

## THE RELATIONS BETWEEN KATHMANDU AND PALPA IN THE RANA PERIOD.

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In this article I want to discuss the question of the relations between the central government and the officials and offices in Palpa district, particularly from the years 1990 to 2007 V. S. (1933-1950 A. D). Some people have argued that the Bada Hakim, also called the Tainathwalla of Palpa Gaunda, was such a powerful figure that he governed the district like a local maharaja. There are several reasons in support of this view. First, because of the transportation and communication difficulties of the time, it was hard for Kathmandu to obtain prompt and complete information of what was happening in a district as far away as Palpa. So how was the Center to dictate policies, exercise supervision over the local authorities, or provide them with the resources they required? These conditions forced the Center to invest the Tainathwalla with great authority, with the result that Kathmandu was dependent upon him for the management of governmental affairs in the district.

Second, the Tainathwalla was a powerful and feared person because he was in charge of all law and order or security matters in the district. Several army regiments were stationed at Palpa and were under his command. Thirdly, if the Bada Hakim was a Rana, and nearly every Palpa Bada Hakim was closely related to the Maharaja as a brother, son, or nephew, this relationship added to his stature and prestige. The Palpa Tainathwalla from 1991 (1934) until the downfall of the Ranas in 1951 was Rudra Shamsher, who once had been the Muktiyar and in line to succeed the Prime Minister. This meant he was senior to Padma and Mohan Shamsher who subsequently became the Maharaja. So it is reasonable to suppose that he was in a much stronger position than the ordinary Bada Hakim to exercise power in ruling the district of Palpa.

Although there is some truth in these arguments, I believe that government records I have read requires us to draw different conclusions. The general argument of this paper is that the central government in fact quite effectively supervised and controlled local offices and successfully prevented officials, even Rudra Shamsher, from acting in ways opposed to the objectives and the interests of the Maharaja (Rana Prime Minister).

In this discussion I will refer to two different kinds of evidence. One is the formal requirements as stated in the sections of laws, sanads (charters), and sawals (regula-

tions). These defined the arrangements for how tasks were to be carried out. Of course laws and rules may be violated, ignored, or not enforced. What is supposed to be done in a particular way may be done in another way or not done at all. The second type of evidence is drawn from reports, letters, and petitions, which indicate what actually was going on in the district. Both kinds of evidence are important in analyzing the relations between central and local authorities.

It appears that central control over district administration increased as the years went by. The degree of authority and discretion of the Palpa Tainathwala was correspondingly reduced. When Bir Shamsheer went to Palpa as "Governor" in 1931 (1874 A. D.), he was also made *Tainath* (a person in command) of all the offices west of the Trishuli River (i.e. Dhading to Palpa).<sup>1</sup> At that time he had the authority to discharge those in the Palpa Brigade whom he found unfit and to make other appointments himself.

A letter written in 1999 (1942) refers to another power that the old Palpa Governors used to enjoy. They could hear appeals against the decisions of the courts and gaundas from Pokhara to Doti.<sup>2</sup> (Later on, the Bada Hakim in Palpa could hear only appeals from the courts in Baglung, Pyuthan, Salyana, Syangja, Thak, and Palpa itself). Until 1954 (1899) the Palpa Governor was also the Talukwala of Butaul Goswara, but this authority was taken away "when it was found that he had not worked well and had caused the people hardship."<sup>3</sup> Thereafter a separate Bada Hakim was sent to Butaul. The ways in which the sanads and sawals limited the Tainathwala's other prerogatives will be considered below.

Within Palpa district the Tainathwala acted as head of the district administration. For the central government to issue directives, give permission in district affairs, and exercise supervision over Palpa officials it had to know the situation there. Kathmandu needed to have reliable and detailed information about local conditions and the particular items of business with which the administration was concerned. What arrangements did the Center make to obtain such information? Was the information received adequate for the Center to achieve its main objectives, and for it to subordinate the district administration to its control?

The Palpa offices themselves were required to furnish a great deal of information. Reports and investigations about matters, request for permission, monthly reports, yearly reports, office account books, drafts for new sanads, and petitions from the local people were all submitted to Kathmandu. In addition, officials could send their

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1. "The Life of Bir Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana." Manuscript, undated, Kesar Library, Kathmandu.
  2. Letter to Rudra Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, Jestha 9, 1999 V. S. (1942 A. D.).
  3. *Idem*.

own letters or petitions about any matter to the appropriate central office or to the Maharaja. Often an official would inform the Maharaja that another worker in the same office had not done his work properly, had violated laws or procedures, or was troubling the people in certain ways. Officials even reported the actions of the Bada Hakim which were considered improper. If many complaints about the district officials were received in Kathmandu, the implication was that the Bada Hakim was not performing his supervisory duties well. He could be reprimanded for this negligence by the Maharaja, in polite terms if the Bada Hakim was a senior Shamsheer Rana, or in more severe language if he was Jang Rana<sup>4</sup> or of some other caste.

Each office was required to submit a monthly report which gave an account of the work the office was engaged in. Most offices had standardized forms to complete. For example the Palpa Mal (Revenue) Office had to submit the following types of figures: the total amounts of uncollected revenue (arrears) from previous years; the total amount of revenue to be collected in the current year; of these two sums, the amounts collected that month; the totals collected so far that year; the amounts for which exemptions had been granted; the amounts for which the office had found it necessary to submit reports; the amounts which had not been collected because some difficulties had arisen; and the amounts for which additional help or time was required in order to make collections.<sup>5</sup> The monthly report also showed the income and expenditures as listed in the account books; the amounts deposited as security; and the figures regarding the kind and number of a documents registered and the fees collected for registration. This monthly report then went to the Gaunda Office which examined and forwarded it to the concerned central office. If the Gaunda found any errors or omissions in the report, it was responsible to have corrections made.

The yearly reports, or *pajani kajag*, contained the same detailed types of summaries of work done and also included personal data on office workers and gave an evaluation of their performances. These are the remarks of the Gaunda Office about a bichari of the Palpa Gaunda Appeal in one year's pajani papers:

A complaint of forgery has been lodged against this bichari, and actions are now being taken with regard to it. In another case it was found that he had improperly

4. After 1900 the Shamsheer Ranas dominated the top administrative positions in the state. The Maharajas, descendants of Dhir Shamsheer, the youngest brother of Prime Minister Jang Bahadur, came from this branch of the family. There were other Rana families, however, such as the Jang Ranas, Narsingh Ranas, Bikram Ranas and Dhoj Ranas. These were the descendants of Jang Bahadur himself and his other brothers.
5. *Palpa Mal Sawal* (Regulations of the Palpa Revenue Office), Shawan 28,1991 (1934), section 151.

detained someone, and the bichari was fined. He is now appealing. Since it does not appear that his motives are good, there should be a new bichari (appointed).<sup>6</sup>

From these monthly reports and pajani papers the central offices were able to know how well the offices and officials were working.

On the basis of these reports, officials in Kathmandu could evaluate the performances of district officials, could make efforts to expedite works that were not complete and could issue reminders, warnings, or levy fines against local offices which had not accomplished their work on time. The system of fines was an important device by which the Center supervised and controlled district administration. Rana Bada Hakims themselves were fined on occasion, though I have found no records indicating that the Palpa Tainathwalla was so disciplined. The Tainathwalla could impose fines on local officials also, but unless directed otherwise, he had to do so for the reasons given in the laws and within the amounts specified therein. Furthermore, the money realized from such fines had to be submitted to the government and could not be appropriated by the Bada Hakim.

At the end of the year routine fines were assessed against the local courts and mal (revenue) offices for matters that had not been disposed of within the allowed time limits. In 2006 (1949) for example, the Palpa Appeal was fined 36.75 rupees, at the rates of 25 paisa for each case which had been decided late, and 50 paisa for each case whose time limit had expired but which was still pending.<sup>7</sup> These fines were collected by making deductions in proportionate shares from the salaries of the office staff. At the same time the mal offices were fined at the rates of 25 paisa per 100 rupees of assessed tax revenue that the offices had been unable to collect, and 1 rupee for each application to cultivate land which had not been acted upon in time.

Fines also were levied at any time when local offices failed to discharge their assignments. For neglecting to measure and prepare a register of lands granted to a daughter of the Maharaja in 1994 (1973), the Palpa Gaunda, Adalat, and Gulmi Mal were each fined 2 rupees. Two more notices were sent out from Kathmandu regarding this task but when the local offices had still not submitted the necessary materials the central office again wrote and demanded that the work be completed within 7 days or the salaries of the concerned officials would be stopped.<sup>8</sup>

If offices fell hopelessly behind in their work or many complaints were received about the failures of offices to carry out their responsibilities or about the corrupt practice

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6. "Appeal Dosra marphat Pahad Adalatko 91 Salka Baliko Pajani Kagaj" (The 1934 Pajani Papers for the Hill Courts under the Second Appeal Court—in Kathmandu), 1991 (1934).

7. Order to Pahad Adalat Appeals (Hill Courts of Appeal). 2006 (1949).

8. Order to Palpa Gaunda (Headquarters of Palpa District), Phalgun 25, 1994 (1938).

of officials, a *daudaha* (inspection team) was often dispatched from Kathmandu to inspect the local offices. It would investigate charges against officials and take whatever actions it could to get arrears collected and to clear up the accounts and cases which the offices had failed to take care of. The chief of the *daudaha*, often a Rana official was given wide authority to impose punishments and to take the necessary steps so that the district offices would again perform their duties as they were required to. *Daudahas* were means by which the Center, through its own deputed officials could have a first-hand look at the way in which the district offices were functioning. Kathmandu did not have to rely solely upon reports sent in from offices in Palpa for an evaluation of affairs in the district.

There was another way in which the Center could check upon the activities of even the Tainathwalla himself. An interesting letter written in 1997 (1940) reveals how secret investigations were carried out by agents sent from Kathmandu to make extensive enquiries into reports of official misconduct. <sup>9</sup> In brief, the letter noted that news had earlier been received in Kathmandu that hakims and clerks in Palpa had gotten together with some scoundrels and had committed improper actions. Rudra Shamsher as Tainathwalla had been asked to make secret enquiries himself about the activities of these people and to report his findings to the Maharaja. He was to make arrests and, if necessary, to expel from the district those of bad character.

When Rudra Shamsher replied that there was no one who had acted improperly as reported, the Center dispatched its own secret investigators. With their report in hand, the Center told Rudra it was obvious that mischief-makers had fooled him. It asked why he had not investigated officials even when information which he had submitted in the *pajani* papers indicated that those officials were not working satisfactorily. The Maharaja then ordered Rudra Shamsher to dismiss a total of 10 officials in Palpa immediately.

During the time they were in Palpa, the Center's spies had checked into whether or not the Tainathwalla himself was implicated in these reports of wrong-doing. While no evidence was found of this, Rudra Shamsher was admonished that "it was bad for you to have informed us (the Maharaja) that these officials work with good intentions and observe the laws" when it was found that they committed improprieties for which they were to be dismissed. <sup>10</sup> Likewise the Tainathwalla was told he had not been making careful investigations as he should have been and should not rely on the opinions of others.

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9. Letter from Shri 3 Maharaja (Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana) to Rudra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Shawan 30, 1997 (1940).

10. *Idem*.

The Center was also able to learn about the situation in Palpa through petitions (*binti patra*) which could be sent by any person on any subject upon the payment of 1 rupee. Daudahas were regularly sent out to the districts, and people were encouraged to bring their grievances and complaints against local officials to the attention of the inspection team. Many petitions were sent to Kathmandu through the district offices, while others were taken directly to the capital by the people themselves.

Some petitions asked the Maharaja for grants of money or other benefits. The Ranas living in Palpa would send petitions to request funds to build new houses, to pay wedding and funeral expenses to perform the "sacred thread" (*bratbandh*) ceremony, and to obtain or increase their monthly allowances that the government provided. Grants of financial assistance to Ranas living in the districts can be seen in part as an attempt by the Maharaja to keep those families contented and loyal, so that it would be more difficult for any Bada Hakim to enlist the support of local Ranas in any corrupt or subversive schemes he might be contemplating.

In times of distress non-Ranas would also petition the Maharaja. For example once the house of a Magar living in Palpa burned down. A neighbor described his plight to the Maharaja in these terms:

...2 of his sons and his father were killed. His pregnant wife is hovering between life and death. 2 buffaloes and 1,000 rupees worth of goods were destroyed... May we receive money by your grace to build a new house and permission to obtain the necessary wood for bulding it from a nearby jungle? 11

One hundred rupees and permission to cut wood in the forest were granted.

Other petitions complained about the negligence of officials in performing their jobs and the hardships they inflicted on the common people. One such petition describes the difficulties experienced by peasants of a village in Palpa district. It says in part.:

In order to cultivate lands in our village, we peasants applied for and receive a signed directive from the Palpa Gaunda in 1989 (1932). The lands were cultivated at our own expense. . When we started to dig an irrigation ditch ourselves, the Gaunda, claiming that it damaged a public trail, put a stop to it. We came to the Center (Kathmandu), submitted a petition to the Government, and permission was given for us to continue digging the canal in order to cultivate the land. 12

It then went on to state that an overseer from the Gaunda Office began to trouble them by telling them to first build the canal in a certain way and then at another time to build it in a different way. Finally he attempted to put an end to the project altogether.

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11. Order to Palpa Gaunda, Asardh 22,2007 (1950).

12. *Bintipatra* (petition), Phalgun 16, 1997 (1941).

The peasants asked that Kathmandu tell the Palpa Gaunda officials to let the new canal be used and to stop interfering with the villagers' efforts to irrigate their lands.

I have given only a few examples from the many types of reports and letters sent on a continual basis to Kathmandu from Palpa. It certainly appears that the messages which were received and answered in surprisingly good time provided the Central authorities with a good account of how administrative affairs were being carried out in Palpa.

In analyzing the relationship of the Bada Hakim to the central government we must consider what kinds of power the Palpa Tainathwala had. Were there effective limitations upon his exercise of those powers? To what extent was he accountable to Kathmandu for his actions? For many years during the Rana period the Bada Hakims of the most important districts functioned as appellate judges for the courts in their region. But even in earlier times, if a person was dissatisfied with the Palpa Tainathwala's decision in his case, it was possible to appeal to the Center and have the case reviewed again. This right of appeal against the decisions of Bada Hakims was an important check on their judicial powers.

During the time of Maharaja Juddha Shamsheer the Bada Hakims were divested of their judicial functions, and the hearing of appeals was entrusted to the judges of the courts in the gaundas and goswaras (district centers).<sup>13</sup> Some Bada Hakims subsequently complained that their prestige had been reduced through these new judicial arrangements. This could well have been one of the reasons for the change. By reducing the powers of the Bada Hakim the Center may have been seeking to minimize the chances for district Bada Hakims to try to establish themselves as independent local autocrats through abusing their powers.

Probably the most significant limitations on the powers of the Palpa Tainathwala and on his ability to act in arbitrary and discretionary ways were the detailed charters and regulations issued to each office in Palpa. In addition to these, there were general regulations embodied in the *Muluki Ain* and *Muluki Sawal* which applied to all offices throughout the country. These regulations elaborated in great detail what works the offices were to do and the procedures to be followed for sending in reports, asking for permission to take some action, obtaining clearance for accounts, etc. The Bada Hakim was not permitted to interfere with or disrupt the normal execution of tasks assigned to the district offices.

Schedules (*darbandi*) were issued from Kathmandu which contained the items and amounts for which expenditures could be made. The expenditures covered all possibilities—from amounts allotted for the salaries of officials to that allowed for purchasing ink for the offices. The Bada Hakim could be asked to investigate whether or not

13. Order to Gen. Mahabir Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, Marg 3, 1997 (1940).

these authorized sums should be increased or whether money for different purposes was required. But no local official including the Bada Hakim could authorize on his own changes in these office "budgets".

Two examples should serve to illustrate how the Palpa Tainathwalla had to approach central authorities in order to request a new authorization of funds. In 1997 (1940) Rudra Shamsher asked for two clerks to be assigned at salaries of 300 rupees each to work for two years in order to sort through, arrange, and number the old papers in the Palpa Kausa! Adda. But the Center gave him permission only to hire one clerk at a salary of 120 rupees and the work was to be completed in one year.<sup>14</sup>

Some years before this, the Tainathwalla, Pratap Shamsher, asked that a schedule be approved for the money necessary to pay porters to move office equipment to Butaul, where the Gaunda Offices were located during the winter months. Until then a separate request had to be made and approved by Kathmandu every year to sanction the 581 rupees required to pay these porters. But before this request could be approved Kathmandu asked the Tainathwalla to submit details as to how many porters were needed and for which tasks, the wage rates, and what expenses had been incurred for similar work over the previous ten years.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that close scrutiny was given to whatever financial recommendations the Bada Hakim might make and that he could not raise money on his own. He could not sanction expenditures for anything other than routine projects (such as repairing damaged government property).

Important local officials such as the hakims had to write and sign agreements (*kabuliyat*) in which their duties and conditions of service were clearly specified. If these officials failed to carry out their responsibilities fully and on time, they were liable to fines or punishments which the central authorities would impose. If the mal office could not collect the revenue it was supposed to, the hakim would be fined and a share of his salary could be withheld. The Center also attempted to influence the behavior of local officials by having them take oaths of office. Men who were appointed locally had to promise that they would "not take anyone's side or show affection of or favoritism toward anyone."<sup>16</sup> They swore loyalty to the Government. They agreed not to "violate the rights of the government or the people" and not to "steal from or deceive" the government. These officials pledged not to "accept bribes, favour, or tributes" themselves or to offer these to others. Finally they promised to inform the Prime Minister immediately if they found out that someone was planning or engaging in political acti-

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14. Letter from the Commander-in-Chief of to Rudra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Baisakh 7, 1997 (1940).

15. Letter to Gen. Pratap Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Bhadra 22, 1988 (1931).

16. *Palpa Gaunda Sawal*, Baisakh 16, 1992 (1935), section 56.



vities or actions directed against the office or the person of the Maharaja. <sup>17</sup> There is plenty of evidence to show that officials who violated the terms of this oath or of the laws they had promised to uphold, and whose actions were reported and the charges against them proved, were dismissed from government service.

All the officials in the district, including the Tainathwalla, were also to sign a document that they would "not act unjustly nor bring harm or loss to the government or the people or cause suffering to anyone." <sup>18</sup> If they did so they could be punished by the government. Many officials of course did abuse their powers and violate this oath at times, but it is significant to note that the central authorities had set forth certain norms of conduct for its workers and reserved the right to take disciplinary actions against those local officials who were found to have violated such standards.

In looking at the position of a Bada Hakim like Rudra Shamsher it is essential to distinguish between the duties he was assigned, and the degree and nature of authority he was granted. The Bada Hakim was the chief administrative official in the district and did have extensive responsibilities in supervising the works of all the offices and in taking care of military and security matters. Because of this fact, some writers have assumed, incorrectly I think, that the Bada Hakim possessed virtually unlimited authority, so that generally he could act as he pleased and run the district like a local maharaja. In fact, however, if we examine the authority that a Rana Tainathwalla had in several important areas of responsibility, and if we keep in mind the methods of central supervision of local offices that I have described above it becomes apparent that the Bada Hakim was not like a local feudal chief who could determine how his area was to be governed and who could take arbitrary actions without being accountable to higher authorities.

I already have mentioned that the Bada Hakim could not on his own establish taxes or change their rates or grant exemptions from payment. He could not appropriate local revenue collected by the talukdars and mal office. Without permission he could not make expenditures of government money or decide how that money should be spent. Limits were set on the total amount of money he could sanction in any one year to have various routine matters taken care of. Thus, while he was consulted about the sums of money that should be approved and the purposes for which the money should be used, the Bada Hakim really had no independent financial powers.

Let us turn to the question of appointments. The authority to appoint and dismiss government workers, especially when jobs may be awarded as favour or in return for bribes or "gifts" can greatly increase the prestige and power of an

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17. *Idem*.

18. *Ibid.*, section 153.

official. He can put his own loyal followers in administrative positions to help protect his own personal interests. It is not surprising, therefore, that Rudra Shamsher had authority to make appointments only to office clerical positions and to the lowest military ranks

As for military appointments, a sawal issued to the Western Commanding General (Jangi Lath) in 1991 (1934) provided for new appointments to be made or existing appointments to be reviewed in the paltars (regiments) at Palpa Gaunda after the names of those in ranks from officers to subedars had been submitted and approved by the Maharaja.<sup>19</sup> The Jangi Lath himself was to give approval for the writers and bahidars of the subedars in the paltans and for the staff of the chowkis (police checkposts). This suggests that the Palpa Tainathwalla could only appoint the "rank and file" soldiers, such as havaldars, huddas, and sipahis. And for enlisting them the Center had prescribed certain physical standards which the recruits had to meet.

On the civilian side, in the Gaunda Office, Sil Khana Magazine, Barud Khana, and Tosakhana, the Tainathwalla could make appointments to ranks below khardar and dittha.<sup>20</sup> (these two officials could be in charge of offices as hakims). In doing so, however, the Tainathwalla was to examine whether the candidates were eligible for service under the provisions of the *Muluki Ain* and whether they were competent to do the required work. In other local offices too, Rudra Shamsher could make appointments and transfers in clerical positions such as naib writer and naib mukhia.<sup>21</sup> He also had the authority to dismiss clerical workers in the district offices and to appoint competent replacements. But he could not appoint any of the office hakims nor the witnesses (*sacchi*) in local customs offices.<sup>22</sup> They were assigned by Kathmandu.

To dismiss those of subedar rank and above for serious offenses Rudra Shamsher had to report to Kathmandu, and presumably the same conditions applied in the cases of those in civilian ranks whose appointments were reviewed by the Center. In punishing any government worker for an offense, the Tainathwalla was bound to abide by the provisions of the *Ain*, or to submit the matter to the Maharaja if it seemed that a greater or lesser punishment than the law required should be given.

Thus the Palpa Tainathwalla could not appoint any military officer or the hakim of any office in Palpa. Those workers in ranks subject to his review were not to be dismissed without cause or new people appointed who were incompetent. While

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19. Sawal to Western Commanding General Mohan Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Bhadra 14, 1991 (1934).

20. *Palpa Gaunda Sawal, op. cit.* section 74.

21. Letter from Chief Saheb (Commander-in-Chief) to Western Commander-in-Chief Rudra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Phalgun 24, 2001 (1945).

22. Letter to Rudra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Jestha 9, 1999 (1942).

the Bada Hakim did have some patronage powers, he could not “pack” the offices with his own men. And the persons he did appoint could be taken before the courts by others for their misbehavior even if the Tainathwalla did not report on them.

Another way of determining how much authority an official has is to consider what types of actions he can initiate without first having to ask for permission and the kinds of reports he must submit to explain his actions. The office sawals specifically identified which matters were to be submitted through which offices and stated that the work should then be done according to the permission received. When the offices needed to make even small changes in their works or procedures, they approached Kathmandu and not the Palpa Tainathwalla. Even when there was no need to obtain permission the Palpa offices sent reports to the Center: for example about officials going on leave, about complaints the offices were investigating, and about any unusual occurrences in the area.

The Palpa Bada Hakim also reported often to the Center, including instances where he had been given authority to act. When special problems arose—droughts, shortages of goods, robberies, etc.—he would notify the central authorities. In reply the Center usually requested that he investigate what was necessary, and in ordinary cases to take actions according to the laws and regulations. In unusual or important matters the Tainathwalla was to add his own suggestions to the details of the report, submit it, and await further instructions.

To investigate affairs, to implement decisions, and to take corrective actions in Palpa: for these tasks the central government had to rely largely upon the Bada Hakim. For example when people from a certain village in Palpa complained to Kathmandu that the local mukhia was not accepting their revenue payments in crops and was collecting more levies than the people were required to pay, the Gaunda Tainathwalla was ordered to find out whether these charges were true or not and to take actions under the laws in light of what he had found. <sup>23</sup>

When a suggestion was made by the Palpa Tin Sancha hakim in 1988 (1931) that his office be given responsibility to also manage the work of the Butaul Taksar (mint), the Tainathwalla was directed to state his opinion about this idea. Upon his recommendation that one hakim would not be able to supervise well the financial matters of the two offices and the government might incur losses, the Center rejected the hakim’s proposal. <sup>24</sup>

In cases like these the Bada Hakim possessed a measure of discretion. If he did not want to have a complete investigation made, to uncover all the facts, or to take all the actions necessary to accomplish a certain goal or to correct an injustice, there

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23. Order to General Pratap Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Kartik 25, 1987 (1930).

24. Order to Gen. Pratap Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Asardh 31, 1988 (1931).

was little the Center could do except admonish him. (Other Rana Bada Hakims could be transferred to another district or relieved of their duties. But Rudra Shamsheer had been in fact exiled to Palpa, and the Maharajas wanted to keep him there). Kathmandu depended very much upon the efforts and cooperation of the Bada Hakims, although regular administrative activities were entrusted by the sawals to the various offices. One should also remember that Kathmandu had other sources of information about district affairs and did not have to rely exclusively upon the Bada Hakim's reports. And if the Bada Hakim failed to act or took improper actions appeals could be lodged against him and his decisions reviewed by central offices.

In light of the available records, reports, and regulations I think one can make several general points about the relations between the central government and the Palpa authorities during the later years of the Rana regimes. First, despite the considerable distance between Palpa and Kathmandu, the Center was very well-informed about the functioning of the district offices and how their administrative tasks were being carried out. It was less well-informed about actual conditions, needs, and problems in the villages as it had to depend a great deal upon the initiative of local people to provide this type of information through petitions.

The performance of district offices was carefully watched by the central authorities. Reports from secret investigators, from local officials and villagers themselves, standard monthly reports, and the yearly review of office accomplishments and officials' appointments were means by which Kathmandu could evaluate and give directions to the local administration. It quite effectively controlled and disciplined district officials by issuing reminders and warnings, imposing fines, withholding portions of salaries, and transferring and dismissing those who worked improperly.

The Gaunda Bada Hakim was charged with the general supervision of district offices and governmental activities. The last Palpa Tainathwalla, Rudra Shamsheer, occupied a special place among the district Bada Hakims, due to his seniority and the unique circumstances which resulted in his appointment to Palpa. While like other Bada Hakims he was entrusted with numerous responsibilities touching on every aspect of district administrations, his authority was clearly circumscribed. He may have been given a few more powers than the average Bada Hakim, but he was not allowed to appoint the more important local officials. He had no independent financial powers, nor could he really make important decisions or take special actions (unless a great emergency had arisen) without first reporting to and obtaining permission from the central authorities. He was bound to abide by the stipulations of the laws and regulations like anyone else unless the Maharaja should issue an order to the contrary, but surely this happened seldom if at all.

On the other hand, the Palpa Tainathwalla, having important duties in military, law and order, and administrative matters, did command great prestige and influence in

Palpa. While he was not in a position to challenge effectively the powers of the central government, no local individual could dare to challenge him. Fear of the Bada Hakims, popular ignorance of rights and procedures given in the laws, the domination exercised over the common people by the local elites—rich landlords, merchants, and money-lenders—all helped to create a wide-spread attitude of apathy and mistrust on the part of most people. Thus in most cases they tended to accept passively whatever actions the Bada Hakim took. The absence of local associations, of organized groups representing different interests, the lack of what we can call institutional restraints in the district upon the exercise of power by a Bada Hakim in fact made him a virtually unchallengeable figure in his area. He was not obliged to consider popular opinion or the public good in order to preserve his position of authority. As long as the Tainath-walla did not commit some gross violations of the law or threaten the political interests of the Maharaja or other powerful Ranas, he had no reason to be concerned about his position and personal well-being.

Probably the people suffered more because of what the government in the person of the Bada Hakim failed to do than from what it did. Since the administration at both the central and district levels was not accountable to the people in any meaningful sense for its actions, the authorities could carry out their routine and limited office duties without having to worry very much about the difficult conditions under which most villagers spent their lives. Although I have argued that Rudra Shamsheer and other local officials worked for the most part under the control of the central government, this fact was not of great benefit to the common man in Palpa. For it was obvious that the interests of those who dominated the government at the national and the local levels—the Ranas and other families of wealth and influence—were seldom compatible with the interests of the cultivators and landless laborers who comprised more than ninety per-cent of Nepal's population in those days.

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