a reorganization of schools. The National Education System Plan (NESP), introduced in 1971, was the overall educational strategy for centralizing and standardizing the educational system for the entire country which attempted to promote only Nepali language all over the nation. The standardized textbooks were a new way of political influence and objective that homogenized children in a particular way of nationalism and constructed a ‘national’ childhood. (Onta Bhatta: 2001).

The new and standardized education system plan was considered as an effective medium that could produce unique Nepali culture, civilized people and patriotic citizen. “This new education system will raise the awareness regarding with nation and nationalism which will ultimately help to maintain the national unity, sovereignty...” (Social education, 1971)

And, interestingly, the basic objective of education system related with nation and nationalism is still same in new democratic political system after 1990. Objectives of the education system and contents of books and curriculum are influenced with previous political system. Basically, those chapters about nationalism, bravery or peace are directly adjusted in new educational content without editing and revising. On the other hand the most of the new writers, editors of textbooks and policy-makers are also from same old education system which always taught ‘national identity’ in monolithic way. The hegemony of particular group from Hindu religion, caste and hill region in education section are constructing and implementing same stereotypical knowledge that they were already taught and given. So, the whole textbooks and discourses of national identities are not far from

⁴ The Government of Nepal: Ministry of Education and Sports, The Curriculum Development Centre, Retrieved in June 10, 2008, from <http://www.moescdc.gov.np/>

 stereotypical notion and colonial discourses which were produced and reproduced in different period in different places by different people for different purposes.

Bravery and Peaceful Identity: A Paradox

The terms *Bir* or *Bahadur* which we translate as 'Brave' point towards an interesting chapter in Nepali history. Onta (1996b) demonstrates how these India-educated intellectuals, excited by the developments elsewhere in the subcontinent, came to construct a '*Bir* history' of modern Nepal by the beginning of the twentieth century as a part of the project of creating a respectable Nepali identity. It was at this juncture that they began to popularise phrases like '*Nepali Jati*', '*Bir Jati*', '*Gorkha Jati*', '*Bir Purkha*', '*Bir Ko santan*' through their writings. However, as we shall shortly discuss, the theoretical foundation of this nationalist discourse came from colonial military models.

The other stereotype to which I want to draw attention is that of the peaceful Nepali. Side by side with the militarised, aggressive description of the '*Bir Jati*', Nepal continues to be portrayed as an isolated, independent nation of peaceful hill people who have been enjoying their traditional life without any disturbance. While the colonial military strategists and government officers often essentialized the '*Gurkhas*' as a martial race, a strong anthropological tradition also insisted on the essentially peaceful nature of the hill people. According to this brand of anthropological writings, the hills of Nepal did not have to bear the brunt of any large-scale military invasion or occupation of its territory by aggressive hordes from outside in any frequency. So, it remained peaceful and untouched by violence. For some scholars, the stereotype of 'peaceful hill people' became a crucial tool to describe the unchanging nature of the Nepali society. Brown (1922) explains that because of absence of warfare "the manners and customs of people, their religion, arts and industries, the towns and the country, are practically the same as they were ten centuries ago. Nepal

presents an ideal picture of the middle ages of the East.”⁵ Today, such types of anthropological tradition have been strengthened by a strategic and selective revival of Buddhist and Hindu legacy and find an important place in the school textbooks.



(Picture-1, ‘the warrior and the peaceful’, *Nepali language*, grade-10, pp.67, 68)

Seemingly, there is a striking contradiction between the two stereotypes: the warrior and the peaceful. However, a strange combination of these two forms dominates the textbook world of representation. The two illustrations (picture 1) here have been taken from the Nepali language textbook of class ten. Together, they show the contradictory pulls of these stereotypes. I shall analyse them one by one.

Martial Gurkha to Brave Nepali

To start from the brave Nepali ancestors, one of the most popular images circulating in the history textbooks is that of King Prithvi Narayan Shah who brought many small

⁵ Brown, *Picturesque Nepal*, 1992.

indigenous ethnic territories under a centralised military administration based in Kathmandu Valley in 1769. Before Prithvi Narayan's conquest, the region was divided into various independent principalities, including Gorkha, the original kingdom of the Shah rulers. By focusing on Prithvi Narayan as the first *Bir* in the long line of *Bir Purkha*, the textbooks already advance two implicit suggestions: One, that the diverse history of a multi-ethnic country like Nepal can be simplified as an essentially Gorkha history. Histories of other ethnic groups like Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Thakali, Rai, Limbu, Sherpa, Sunuwar and Bhotiyas are subsumed under a "pan-Gorkhali" umbrella. Two, that Nepal is essentially a 'Hindu' country where the Kirantis, Buddhists, and Muslims are negligible minorities. Textbooks after textbooks repeat that Prithvi Narayan described Nepal as an *asli Hindustan*, the real Hindu land. Not only one standardized portrait of Prithvi Narayan with *Khukuri* or traditional Nepali dagger, is widely used in the textbooks, but his big posters are also very common in schools. In class seven's language textbook, it is said, "He was the creator and a brave ruler of Nepal. So, he deserves our complete devotion today and because of his political leadership, we are independent."

The marriage between martial Gorkha identity and the Hindu religion is further confirmed by the production of a number of other heroes in the history textbooks. Apart from Prithvi Narayan Shaha, other people embody national icons that are also included in the history textbooks: Bhimsen Thapa, the prime minister of Nepal during Anglo-Nepal war, Amarsing Thapa, a military General in the Anglo-Nepal war, Bhakti Thapa, his colleague, and Balbhadra Kunwar, another warrior hero of the same period.

At this point, we must clarify that the lists of heroes were built in the nineteen thirties and forties when the nationalist intellectuals mixed up the popular stories and ancient biographies of Prithvi Narayan, Balbhadra and Amarsingh with

the colonial discourse of martial Gurkha army.⁶ Thus like the sympathetic British military officers, they praise both the fighting skills of 'Brave Gurkha' and the 'loyal', 'simple', and 'honest' nature of the tribesmen. As Lionel Caplan and Kaushik Roy (1991) show in their research, these were precisely the qualities attributed by the colonial writers to their favorite regiments.

Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16 was a reference point where the British army officer 'discovered' the *Gurkhas*⁷. After this event, they not only identified and represented 'Gurkha army' as a martial race in their writings but also disseminated the rhetorical and stereotypical notion of particular 'martial' caste or groups.

The idea of *Gurkhas* as a martial race developed fully towards the end of the nineteenth century. At first the *Gurkha* regiments did not distinguish people in their recruitment policies but gradually Nepal was divided up in to 'tribal' vs. 'Hindu'. Caplan(1991) argues that some British officers became avid ethnographers, producing handbooks in which ethnic differences were exaggerated and systematized. They not only found the mere *Gurkha* people but they tracked the particular caste which was good for army.

This unstinting admiration for Nepalese bravery, however, very soon became differentiated. It were the ordinary Nepalese soldiers on whom praise continues to be lavishly conferred, but their military leaders, the Nepalese officers, were carefully excluded. Kaushik Roy (1997) also discusses about this procedure that, in the beginning, how Hugh Gough, the English General during the Sikh wars glorified the *Gurkhas* and thus set the stage for Roberts, Macmunn and Shakespeare to admire the 'short stocky *Gurkhas*'. Gough's view was that the *Gurkhas*

⁶ Kaushik, Roy, 1991, Lionel Caplan, 1991.

⁷ The term 'Gurkha', derives from the place name of Gorkha, which is a small principality to the west of Kathmandu, whose kings, around 1765, conquered the other tiny states and created the modern Nepalese state.

were full of courage and could be compared with the elite infantry, the British Grenadiers. But Shakespeare's argument was that the *Gurkhas* were better than the British soldiers while performing after long journeys with loads. But, the Nepalese army, which had by all earlier accounts acquitted itself so well during the Anglo-Nepal war, was to be dismissed as of little moment. The need for British officers was, moreover, apparent to the ordinary troops in the Nepalese army from the very beginning.

Hodgson's identification of martial groups formed a recruiting blueprint, and only *Magars* and *Gurung* were recruited in Army. Hodgson's other military class, the *Khas Chettris* whom he deemed to be somewhat less desirable because of their 'Brahmanical prejudices' and devotion to the Gorkha state were rarely recruited. He admits that the *Gurkhas* constitute a martial race above all demonstrated by their bravery. There was no printed work on the *Gurkhas* which does not refer to their toughness, strength, ferocity, courage and bravery and all militaries and regimental histories were full of the crucial fighting qualities of the *Gurkhas*.

Then the perfect martial race, an ethnic group, was produced as being both martial and loyal. So, *Gurkhas* were frequently described in diminutives, indicating immense affection and a patronizing manner. They were also described as crude, little highlanders, tough Mongolian hill-men, slow-witted, and 'extremely simple minded'. On the one hand, the *Gurkhas*, were portrayed as a perfect martial ethnic category equally capable to British army but on the other hand they were seen as simple, honest, childish, and dependent who need a instruction from senior officers or their British officers. From colonial discourses the *loyal, simple, honest* tribe Mongolian hill-men with martial quality was emerged but not an independent and equally trained like British officers.

Postcolonial Adjustment

Here, it should be mentioned that, in 1930-40, the particular notion of bravery or national identity were reconstructed and re-disseminated by Nepali laureates who were in Calcutta, Darjeeling, and Benaras. Nepali identity in *Bir* mode drawn by Nepali laureates and the whole discourse of martial race and brave Nepali discussed in colonial writings shaped a particular idea of national identity which was followed by other laureates. Then the whole discourses reproduced by the laureates in different period and places were accepted as an authentic source of National history and became the part of textbook and national identity in Panchāyat period (1960-1990). However, it is equally effective after 1990. It is visible that many songs, stories, biographies or writings which have become the part of school textbooks came from colonial writings or Panchāyat period writings. On the other hand, many events and historical writings go back from Anglo-Nepal (colonial period) war to pre-colonial period claiming that the first king of existing Nepal, Prithivi Narayan Shah unified Nepal which was never colonized and always remained independent and free because of 'brave ancestors'. The stories and biographies of *Bir* Prithivi Narayan, *Bir* Balbhadra and *Bir* Amarsingh are mixed up with colonial discourse of martial *Gurkha* army where most of the armies were from ethnic/tribe community⁸. Then, the whole history tried to homogenize all people under one superstructure of national identity of independent, free nation of *Bir*, or nation of *Bahadur*. Another interesting phenomenon is that the whole literature and school level textbooks do not only laud about the fighting qualities and patriotic notion of 'brave *Gurkha*' but also talks about the loyal, simple, honest all *Nepali Jati* rather *loyal, simple, honest* tribe hill-men with martial quality, attributed by the colonial writers (Caplan, 1991: Roy, 1991). Interestingly martial identity of bravery shifts from particular caste to homogeneous Nepali citizens in literature, latter it appeared in school/college level textbooks.

⁸ Kaushik, Roy, 1991, Lionel Caplan, 1991.

The textbooks took and mixed two different events and people in one place from different period; Balbhadra Kunwar, Bhimsen Thapa, Bhakti Thapa and other warriors from Anglo-Nepal war (1814-16), World War I and II and Prithivi Narayan Shah, Bahadur Shah, Kalu Pandey (Commander chief of *Gurkha* army when *Gurkha* army attacked Kathmandu Valley) from unification era (1740s-1816). It blurred the two separate stories and historical events giving same identity of *Bir* ancestor where writer claimed and explained that all battles were fought to protect the national sovereignty.

Interestingly, even the poet laureate of Nepal, Bhanubhakta (1814-1868), was then described as a *Bir Purus*, because it was argued that his writings united the Nepali citizens and increased their courage and dignity. Onta (1996 b) argues that people who were studying and living in Benaras and Darjeeling identified *Bhanubhakta* as national icon who served and helped to promote Nepali language through his writing and translated *Ramayan* in to Nepali language in lyrical form. Onta claims that, the ‘rediscovery’ of *Bhanubhakta* in Benaras and Darjeeling converted him into a *Jati Bir Purus* (brave man), a legacy which the post-1950 Nepali state found easy to borrow and disseminate. as part of its reification of the national *Bir* ideology.

The most known phrase about the *Gurkhas* is the ‘bravest of the brave.’ It appeared in the preface of Ralph Turner’s *Nepali Dictionary* in 1931. Turner was an officer of the British *Gurkha* regiment. His phrase has not only survived the nationalist upsurge but has also been quoted in many school-level textbooks.

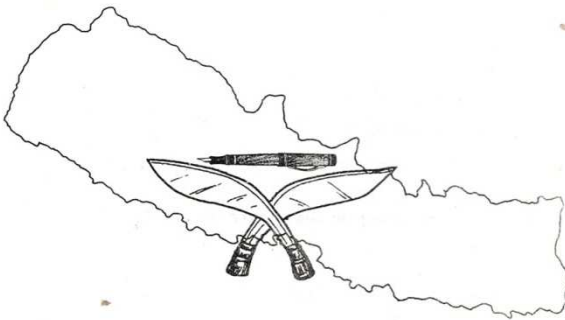
“Bravest of the brave,
Most generous of the generous,
Never had country more faithful friends than
you.”⁹

⁹ Sir Ralph Turner MC

The history book of class ten proudly declares that the British appreciated the Nepali warriors so much that they even built statues of them. The class nine language book introduces Bhimsen Thapa as a world- famous *Bir* who was saluted by the Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh, British historians Henry Oldfield and Percival Landon and philosopher Karl Marx. Like Bhimsen Thapa, the book argues, Nepalis are born brave and that fact is widely known.

The iconographic representations of this idea of ‘bravery’ have taken mostly two dominant forms in the school textbooks. One, the *Khukuri*. Two, the flag. The Khukuri has come to symbolize the essence of the militarised identity. The illustration here is from the class nine language book. It accompanies a Nepalese poem which reads:

We are Gorkhali and we are famous as Khukri Bir
We are challenging in the battle field
But, as a Nepali, now, it is time to be a Kalam Bir
Which can speak a soft voice of our heart
Sing a melodious folk song
Sit under the shadow of tree
Remember the happiness and sadness of Nepali
And, heartily welcome all people from the world
(*Nepali Language*, grade 9, p.99)



Picture- 2, ‘two different Bir’, *Nepali Language*, grade 9, p.99
Here the poem not only justifies the contribution of war heroes like Prithivi Narayan Shah who unified Nepal with Khukri, but also shows the significance of poet *Bhanubhakta* who unified

 Nepali with the pen. Interestingly, there is no other way available to express the greatness of *Bhanubhakta* than the word 'Brave' or *Bir*.

Although the national flag appeared only in 1962, it is inserted in most of the historical portraits of pre-colonial and colonial period. This gives the triangular Nepali flag an image of eternity and timelessness. As if, from time immemorial the flag had been there in the hands of the brave ancestors. It produces a sense of authenticity and uninterrupted-ness of the Nepali *Bir*. In the picture which is used in a number of textbooks, one can see that the present-day flag is placed on Prithvi Narayan's throne.

The class nine language book contains a story (pp 8-18) called 'Shahid' (Martyr) which narrates the story of the 1950s movement and describes how a laborer who worked in Calcutta devoted his life for the movement and became a martyr. I want to discuss this story at some length. Birbahadur, main character of the story, and his name is interesting, was stopped in Gorakhpur and encouraged to join the anti-Rana movement and was about to return home after receiving the message of his son's death. In Gorkhapur, he met Devtababu who was one of the leaders of armed struggle fighting against the Rana regime. Devtababu convinced Birbahadur that armed struggle against the feudal Rana regime was more important than the family tension and responsibility because it was for the whole nation not for any individual or for a family. He encouraged Birbahadur in this way, "Do you know how the thousands of sons of Bharatmata sacrificed their life in the '42 movement? Don't you love your mother? After all, we all have to die in the course of our life, but people should know how to die. Those nations, which know how to die, also know how to live."

After listening to this emotional and nationalistic lecture, Birbahadur forgets his family (his wife and death of his son) and changes his destination. Finally, he dies in the struggle and the dead body is covered by the national flag while the masses

chant the slogan ‘Bir Shahid Jindabad’, ‘Birbahadur Jindabad.’ Interestingly, the textbook carries an illustration of this story, picturing the crowd and the deceased body of Birbahadur covered with the national flag. However, this national flag was officially adopted on December 16, 1962. This story was originally published in 1963 without any picture and made a part of the textbook published in 2000. But the whole story is set in the background of the 1950s movement, when the national flag as it is portrayed in this book only represented the flag of the Rana and the Kings’ family.

In another illustration, the flag is represented as the centre and source of national unity. According to the class Nine language textbook, red in the national flag represents the ‘blood’ of the brave ancestors and ‘blue’ signifies peace. Moreover, the icons of sun and moon are believed to represent the ancient historical Hindu tradition of the country.

The recurring allusion to blood is particularly striking in the compulsory songs which have to be sung in every school by all children and which are printed in the back cover of the textbooks. One of the most common songs is worded like this:

We are independent by birth
So we won’t accept to be subjected
Our borders are drawn by blood so they won’t be
erased

Another popular national song describes the relation between mother and son in this way.

If country demands any blood, sacrifice my life
My mother won’t cry, as she is a daughter of a Nepali
mother

At the same time, another national song compares peace with national flag:

See the colour of sky, that is also blue
Blue colour: a colour of peace
Colour of the flag’s border

Which is also blue

The coexistence of red and blue in the national flag is explained as the harmonization of the stereotypes of the brave Nepali and the peaceful Nepali. This coexistence enables the state to adopt an interesting strategy. It can alternatively emphasize the militarised identity of the Nepali or the docile, honest, and law-abiding identity of the hill people. Let me explain this issue with reference to the stereotype of the peaceful Nepali.

Peaceful Hill People, Religion and Political System

In 1960 King Mahendra dismissed the multiparty democratic system and started a single party legislature under the name of ‘Panchāyat System’. The era of parliamentary democracy in Nepal from 1950 to 1960 had indeed been a failure in terms of education, infrastructure development, security and political stability. King Mahendra announced,

“...the parliamentary system could not prove suitable on account of the lack of education and political consciousness to the desired extent and on account of its being out of step with the history and traditions of the country and wishes of the people. ...Panchāyat system, which has its roots in the soils of our country, is capable of growth and development in the climate prevailing in the country” (Translation: Abhi subedi).

The new Panchāyati system was projected as an era of peace and development. Most of the textbooks that I discuss here were written in this period. In fact, even after the collapse of the Panchāyat regime, these textbooks have survived and are still used in schools.

The political ideology of Panchāyat was linked with school and educational system as an institution which was essential for a modern ‘developed’ nation. The school thus acts as an arena of ‘development’ process where state could win the support and

confidence of the people. Education was taken as an idea of modernity and development. Caddell (2005) argues that the whole education policy and contents of the book presume that citizens are agents of development who maintain a particular relationship with the nation-state.

The period of king Mahendra, 1955-1972, stands out for a wide variety of political and economic experiments. He moved between models of western democratic parliamentary system to very authoritarian political structures. Along with the institution of the national flag, the official declaration of Nepal as a Hindu state, the construction of the East-West (Mahendra) National Highway along the southern foot of the hills, the demographic engineering of the Tarai, the launching of several economic and social development projects, the promotion of the tourism sector, King Mahendra also restructured the education system.

The implementation of a new education system as the basic requirement for 'development' plays a crucial role in the ideological regime of Panchāyat. Let me repeat that most of the Nepali textbooks we are using today were written in that period. The new ideas of modernity and development, and the use of schools as instruments of social change became the key sources of legitimacy for the Panchāyati political system, which sought to advance a new vision of 'Nepaliness'.

In that period it was claimed that the indigenous political ideology which talk about Nepali civilization, history, culture and moral value would produce honest, civilized, and educated Nepali citizens. Sowing the seed of such knowledge through various media and textbooks King Mahendra, in 1962, announced,

We have confidently moved towards Panchāyat democracy by beginning of the New Year with the initiation of the Panchāyat system. This Nepali plant...is suited to the climate of our country. There is no Nepali who does not know what a Pancha and a Panchāyat is. The development of culture and civilization in our country has taken place under the

Panchāyat system. Parliamentary democracy has proved unsuitable because it lacks the Nepali qualities which are found in the Panchāyat system. The nationalistic feelings associated with the awakening are not as possible under any other system as they are under the Panchāyat system (Joshi and Rose, 1966).

In his proclamation, when king Mahendra talked about ‘Nepali plant which is suitable in Nepali soil’ then, it is necessary to assess about the ‘seed’ which was sowed for that ‘Nepali plant’. It can be asked whether the ‘seed’ which was planted and tried to cultivate ‘Nepali plant’ in ‘Nepali climate’ or ‘Nepali soil’ was original, or, the ‘seeds’ were brought from somewhere else and acclimatized in native soil? One of the main objectives of inquiry is whether the ‘seeds’ of national identity, ‘brave Nepali’ and ‘peaceful Nepali’, which emerged in Panchāyat period, was transformed from somewhere else to ‘Nepali soil’ or it was the native ‘seeds’ which was necessary for ‘Nepali plant’?

In the Panchāyati vision of modern Nepal, the emphasis was on national unity. Therefore, in a multiethnic and multilingual country like Nepal, the notion of one language, one national dress, and one culture was disseminated through state propaganda, mass media and textbooks. The brave ancestors of the past had to be reinvented at this point, not so much as martial heroes but as forefathers of development and peace. Therefore, the national holiday of National Unity Day was named after Prithvi Naryan. Celebrating the birthday of Bhanubhakta became a national duty. The Kalam Bir became as significant as the Khukuri Bir.

King Mahendra presented peace, development and betterment of the people as the main thrust of his policy and the justification of his action. After two years of the royal take-over in 1960 he claimed that the people in the country were happy and felt more secure in comparison with the previous multi-party system.

All the people have very well understood the objectives behind the actions that we have taken from time to time with the sole objectives of putting an end to the *political uncertainty* and establishing democratic patterns in actions with proper utilization of people's energy for the *development* of the country, for the encouragement of all forms of activities and for the amelioration of the people. We also wish for the people to understand the spirit of the messages we have given from time to time. Especially the declaration of 15th December 1960 and the other made after that. By translating the message given in these declarations into action people have experienced a sense of *peace* and *security* every day from Mechi in the east to Mahakali in the west. (Translation: Abhi subedi, Emphasis added)

He announced that the 'Nepali plant' which was suited to the 'Nepali climate' had grown and the development of culture and civilization with modernity would take place under the Panchāyat system. He argued that was the system for peace. And without peace any kind of 'modernity' and 'development' would not be possible. He claimed that the Panchāyati political system, steeped in Nepali tradition and culture, best understood the wishes of people and could develop the nation independently. People could work together for the nation and development while they fought against sadness and hunger. The class song of grade 10 written during this period, but which remains popular till today, explicitly says,

...We can start the work of development using our own hands/ We can fight against the diseases, hunger, and the sadness...

Panchāyati ideology also emphasized the need of disciplined and peaceful people along with a stable political system as preconditions of modernity and development. The people were constantly told that they were forgetting their past and peaceful character because of undisciplined and unsuitable political

systems. So, they were told to remember their past where all people were together in a harmonious atmosphere. People had to maintain their tradition and culture, which were basic components of the Nepali society.

For this purpose, the textbooks combine the moral and ancient stories from Hindu religious text like *Mahābhārat*, *Rāmāyan* and moral stories about Buddha. Apart from religious and moral stories, they include essays, biographies, poems and other contents which explicitly deal with the issues of national identity, national pride and peace. The textbooks not only focus on kings and national warriors but also religious and mythical icons like Buddha, Janak, and Sita. The class song of grade seven is concerned with 'brave' and 'peace' in connection with these popular icons.

...Don't forget the devotion, *bravery* and victory of
your ancestor/ Knowledge of 'Janak', morality of 'Sita'
and the character of 'Buddha'...

Here, it is important to discuss that the Hinduism is seen as an essentially non-violent and unifying factor, as already elaborated in our reference to Prithvi Narayan Shah. But, to convince the students about a non-violent and harmonious past, the textbooks combine the colonial writings that praise peaceful hill people with the mythological and religious writings that talk about the holy mountains and sacred places. There are some native writings written around 14th and 15th centuries which render a mythological account of the early history and sacred geography of Nepal.

On the basis of such writings, like the Buddhist *Swayambhū Purāna*, the Hindu *Pashupati Purāna* and the *Nepal Māhātmya*, Nepal is represented as one of the holiest and most peaceful places. Peace for development and modernity becomes possible only by positing peace as a religious inheritance. These books become the source of history writing and are quoted in school textbooks written after 1960. The various mythical and religious writings are used mainly in textbooks to show the

significance of free, independent, sacred and peaceful nation, as if there was a single nation-state of Nepal through centuries which always remained peaceful. The Social Studies textbook of grade 8 states that, “Nepal is an independent peaceful Hindu Nation. This pure spiritual land is famous from ancient times. Skandapurān Himbatkhand, chapter 72 explains Nepal in this way:

Satyé satyavatī yatra trētāya tu tapovanam
 Dwyāparé muktisopānm kalau nēpālikā purī
 (In Satyayug, its name was Satyawati, in Tretāyug,
 Tapovan, in Dwyaparyug, Muktisopān and in Kaliyug
 its name remains Nepal”¹⁰.)

In the early decades of Panchāyat, the textbooks didn’t distinguish between two religions; Hindu and Buddhism. Buddhism is taken as a component of Hindu religion. The textbook conveys popular Hindu assumptions like; the *Matsya*, *Kurmo*, *Baraha*, *Narsingha*, *Baman*, *Ram*, *Krishna*, *Parsuram*, *Buddha* and *Kalki* all are Hindu gods who born in different time periods.

Matsya, Kurmo, Barāhaschha, Narsinghā Bāmana tatha
 Rāmo, Rāmashya, Rāmaschha, Buddha, Kalki Tathai
 bacha.

The textbooks give other examples on how Gods like Ganeśa, Bhairava, Mahakala, or some of the goddesses like Kumari, Vajrayogini and Guhyeswari are worshipped as much by the Hindus as by the Buddhists. The most outstanding instance of this spirit of religious fusion is represented elaborating the story of ‘Matsyendranatha’ which is equally popular among Buddhist and Hindu.

A class nine Nepali language textbook elaborates *Swyambhū* with a picture, emphasising that people from both Hindu and Bauddha religion to have believed in Buddhism and worship in *Swyambhū*. “It is a world heritage centre where thousands of

¹⁰ Grade 8, Social education studies

people visit for touristic purposes. Here, people can feel peace.” The description of *Lumbinī* (the birth place of Buddha), *Swyambhū*, *Bauddhanātha* are more related with peace and world heritage where, textbook claims that thousands of people from all over the world come to visit these holy sites; a symbol of peace. It also elaborates Nepal as a “nation of temples, nation of Mount Everest, and the Nation of Buddha.” (Class 7, Page 30, Nepali language textbook)

The textbook mixes up two different religious practices in one place and conveys the message that there is no difference between Hinduism and Buddhism because people from both religions believe in the same gods and goddess and – more importantly – both groups believe in peace and harmony.

In this way, the idea of peaceful Nepal, peaceable Nepali, peaceful Panchāyati system and peaceful religion are portrayed in textbooks. During Panchāyat period it was claimed that the Panchāyati system was ‘a unique Nepali political system’ by virtue of which people could accomplish development and modernity peacefully within a stable political system.

However, *Lumbinī*, *Swyambhū*, *Bauddhanāth* all have become tourist spots and devices to earn some foreign revenue later. They could be promoted as symbols of the ideology of peace and development too. The school level textbooks has also introduced other monuments and national heritages like *Pashupatināth*, *Gosaikunda*, *Muktināth* not only as Hindu religious sites but as beautiful and peaceful tourist spots. The textbook claimed that for the development of tourism and the economy, peaceful nation is necessary, and for this purpose ‘Panchāyati’ political system was the best one. During that period the Lumbini Master Plan was implemented to particularly encourage western tourists.¹¹ It was in the same

¹¹ The Master Plan for Lumbini’s Development, initiated in 1970, and was completed in 1978.

period that the East-West (Mahendra) Highway was constructed and glorified in textbooks as a model of development that unifies Nepal and the Nepali people from east to west. It was suggested that this unifying effect of development was a logical conclusion of the acts of Bir ancestors from centuries.

In this project, heterogeneous elements from different time periods were gathered and combined to project an authentic Nepali identity. As I have already mentioned, phrases and ideas from colonial administrative, military and anthropological establishments continue to be freely picked up by the textbook writers.

Conclusion

The contemporary trends of popular stereotypical notion which have a long socio-political lineage appear in different media, textbooks and literatures, even in textbooks. The people's revolution of 1990 put an end to Panchāyat and re-established plural politics. However, the rhetoric and the stereotypes of 'peace' and 'bravery' continue as before in the textbooks.

The notion of 'peace' related to Panchāyat political system and 'bravery' related with the martial identity does not work on the new socio-political ground. However both 'peace' and 'bravery' as signifiers are attached with different meanings in different contexts; that peace and bravery indicate different notions to different people in different socio political contexts. Peace, already known, fixed, frequently repeated, shifts its position from anthropological observation to Panchāyati politics, and then to a more religious and cultural ideology.

Textbooks, literature, and the popular media can avoid neither the use of this paradoxical rhetoric notion of the 'brave' ancestor nor the reference to the myth of 'peace'. Both notions appear almost everywhere in textbooks, music, and literature, even in the new national anthem which followed a decade-long

Maoist revolution that took the lives of more than 14000 people.

By the blood of heroes, independent and resolute
Land of knowledge, land of peace, Tarai, Hill,
Mountains.¹²

To think of an education beyond these stereotypes is the greatest task ahead. Because through these and similar stereotypes the discrimination of the state, be it religious, cultural or linguistic, is naturalized. A more egalitarian Nepali society will have to think of better means of disseminating knowledge.

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