Chapter One

THE BACKGROUND
Secluded from other peoples in her mountainous abode, with Tibet in the north and India in the south, Nepal had for a long time pursued a destiny peculiarly her own. The inaccessibility of the region, intersected by mountain passes, deep rivers and impenetrable forests, fostered a spirit of isolation and divided the country into small and mutually exclusive social units, whose divergences were accentuated by the infinite variety of local conditions. The difficulties of intercommunication among various districts and regions and the self-sufficient and static economy of the villages retarded the growth of a common national feeling among the people. Further, Nepal's peculiar geographical position of being hemmed in by the two giant powers of Asia - India and China - dictated the policy of isolation which her rulers had followed until very recently. Prithvinarayan Shah, the founder of Nepal's present greatness, who laid the basis of this policy, pointed out that his kingdom was "sandwiched between two giant powers" (1) and advised his followers not to develop intimate relations with either of them. (2) Though this policy was not fully followed by the Rana rulers, on the whole, 

(1) Yogi Naraharinath and Baburam Acharya, ed., Rashtrapita Sri 5 Bada Maharaja Prithvinarayan Shah Dev Ko Divyiva Upadesh (Kathmandu, 1953) 15.
(2) Ibid., 18-9.
they also pursued a course which served to keep the country rigidly shut off from outside contacts. While this policy helped in preserving Nepal's independent entity, the forces of modernization, which became active in other parts of Asia, left her untouched until the middle of this century. Thus, Nepal's geographical position accounts, in a large measure, for her prolonged isolation as well as the fact of her slow political progress, economic immobility and social backwardness.

I

The Making of Nepal: A Historical Outline

The foundation of the modern State of Nepal was laid by King Prithvinarayan Shah of Gorkha in 1769 A.D. Before the Gurkha conquest, the kingdom of Nepal consisted only of the Kathmandu valley which was ruled by three Malla kings with their capitals at Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan. (3) Ippolito Desideri, a Jesuit missionary, who visited Nepal in 1721 A.D. wrote in his famous account

The Kingdom of Nepal is not large, one can go from one end to the other in a few days; part of it is flat, open country, but the principal part is mountainous; the mountains, however, are well wooded and pleasant. The chief products are wheat, rice, a certain black millet, vegetables, and various kinds of fruit such as prickly pears, pine-apples, lemons and oranges. (4)

(3) For the early history of the Malla dynasties of Nepal, see Luciano Petech, Medieval History of Nepal (C 750-1480) (Rome, 1958); for later history see Baburam Acharya, "Sri Jai Prakash Malla," Pragati (Kathmandu), 3 (n.d.) 35-85.

The riches of the Kathmandu valley, its natural bounties and the wealth of the Malla kings, who minted coins for Tibet in return for a huge profit, (5) constituted a source of great temptation to the rugged hillmen of the small states which congregated in the western part of Nepal. The chiefs of some of these states were the descendants of the ruling families of Rajputana who had fled to Nepal at the time of the Muslim invasion. By the middle of the eighteenth century these states were roughly divided into two loose confederacies called the Baisi and the Chaubisi, according to their approximate number 22 and 24 respectively. (6) The rulers of the Baisi and Chaubisi states, especially those of Gorkha, Tanahu and Makwanpur, made several attempts to wrest the Nepal valley from the Malla rulers. (7) Later, the chaotic rule of the Malla kings and their internecine warfares created great dissatisfaction among various sections of the nobility, the merchant and priestly classes who sought the help of these adventurers from the hills to oust their rulers. It was at this time that, finding the moment opportune, Prithvinarayan Shah

(5) The Malla kings had minted coins for the Tibetans since the reign of Mahendra Malla, Raja of Kathmandu in the sixteenth century. According to Kirkpatrick minting of coin was first the monopoly of Kathmandu. Later the Rajas of Patan and Bhatgaon also sent silver coins to Tibet. He estimated that the annual profits on silver coinage had yielded Nepal, before the Gurkha conquest, over 100,000 rupees. See Colonel Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (London, 1811) 211, 217.


(7) Acharya, n. 3, 39.
of Gorkha swooped upon the valley and, after several abortive attempts, conquered the three Malla kingdoms in 1769 A.D. (8)

**Age of Gurkha Expansion**

With the victory of Prithvinarayan Shah, the history of Nepal turned over a new leaf. The insularity of Kathmandu where the drama of the Mallas had hitherto been enacted gave way to the insatiable land-hunger of the Gurkha soldiery. The rabble which had gathered round Prithvinarayan Shah was organized into a regular army which was sent to conquer new territories in all directions. By 1775 A.D. the Gurkhas over-ran the whole of the Kiranti land east of Kathmandu, Morang in Terai, and Ilam touching the border of Sikkim. After Prithvinarayan's death, the Gurkha conquest was pushed further by Bahadur Shah who acted as the Regent of his nephew, King Rana Bahadur Shah (1777-1799 A.D.). After winning over the Rajah of Palpa by a marriage alliance, Bahadur brought under control the Baisi and Chaubisi states and sent his forces as far west as Kumayun. In the east the Gurkha arms penetrated into Sikkim and even threatened Bhutan. (9) Emboldened by these victories, the Gurkhas began to cast a longing eye on Tibet. The prospect of winning the rich lamaseries of Tibet itself constituted an inducement to the Nepalese army to move northward.

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(8) For details see Regmi, n. 6, 52-103.

Further, the refusal of the Tibetans to circulate Gurkha coins in their territory, as they had done during the time of the Mallas, not only disrupted the old trade between Tibet and Nepal but deprived the new rulers of a lucrative source of income. (10) It was, therefore, partly to satisfy their avarice and partly to teach the Tibetans a lesson, that the Nepalese invaded Tibet in May 1788. The war, after a brief interval, continued till 1792 A.D. when the Tibetans with the help of a Chinese army defeated the Gurkhas and pursued them as far as Jeetpur Phedi inside the Nepalese territory. (11) Forced by this defeat, the Nepalese Darbar sued for peace which the Chinese granted on condition that Nepal would accept Chinese suzerainty and send presents to China every five years in token of "filial love." (12) The Nepalese, in their turn, got the right to carry on trade in Tibet and received an assurance

(10) Bogle who visited Tibet in 1774 A.D., as the Agent of the East India Company, reported that the currency question had become the bone of contention between Nepal and Tibet. See Clements R. Markham, Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Tibet (London, 1876, 2nd edition, 1879) Ch. XV.


from China that she would help them "if Nepal be ever invaded by a foreign power." (13)

Setback to the Policy of Expansion

The humiliation which the Gurkhas suffered at the hands of the Tibetans caused a violent shake-up in their political set-up. A regime which squarely depended for its sustenance on an army, raised on a "war-footing," (14) could not sit at rest until it found new avenues of territorial expansion. Hence, failing in the northern region, the army was sent to push the frontier further south - a policy which culminated in the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16 A.D. (15) After a protracted period of mountain warfare in which the Nepalese "fought with the greatest gallantry," (16) a treaty was signed at Segowli on 4 March 1816 by which Nepal lost her possessions in Sikkim, Kumayun and Garhwal. To the south Nepal was compelled to cede western Terai to the kingdom of Oudh, and eastern Terai to the British a portion of which was, however, returned to her in the same year. (17) By the same Treaty the Nepalese Darbar

(13) Ibid.
(14) Levy, n. 9, I, 39.
agreed to receive a British representative at Kathmandu. Thus, by 1816, the political boundaries of Nepal were finally settled which, with a few minor adjustments and alterations, have remained intact until the present time.

II

Politics During the Pre-Rana Period

Hereditary Monarchy and the Nobility

Tracing their origin from the royal family of Chittor, (18) the Shahs of Gorkha established a political system in Nepal which was essentially military and despotic in character. As sovereign the King wielded supreme authority in both civil and military affairs of the State. Monarchy was a hereditary institution and every monarch, on his accession, assumed the title of Sri Panch Maharajasdiraja. For the purposes of administration, however, the King employed ministers and Bharadars (19) from higher caste noble families with whom he had intimate relations. These ministers and


(19) The meaning of the term Bharadar is not clear. Sometimes they worked as important state officials, at other times as feudal chiefs who helped the King in various state business. Together they formed the Bharadari or the Council which Kirkpatrick describes as follows:

This Council is composed of the principal ministers of government, and of such other persons as the Prince or Regent thinks proper to entitle to it, and its business is to examine the conduct of all public officers during the preceding year, to degrade, punish, and reward them, according to their merits, and to bestow governments, military commands, and jaghire lands for the ensuing year in all which it is the policy of the court to make frequent changes. ...

Kirkpatrick, n. 5, 87.
Bharadars were given lands called Jagirs and Birtas in payment of the services they rendered to the King. In course of time, this system of granting lands raised a feudal oligarchy which became the strongest political force in the country next only to the monarch. Again, among the nobility, some important families came to enjoy hereditary rights to the highest offices of the State even during the reign of Ram Shah (1606-33 A.D.), an illustrious ancestor of Prithvinarayan. (20) These families were the Pandes, the Aryyals, the Khanals, the Ranas and the Boharas who, according to the Gurkha Vamsavali, had helped Ram Shah's predecessor, Drabya Shah, to capture Gorkha in 1559 A.D. Some of these families and the royal collaterals, called the Chautarias, played an important role during the campaign of Prithvinarayan Shah and, in recognition of their service, received further confirmation of their hereditary titles. (21) At the same time, Prithvinarayan acknowledged the supreme position of the Brahmins in the social order. He declared Nepal as the "true Hindustan with 4 castes and 36 varnas." (22) He distributed tax-free lands called the Birtas among the Brahmins and granted them total immunity from capital punishment. In a way, therefore, the victory of the Gurkhas also signified the ascendancy of Brahmanic orthodoxy in Nepal. (23)

(20) Regmi, n. 6, 20.

(21) By a Sanad of Prithvinarayan Shah, the chief offices of the State were distributed among the noble families in the following manner - Kappardari to Kalu Pande's descendants; Kazishin to the Basniats; foreign affairs in regard to southern countries to the sons of Shivaram Basniat and affairs regarding Tibet to the Pandes; the Panthas, the Magars and the Chautarias were to serve as commanders of the armed forces. See ibid., 282.

(22) Naraharinnath and Acharya, n. 1, 20.

(23) Levy, n. 9, I, 33.
The prevalence of a powerful feudal nobility side by side the hereditary monarchy brought new complications and tensions in Nepalese political life. While powerful feudal chiefs tried to outshine one another, other members of the nobility and Bharadars who did not enjoy hereditary rights constantly engaged themselves in intrigues to plan the destruction of the former. Often, when the King was a minor or proved to be a weakling the nobility grew too powerful. These tendencies were, however, kept in check so long as a strong personality like Prithvinarayan Shah ruled over them and the Gurkha flag of victory extended far and wide. But once his strong hand was removed a showdown among the top noble families became not only immediate but unavoidable.

Contest for Regency

The contest began during the minority of King Rana Bahadur Shah when his uncle Bahadur Shah and the Queen-Mother Rajendra Laxmi raced for the possession of the Regency. As they clashed with one another, the nobles also got divided into two parties to the support of their respective leaders. But the untimely death of the Queen in 1786 A.D. left Bahadur Shah unchallenged in the field. With the help of his associates, Damodar Pande, Abhiman Singh and Gajaraj Misra - a Rajguru (royal teacher), Bahadur Shah sought to become the actual ruler of Nepal. He treated the minor King with impunity, held back his regular allowance and, in the bargain, accumulated for himself "considerable treasures." (24) His plans were, however,

(24) Kirkpatrick, n. 5, 213.
frustrated when Rana Bahadur, coming of age, threw him out of power in 1795 A.D. The impetuous King, in turn, attempted to revive the personal despotism of the monarch in all state affairs. But his policy was stoutly resisted by the privileged nobility and the Brahman priestly families. At the end, he was forced to abdicate the throne in favour of his infant son, Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah, and live in exile for sometime. Later, when Rana Bahadur returned to Nepal to become the Mukhtiyar of his son, he used the support of the Thapas to fight the old aristocracy and replace it by a new one. It was to achieve this purpose that he also persecuted the Brahmans, confiscated their lands and proclaimed that the Brahmans had "forfeited the laws of their caste by the unworthiness of their conduct." (25) But this is as far as Rana Bahadur Shah could go, for in 1805 A.D. he was murdered and, from then on, ensued a frantic struggle for power among various factions of the nobility led mainly by the Pandes and the Thapas. Finally Bhimsen Thapa emerged as the strongest man of the kingdom and dominated the arena of politics for the next thirty years (1806-37 A.D.) as the Mukhtiyar (Prime Minister) of Nepal.

**Rise of Bhimsen Thapa**

Bhimsen Thapa brought into force a scheme in which all important posts in civil and military administration were filled by members of the Thapa family and their kinsmen. The Pandes and their partisans were ruthlessly persecuted. They were deprived of their

(25) Levy, n. 9, II, 320.
landed properties and even some Brahmans suffered humiliation. (26)
At the same time, Bhimsen established a political system in which the Monarch was reduced into a figure-head while all real powers belonged to him as Prime Minister. Fortunately for him both the Kings, Girvan Juddha Bikram Shah (1799-1816 A.D.) and Rajendra Bikram Shah (1816-47 A.D.), were minors when they ascended the throne. In Queen Tripura Sundari Devi, who acted as the Regent during the minority of Rajendra Bikram Shah, Bhimsen also found a sympathetic friend who was willing to help him further his political designs. How far Bhimsen succeeded in his designs can be seen from the following excerpts of a letter which Hodgson, the then British Resident at Kathmandu, wrote to the Governor General of India:

... Almost every office is filled with Bhimsen's creatures; he and his family monopolise all the loaves and fishes. Mere children of his kindred hold high commands. The ancient families of the Pandes and others who, by the constitution of this State, are entitled to share its counsels and exercise its highest offices, are excluded almost wholly from the one and other, besides being treated with habitual contumely by Matabar Singh, Bhimsen's overbearing and heedless nephew.

The Raja is hemmed into his palace, beyond which he cannot stir unaccompanied by the Minister, and then only to the extent of a short ride or drive. Even within the walls of his palace, the Minister and his brother both reside, the latter in the special capacity of a "dry nurse" to His Highness. (27)

But there were several serious flaws in Bhimsen's new arrangement. In the first place, his powers of an absolute despot alienated other sections of the nobility. Secondly, though the


Pandes and their supporters were driven out of power, they still constituted, as Hodgson wrote, "a weight of adverse rights which needs only to be put into motion to crush him [Bhimsen] and his family to pieces." (28) Thirdly, the presence of the British Resident in Nepal created new difficulties for Bhimsen. Eager to build direct contact with the ruler, the Resident was as much interested in breaking Bhimsen's monopoly over the royal palace as were the Pandes and their allies. This brought the Resident in close contact with Bhimsen's enemies and made the British Residency a nucleus of nefarious intrigues. Finally, a section of the army and even certain members of the Thapa family got dissatisfied with the manner in which Bhimsen conducted his office. The combined efforts of all these factions and parties led to the downfall of Bhimsen in 1837 A.D. (29)

Disintegration and Anarchy

But Bhimsen's fall only set in motion the forces of political disintegration. Almost immediately old family disputes, dissensions and violence returned to politics. In view of the ambitions of rival factions of the nobility, King Rajendra Bikram Shah failed to reassert the authority of the Crown. On the other hand, none of the families or their chiefs proved strong enough to restore stability in the administration. As a result, for the next eight

(28) Ibid., 135.

years, "the people let the rival nobles kill each other, and obeyed whichever faction for the time being spoke in the name of royalty." (30)

For a time though the process of disintegration was checked by Matabar Singh Thapa, Bhimsen's nephew who was made Mukhtiyar and Commander-in-Chief by the King in November 1843. (31) But the ruthless manner in which Matabar settled old scores with the Pande faction fanned, instead of subduing, the clan warfare. He also lost favour with the Chautarias by confiscating the property of Fateh Jang, their leader. Even the King, who watched with alarm Matabar's growing influence, became suspicious and uneasy. The end came soon when on the night of 17 May 1845 Matabar Singh was treacherously murdered by his nephew, Jang Bahadur. (32)

After the death of Matabar Singh, a coalition ministry was formed with Fateh Jang Chautaria at the head. But the petty intrigues among the various factions in the ministry made the administration totally ineffective. Taking advantage of the unsettled conditions, Jang Bahadur quietly laid his plans to oust the Junta which ruled in the name of the King. On 14 September 1846, Gagan Singh, one of the ministers and a favourite of the younger Queen, was found murdered. The next day Jang Bahadur and his brothers

(30) Hunter, n. 27, 157.

(31) For Matabar Singh Thapa and his time see H. B. Edwardes and H. Merivale, Life of Sir Henry Lawrence (London, 1873) I, Ch. XI, and J. T. Wheeler, Diary of Events in Nipal 1841 to 1846 (Calcutta, 1878).

(32) See Pudma Jung, n. 12, 49-58.
slaughtered at the Kot all the leading chiefs and Bharadars belonging to the camp of the Chautarias, the Pandes, the Basniats, the Thapas etc. Thus, the house of Jang Bahadur, later known as the Ranas, replaced the noble families of old.

III

Politics and Political System Under the Ranas

Jang Bahadur's policies

Like Dhimsen Thapa, Jang Bahadur also proceeded to crush his opponents at the very beginning. By massacring, hounding and exiling them out of the country he crushed for all time their chances of recovery. At the same time, Jang Bahadur realized that without securing the goodwill of the British Government of India, it would not be possible for him to consolidate his position. To this end he applied himself with the thorough-going finesse of a diplomat and soon secured British recognition of the new arrangement he had effected after the Kot massacre. Another event favoured Jang's fortune at this stage. In 1847, he forced King Rajendra Bikram Shah to abdicate in favour of his son, Surendra Bikram Shah, - a fact which was endorsed by 370 officers and Bharadars created by Jang Bahadur himself. (33)

The two important objectives with which Jang Bahadur began his office were, first, to entrench himself in power as permanently as possible and, second, to pass on the Prime Ministership as well as other important offices of the State to his brothers and

(33) Sharma, n. 6, 311.
descendants in perpetuity. In order to achieve these goals, he forced the Monarch to retire into his palace and take as little part in administration as possible. Secondly, he procured from King Surendra Bikram Shah, in 1856, a Lal Mohar (royal order) granting him the title of the Maharaja and the rulership of Kaski and Lumjung which was to pass from him "to his offspring to offspring." (34) He was further invested with powers to exercise rights over the life and death of the Nepalese subjects throughout the domain, to appoint or dismiss all public servants, to declare war or conclude peace or sign treaty with foreign powers, to inflict punishments on offenders and to repeal or amend or frame laws of the country. (35) By the same Lal Mohar it was fixed that the succession to Mukhtivari would pass from Jang Bahadur to his brothers and then to his son, Jagat Jang. (36) These extraordinary powers were reaffirmed, in 1857, by another Lal Mohar and a copy of it, attested by four brothers of Jang Bahadur, was sent to the Governor-General of India. (37)

Thus, by obtaining the highest legal sanction of the country, Jang Bahadur avoided the mistake which had cost Bhimsen Thapa his life. He also raised the social status of his family by securing from the King the elevated "caste of the Ranas" (38) and, later


(35) Ibid., 237.

(36) Ibid., 238.

(37) Ibid., 238.

(38) Lal Mohar granted by Surendra Bikram Shah on 5 May 1849, ibid., 233-5.
he began the policy of contracting marriages with the royal family which none of his predecessors had thought of doing. (39) These marriages, as his own son suggests, "were downright political treaties" (40) which raised the social standing of the Ranas on par with the members of the Shah family. Again, knowing well the immense political influence of the Brahmans and the position they held in society, Jang Bahadur bestowed liberal favours on them. He preserved their ancient rights, granted them lands and Birtas and, in general, promoted their economic interests. Similarly, though he advocated certain reforms like abolition of the Sati and slavery, he left untouched the civil and criminal laws based on the Hindu Dharmasastras (religious code). This attitude reflected Jang Bahadur's anxiety to show, notwithstanding the violence which attended his rise to power, that he was not unwilling to follow the rules and precepts of caste and society as laid down by the Brahmans. It was the same motive which prevented Jang Bahadur from upsetting the existing system on land or the essentially military structure of the Government. (41) As a matter of fact, he continued to recognize all the institutions which had been handed down to him from the past like granting of Birtas and Jagirs and practice of Pajani by

(39) In 1854, Jang Bahadur's eldest son, Jagat Jang, was married to the eldest daughter of the King. In the same year he himself married the sister of Fateh Jang Chautaria. Later, his second son, Jeet Jang, was married to another daughter of the King.

(40) Pudma Jang, n. 12, 171.

which the services of all officers of the State from the top downward were reviewed, renewed or terminated. Even the Bharadari or the grand council as mentioned by Kirkpatrick was preserved though its use, under the Rana despotism, seems to have been only nominal. (42)

The Rana Hierarchy

Thus, the advent of the Rana regime did not usher in an era of revolutionary changes in the social and political life of the country. What it actually did was to eliminate the great families of old and replace them by a new one. The administration was made hereditary property of the Ranas whose ranks and positions were determined on the basis of their seniority of birth. At the head of the family was the Maharaja Prime Minister who centralized in himself all civil and military powers. The scope of his jurisdiction, executive or legislative, remained mostly undefined and he ruled the country more or less like an absolute despot.

Below the Prime Minister was the Commander-in-Chief who was the next senior-most member of the Rana family. Then followed the four Commanding Generals of the army holding both civil and military authority in four different parts of the country. The appointment to other successive posts were made on the same basis of seniority among the various families of the Ranas. In the army, also, top offices were filled by the Ranas who held military titles from the very

(42) The three important occasions when the Bharadari was called to endorse the decision of the Prime Ministers were: (1) in 1847 when Jang Bahadur declared the abdication of Rajendra Bikram Shah, (2) in 1885 when Ranodip Singh was killed and Bir Shamsher proclaimed himself the Prime Minister, and (3) in 1950 when Mohan Shamsher declared the abdication of King Tribhuvan Bikram Shah.
moment of their birth. Apart from getting their regular salaries, the Ranas also received grants of Birras, commissions on revenue collection, Nazarana (43) and other feudal dues from their tenants.

**Over-centralization of Power**

There is no doubt that the new system brought in a long period of peace and stability in the Government. The centralization of power in a single man succeeded in checking, to a large extent, the dangerous drift towards disintegration caused by endless warfare among the older families. Secondly, by keeping friendly relations with the British Government of India, the Ranas also preserved Nepal's political independence.

But the dangers of over-centralization cannot be overemphasized. Ranging from all policy matters, administrative, fiscal and judicial, the Prime Minister kept control over every branch of administration. (44) The over-all effect of such a system, though it proved conducive to the personal despotism of the Maharaja, was to kill trust and initiative in the lower orders of the administration. On the other hand, the burden of daily work of the Prime Minister increased so enormously that it became almost impossible for a single man to tackle it efficiently. As a result, in the absence of properly defined rules and regulations, the administration was run on sudden flashes of intuition and wishes of the Maharaja.

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(43) The practice of paying presents to the landlord on such occasions as festivals or marriages in the latter's house.

(44) It is said that Jang Bahadur carried the practice to such extremes as to decide even the leave application of every soldier in the army. See Cavenagh, n. 41, 57.
The highly personalized character of the rule also made top officials, Bada Hakims (district governors), army generals and others throng at Kathmandu to crave for pleasures of the Prime Minister and of those Ranas who mattered in the Government. Even the four Commanding Generals who were supposed to attend duties at their regional headquarters spent most of the year at the capital. As a result, the rest of the country, especially the Terai and the Hills, was left to suffer its own fate and bear the worst exploitation of the regime. Kathmandu, on the other hand, came to represent the seat of power, filled with the hubbub of intense lobbying among the Ranas and such intrigues and rumours as are commonly associated with the court politics of a feudal potentate.

Dissensions in the Rana Family

But the greater evil of the system was in the kind of politics, personal jealousies and perpetual tensions which it originated within the Rana family itself. Jang Bahadur himself was not unaware of this danger as twice during his own life-time attempts were made by his brothers to kill him. (45) For all practical purposes the roll of succession which he had prepared in 1856 proved useless. Immediately after his death, two factions arose in the Rana family - one headed by his brothers and the other by his sons.

Again, despite the roll, the next Prime Minister, Ranoddip Singh, was murdered in 1885 by his own nephews. (46) The succession

(45) Pudma Jang, n. 12, 155-9.

(46) For an account of the assassination of Ranoddip Singh see William Digby, 1857 A Friend in Need; 1887 Friendship Forgotten (An Episode in Indian Foreign Office Administration) (London, 1890) 75-81.
was rearranged by Bir Shamsher (1885-1901 A.D.) but inspite of it, his successor Dev Shamsher was deposed by Chandra Shamsher only three months after his accession. It was during the Prime Ministership of Chandra Shamsher (1901-29 A.D.) that another elaborate succession roll was prepared and the Rana families were divided into 'A', 'B' and 'C' classes. (47) Later, in 1935, the names of the 'C' class Ranas were struck off from the succession roll because they were considered to be illegitimate by birth.

Results of the Rana Rule

These dissensions and incessant struggles for power among the important Ranas reduced the Government into a state of perpetual flux and anxiety. In view of the uncertainty about the future, every person, from the Maharaja to petty officers, got busy in accumulating for himself as much wealth as he could. As a result, in its later stages, the Rana administration became an instrument of systematic loot and oppression. It did little in the way of improving the basic amenities of life and lost every initiative to absorb new ideas from outside.

The system of granting Birtas to the Ranas and their dependants, on the other hand, raised a class of big landowners who represented the ruling aristocracy of the country. Between them and the masses, consisting mainly of the peasantry, there was hardly anything in common. The only intermediary class which grew

up under the Ranas consisted of merchants, Zamindars, small Birta owners, priests and petty officials who remained completely dependent on their feudal benefactors. As servants of the Ranas, the fate of these men was closely interlinked with that of their patrons. As such they adopted in politics an attitude which only helped in preserving the Rana rule.

Further, the prevalence of feudalism and lord-and-servant relationship prevented the growth of an independent middle class which, in the long run, might have exerted its influence against the continuation of the autocratic regime. During the later phases of the Rana rule, it became an article of faith with the rulers to suppress the growth of an educated intelligentsia. The right to higher education was strictly limited to the members of the ruling family, while the acquisition of knowledge by ordinary citizens was regarded as an act of sedition. Further, in order to prevent the growth of new ideas among the people, the Ranas kept the country rigidly shut off from all outside contacts. Those of the

(48) Birtas were, again, divided into several categories, e.g., Kusha Birta (given to the Brahman), Pota Birta (liable to pay the tax called Pota), Sewa Birta (given in the form of emoluments to government servants), and Tikuwa Birta which paid a nominal tax. See Mahesh Chandra Regmi, Some Aspects of Land Reform in Nepal (Kathmandu, 1960) 2-4.

(49) Throughout the Rana period only one College and four High Schools were started. Admission to the Tri-Chandra College at Kathmandu was limited to the Rana and some other higher caste families. See D. R. Regmi, Vartman Nepal aur Jana-Andolan ka Uddeshya (Banaras, 1948) 3.

In 1948, the Government controlled Gurkhanapra made an investigation about the total number of educated persons in Nepal. The following numbers were given - 7 holding M.A. or B.A. degrees, 48 undergraduates and 14 holding Sanskrit degrees. Gorkhanapra, 48 (Asadth 12, 2005 B.S.) 8.
non-ruling families who dared to leave the country in search of education or other matters, were deprived of their properties and received additional punishments when they returned to the country.

Thus, the survival of the Rana rule depended mainly on its capacity to suppress the growth of political awakening in the country. Yet, notwithstanding the oppressive character of the regime and social and economic backwardness of the country, the urge for change began to gain momentum in a section of the people. Some families in Nepal Terai, who came in greater contact with India than with Kathmandu, got imbued with the ideas of social and political reforms as generated by the Indian nationalistic movement. Similarly, some members of the lower class civil servants left Kathmandu to settle permanently in India. At a still later stage, some 'C' class Ranas migrated to India where they received higher education and such knowledge as could allow them to participate in commercial enterprises. It was from these three types of emigre Nepalese families that the first opposition to the Rana rule came in the shape of political movements. As these movements culminated in the armed revolt of 1950-1 and as the nature and scope of that struggle determined, to a large extent, the subsequent political developments of Nepal, the genesis of the revolt and its various phases form the subject matter of the next Chapter.