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Emergence of the Nepali Nation-State: A Stepping Stone to Modernity

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Abstract

The present study examines traces of nation-state and nationalist capitalism in Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Dibya Upadesh*, a collection of royal edicts, in the light of relevant historical details. As Prithvi Narayan Shah's campaign of uniting the princely states has been very contentious one, the scholars have different opinions regarding it. With the abolition of monarchy and rise of the identity politics in Nepal in the recent years, there is no dearth of scholars, who are bent on proving Prithvi Narayan Shah's venture as a colonial and expansionist campaign triggered by his greed for property and power. However, this dissertation does not try to judge him in terms of needs and values of the present Nepali society. Instead, this study, keeping the values and constraints of the then historical period, examines Prithvi Narayan's venture in terms of its consequences and thus claims that Prithvi Narayan Shah's unifying campaign contributed to the rise of nascent nation-state and nationalist capitalism in Nepal. As the nascent nation-state based on the Hinduism, the hill culture and the Nepali [Gorkhali] language set the path of the history of modern Nepal, it has remained a semi-feudal and premodern state at the core. Regarding nation-state, capitalism and modernity, this qualitative as well as interpretive study employs the relevant ideas of Kathleen Thelen, David Gellner, Anthony Giddens, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Renan, Mark Leichty, and Mahesh Chandra Regmi, among others.

Keywords: *nation-state, capitalism, modernity, Nepali nationalism, historical institutionalism*

Introduction

As Nepal, along with other parts of the world, has witnessed an unprecedented rise in identity politics yoked with justice, some scholars have started questioning Prithvi Narayan Shah's (hereafter Prithvi Narayan) venture of uniting princely states into one nation-state. They present his unification campaign as a colonial campaign. They also accuse him of courting all sorts of injustice to Nepal. In his study, Nabaraj Dhungel presents Prithvi Narayan as the one, who started a trail of exclusion and marginalization of Dalits and indigenous communities in Nepal. He argues, "Since Prithvi Narayan Shah's time, the monarchy in Nepal has made the people only subjects born to serve the king worshipping them as god. This institution has promoted only the singular exclusive ideology, culture and identity marginalizing all the dalits and janajatis and using them only as the weapons to protect the throne" (Dhungel 313). Dhungel examines Prithvi Narayan's actions with the concerns and values of the present times, i.e., identity politics, in his mind. Likewise, Yug Pathak does not agree with the narrative of unification. He supports the argument that "Gorkha's king took over other states in order to achieve wealth, prosperity and authority" (Pathak 24). Deriving from Mahesh Chandra Regmi, Pathak argues, "Indeed, the Gorkhals did not have any idea and method to develop an extensive economic system" (12). He calls this campaign an imperialist venture rather than unification. He thinks that the narrative of unification is just a figment of the historians working with the kings like Tribhuvan and Mahendra. Then a question arises: Why did the historians create a discourse of unification? Pathak has this argument: "Indeed, its purpose was to establish monarchy as the hero of the nation. If it was called state expansion, there was a risk of monarchy's heroism disappearing from modern consciousness" (30). Moreover, he also thinks that hegemonic discourses of nation and nationality were also constructed by these historians after 1951: "At that very time, nation and nationality were envisioned. In the campaign of this vision, there was a contribution of the powerful historians, litterateurs, poets, musicians of that time" (10). Certainly, the narratives about nation and nationality were institutionalized during the reign of king Mahendra. It is also true that the powerful historians, poets, musicians and writers contributed to the formation of those narratives along the line of the Hinduism, the Shah monarchy, the Nepali language, and the upper caste hill culture. Nevertheless, this argument does not pay attention to the reasons behind the connection between what Prithvi Narayan and king Mahendra did. For example, it, among other reasons, does not point out historical institutionalism, which forced the historical actors following Prithvi Narayan to adjust themselves to the nationalist ideology, i.e., *asali* Hindustan, set by Prithvi Narayan. Shedding light on the significance of institution, Kathleen Thelen discusses historical institutionalism in this way:

Institutions are a product of history, but at the same time, once in place, contribute to the shaping of historical developments. As a result, historical institutionalism adopts the concept of path dependence according to which politics involves some elements

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of chance (agency, choice), but once a path is taken, then it can become ‘locked in’, as all the relevant actors adjust their strategies to accommodate the prevailing pattern. (Thelen 385)

In the case of Nepal, the country took the path with the emergence of the nation-state along the line of the *asali* Hindustan with the hill based upper caste Hindu culture and it got locked in as the agents following this point of history have tried to adjust themselves to this path in one way or another.

Moreover, such a dismissive way of looking at historical events and personalities does not let one examine them in a critical manner. This approach is driven by the present social and political agendas. Whereas the current issues cannot be written off, sometimes it may be fallacious to examine history from the perspectives shaped by the present agendas or needs only. Doing so amounts to committing an error of presentism, a prejudice of judging the events of history through the values of today. *Oxford Dictionary* defines presentism as “uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts” (qtd. in Ratner). This tendency of viewing the present as the best will, as per Ratner, lead us to view the people from the past as inferior. Examining the recent acts of dismantling the Confederate statues and monuments across the U.S. in the name of getting rid of the history of slavery of the African American people, Paul Ratner asserts, “There is a big danger, on the other hand, that as the conversation turns to exorcising ghosts of currently unpopular attitudes, we are doing it through the lens of presentism” (np). While Ratner agrees that the state should resort to viable measures to right the historical wrongs, he claims that “it’s unfair to view how people reacted to situations around them within the constraints and prejudices of the society of their day” (np). That means one, if need be, has to examine the historical events keeping the values of the time in mind. Therefore, for the critical debate, one has to acknowledge the given context of the historical events as well. Keeping the relevant historical details and values in mind, the present study attempts to examine Prithvi Narayan’s act of expanding the Gorkhali state with reference to his *Dibya Upadesh*.

Certainly, there are several narratives about Nepal’s entry into modernity. Mary De Chene presents the end of Rana rule as Nepal’s entry into modernity. She presents the development, i.e., *bikās*, as the Nepali version of modernity, which unified Nepal to the rest of the world. With an air of authority, she declares, “Let me now posit a Third *Ekikaran* in the latter half of the 20th century: unification with the rest of the world through the advent of modernity. The hero in this case is not an individual, but *bikās*. The Third *Ekikaran* is, in fact, a much-told story, but it is recounted as a tale of progress” (263). One must acknowledge the significance of the end of Rana rule and the rise of democracy in Nepal. However, presenting the 1950s as point of departure for modernity inflicts injustice

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to the historical processes that really kick-started modernity in Nepal. Going beyond this narrative of modernity, the present study locates modernity in the late eighteenth century when nascent nation-state and nationalist capitalism emerged in Nepal. Examining the traces of nation-state and nationalist capitalism in Prithvi Narayan's *Divya Upadesh* in the light of the relevant historical documents and theoretical insights, this study makes a claim that Prithvi Narayan had envisioned a larger Gorkhali state as the *asali* Hindustan but not the Empire. He shifted his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu, leading to the rise of a central government. Furthermore, his stiff resistance to the partition of the newly built state among brothers and warlords cannot be simply discounted. He let the local cultural practices of the Kathmandu Valley continue as they were. He prioritized the establishment of institutions for development as well as governance. His call for unity on the basis of *asali* Hindustan was his strategy to unify all the Hindu princely states to protect themselves from the rising East India Company in the south. Though he recognized Nepal as a nation of people having diverse cultural backgrounds, he took the Hinduism as something shared by all the people within the territory of the larger Gorkhali state. This homogeneity was also the bedrock of the emerging nation-state. In this way, one can easily observe the components essential for the formation of a nation-state within the then expanding Gorkhali state. The Gorkhali state under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan, therefore, was a nascent nation-state, which had its own administrative mechanisms to raise and mobilize capital. These facts illustrate that Nepal entered modernity when it emerged as a nascent nation-state with its nationalist capitalism during the years of the expansion of the Gorkha state in the last quarter of the 18th century.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research based on close reading and interpretation of the primary text in the light of the relevant historical details and theoretical insights. *Divya Upadesh*, a text credited to Prithvi Narayan, has been selected as the primary text for this study. Though many scholars have expressed their doubt regarding the authorship of *Divya Upadesh*, this study has given Prithvi Narayan's authorship a benefit of doubt. Prithvi Narayan's *Divya Upadesh* makes it very clear that he was envisioning a larger Gorkhali state as the *asali* Hindustan but not the Empire. As the present study assumes the unification of Nepal as the point of departure for a trajectory of Nepali modernity, this text has offered an opportunity to examine Prithvi Narayan's vision about the nation-state. On the one hand, Shah managed to found a nation-state with his expansionist venture, opening a door to modernity in Nepal. He, on the other hand, defined the Nepali nationalism as the Hindu nationalism in his bid to establish an *asali* Hindustan, a pure country of the Hindus. This nascent nationalism anchored to the Hinduism would have grave consequences in the future. However, the primary text, regardless of the meticulous textual analysis, has been

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primarily used as a springboard to theorize the connections among modernity, capitalism and nation-state. For the present study, I have used Ludwig F. Stiller's translation of *Divya Upadesh in his Prithvi Narayan Shah in the light of Divya Upadesh* (1968). Moreover, Bhim Bahadur Pandey's *tyas bakhhatko Nepal*, among others, has been used as an important text for historical details. Close reading of the primary text and other relevant texts is the major source of data collection tool. Moreover, searching and analyzing the secondary texts, both off line and online, is another tool for data collection for this qualitative research. In relation to the ideas related to nation-state, capitalism and modernity, this study engages with the ideas of Anthony Giddens, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Renan, David Gellner, Mark Leichty, Kathleen Thelen, and Mahesh Chandra Regmi, among others.

Modernity, Nation-State and Capitalism

As modernity has remained one of the most contentious issues in the recent academic debates, this study, deriving from scholars like Anthony Giddens, Benedict Anderson, and Nicolas P. Mouzelis, assumes modernity as a new set of social arrangements, which challenge the age-old familial, social, cultural, economic and political values. In this study, the new familial, social, cultural, economic and political values of modernity are broadly represented by the two categories: nation-state and (global) capitalism. Therefore, in the context of the present study, the following definition of modernity by Graham Murdock sounds quite relevant:

We can define modernity in its most general sense as that complex of processes that detached societies from the economic, social, and cultural formations we now characterize as 'ancient' or 'traditional,' and constructed the formations we have come to see as defining the distinctiveness of the contemporary world. These processes include: the rise of capitalism as the dominant mode of economic organization, the development of the nation-state as the model unit of political administration and action, the ending of religious monopolies over thought and knowledge and the emergence of a more fragmented and contested cultural field, in which contending discourses struggle for public visibility and authority. (Murdock 523)

This definition, just like the present study, encompasses capitalism and nation-state as the major components of modernity. Likewise, this study, in order to foreground the distinctiveness of modern society, makes a distinction between the processes and institutions, which distinguish modernity from tradition. Murdock also appears to be aware of the continuation of traditional practices and institutions, which are still vying with modern processes and institutions for retaining their space. Since traditional practices and institutions are still fighting hard for retaining their relevance and influence in the Nepali society, this idea particularly resonates with the present study. In this study, too, modernity has been

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perceived “as a set of dynamics rather than as a condition, a continual process of becoming rather than an accomplished state of being” (Murdoch 524).

Likewise, Nicolas P. Mouzelis takes modernity as a new set of social arrangements, which challenged the premodern familial as well as social ties and led the people to wider networks of political, social and cultural institutions, which constituted nation-state. To Mouzelis, the emergence of the nation-state is the point of departure for trajectory of modernity. This is also the proposition of the present dissertation in the case of Nepal. In this study, the emergence of the nascent nation-state under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan at the end of the eighteenth century, therefore, has been presented as the point of departure of modernity in Nepal. Deriving from Michael Mann (1986), Mouzelis highlights the significance of the nation-state in this way: “The nation-state is historically unique in the sense that, compared to all pre-industrial states, it achieved unprecedented ‘infrastructural’ powers. Therefore, it succeeded in penetrating the periphery and bringing its population into centralized bureaucratic mechanisms, to a degree that was simply unthinkable in any pre-industrial social formation” (Mouzelis148). With the help of the technologies following the industrial revolution, “the nation-state managed to mobilize human and non-human resources to such an extent that segmental localism (economic, social, political, cultural) was dramatically weakened as subjects were transformed into citizens, and as people gradually shifted their loyalties and orientations from the local, traditional communities to the ‘imagined community’ of the nation-state” (Mouzelis 148). In the context of Nepal, one can observe how Prithvi Narayan made an attempt to build Nepal after the concept of nation-state.

Not surprisingly, Mouzelis seems to have derived this idea from Anthony Giddens, who has this to say regarding the two tiers of modernity:

When we speak of modernity, however, we refer to institutional transformations that have their origins in the West. How far is modernity distinctively Western? In answering this question, we have to consider various analytically separable features of modernity. In terms of institutional clustering, two distinct organisational complexes are of particular significance in the development of modernity: the nation-state and systematic capitalist production. (174-175)

Indeed, the present study is also an endeavor to trace out modernity in Nepal in terms of the ways of life triggered by nation-state and capitalism. This idea of two tiers of modernity is particularly significant in Nepal’s case. Basically, the emergence of Nepal as the nation state under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan led to the rise of nation-state based modernity and this modernity slowly gave into global modernity as the Rana rulers started brushing their shoulders with the British rulers. This opened up more with the demise of the Rana rule in 1951. The modernity based on nation-state still continues to assert itself amidst

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all the challenges like exclusion of marginalized communities from the official narratives as well as institutions of the Nepali nation-state. Despite all this, unlike in the West, both tiers of modernity prevail in Nepal simultaneously. They are parts and parcels of evolution of capitalism in Nepal.

Explaining the connection between nation-state and modernity, Anthony Giddens asserts, “In explicating the nature of modern societies, we have to capture the specific characteristics of the nation-state—a type of social community which contrasts in a radical way with pre-modern states” (Giddens 13). Giddens emphasizes how the modern societies differ from the pre-modern ones. He connects the nation-state to the modern society. The nation-state, according to Giddens, “has long participated in that reflexivity characteristic of modernity as a whole” (72). He argues that sovereignty needs to be monitored reflexively. Unlike in the past, the notion of sovereignty made it mandatory for the neighbouring states to acknowledge a nation-state’s autonomy within the territory. Eventually, it brought the stability of the borders. Giddens claims that this factor markedly differentiated the nation-state from the pre-modern states (72-73). Since Nepal also emerged as a nation-state out of premodern princely states with its borders recognized by Great Britain following the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, Giddens’s ideas about nation-state sound quite relevant in the context of this study.

In this context, it is important to examine Ernest Renan’s ideas regarding nation. Renan acknowledges the importance of the earlier forms of state in relation to the emergence of the nation-states. Dynasties, will of provinces/states, or consciousness of people—according to Renan, herald unity among the people required for the formation of nations. In relation to Nepal, the Shah dynasty, under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan, brought unity among people from different princely states. Prithvi Narayan reminds one of the Norman invaders, who, after a few generations, “were no longer distinguishable from the rest of the population; their influence had nonetheless been profound” (Renan 250). Like the Norman warriors, Prithvi Narayan accepted the culture of the conquered ones and offered them a unifying ideology and military habits in exchange. Undeniably, Prithvi Narayan’s soldiers inflicted violence on the people from several neighboring princely kingdoms. The process of unity, as per Renan, “is always achieved brutally . . .” (251). Not surprisingly, the mainstream history tries to hide this violence as forgetting “is an essential factor in the creation of a nation . . .” (251). In this way, Renan foregrounds the significance of the willed amnesia shared by the people for the emergence of the nation. Along with this mass amnesia, “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, . . .” (251).

Deriving from Renan, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet

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them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their Communion” (Anderson 4-5). In addition, the nation “is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). This imagined horizontal comradeship “makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7). In his opinion, the answer to why people become ready to lay down their lives for the imagined community lies “in the cultural roots of nationalism” (7). Eventually, the nation-states institutionalized their nationalism and thus official nationalism was established. In the context of Nepal, this happened with the king Mahendra’s campaign to institutionalize the Nepali nationalism along the line of the Hinduism, the Nepali (Gorkhali/ *khas*) language and the Shah dynasty in the 1960s. Historical institutionalism played a significant role as the official nationalism derived the major components from Prithvi Narayan’s *asali* Hindustan.

One can look into the case of the national language, i.e., Nepali. Bryan Maddox has examined the Nepali state’s attempt at homogenizing through the promotion of the Nepali language as a door to modernity and development at the cost of other languages: “Nepali was promoted and developed as a national language in the early 1900’s. What was Gorkhali the dominant language of the ruling elite, widely spoken by the hill-castes, was transformed into Nepali, the modernist language of nation building” (Maddox 207). Maddox observes a significant link between the Gorkhali language or *khas kura* and the present Nepali language. Actually, the Newari should have been Nepali language since it was the language which used to be practised in the then Nepal, i.e., the Kathmandu valley. However, with the victory of Gorkha’s Prithvi Narayan, the *khas kura* became the Nepali language. Maddox misses the contribution of the Nepalis from the Indian diaspora in developing the Nepali linguistic nationalism by associating the Nepali language with the Nepali jati. Deriving inspiration from them, the Nepali literature and literary icons like Bhanubhakta, during the Panchayati rule, “were promoted, celebrating the ‘linguistic unification’ of the country” (Maddox 207). In this way, Nepali, a regional vernacular, was established as a national language for the sake of nation building process. That means even after 200 years after the emergence of the nascent nation-state, the Nepali state under the king Mahendra followed the path Nepal took during the reign of Prithvi Narayan, thanks to the latter’s *asali* Hindustan . After all, the official Nepali nationalism was an attempt to concretize the Nepali imagined community, which had been evolving since the unification of Nepal in the late eighteenth century. Despite the insurmountable hierarchy between the Shah dynasty and the common people, this official nationalism also offered the Shah dynasty an excuse to showcase itself as a part of the horizontal imagined community. Anderson echoes the same: [O]fficial nationalism concealed a discrepancy between nation and dynastic realm” (110). Not surprisingly, the official nationalism sidelined the ethnic indigenous communities, the

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Madheshi communities and religious minorities. In this regard, Miriam Poulsen Kramer observes: “14 Successive regimes, from Rana to Panchayat rule, attempted to consolidate Nepal as a nation through homogenizing practices geared at erasing the tremendous ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of Nepal” (Kramer 29). Therefore, “the idea of the Nepali nation is and has always been a contested one” (29). However, the same official nationalism, in different reincarnations, persists even when Nepal is struggling to establish itself as a federal republic following the end of Shah dynastic rule in 2008.

Though capitalism, as illustrated above, plays a significant role in the formation of the nation-state, Giddens downplays the role of capitalism in the rise of nation-state in this way: “The nation-state system was forged by myriad contingent events from the loosely scattered order of post-feudal kingdoms and principalities whose existence distinguished Europe from centralised agrarian empires” (62). In the context of Nepal, Bal Bahadur Thapa, in his article “Emergence of the Nepal Nation-State: A Stepping Stone to Modernity,” argues, “We can observe the same with the rise of the nation-state in Nepal under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah. However, capitalist atmosphere, national and international, seems to have been somehow responsible for the emergence of the nation-state” (6). Acknowledging other contingent factors for the rise of the nation-state in Nepal, Thapa hints at the role of capitalism as well. However, Thapa does not pursue this connection further. This study, however, digs deeper into the factors behind the connection between nation-state and capitalism.

Casting its shadow worldwide, capitalism- in the form of colonization- had its several manifestations. The East India Company, which was in the process of colonizing the whole India, represented the proto global capitalism. Against such background, this study claims that Prithvi Narayan commenced his unification campaign to fend off the East India Company. Whereas Prithvi Narayan’s unification campaign brought a nascent nation-state with nationalist capitalism, it- unlike in the West- was not the end of religious mode of thought. Instead, Prithvi Narayan’s nationalism of *asali* Hindustan was based on the pure Hinduism.

Rise of a Nascent Nepali Nation-State with Nationalist Capitalism

As city states or princely states located in the Kathmandu valley, Nepal Mandala seems to have commenced the journey to modernity even before the unification of Nepal. However, this study assumes that, Nepal, as a nation-state, embarked on this journey to modernity after Prithvi Narayan’s unification of Nepal in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Therefore, Ludwig F. Stiller (1995) asserts that “in the history of Nepal there can be no period which is more important than this one for an understanding of Nepal as a modern state” (Stiller np). However, Richard Burghart does not seem to agree with this view. Burghart claims that the idea of nation-state was absent “in governmental discourse

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during the period of Nepalese expansion across the southern flank of the Himalayas at the turn of the nineteenth century” (Burghart 71-72). Burghart seems to hint at the lack of fixed territorial boundaries and proper governmental institutions. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to notice the elements of a nascent nation state if one examines *Dibya Upadesh* in the light of the relevant historical details. In this regard, Thapa argues, “The very emergence of a nascent nation-state in the last decades of the eighteenth century heralded modernity in Nepal” (5). However, Thapa does not explore the nationalist capitalism that comes along the nation-state in his article. In this connection, the present study fulfills that gap as well.

Most probably with the awareness of the rising East India Company in the neighbouring Indian states, Prithvi Narayan Shah, way before the high imperialist ideology emerged in Europe in 1880s, appears to have conceived the notion of integralist sort of nation-state. Such integralist notion of nation-state, according to Wolfgang J. Mommsen, gave “the idea that nation states should be homogenous. The imperialist ideology also gave an additional impetus to the idea of racial superiority of one’s own nation . . .” (Mommsen 217). Whereas this study assumes that the unification campaign was not a colonial or imperialist campaign, it agrees with Mommsen’s notion of integralist nation-state, which seeks homogeneity based on the superiority of the pure Hindus. Prithvi Narayan’s call for establishing an *asali* Hindustan fits the bill. If one views Prithvi Narayan’s venture in terms of the way things were at that time, she can see sufficient traces of a nascent nation-state.

Despite his disagreement regarding the prevalence of nation-state in the governmental discourse of the time, one can use Burghart’s idea about a nation-state, which is “a form of government that is seen to be an expression of the will or character of a culturally unique people . . .” (Burghart 71). In *Divya Upadesh*, Prithvi Narayan, regardless of cultural diversity, presents the Nepali people under his rule as the pure Hindus and thereby Nepal as an expression of the will of these pure Hindus. Prithvi Narayan, therefore, asserts that Nepal “will be a true Hindustan of the four jats, greater and lesser, with the thirty-six classes” (44). Certainly, he seems to have aspired to inculcate nationalism in terms of the pure Hinduism, untouched by the Islamism and Christianity flourishing in the south. Barbara Grossman-Thompson echoes the same:

At the same time as Shah was expanding Nepal’s borders, he carefully withdrew Nepal from relations with European powers, who were instituting full-blown colonialism in India to the South. Shah had several reasons for such maneuvering. First, he expressed disgust for the subservient relationship between India and British forces and wished to avoid a similar colonial relationship with Europe. Second, as a devout Hindu he believed that foreigners were heretical by nature and their presence in Nepal was quite literally polluting. (69)

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Grossman-Thompson thinks that Prithvi Narayan aimed at protecting the sovereignty of his *asali* Hindustan from the British colonialism. Indeed, his vision of *asali* Hindustan could have been a way to unite the Hindu princely states so as avoid humiliation at the hands of the expanding British colonizers, who also happened to be impure as well as heretical. Similarly, Mark Leichty thinks that Prithvi Narayan's "conservative self-awareness and self-production were based firmly in the recognition of an external and threatening 'other'" (Leichty 36). Leichty links Prithvi Narayan's evocation of *asali* Hindustan to the threatening other, i.e., the British colonial power in the south. Though David Gellner has some reservations regarding the idea that Prithvi Narayan had an insight regarding the potential rise of the British power in the neighbourhood. Gellner, however, agrees that Prithvi Narayan "was able to create a political unit that dwarfed the tiny kingdom he inherited" (Gellner 3). Certainly, this political unit was much more than just an addition of chunks of land to his princely state Gorkha. To retain this political unit intact, Prithvi Narayan appeals to the people belonging to different castes and ethnicities not to "leave your ancient religion" (Stiller 44). In this way, the pure Hinduism seems to be a glue to unite the people from different princely states and bind them together in one political unit.

Prithvi Narayan's confidence regarding the status of his new kingdom as a nation-state can, therefore, be observed in the following edict: "This *country* is like a gourd [yam] between two rocks" (my emphasis, Stiller 42). Regardless of the existence of several princely states around, he presents Nepal as a distinct nation lying between India and China. He seems to be confident about the remaining princely states joining the Nepal sooner or later. In this edict, he is warning the upcoming rulers to be alert about the intentions of the much more powerful and ambitious neighbours: British India and China. Indeed, this idea has grown popular as 'yam theory' among the Nepali diplomats and scholars of international relations.

Moreover, Prithvi Narayan's outlook towards institutions deserves to be examined. For example, he has this to say about the judiciary system: "In each court put a man skilled in law. Conduct courts according to the law" (45). Though his notion of rule of law is not certainly what rule of law means now. Nevertheless, it is clear that he, unlike the rulers of the princely states of his time, does not want the words of the ruler to become law. No matter how impartial a ruler is, s/he cannot deliver justice fairly in the absence of the rule of law. But with the mechanisms for rule of law in place, the delivery of justice, regardless of the character of the ruler, is guaranteed to a great extent. Therefore, this edict by Prithvi Narayan also expresses the same confidence in the rule of law: "Let there be no injustice in our country" (44). Despite his evocation of the conservative *asali* Hindustan, his faith in institutions, the building blocks of nation-state, speaks volumes about his vision about the nation-state.

Moreover, to understand the significance of state mechanisms Prithvi Narayan had created, one has to examine the state mechanisms of the princely states before the unification

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of Nepal. Bhim Bahadur Pandey, in Volume V of *tyas bhakahtko* Nepal, claims that the kings were too poor to retain the corrupt and unstable administrators for a long time. Pandey infers: “Since the king of these states were weak and courtiers licentious, the administration grew corrupt and weak, and the people, as a result, had suffered whereas the administrators, like opportunists, kept changing jobs across states” (my translation, Pandey 1). One has to take the concerned historical circumstance into consideration to examine Prithvi Narayan’s endeavour to set up the state mechanisms. Prithvi Narayan’s act of overhauling the state mechanisms, as per Pandey, is quite palpable:

Right after becoming the king of 12000 Gorkha, Shree Paanch Prithvi Narayan Shah’s attention, at first, tilted towards the rectification of the administration as illustrated by these examples: the selection of the Minister Kalu Pande as the Chief Minister on the basis of bravery and merit, the reorganization of *tharghar*, the creation of *jharot* (voluntary service to the state), the system of supporting courtiers by sidelining the sibling brother in the matters of the governing and the strong command over the courtiers, who existed as a bridge between the king and the subjects. In short, Shree Paanch Prithvi Narayan Shah organized Nepal’s administration on the basis of merit and bravery He had a pure aim at building Nepal into a great nation and he, as clarified by *Dibya Upadesh*, had made the strong administration his main instrument to achieve it. (1-2)

Indeed, his act of revamping the administration within his earlier Gorkha kingdom manifest’s his belief in state mechanisms run by the people of merit. Moreover, one should consider other historical factors. Regardless of the immense pressure, Prithvi Narayan was reluctant to make his brothers kings of the princely states he had conquered. One can examine Prithvi Narayan’s notion of a state as a *dhungo*, a stone, to understand this better. Mahesh Chandra Regmi argues that the *dhungo* refers to the territorial integrity of the state. Regardless of change in rulers, the state remains permanent. Regmi asserts:

The Gorkhali State was based on the concept of *dhungo*, literally a stone, but used as a metaphor to denote the state. The concept implied that the Gorkhali state was a permanent entity that transcended the person of the ruler. In other words, allegiance to the state superseded personal loyalty to the ruler. The concept found its practical application in the principle of territorial integrity, an essential attribute of a state in the modern sense. (x-xi)

This extract also demonstrates Prithvi Narayan’s vision of the Gorkha kingdom as the proto nation-state. Therefore Regmi thinks that “hence a proper understanding of that period is essential for a proper understanding of the modern state of Nepal as well” (xviii). To Prithvi Narayan, the state was indivisible. Additionally, he started ruling from Kathmandu once he conquered the princely states of the Kathmandu valley. This act led to the rise of the central

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government, building the foundation for a nation-state. In this connection, Blaikie et al. argue, “The subsequent transfer of the capital from Gorkha, in order to take advantage of the peculiar location and agricultural wealth of the Newar Kingdoms, marked the establishment of central government in the Kathmandu Valley, . . .” (Blaikie et al. 26). From the view point of this study, the establishment of the central government in the Kathmandu valley really helped Prithvi Narayan get his vision of a nation-state materialized.

As per the discussion above, nation-state generally comes along with capitalism. Or, capitalism is another aspect of nation-state. In such a context, this study claims that Nepal’s journey towards capitalism also started from the same moment of the emergence of nascent nation-state in Nepal. It means modernity’s trajectory in Nepal, even from the perspective of capitalism, commenced from the reign of Prithvi Narayan. The analysis of Prithvi Narayan’s *Divya Upadesh* makes it amply clear that the nascent Nepali nation-state started its journey towards nation-state capitalism. Though one may call Prithvi Narayan’s vision related to trade, business and economy his acumen to mercantilism, one cannot ignore the fact that the same mercantilism led to the establishment of mechanisms to collect capital from the people to fund the functioning of the state and the ventures to expand the state.

However, it is not easy to determine whether the journey of capitalism in Nepal also started from Prithvi Narayan’s reign. Unlike the nation-state, the global flow of ideas and goods appears to have started way earlier in the case of the Kathmandu valley, which used to be known as Nepal before Prithvi Narayan’s venture. Nepal, unlike many scholars think, was not too far from cosmopolitan consciousness even in the eighteenth century. It was a centre of trade and pilgrimage. The traders from Tibet, Kashmir, Italy and China, among others, would visit and stay in the Kathmandu valley. Moreover, Nepal, for those traders, was a popular trade route to Tibet. Most of those traders were involved in business as individuals rather than the agents of the state. In the absence of the centralized nation-state, the state did not have much say regarding the trades. However, the three kings of the Kathmandu valley would collect tax to fund the functioning of the state. Moreover, they would also mint the money for Tibet. Like other historians, David Gellner (2018) claims, “The Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley had provided silver coinage for the Tibetans and gaining control of this contract was one of Prithvi Narayan’s motivations for conquest” (Gellner 4). The missionaries like Capuchins were there even when Kathmandu fell to Prithvi Narayan’s soldiers in 1776. Nevertheless, there was no concept of a planned way of accumulating or distributing capital. Even the princely states were like merchants. The economic system before the emergence of Nepal as the nation-state, therefore, can be called mercantile capitalism. Nevertheless, feudalism was the order of the day. Within this broader feudal system, mercantile capitalism was flourishing. Mercantile capitalism, therefore, might have laid ground for nation-state capitalism, which is supposed to have kicked off modernity.

Keeping these historical facts in mind, this dissertation claims that the trajectory of
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capitalism also started from the time when Nepal, thanks to Prithvi Narayan's venture, emerged as a nation-state. Though he expelled the Capuchin fathers, the Christian missionaries, from Kathmandu in his bid to create an *asali* Hindustan, he, as the discussion above shows, was not against the international trade. He advised the Nepali people to produce essential goods and services within the country and export them to other countries. In short, he promoted the protectionist nation-state capitalism. Nevertheless, he had hired the foreign experts to produce the guns within the country. Prithvi Narayan's *Dibya Upadesh* manifests his ideas about business and trade. He believes that the exporting goods to India and producing necessary goods within the country make the people wealthy. According to Prithvi Narayan's edict, "If the citizens are wealthy, the country is strong. The king's storehouse is his people" (Stiller 43). Not only does this edict demonstrate his familiarity with trade and business but also manifests care for his people. Furthermore, he suggests his people not to bring dancers and artists from abroad (*Muglan/* India) as "it drains your wealth. They take away secrets of the country. . ." (Stiller 46). Therefore, he recommends them to "bring some of the Newar dancers of the three cities of Nepal. . . . If anything is given to them, it remains inside your own country. If this is done, your country will be protected" (Stiller 46). Mark Leichty has named Prithvi Narayan's nationalism in relation to trade and business 'swadeshi' nationalism. Emma Tarlo thinks that this swadeshi nationalism "seems to have been motivated more out of mercantilist than moral sentiments" (qtd. in Leichty 36). These mercantilist sentiments brought mercantilist capitalism, which developed into nascent nation-state capitalism within the reign of Prithvi Narayan.

Regarding his vision for nationalist capitalism, one can examine Prithvi Narayan's edict from *Divya Upadesh*: "In a place where there are minerals, even though a village is situated there, the village must be moved and the mine worked. In places suitable for paddy, canals should be dug, fields cultivated, even if it means moving a house" (Stiller 45). This edict gives us a hint at Prithvi Narayan's vision of producing capital in the country. He also understands the importance of fertile land for cultivation. For good production of grains, he, on the behalf of the state, is even ready to get the villages shifted from the place suitable for cultivation and canals. One can observe the nascent nation-state trying to be very active in managing the things like mineral and cultivation, which are sources for national capital. In the same process, advising the Nepali people to export the local products to India for earning money, he asserts, "If the citizens are wealthy, the country is strong. The king's storehouse is his people" (43). This expression portrays him as a national leader, who cares for people. Though he does not appear to have particular national plan to collect capital or redistribute it in the current sense, this edict also shows that he is also familiar with trade. In a way, this is a way of earning capital from outside. The people's capital is state's capital. After all, as the king, he could mobilize the capital of the people for war or other works. Along the same line, he advises his people not to invite the dancers and artists from the *muglan* [India] because "it drains your wealth" (46). One can notice his business acumen. He does

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not want the national capital to be drained away. Instead, he advises them to “bring some of the Newar dancers of the three cities of Nepal. . . . If anything is given to them, it remains inside your own country. If this is done, your country will be protected” (46). Again, one can observe Prithvi Narayan’s policy of preserving capital within the nation. The important thing is Prithvi Narayan’s mercantilist sentiments, along with the emergence of the nascent nation-state, reflect nascent form of nation-state capitalism. Therefore, it can be taken as point of departure for modernity in Nepal.

Against this background, the emergence of the East India Company, a business venture cum a strong arm of the British Empire in India, was alarming. It was actually a nascent form of global capitalist venture originating from Britain. Though it started as a group of British traders, it metamorphosed into the right arm of the British Empire because Britain was already a nation-state and the East India Company became a part of British national corporate capitalism. That is why it was backed by the British army. Finally, the East India Company emerged as the British Raj, which would become a colonial force with its claws expanding all over the world. Nepal was exposed to colonial modernity as represented by British Raj. Nepal shared porous and malleable border with India under the rule of the East India Company. Nepal was pushing its borders further to the south, the east and the west. In other words, it was in loggerheads with different princely states under the control of the East India Company. On the other hand, the East India Company was also looking for a market as well as a source of raw materials for its industrial products. In this context, Prithvi Narayan may have united Nepal to protect small princely states, including his own to withstand the pressure from the neighbouring colonial force. He even fought and defeated the East India Company’s army marching towards the Kathmandu valley. As long as he was alive, he, therefore, did not let the Britishers set their foot under any excuse. He drove the remaining foreigners like Capuchin missionaries away from Kathmandu once he came to learn that they were involved in plotting the invitation of the East India Company’s army on the behalf of Jaya Prakash Malla. Furthermore, he did not want to lose national capital and secrets to the foreigners. The continuous war forced the Nepali state under Prithvi Narayan to manage state institutions to collect as well as distribute resources, leading to the rise of Nepali national capitalism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study on the nation-state and nationalist capitalism in relation to Prithvi Narayan’s *Divya Upadesh* amply illustrates that his campaign of unification heralded the nascent nation-state and nationalist capitalism in Nepal. To begin with, he thought of the state as a *dhungo*, a permanent indivisible phenomenon, distinct from the king. In such a context, his stiff resistance to the partition of the newly built state among brothers

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cannot be simply discounted. Even his slogan of *asali Hindustan* was his strategy to unify the Hindu princely states to fend off the threatening British colonial power in the south. He also used it as a glue to retain the newly achieved political unit intact. Following his victory over the princely states of the Kathmandu valley, Prithvi Narayan started ruling from Kathmandu and thus he had the central government, which laid foundation for nation-state. His faith in institutions for governance, economy, development, justice and foreign policy- building blocks of nation-state- cannot be simply overlooked. Having said all these, one cannot ignore the expanding Gorkhali state, the sporadic resistances against the ruler, and the lack of programmes or strategies to promote a sense of shared imagined community. Therefore, the emerging Nepali state was not a stable, secure and confident nation-state. However, one can easily notice the components required to form a nation-state within the then expanding state. The Nepali state under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan, therefore, was a nascent nation-state, which had its own administrative mechanisms to raise and mobilize capital. Though Prithvi Narayan's vision related to trade, business and economy may be called his acumen to mercantilism, one cannot ignore the fact that the same mercantilism led to the establishment of mechanisms to collect capital from the people to fund the functioning of the state and the ventures to expand the state. Therefore, nascent nation-state and nationalist capitalism during the years of the expansion of the Gorkha state in the last quarter of the 18th century. Certainly, Nepal had to wait for the king Mahendra to get this nation-state properly institutionalized along the nationalist ideology set by Prithvi Narayan's *asali Hindustan*.

With regard to the nature of the Nepali nation-state, one cannot overlook the political changes like the end of Rana rule, the end of the Panchayat system, the abolition of monarchy and the establishment of the secular federal republic. In such a context, one is certainly tempted to take the Nepali nation-state as modern as its European and American counterparts. However, one needs to be equally aware of the institutional continuities and their reincarnations set by historical institutionalism related to the *asali Hindustan* founded by Prithvi Narayan Shah. The present Nepali society- thanks to the changes triggered by the ten year Maoist insurgency, among other factors- is trying to deal with multiple cultural identities. Therefore, the Nepali nationalism is negotiating with the two contradictory forces as it is struggling to carve a nation-state, which can simultaneously work as an overarching institution to bring all communities together under one umbrella and acknowledge differences across caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and region, among others. Nation-state, in the context of Nepal, is still an ongoing project of modernity with its share of despairs and aspirations.

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