

The Birth of Rana Feudalism in Nepal

By S. C. Lohani

History says that the period of transformation and change in a society appears only after the end of feudalism. The end of Sugu-nate in Japan, feudalism in Russia and other parts of the world are the eloquent examples. In Nepal the beurocratic system of Govt. opened by the feudalistic pattern of Rana society, enunciated by the rise of Jung Bahadur is the burning example for the readers of Nepalese history. The present article may help the readers to find out the establishment of feudalism in Nepal with its historical background which appears as a result of personal ambition and character of Jung Bahadur alone.

The history of Nepal after 1850 is completely overshadowed by court intrigues, bloody incidents, massacre etc. A soldier in the rank, reaches the height of power as a Prime-minister. The glorious history made by the great, unforgettable leaders like Bhim Sen Thapa, Amar Singh Thapa and others is obscured by the Rana dynasty, who completely changed the picture of Nepal, what it was before.

It is interesting to note, when the reader of Nepalese history goes through the incidents and events followed during this period.

Born on 18th June, 1807, the second son of Bala Narsingh Kunwar, Jung Bahadur came in power in 1846 with high ambition. He had to establish himself as an unchallenged and undefeated personality with a horrible

background. King Rajendra Vikram Shaha, though on the throne in name, led a lonely life, with all the powers vested in his second queen. Jealous of the heir-apparant and supported by the selfish courtiers, the second queen of Rajendra Vikram Shaha became furious and thought of keeping her own son in the heir apparent.

Many personalities were changed and many intrigues were made, but her ambition could not be fulfilled. The death of Gagan Singh, brought an opportunity to Jung Bahadur to come in the front and to play the bloody game, which was later a blessing in disguise to him.

The Kot massacre which was followed due to the angry mood of the second queen and fully supported by Jung Bahadur and his brothers, took away most of the lives of the great generals of Nepal. The Kot massacre is an unforgettable event in the history of Nepal and the instigators can not be pardoned in history.

The Kot massacre paved the way for Jung Bahadur to become the right hand man of the queen and also he got an opportunity to fulfil his Macbethic ambition. It can not be forgotten that to fulfil his ambition and to reach the height of power, Jung Bahadur's hand became blood stained with the murder of his own maternal uncle Mathbar Singh Thapa.

By the queen's blessings Jung Bahadur became the Prime-minister of Nepal, when he became the Prime-minister and when he established his full authority, Jung Bahadur went ahead even to imprison the Queen with the Lal Mohar (Royal order) of the King, when he was ordered to kill the heir-apparant Surendra Vikram Shaha.

Thus, by securing full support from the army, people and his own brotheren, Jung Bahadur established his supreme authority in the Kingdom of Nepal. During his period of premiership, the greatest achievement secured by Nepal was the good will of the British Government

Rajendra Vikram Shaha accompanied by his wife retired at Varanasi. Surendra Vikram Shaha was enthorned by Jung Bahadur. He was the full authority of Nepal supported by his army and his brothers. The real sovereign, remained a puppet in his hand. This tradition was followed for nearly a century in the history of Nepal.

From 1850 onwards, the fate of Nepal was in the hands of the Ranas. After 1850 the historical scene of Nepal is completely overshadowed by the personality and acts of Jung Bahadur alone.

In course of time Jung Bahadur resigned from his post of Prime-ministership. The strong personality, who came in power in 1846, who visited England and the European countries, convinced himself of the superiority of the British power and tried to create good feelings with the British Govt. resigned from his post of premiership and Commander-in-Chief of Nepal on the 1st August 1856. The resignation of Jung Bahadur from his post remains a matter of mystery to all the readers.

Different writers have commented in different ways. His own son and biographer, Padma Jung failed to make correct observation and wrote—

“Probably he was really in bad health; probably he suspected that some harm might come from his brothers, and so he relegated his powers to one of them and pacified the others with the hope that their turn would come in time. But it is no use heaping conjecture of conjecture; the question of motive in this case remains a question of probability for ever.”¹

Next writer Iqbal Ali Shaha observed : “He assigned no reason for this sudden action except fatigue”.²

The Resident at Nepal, Major General Ramsay in a letter to Secretary to the Government of India, reporting the general character of Jung Bahadur and expecting that the change in premiership will not affect the relationship with the British Govt. wrote—I observed that whilst Jung Bahadur had been Minister, the relations between the two Governments had materially inproved, and that a degree of good feeling now subsists between the two countries, Which has never before prevailed, and which, I hope may not be interrupted by the present change in the administration of affairs.³

Jung Bahadur was succeeded by his brother Gen. Bum Bahadur. The King appointed him the Prime-minister and the Commander-in-Chief of Nepal.⁴ The advent of Bum Bahadur as the Prime-minister and the Commander-in-Chief of Nepal made the then Resident in Nepal observe like this—“There is something however, in General Bum Bahadur's appearance—a crafty, underhand, treacherous look,

1 Pudmajung—LIFE OF MAHARAJA SIR JUNG BAHADUR Page. 192-93.

2 Iqbal Ali Shaha—NEPAL HOME OF GODS. Page. 95.

3 Foreign Department, Secret Branch, Dated 29th August 1856, Cons. No. 51-54.N.A.I.

4 Ibid

in conformity too, with his general character, which convinces, that when in absolute power he will be a very different man to deal with than he has hitherto been, and I do not think that his advent to power will improve our relations with this Durbar, though they may not be in any way disturbed by it."¹

Though, Bum Bahadur assumed the post of premiership, he could not achieve the public support. Jung Bahadur was supported by all the Nepalese subjects, army and the courtiers. The resignation created suspicion, and different sorts of rumours among the Nepalese people.

The King vested all the executive, judiciary and legislative powers in the hands of Jung Bahadur. The title of Maharaja conferred on him by the Royal Sanad, also invested the succession to the Premiership in Jung Bahadur's brothers and sons. He was also offered a salute of nineteen guns in the name of honour, by the king of Nepal.²

"He was thereby given the powers of life and death and punishment: of appointing and dismissing all Government servants: of declaring war, concluding peace, and signing treaties with all foreign powers including the British, the Tibetans and the Chinese: and finally he was given the authority to make new laws and repeal any old ones, whether civil, criminal or military."³

The vast power to be exercised by Jung Bahadur as a sovereign of two semi-independent states of Nepal as the Maharaja, brought trouble to the Resident at Nepal in dealing with the two sovereigns. The British Govern-

ment did not recognise Jung Bahadur as a sovereign, although no important business of state was ever transacted without his approval, yet he was without official responsibility or power. The Resident could transact no business with him in his anomalous character, nor could the British Government have any political relation with him. Although he was virtually all in all he was still really but a subject of the reigning monarch.

The Government of India refused to meddle with the internal privileges and arrangements of Nepal. They would deal with the Prime-minister and with him alone.⁴

Several instances created bitterness in the mind of Jung Bahadur and at the dealing procedure of the Resident. It is better to cite one or two examples while the Resident ignored Jung Bahadur's position. The asylum of Rani Chanda Kaur of Lahore in Nepal, brought bitter feeling between the position of Jung Bahadur and that of the Resident, when the question of the delivery of the letter to the Rani sent by her son Dileep Singh arose.

Jung Bahadur, being the Maharaja demanded that every sort of communication should come before him and the Prime-minister Gen. Bum Bahadur also was asking for the same. The Resident thought it better to communicate directly to the Governor General in Council because the Rani was an enemy of the British Government, though the demand of the Prime-minister was reasonable in character.⁵

Amity between the two Governments came in picture due to the exchanges of Khureetes and presents between the King of Nepal and the Governor General in Council.⁶

1 Ibid.

2 Foreign Department, Political Branch, dated 29th Aug. 1856, Cons. No.55-57.

3 Landon (Perceval) NEPAL, VOL. II Page.147.

4 Foreign Dept., Political Branch, Dated 29th Aug. 1856.

5 Foreign Dept, Political Branch, dated 19 Sept. 1856 Cons. No. 55- 57.

6 Descriptive list serial No.4-5.

Matrimonial ties to be knotted between the eldest daughter of Jung Bahadur and the heir-apparent, strengthened the position of Jung Bahadur in the relation with the King of Nepal.¹ The delay occurred in this auspicious occasion was due to the death of Bum Bahadur, who died a natural death.² The marriage between the heir-apparent and the eldest daughter of Jung Bahadur took place on the 25th-26th of June 1857. The British Government in India congratulated both the King and Jung Bahadur on this occasion.³

The death of Bum Bahadur, brought Krishna Bahadur, one of the brothers of Jung Bahadur to be the officiating minister.⁴

It is a known fact that the life of Jung Bahadur was full of struggle. Many times the plot for his murder came in picture. One Subdar of Gurung caste indulged himself in

exciting revolt against the British Residency in Nepal and a plan for assassinating Jung Bahadur. It was feared that a large number of old officers were implicated in this plot. A general parade of all the troops were ordered on the Tundikhel and the verdict of the different regiments as to the punishment that should be inflicted on the traitor was taken. The conspirator was hacked in pieces by one of the soldier of the same regiment.⁵

Then only Maharaja Jung Bahadur resumed his old post as the Prime-minister and the Commander-in-Chief of Nepal with the vast power conferred on him by the King of Nepal.⁶

In conclusion it can be said that the above mentioned historical facts generally depicts that the birth of Feudalism in Nepal, took place only because of the rousing ambitious designs of Jung Bahadur and the circumstances prevailed in the court of Nepal during those days.



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- 1 Foreign Dept. Political Branch, Dated 19th June 1857, Cons. No. 27.
 - 2 Foreign Dept., Secret Branch, Dated 25 Sept., 1857, Cons. No. 470.
 - 3 Foreign Dept., Political Branch, Dated 20th Nov. 1867, Cons. No 66-69.
 - 4 Despatch to Secret Committee, No. 33, 1857.
 - 5 Foreign Dept., Secret. Branch, dated 26 June 1857, Cons. No. 129-30.
 - 6 Foreign Dept., SecretBranch, dated 25Sept. 1857, Cons. No. 471-74.