Self-postponement Vs. Visionary in Exile: Nepal's Quest for Modernity in the 1960s

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Abstract

Nepali modernity had encountered challenges in its development in the 1960s because King Mahendra Shah (1920-1972) had risen to power, thereby derailing the course of for modernity. He believed that democratic institutions and liberal values hindered the essential course of Nepali society and its traditional virtues. In the name of inventing a political system that suited the clime and soil of the nation, he dissolved the parliament, overthrew popularly elected Prime Minister B. P. Koirala (1914-1982), and implemented "partyless democracy" (?) in the name of the Panchayat system. This study has examined the tension, resulting from the tussle between the conservative camp and the liberal values in Nepal's quest for modernity in the 1960s. Mahendra Shah outlawed democracy to initiate the material transformation and industrialization in Nepal. Koirala and his associates were a group of visionaries who held liberal values. King Shah's project of modernity entailed self-postponement as it focused on achieving material transformation without transforming the consciousness of people and without allowing people's participation in the making of a nation by treating the visionary leaders as exiles from the political system. Methodologically, the paper applies new historicist reading of the texts to explore and analyze quest of modernity in Nepal in the 1960s. By analyzing Shah's speeches, and Koirala's speech and autobiographical writings, the paper rereads Nepal's quest for modernity in the 1960s.

***Keywords*:** Nepali modernity; Social change, Agency, Political change, Panchayat system

Introduction

Nepali modernity has passed through a perilous path after the social and political change in 1951. Often, major historical shifts provide people at present to understand

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their own situation and explore the means to cope with the challenges of the moment. Nepali modernity also faces similar types of challenges at present as Nepali witnesses the severe tension from the rise of ultra-rightist camp and the populism in the political landscape after the general election in 2022. Since memory and history serve the present by turning into a forum to analyze the shortcomings, errors, whims, and the fantasies of the rulers, it makes sense at present to approach the 1960s in search for the remedies of the challenges of the moment. The rise of conservative camp has posed the primary challenge for Nepali modernity to smoothly realize itself after 2006 in Nepal as the liberal left has been forced to negotiate with it at multiple junctures.

The paper does not focus on the development of modernity in Nepal after 2006 as it lies beyond the scope of the study. Since the paper sets out to examine the political and historical development that took place in the 1960s to comprehend the dynamics of modernity in the contemporary times, it rereads the political and historical challenges that the mainstream history had pointed out in Nepal in the 1960s and the ones that alternative readings reveal from the historical and political documents of the time at present. As the study seeks to treat Western debate on modernity as the frame of reference, I have briefly sketched some of the features that societies display after embarking into the project of modernity. The tenets have also helped the study to examine certain aspects of modernity when people begin to seek for it in Nepal.

After the social change in 1951, Nepal spent almost a decade groping for ways to institutionalize the change. The tension between the liberalists and conservatives reached its apex after King Tribhuvan Shah passed away in 1955. This study examines the frames of references developed in Western discourses on modernity to examine the course Nepal had to undertake in the 1960s after King Mahendra Shah captured the power of the state through a coup d'état on December 15, 1960. In the paper, I have analyzed some of Mahendra Shah's speeches that were delivered on key occasions to institutionalize partyless Panchayat and justify his intentions behind suspending the democratic journey of the country. Similarly, I have studied B. P. Koirala's speech on nationalism and his autobiographical writings to interpret the political values that he had developed before and after 1950. Reading Shah and Koirala against the backdrop of each other, the paper has explored the birth of agency and critical sensibility in each of them to analyze the reasons behind the derailment of Nepal's quest for modernity in the 1960s.

Reconceptualizing Modernity

By the points of reference of Western modernity, societies must exhibit certain

components to attain modernity. For instance, rationality, homogeneity, and social change can be taken as three general features of modernity. However, societies can develop their unique patterns of rationalization, homogenization, and social change, thereby producing unique modernities on their own. Societies do not function the way they used to after the emergence of modernity. When people make a conscious attempt to bring about change in society, they force transformation in the underlying structure. Since modernity does not refer to a straightforward process of social change, the social spirit also suffers a certain type of contradiction in the process of transformation because of tension between the old and the new. As a social phenomenon, modernity implies the play of opposite forces, ideologies, power centers, and the resulting tensions. In this paper, I have developed a functional argument regarding modernity: as a social phenomenon, modernity stands visibly through rationalization, homogenization, and social change. The transformation of the consciousness of people and society can be approached when the three factors are taken into consideration to analyze the history and politics of a particular society in a specific context.

Rationalization develops out of the social quest to logically understand its organization and distribution of power and privileges. Naturally, social and intellectual maturity pave the road to modernity through rationalization in that people develop an attitude of posing critical questions in society. Rationalization points out why a certain group of people enjoy a better life and a better position in society. Implicitly, people begin to employ logical reasoning for their emancipation from the existing circumstances that have imprisoned them in the labyrinth of traditional forces. As a reasoning subject, the awakened self argues for the political privileges for everyone in society. Europe saw such attempts at modernity in the Enlightenment when German thinker Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) viewed the moment as an escape from the immature past. He has written in his 1784 answer to the question, "What is Enlightenment?":

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. (2010, p.54)

The participants of modernity develop courage to logically challenge the prevailing circumstances as Kant (1784) has further stated, "'Have courage to use your own reason!'" (2010, p. 54). Joining in the conversation later in the twentieth century, French philosopher Foucault (1926-1984) has critically viewed Kant's vision of modernity:

> Kant in fact describes Enlightenment as the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority; now its role is precisely at this moment that the critique is necessary, since its role is that of defining conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped. (1984, p. 37)

For Kant, modernity depends on the intellectual maturity of an individual or a group of individuals, while Foucault states that such spirit of contemporary times emerges as the transformation of consciousness in the form of an attitude. Kant had taken the source of data from the political transition of Europe in the late eighteenth century. Besides, American Sociologist, Bendix (19916-1991) has also studied eighteenth-century Europe and acknowledges that social change resulted from rationalization at the time (1967, p. 331). Rationalization directly results in a political quest for justice, enhancing democratic values. Rationalization adds to liberal values in society, thereby preparing it to tolerate the differences in terms of diffusion of power.

As rationalization paves a road to challenge the traditional social structure, it helps establish a new democratic foundation in society. The eighteenth-century transition of Europe also informs critics about such a route to modernity in the West. German Sociologist, Eder (1946-) has observed a cultural world of the working class and the bourgeoisie in the formative days of European modernity. As he has critiqued, "The world of unlimited development of industrial forces of production is replaced by a new legitimating practice: the programming of the economic, cultural, and social reproduction of society" (1991, p. 332). Danish Geographer Flyvbjerg (1952-) has also stated that the foundation of democratic values is laid at the arrival of rationalization in society since rationalization helps develop a universal foundation for the democratic institution (1998, p. 211). German philosopher, Habermas (1929-) has promoted a transcendental approach to modernity by rejecting the subject-centered approach of rationalization. He has argued for modernity based on communicative rationality: "The communicative rationality recalls older idea of logos, inasmuch as it brings along with it the connotations of a noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a disclosure in which the participants overcome their at first subjectivity based views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement" (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 212). Still, Habermas has agreed with Kant and Foucault as the former has sought to understand the process of democratic transition through rationalization that results in the formation of democratic values.

European experience of rationalization shows that it results in democratization in

politics and industrialization of the economy. Europe had undergone a tremendous transformation at the time, resulting from scientific and technological innovation. American Sociologist, Tiryakian (1929-) critically observes that European transformation in the eighteenth century "assumes that the scientific-industrial order can be transformed, perhaps by bringing together past and the future so as to produce a new present" (1991, p. 85). Industrialization transforms the economic organization of society by enforcing transformation at the underlying structure and consequently leading to the formation of a networked society. As opposed to the political society, civil society is also born out of the new organization. For Foucault, such networks produce power and discourses to propagate power, knowledge, and truth. Besides, Flyvbjerg (1998) has claimed that network societies also hold a danger of misuse of power as everybody becomes so sovereign that they hold the potential to occupy the seat of power. He has further stated:

> … Foucault and Habermas agree that rationalization and the misuse of power are among the most important problems of our time. They disagree as to how one can best understand and act about these problems. Habermas's approach is oriented toward universals, context-independence, and control via constitution-writing and institutional development. Foucault focuses context-dependent and toward the analysis of strategies and tactics as the basis for power struggle (1998, p. 227).

Flyvbjerg has examined the reasons for both Foucault and Habermas to envision a system that can help in the smooth functioning of democratic institutions and polity. The social transformation leads to the formation of homogeneous structures as envisioned in the discourses of Western modernity.

In the West, the discourses on modernity focus on urbanization as the resultant effects of rationalization. Such discourses promote the idea of homogeneous living. However, the cultural experience of modernity depends on the people and their traditions. Israeli Sociologist, Eisenstadt (1923-2010) has advocated a linear path to modernity in the analysis of historical and social development. Such an approach leads to formation of unique aspects of cultural experience of modernity. Hence, he has argued that non-Western societies have constantly developed new cultural and political programs, thereby resulting in the experience of unique modernity. As he has written, "The cultural and institutional programs that unfolded in these societies were characterized particularly by a tension between conceptions of themselves as part of the modern world and ambivalent attitudes toward modernity in general and toward the West in particular" (2000, p.15). However, European modernity attempted to search for transcendental unity among science, arts, and morality. In search of the generalities, the Enlightenment devoted time

and energy to ascertain homogeneity in human life. As Habermas has argued,

> It was the Renaissance which first saw the emergence of a specific domain categorized exclusively in terms of the beautiful. Then, in the course of the eighteenth century, literature, the plastic arts and music were institutionalized as a specific domain of activity distinct from ecclesiastical and court life. Finally, around the middle of the nineteenth century, there also arose an aestheticist conception of art which obliged artists to produce their work in accordance with the conscious outlook of *l'art pour l'art.* The autonomy of the aesthetic was thereby explicitly constituted as a project (1997, p. 46-47).

Habermas has asserted that such fusion would have resulted in a complete transformation of Europe: it was the dream of European modernity. However, such a dream was never realized in Europe because of the intervention of avant-garde popping up in European history. Habermas calls them "various conservative positions" (1997, p. 53) that never allowed the realization of the European dream of modernity. Habermasian analysis of Europe has revealed unique points in formation of modernity as he has taken the generalities together and the dream of bringing uneven aspects of human life into one category which he names 'modernity.'

Habermasian European modernity never achieved homogeneity by bringing arts, morality, and science into a transcendental unity. Still, the contemporary world has witnessed the emergence of some of the universal world structures in the economic domains. In favor of symmetrical structures in the economic order of the world, W. Meyer, et. al. (1997) have written: "World models have long been in operation as shapers of states and societies, but they have become especially important in the postwar era as the cultural and organizational development of world society has intensified at an unprecedented rate" (p. 145). Scientifically valid and user-friendly world structures have impacted at a large scale in the global order. Though the cultural experience varies from society to society, modernity also challenges the belief systems of the people. Discussing European experience, Tiryakian (1991) has stated that "Protestantism stripped the world of the magical mystification associated with the Catholic Church" (p. 83). As a protest movement, it led to the formation of a unique ethos of a new age in Europe, challenging the established order of Catholicism.

Modernity gives way to the birth of agency in revising and reorganizing social practices. Human beings begin to accept themselves as the cause and consequences of their attempts to bring about change in their lives. In other words, they attain mastery of

their actions. German social and political theorist, Wagner (1956-) has extensively discussed the formation of agency in modernity. As he has mentioned,

> … modernity refers to a situation in which human beings do not accept any external guarantors, i.e. guarantors that they do not themselves posit, of the certainty of knowledge, of the viability of the political orders or the continuity of their selves. Despite the enormous variety of specific conceptualization of modernity, the great majority of them take it to be the key characteristic of modernity that human beings think of themselves as setting their own rules and laws for their relation to nature, for their living together and understanding themselves (2001, p. 4).

The people participate in the process of social change out of their will to enforce transformation in the prevailing circumstances. Kant (1784) has also argued for the public use of reason for the attainment of agency as he has stated, "The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men" (p. 55). In this sense, Kant (1784) and Wagner (2001) have identified the birth of agency as the precondition for modernity to emerge as the experience of people. However, Kantian agency assumes homogeneity as a rule which Foucault does not accept as the goal. Foucault (1984) has critiqued the Kantian vision of the Enlightenment when he has analyzed it thus: "For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it …and to transform it not by destroying but by grasping it in what it is" (p. 39). Kant (1784) and Foucault (1984) differ in their approach to agency as the former emphasizes the cognitive capabilities of an individual whereas the latter focuses on historical context and the network of society. British historian, Hawkes (1923-2009) has also agreed that Foucault prioritizes historical aspects of the making of modernity (2007, p. 153). Foucault's historicization of the process, to the extent that he believes in truth as the effect of power (1992, p. 1141), acknowledges the dissimilarities; yet, it also transforms into a homogenizing mission when he proposes the power structure that functions universally. He upholds the context and the agents are critically aware of it.

Certain symmetrical structures surface with the emergence of modernity. However, such a phenomenon does not guarantee homogeneity in cultural experience in general. Different societies can have different types of cultural experiences which allows multiplicity in the semantic organization of experiencing modernity. Rationalization and homogeneity also impact the transformation of social relationships in modernity. Since modernity replaces the authority of a single head with institutional accountability.

European modernity also shows change in social relationships as Calhoun (1992) has argued that indirect social relationships form "one of the constitutive features of the modern age" (p. 207) since market expansion and the birth of civil society took place in the late eighteenth century. The traditional power structure promotes direct control in society, while modernity diffuses it by supplanting it with an indirect system of regulating society. As modernity prepares collective conscience in society, people begin to exercise an indirect regulatory system through organizational mediation. Also, indirect social relationships lead to crises in meaning in the experience of modernity. As Eder (1991) has claimed, "The evolution of modern society becomes dependent on the communication that is the subject of communicative relationships" (p. 326). After the traditional chains of society are broken into pieces, modernity attempts to construct new channels through civil society and communication networks. Societies employ communication technology to meet the needs of people in such circumstances.

Modernity also brings about conflict in society as the old and the new come into confrontation. At times, the old is not entirely erased from the structure, thereby leaving space for it to reemerge with a certain magnitude. In eighteenth-century England, the gentry and the owner of polite culture had come into confrontation (Eder, 1991, p. 329). The transformation of traditional belief systems also leads to the formation of a new meaning in society by equipping people with a new perspective to relate themselves to the world. As social change forces people to abandon their traditionally held values, the people are detached from their past and/or roots. In such cases, the people are further pushed away from the traditional ways of life. American Sociologist, Eyerman (1942-) argues that modernity loosens the strings connecting society with its past. As he has argued,

> The break with tradition and the rural community meant the break with established identity-giving authority. The new individuals, freed from the traditional collective, were free to reorient themselves and to reconstruct their world: to "make history," as Marx put it, "but not under conditions of their own choosing." The social changes associated with modernity, industrialization, and especially urbanization were neither chosen nor directed by the individuals involved in these demographic changes. They were its victims, not its instigators. Once in motion, however, these shifts opened new possibilities (1991, p. 38).

However, he fails to take into account the innate ability of the agency to cope with the emerging contexts. The agents of change also invent their ways of appropriating the new circumstances in their lives: Alberto Melucci has claimed that "the (post-)modern world

brings a new form of social control, conformity pressures, and information processing to which new social movements respond" (Buechler, 1995, p. 446). The participants who enforce change also know the ways to tackle the crises of meaning in a new order. Furthermore, they perceive the hurdles blocking the smooth functioning of their everyday life and intervene into the social milieu to find out the solution for the complexities.

The experience of modernity can be approached through rationalization, homogeneity, and social relationships after social change. Rationalization helps understand and explore the inner complexities and the dynamics of tradition. Though it assumes a homogeneous experience of modernity in all societies, cultural experiences can diversely vary depending upon the forces that modernity attempts to dismantle to bring about a new type of social configuration. Most importantly, the critical agents challenge the traditional power centers and their rationale as the new ethos of the age has emerged in a new context. Modernity celebrates the formation of such courage and valor through the birth of agency. After bringing about change in society, traditional power centers are rewritten in a newer light: the old loses power and privileges, while a new center emerges to serve the people and society. At times, they confront each other when they begin to accumulate power to counter each other. The conflict between the new and the old can also reverse the course of modernity by writing off a new set of rules and supplanting the new with the old.

Methodology

As the paper rereads speeches and life narratives of two key persons of Nepali history from the 1960s, I have applied the critical approaches of new historicism. French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) developed an extensive technique of rereading history through non-canonical texts and examining the tension resulting from various historical circumstances. For him, the forces that drive history are whimsical and nonlinear. This paper has given a new historicist reading of the 1960s in Nepali politics. Furthermore, I have also taken critical insights from the theorists of modernity, who have offered models to scrutinize social change and determine progress in society.

Multiple Facets of Modernity

Modernity encompasses various dimensions that are displayed through social change. European experience of modernity shows a unilinear path to social reorganization. However, critics like Eisenstadt do not agree with what Kant, Foucault, or Habermas would suggest about the approach to modernity. However, the Western frame of reference is useful while interpreting the modernity of a different location in that such

discussions provide vocabulary, concepts, and methods already applied to theorize the experience. Unlike the Kantian project of absolute emancipation from the ignorant past, modernity can mean evolving into a better state of life today through critical sensibility, rationalization, the ability to question authority, and the transformation of social relationships. The cultural experience of modernity can have variations, depending on the people's involvement and ways of relating to the contemporary ethos. Modernity varies from society to society as their contexts differ from one another. Societies can have different grounds and approaches to obtain and sustain modernity on their own. However, this study assumes that societies display certain general features when they seek after and obtain modernity when modernity is approached through historical and political vantage point.

Similarly, the nature of data also plays a vital role in interpreting modernity. Since the study is built on interpretation of textual data in order to analyze the worldview embedded in two towering figures of the time: King Mahendra Shah (1920-1972) and Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala (1914-1982). This study derives data from Shah's speeches, Koirala's auto/biographical writings: *Aafno Katha* [Autobiography] and *Atmavritanta* [Reflection from Life]. In addition to the writings, I have also taken into consideration Koirala's "Speech on Nationalism" to contrast two versions of nationalism promoted in the 1960s. Shah's nationalism is more focused on devotion of the people because Shah has emphasized on development of the nation. On the contrary, Koirala states that the basis of nationalism is people and the transformation of people's consciousness truly helps attain modernity. Both Shah and Koirala had divergent views on modernity and social reconfiguration: their tussle results in a period of intense magnitude in Nepali history in the 1960s. Koirala had stood as the awakened social agent critically questioning the authority of the Rana autocracy in 1951 and had successfully led the movement to overthrow the Rana rule. After accession to the throne after King Tribhuvan Shah's death on March 13, 1955, King Mahendra Shah waited for the propitious moment to capture the absolute power of the nation. On December 15, 1960, King Mahendra Shah dissolved B. P. Koirala's government and imprisoned all the democratic leaders to implement his project of modernity in Nepal. Reading Shah in the backdrop of Koirala reveals the nature of self-postponed modernity in the 1960s in Nepal, while B. P. Koirala's progressive vision sparks through his speech and autobiographical writings regarding the transformation of Nepal.

Tension in Nepal's Quest for Modernity

After social change in 1951, Nepal established democracy in its quest for

modernity by overthrowing a century-old Rana rule. King Tribhuvan Shah (1906-1955) who ruled Nepal from 1911 until his death in 1955 also actively participated in people's struggle to end the Rana Oligarchy in Nepal. The representatives of the people led by B. P. Koirala and the palace had undergone a certain type of tension right after King Tribhuvan Shah's death on March 17, 1955. Now, King Mahendra Shah ascended to the throne and began to lead the old conservative camp in the power struggle. Nepali modernity was delayed as the uncertainty about institutionalizing democracy was ignored in the beginning. However, the promulgation of the constitution and election in 1959 were the first steps toward preparing a firm ground for modernity. By the time, King Mahendra Shah's conservative aspiration for modernity had reached its top when he suspended all the democratic process of the nation on December 15, 1960. The popularly elected Prime Minister B. P. Koirala and other leaders were imprisoned in the name of implementing a political system rooted in local values. This study contends that Nepal's quest for modernity was derailed in the 1960s because of the tension between the old and the new order. The conservative camp led by the King rose to unprecedented power to suppress the liberal camp that was gradually growing under B. P. Koirala's leadership. Nepali modernity could not realize its goal set by the social change in 1951 because King Mahendra Shah suspended the democratic rights of the people to bring about industrial/material transformation. On the other hand, the leader of the people had to wait in exile. I have discussed King Shah's self-postponed modernity and Koirala's liberal quest in separate sections by analyzing their speeches and autobiographical writings below.

Self-Contradiction in King Mahendra Shah's Modernity

King Mahendra Shah's modernity attempts to grow out of the monarch as the center of all thinking and the people as the recipients of benefits at the margin. By suspending critical sensibility and rationalization, Shah projects to attain a modern state in which both material transformation and industrialization occur for the benefit of society. He suspends all the political rights of the people by imposing an embargo on the political parties. As the King, he believes that political parties create noise and spoil the environment of social awareness as such interest groups have their own interests to serve in society (Shah, 1960, p. 699). Implicitly, Mahendra Shah reveals that he does not trust critical sensibility and rationalization that jointly challenge the traditional feudal order. He further attempts to justify his new political system by rationalizing it as the native form of governance when he has stated that Nepalihood is "inherent in the Panchayat System" (Shah, 1962, p. 42). He searches for a native ground in his homegrown political

order as he says to his people, "This Nepali plant sprouting from the grassroots is, I am sure, suitable to our needs and clime" (Shah, 1962, p. 42). After he acceded to the throne, Shah wanted to see the real civic sense in people to prepare the nation for the general election as early as 1955 (1955, p. 16). He suspended the political rights of people and people's participation in the formation of polity, for he thought that rationalization and the birth of critical sensibility occur from the top and spread to the bottom. The King's believed on the flow of ideas from the top to the bottom, he could not understand and/or tolerate the democratic process in which ideas, vision, and perspectives emerge from the bottom and move upward toward the top.

Mahendra Shah fails to escape the narrow circle of his family. He treats the affairs of the state as his family business. As a traditional feudal lord, he takes direct control of social affairs. A Convention of Political and Social Parties that had taken place in Narayanhit Palace on May 8-16, 1955 advised Shah not to employ his direct rule as the primary agenda (1955, p.18), but he did not accept the suggestion. According to K. C. (2023), King Mahendra Shah was a different person. Generally, he was an insisting fellow who would not listen to others and cause conflict to capture the leadership of himself. He never knew how to give feedback for the improvement of others and had no patience at all (K. C., 2023, p. 161). For him, direction control over the state machinery through a committee of five people forms the core of Panchayat as the political system. The traditional forces become his playground to legitimize his claims as he equates the five leading members of society with the God when he has said,

> The Panchas have been getting their due respect as Pancha Parameshwor (Five gods). This is the reason why we Nepalis had to adopt the Panchayat way of life. The democracy born of this system is the one to be intelligible to the Nepali. (Shah, 1968, p.42)

Democratization promotes the spirit of secularism and equality by promoting disenchantment and critical reasoning. Critically observing Shah's rule, Thapa (2023) has also critiqued:

> 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. (p.15)

Such tendencies imply a different course in action and another in spirit. King Mahendra

Shah had missed the course of modernity that dwells amid the people and their participation when the King suspended people's rights. He had taken a completely wrong path to modernity: in his attempt to modernize the nations as reflected in his words, he postpones the project of modernity that had already begun a decade ago in 1951.

As a political system, Shah's Panchayat sets a target to industrialize the nation to bring about economic transformation. The King employs the scientific-technological requirements to suppress the rights of people when he has stated, "Since the development of a nation is not possible without industrialization, the new cabinet of ministers will pay attention to the creation of infrastructures: transportation, communication, and electricity" (Shah, 1960, p. 698). The ambitious King could not understand the goal of participation of people and transformation of general consciousness before implementing the agenda of industrialization in the nation. As Shah's political system trusted that the King was the source of vision of a homogeneous nation and similar cultural experience throughout the states, the ruler's ideology of development, patriotism, and nationalism emerged as the general truths in the national context. By inventing the rhetoric of development and indoctrinating people with a dream of native heaven in Nepal, Shah's rule hopes to get people ready to sacrifice liberty and freedom for material transformation.

Mahendra Shah's politics centers on the promotion of the discourse of development to the root of Nepali society and justifies it as more valuable than democracy. Shah demands people to emerge as selflessly serving the nation. He attempts to promote both the ideology of nationalism and development as one when he has stated, "Panchayat System is the foundation of democracy" (Shah, 1960, p. 699). In his quest for modernizing the nation, he suspends the possibility for anybody to grow as an agency by outlawing the leaders of the people. He developed a form of indoctrination through law to impart in people devotion, patriotism, nationalism, and development as evidenced in the National Civil Codes,1963. Shah imprisons Nepal's quest for modernity in the labyrinth of the Panchayat as his system of native rule and defeats the goal of social change in 1951.

Visionary in Exile

B. P. Koirala (1914-1982) spent most of his life in exile before 1950. After being imprisoned in 1960, he stayed in Sundarijal Jail without a trial until 1968. After being released in 1968, he went on self-exile to Banaras until he returned to Nepal in 1976. The revolutionary critical self of Koirala was shaped by the democratic movement in the 1930s and the 1940s when he participated in the Indian struggle for independence and

armed struggle in Nepal to overthrow a century-old Rana regime. He was deeply influenced by his father Krishna Prasad Koirala's democratic ideals right from his childhood. Koirala's early years were instrumental in the formation of a democratic self in the 1920s and the 1930s. He has viewed himself as the first generation after the World War I (Koirala, 2056 B.S., p. 56). Reflecting on the course of his life, Koirala thinks that time demanded to shoulder the responsibility of recreating the World order for his generation since the world was devastated due to two great wars in the century. In the formative years of his life, he was exposed to the ills of oligarchy through his father's encounters with the Rana rule in Nepal. The early Koirala had begun to raise critical questions about the system that had tormented civic life and people.

As a member of a family in exile, he was brought up amid the political analysis and interpretation of the grownups. Besides, he was involved in the nationalist movement of India as well. As he has written, "Gandhi's civil disobedience affected our family so much that my father and cousin brothers [sons of father's sisters] became the local leaders and activists of respective areas" (Koirala, 2056 B. S., p. 74). He learns to question irrational social practices and raise his voice for the cause of justice as a modern subject. Critical sensibility often causes trouble inside personal life which he sees in the early stage of his life as he finds his father had "modern perspectives on every subject like religion, behavior, and ritual and culture" (Koirala, 2055 B. S., p. 60). Analyzing the birth of agency in himself, he has stated that he had read Strechy's *Theory and Practice of Socialism* (2055 B.S., p. 31) which changed the ways of looking into the social reality. Besides, the political awakening had also informed him that India's independence was intricately related to preparing a regional ethos in favor of social change in Nepal.

Koirala understands the hindrances caused by the Rana rule in the development of Nepal. On the one hand, British colonial rulers had kept them under their patronage; on the other, they had established a system of complete control over the resources of the nation. In the early years, his father had decided not to accept any roles in the government because the rule was not predictable (Koirala, 2056 B.S., p. 17). A political system beyond rational projection torments and tortures its people: such rulers legitimize themselves through fear. As he has written,

> In my view, the reason for the disinterestedness of Nepali people toward politics was the tyrannical system in which keen interest in politics would be treason. They had learned their lesson well not to show any interest in politics. Such phenomenon of conditioned mass psychology was the contribution of the tyrannical system. (Koirala, 2055 B. S., 141)

He has critiqued the nature of a traditional society in which the rulers demand absolute obedience from the people who are devoid of any critical sense regarding the prevailing circumstances. As Lamichhane (2023) has stated,

> Koirala's autobiography *Atmabrittanta* acquaints an extended account of parallel historiography. It serves as a manual for resisting hegemonic power blocs. It focuses on giving, developing and encouraging self-agency. More specifically, the autobiographical memory counters the subordination of women, defuses the foreign attempts of organizing Nepali consent, outbreaks the domination of monarchy and dismantles the strategies of the Rana oligarchy by empowering people and motivating them to fight for their rights (2023, pp. 21-22).

Reflecting on the rise of rigidity in politics, Koirala associates the death of Queen Victoria in Britain in 1901 with the rise of Chandra Shumsher in Nepali politics (2055 B. S., p. 22). As a politically matured and awakened intellectual self, Koirala contemplates on the global and local course of history and seeks to make meaning out of it to understand the complexities of his society.

Krishna Prasad Koirala's public engagements acquainted his son in the formative years of his life. He has fondly recollected his father's activities of establishing a hospital and a school in Biratnagar, bearing all the cost by himself (Koirala, 2056 B. S., p. 41). Koirala realized the significance of critical sensibility and rationalization in making the ethos of a particular time. Only the secular training of the mind can pave the way to the birth of social agency. He has seen social reform through health and education in the early stage of his life, and modern consciousness in Dharanidhar Koirala (Koirala, 2056 B. S., p. 50), who had developed a modernist attitude of questioning the authority by arousing the people's slumbering agency. Education also helps transform social relationships by creating asymmetrical patterns in life and bringing about indirect social relationships in practice. For Koirala, the establishment of democracy was a departure in 1951 towards creating a modern society through the transformation of administration (Koirala, 2056 B. S., p. 150). His critical mindset analyzes the present features and locates the absence of society in the quest for modernity. He organizes people into a political party, analyzes the problems of society, and devises the means to tear asunder the complexities for the greater public good. In this sense, Koirala provides a philosophical base for the national quest for modernity.

Unlike Mahendra Shah who views the nation as the collection of native virtues or soil, Koirala accepts that the nation comprises people, their attempt towards a common

aspiration, and the feeling of unity experienced during such aspiration (Koirala, 2053 B.S., p. 60). In the formation of nationalism, people sharpen their ability to critically use rationality to comprehend the existing circumstances. In Shah's modernity, people turn into devotees, devoid of critical sensibility; still, they believe in self-sacrifice, respect the discretion of five leading figures of their society, and believe in development, patriotism, and nationalism. On the contrary, Koirala thinks that people form the base of any polity in which democracy survives only through their participation (Koirala, 2055 B. S., p. 84). He views colonial and feudal orders as complementary to each other because both treat people at the base of the power structure as mere puppets. Until people organize themselves to undo the atrocities inflicted upon them, they never obtain their emancipation. In defense of his faith in democracy, Koirala has claimed:

> In my view, faith in freedom and democracy enroots itself beneath the intellectual domain of human psychology. In this way, democracy is not just the political system in which accountability it ends after one is bound by certain rules. It is acceptance of the essence, for which fitting temperament is present in everybody. Otherwise, such temperament can be created in people through appropriate training (Koirala, 2056 B. S., p. 74).

He respects the base of society which comprises of the common people and their wisdom. The people can perceive, analyze, and explain the contradictions present in their socio-political order which they transform by rewriting to accommodate the emergent ethos of their age.

As the social agency is born in society, it intervenes in the complex erroneous social structure through a new form of struggle to bring about justice and the civil rights of people. Freedom, liberty, and civil rights emerge as the goal of social change in quest of modernity. Koirala's father had suffered the atrocities of autocratic rule of the Ranas who expected an absolute form of obedience from their subjects. So, Koirala firmly believes in the need for "civil freedom, constitutional and responsible reign" (Koirala, 2055 B. S., p. 93) as the goal of social change in Nepal in 1951. He rightly views that only through democratic exercises and people's participation, the transformation of consciousness and the material circumstances is obtained in the process of social change. After being appointed as the first popularly elected Prime minister, Koirala aspired to implement the reformation programs in the mode of production. His first target was a reformation in the use and distribution of land and then the implementation of industrialization. After the establishment of democracy, the nation spent a decade in confusion until the general election in 1958. However, Koirala had observed the rise of

political ambition in Mahendra Shah after accessing the throne in 1911. As he has assessed,

> I guess the King had not thought that we [the Nepali Congress] would be so strong. He was critical about the control of the military: he had a fear that we would command it. Therefore, he promulgated the Military Act in the meantime. It is undemocratic for the King to promulgate the Military Act after the parliamentary election, keeping it out of command and control of the parliament regarding its mobilization (Koirala, 2055 B. S., p. 212).

The parliamentary election and its results had produced doubt about the overshadowing presence of democratic leaders in the late 1950s. Mahendra Shah was alarmed at the growing popularity of democratic leaders and their aspirations for modernity.

Koirala celebrates the idea of the welfare state as the basic unit of modernity. Economic distribution and spiritual equilibrium emerge as the primary features of modern human beings. He reverses the traditionally accepted model of power structure when he says that social change addresses the "inability to be within oneself, attempt to come out of and rise above oneself, or to be dissatisfied with own circumstances," although they function to indicate covert insanity, help explore and actualize human capability (Koirala, 2055 B. S., p. 46). Koirala points out the need for socially and politically awakened intellectuals to intervene in society in the quest for public welfare as he has written, "Politics is not that profession in which the person retires after a certain age. It is a gigantic call from the core of heart that inspires people" (Koirala, 2055 B. S., p. 151). Koirala's vision of agency practices rationalization, and critical sensibility, and stands as a challenge to the irrational use of power in the progress of society. He seeks to see the nationalistic feelings in the modern self. Analyzing the Sugauli Treaty (1816) as a significant historical event, he says that it paved the road for a common language and fixed border for Nepal (Koirala, 2053 B. S., p. 63). Koirala's vision significantly opposes Shah's understanding of the people and polity in that the former derives his ideas from the bottom of the society: the people formulate the ethos of the moment and execute it as a political program in search for social welfare. The people's aspiration reflects the ethos that helps society to find out its direction. On the other hand, Shah believes in top-down approach to development: the ruler envisions projects and ethos for the age from his comfort zone and the ideals percolate down to the common people. As his notion of nationalism is centered on public welfare, he explores four elements of nationalism: people, problem, collective effort, and unity of people (Koirala, 2053 B. S., p. 61). Unlike Mahendra Shah, Koirala's modern self develops the ability to see through social problems

by using rationalization, critical reasoning, and public welfare. Since Koirala believes in people as the base of society, he treats their wisdom and judgment as the impetus to drive society in the quest for modernity.

Conclusion

Even after social change in 1951, Nepal spent almost a decade before the promulgation of the Constitution and holding a general election in 1958. Though B. P. Koirala was appointed as the Prime minister after the election, King Mahendra Shah dissolved the democratic institutions and put the people's leaders in prison without a trial until 1968. In quest of modernity, the leaders had dreamed of transformation of both consciousness and material circumstances through democratic means; however, Mahendra Shah's coup d'état derailed the whole process of democratization of society on December 15, 1960. The conservative camp led by Shah promoted anti-modern values that negated rationalization, critical reasoning, and the emergence of indirect social relationships. On the other hand, Koirala and his associates who promoted liberal values and reformation in society were put in prison and later forced to go on self-exile after 1968. Shah's contradictory approach to social transformation ended up in self-postponing the spirit of modernity as he sought devotion, trust, and faith in a unitary mode of thinking: the discourses of development and nationalism were used to indoctrinate the people. Shah focused on native values and charged leaders like Koirala with promoting Western ideals. In an attempt to recreate a Hindu spirit, Shah postponed modernity in Nepal through the exercise of regressive means and modes of experimentation with the political system in the 1960s.

Koirala had spent a large period of his life in exile. Through the general election in 1958, people voted for the spirit of modernity that he had developed in exile. As an avid advocate of liberal values, Koirala was devising plans for reformation by empowering people with the capability of rationalization, critical reasoning, and transformation of social relationships; however, King Mahendra Shah took over the executive power of the state. Koirala was imprisoned in Sundarijal Jail until 1968 without a trial. After his release, he went to Banaras in self-exile. The spirit of modernity was thus removed from its implementation in the 1960s. Nepal's quest for modernity encountered two fundamental challenges in the 1960s: Mahendra Shah's ambition to bring about material transformation without people's participation and the banishment of the visionary of social change from the political structure.

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