

The Intersection of ‘Hindu’, ‘Independence,’ and ‘Sovereignty’ in the Nepali Public Discourse of the 1920s

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the public discourse on Nepal around the 1923 treaty which rested on its central theme of reassuring Nepal’s independence and sovereignty in the comity of nation-states, studying Nepali national imaginative elements of statehood that unravels intricacies of history for the present discourse of Nepali state in a substantial way. The aim is to unpack the treaty’s reception and assess its consequences in shaping Nepali ‘state’ discourse, shedding fresh light on a historical event that has remained largely understudied. Once a treaty is signed, it becomes public property, capable of igniting change in the behavior of the signing nations or the lives of their citizens, or both. Examining how such changes manifested in the public discourse in Nepal and beyond after the 1923 treaty provides valuable insights into the formative democratic space in the country. For this, it employs a triangulation of primary sources from Nepal’s domestic discourse as chronicled in the Gorkhapatra. The second set of data is drawn from the sporadic and emergent Nepali media landscape of the 1920s, primarily based in India. Furthermore, a third set of sources is assembled from English-language newspapers from India and the United Kingdom that reported on the 1923 treaty as it unfolded. This approach, hitherto unapplied in the study of this treaty, provides a comprehensive understanding of the public discourse surrounding it.

Keywords: 1923-treaty, Nepal-Britain relations, public discourse, Nepali sovereignty, Gorkhapatra

Introduction

The distinction between public and government discourse was not discernible in Nepal during or before the 1920s. The actions of its government led by Rana Prime Ministers dictated the direction of any discourse at the national level. Discourse in this framework, defined as communication "governed by analyzable

rules and transformations" (Foucault, 1972, P. 211), could be identified through the objects, concepts, subjects, and strategies employed by the communicator, which was the government in this context.

For example, a notice from the Nepal government informing youths about recruitment¹ for the First World War would typically prompt

a confirmatory response from the people, with occasional and limited opposition, mostly from the mothers (Des Chenes, 1991, p. 276). The success of these notices could be measured by the number of aspiring recruits lining up at the designated center, a common occurrence in Nepal during the War.² In the context of this chapter, therefore, the exchange of communication through texts, symbols, and talks among individuals in the public domain is defined as public discourse. This encompasses media discourse, political communication, and communication in organizational and professional settings. At this, a question may arise how ‘public’ was this public discourse in reality. It was in fact an elite-driven discourse, which demonstrated abundant interest in the political and social developments in Nepal during the time.

The transformative nature of discourse, as emphasized by Fairclough (1992, p. 8), plays a critical role in catalyzing socio-cultural change. Discourse, therefore, is a practice through which individuals "invest reality with meaning" (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009), and as employed in this essay, is akin to direct or indirect deliberation on the aspects of the 1923 treaty even if the treaty is not tangibly referred to.

Exploration of the discourse of a specific field of study during a particular historical

period through the analysis of primary sources provides valuable insights into the society and polity of that time. This approach eliminates potential hindsight bias, fostering a deeper and more accurate understanding of history. This study aims to capture some of these insights in the framework of the 1923 treaty by analyzing selected original newspaper sources from the 1920s. The focus of the investigation remains objectively on the Nepali language newspapers as they approached the context, theme, and importance of the 1923 treaty. Subsequently, the chapter extends its examination to include selected English language coverage of the treaty from India and abroad, which is an attempt to find a comparative perspective.

At the time the 1923 treaty was signed, the *Gorkhapatra* stood as the sole active Nepali language newspaper. Within the decade the treaty was signed, three Nepali newspapers originating from India—the *Gorkha Samsar*, the *Gorkhali*, and the *Tarun Gorkha*—appear to have played some part in shaping the emerging vernacular socio-political discourse on Nepal (Devkota, 1967, pp. 46-47). There were other newspapers dedicated to the progress of Nepali language and literature. They were also irregular and none of them existed at the time the treaty was signed and its immediate aftermath.

Table 1

Newspapers Dedicated to the Progress of Nepali Language and Literature

SN	Names of the newspapers	Issues examined	Remarks
1	Gorkhali 	Available at the archives of Madan Puraskar Library, Lalitpur, Nepal.	

During Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher's rule, the official government narrative in Nepal trickled into the public space through the *Gorkhapatra*, the country's exclusive newspaper. It is important to note that the *Gorkhapatra* held minimal influence as a means of discourse, with the government's message disseminated more effectively through instruments such as the army, tax collectors, local zamindars, mukhiyas, and other government employees, serving as potent narrative transmitters and law enforcers. These entities systematically promoted every significant government action, while the *Gorkhapatra* acted as a force multiplier by showcasing such deeds in print and reinforcing the rulers' position (Regmi & Kharel, 2002). Being the only Nepali language newspaper at the time of the 1923 treaty, the *Gorkhapatra*'s coverage of the events surrounding the treaty stands out as the most regular, detailed, and occasionally unexpectedly analytical for that era. It contributed to the political socialization process, shaping public behavior in favor of government actions.

Among the other Nepali language newspapers from that decade, the *Gorkha Samsar*, which was published three years after the 1923 treaty from Dehradun, India, is noteworthy. An examination of its archival records reveals that while the newspaper did not explicitly reference the 1923 treaty, it consistently emphasized the key theme of the treaty such as Nepal's continuous independence and dignity compared to the feudatories of India.

The *Gorkhali*, published from Banaras in India under the auspices of Subba Devi Prasad Sapkota, offered a more critical approach. Sapkota, a government employee at Munsikhana,³ exiled from Nepal in 1903 due to his opposition to the Younghusband expedition and adopted a hostile position towards Chandra Shumsher's government and the Rana regime in general. The *Gorkhali* presented an oppositional viewpoint on Chandra Shumsher's policies, both domestic and foreign. Notably, this newspaper was banned about a year before the treaty and there is no question it would refer to the treaty in any

form. Another newspaper of the same name- the *Gorkhali*- published briefly by Madhav Prasad Regmi and edited by Surya Bikram Geywaly during the First World War came also from Banaras. A study of several of its issues archived at Madan Puraskar Library in Lalitpur informs that this weekly newspaper's focus was more on the advancement of the Nepali language and literature. But its front pages extensively covered news of the War from all over the world as current affairs. This publication barely continued for a year, having closed down much before the 1923 treaty.⁴

The *Tarun Gorkha*, a twin publication of the *Gorkha Samsar*, emerged as the third newspaper that represented or influenced the perspective of Nepali-speaking people residing in India during this period.⁵ Despite the British Empire's citizenship concept aligning with the notion of domicile, the Nepali-speaking community in India considered Nepal as its guardian state, expressing dissatisfaction with its close collaboration with the colonial power. This situation led to an increasing identity crisis among the Nepalis in India. On the one hand, they maintained a growing sense of belonging to home because of common language and culture, while on the other, uncertainty about the community's future in the light of continued British colonialism made them feel insecure and more willing to integrate into the Indian society (Dasgupta, 1999). This was abundantly reflected in the general coverage of the India-based Nepali newspapers of that era.

It is central to acknowledge that these newspapers were in their very early stage. They often began with high aspirations but faced challenges in gathering sufficient resources for sustained publications. Simultaneously, both the Indian and Nepalese governments closely monitored their activities, and any criticism of the authorities of either country could result in forced closure, as experienced by many. Despite their limited impact on the populace, these newspapers played a significant role in shaping narratives around education, political reforms, democracy, and the unity of the Nepali community.

To further diversify perspectives, this study concludes by examining English language coverage of the 1923 treaty from the same era. While several newspapers are discussed, notable exploration includes an editorial from *The Pioneer Mail* in Allahabad and some news stories from *The Daily Telegraph* in London, both subject to analytical consideration. Remarkably, the *Telegraph's* coverage stands out as particularly impressive among the English newspapers because of the contributions of Perceval Landon from Nepal and the region.⁶

These sources, analyzed through a triangulated approach, are treated as representative coverage to present a comparative outlook. English media of the time provided more extensive coverage of the treaty compared to Nepali newspapers, indicating that the event was well-received as momentous in the United Kingdom and more informed circles. From the signing of the treaty to the exchange of ratified copies, English newspapers covered the events with much greater detail and included illustrations too. The domestic narrative of Nepal around the treaty, as conveyed by the *Gorkhapatra*, found broad representation in the English language press. It was frequently the overlooked or

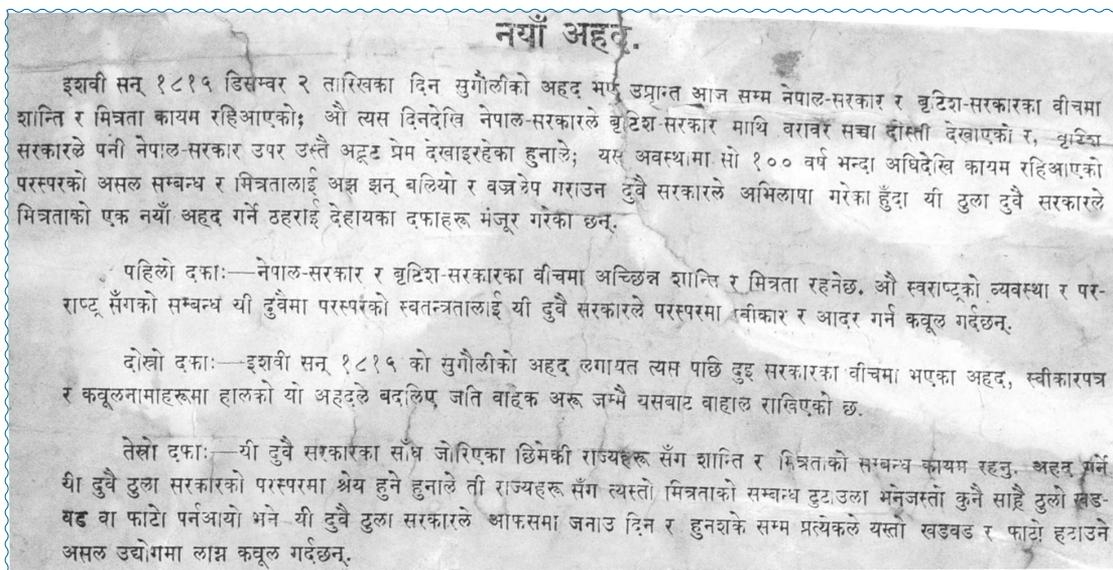
presented with minimal perspective in the oppositional Nepali discourse based in India.

The absence of pertinent literature in the context of this study may be attributed to the novelty of the subject. This study is, therefore, positioned at the forefront of further scholarly examination, considering it as an unexplored area within the scope of the 1923 treaty and its reception by the Nepali public sphere. This study may also be considered as the content analysis of Nepali as well as British newspapers in their reportage of the 1923 treaty.

Discussion

Emergent 'Nepal' Discourse

The discourse around the 1923 treaty can be outlined as a combination of three narratives—Nepal's domestic perspectives, oppositional accounts, and British point of view as it formed another side of the treaty. The *Gorkhapatra*, as the sole Nepali newspaper during the time of the treaty, holds critical importance in providing detailed insights into the treaty's particulars. The newspaper not only chronicled the grandeur of the event but also documented the proceedings of the treaty. This coverage extended to the addresses delivered by the key figures involved,



Gorkhapatra, December 24, 1923

namely Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher and British Envoy William Frederick Travers O'Connor, who represented their respective governments in sealing the agreement. The *Gorkhapatra's* continued documentation may be seen in its reporting further on the exchange of ratified copies of the treaty, two years after the initial signing.

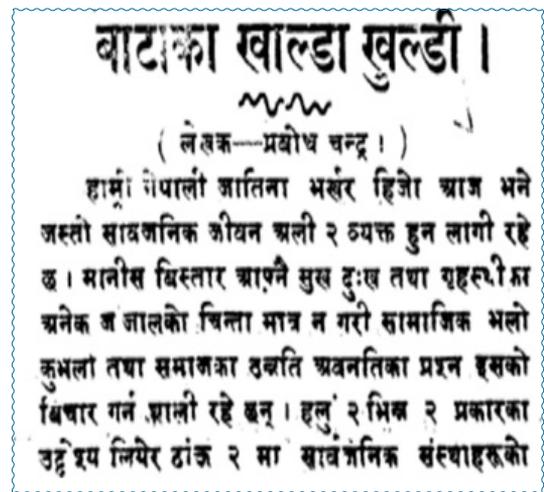
Much of the current public memory of the 1923 treaty is informed by the *Gorkhapatra's* coverage during that period. The newspaper's role as a primary source of information has greatly contributed to preserving the historical context and significance of the treaty in Nepal's history.

The entire issue of the *Gorkhapatra* of 24th December 1923 may be considered a repository of the treaty. In addition to giving the running commentary of the accounts at the treaty's signature, it has recorded several interesting aspects accorded to the treaty in Nepal.

That was the *Gorkhapatra*. However, an alternative narrative was taking shape within the same decade which looked at the treaty and its theme from a different point of view. The Nepali-speaking community, living in Indian territories and Burma under the British Raj, and Bhutan, found a unified voice through the establishment of the All India Gorkha League (*Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League*) in February 1924. One of the first organizations of political and social nature founded by and for Nepalis in India, it strengthened their sentiment of collectiveness which was expressed in the public sphere via the *Gorkha Samsar*, a Nepali-language weekly newspaper serving as the official mouthpiece of the League. Its publication had started in 1926.

Chandan Singh Thakur, a retired army officer and former organizer of the Indian National Congress, assumed the role of its editor, and the newspaper quickly gained prominence. To launch the League, Thakur had distanced himself from the Indian National Congress due to its discriminatory treatment of Nepalis in India,⁷ yet he maintained profound admiration and respect for Mahatma Gandhi throughout his life.

Under Thakur's editorial guidance, the *Gorkha Samsar* placed a strong emphasis on social reforms, advocating for the *unnati* (progress) of Nepalis through initiatives such as education, the eradication of caste-based discrimination, the promotion of women's dignity, and economic advancement (Lama, 1997: 38). At the same time, the League, branding itself as a social organization rather than political, actively worked towards the integration of the Nepali community into Indian society, while also spreading political awareness for Nepal's early democratic movement as well as fighting for the independence of India.



Gorkha Samsar, December 24, 1923

This newspaper and Gorkha League collectively created quite an impactful discourse on Nepal in the Nepali language. This was soon felt by the community. For example, on July 12, 1927, Prabodh Chandra⁸ wrote under the title “*bataka khalada khuldi* (the potholes along the path)”:

“It is only in recent times that the public discourse (*sarwajanik jeevan*) within our Nepali community has begun to emerge gradually. People, overcoming their individual and household anxieties, are now contemplating broader societal matters, including concepts of social well-being, ethical considerations, and the trajectory of societal progress or regress.

Numerous organizations are sprouting up in various locations, each with its unique mission. Some aim to curb alcohol consumption, others aspire to foster the advancement of Nepali language and literature, and there are those dedicated to religious progress.” The discourse, therefore, was real and tangible.

‘Independence’ and ‘Hindu’ Equating Political Reforms

Within this newfound discourse, Nepal’s historic uniqueness, reflective of the country’s independence, is repeatedly emphasized by multiple newspapers whenever larger political objectives are implied. These objectives would mean the emancipation of Hindus, the independence of India from British colonization, the welfare of Nepalis living in India, and socio-political reforms in Nepal among others. Although the inaugural issue of the *Gorkha Samsar* distanced the paper and the League from any political movement, it prominently featured a full front-page photograph of King Tribhuvan, addressing him as "His Majesty" and using the complete formal honorific "*Giriraj chakra chudamani naranarayanetyadi...sada samaravijayinam.*" Subsequent issues continued this trend, showcasing similar photographs of Janga Bahadur and Chandra Shumsher.

This was a way to portray Nepal as the guardian state of Nepalis across several states within India. Territorially, India at the time was a collective name of several states within British dominion eastward from Afghanistan and southward from Nepal. This attests the presence of Nepali Nepali-speaking population in these territories long preceding the birth of the State of India. The interest of this population could be protected only by the British or Nepali authorities or a joint effort of the two.

An alternative reason for showing reverence to Nepali rulers by this newspaper may also be attributed to the presence of Rana's family members in the leadership of the Gorkha League.⁹ Thakur Chandan Singh himself had

married the daughter of Khadga Shumsher,¹⁰ Chief of the Nepal Army and one of Chandra Shumsher’s brothers, potentially providing him a shield of defense even as he carried profound confidence in favor of Indian independence and Nepali democratic transformation. Another, perhaps more significant reason, was to circulate the newspaper within Nepal so that the King and the Prime Minister would stay informed about the ongoing socio-political discourse in India in favor of new transformations in both countries. But this newspaper as well as the League’s subsequent publications were never allowed in Nepal.

As stated above, the *Gorkha Samsar*’s publication started after three years of the 1923 treaty. During this period, it became apparent that the outcomes of the treaty had resolutely reaffirmed Nepal’s independent status, at least in political terms, in its relationship with British India as a *fait accompli*. Even if the newspaper did not directly reference the treaty, its predominant theme emphasizing Nepal’s independence, like that of Afghanistan and in contrast to the Indian feudatories, is evident in many of the paper’s regular writings and columns. Since Thakur was also a Hindu activist, the terms “Hindu”, “independent” and “dignity” appear to be the most commonly repeated while describing the political status of Nepal. At the same time, several of its authors point out the abject poverty as well as the lack of education in Nepali society and call on the Nepalis to wake up for their progress and advancement, which seems to be the rallying cry of the newspaper as well as the League. Nepali independence, as the direction of this discourse suggested, would be actualized for the people only if it could raise Nepal’s leadership role in protecting the Hindus not only of Nepal but also of India. And, India at that time did not mean a singular, unified country. It was identified as a collective of several small states subordinated under British rule.

The “independent” and “Hindu” theme of the discourse on Nepal inseparably takes flight right from the inaugural issue of the *Gorkha*

Samsar, published on November 4th, 1926. The story under the title “*Gorkha jatiko vartaman awasthaa !* (Present condition of the Gorkha people)”, explains to the readers that the formation Gorkha League had blessings from Maharaja Chandra Shumsher and at the onset celebrates Nepal’s independence, dignity, and Hindu-ness. This essay is pretty detailed covering pages 4 and 5. The first part of this essay reads as:

गोर्खा जाति को वर्तमान अवस्था !



गोर्खा जाति आज दिन हिन्दुधर्मावलम्बी जाति हक मा सब भन्दा प्रतिष्ठित र जगत् किय्यात छ हास्रो बाहुबल हास्रो शूरवीरता को विजयी पताका हाज्रा स्वतन्त्र नेपाल राज्य मा मात्र होइन किन्तु समस्त भारत वर्ष देश मा पनि गौरव का साथ आकाश मन्डल मा उड्ने रहेको छ । आज दिन जब जाति ले आफ्नु स्वतन्त्रता र स्वाभिमान लाई रक्षात्मक दुनियाँ मा जीवित जाति भई माथ उड्ने गरी हिन्दु शकल त्यही जाति जीवित रहन योग्य छ ईश्वर को कोटानकोटि धन्यवाद छ कि नेपाल राज्य लाई बलभारी र स्वतन्त्र राखी हाज्रा पराक्रमी राजा महाराजा हक ले हिन्दु धर्म को सुन्ये लाई फलत हुन दिये का दिन यो ता हामी सबै जान्ने कुरा छौं कि नेपाल स्वतन्त्र र अखण्ड राज्य छ, गोर्खाली हक रक्षायोधा सह वीर कर्मि छन् तर आज दिन दुनियाँ मा केवल सह वीरता ले सबै काम सरेछ

Gorkha Samsar, November 4th, 1926

“Among the Hindu people today, the Gorkhas stand out as the most dignified and well-named in the world. Our flag of bravery and strength proudly flutters not only over the sky of our independent state of Nepal but also across the entire Bharatvarsh (India). In the current circumstances, it is only those people who preserve their independence and dignity that deserve to live with their heads held high in pride. We owe a million thanks to the almighty Ishwar for keeping Nepal strong and independent, empowering our brave kings who never allowed the sun of Hinduism to set. While we recognize the Gorkhals as Kshatriyas, who are formidable warriors, we must acknowledge that in

today's world, bravery in battles alone is insufficient to steer through the complexities we face...”

The paper and several of its authors, indiscriminate to their ethnic orientation, repeatedly equate Nepal’s independence and Hindu population with their expectation of change. The July 20 issue in 1928 for example runs a strong commentary urging Nepali rulers to embrace the call of Indian Hindus and to become the leader of the Hindu world.

नेपाल ! विजय श्री जयमाला लियेर तलाई देखी रहे की छे

नेपाल ! भय न गर ! ठठ अरु मडाद्वार मा खट खटाए को भारत भाग्य श्री को स्वागत गर ! !

लागला कि भनि लेखेयौं । हिन्दु जनता पराधीनता बाट मुक्त हुन कठोर चेष्टा गरि रहे का बेला नेपाल ले आफ्नु स्वाधीनता को केई उपयोग न गर्नु अति दुःख को विषय हो । आज सम्म अफगानिस्थान एक अङ्गली, अशिक्षित र पछि रहे को देश थियो तथा संसार पनि तेस को अस्तित्व स्वीकार गर्न तयार थियन । तर विगत दश वर्ष मा अफगानिस्थान ले आफ्नु आधुनिक सुधार विजुलि जस्तो बेगले प्रचार गर्दा आज उसलाई पतिको महत्त्व प्राप्त भए का छ । के नेपाल लाई तेस्तै प्राप्त हुन सकोइन ? होला, अवश्य होला, तर तेसका निमित्त आशा मुखी भई रहने दानी जर्म त्यो नर निर्भय वृत्ति धारण गर्नु पर्छ ।

Gorkha Samsar, July 20, 1928

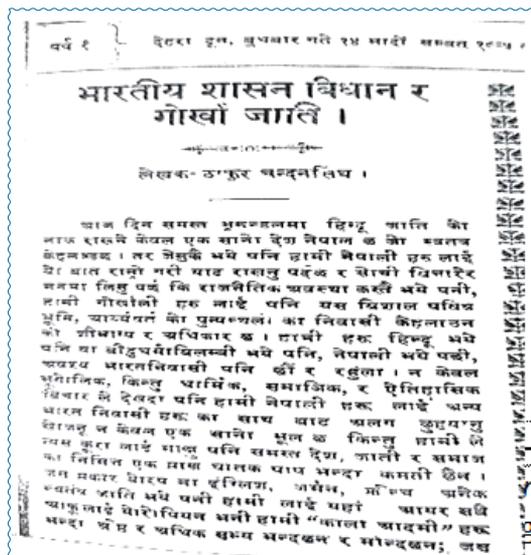
The story titled “Nepal ! Vijay Shree Jayamala Liyera Tanlai Dekhi Raheki Chhe” (Nepal, Ultimate Victory Is Looking for You with laurels)” opens with the prediction of the next World War in which Russia was likely to attack the British Empire. According to the writer, since India was the heart of the Empire, the war would be concentrated there. Nepal, therefore, has been urged to embrace the call of Indian Hindus and adopt fearlessness in its dealing with the British government.

A section of this essay reads: “Nepal failing to utilize its independence when the Hindus are struggling hard to emancipate themselves from subjugation is a matter of great sorrow. Until ten years ago Afghanistan was an uneducated, backward, and savage country. But now, it has taken the speedy road of modern reforms, which has earned it so much importance. Can’t Nepal achieve the same (importance)? It certainly can, but for this to happen not only should Nepal reject the expectations (of the British rule) but also adopt the attitude of fearlessness.”

Nepal’s independence, therefore, takes a significant meaning within the context of this emerging discourse only when employed to fight the British rule in India, at least for the sake of Hindus, and inspire democratic change in Nepal. On a philosophical level, independence generally refers to the state of being free from external control, influence, or authority. It signifies the capacity of a nation, group, or individual to govern itself, make independent decisions, and chart its own course without being subject to interference or domination by others. Independence can manifest in diverse forms, including political independence for a sovereign nation, economic independence for a self-sufficient economy, or personal independence for an individual's autonomy and freedom. The concept is closely associated with principles of sovereignty, self-determination, and the absence of external constraints on one's affairs. It is noteworthy how this discourse of the *Gorkha Samsar* strategically associates itself with Nepal, aiming to elicit favorable responses from Chandra Shumsher, especially within the broader background of British colonialism's subjugation of India.

Carrying this view forward and urging Nepal to make use of its freedom, an article published in the *Tarun Gorkha*, another Nepali language publication of the League, under the title of “*Hamro Wastavik Awastha* [Our Actual Situation]” summarizes Nepal’s independence as an incomplete one.¹¹

It said:



Tarun Gorkha, August 29, 1928

“Independent states are said to be equal before international law because it is incompatible with the nature of an independent state to be subservient to another. The proposition negates any claim of precedence on the part of one or more states in international rank and asserts that all states are equally entitled to the benefit of international rules. No difference in constitution affects this equality, a republic being the equal of a kingdom and a kingdom of an empire.”

The same article then portrays Nepal’s political situation, “Who is independent amongst us? The highest and most respected authority is our King, but is he also independent? Are his people independent? The answer to this could be found in the heart-rending and pathetic conditions in which our people are living in the villages. In Nepal, the monarchy is the ruling regime only for the namesake the real rule is done by the Military oligarchy. That’s why it is impossible to have not only individual freedom but even for the entire people and the society.”

Independence of Nepal, as viewed by this piece, would be meaningless unless it allowed the King and people freedom from internal chains imposed by the Rana regime. Material independence of the state would have to result in the independence of the people for it to obtain political significance. In this, the *Tarun Gorkha* looks more political than the *Gorkha Samsar*. Both newspapers kept the nascent discourse on Nepal moving towards democratic reforms for the optimum utilization of Nepali independence. Both newspapers believed that the tentacles of colonialism suffocated Nepal through indirect means while India had been its direct and blatant victim.

The *Tarun Gorkha*, therefore, blasted Nepali Rana rulers who had, in its view, been acting as the marionettes of British colonial rulers of India and gave reasons why Nepalis in India had united for political reforms: "In Nepal, the foreigners may be respected with special greetings but the moment they (Nepalese authorities) realize that you are a Nepali, they start staring at you with dirty intention. Nepalese going from India to Nepal are humiliated and made the targets of sarcasm. The people who have stayed in a relatively free atmosphere of India cannot tolerate this torture and humiliation and neither is there a need to do so. But even if the Gorkhas have quit Nepal, their love for their country will never die. That's why the reform movement in Nepal has been initiated by the Nepalese in India. Alas! No one even publishes a newspaper in Nepal! The newspapers printed here are also not allowed to enter Nepal. We also know that The Himalayan Times and *Gorkha Sansar* are banned, and the question of accepting the *Tarun Gorkha* does not arise.¹²"

These viewpoints expressed in these newfound newspapers represent the early oppositional discourse introduced by Nepalis living in India. Their understanding of Nepali independence in the context of the 1923 treaty directly contrasts with the one within Nepal. The *Gorkhapatra*'s coverage of the 1923 treaty,

its celebration by the state, and the discourse around it was certainly a portrayal of a major achievement. This was either overlooked or undermined by these Nepali newspapers of the 1920s in their attempt to disparage the Rana rule. Nepal's "independence" for them, as felt within the country, was dignifying, but people's and the king's subjugation under the Rana Regime for them was humiliating, which they believed disdained this state of independence.

Afghanistan in the Nepali Mindset

The 1923 Treaty was influenced quite a great deal by the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921. Chandra Shumsher's rationale for advocating the treaty was bolstered by Afghanistan's geopolitical position concerning Great Britain. This comparison between Nepal and Afghanistan persisted not only within governmental discussions but also in broader political discourse throughout the decade. The Himalayan Times, an English language weekly, published also by the Gorkha League, in its 8th January 1928 issue, made one such comparison as it called on the King of Nepal to take the leadership of South Asia against British colonization.

The story under the title "Nepal and Afghanistan" reads, "When we compare the conditions now arising with marvelous rapidity in Afghanistan where we behold batches of several hundred young Afghans being sent every year by their Government to foreign countries all over the world for training and reforms being carried out in every branch of administration of that country, we cannot but heave a sigh of grief to observe the contrast which conditions in Nepal present! Nepal is the hope of the Hindus. Nepal is the shield of India and if Nepal will not reap the fruit of the immense potentialities which are open to it and boldly enter into the realms of modern civilization and progress, the future history of this vast country of the Hindus shall be written in the letters of blood and tears; and if Hinduism fails there shall be no hope for Nepal either."

"When we compare the conditions now arising with marvellous rapidity in Afganistan where we behold batches of several hundred young Afgans being sent every year by their Government to foreign countries all over the world for training, and reforms being carried out in every branch of administration, it is a grievous grief to observe the contrast which conditions in Nepal present! ... Nepal is the hope of the Hindus. Nepal is the shield of India and if Nepal will not reap the fruit of the immense potentialities which are open to it and boldly enter into the realms of modern civilization and progress, the future history of this vast country of the Hindus shall be written in letters of blood and tears: and if Hinduism falls there shall be no hope for Nepal either."

The Himalayan Times.
8th January 1928.

The narrative's favorable mention of Afghanistan carries an underlying political meaning. Kabul at that time served as a refuge for the Exile Government of Indian revolutionaries, adopted an anti-British stance¹³ during the First World War, and consistently challenged British-Indian authority while asserting its independence. This was naturally received in a positive light by the anti-British revolutionaries of India. In contrast, Nepal traditionally sided with the British, opting for a diplomatic resolution of disputes and avoiding a confrontational path, particularly after its experience of the Treaty of Sugauli. Moreover, to the further dismay of India's freedom fighters, Nepal's Rana rulers sent troops in support of British-Indian authorities to suppress the freedom movement right since the Sepoy Mutiny. So, when it came to comparison with Nepal, it's no surprise that Afghanistan was portrayed more constructively by India's pro-revolutionary publications.

India's Hindu or political organizations, fighting for independence, sought ways to receive support from Nepal like they did from Afghanistan and used Hinduism as a potential instrument in achieving this goal, though without success. At one point, even a Muslim leader, Saiyed Hussain Khan, for example, proposed a ten-member delegation of revolutionary Hindu

leaders to advise the King and the Prime Minister of Nepal on matters of leadership and reforms.¹⁴ Among the names he proposed in the hope of garnering support from the Government of Nepal are the likes of Madan Mohan Malaviya, Damodar Savarkar, Lala Lajpat Rai, Ramdev, Satyapal, etc.

This Hindu narrative looked attractive even to a circle of Singha Durbar. As a testimony, the *Gorkhapatra*, the government mouthpiece in Kathmandu also occasionally carried translated stories from Hindi language newspapers which called on Nepal to take the leadership of Hindus. It published reports of Hindu activists in India even if they were demanding self-rule from the British. For example, the story of Annie Besant's famous Kamala Lectures titled "Indian Ideals in Education Philosophy and Religion, and Art" found prime space in the *Gorkhapatra* on 23rd March 1925 with a quote that Indian education was adversely impacted under the British East India Company.¹⁵ Shankaracharya's life story was serialized in some issues.¹⁶ Most notably, the General Convention of Rajput Mahasabha held on 21st November 1923, where Pundit Madan Mohan Malaviya had addressed "Bharat Dharma" was reported with an emphasis. One of the major actions of this Mahasabha was to convert Muslims back to the Hindu religion after performing purification rites.¹⁷ Malaviya's vision, promoted through Hindu Mahasabha, an organization he founded, aimed to establish a Hindu Rashtra in India by fostering a unified culture, suggesting that acknowledging Hinduness as the core of India's nationhood would involve integrating other religions into the framework of 'Hindu culture' (Bapu, 2009; Meadowcroft, 2006).

Even for India's Nepali newspapers, specifically the *Gorkha Samsar* and the *Tarun Gorkha*, "shuddhi"- purification from other religions into Hinduism- was a recurring theme reported regularly as the success story of Hindu organizations. Both newspapers saw this act as necessary to consolidate Hindu cultural primacy in India and the region by converting Muslims and Christians back to Hinduism. Nepal in this

framework featured as a pristine Hindu state, capable of preserving its unique culture and religious identity, despite its autocratic regime and pervasive poverty. Nepal's existence as a Hindu Rashtra (Asali Hindusthana) was an aspirational ideal for many Hindu leaders' imagination of India or *Bharatvarsh* as they would say (Chattopadhyaya, 2017).

आफगानिस्थान अरु नेपाल । इनी दोई राज्य को वर्तमान सैतन्ध तथा कस्य मा कस प्रकार महान् अन्तर हुँदै गर्दै रहे को क ? वास्तवितः आफगानीस्थान को जन सख्या ६० लाख अरु नेपाल हिन्दु राज्य को पनि से हो जन सख्या कम से कम अ, आफगानीस्थान लाई पुस्त स्वतन्त्रता मिले को अ, त नेपाल पनि आज पूर्वतया स्वतन्त्र अ, नेपाल का प्रत्येक नागरिक ससख अ, यती मात्र नहि नेपाल को अवस्था प्राप्त प्रत्येक युवक सैनिक ही हुन्छन । नेपाल को प्रत्येक मे पडी एक सानो गिरि अथवा बिपही हर को एक स्थानी अरुनी हुन्छ, कारख उस अरुनी मा जो युवा २ वाबु, बाजे हुन्छन, उनी हर ले अपेन या नेपाल को सेना मा आबन्न पुग्न कसे मा विताए, वेन्सन वा युवा प्राप्त गरेका वृद्ध युद्ध खीर हुन्छन, उस भोपडा मा कष्ट स्वदान पुरुष अथवा उस वृद्ध को खेरा का जाती हर हुन्छन, इनी खेरा या जाती कसे अवेनी या नेपाली मा सेना काही काम गर्ने वाला अथवा कसे रक्षेत्र मा प्रत्यक्षत : लडाईं गरी रहे का खीर हुन्छन, अरु उस भोपडी मा रहने वाला वृद्ध का खेरा का जाती उस जुम्ने का खिर का वच्चा, आफना बाजे या पिता का मुख

In the issue of July 13, 1928, the *Gorkha Samsar* published a story titled “Akhil Bharatiya Gurkha Sangh tatha Nepal ke Maharajaka Kartavya [All India Gurkha League and the Duty of the King of Nepal]”, in which it explains why the Hindus of India had pinned their hopes on Nepal. According to the story, Nepal, like Afghanistan, was a completely independent country; each of Nepal's men, young or old, were battled hardened warriors for generations. Every household in Nepal, as the story exaggeratedly wrote, was like a military barrack and once the Nepali nation came forward, no one could stop the rise of Hindus, not even the British.

The Gorkha League and its founders like Thakur Chandan Singh, as revealed through several of their publications,¹⁸ saw a pattern in the British exploitation of Indian masses and the excesses of the Rana rulers in Nepal. They were also aware of the connection between the British administration and the Rana regime, which

provided external legitimacy to the authority of the Ranas (Lama, 1997, p. 32). Therefore, the independence of Nepal recognized by the British through the 1923 treaty did not translate into the gains of those who were leading the pro-democracy discourse for both India and Nepal.

Nepal's Rana rulers, on the other hand, had their strategic calculations amidst these maneuvers. They saw the durability of their regime and the protection of Nepali independence as converging with British objectives. Consequently, rather than persuading Chandra Shumsher, the proposed actions by non-state actors in India, such as the Hindu Mahasabha or Gorkha League, only heightened his concerns. Even during the First World War, he had rejected a similar proposal from King Mahendra Pratap, who had garnered German and Afghan support for the same cause (Dhakai, 2023). Chandra Shumsher's aversion to these provocations stemmed from Nepal's historical experience. Before the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1815), Bhimsen Thapa's attempt to forge a South Asian alliance against impending British dominance witnessed Hindu kings in India opting to coexist with British rulers rather than collaborate with Nepal's offer (Nepali, 2019, pp. 111–112). This episode deeply influenced the skepticism of Nepali rulers, who increasingly started viewing Hinduism only as a cultural bond among people across their borders that didn't necessarily translate into a political alliance. Post-war, emphasizing a distinct political identity, Janga Bahadur followed Prithvi Narayan Shah's lead in reclaiming Nepal as the Asali Hindusthana, the authentic land of Hindus. This move not only responded to Indian feudatories but also aimed to internally unify the people of Nepal. Additionally, taking the side of Indian revolutionaries against the British government would invite fresh troubles along the extended borders—a situation the Rana rulers sought to avoid at all costs.

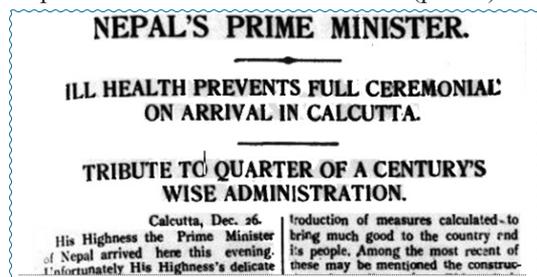
More than a decade before the emergence of these political newspapers, the Chandra, a literary monthly magazine edited by Madhav (Madho)

Prasad Regmi and published from Banaras, India, featured a serialized history of Afghanistan in a refined Nepali language.¹⁹ This highlights Nepal's historical interest in Afghanistan, driven by both political and social motivations during that period.

Nepal's Domestic Discourse Towards English Newspapers

In contrast to the critical approach to independence itself of the oppositional discourse, the *Gorkhapatra's* celebrative reportage of the 1923 treaty is well-mirrored by the coverage in English newspapers published from both India and England. The way the oppositional discourse, as observed in the analysis of India's Nepali language newspapers of the 1920s, didn't find a reason to acknowledge the treaty in highlighting Nepal's historical independence, English language publications in India and the United Kingdom appear to have completely ignored the oppositional discourse in their appreciation of the treaty.

A study of the archival records of English language newspapers demonstrates abundant attention given to the treaty which belies what Willaim O'Connor (1931) observed as not exciting "any particular public interest or attention in the worldwide affairs of the British Empire" yet meaning "a good deal for those who were on the spot and who knew the history of Nepal's relations with Great Britain" (p. 310).



Civil and Military Gazette, Dec 30, 1927

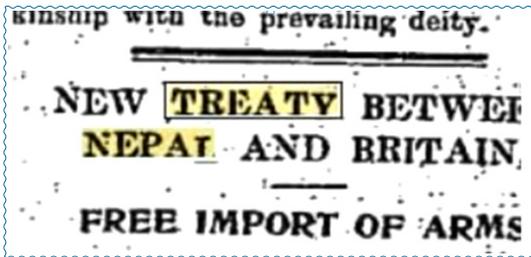
Immediately following the signing of the treaty, The Pioneer Mail from Allahabad on 26th December 1923, published a supportive editorial on Nepal. This surely helped lift the treaty's

narrative beyond the 'spot.' Recounting Nepal's support to the British Empire during the Sepoy Mutiny, Younghusband mission, the First World War, and the Afghan War, the newspaper expressed satisfaction after the treaty, emphasizing that it would "cement the good relations and friendship" between the two countries (Hussain, 1970, pp. 208–209). This paper advocated for Britain's considerate relations with Nepal as an important state and ally, which was contributing to the stability of the region. In the next issue, on 2nd January 1924, it printed the full text of the treaty.

Its fraternal publication the Civil and Military Gazette (CMG), which was a daily newspaper based in Lahore, also printed the entire treaty with a brief analysis on Tuesday, 1st January 1924.²⁰ It carried a similar line from The Pioneer's editorial in declaring that the treaty would "strengthen the long-existing friendship between Britain and Nepal." These newspapers, founded by British businessperson George Allen, were known for their pro-British position, which would make their appreciation of the treaty expected but at the same time, their contribution to promote Nepal among the British public is equally substantial. The CMG, until long after the treaty, continued to invoke it whenever it got the opportunity, crediting William O'Connor of negotiating it with Nepal.²¹

In view of the "imperial enthusiasts, who could be journalists or writers", South Asia's frontier states like Afghanistan, Tibet and Nepal were countries where the Great Game²² was being played out. Nepal among them was the friendliest with Britain. Mysterious isolation and British-centric polity, coupled with the emphasis on Gurkha recruits were the precise reasons why British Newspapers presented Nepal as a fascinating, forbidden, and friendly country (Watts, 2020: 200). For Nepal, this provided regime stability for Ranas with British support and a secured frontier with British-India. The 1923 treaty was signed during this win-win scenario for the rulers of both countries. This interpretation was widely reflected in the British

press. In a way, Nepal's domestic discourse as crafted by its government had entered masterfully in the British newsrooms.



The Guardian's Headline

Among the newspapers published in the United Kingdom, The Guardian reported the treaty's signature in Kathmandu as an important event.²³ Its headline not only captured the signing of the treaty but also mentioned that Nepal was allowed "free import of arms". For most British newspapers of the time, Nepal's independence appears a given as they emphasize Nepal's ability to purchase arms and machinery as the major achievement of the treaty. Well aware of Nepal's sensitive approach to its historical independence, they refer to Nepal as "independent" but with an implied message that the country was an ally, having remained under British sphere of influence for a long time. Percival Landon, a Nepal enthusiast and equally "well-placed within the imperialist circle in Britain", had a regular position with The Daily Telegraph when the 1923 treaty was signed (Watts, 2020: 180). On 24th December, three days after the treaty, the newspaper wrote a story, on its seventh page, on the signing of the treaty, detailing that Nepal had remained independent forever and that the treaty would further cement Britain-Nepal friendship.²⁴ The story did not carry the name of its reporter though. Then a week later, the newspaper published the entire text of the treaty with its brief introduction.²⁵ Landon later went on to write a serialized story for The Daily Telegraph under the title "Unknown Nepal" for over two years.

The first article of this sequence was published on July 10, 1924, about a year before the series was formally announced. With

the headline reading "India's Relations with Neighbouring States",²⁶ Landon in this article compared British-India's relations with Nepal, Tibet, and Afghanistan and presented Nepal most favorably among all. The 1923 treaty at this stage for him was only a formalization of what Nepal had been enjoying for centuries. Landon wrote that there was no example of friendship like that of Nepal and Britain in the whole field of international relationship and quoted an official of India Foreign Office as having said, "We have no policy towards Nepal, we have only friendship."

This idea was readily editorialized by the Pioneer Mail in Allahabad about a month later. The newspaper in its editorial headline "India and Her Neighbours" concurs with Landon and appreciates the 1923 treaty while celebrating the relationship between Nepal and British India as well as Nepal and Great Britain.²⁷

Landon (1928) skillfully articulated to his readers Nepal's historical independence and uncolonized past as the source of self-confidence and fighting spirit of the Nepali population. Introducing Nepal's specialty to the world, he says, "Nepal among Asiatic powers has never suffered either the galling triumph of the Moslem or the political or commercial results of Christian expansion" (p. v). He adds the fact of ancientness describing Nepal as a living example of "seventh century" grandeur.²⁸ This aspect of Nepal was alluring for almost all of the British newspapers that reported on the 1923 treaty.

These writings are important as the prominence of British newspapers had profoundly grown during the First World War with leaders and governments making all-out efforts to keep the press in good humor. On December 9, 1916, for example, the day Lloyd George was appointed prime minister in the middle of the First World War, he went to dinner straight from Buckingham Palace not with his political advisors but with the owners of two newspapers- the News of the World and The Daily Telegraph (McEwen, 1982). At the time of the First World War, British newspapers had increased in number as well as in circulation, giving confidence to the Media to define itself as

the Fourth Organ of the state (Keisinger, 2014). This also led to an extent of collusion between newspapers and the government to keep the War truth away from the front pages. After the War, media attention centered on the empire's preservation as many colonies intensified their freedom struggles. Nepal, supplying its youth for the British Army, became formidably important at this juncture even after the war had ended. It was in this context that almost all of the major British Newspapers of the time wrote stories on the 1923 treaty, from its signing to its ratification, promoting Nepal's favorable image among the British public, and through them the entire European continent which is largely represented in the present discourse of language politics in Nepal (Gautam, 2022). This supported Nepal's gradual transformation from isolationism to globalization. The 1923 treaty was one of the most substantial pointers Nepal presented to obtain membership in the United Nations.

Going beyond, this treaty continued to stir all kinds of British newspapers for a long time whenever they found an opportunity to storify Nepal's appeal. An example may be seen in The Daily Herald's article on the conquest of Mount Everest in 1953. Victor Thompson utilized that opportunity to portray Nepal as a country that "has virtually merged the two great Eastern religions (Hinduism and Buddhism), and believes in both, even when they contradict each other." He then says, "The people (of Nepal) are still foreign-haters and yet proud of their connections with Britain which is based on the 1923 treaty between equals."²⁹

Conclusion

Nepal in the 1920s lacked a national discourse independent of its government, which generally guided and controlled the country's messaging both internal and external. The *Gorkhapatra*, as the sole domestic newspaper under Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher's rule, naturally played a significant role in shaping public discourse as well as disseminating government communication. Other Nepali-language

newspapers, like the *Gorkha Samsar*, the *Tarun Gorkha*, and the *Gorkhali*, originating from India, contributed diverse perspectives, marking the formative stage of a more pluralistic Nepali public discourse.

Nepal's independence and sovereignty comprised two central themes of the 1923 treaty, which the *Gorkhapatra* celebrated as a major historical achievement, reinforcing the government's position and shaping public perception accordingly. Its chronicle of the treaty equally served as a historic documentation archive.

In contrast, the *Gorkha Samsar* focused on themes of social reforms, while the *Tarun Gorkha*, with its more critical stance, presented an oppositional political viewpoint. These newspapers represented the Nepali-speaking community that was grappling with an identity crisis in various British dominions within India. They wanted India's independence, Nepal's socio-political reforms, and Hindu religious primacy. Despite their pride in the independence and sovereignty of Nepal, which they viewed as their guardian state, the India-based newspapers adopted a minimalist approach towards the 1923 treaty. Moreover, their strategy centered on generating a discourse strong enough to encourage the King of Nepal to undermine the Rana Regime and come forward to lead democratic reforms. They further wanted the Nepali King to accept the leadership of South Asia's Hindu population as proposed by Indian revolutionary Hindu leaders. For the Nepal government, informed by historical lessons, Hindu affinity between Nepal and India was only a cultural bond that would not lead to a political alliance. In hindsight, the choice of India-based Nepali discourse to ignore the treaty and provoke the king at the expense of Rana rule may be considered a misguided tactic as the narrative failed to penetrate the Nepali state. Both Nepali polity and the British regime could afford to disregard their positions. Nevertheless, their contribution to laying the foundation of a democratic Nepali narrative in the Nepali

language should not be underestimated.

The English language coverage, particularly from newspapers like *The Pioneer Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*, offers a comparative perspective. Several English newspapers, from both India and the United Kingdom, provided extensive and detailed coverage of the 1923 treaty, underscoring its significance within the British Empire. Nepal's domestic narrative regarding the treaty was mirrored in the English language press to a great extent. This treaty, marked by the unequivocal British acceptance of Nepali independence and sovereignty, formed the basis of Nepal's globalist foreign policy approach and formalized its standing as one of the world's oldest states. This attention of the British press crafted a positive image of Nepal among the British public and, consequently, throughout the entire European continent. This treaty helped Nepal obtain the United Nations membership in 1955. The influence of Nepali media (Gautam, 2021) because of migration is the long-term impact of Nepali discourse since the 1920s.

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4. The Gorkhali, edited by Surya Bikram Geywaly and published by Madav Prasad Regmi was printed at The Himalayan Press, Punchganga, Benares. Its first issue came out on 27th September 1915 and continued for eleven months. It was closed down because of financial burden after publishing 48 issues.
 5. Both of these newspapers were the mouthpieces of Gorkha League, an association of the Nepali speaking people in India.
 6. Landon was at the time a commissioned reporter for The Telegraph.
 7. See Mahendra P. Lama's monograph (1997) published by Sahitya Akademi India on Thakur Chandan Singh for further details.
 8. Articles under the authorship of Prabodh Chandra have appeared repeatedly in the Gorkha Samsar. This column appears to maintain an optimistic and moralizing tone advocating for a gradualist and incremental societal change, as opposed to some columns that speak for revolutionary social change.

Notes:

1. These recruitments were conducted for both the Nepali as well as the British Army. See chapter 5 for Nepal's participation in the First World War. The Nepal government adopted a policy of recruiting as many youths as possible during the War.
2. The local Mukhiyas and community heads brought youths to the recruitment centers. Most of these youths were not only unaware of the destructive fate of the war, but were also tempted by the potential of money, good food and pension post-service.
3. Munsikhana is the early name of Nepal's Foreign Office. Sapkota held a view that supporting Younghusband expedition would violate Nepal's Thapathali Treaty with Tibet (1856). Article 2 of the treaty required Nepal's support to Tibet in the event of any external attack. But Chandra Shumsher not only ignored this provision of the treaty, but also sided with Britain against Tibet.
9. Among the major office bearers of All India Gorkha League, Prince Narendra Shumsher JBR, son of Former Prime Minister Dev Shumsher, was its President. There were four vice presidents: Hem Shumsher JBR, Kundan Singh Basnyat, Nanda Ram Thapa and Jeevan Singh Khatri. Bharat Singh Bhandari was its General Secretary while Thakur Chandan Singh remained its Joint Vice President and played central role in expanding the organization. Rana family members, exiled from Nepal due to power struggle within the family promoted this organization.
10. Khadga Shumsher today is better known as the builder of Rani Mahal Palace in Palpa district of Nepal.
11. From the issue of The Tarun Gorkha, September 5, 1928, pp 2 &3. This newspaper was also published by Chandan Singh Thakur from August 8, 1928 and continued for five years until 1933. The translation

- of this story is adopted from Mahendra P. Lama's monograph on Thakur.
12. "Haamro Vastavik Awastha [Our actual situation]" was a serialized article, published in five issues regularly. This section is a translation from the issue of September 12, 1928, p. 2.
 13. The government of Afghanistan stayed neutral in First World War because of British influence in its foreign policy but the people and religious leaders were in favour of the alliance of Germany and Ottoman Empire.
 14. Khan, Saiyed Hussain, "Ke Nepal yatatira dhyan delaan? (Will Nepal ever heed this?)". *The Gorkha Samsar weekly*, November 27, 1928, pp 9-10. Dehradun.
 15. Arranged to be delivered at the Senate House Calcutta every January, Kamala Lectures were established by Sir Ashutosh Mukherji in memory of his daughter Kamal Devi. Mukherji, Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, was a
 16. "Shankaracharya ko jeevani (Life story of Shankaracharya)". *Gorkhapatra*, September 9, 1918, pp 4 & 5. Kathmndu.
 17. Pundit Malaviya was a leading figure of Hindus, who championed the belief that Muslims in India were the offsprings of those Hindus who had been forcefully converted to Islam under the past Muslim rulers. So, the Muslims, he said, had to be brought back to Hindu fold through religious purification process.
 18. The Gorkha League took ownership of four newspapers, all of them initiated by Thakur Chandan Singh. These newspapers in Nepali language were the *Gorkha Samsar* and the *Tarun Gorkha*. In English language, *The Himalayan Times* and *Himalayan Review* were regular newspapers until mid-1930s.
 19. "Afghanistan ko itihās (History of Afghanistan)". (1914, Oct., Nov. and December). *Chandra Monthly Magazine*, Issues 3, 4 & 5. Benares.
 20. Civil and Military Gazette at the time of 1923 treaty was i published from Lahore and Simla. The Simla office was moved to Karachi for a brief period, which was also closed after four years. From Lahore, the newspaper continued its publication until 1963, well beyond the independence of Pakistan.
 21. "Hollywood Producer's Visit to Lahore", *Civil and Military Gazette*, October 19, 1937, p. 11, Lahore. In a 207-word news, the paper inserts a sentence on Nepal and the treaty, "Sir Frederick O'Connor negotiated and signed a new treaty between Great Britain and Nepal in December, 1923".
 22. 19th Century rivalry between Russia and Britain for influence over Central Asia, including Afghanistan, Persia, Tibet etc. In this calculation, Nepal constituted a borderline state, falling under British influence. It was on this ground that German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, with Afghan support during the First World War had tried to separate Nepal from British sphere of influence.
 23. "New Treaty between Nepal and Britain Signed", *The Guardian*, December 24, 1923, p. 8, London.
 24. "Treaty with Nepal Signed". *The Daily Telegraph*, December 24, 1923, p. 7, London.
 25. "Nepal and Britain: Terms of the New Treaty". *The Daily Telegraph*, January 1, 2024, p. 14, London.
 26. Perceval Landon, "India's Relations with Neighbouring States". *The Daily Telegraph*, July 10, 1924, p. 11. London.
 27. "India and Her Neighbours". *The Pioneer Mail*, August 8, 1924, p. 3. Allahabad.
 28. "Nepal: the Land Forbidden". *The Daily Telegraph*, January 19, 1925, p. 5. London.
 29. Victor Thompson, "No one Worries in Tensing's Homeland". *The Daily Herald*, June 14, 1953, p. 4. London.

