

## Indo-Nepalese Relations in the Beginning of the 19th Century (1799-1801)

*By Shaphalya Amatya*

The fall of the Regent Bahadur Shah engineered political unrest, plots, conspiracies and intrigues in Nepal in the beginning of the 19th century. The throne went to Rana Bahadur Shah, who still needed lot of experience in administration. The sudden death of his favourite consort, Kanti Bati made him totally upset. He expressed his desire to abdicate the throne in favour of his minor son, Girwan Yudha Bikram Shah. In this connection he had written letters to Governor General of India. In one of his letters, he had expressed his desire to lead a secluded life and devote himself entirely to the worship of God. He desired the Governor General to extend the very kind of friendship and consideration to his son as he did in his own case. "I trust," the Raja wrote, "you will bestow the same kindness and favour on Maharaj Koonwar which I have experienced, even in a two-fold degree."<sup>1</sup> The Governor General assured the Raja in reply to his letter that the most earnest desire would always be manifested by the British Government towards his son in order to "connect and strengthen the bonds of amity and union".<sup>2</sup> Thus in favour of his son, Rana Bahadur Shah abdicated the throne towards the end of March 1799. According to the intelligence report from Benaras dated 28th May 1890, the Governor General came to know that Raja Rana Bahadur had arrived at Benaras as a refugee. He came to know that the causes of his flight were his misconducts and misbehaviours at the court of Nepal.<sup>3</sup>

There is a dispute about the causes of his flight. The British writers contend that the exasperated nobles forced him to abdicate in favour of his infant son. Dr. Regmi has pro-

ved by Nepalese documents that his abdication was voluntary and it took place eight months before the death of his beloved consort in November 1799. The documents available in National Archives of India, however, show that his abdication was not voluntary but forcible. The Governor General's minute dated 23rd June 1800 shows that his flight was due to the revolt of his principle chiefs.<sup>4</sup> Chittaranjan Nepali, who wrote biography of Raja Rana Bahadur has clearly stated that his abdication of throne was neither voluntary nor forced but to avoid the grave situation of the country, which was in its zenith, at that time.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the patriot and wise king thought it better to leave the country and abdicate the throne in favour of his minor son Girwan Yudha to avert the situation of civil war, which might have happened at that time. Because the selfish courtiers led by Damodar Pandey had already established a parallel Government with Girwan Yudha as the King at Nuwakot. The situation of the valley was getting worse and worse day by day. Neither the king nor his minor son was in a position to save it. And when Raja Rana Bahadur Shah heard of the troops marching down to Kathmandu from Nuwakot he at once left the valley and proceeded towards Benaras.<sup>6</sup> The ignorance of the minor King Girwan and the terrific situation at Kathmandu can be traced out from a letter written by the King Girwan Yudha in about 1800 A.D. from his court at NUWAKOT to the people of Kathmandu. He had asked his people by whose order they wanted to make a war and with whom they wanted to fight.<sup>7</sup> The fact that there was a situation of civil war

is clear from the orders issued by the court of NUWAKOT in the name of the King Girwan Yudha to mobilize the army and the people at NUWAKOT.<sup>8</sup> Thus, during the beginning of the 19th Century the domestic situation of Nepal was not good. The authorities of the East India Company thought it a golden opportunity to establish their influence in Nepal politically as well as commercially. The Arzee from the British agent named Bodi Nath Singh of Barille to Mr. Revell dated 22nd May, 1800 states that, "this was a favourable opportunity for the Company Government to obtain possession of the country, if it wished, and to achieve purpose moreover with the greatest facility during those commotions, as the internal Government of Nepal could be relied upon to be weak, vacillating and torn by serious internal disputes.<sup>9</sup> The Governor General was also not late to extract concessions from Nepal Government during this period of turmoil and confusion. His minute dated 23rd June 1800 clearly shows his intentions." was it a curious political development. Here right inside the the Company's territory was the ex-king of a country, Nepal with whom the English had in vain sought to establish closer relation—a person aggrieved and smarting under humiliation, with a rankling ambition to be back in power. Little wonder, the Company tried to exploit him as a political weapon to fulfill its cherished commercial objects in Nepal. It was willing to mediate between the Nepal Darbar and the exiled King with a view to restoring to him power under British guarantee.<sup>10</sup>

Any way the arrival of Rana Bahadur Shah at Benaras opened a new chapter in the Anglo—Nepalese relations and led to the signing of a fresh treaty between the two countries, to fulfill the Company's aims. Capt. H. D. Know was appointed as an attendant at Raja's court at Benaras. On the other-hand, Rana Bahadur wanted to get financial assistance from the Company Government and to persist in his intrigues against

the Government, then in power in Nepal without any interference from the Company's officers. To meet the expenses the Raja requested the Governor-General to extend him allowances seventeen thousand rupees per month which the Governor General directed Capt. Know to allow the Raja, not as monthly stipend, but as an occasional aid, sums of money not exceeding Rs 6,000 per month.

As a matter of fact, the exile of Rana Bahadur Shah at Benaras as Sadhu Nirgunananda Swami was only a pretention. He still wanted to go back and rule the country. So in September he sent a request to the Governor General asking for the loan of 9 battalions of sepoys and one battalions of Europeans with a large portion of artillery to accompany him back to Nepal. He also promised that on being reinstated in his Government, he "would defray the just charge of the troops in the usual manner by instalments" and "fulfil any stipulation of an attachment and alliance....."<sup>12</sup>

But the Company Government expressed their wish to help the King on one condition that they should be allowed to trade in Nepal. The King consulted his councilors especially Bhim Sen Thapa. Bhim Sen did not agree to the Company's proposal and the matter was dropped.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand the Company was also not ready or interested to take any such step which would cost them a lot. Very soon they found that the Nepalese authorities in power were anxiously waiting for a chance to win the Company's friendship to defend themselves from the danger of the exiled King's possible attempt to regain power with the help of the Company. Immediately the Company authorities started their move towards independent negotiations with the ruling party of Nepal. Guru Gajraj Mishra was deputed by the Company to materialise their move. Gajraj was a shrewd diplomat. He knew that the strength

of the Company Government could not be challenged by Nepal. He came to Nepal as an agent of the Company Government and convinced the then Prime-minister Kirtiman Basnet to conclude a treaty of friendship with them. Kirtiman agreed to his proposals on condition that they were ready to sign if the Company Government could give them the guarantee to check Swami Maharaj at Benaras and not to give him any kind of liberty. With full assurance of the Nepalese court Mishra went to Patna and began drafting the treaty but at that very time Kirtiman was assassinated in Nepal. But the treaty was finally drafted and signed.<sup>14</sup>

After the death of Kirtiman, Damodar Panday became the chief of the courtiers in Nepal. The new leader of the ruling party Damodar Panday who was from the very beginning anti-British now began to be turned a friend of the Britishers, because he thought that without the help of the Britishers he would not be able to suppress his enemies. He was very much anxious to make a treaty with the Company Government. According to Chittaranjan Nepali, he concluded the treaty because he was afraid of Swami Maharaj's intention of coming back to Nepal and ruling the country once again. When the proposal of treaty came from the Nepalese side, the clever Governor General, Wellesley did not look back to materialise it. At last a treaty was signed between the Nepalese Government and the Company Government in 1801, Oct.30.

Prof. G.C. Shastri is of opinion that Lord Wellesley had forced Nepal Darbar to accept the British Resident and he took the best opportunity to hook Nepal, when the country's domestic situation was not good.<sup>15</sup> Mr. Hemanta Rana, in his article published in *Vashudha* opines like this: "The English tried to hold Rana Bahadur as a hostage and thereby blackmail Nepal. As a result of this the Anglo Nepalese treaty of 1801 was entered upon by the weak Bharadaras of Kathmandu<sup>16</sup> What had compelled the Nepalese chief-

tains to conclude a treaty of friendship was rightly mentioned by Chittaranjan Nepali and B.D. Sanyal. Mr. Sanwal has quoted the opinion of Capt. Knox, who was with Rana Bahadur at Benaras as the agent of the Company Government. Capt. Knox thought that "the treaty had certainly been the off-spring of fear", it would no doubt, continue in force as long as Rana Bahadur Shah remained under the protection of the Company Government.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the selfish Nepalese chieftains under the leadership of Damodar Pandey gave a good opportunity to the Company Government to conclude this treaty. They wanted their friendship only to check Rana Bahadur Shah's ambition of recapturing the power with the help of the Britishers. From Benaras Rana Bahadur Shah was curiously and secretly watching and studying situation in Nepal. When he ultimately realised that Britishers were not in favour of giving him military aid and trying to come into close contact with the reigning party of Nepal, he deemed it necessary that he must do some thing against the plan of the Britishers and his enemies at the court of Nepal. He, therefore addressed a series of secret communications to the chiefs of Nepal warning [them against the danger that any settlement with the British was fraught with. In one of his letters to the nobles of Nepal court who were in his favour he had written like this: "The appetite of the English is insatiable. They wish to tax you with something, after obtaining a writing from me and making me subscribe to an oath. You should not write in terms of sincerity of conciliation. Mr. Gajraj is interested in the prosperity of the English and he will deceive you. He has written to them hence asserting his fidelity in most solemn manner, but you should keep this Communication secret from him and the English. He will swear a thousand oaths to you and the English also will conciliate you in various ways with a view of gaining their object which is to your injury. This you should consider in every sense as the advice of your friend that the English wish to deceive you<sup>18</sup> This letter has clearly shown the anti-British

attitude of Rana Bahadur Shah. He in fact had tried his level best to stop the Nepal Darbar from signing this treaty but he could not succeed and at last this treaty was signed on 30th Oct. 1801.<sup>19</sup>

**References:-**

- (1) Political Consultation. September 3rd 1799  
No7(N.A.I)
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Foreign Secret June 26th, 1800 to (N.A.I.)
- (4) Ibid No. 85
- (5) Chittaranjan Nepali. "Shree Pancha Rana Bahadur Shah." pp 23.
- (6) Ibid. pp. 60,
- (7) Itihas Prakash. Volume No. 1 pp.57, 58.
- (8) Chittaranjan Nepali. Shree Panch Rana Bhadur Shah. p 53.
- (9) Foreign Secret. June 20th, 1800 No. 71  
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- (10) Dr. K. Majumdar's unpublished thesis available in Sapru House Library, New Delhi. pp 1 to 50, for. sec. June. 26th 1800 No. 85, 86 (N.A.I.)
- (11) Foreign Secret. June 26th, 1800, No. 86  
(N.A.I)
- (12) Ibid Oct. 2nd 1800, No. 18 (N.A.I.)
- (13) Chittaranjan Nepali., Shree Panch Rana Bahadur Shah.
- (14) Babu Ram Acharya, "Nepali ko Samkhipta Britanta." pp 111-112.
- (15) G. C. Shastri, "Freedom loving Nepal" pp6
- (16) Vasudha. 1968. August pp 26.
- (17) B. D. Sanwal's "Nepal and the East India Company." p 104.
- (18) Foreign Secret. April 16th 1801, No. 130  
(N.A.I.)
- (19) For details see Appendix 10 of B.D. Sanwal's "Nepal and the East India Company." pp 326.