

## TOPICAL REPORTS

### Higher Education and Liberal Values in Nepal\*

Dipak Raj Pant

#### Higher education in the Nepalese context: Tradition and history

Higher education, in general terms, can be defined as formal training at post-essential level with a specialist orientation, implying a wider cultural exposure and some critical-theoretical exercise. In the context of Nepal<sup>1</sup>, formal education beyond the School Leaving Certificate (S.L.C.) level can be called higher education.

According to official sources (CBS/NPC 1993: 284-285), there were 110,239 enrolments in institutions of higher education in Nepal<sup>2</sup> in the academic year 1991/92. In view of the trend over the past years the number is bound to grow steadily.<sup>3</sup> But still only a very tiny section of Nepalese youth manages to make its way into higher education.

According to the above-mentioned sources (CBS/NPC, in the academic year 1991/92), total enrolments in the Humanities and Social Sciences were the highest in number (46,487) followed by Commerce/Management (29,314), Education (26,232), Natural Sciences and Technology (12,113), Law (7,991), Engineering (2,268), Medicine (1,777), Agriculture and Animal Sciences (731), Forestry (454), and Sanskrit (578, according to the latest available but unreliable data referring to the academic year 1988/89). More reliable data about enrolments in Sanskrit studies refer to the academic year 1986/87, in which total enrolments were counted to be 365 (new enrolments 167, carry overs 198).

Sanskrit used to be the only form of higher education - both as the medium of instruction of traditional letters and sciences and as the subject in its own right - till the early decades of this century. Now, it seems to be one of the least preferred. Together with Forestry<sup>4</sup> and Agriculture and Animal Science<sup>5</sup> it has been one of the least demanded subjects in past academic years.

It is a paradox that Sanskrit is so neglected in Nepal, the only Hindu Kingdom on earth and the cradle of Mahayana Buddhism. The scriptures of both orthodox Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist traditions are in Sanskrit. Another paradox is constituted by the fact that forestry is one of the least attended disciplines in Nepal where 37.6% (CBS/NPC 1992: 78) of the national territory is covered by forest and the forest is a major source of energy and revenue. Even more paradoxical is the fact that Agriculture and Animal Sciences is one of the least developed disciplines in a country where the overwhelming majority, 80.49% (CBS/NPC 1993: 126ff), of the economically active population (aged 10 years and over), is engaged in agro-pastoral (including fishery) activities.

Certainly, the lack of adequate facilities and infrastructures can be blamed for this. But only to some extent. The facilities and infrastructures of Engineering, Medicine and Law are not better, in either quantitative or qualitative terms, but these sectors have been gradually enlarged due to the continuous pressure of high demand. The decisive elements seem to be the value and the priority (and consequently, high demand) accorded the latter subjects by the young aspirants and their seniors and, as a whole, by society.

Sanskrit is considered to be "old" (equivalent to "rotten"), "un-modern" and "un-scientific" by the dominant élites as well as by the vast majority of upwardly mobile, lower-middle and middle class Nepalese of today. The prevalent common wisdom of the urbanised or urbanising Nepalese equates everything modern (in the sense of "new", "recent" and imported from the West) with "scientific" and vice versa. For them, science is not an approach, method or research which can be applied to Sanskrit and other traditional disciplines too, but is only relevant to modern, Western subjects. Research in and solution-oriented applied studies of traditional disciplines such as *Āyurveda* (medicine, in Tibetan *gSo-ba'i Rig-pa*), *Jyotirvijñāna* (astronomy), *Vyākaraṇa* (grammatics), *Dravya-Guṇa-Vijñāna* (metallurgy-chemistry), *Tarka* (logic), *Darśana* (philosophy), etc. could be very helpful - not only for overall cultural and scientific advancement, but also for economy and self-reliance.

The traditional Hindu (Vedic-Upanishadic-Puranic) and Buddhist (*Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna*) education based on Sanskrit used to be imparted through the centuries-old master-disciple tradition (*guru-śiṣya paramparā*). Today, this seems to be obsolete and impractical for the solution of many of the needs and problems of the people, but it served to shape the cultural and intellectual background of Nepalese society. In the past, it produced high quality classical scholarship.<sup>6</sup> In the last decades, the Sanskrit schools (including the Sanskrit University at Dang, south-western Nepal) have been producing only a few priestly workers (Nep. *karma-kāndī*) and some diploma and degree holders aspiring to government employment. No significant contribution has come from contemporary Sanskrit schools. The modern scholars of Nepali letters have limited themselves to the historical and contemporary aspects and problems of the Nepali vernacular and its creative literature. In sharp contrast to those of India and Tibet, the classical studies of Nepal have remained virtually neglected.

#### The beginnings of modern higher education: Social and political background

The history of modern formal higher education in Nepal is not a long one. The first institution of higher education (Tri-Chandra College in Kathmandu, then affiliated to Patna University of British India) was established by the then Rana premier Chandra Samsher in 1919. The Rana rulers were reluctant to initiate modern institutions while the populace was dormant. But growing contact with British India stimulated both the rulers and the people. The rulers

took a few timid steps towards modernisation and a section of the upper class intelligentsia became exposed to liberal values. The ruling establishment crawled hesitantly toward modernity. By doing so, it exposed its own contradictions to the intelligentsia. The intellectuals' progressive attitude and dissidence paved the way for eventual rebellion against the Rana regime. Both developments - the Rana rulers' reluctant opening and the Nepali intellectuals' growing dissidence - were due to their exposure to the liberal values articulated by the British education in the Indian subcontinent. Even the anti-colonial (anti-British) attitude of some was, in a way, caused by the higher education made available by the British. The British colonial regime could not afford to place man-power brought in from the British Isles in all the clerical and administrative positions that we needed to govern the vast territory of the Indian subcontinent. Neither could it accept some aspects of the local social structures. So intermediate and higher education was made available locally for the sake of local recruitment and reform.

The first agents of political change in modern Nepal were those who had received their higher education in British India and who were in contact with the British-educated Indian liberals, nationalists and anti-colonial forces. The Rana regime (hereditary premiership and command of the armed forces by the *Rāṇā* clan) drew its support from the British to a great extent. After the British departure from the Indian subcontinent the Ranas became politically and strategically orphaned. In 1950-51, the reigning monarch, King Tribhuvan, succeeded in ending the Rana rule. Alongside the king, the Nepali liberals were the protagonists of a series of events which paved the way for a more democratic administrative set-up in Nepal. The new rulers of the Republic of India played a very supportive role in favour of the liberals and the King.

During the 1950s, the Nepali liberals, former dissidents and revolutionaries, went on sharing power with the royal palace in a confused manner. Between 1951 and 1958, the political atmosphere in Nepal was confused, factional and extremely unstable. As Michael Hutt remarks on the creative literature of that period, a growing sense of disenchantment prevailed among the literati as well as among the ordinary people (Hutt 1989:143). Besides, the liberals' insensitivity to the tradition-minding masses gradually alienated them. The liberals were soon discredited as "immoral", "messy" and, above all, "anti-religious".

The liberals of Nepal had (and still have) a very confused and compound ideology made up of disparate elements. The post-colonial euphoria (later fully developed as "Third-World-ism", i.e., a tacit admiration and desperate imitation of, along with a loud antagonism to, the West) and a pronounced anti-traditional attitude have been the hallmarks of the Nepalese liberals as well. The incapacity to deliver socio-economic results, political stability and justice weakened the liberals' hold on power. Their anti-traditional reputation isolated them from the socio-cultural mainstream. The Nepali Congress, which represented the most liberal political force in the country during this period, soon lost power.<sup>7</sup>

The late King Mahendra,<sup>8</sup> a staunch nationalist and a mild Third Worldist, took full advantage of the chaotic situation and Nepali Congress alienation (Subedi 1978: 63-64). He imposed himself as the saviour of the nation, overthrowing the elected government led by the late Mr. B. P. Koirala<sup>9</sup> and, with that, the whole multi-party parliamentary system, in the year 1960. However, during the brief and turbulent period of pluralistic democratic experiments in the 1950s, higher education had become one of the priorities. In 1955, the first university (Tribhuvan University) was established. Many colleges were opened and the number of people approaching the institutions of higher education in the country and abroad (mostly in the Indian universities) increased. Even after the end of multi-party democracy, higher education continued to be a priority.

In 1962, the Panchayati (partyless) constitution<sup>10</sup> was introduced in Nepal and, for the first time, the country was formally declared to be a Hindu Kingdom.<sup>11</sup> It was a shrewd (and successful) move to play the "tradition" card at home, and to de-legitimize the liberal (anti-traditional) intelligentsia represented by the Nepali Congress leadership and its supporters. Externally, it also served to obtain tacit approval and legitimacy from an influential section of the political and cultural élites of India (the "high" caste and aristocratic Hindus) which still regards Nepal as the pure and pristine Hindu land and considers so-called "Hinduness" (in the Hindi neologism, *hindutva*) more crucial than democracy or dictatorship. Therefore, the declaration of Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom was related to the question of self-legitimacy not only *vis-à-vis* the liberal intelligentsia and the traditional majority at home but also *vis-à-vis* the Hindu élites and the majority of the citizens of neighbouring India, where it was felt that Hindu identity was suppressed by the self-imposed, official "secularism".<sup>12</sup>

The Panchayati establishment also accorded priority to the development of higher education. During the last three decades (1960-1990), the institutions of higher education expanded and the number of individuals entering higher education grew rapidly. The quantitative growth in the higher education sector was favoured by growing contacts with the outside world, a diversifying socio-economic life, an increased population and also, to a great extent, the Panchayati government's favourable policies. In 1973/74, a new education plan (inspired and aided by the U.S.A.) was implemented in the higher education, and resulted in a total fiasco. The old system (of British-Indian type) was then reinstated with minor and nominal changes. In the meantime, the number of Nepalese youngsters seeking enrolment in Nepalese campuses and neighbouring Indian colleges and universities continued to grow.

### Education, economy and ethics

One of the most important factors favouring the expansion of the higher educational establishment has been the upward mobility of the Nepalese lower and middle classes. Today, for an average Nepalese of lower and middle classes (and, "clean" or "high" castes) the most rewarding job is a "not-to-



work" job, i.e. a "sitting-in-a-chair" type of job. The "sitting-in-chairs" upper and middle class (and, of course, "clean" or "high" caste) fellows have been the models of success in Nepalese society. A typical Nepalese success story usually concerns a son of a village farmer who has left his home and village, educated himself, become a big shot in the government administration, bought a piece of land in the urban area of the Kathmandu Valley, and built a two-storied brick house.

Those employed in the government machinery constitute the model and reference group for all, including the young of the occupational castes ("low" and "unclean") and ethnic groups. An average schooled Nepalese adolescent (of any caste or ethnic group) aspires to get rid of the rural-based, agropastoral and traditional duties. Higher education provides an instrument of evasion from manual work. It constitutes the stairs by which one may reach the upper echelons of society and polity by gaining employment in Nepal's labyrinthine politico-administrative set-up.

It is noteworthy that, despite the fact that Nepal is an overwhelmingly agrarian country, enrolments in agricultural and animal sciences have been very scarce in comparison to other fields of study.<sup>13</sup> The high priority accorded to the office employment *jāgir* (originally a Persian-Urdu term meaning the feudal allotment of land properties and local administrative responsibilities to courtiers by a sultan) by the lower/middle classes and the government's indifference to vocational and technical training have caused this discrepancy. The same can be said about forestry and related disciplines.<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted that an expansion of bureaucracy, an increase in foreign aid (which serves mainly to sustain offices, projects and personnel) and a quantitative boom in higher education all coincide. Growth in these inter-related sectors, and in the process of urbanisation was spectacularly fast in the late 1970s and 1980s. The growth in the number of individuals being sent from the higher educational institutions to the job market soon outpaced the capacity of the administrative machinery to absorb them.

Higher education has been able to stimulate a critical attitude towards the authorities, traditions and socio-political status quo, but has not been able to generate true liberal values in the socio-economic sphere. The Nepalese establishment has never been serious about socio-economic liberalism. It has been doing its best to check criticism and dissidence. The so-called "mixed" economy (adopted by most of the "Third World-ist" regimes) of Nepal was in reality a government-controlled one. Corruption was the natural outcome. Not because Nepalese high officials are particularly immoral in public affairs; but because corruption is a direct consequence of the complexity of the government intervention. And, if the government is not accountable for its deeds to any public forum (as was the case in Nepal for the last three decades until the advent of democracy in 1990), matters get worse.

The widespread corruption angered socially and politically conscious individuals engaged in higher education, while for others of them it also showed the "right" path to follow: get the right placing (through the help of your castemen, kinsmen, alliances etc.) inside the most "fruitful" sectors of the

government machinery (e.g. customs or taxes or forest department) and grab as much as you can. Thus kinship, friendship and bureaucratic alliances became much more important than professional training or competence. But, at the same time, as pro forma, diplomas and degrees from higher institutions were indispensable in "modern" Nepal.

The Nepalese state has been, until recently, a mosaic of several fiefdoms commanded by "big shots" (*thūlo mānche*) to whom many longed to be close and kin (*āphno mānche*). The ultimate sources of power of the various *thūlo mānches* were the overt and covert lobbies operating around the central "power-house" (i.e. the royal palace). Many of the pro-establishment, educated individuals have been entering the race to become an *āphno mānche* of some *thūlo mānche* in order to get a better and higher placement (*rāmro jāgir*). Many of the educated Nepalis had to content themselves with lower ranks and "bad" placements (e.g. in the postal services) and, therefore, marginal opportunities to "earn", while for a large section of the educated there was no job but just frustration and anger. Naturally, a large section of the educated youth embraced radical ideologies.

One of the most disheartening outcomes of higher education in Nepal has been the distortion of the traditional work ethic. Traditional work concerned with agriculture, forests, livestock breeding and related services and craft businesses (specialities of particular caste groups) have been looked down upon by the new, educated generation. There has been an incessant unilateral campaign against caste for decades. So anything related to caste (including specialised occupations, knowledge, skills, experience etc.) is implicitly condemned. Naturally, no local craftsmanship and entrepreneurship could develop in such a climate. Education has alienated the youngsters from their rural-based, native communities and from their knowledge, skills and traditions. At the same time, truly urbane, free individual enterprises and a realistically ambitious entrepreneurial youth have not emerged. In the meantime, rapid urbanisation and the growth of tourism generated a substantial market for a broad spectrum of services, crafts and businesses. Even the high-potential agro-alimentary sector, where Nepalese have good experience and no outside competitors, was left aside. The *jāgir*-oriented lower/middle class Nepalese could not cash in on the new situation.

So far the entrepreneurial void has been filled by Indian migrants. Today, craftsmen, traders and service-workers of Indian origin are the busiest economic operators in Nepal. Even the petty hawkers, selling fruits and vegetables and offering semi-skilled services, in the Nepalese urban centres are mostly migrants from the adjoining Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It is unthinkable for an average Nepalese with some education to make money by venturing and working hard. He/she prefers, if it is affordable, to get higher education and wait in long queues to enter the administrative service or, even better, any foreign-sponsored development project's office. The Nepalese experience of the last three decades has shown that higher education may also distort traditional morality and the socio-economic fabric and that it alone cannot generate liberal values.

The population of unemployed and inadequately employed (i.e. "lower" rank despite "higher" diploma) youngsters has been growing rapidly in the last decades. The economic omnipresence of the Indians too has been pinching the Nepalese.<sup>15</sup> Foreign aid has been viewed by most critics as legitimacy conferred upon the regime, and as a nice opportunity for a few already enshrined in the power structure. The drop-outs, dissidents and unsatisfied ones have increased in number. Radically anti-Indian, anti-western and anti-regime sentiments have been swaying the majority of the highly educated "have-nots". Left political forces, until recently outlawed and underground, gained more from this situation.

Another interesting development, closely related with higher education in Nepal, has been the assertion of ethnicity. Many educated individuals belonging to different ethnic/territorial/religious groups have become "aware" of their "separate" identity. In the last few years, Nepal has witnessed a proliferation of cultural and recreational groups of different ethnic/religious/territorial belongings. Gradually, these groups have been assuming a more aggressive political posture. With the advent of democracy (after the popular revolt of 1990), these groups have become openly and loudly political with many claims, demands and vindications.

It is interesting to note that most of the ethno-political groups are organized by individuals who are modern-educated, urban-based and, to some extent, pseudo-westernized. They claim to struggle for their traditions while their life-styles and ideologies have nothing to do with their own traditions. Their relations with the native rural area are limited to vacations or special events, and they mostly dwell and operate in the capital or urban centres. It is also noteworthy that many of the top leaders of such ethno-political organisations have been actively involved in leftist politics in the past. But now most have already dissociated themselves from the mainstream left party.

To a great extent, higher education has reinforced radicalism (e.g. far left politics, retrenchment in ethnicity) in Nepal. Higher education provided a critical attitude to the status quo. But it failed to stimulate a constructive approach such as the invention of new and re-qualification of old *métiers*, economic enterprises, social reforms, participation in existing programmes, environmental consciousness and ethics, critical revaluation of the traditions, and so on. It taught to disobey but not to discern. Instead of encouraging a rigorously scientific attitude to tradition (which, nevertheless, presupposes an initial curiosity and a sympathetic attitude) it has been turning the youth blindly against it. The bigoted and uncritical attitude of the old establishment has further stiffened the blind opposition of the educated, young generation. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, in between the radicals and the bigots, the cultural and religious patrimony (particularly the Hindu tradition) of Nepal is in great danger of distortion and the gradual loss of many of its valuable tenets.

In the political arena too, higher education has not been able to articulate liberal values in Nepal. Liberalism has been mostly misunderstood and misrepresented (as being "alien", "free for all", "messy"). As in many

other parts of the so-called "Third World", in Nepal the average intellectual's fascination with modernity or progress has been tinged with Marxism (which, curiously, is not labelled "alien"). Marxism seems modern and legitimate to many intellectuals who identify liberalism just with the free import of cars and cosmetics and free access for foreign multinationals to the national economy. It is precisely because the intellectuals themselves articulate such misrepresentations and give them legitimacy, while the oppressive and corrupt establishment tries to negate all possibilities for free debate, that the youngsters in the campuses embrace fire-brand radicalism.<sup>16</sup> Three decades of the Panchayati regime has bred more far-leftist radicals than liberals or any other type. This is borne out by the outcomes of the 1991 and 1994 parliamentary elections (the first multi-party elections since 1958) in the areas renowned for more educated and well-exposed youth.<sup>17</sup>

### Liberal values and "barefoot" capitalism

Liberalism in the Nepalese context should be explained as "barefoot" capitalism. This means a free enterprise society right from the lowest levels. It requires a kind of legislation which supports and protects grassroots-level enterprises through credit, service, market and other facilities. It also demands, contrary to what exists, a non-obstructive, people-friendly and streamlined education. There is a great need for streamlined intermediate and higher education, capable of providing necessary skilled man-power at all levels and a critical but constructive intelligentsia. Nepal cannot afford to have a huge, money-losing, diploma-distributing academia. Nor can it sustain a sterile and born-tired intelligentsia, equipped only with negative attitudes.

A cobbler (*Sārki*) in the highlands or a rickshaw-puller in the lowlands finds it hard to cope with the changing reality. He cannot improve his devices and skills due to the lack of training, credit and other facilities as well as sufficient protection. He cannot compete with goods from the modern leather items manufacturers or, say, with the motorized three-wheeler's passenger services. But there are no socio-economic designs to make him more competent and to improve his devices and skills through training and financial facilities. There are young, educated radicals who are quite eager to make him hold a revolutionary flag. There are others who would like to turn him into a welfare-recipient citizen. There have always been the pundits who could console him with explanations regarding other "worlds" and other "lives". The intellectuals and politicians shed tears for him. They also have elaborate theories concerning the causes and remedies of his malaise. But they all are really against him because his tools and manners are un-modern. His existence is an "ought-not-to-be" because it reminds them of nasty things such as casteism, exploitation, class conflict, backwardness and so on. He is forced to make his living in a system which, notwithstanding the indispensability of his services for the time being, is increasingly working against him. The whole system is set to move towards the elimination and replacement of "old" and "backward" jobs without worrying about the worker who is making his



livelihood through them. Instead, it would make more sense to improve gradually the conditions of the worker and to qualify, little by little, his instruments, organisation and environment in order to let him be the protagonist of the whole development process.

More refined products and services from bigger and better organized companies (mostly Indian and foreign) on one side, and the indifference of the élites regarding his training, devices and finances on the other, are pressing the traditional barefoot entrepreneur of Nepal to economic irrelevance. His "lower" social standing (in terms of caste and class) becomes more unbearable due to his growing economic irrelevance.

Present-day liberalism in Nepal is only of the head-level. If a big businessman (usually, he/she belongs to a "clean" caste and middle or higher class) wants to start a new venture, he/she gets almost all the facilities and protection he/she needs. The contrary is to be found in the case of a small local artisan or serviceman, e.g. a blacksmith (*Kāmī*), tailor (*Damāī*), a cobbler (*Sārki*), farmer, livestock-breeder, craftsman or rickshaw-puller. In this regard, the Small Farmers Development Programme (SFDP) of the Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal (ADB/N) has been a nice exception and a good attempt. But it has too many limitations and snags. Its implementation has not been quite satisfactory due to widespread corruption and opaque and unstable politics. Corruption along with the lack of stability and transparency in the government's policies and plans stand in the way of socio-economic betterment, because these preclude an average individual's or household's ability to take long-term decisions, to make plans and to participate effectively in existing socio-economic programmes.

At present (early 1995) Nepal has a liberal political set-up. The major political players (the Nepal Communist Party in Government and the Nepali Congress in opposition) declare themselves to be committed to liberal and democratic values. The mainstream left (Nepal Communist Party) looks more like a modern social-democratic and less like a hardline communist organisation. The international community views Nepal and the Nepalese with sympathy. It is the right moment to overhaul the existing administrative and educational set-up in order to establish new and efficient ones.

#### Notes:

\*These considerations are based on the personal experiences and observations of the author, both as a native and as a university teacher and field researcher in Nepal.

<sup>1</sup>According to the last census (1991), the total population of Nepal was 18,462,081 compared to the 15,022,839 of the previous (1981) census report. According to the results of the 1991 census, the majority of the Nepalese population is still illiterate. The literacy rate for age 6 years and over is 41.25% for both sexes. According to the 1981 statistics, the overall literacy rate was 23.3%, which was projected to reach 33% in 1987.

<sup>2</sup>Enrolments in foreign institutions are not included in this account. A good number of Nepalese students are to be found in various Indian colleges, institutes and universities. A small number is also enrolled in other countries. A few Nepalese students and scholars go to overseas (beyond India) institutions through various scholarship and exchange programmes for technological studies and higher specialisation or research.

<sup>3</sup>The number of enrolments in public institutions of higher education in Nepal was 52,070 in 1982/83; 48,229 in 1983/84; 55,560 in 1984/85; 54,355 in 1985/86; 78,490 in 1986/87; 83,356 in 1987/88; 95,240 in 1988/89; 79,432 in 1989/90; 93,753 in 1990/91. Exact information about the Sanskrit faculty and departments during the last three academic years is not available.

<sup>4</sup>The quantified information provided by official sources about enrolments in institutes of Forestry shows considerable stagnation and even a regressive trend. According to the official sources, there were 445 (1982/83), 299 (1983/84), 333 (1984/85), 489 (1985/86), 553 (1986/87), 541 (1987/88), 587 (1988/89), 577 (1989/90), 561 (1990/91) and 454 (1991/92) enrolments in the Forestry institutes in past academic years.

<sup>5</sup>According to official sources, the number of enrolments in Agriculture and Animal Sciences has been as follows in past academic years: 1306 (1982/83), 1097 (1983/84), 1176 (1984/85), 1176 (1985/86), 956 (1986/87), 1151 (1987/88), 1252 (1988/89), 1318 (1989/90), 684 (1990/91) and 721 (1991/92).

<sup>6</sup>Vālmīki (several centuries before Christ ?); Buddhahadra (358-429 A.D. ?); Śīlāmañju and Buddhakīrti (7th century A.D.); Guṇadharmā (8th cent. A.D.), Bodhigupta and Vāgīśvarakīrti (11th cent. A.D.), Ratnarakṣita and Ravindra (13th cent. A.D.), Mahākarna, Sāmantaśrī, Śūnyaśrī Miśra, Kṣemacandra and Janakīrtisena (12th - 15th cent. A.D. ?) etc. are said to be some of the renowned Hindu and Buddhist scholars of Nepal.

<sup>7</sup>The Nepali Congress is the most senior of all the political parties of Nepal. After a brief and controversial period in power (1991-94) it is now on the opposition benches of the parliament. Its founding leaders were protagonists in the revolutionary events of 1950/51. For a long period (between 1960 and 1990) its leaders and members had to live as exiled, underground, semi-clandestine elements. It declares itself to be committed to liberal values, social democracy, human rights and constitutional monarchy. It played an active and leading role (along with the mainstream leftist organisation now governing Nepal) in the popular revolt of 1990 which eventually ended the three decades-long Panchayatī system which was absolute monarchy in disguise. Usually, the critics considered the urbanites and the educated as its support bases. But the last two parliamentary polls proved that it does not enjoy so much support in the Kathmandu Valley or elsewhere in urbanised areas with a higher concentration of educated people. It has been badly defeated by the mainstream leftist force (Nepal Communist Party - United Marxist-Leninist) in most of the electoral constituencies of the Kathmandu Valley and the eastern region which hosts the relatively prosperous and educated population in Nepal.

<sup>8</sup>The late King Mahendra (the father of the presently reigning monarch, King Birendra) was an able statesman with literary passions. He was successful in obtaining popular support while crushing the Nepali Congress, and with that the whole of the multi-party, parliamentary democracy in Nepal. He was also successful in designing and implementing a foreign policy which resulted in the international recognition of Nepal as a sovereign and independent nation, in a balanced relationship with its two giant neighbours (India and China), and in much foreign technical and economic assistance for development despite Nepal's poor record in respecting civil liberties and democratic norms. His poems have been published in two volumes, *Usaiko Lāgi* and *Pheri Usaiko Lāgi*. Critics have praised his verse for its tender, lucid and lyrical style. Many of his poems are imbued with nationalist fervour while some are remarkably good in describing natural beauty in a picturesque style.

<sup>9</sup>The late Mr. B.P. Koirala was the first elected premier of Nepal (1958). So far there has not been a single political figure in the post-World War II history of Nepal who can be compared to him in terms of popularity, international recognition and intellectual stature. He spent many years in the late King Mahendra's prison and in exile (in India) before his return to Nepal. After his return, he campaigned for multi-party democracy in the referendum of 1980. He was a literary genius, too. His writings in Nepali reflect a rare combination of realism and psychic intrigues, and an evergoing clash between the ideal and the real. In his fiction (and, many of

his opponents believed and gossiped, in his real life, too) Koirala seems to be overly preoccupied with the role of sex. His literary "obsession" with *libido* was quite successfully exploited by his opponents to depict him as "immoral" and "hedonistic". Besides, his much publicised anti-traditional, anti-religious stand discredited him in the eyes of the tradition-minding Nepalese. The most representative of his works are *Doṣi Casmā*, *Sumnimā*, *Tin Ghumti*, *Narendra Dāi* etc.

<sup>10</sup>*Pañcāyat* (lit. 'council of five') used to be a grassroot-level socio-juridical platform in the older times. It used to be a public tribune of five (Skt. *pañca*, Nep. *pāñca*) eldest (and, supposedly, wisest) members of a village community for decision-making, conflict-resolution and so on. The term had a cosy and respectable place in the people's minds. The notion was utilised to establish a new political order in 1962. After years of corruption, mismanagement and repression of dissenting voices at all political levels, the term "Panchayat" has lost its original significance and has been completely discredited even at the grassroots-level.

<sup>11</sup>After a passionate and controversial debate on "secular" vs. "Hindu" state, and despite some hue and cry by the neo-Buddhist and ethno-political organizations, and by some leftists and democrats, against the "Hindu state", the term "Hindu Kingdom" has remained in the Nepalese constitution (see *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047* (1990), Part I, Art. 4.)

<sup>12</sup>In modern India "secularism" has been translated as *dharmā-nirapekṣatā*; if defined strictly, it would mean 'indifference to *dharmā*'. *Dharma* is a very wide and all-inclusive term ('righteousness', 'duties', 'cosmic order' or just 'order' and so on). But modern Indians have confusingly equated it with 'religion' in the Judaic-Christian or Islamic sense. Even today, after almost half a century of the constitution of the Indian Union, *dharmā-nirapekṣatā* is still a very controversial and unsettled issue which has caused much equivocation and tension. And, to some extent, it can be held partially responsible for the increasing political clout of the fundamentalists on all sides.

<sup>13</sup>The share of agro-pastoral activities in the gross domestic product of Nepal was about 56% in 1990/91 (cf. C.B.S./NPC 1992: 36).

<sup>14</sup>Forests are the main source of energy (fuelwood) in rural Nepal. It covers about 95% of the total fuel-items for the whole country. Revenue from forest products was about 4% of the total revenue in 1986/87. The forests cover more than 50% of the total supply of animal food in the country. Deforestation constitutes the major threat of an environmental, economic and energy-related crisis in Nepal.

<sup>15</sup>Anti-Indian sentiments have always been a marked feature of both the so-called nationalist (pro-Panchayat) and leftist forces of Nepal.

<sup>16</sup>Since the early 1980s, most of the students' unions of various campuses of Nepal have been offed by the leftists; many of the teachers' unions too have been captured by them (naturally through free and fair elections).

<sup>17</sup>The eastern region (comprising Mechi, Koshi and Sagarmatha zones) and the Kathmandu Valley have the highest number of educated persons. In the past general elections (1991 and 1994) the major mainstream leftist party, Nepal Communist Party - United Marxist-Leninist (N.C.P.-UML), won most of the parliamentary seats in these areas.

## References:

- Bandhu, C.M. 1989. "The Role of Nepali Language in Establishing the National Unity and Identity of Nepal." *Kailash* XV, no. 3-4.
- Baral, L.R. 1983. *Nepal's Politics of Referendum*. N. Delhi: Vikas.
- Central Bureau of Statistics/National Planning Commission. 1987. *Population Monograph of Nepal*. Kathmandu: His Majesty's Government of Nepal.
- Central Bureau of Statistics/NPC. 1988. *Statistical Pocket Book*. Kathmandu: HMG/Nepal.
- 1992. *Statistical Pocket Book*. Kathmandu: HMG/Nepal.
- 1993. *The Analysis of the 1991 Population Census*. Kathmandu: HMG/Nepal.
- 1993. *Statistical Year Book of Nepal*. Kathmandu: HMG/Nepal.
- Hutt, M. 1989. "Reflections of Political Change in Modern Nepali Literature." *Kailash* XV, no. 3-4, p.143.
- 1991. "Drafting the Nepal Constitution." *Asian Survey*, vol. XXXI, no.11, pp. 1029, 1035.
- Luintel, Y.R. 1989. "Communication Gap: The Presence and Absence of Rural Youth in Village Mainstream." In: D.R. Pant (ed.). *Aspects of Rural Communication in Nepal*. Kathmandu: privately published, pp. 69-80.
- Mishra, S.P. 1985. *B.P. Koirala. A Case Study in Third World Democratic Leadership*. Bhubaneswar: Konark.
- Pant, D.R. et al. 1990. *Rāṣṭriya Jana-Āndolan: Vivaraṇ ra Viśleṣaṇ*. Kathmandu: privately published.
- Pant, Ramesh. 1990. "Dharma-nirapekṣatā ek Anāvaśyak Vivād." In: D.R. Pant et al. *Rāṣṭriya Jana-Āndolan: Vivaraṇ ra Viśleṣaṇ*. Kathmandu: privately published.
- Sharan, D.N. 1974. *Nepālī Sāhitya-kā Itihāsa*. Patna: Bihar Hindi Grantha Academy.
- Sharma, B.C. 1975. *Nepālko Aitihāsik Rūp-rekhā*. Varanasi: B. M.P. Sharma, 3rd ed.
- Sharma, T.N. 1975. *Nepālī Sāhitya-ko Aitihāsik Paricaya*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi.