



# Emergence of the Nepali Nation-State: A Stepping Stone to Modernity

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## Abstract

The present qualitative study examines Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Dibya Upadesh* in the light of relevant historical details and thereby makes a claim that his venture of unification led to the rise of nascent nation-state, which became Nepal's stepping stone to modernity. In connection to the ideas related to nation-state, capitalism and modernity, this study engages with the ideas of Anthony Giddens, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Renan, Mark Leichy, Mahesh Chandra Regmi, among others.

**Key Words:** *Nation-state, capitalism, modernity, Nepali nationalism*

## Introduction

The very emergence of a nascent nation-state in the last decades of the eighteenth century heralded modernity in Nepal. Though the journey of the formation of the nation-state started in the last decades of the eighteenth century, Nepal, like many other countries in the world, is struggling to become a well settled nation-state. In this sense, Nepal is becoming modern. Generally, if we look at the West European and North American countries, we see the formation of the nation-state as the first phase of modernity and they seem to be grappling with globalization, the recent avatar of modernity. Many of these countries, as colonizers and neo-colonizers, have worked as agents of globalization in different phases of the world history. Now different global challenges like terrorism, multi-national capitalist corporations and the waves of migration from the rest of the world to these developed countries have awakened them to the threat to their nation-states. The Brexit, the rise of Donald Trump (with the slogan "Make America Great Again"), and the rise of nationalist parties all over Europe are a few markers of that awakening in the recent years. In the case of many developing countries like Nepal, both journeys, the journey to become a nation-state and the journey to globalization, are, however, moving together.

## Capitalism and nation-state

Arguing why we need to study nation-state to analyze modernity, Anthony Giddens (1996) claims, "In explicating the nature of modern societies, we have to capture the specific characteristics of the nation-state—a type of social community which contrasts in a radical way with pre-modern states" (p. 13). Moreover, nation-state, according to Giddens, has long participated in that reflexivity characteristic of modernity as a whole. The very existence of sovereignty should be understood as something that is reflexively monitored, for reasons already indicated. Sovereignty is linked to the replacement of "frontiers" by "borders" in the early development of the nation-state system: autonomy inside the territory claimed by the state is sanctioned by the recognition of borders by other states. As noted, this is one of the major factors distinguishing the nation-state system from systems of states in the pre-modern era, where few reflexively ordered relations of this kind existed and where the notion of "international relations" made no sense. (p. 72-73)

Because of these aspects of nation-state in terms of modernity, it is essential to discuss nation-state. Since Nepal also emerged as a nation-state out of premodern princely states having its borders recognized by Britain, Giddens ideas' about nation-state sound quite relevant in the context of this study.

Though the earlier concept of states emerged from the ideas of race, religion, and language, the concept of nation supplanted all of them. According to Ernest Renan (2018), "A nation is a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the configuration of the earth" (p. 260). Such nation is constituted out of two things: "One is in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form" (Renan, p. 261). In this manner, Renan looks at nation as a living human being. He claims, "The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotion" (p. 261). Therefore, the nation needs glory from the past, which "is the capital stock upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more, these are the essential preconditions for being a people" (Renan, p. 261). Not surprisingly, Renan lays emphasis on consciousness and moral conscience as the most important factor in the operation of nation: "A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates a moral conscience that is called a nation" (p. 262). Another name to this moral conscience is nation since this consciousness encourages people to make personal sacrifices for the sake of their community.

Earlier states or republics were simply feudal structures, which were not nations. However, Renan acknowledges the importance of such states for the emergence of nations: "The modern nation is therefore a historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts" (p. 251). Generally, dynasties, will of provinces/states, or consciousness of people bring about the much required unity among the people for the formation of nations. In the case of Nepal, too, the Shah dynasty brought the unity among people from several princely states under Prithvi Narayan's slogan of creating *asali* Hindustan. We can compare Prithvi Narayan to the ambitious

Norman invaders, who, after a few generations, “were no longer distinguishable from the rest of the population; their influence had nonetheless been profound” (Renan, p. 250). As a result, the Normans ended up endowing “the conquered country a nobility, military customs, and a patriotism it had lacked previously” (Renan, p.250). Prithvi Narayan also didn’t distinguish himself from the conquered ones. He accepted their culture and gave them the proto Hindu nationalism and military habits in return. On the way to the founding of a new nation, Prithvi Narayan’s soldiers inflicted violence on the people from several neighbouring princely kingdoms. After all, the process of unity, as per Renan (2018), “is always achieved brutally;” (p. 251). The mainstream history, however, tries to cover up this violence since forgetting “is an essential factor in the creation of a nation . . .” (Renan, p. 251). Here, Renan highlights the importance of willed amnesia shared by the people for the formation of the nation. Therefore, “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things” (Renan, p. 251).

Building upon Renan, Benedict Anderson (1991) defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their Communion” (p. 4-5). In addition, the nation “is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, p. 7). This imagined horizontal comradeship “makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson, p. 7). Such killings and sacrifices help Anderson figure out answer to the question why people become ready to take life and sacrifice their life for nation. The answer lies “in the cultural roots of nationalism” (Anderson, p. 7).

Later on, the nation-states institutionalized their nationalism, leading to the rise of official nationalism. Anderson has the following to say regarding this in the context of Europe: “In the case of the Western Europe, The key to situating 'official nationalism' — willed merger of nation and dynastic empire - is to remember that it developed *after*, and *in reaction to*, the popular national movements proliferating in Europe since the 1820s” (p. 86). In the context of Nepal, this happened with the king Mahendra’s campaign to institutionalize the Nepali nationalism along the line of the Hinduism, the Nepali language and the Shah dynasty in the 1960s. Though it was a dynastic policy, it managed to galvanize the Nepali people behind the throne as in the case of the Russification. Anderson presents the Russification as “a fine example of the character of official nationalism — an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally imagined community” (p. 101). However, unlike the Russification, the Nepalization was largely the continuation of the earlier dynastic policy of *asali* Hindustan. It was not a response to threat of emerging imagined communities. Instead, the official Nepali nationalism was an attempt to concretize the Nepali imagined community which had been galvanizing since the unification under Prithvi Narayan in the late eighteenth century. Such official nationalisms, of course, were not confined to the European countries and their erstwhile

colonies in Asia and Africa. According to Anderson, “they were picked up and imitated by indigenous ruling groups in those few zones (among them Japan and Siam) which escaped direct subjection. In almost every case, official nationalism concealed a discrepancy between nation and dynastic realm” (p. 110). Here, we must add Nepal to Anderson’s list. Nepal also didn’t undergo direct subjection to any colonial power and the Shah dynasty under the king Mahendra institutionalized the official nationalism in Nepal.

Anderson’s observation about the nature of official nationalism was true in the case of Nepal to some extent. In the case of Nepal, there was not as big gulf between the nation and the dynasty as hinted by Anderson since Mahendra’s official nationalism represented the majority of the population. However, significant chunk of population belonging to ethnic indigenous communities and the Madhesh communities were excluded. So were religious minorities. Miriam Poulsen Kramer (2008) observes, “14 Successive regimes, from Rana to Panchayat rule, attempted to consolidate Nepal as a nation through homogenizing practices geared at erasing the tremendous ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of Nepal” (p. 29). Therefore, “the idea of the Nepali nation is and has always been a contested one” (Kramer, p. 29). As the formation of nation-state is based on culture to a great extent, the problems related to “identity and ethnicity prompted both the exclusionary institutionalization of a particular Nepali (high caste Hindu) identity and the various political and revolutionary movements that have contested the ruling ideology of ‘Nepaliness’” (Kramer, p. 29). Not surprisingly, this contested nature of nation also foregrounds why nation is an imagined community.

Though capitalism seems to have played a significant role in the formation of nation-state, Giddens is careful not to associate the rise of the nation-state to capitalism. According to him, “The nation-state system was forged by myriad contingent events from the loosely scattered order of post-feudal kingdoms and principalities whose existence distinguished Europe from centralised agrarian empires” (p. 62). We can observe the same with the rise of the nation-state in Nepal under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah. However, capitalist atmosphere, national and international, seems to have been somehow responsible for the emergence of the nation-state. Benedict Anderson, too, relates the nation with sovereignty. In Anderson’s words, “It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (p. 7). In this way, the notion of nation seems quite modern since it emerged out of the destruction of old values shaped by feudalism and religion in the eighteenth century which, particularly in the Western Europe, “marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but also the dusk of religious modes of thought” (Anderson, p. 11). Meanwhile, it was also the age when capitalism was raising its head worldwide. Owing to the East India Company, one of the strong arms of nascent global capitalism, Prithvi Narayan Shah seems to have launched his unification campaign to maintain the sovereignty of the *asali* Hindustan he had envisioned.

In spite of the rise of global capitalism, nationalism, according to Benedict Anderson (1991), has not become obsolete as predicted by many scholars. In Anderson’s words, “The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is

the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (p. 3). Interestingly, the evolution of the nation-state is still tied to capitalism. Unlike in the past, this connection is not confined to print capitalism. Capitalism, through the TV, the film, the radio, cell phone, and the internet, has radically transformed the way people communicate with each other. In such a context, "the intelligentsias [have] found ways to bypass print in propagating the imagined community, not merely to illiterate masses, but even to literate masses *reading* different languages" (Anderson, p. 140). Therefore, the nation-state, despite the increasing rise of globalization, still sounds one of the most relevant and legitimate institutions on the international political stage. The Nepali state, for example, continues to exert immense influence on its populace and in doing so, shape the "defined fields of possibility" through which informants experience modernity (Appadurai, 1997, p. 31). As an example, current laws in Nepal prohibit women under 30 from migrating to Gulf countries for labor without the permission of her husband or father. Therefore, according to Barbara Grossman-Thompson (2015), "The patriarchal rationale of this law cannot be interpreted as anything *but* the state intervening on the possible modernities of my informants. The role of the state is still quite salient" (p. 25). That's why nation-state has been presented as one of the important components of modernity in the present study.

### Emergence of the Nascent Nepali Nation-State

Though Nepal, as a conglomeration of city states located in the Kathmandu valley, had embarked on this journey to modernity much earlier, it, as a nation state, seems to have done so only with the emergence of Nepal as a nation state following the unification of Nepal under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Ludwig F. Stiller (1995) argues that "in the history of Nepal there can be no period which is more important than this one for an understanding of Nepal as a modern state" (np). Richard Burghart (1996), however, argues that "there is no evidence that it [the idea of the nation-state] in governmental discourse during the period of Nepalese expansion across the southern flank of the Himalayas at the turn of the nineteenth century" (p. 71-72). Nepal might not have had fixed territorial boundaries. It might not have the concrete manifestation of the nation-state in the then governmental institutions. However, one can see a nation-state in the making following the unification as observed in Prithvi Narayan's *Dibya Upadesh* translated by Ludwig F. Stiller in *Prithvi Narayan Shah in the light of Divya Upadesh* (1968).

Prithvi Narayan, as reflected by *Dibya Upadesh*, tries to create a nation state in terms of "a form of government that is seen to be an expression of the will or character of a culturally unique people . . ." (Burghart, p. 71). Despite the cultural diversity of the Nepali people, Prithvi Narayan tries to project all the Nepali people as *asali* [pure] Hindus and a nascent nation-state as a will of these pure Hindus. Rather than just adding some princely states to his own Gorkhali state, Prithvi Narayan seems to have been confident that he has built a nation-state through his effort. Therefore, he declares, "This country is like a gourd between two rocks" (Stiller, 1968, p. 42). Here, we can see him addressing Nepal as a nation state lying between India and China. He doesn't seem to be worried about the princely states to be unified in the far east and the far west. Cautioning his people against both the powerful countries, especially the British Raj, Prithvi Narayan claims that Nepal "will be a true Hindustan

of the four *jats*, greater and lesser, with the thirty-six classes" (Stiller, p. 44). We can see his effort to instill nationalism in the Nepali people along the line of religion: *asali* Hinduism. He has envisioned Nepal as a pure Hindu country unsoiled by Islamism and Christianity. Here, one can't forget India, another Hindu country soiled by Muslims and Christians. In this regard, Barbara Grossman-Thompson's observation sounds quite relevant:

At the same time as Shah was expanding Nepal's borders, he carefully withdrew Nepal from relations with European powers, who were instituting full-blown colonialism in India to the South. Shah had several reasons for such maneuvering. First, he expressed disgust for the subservient relationship between India and British forces and wished to avoid a similar colonial relationship with Europe. Second, as a devout Hindu he believed that foreigners were heretical by nature and their presence in Nepal was quite literally polluting. (2015, p. 69)

In this manner, Prithvi Narayan aspired to protect the sovereignty of the *asali* Hindustan he had envisioned from the British colonialism. Or one can also argue that his vision of *asali* Hindustan was a strategy to unify the Hindu princely states, which didn't want to be humiliated by the expanding Christian colonial power. For maintaining a distinct identity as well as unity among people divided in different *jats* and *varnas*, he, therefore, urges the Nepali people not to "leave your ancient religion" (Stiller p. 44). According to Mark Leichty (1997), Prithvi Narayan's "conservative self-awareness and self-production were based firmly in the recognition of an external and threatening 'other'" (p. 36). It's also true that the current state of Nepali modernity appropriated and upstaged by tradition, to some extent, has to do with the beginning of the very trajectory of modernity in a new nation state founded on the bedrock of tradition: *asali* Hinduism. Notwithstanding this long term adverse institutional impact, if we look retrospectively, on the very evolution of the nation-state, we can't ignore the nationalism Prithvi Narayan Shah tries to instill in his people.

Advising the Nepali people to export the local products to India for earning money, he asserts, "If the citizens are wealthy, the country is strong. The king's storehouse is his people" (Stiller, p. 43). This expression portrays him as a national leader, who cares for people. This edict also shows that he is familiar with trade as well. He advises his people not to invite the dancers and artists from the Muglan [India] because "it drains your wealth. They take away secrets of the country. . ." (Stiller, p. 46). Instead, he advises them to "bring some of the Newar dancers of the three cities of Nepal. . . . If anything is given to them, it remains inside your own country. If this is done, your country will be protected" (Stiller, p. 46). His nationalism in terms of his trade and security policies can't be overlooked here. Leichty calls Prithvi Narayan's nationalism 'swadeshi' nationalism, which, according to Emma Tarlo, "seems to have been motivated more out of mercantilist than moral sentiments" (qtd. in Leichty, 2007, p. 36).

Furthermore, we need to examine Prithvi Narayan's focus on institutions, which form the gamut of nation-state. Prithvi Narayan cares for technology and development as illustrated by this edict: "In a place where there are minerals,

even though a village is situated there, the village must be moved and the mine worked. In places suitable for paddy, canals should be dug, fields cultivated, even if it means moving a house" (Stiller, p. 45). Likewise, he cares for the rule of law: "In each court put a man skilled in law. Conduct courts according to the law" (Stiller, p. 45). Of course, his rule of law may not be equivalent to the meaning it bears now. Still, he doesn't favor the ruler being the supreme justice himself. With the help of this legal mechanism in place, he wants to ensure justice for the people as illustrated by his edict: "Let there be no injustice in our country" (Stiller, p. 44). Actually, his faith in institutions rather than rituals and beliefs is quite intriguing.

Before the unification of Nepal, the kings of the small princely states were quite poor. The social, political and administrative institutions and administrators of these states were corrupt and unstable. In Volume V of his seminal text *tyas bhakhtiko Nepal* (2061 V.S.), Pandey makes this observation:

Since the king of these states were weak and courtiers licentious, the administration grew corrupt and weak, and the people, as a result, had suffered whereas the administrators, like opportunists, kept changing jobs across states. . . . Therefore, the administrative service before the unification of that great Nepal was not only insecure and corrupt but there was no special recognition of the employees . . . (p. 1)

One, according to Pandey, could not expect Prithvi Narayan to establish a nation-state given the kind of corrupt state institutions and administrators were. Against such background, we should examine Prithvi Narayan's effort to establish and institutionalize the state institutions in his bid to found a nation-state. Pandey's observation regarding Prithvi Narayan's act of modernizing administration is quite telling:

Right after becoming the king of 12000 Gorkha, Shree Paanch Prithvi Narayan Shah's attention, at first, tilted towards the rectification of the administration as illustrated by these examples: the selection of the Minister Kalu Pande as the Chief Minister on the basis of bravery and merit, the reorganization of *tharghar*, the creation of *jharot* (voluntary service to the state), the system of supporting courtiers by sidelining the sibling brother in the matters of the governing and the strong command over the courtiers, who existed as a bridge between the king and the subjects. In short, Shree Paanch Prithvi Narayan Shah organized Nepal's administration on the basis of merit and bravery . . . . He had a pure aim at building Nepal into a great nation and he, as clarified by *Dibya Upadesh*, had made the strong administration his main instrument to achieve it. (p. 1-2)

Pandey's observation helps us understand Prithvi Narayan's vision of nation-state from a different angle. Even when we discount Prithvi Narayan's venture of expanding his state, we can see his vision of nation-state. Though he sticks to the Hinduism, his efforts to restructure and rectify the state institutions certainly help us see how he perceives his state.

Here, we must examine a few steps taken by Prithvi Narayan to see his vision of nation-state further. Prithvi Narayan didn't divide the states he won among brothers and chiefs. Likewise, he shifted the capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu. While discussing the emergence of the Nepali nation-state, one must tackle the question of the position of the Kathmandu valley after the Prithvi Narayan took it over from the Malla kings. In this regard, Blaikie et al (2014) have something interesting say in relation to the present study. They argue, "The subsequent transfer of the capital from Gorkha, in order to take advantage of the peculiar location and agricultural wealth of the Newar Kingdoms, marked the establishment of central government in the Kathmandu Valley . . ." (p. 26). Here, Blaikie et al point out two things. Firstly, they think that Prithvi Narayan shifted the capital from Gorkha to the Kathmandu Valley in order to exploit the resources and the strategic location of the Valley. Secondly, they also think that this act of shifting also led to the rise of the central government. This kind of central government, as proposed by the present study, was a key to the emergence of the nascent nation-state. This is how Prithvi Narayan contributed to the initiation of modernity in Nepal. From the perspective of this study, the act of shifting the capital, therefore, bears a great significance.

The newly established state would be called Gorkhali state rather than Nepal. The Kathmandu valley, like earlier times, would be called Nepal. Mahesh Chandra Regmi (1999), therefore, uses the term 'Gorkhali state' rather than Nepal to refer to the emerging nation-state under Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors like Pratap Singh Shah, Ran Bahadur Shah and Girvan Yudda Shah. Regmi has the following explanation in this regard:

My use of the term *Gorkhali state* needs an explanation. I have chosen to use this term to describe the political entity that emerged from the territorial expansion of the State of Gorkha during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The capital of the state was shifted from Gorkha to Kathmandu in 1768, but the use of the term Gorkhali state (*Gorkha Raj*) was not given up. The term *Nepal* then denoted only the valley of Kathmandu. (p. x)

Certainly, one doesn't need to doubt Regmi's use of the term 'Gorkhali state.' Meanwhile, one can't also ignore Regmi's objective behind sticking to the term Gorkhali state. Since he claims that Gorkhali campaign was not simply a campaign for uniting different states into a nation-state but a campaign for establishing an empire, i.e., the Gorkha empire, Regmi takes this shifting of the capital as a part of Prithvi Narayan's strategy for establishing his Gorkhali empire. That's why Regmi finds the term Gorkhali state pertinent. One can't simply argue that Regmi is not aware of the consequence of Prithvi Narayan's venture. Well, Regmi claims that the period of unification and expansion was "a *formative period* in the history of modern Nepali state" (my emphasis p. xviii). Though Regmi seems to be more interested in exploring the imperialistic aspect of Prithvi Narayan's venture, one can't forget that this period of expansion and unification, even if it was imperialistic, led to the rise of the Nepali nation-state. Along this line of argument, the present study prefers the term Nepal to Gorkhali state. This preference also demands explanation. Firstly, it helps us avoid the

intellectual labour of explaining when exactly the term Nepal replaced the term Gorkhali state. From the perspective of the present study, this explanation doesn't lead us anywhere, anyway. Moreover, this study assumes that the modern Nepal has been in existence since the emergence of a nascent nation-state under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan. Secondly, Prithvi Narayan, as rightly pointed out by Regmi as well, shifted the capital of the state from Gorkha to Nepal, the then Kathmandu valley. From Nepal, he ruled over the territories he had won and united. In the official [royal] documents, the new state has been referred to as Nepal rather than Gorkhali state. Because of this very reason, even the British soldiers and scholars have referred to that new state as Nepal, not as Gorkhali state. I have a serious hunch that that very decision on the part of Prithvi Narayan separated him from other princes of the states scattered around Gorkha at that time. Thirdly, the term Nepal is pertinent in the context of the current study since it assumes the unification of Nepal under Prithvi Narayan as a point of departure for the trajectory of modernity in Nepal.

Though I, for a particular objective, beg to disagree with Regmi regarding the use of the term 'Gorkhali state', I absolutely agree with his explanation of the term 'dhungo' in terms of a nation-state. Prithvi Narayan calls Gorkha state a *dhungo*, a stone. It, according to Regmi, refers to the territorial integrity of the state. The rulers come and go. The state remains. In this way, Regmi, too, traces the notion of emerging nation-state in Prithvi Narayan's use of the term *dhungo* in the passage below:

The Gorkhali State was based on the concept of *dhungo*, literally a stone, but used as a metaphor to denote the state. The concept implied that the Gorkhali state was a permanent entity that transcended the person of the ruler. In other words, allegiance to the state superseded personal loyalty to the ruler. The concept found its practical application in the principle of territorial integrity, an essential attribute of a state in the modern sense. (p. x-xi)

In this manner, we, in the passage above, can see how Prithvi Narayan envisioned the Gorkha kingdom as the nation-state rather than an individual's property. Highlighting the significance of his study on the Gorkhali imperial experience, Regmi claims that "hence a proper understanding of that period is essential for a proper understanding of the modern state of Nepal as well" (xviii). Here, we can observe two things. Firstly, Regmi notices an emerging nation state during this period of unification and expansion. Secondly, he calls it the formative period of Nepali nation-state rather than Gorkhali state. This is exactly why this study resorts to the term Nepal rather than Gorkhali state.

We can also examine Mara Malagodi's (2013) observation regarding this issue. Highlighting the far reaching consequence of Prithvi Narayan's military campaign, Malagodi argues, "Moreover, in the Himalayan kingdom the formation of the State in the late eighteenth century through the military campaigns of King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha preceded the creation of the nation" (p. 30). Malagodi claims that Prithvi Narayan's campaign led to the formation of the state, which demanded a nation for itself. Because of this very reason, from the very beginning, Nepal's nationalism, to borrow from Roger

Brubaker (1999), has remained state-framed nationalism as observed below:

The notion of state-framed nationhood or nationalism enables us to talk about the way in which linguistic, cultural and even (narrowly) ethnic aspects nationhood and nationalism may be framed, mediated, and shaped by the state. . . . State-framed nationalisms are often imbued with cultural content. . . . The culture that is understood to be constitutive of nationhood is pervasively state-framed, and, in modern times, state-propagated culture; . . . (p. 68)

Nepal's nationalism, since the very moment of its inception, has remained state-framed nationalism and, therefore, it is imbued with the culture of the hill based Hindu upper caste rulers including Prithvi Narayan. Malgodi (2013) takes this argument further in this way:

Nepali nationalism inside Nepal was entirely a State-promoted phenomenon that aimed at subsuming the many conquered kingdoms, groups, and tribes into a collective identity distinct from that of the Gangetic plains, especially in view of maintaining its independence from British and independent India later on. In this regard, I argue that the proximity to British colonial power in the subcontinent and the exposure to modern political concepts and institutions have been instrumental in the modality of selection and crystallization of coordinates informing the Nepali nation over the years. (p. 31-32)

This passage also answers why Prithvi Narayan looked for a nation. Moreover, the British Empire appears as a source of modernity as Nepal's proximity to it exposed Nepal to modern political concepts and institutions and thus helped Nepal emerge as a nation. Malagodi further reinforces this point in these words: "In non-European contexts, it was through European direct domination or indirect influence that the modern concept of nation-state established itself. Consequently, the creation of modern European style structures and institutions allowed for the development of nationalist ideologies" (p. 33). Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to claim, as does this study, that modernity, in the form of nation-state and nationalism, spilled into Nepal from the British Raj. Therefore, the trajectory of modernity departed from that moment of formation of the nation-state in Nepal in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Some scholars, however, do not agree with this line of argument. Yug Pathak (2074 BS). For example, doesn't agree with the narrative of unification. He supports the argument that "Gorkha's king took over other states in order to achieve wealth, prosperity and authority" (Pathak, p. 24). Deriving from Regmi, Pathak argues, "Indeed, the Gorkhals didn't have any idea and method to develop an extensive economic system" (p. 12). He calls this campaign an imperialist venture rather than unification. He thinks that the narrative of unification is just a figment of the historians working with the kings like Tribhuvan and Mahendra. Then a question arises: Why did the historians create a discourse of unification? Pathak answers it in this way: "Indeed, its purpose was to establish monarchy as the hero of the

nation. If it was called state expansion, there was a risk of monarchy's heroism disappearing from modern consciousness" (Pathak, p. 30). Moreover, he also thinks that hegemonic discourses of nation and nationality were also constructed by these historians after 1951: "At that very time, nation and nationality were envisioned. In the campaign of this vision, there was a contribution of the powerful historians, litterateurs, poets, musicians of that time" (Pathak, p. 10). Certainly, the narratives about nation and nationality were institutionalized during the reign of Mahendra. It's also true that the powerful historians, poets, musicians and writers contributed to the formation of those narratives along the line of the Hinduism, the Shah monarchy, the Nepali language, and the upper caste hill culture. However, such dismissive way of looking at historical events and personalities do not let us them in a critical manner. Such dismissive approaches are driven by the present social and political agendas. Whereas the current issues can't be written off, sometimes it may be fallacious to examine history from the perspectives shaped by the present agendas only. For critical debate, we need to be able to acknowledge the given context of the historical events as well.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, we, at present, are not in the position to be able to determine retrospectively whether Prithvi Narayan intended to plunder or build a strong nation-state. However, we can glean some ideas if we examine the consequences of his venture. Suitable to his time, he brought the people from different princely states under one umbrella with a slogan of *asali* Hindustan, leading to the birth of Nepali nationalism. He shifted his capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu, leading to the rise of a central government. He didn't divide the newly acquired states among brothers and chiefs. He let the local cultural practices of the Valley continue as they were. He prioritized the institutions over the customs for development as well as governance. These gestures from Prithvi Narayan, as claimed by this study, led to an emergence of a nascent nation-state. If one also adds Prithvi Narayan's *Dibyā Upadesh* to all these as discussed above, one can easily see through Prithvi Narayan's vision of the nation-state, which proved to be the stepping stone of modernity in Nepal.

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