

## Major General Vijay Shumsher Rana: A Memorable Figure of the Rana Regime

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### Abstract

Major General Vijay Shumsher Jabara was a visionary military officer and diplomat from Nepal during the twilight years of the Rana regime. Born in 1974 B.S. as the youngest son of Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher, he rose to the rank of Major General in his mid-teens, a rare distinction. Educated at the University of Calcutta with a master's degree in English literature, he became known for his intelligence, refined demeanor, and progressive views. Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, he played pivotal roles in Nepal's internal politics, foreign policy initiatives, and economic planning. As Nepal's first envoy to post-independence India, he laid the groundwork for Nepal-India relations. His untimely death in 2010 B.S. in Delhi marked a profound loss for a nation in transition.

**Keywords:** ambassador, development, economy, politics, negotiation, reform, relations

### Introduction

The military barracks at Maharajgunj Kathmandu, currently housing the Nepali Army's Para Battalion and Bhairavnath Battalion, were once known during the Rana era as 'Laxmi Niwas'. It was here, in the year 1974 B.S., that Vijay Shumsher was born as the youngest son of then Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Rana. At just around 15 or 16 years of age, he was appointed as Major General, a rare feat, and went on to play a pivotal role in Nepal's economic, political, and foreign affairs. His life was cut tragically short when he died at the age of 38 while serving as Nepal's ambassador to India, a story that remains unfamiliar to many even today.

From an early age, General Vijay Shumsher exhibited keen intelligence. He completed a Master's degree in English Literature from the University of Calcutta, consistently standing at the top of his class. Because of his sharp academic mind, he earned admiration among his peers and quickly became recognized, not only within the Rana family but across the country as a promising and gifted youth by the age of 24 or 25 (Pande, 2044 BS). A voracious reader, he gravitated toward works on literature, history, autobiography, and contemporary politics. During his university years in Calcutta, he became well-acquainted with some of the era's most influential South Asian thinkers and leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Acharya Narendra Dev, and Jayaprakash Narayan. Because of his scholarly excellence and incisive thought, he held key positions during the administrations of both Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher Rana and Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Rana, contributing substantially to Nepal's economic, political, and international sectors.

### **Role in Economic Development**

While seeking capable young members within his family to spearhead Nepal's economic development, Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher found promise in General Vijay Shumsher Rana. He entrusted him with a number of important posts across various offices and departments. As a result, General Vijay Shumsher went on to serve in key roles such as Vice Chairman of the Industrial Council, Director General of the Department of Botany, and head of the Nepali Textiles and Domestic Skills Promotion Office, Land Mortgage Bank, Cooperative Society, and Chairman of Nepal Bank. If the head of any department or office was absent, the responsibility would often fall to him (Pande, 2044 BS).

Due to his successful tenure as chief of these various institutions, Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher instructed General Vijay Shumsher to prepare a draft for accelerating Nepal's economic growth. With the assistance of Sardar Bhim Bahadur Pandey, Vijaya Shumsher developed a strategy for Nepal's economic development, which included drafting a 20-year national development plan, modeled after similar efforts in other countries. This initiative marked Nepal's first formal step toward planned economy (Pande, 2044 BS). At that time, General Vijay Shumsher estimated that the necessary infrastructure development would cost about 20 million rupees. If the nation could not bear the cost, he proposed that members of the Rana family should personally invest in the initiative. Although his revolutionary proposal didn't fully materialize (Rana et al., 2002), his contribution to the industrial growth of Nepal during Juddha Shumsher's tenure remained vital.

In 1990 A.D., during Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher's rule, when famed Swiss geologist Dr. Toni Hagen came to Nepal for a geological survey under the auspices of the United Nations, it was General Vijay Shumsher who provided full support and logistical coordination. Dr. Hagen surveyed remote corners of Nepal and revealed several new geological insights (Hagen, 2058 BS). In 2006 B.S., while flying from Kathmandu to Delhi, General Vijay Shumsher noticed the Rapti Valley from the air. He envisioned settling the area to supply food to the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding hill districts. This forward-thinking plan was later implemented in practice (Pande, 2045 BS). It is evidence of his foresight and strategic mindset.

**Role in Internal Politics**

General Vijay Shumsher also played a significant role in the nation's internal politics. He was instrumental in efforts to secure the release of B.P. Koirala from prison, maintain contact with Ganesh Man Singh, assist in the return of King Tribhuvan from the Indian embassy after his asylum, and in negotiating political transition following the King's exile to Delhi. Among these efforts, his role in saving B.P. Koirala's life stands out. When Koirala returned to Nepal to expand political activity, he was arrested and began a hunger strike in prison. As his health deteriorated dangerously, there were concerns that he might not survive. Some hardliner Ranas even advised Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher not to releasing B.P. Koirala from custody. Despite this, General Vijay Shumsher stood alone in advocating for Koirala's freedom. However, when his health deteriorated severely, General Vijay Shumsher warned his father Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher that 'if B.P. were to die, the moral burden and public condemnation would fall on him and his descendants' (Stiller, 1993). He also feared that such an outcome would send a negative message internationally. Lastly, his firm yet compassionate appeal, B.P. Koirala was ultimately released (Pande, 2945 BS). That decision still remembered by former staff at Laxmi Niwas. After B.P.'s release, General Vijay Shumsher arranged for B.P.'s mother and wife to meet him, despite his father's disapproval. B.P. himself recounted this incident in his autobiography (Sharma, 2055 BS), emphasizing that his release wasn't solely due to Indian pressure. Had he perished at that time, Nepal's political trajectory might have taken a vastly different turn. His lenient and human character also earned praise from figures like Matrika Prasad Koirala, who in his own memoir described him, despite being from the Rana family as 'a good man'. Over time, cordial ties were established between the Koirala and Vijay Shumsher families, highlighting his enduring grace (Sharma, 2055).

General Vijay Shumsher's aptitude for solving sensitive matters with intelligence led Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher to entrust him with critical assignments. For instance, when King Tribhuvan took asylum in the Indian Embassy, the task of coaxing him back initially fell to Vijay Shumsher and Arjun Shumsher (Tuladhar, 1980). Later, only Vijay Shumsher was sent (Pande, 2045 BS). Despite having a close relations with the King, Indian officials blocked the meeting, something General Vijay Shumsher realized keenly (Stiller, 1993). Had he met the King, perhaps a solution could have been brokered then and there. When some proposed storming the Indian Embassy to seize the King or digging trenches on the runway of Airport to prevent his departure, General Vijay Shumsher was the only one to oppose such drastic actions. After the King left for Delhi, the revolution spread across Nepal. As police and security forces clashed with revolutionaries, violence escalated. While most of the Rana elite favored crushing the movement, General Vijay Shumsher stood alone in urging restraint. He advised his father to initiate peace talks with India and return the seal of premiership, paving the way for King Tribhuvan's return (Joshi & Rose, 2004). Mohan Shumsher accepted his son's wise counsel and sent General Vijay Shumsher and General Keshar Shumsher to Delhi for talks (Tuladhar, 1980). There, they stayed at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's residence and discussed Nepal's political situation with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Their conversation focused on the rightful monarch of Nepal and the urgent need for reform (Amatya, 2004). Although the first

round of negotiations was unsuccessful, General Vijay Shumsher was sent alone to Delhi for second round talks. On this occasion, he successfully handed over the letter of abdication from Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher to King Tribhuvan, helping bring the talks to a consensus (Tuladhar, 1980). In Delhi, General Vijay Shumsher made personal efforts to build rapport with B.P. Koirala, one of the leading figures among the revolutionaries. B.P. reciprocated his approach. But, Matrika Prasad Koirala, the elder brother of B.P. Koirala, dissatisfied of such closeness between them before the negotiations had concluded (Sharma, 2055 BS). Nevertheless, this second round of dialogue resulted in the 'Delhi Agreement', which laid the foundation for the establishment of democracy in Nepal. Following the agreement, General Vijay Shumsher was tasked with coordinating the oath-taking ceremony and formal proceedings for the newly formed Rana-Congress coalition cabinet. He fulfilled with remarkable tact and foresight (Singh, 2057 BS). At that time, General Vijay Shumsher was among the few in the Rana family representing the younger generation of reform-minded leadership, playing important role in resolving the revolution through peaceful means (Pathak, n.d.). His contributions were crucial in ensuring that the Revolution of 2007 B.S. did not devolve into widespread bloodshed, but instead found a diplomatic and political solution. He also served as the chief political advisor to Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher, often drafting the Prime Minister's speeches. Many of the liberal ideas and thoughtful remarks in those addresses were attributed to Vijay Shumsher's intellect (Pande, 2045 BS). As a democrat at heart, he had repeatedly urged his father to implement the Sri Prakash Constitution. a statute introduced in 2004 B.S. Had Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher heeded his son's advice, the end of the Rana regime might have been delayed. Later, when it became known that, British and American diplomatic missions were visiting Nepal to assess the political situation after King Tribhuvan's exile, Vijay Shumsher advised his father to be mindful of international optics noting that these representatives would report back to their governments, potentially influencing foreign policy. However, his counsel was ultimately disregarded, leading to a failure in securing broader international support.

### **Foreign Export and Successful Diplomat**

General Vijay Shumsher was a skillful diplomat. In March 1947, he led Nepal's delegation to the first Asian Relations Conference in Delhi, aimed at asserting the sovereignty of Asian nations in the world (Amatya, 2004). At that conference, General Vijay Shumsher clearly articulated Nepal's desire to strengthen ties with traditional allies while also expanding its friendship with newly emerging nations around the globe (Muni, 1973). His remarks made it evident that Nepal was shifting from its old foreign policy approach and was ready to foster broader diplomatic relationships. By affirming Nepal's sovereignty and national dignity, he made sincere efforts to bolster Nepal's standing with the attending countries. His keynote address was so compelling that it left a lasting impression on India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and conference chair Sarojini Naidu. That conference marked Nepal's first appearance on the international stage, where General Vijay Shumsher played a pivotal role in presenting

Nepal as an independent, sovereign state. His contribution was not only diplomatic, but symbolic-ushering Nepal into a new era of global recognition.

After returning from the Asian Relations Conference in 1947, he founded the 'Nepal Council of World Affairs' in 1948 to guide palace-led foreign policy. He became the council's first president (Pande, 2045 BS). Around the same time, an affiliated body, 'the Council for Asian Relations', was also established under his initiative (Amatya, 2004). While serving as Director General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, he was the first to formally apply for Nepal's membership in the United Nations in February 1947, submitting a detailed petition signed in his name (Pande, 2045 BS). Although Nepal did not gain membership until 1955, by then General Vijay Shumsher had already passed away.

After India's independence in 1947, he was among the first to warn that an independent India would hold greater importance to Nepal than Britain. Few at that time grasped the shifting geopolitical realities as he did. This became proof when Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher believed Britain's endorsement of Crown Prince Gyanendra as King would grant him legitimacy. But, India refused to recognize Gyanendra's ascension and both Britain and the United States followed India's decision. Had Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher heeded his son's foreign policy advice, the Rana regime might not have collapsed in his tenure. His keen understanding of international affairs is evident in the letters he wrote as ambassador to India to Prime Minister Matrika Prasad Koirala (Koirala, 2008). Because of these efforts, General Vijay Shumsher is often credited as an architect of Nepal's foreign policy.

### **Nepal's Ambassador to India and Tragic Death**

After the democratic transition, the Rana-Congress coalition appointed General Vijay Shumsher as Nepal's ambassador to India on 8 Asar 2008 B.S. (Devkota, 2036 BS). During his tenure, he worked diligently to improve Nepal-India relations and prevent direct Indian interference in Nepalese politics. He also developed a close rapport with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. While still in service, King Tribhuvan reportedly considered appointing him as Prime Minister, and Vijay Shumsher even discussed this possibility with close confidants. However, tragedy struck when he died at age 35 on 15 Poush 2010 B.S. in Delhi. According to reports, he died from an electric shock when he was bathing in bathtub. When Nehru was informed about the death of Vijaya Shumsher, he rushed to the scene and instructed doctors to do everything possible to save him. Upon learning that he could not be revived, Nehru was deeply grieved. Though rumors of conspiracy circulated about his death, his family does not believe his death was the result of any plot. Still, to this day, his death remains shrouded in mystery and sorrow. At a time when Nepal desperately needed educated and visionary leaders to steer the country toward development, the premature death of a promising figure like General Vijay Shumsher marked a profound loss for the nation.

### **Conclusion**

At the time, General Vijay Shumsher commanded deep respect both within Nepal and beyond its borders. Among members of the Rana family, his popularity stemmed largely from his

amiable temperament and ability to win others over with his sincerity. He was so kind-hearted that, when Commander-in-Chief Rudra Shumsher was removed from office after Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher's tenure in 1990 B.S., Vijay Shumsher reportedly wept. For this reason, even today, descendants of Rudra Shumsher regard him warmly. Following the establishment of democracy, tensions flared between Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher and Home Minister B.P. Koirala over the 'Gorakha Dal' incident and the arrest of Bharat Shumsher. In that moment of discord, General Vijay Shumsher is said to have gently told B.P., "He just lost his temper, please don't take his words to heart" (Sharma, 2055 BS). A son who can calmly remind others of his father's faults to mediate conflict is a rare gem indeed. During the 2007 B.S. revolution, General Vijay Shumsher had no hand in the harsh punishment of political detainees. On the contrary, there are documented accounts of his kind behavior toward them. Such examples underscore his soft-spoken and warm-hearted nature. Even with staff at Laxmi Niwas, he treated everyone with humility, and he was always ready to lend a hand to those in distress.

According to Ganesh Man Singh, General Vijay Shumsher was highly intelligent and fluent in English (Singh, 2057 BS). He had a natural instinct for human interaction, treating everyone he met for the first time with friendship. Most people who encountered him came away deeply impressed. He had the rare ability to adapt his communication to suit his audience, which enabled him to deeply influence both King Tribhuvan and his father, Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher. He was known for decisiveness, a quality that led Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher to frequently consult him and delegate full responsibilities in times of difficulty. During Mohan Shumsher's premiership, General Vijay Shumsher played a central role in state affairs. Among the Ranas of his generation, he is often regarded as the most astute and capable. He was one of the few individuals who could speak openly and candidly with Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher. Between 1999 and 2007 B.S., General Vijay Shumsher significantly influenced Nepal's internal politics, economic developments, and foreign engagements. And yet, such an extraordinary figure receives far too little attention in our historical chronicles.

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