

BOOK REVIEW

Khatry, Prem Kumar, Ananda Prasad Srestha, Anand Aditya, Hari Prasad Shrestha, Dev Raj Dahal (eds.) 2004. *Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah: Man Behind the Persona*. Nepal Mountaineering Association, Kathmandu, pp. 344, photo albums 144 with 5 appendices (price not stated)

Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah (1942-2001), who died a tragic death on June 1, 2001 along with his wife princess Sharada Shah and other royal family members, was the former Executive Director of Center for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University for almost seven years (1983-1989). The present review has two objectives: i) to pay sincere tribute to Kumar Khadga for his excellent contributions to enhance the status of CNAS internationally as the Executive Director of CNAS, and ii) to introduce to the readers the lesser known side of Kumar Khadga - the man behind the persona, as depicted in the book.

The book under review is the biography of Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah, a man with a multi-faceted personality. Narratives of his life are drawn from the memories of persons with whom Kumar Khadga spent his time in different stages of his career. He left behind many memories of his private and public life but it was rather difficult to write a good biography about Kumar Khadga as he lived a life with two distinct identities: a person with the background of a middle class family who started his career as a clerk in the British embassy, and later became a part of the royalty after marrying princess Sharada, the second sister of the present king. In other words, his career interestingly combined a double role of sorts in the hierarchically organized Nepali society. For many, his roles appeared ambivalent and elusive especially for those who were not in close contact with him in his wide network of acquaintanceship. But the editors of the book have done a remarkably good job in producing a highly readable account of a man whose life is unquestionably worth noting.

The book has six sections: Personal life, Sports, Mountaineering, Academics, Miscellany and jottings from the Pen of Kumar Khadga himself.

In "Personal Life" 10 brief notes on Kumar Khadga's personal life have been presented: three by his two blood brothers and a niece, three by his closest friends and other four by those who worked at Sharada Sadan. This section notes Kumar Khadga as a good brother, father, husband, student, and cook. The account by Lalit Bikram Shah, his blood brother is touching as he narrates their family life and school days and how "Thulu"(Kumar Khadga the elder bother) played a significant role in the family as a loving brother, father and teacher.

In the section on "Sports" seven notes are presented in which Kumar Khadga is depicted as a fine sportsman, a good football player (in one of the football games he even broke his leg according to Dr. Gurung) and a cricketer (in one cricket game he scored a century, Komal Pandey notes). He later in his chequered life became the Member Secretary of the National Sports Council in 1967 and remained in that position for ten years. During this period he played dynamic roles in establishing gymnasiums and sports centers in Kathmandu and various districts of Nepal to develop sports. In addition, because of his able managerial role in sports, Nepali players started participating in the Olympics and Asian games!

The third section on "Mountaineering" includes 12 notes, mostly written by his colleagues of the Mountaineering Association of Nepal. Kumar Khadga was the founder President of Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) where he worked for almost 17 years (1973-1990). NMA under his able and dynamic leadership and innovative ideas became a prominent institution for mountaineers in Nepal. He launched a joint expedition to climb Mount Everest, where he himself went up to as far as the Base Camp. He also laid the foundation stone of the International Mountain Museum in Pokhara so that " the history of mountain activities could be maintained and preserved".

In section four, "Academics" there are nine short-notes on Kumar Khadga, depicting his research skills and writing, written mostly by his close colleagues of CNAS. As Professor Prayag Raj Sharma rightly pointed out that though he was initially received a little coolly at CNAS, he really managed to handle academics rather well by his skill in writing, oratory power and his open, receptive and friendly behavior with everybody. It was he who hired academics of different political allegiances to work at CNAS. He organized many national and international seminars and two of them are

regarded to be very important from the national perspective. The national five-day seminar organized by CNAS at Annapurna Hotel, Kathmandu in 1986 on the occasion of the 25-year Panchayat jubilee celebration, in which most of the seminar participants criticized the Panchayat regime is a case in point. It became a hot topic for discussion between academics and pro-panchayat regime supporters in those days and Kumar Khadga played a mediating role between the two groups. Likewise, the international seminar on "Regional Security in South Asia" conducted in 1985 elevated the status of CNAS as an important research institution in South Asia. He always questioned the "intellectual honesty" of scholars in different forums and seminars. In his tenure at CNAS, three more periodicals, *Strategic Studies Series*, *CNAS Year Review* and *CNAS Forum*, were added in addition to *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Except *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, all other periodicals gradually phased out from CNAS because of financial and other technical problems.

The section five on "Miscellany" has nine short notes contributed by a medical doctor, diplomat, lawyer and journalists. Finally, Kumar Khadga himself was a good writer, which he clearly demonstrates in section six, "From the Pen of Kumar Khadga". In these writings, written under different pen names he presents himself as a scholar, a poet, a nationalist and a romantic poet. There is a lot the book has to offer, depending upon what a reader is looking for.

- Dilli R. Dahal