

# **AMBIVALENCE DENIED: THE MAKING OF *RASTRIYA ITIHAS* IN PANCHAYAT ERA TEXTBOOKS**

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Looking back to our history lessons in schools in Nepal, I cannot budge the feeling that our nationalistic pride and biased high opinion regarding Nepal (and its sovereign past and all) were so deeply implanted in us that even before our mind gets enough time to evaluate issues concerning Nepal's pride, our so called 'pride for being Nepali' gets in the way.

- A Nepali high school graduate from the class of 1991

## **Introduction**

As eleven Nepalis (including myself), all in their twenties or early thirties, climbed one of the hills on the northwestern outskirts of Kathmandu one fine sunny day in October 1994, I asked them what lesson of Nepali history they remembered the most from their days in school.<sup>1</sup> Excluding one person who had grown up outside of Nepal and had thus missed out being socialized into the textbooks' version of national culture, all the rest unanimously remembered the account of Balbhadrā's bravery in Nalapani during the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-16) as the history lesson par excellence from their school days. I had anticipated this answer. As we stopped for a brief rest, we proceeded to collectively remember aloud the details of what we as school students had read about Balbhadrā some ten to twenty years ago.

Sometime in the 1960s, the Nepali language primers for all school grades were renamed *Mahendramala* after the then reigning King Mahendra (r. 1955-1972). The *Mahendramala* that was used in grade four before the New Education System Plan (NESP) was implemented in 1971 contains a chapter on Balbhadrā as a drama (Khanal et al. 2028 v.s.:105-10). The NESP, which was executed in various phases over a number of years, was

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implemented in the district of Lalitpur, where my school was located, in 1974. As in the other districts in which the NESP was introduced that year, students of grade four were required to read the new set of nationally standardized textbooks.<sup>2</sup> I had reached grade four in 1974 but since I have not been able to locate the textbooks I used that year, I can not say if I heard about Balbhadra that year. The following year, I read about him more than once. The *Mahendramala* I read in grade five contains not one but two separate chapters on Balbhadra: first a poem simply entitled "Nala-Pani" and a few pages later, an essay called "Bir Balbhadra" (Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.:93-5, 108-111). The subject of multiple chapters and genres, Balbhadra, or more correctly, his name as an icon of Nepali nationhood, remained indelibly with me. On that October morning I confirmed that it had been no different for some other Nepalis of my generation and class, socialized in the schools in the 1970s and the 1980s. In this essay I discuss the process that shaped our collective memory and highlight its significance for studies of national culture in present-day Nepal.

Recently many observers have noted that during the reign of the Panchayat system (1962-1990), the Nepali language, Hinduism and monarchy constituted the triumvirate of official Nepali national culture (Burghart 1994, Shah 1993, P. Sharma 1992).<sup>3</sup> This characterization leaves out one other important theme - that of Nepali national history written in a very particular template - from the corpus of Panchayat-sponsored Nepali nation culture. The ground work for the making of this national historical narrative that would become central to the Panchayat era state-produced Nepali nationalism in Nepal was laid during the first half of this century in British India by a small group of variously expatriated Nepalis. As I have shown elsewhere, while the Rana rulers of Nepal and their intellectual bards did not build a historical genealogy for the Nepali nation, in a different political context, the Nepali proto middle-class actors in British India did exactly that via the self-conscious fostering of the Nepali language and the writing of a *bir* (brave) history of the Nepali nation (P. Onta 1996a, 1996b).

The post-Rana and especially the Panchayati state appropriated this *bir* history of Nepal as one of the central themes of Nepali nation culture. Backed by the state apparatus, this national culture was both elaborated in and disseminated through print, radio and visual media as well as educational resource materials.<sup>4</sup> But detailed studies of its characteristics and significance and the ways in which it was disseminated remain to be done (cf. Gaige 1975, Hutt 1994a, Pigg 1992). Given the centrality of the Nepali language in the construction of this national culture, written discourses in that language are important for any study of the national narratives about Nepal.

While some foreign scholars have led the way in the study of governmental discourses on the Nepali nation (e.g., Borgstrom 1980, Burghart 1984, 1996, Höfer 1979), most of them, in the words of one member of their tribe, "continue to produce accounts and studies of Nepali society without having read anything written by members of that society in their own national language" (Hutt 1994a:84). The political economy of being a Nepal-scholar outside of Nepal thus far, in the main, has not required a close familiarity with writings produced in any of the languages used in Nepal. Since it goes without saying that both Nepali and foreign scholars of Nepal would be more able to understand the complexities of recent Nepali society if they also read what is being produced in various Nepali languages, this status quo is no longer acceptable scholarly practice (Des Chene 1995, 1996; see also Onta and Des Chene 1995). In this essay I look at one specific type of Nepali language writing - school textbooks - in which the project of creating and disseminating a national historical narrative was embodied.

The nationalization of the past under the Panchayat system created a sensibility of a shared history - I shall call this *Rastriya Itihas* (RI), literally "National History" - amongst inhabitants of Nepal. The writing of history as RI and its teaching in schools through standardized textbooks - a key means of its dissemination - were at the center of the state-sponsored effort to make students into citizens socialized and loyal to "a particular image of the nation" (Shah 1993:9).<sup>5</sup> A full-blown study of this process is not possible here. Instead I discuss one set of examples drawn from Panchayat period textbooks having to do with Balbhadra to highlight some aspects of the making of RI. The specific content of these textbook lessons will be analyzed to reveal the particular idea of "nationhood" that was being deployed by the state via its education system. I argue that the making of RI involved a project of "national pruning." Since the narrative of RI needed to be simple, clear and elegant, uncomfortable and discordant facts were eliminated from it. Producing a people socialized to accept glorified images of the nation was made a manageable project by, among other things, cleansing RI of any ambivalence. I begin by describing the educational plans that shaped the RI disseminated in these textbooks.<sup>6</sup>

### **Educating Nepal: The Plans**

As is well-known, the Rana rulers (1846 - 1951) of Nepal were not interested in making public education available to Nepalis at large. Therefore, for most of their century-plus rule in Nepal, apart from the Durbar School which catered to the children of Rana and Rana-affiliated families and a few other Sanskrit and monastic schools, public educational

institutions were largely non-existent (G. Sharma 2043 v.s.). In the early decades of this century, the students in Durbar School were required to study the history of India and Britain but courses on the history and geography of Nepal were not taught there (B. Pandey 2039 v.s.:148, 157).<sup>7</sup> In the 1940s - the last decade of the Rana regime - several primary and secondary schools were opened in different parts of the country (Swar 2037 v.s.:8-26). When Rana rule ended in 1951, it was recognized that "the dawn of the democratic era" (Upraity 1959:1) had arrived and democracy required education.

Trailokya N. Upraity, one of the key players in the making of the first education plan for Nepal in the 1950s, characterized that moment in the following manner:

With this dawn, there came an awakening of the need for education. There was an urgent desire for the recognition of our people's rights to education in our democracy, and, consequently, Nepal had to reshape her educational framework to meet the requirements of these changing times. In order to make democracy a real success, people had to be properly educated in the shortest possible time (Upraity 1959:3).

Amidst various experimentations in governance at the center, a Board of Education was established in 1952 and it in turn recommended the appointment of a National Education Planning Commission (NEPC) the following year. The NEPC began its work in March 1954 with American advisory and financial aid. To be able to make a long-term educational plan for the country, it first set out to do a survey of the existing educational institutions and their facilities and identify the country's educational needs. In trying to do these tasks, the NEPC was challenged to overcome many obstacles. In the words of Upraity, there "were no precedents to follow, no established principles to guide, no experienced and trained surveyors to lead" (Upraity 1959:3).

Apart from the paucity of material resources, the NEPC discovered a bewildering variety of teaching curricula in the various types of schools - English-style schools, sanskrit pathshalas, Gandhi-inspired Basic Schools and monastic institutions like Gompas - that were operating in different parts of Nepal in 1954 (R. Pandey et al. 1956:39-46). The heterogeneity of the curricula as well as the population at large was recognized as a challenge by the NEPC whose responsibilities included the planning and developing of a long range "unified and national system of education" for Nepal, a country situated "at the crossroads of two ancient civilizations, China on the North and India on the South" (Upraity 1959:4). In fact when its report was

completed on 1st March 1955, the NEPC explicitly recognized this particular task in the following words under a chapter heading "Need for Education in Nepal Today":

[O]ur isolation has made us proud and nationalistic, and we wish to remain so. We wish to develop our national individuality, our heroism, and our reputation among other countries of the world. During the last few centuries we have neglected these essential characteristics of all strong states - national pride, virility, individuality - because we have allowed ourselves to go into darkness. Education must restore these values to our country (R. Pandey et al. 1956:74).

These words were later included verbatim in "The Five Year Plan for Education in Nepal" (1956 - 1961) drafted in July 1956 on the basis of the NEPC's Report (Government of Nepal 1957:2). The rationale for educational planning at the national level was thus made clear by stating that the "dawn of the democratic era" required that education be "of a national type to meet the nation's aspirations, wants and needs." A single system of education that was "national in character and suited to the genius of the people" needed to be planned to replace "the wasteful hotch-potch efforts" prevalent until that time (R. Pandey et al. 1956:74-5). Such a system of planned "National Education", it was said, would "develop the individual" - culturally, aesthetically and physically - and "develop citizenship" in all Nepalis (R. Pandey et al. 1956:80-1) while restoring the "virility" of the Nepali state.<sup>8</sup>

Data from 1959 suggests that concrete work toward uniformity in school curricula envisaged in the first five year plan had barely begun. It records the continuance of heterogeneity in the types of schools and a spectacular growth in English-style primary schools during the late 1950s (Upraity 1962:71-77, 230). The Education Minister was quoted in August 1960 as saying, "There is still a great intermixture of the various systems in the educational structure of the country and a democratic national system of education is the imperative need of the hour."<sup>9</sup> Upon the recommendation of the NEPC, His Majesty's Government adopted the national primary school curriculum in 1959 which made the teaching of Nepali language compulsory for all classes in all schools. With respect to the language of instruction in primary schools, the NEPC had recommended that Nepali be "the medium of instruction, exclusively from the third grade on" and no other languages be taught in the primary schools, even optionally, for "few children will have need for them, [and] they would hinder the teaching of

Nepali" (R. Pandey et al. 1956:104). Through such a policy it actually hoped that other languages would become extinct in Nepal. In this connection the NEPC report explicitly states:

The study of a non-Nepali *local* tongue would mitigate against the effective development of Nepali, for the student would make greater use of it than Nepali — at home and in the community — and thus Nepali would remain a "foreign" language. If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language then other languages will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result (Pandey et al. 1956:97).

Education Materials organization (later renamed Janak Education Materials Centre) was established in the fall of 1960 and Nepali writers were asked to prepare appropriate textbooks (A. Pradhan 2034 v.s.:131).

The Royal 'coup' by King Mahendra in December 1960 put an end to a brief experiment in multi-party democracy and initiated an era of relatively more autocratic monarchical rule in Nepal. In 1961, the All Round National Education Committee was established. While it did not recommend fundamental alterations in the previously designed curricula for the schools (G. N. Sharma 1980:6), it suggested slight revisions to include the biographies of "national *bir purusharu* , patriots and martyrs" as well as lessons on *rajbhakti* (A. Pradhan 2034 v.s.:131).<sup>10</sup> Without doubt, the theme of *rajbhakti* - service to the monarchy - served to help legitimate the assumption of autocratic power by the king. Nepali language was further reinforced as the language of instruction (His Majesty's Government [HMG] 2019 v.s.). Educationists talked about giving students "training for nationalism" (A. B. Shrestha 1962).<sup>11</sup> Some years later, a government publication stated as one of the broad purposes of primary education "the political, economic and cultural regeneration of Nepal" while one of its specific objectives was to

develop civic competencies - attitudes of responsibility and cooperation, appreciation of our struggle for democracy and the contributions of our national heroes, understanding of the working of democracy, skills in civic participation, a feeling of national unity and solidarity, a desire for self-sufficiency and willingness to help oneself, etc (HMG 1967:13-14).

Information on the deliberations held prior to the production of textbooks which were put together in conformity with the above objectives is scant

(cf. Rutter 1970). However, by the late 1960s uniformity in school curricula and textbooks was in place at a much greater level than ever before. Panchayat's nationalization of school culture also extended to other non-textual forms. In April 1961 students in all educational institutions were required to recite the national anthem at the beginning of each school day and at the beginning and end of all school functions. All the schools were told to keep a portrait of His Majesty the King in their premises (G. Devkota 1983:349). Students were also taught other national songs, generically referred to as *rastriya git*. Some of these songs were reproduced in textbooks and a majority of them were made available to the students and the population at large via the radio.<sup>12</sup> The most famous of them all, written by the poet Madhav Prasad Ghimere, contained the refrain:

*Gauncha Git Nepali  
Jyotiko Pankha Ucali  
Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey Nepal  
Sundar Santa Bisal.*

Nepalis sing a song  
While lifting a flag of light  
Glory, Glory, Glory to Nepal  
Which is beautiful, peaceful and great.<sup>13</sup>

The national anthem and the *rastriya* songs gradually displaced the *Saraswati bandana* (prayer) with which children began their day in school in the 1950s. Generating "a feeling of national unity and solidarity" by making students recite early in the morning words that evoked grand images of the Nepali nation had become more important than praying to Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning.

By the end of the decade, signs of governmental displeasure with education in Nepal were again becoming obvious. King Mahendra asked the National Education Advisory Council to look into the nation's needs and come up with a new national education plan. The outcome was the announcement of the New Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971. But when Mahendra died in early 1972, the responsibility to implement this Plan fell to the government headed by King Birendra, who as the Crown Prince had been closely involved in its formulation.<sup>14</sup> The NESP was prepared with the objective "to produce citizens who, with full faith in the country and the Crown, will conduct themselves in accordance with the Panchayat System and to meet the manpower requirements of the (sic) development through the spread of scientific and technical education" (HMG 1971:v). It was

marketed as "the culmination of the process of educational reforms started as early as 1954" (Ragsdale 1989:205).<sup>15</sup> Documents related to this Plan explicitly acknowledged the less-than-successful results of the previous two decades as far as the molding of a national educational system was concerned. Mohammad Mohsin, one of the chief architects of the NESP, wrote:

Our experiences of the last two decades make it clear that the nation-building process cannot be self-perpetuating and self-sustaining unless our education system and its processes are compatible with the needs of national development and the fundamental basis of national polity....With its population comprising an amalgam of diverse ethnic groups, Nepal's major responsibility is to formulate a comprehensive, co-ordinated and dynamic base of national heritage for all the distinct traditions and communities. This is the major objective of the National Education System Plan (1974:1-2).<sup>16</sup>

In the Plan itself, this double agenda of nation-building - development and integration - was stated unequivocally:

The Plan is primarily aimed at counter-acting the elitist bias of the inherited system of education by linking it more effectively to productive enterprises and egalitarian principles....The Plan calls for unifying education into one productive system that serves the country's needs and aspirations. The concept of education as an end to white-collar jobs is being replaced by a new concept that regards education as an investment in human resources for the development of the country (HMG 1971:i).

Tractors and modern machines do not function or maintain themselves without manipulation. Again, roads and tracks are not laid-out by natural volition just as sectional parochialism cannot be transformed into social cohesion without deliberate effort ....But politicisation of the traditional multiethnic Nepalese societies will not lead to national solidarity and independent sovereign nationhood without a central guidance in planned socialisation...(aimed) at coordinating the various economic and social interests, harmonizing diverse multi-lingual traditions into a single nationhood, consolidating the loyalty and faith of the Crown and (accelerating) socio-economic progress in order to transform the geo-political entity of Nepal into a positive emotional integration (HMG 1971:1-2).



The Plan's major aspects were delineated in a leaflet distributed by the government to the citizens at large. To fulfill its agenda of national integration, the NESP sought to use school education to "preserve, develop, and propagate the national language and literature, culture and arts" (HMG 1971:8). Nepali was reconfirmed as the medium of instruction in the primary and secondary schools. The NESP recognized the textbook as the "most important item of educational material" as it was the only such thing "used throughout the country" (HMG 1971:32). New textbooks were prepared including ones for a separate subject called "Panchayat." These books elaborated the political philosophy of the Panchayat system and informed secondary school students of their rights and duties as citizens of Nepal under that system.<sup>17</sup> Extra curricular activities that fostered the overall objectives of the NESP were made mandatory in the schools (HMG 2044 v.s.b).

So while there were some differences in the particular agendas enunciated in the various plans announced between 1955 and 1971, they were remarkably similar in their pronouncements regarding the role of education in nation-building.<sup>18</sup> The first plan envisaged education to develop a virile national individuality and pride and restore Nepal's heroism and reputation in the international community of nation-states. It argued that such a project had not been carried out in the past few centuries because Nepalis as a people had allowed themselves to go into "darkness."<sup>19</sup> Its project of developing citizenship was retained in the 1960s when education was supposed to inculcate an appreciation of Nepal's struggle for democracy and the role of national heroes toward that and other goals as well as generate a sentiment of national solidarity. The NESP explicitly stated that education was central to a process of planned socialization of diverse communities into a positively emotionally integrated single nationhood. With respect to rhetorical differences, we might note that while the first plan talked about planning a national education "suited to the genius of the people," the NESP aimed to produce a people via national education suited to the state and its agenda. As Burghart notes for the political culture of Panchayat democracy (1994:1-2), in the former case, the nation as agent expresses its genius through the state's education plan while in the latter the state as agent builds the nation. Each of these successive plans tried rhetorically to justify its own existence by pointing to the failures of the previous plans. While reading the plan documents one gets the feeling of repeated beginnings but they do not prevent us from seeing the cumulative nationalization of school curricula that happened over the 1960s and the 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

### **Making Nepal Bir: Balbhadra in Nalapani**

Producing a people imbued with national pride and a sense of civic responsibility required, among other things, lessons on a common history. Restoring Nepal's heroism internationally and overcoming the "darkness" of the Rana century via education that promised a bright and democratic future for everyone in Nepal through *bikas* (development) meant that this common history had to be rendered as RI in what I would call the *bir to bikas* (Brave to Development) narrative mode.<sup>21</sup> In this mode, the years between the early 1740s (when the conquest campaigns of Prithvinarayan Shah began) and 1816 (when the Treaty of Sagauli put a definitive end to the period of expansion) is identified as the *bir* (brave) era of RI.<sup>22</sup> This golden age of Nepali heroism then disappears into the black hole of Rana rule until 1951 when the era of *bikas* (development) is said to begin. The *bir* era of RI in the textbooks is more often than not reduced to an onomastic drill (Makolkin 1992:211-17) of brave warriors and their war campaigns. The list begins with Prithvinarayan Shah and includes Bahadur Shah, Amarsingh Thapa, Bhakti Thapa and Balbhadra. The cultural terrain of the nation as described by *bir* history provides individual characteristic to the land on which development agendas - mostly imported from elsewhere - were implemented.

The territorial ambitions of an expanding Gorkhali state in the foothills of the Himalayas had begun to clash with the colonial Company state in the plains of India by the early 19th century (Pemble 1971, Stiller 1973). In the context of competing claims over land in the central Tarai, the two sides went to war in late 1814. It is not necessary here to discuss in detail the state of affairs that led to this war, nor to describe its campaigns. For our purposes, suffice it to note that the Company army, with little prior experience in fighting wars in the hills, fared disastrously in the early phases of the war (Pemble 1971, Stiller 1976:352-59). It was in the first of the early campaigns that a unit of Company troops, led by General Gillespie, met a few hundred Nepali soldiers led by Balbhadra Kunwar in a fort in a place called Nalapani near the city of Dehra Dun.<sup>23</sup> The battle that was involved in the British takeover of this fort was, by all accounts, fierce. Gillespie and several of his subordinates were killed in the initial attack. The second British assault was launched weeks later after reinforcements had arrived and even then, Balbhadra and his soldiers are said to have fought admirably. When the situation inside the fort became unbearable due to lack of water and other supplies, and due to the continuous bombardment by the British, Balbhadra and some of his subordinates escaped to another location in the war territory. When the British army entered the fort, it is said, it

found dead and dying Nepali soldiers and women and children, who also had participated in the fighting.<sup>24</sup>

The above facts, common to most narratives of the battle of Nalapani, are also part of the stories presented in Panchayat era textbooks. One such story in a Nepali textbook for students of grade four, presented as a drama, begins with Balbhadra reading a letter which was sent to him before the onset of hostilities (Khanal 2028 v.s.:105-9). He says, "These English are again looking for an excuse, they say they will attack our country!" He then orders one of his subordinates to assemble all of the soldiers in the fort. Addressing the soldier-crowd he says, "My brave soldiers! I have just been informed that the English have threatened to go to war with us. It seems like they will attack us imminently. The time has come to show the name of our country and our devotion to our king. When will we get a better opportunity to show our bravery? .... Let us promise in the name of God that until there is a drop of blood left in our bodies, we will not surrender to the enemy. Jaya Nepal!" His soldiers repeat "Jaya Nepal" – Glory to Nepal – after him.<sup>25</sup> The rest of the first scene consists of a conversation between Balbhadra and his wife, Kamala, about the issue of the participation of women in the war. Kamala tells her husband that the women in the fort can lift guns against the enemy and supply the necessary ammunition to the men. They can feed the men on time, she adds, as well as provide first aid to the wounded. "How can we do nothing when such a problem strikes our country?", she asks.

The second scene recounts the death of British officers including that of Gillespie. When one soldier comes with the news that Gillespie had been killed, Balbhadra says "When have the brave Nepalis been afraid of these [i.e. English]?" The drama then mentions how water to the fort was diverted by the British and in its lack, conditions inside the fort became unbearable. Balbhadra then rounded up those who were still alive, and led the group as it left the fort. They then drank water and even as the enemy was confused as to what they were doing, Balbhadra turned to them and said, "You enemy, you could not beat us in war but tricked us (by denying us our water). We will now meet you again in Jitgadhi." The British are said to have just stared at the departing group led by Balbhadra.

In the poem entitled "Nala-Pani" reproduced in the Nepali textbook I read in grade five, the second verse describes Nepal as a small country that was as beautiful as a flower and then blames a nameless enemy for trying to capture it (Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.:93-5). The savior, Balbhadra, is said to have fought off the attack by defending the fort at Nalapani tirelessly. The khukuris glittered on the top of the hill-fortress as they sliced the enemy like radishes. Like the thunder in the sky, Nepalis, including women and

children, are said to have fought bravely at Nalapani at a great loss to the enemy until they found a way to stop the water-source to the fort. The poem ends by saying that the story of Nalapani, written in blood years ago, is still fresh (in the memory of Nepalis).

The essay on Balbhadra in the same textbook begins with the following sentence, "Balbhadra is a hero who made Nepal famous" (Adhikari et al. 2031 v.s.: 108-111). It then goes on to say that he fought bravely to prevent Nepal from falling into the hands of the English. Famous as the battle of Nalapani, this war was fought not only by soldiers, but also, it stresses, by women and children who gave up their lives for the country. It mentions that the English put up a sign in Dehradun in recognition of the bravery of Balbhadra and his soldiers. Rarely in the history of the world has one enemy praised another, it adds, before describing Balbhadra as that uniquely brave figure that deserved such an honor.

In addition to commonplace information about the encounter, this essay mentions that Balbhadra's father and grandfather were both brave and served in the army, with his grandfather reaching a respectable post in the time of Prithvinarayan Shah. It acknowledges that because of the surprise beginning of the war, about 300 women and children who were in the fort could not escape and thus participated in the war with approximately 300 soldiers. The last paragraph of the essay, after once again praising Balbhadra for his courage and bravery, goes on to say, "He wanted to die fighting in a war. During his time, it was an honor to die in a battle. Balbhadra was born in a brave family, he fought bravely for the country, and died fighting in a war. Therefore he is one of our eternal national icons."

In these lessons, the war episode at Nalapani and Balbhadra's role in it are simultaneously turned into a moment when Nepal's sovereignty was challenged by evil imperial forces and its separate independent nationhood was made famous. It also represents an occasion in which brave Nepalis got an opportunity to prove their devotion to their king and their country through their use of the khukuri and more importantly through the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. The loss at Nalapani is explained as being possible only due to an unfair trick on the part of the British who it is said, despite winning the fort, honoured Balbhadra and his soldiers with a memorial. Evocation of "Jaya Nepal" and the idea of "brave" death – death on the battle field on behalf of the country – together elevate Balbhadra's story to a celebration of Nepali nationhood and a reminder of one's duties as a citizen of Nepal. However, we also need to note that the ideal citizen is the patriotic *bir purus* (brave man) whose individual bravery sustains nationhood and celebration of whom is an essential part of being proud of one's nation. National identity itself is embodied in his virility and this

gendered notion of the nation is the image propagated through the education system. While Balbhadra's wife and other women in the fort participated in the war, their role is marked as ancillary to the real business of war conducted by Balbhadra and his men (cf. R. Sharma 2017 v.s, Sundas 1995).

Even before the nationalization of textbooks in the 1960s and the 1970s, stories about Balbhadra were widely available. Two of these were published in 1940, one in Darjeeling and the other in Kathmandu. Some comparison of these with the textbook stories mentioned above will help us to see how the nationalization of history pruned ambivalence out of the Nalapani encounter and presented it as an example of unadulterated Nepali bravery at work. I begin with the version written by Sagarmani Acharyadixit and published in Kathmandu in 1940 in the journal, *Sarada* (Acharyadixit 2026 v.s.[1997 v.s.]).<sup>26</sup> He begins his essay by describing Balbhadra as the "glory of Gorkha, extreme patriot, clever war leader and brave." Then he says that the unparalleled bravery shown by the mere six hundred children of "Arya Gorkha" in Nalapani is an event that deserves to be described in golden letters "not only in the history of Nepal, but also that of India." He continues:

Bravery, war skills, patriotism and devotion to the king shown by brave Gorkhas [on that occasion] are second to none [including] those that can be found in any civilized *jati*. Gorkha *jati* might be poor and few in number but they have demonstrated how ready they are to sacrifice everything to save the independence of the country (2026 v.s.[1997 v.s.]:290).<sup>27</sup>

Written a few years before the end of colonial rule in India, the author reminds the readers that unlike native states in India, Nepal is an independent country. Nepal's independence is then attributed to the work of brave souls like Amarsingh and Balbhadra who were willing to risk their lives while serving their country. The rest of the essay provides a predictable account of the Nalapani encounter.

In this essay we can find many attributes of an openly ambivalent nationalism. The reference to Balbhadra as a glory of Gorkha is interesting. Although later in the same paragraph the author refers to Nepal by that name, the mention of "glory of Gorkha" shows that the tradition of thinking about the kingdom as the possession of the House of Gorkha (Stiller 1973) still persisted in 1940. In fact the switch in nomenclature from "the possession of Gorkha" to "Nepal" in governmental discourse in Nepal occurs sometime around 1930 (Burghart 1984:118-19; cf. P. Onta

1996a), but here we see the persistence of the old name a decade later. Similarly, along the same line, we must note Acharyadixit's reference to the people as Gorkha *jati* and not Nepalis. It is in this context that we can say that the evocation of "Jaya Nepal" in the drama version of the textbook discussed earlier is anachronistic for 1814. The unproblematic reference to a Nepali nation in 1815 is yet another evidence of pruning because by seamlessly inserting the phrase "Jaya Nepal" in the text, it smooths over the complexities of the past whereas in Acharyadixit the ambivalence in nomenclature remains.<sup>28</sup>

The reference to Balbhadra's soldiers as the children of "Arya Gorkha" also confirms the above point. Although no complete caste and ethnicity returns for these soldiers are available, there are strong reasons to believe that many of the soldiers were Magars and men of all *jats* recruited from Garhwal. Eden Vansittart, who was the chief Gurkha recruitment officer for the British during 1888-95, mentions that Balbhadra's soldiers "belonged mostly to the regiment known as the Purana Gurakh which consists entirely of Magars" (1896:40).<sup>29</sup> Acharyadixit simply refers to all the soldiers as "Arya Gorkha," to nationalize ethnicity with a particular Hindu slant. While it is hard to say how intermingled his notion of Arya was with the version of national caste hierarchy elaborated in the *Muluki Ain*, there is no doubt that Arya refers loosely only to bahun (Brahman) and chetri (Kshatriya) castes of Nepal and not to the other groups such as the Magars and the Gurungs.

By the time the textbook versions are produced in the 1960s and the 1970s, two other indications of ambivalence present in Acharyadixit are pruned out. One is the statement which acknowledges the poverty of the Gorkha *jati* even as it goes on to celebrate their patriotism. Never is the theme of poverty discussed in the same breath as Nepali bravery in the textbook versions of RI. The other is the statement that Balbhadra's story should be described in golden letters "not only in the history of Nepal, but also that of India." The Balbhadra of my textbook is the national symbol of Nepali sovereignty, independence, and bravery. The suggestion that he could also be part of the history of India is inconceivable to the exclusive national sensibilities of those educationists who compiled the textbooks of the Panchayat period.<sup>30</sup>

The other text published in 1940 - this one in Darjeeling - was an essay by Surya Bikram Gyawali entitled "Bir Balbhadra." This is one among many historical biographies that Gyawali wrote (P. Sharma 1974:115, V. Pradhan 2044 v.s.:80-8) and is an important early text of the project in which the history of the "unification" of Nepal was rendered in the *bir* mode in British India.<sup>31</sup> Written to make the story of Balbhadra popular among young adults, this essay is fairly detailed. Although presented in a highly

patriotic framework, ambivalent themes pruned out from the later textbooks mark Gyawali's essay.<sup>32</sup> He begins by tracing the family linkages between Balbhadra and the Ranas who ruled Nepal then. The grandfather of the first Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur (whose name was Ranajit Kunwar) and the father of Balbhadra, Chandrabir Kunwar were first cousins (2018 v.s.[1997 v.s.]:1-2). The later textbooks, written in the *bir to bikas* mode of RI in which the Rana era was depicted as an age of darkness, make no mention of the fact that Balbhadra was such a close relative of Jang Bahadur. Gyawali further writes that among Balbhadra's soldiers were men of all jats recruited from Garhwal and nearby areas and Magar soldiers belonging to the Purano Gorakh battalion (ibid:6). As I noted above, the Magar ethnicity of the soldiers is nowhere mentioned in the later textbooks where they are simply referred to as Nepalis. Nor is there any mention of the soldiers from Garhwal, a place that was no longer a part of Nepal.

While the details of the war are familiar, Gyawali mentions that after the treaty of Sagauli, Balbhadra returned to Nepal but soon after that went to join the army of the Sikh king Ranjit Singh. While he mentions that being aware of the demonstrated bravery of the Nepalis Ranjit Singh recruited them in his army, he does not mention what prompted Balbhadra, the hero of Nalapani and the embodiment of Nepali bravery and patriotism, to go and join this foreign army.<sup>33</sup> Gyawali later mentions that Balbhadra died fighting for the Sikhs against the Afghans (ibid:13-15). Commenting on this, he writes that although this was a "brave death" it would have been even more respectable had Balbhadra died fighting for his country. The fact that he died in a foreign country while in the service of Ranjit Singh should teach us a lesson about how we need to be loyal to our employer (*noon ko sojho*) writes Gyawali, but it can not serve as an example of how, like Bhakti Thapa, we need to be always ready to give up our lives for the sake of our country (cf. R Sharma 2017 v.s.).<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless Gyawali writes that Balbhadra's name and work will be written in golden letters in the history of Nepal (2018 v.s.[1997 v.s.]:21).<sup>35</sup>

In the RI textbook versions, Balbhadra's service with Ranjit Singh is passed over. This fact is omitted when the British memorial placed in his honor in Dehra Dun is quoted. Furthermore while talking about his death, the RI textbook version, as we saw, simply states that "Balbhadra was born in a brave family, he fought bravely for the country, and died fighting in a war." It pointedly does not specify that he died fighting for the Sikhs and leaves the students with the impression that he had died in some other battle between Nepal and the British following the one in Nalapani. Why it does so is pretty clear: one cannot make someone "one of our eternal national

icons" while acknowledging that he died fighting someone else's war, even if he had the impressive prior record in Nalapani.<sup>36</sup>

If RI is an onomastic drill of *bir* Nepalis, why is there such an obsession with Balbhadra? Why aren't other brave warriors from the unification era - Amarsingh Thapa, Bhakti Thapa and others - remembered as much?<sup>37</sup> In fact the significance of this question looms large after Gyawali's above-mentioned comparison of Balbhadra with Bhakti Thapa. This comparison raises the possibility that under another process of pruning, a different version of RI could have been shaped with respect to the 1814-16 war. That version could have valorized Bhakti Thapa as the exemplary figure of the entire war for dying for the country. It could have pruned out Balbhadra for living through a defeat or for joining the Sikh army later. This possibility raises the question, what was at stake to hold onto Balbhadra even when the ambivalent facts related to him as noted above had to be suppressed? A definitive answer to this question is hard to give. However I would posit that extracting a heroic story of even temporary supremacy over the British from an overall defeat is the key to understanding the obsession with Balbhadra. It might be recalled here that the 1814-16 conflagration brought an end to the expansionary era of the Gorkhali empire which began in the early 1740s with Prithvīnarayan Shah's campaign of conquest (Pant 2021 v.s.a). The Treaty of Sagauli which concluded this war included significant territorial losses to the Gorkhali empire (Stiller 1976).<sup>38</sup> This truncation is evoked even today in nationalist writings. Take for instance, the following poem entitled *Sagauliko Ghau* by poet Phanindra Nepal (born 2015 v.s.):

When the pride of my ancestors fills my chest  
I see Nepal in my own palms  
Opening up my fist  
I see Nepal's map  
Increasing in size at the speed of a kite released in the sky  
Up to Teesta  
Spreading up to Kangra  
In victory I smile liberally  
In happiness I dance freely  
But when my own history mocks me  
I burn internally  
I tire entirely  
When the wound of Sagauli returns to my heart  
I worry because Greater Nepal is not in my palm  
Like a river in which the water is drying  
I see the shape of my country



Being reduced to Mechi  
 Being shrunk to Mahakali  
 I simply close my fist  
 Tight and more tightly  
 The more I close my fist  
 The more I feel suffocated at the shrinking of each line in my palm  
 The more I get drowned in darkness (Nepal 2048 v.s.:108-9).

In a war with such disastrous consequences, the battle at Nalapani where the commander leading the attack for the British, General Gillespie was killed, could be turned into a celebration of the *bir kal* more easily than the other encounters. The fact that during the nineteenth century even the British narrators of the war had given special attention to this event made this process easier. The long history of transmission of the Balbhadra story by the British before it was picked up and reproduced by the Nepali nationalist writers in this century has made the story excessively plausible.<sup>39</sup> It has become the truth. Ironically, early British accounts (like Williams 1874) are suitable for *bir* readings just because they are engaged in their redemption of a defeat, albeit only an initial one, by celebrating Balbhadra. On the winning side a partial defeat required special attention while on the losing side a partial victory could redeem national pride. In fact in RI renditions of the Nalapani encounter the larger narrative of the entire war and of ultimate defeat is mostly pruned away.

### **Making Gaje Ghale Disappear**

The case of Balbhadra examined above is one example of how the pruning of history was made part of the construction of RI in nationalized textbooks. As we saw, while the representation of Balbhadra as a national icon of bravery could already be found in writings predating those textbooks, the ambivalences contained in the earlier renditions were filtered out from the later textbook versions. Another process of filtration occurred when stories popular in the pre-nationalized textbooks that could not fit into non-ambivalent RI were simply dropped from the textbooks of the 1960s and later. I present one example of the latter here.

The story is about Gaje Ghale.<sup>40</sup> Those who were in school in the 1950s and the early 1960s and read Nepali language primer books put together in Darjeeling will remember him. In a chapter entitled *Jamadar Gaje Ghaley, VC in Nepali Sahitya* (Second Part) prepared by Parasmani Pradhan and Rudramani Pradhan as a Nepali language primer for grade two, the students were told how a man who had grown up in the village of Barpak in central Nepal and joined the British Indian Gurkha Regiments as a Recruit Boy in

1935 went on to capture an important Japanese post in the Basha hill in Burma in 1945 (Pradhan and Pradhan 1956:38-46).<sup>41</sup> Undaunted by profuse blood loss as a consequence of being hit by enemy bullets, Ghaley was described as leading his platoon in assault after assault against the Japanese until Basha hill was captured. His unlimited courage, steadfastness and unusual bravery are beyond description, the story maintained, and for his commendable work, he was given the Victoria Cross (VC) by the British government.

What is interesting to note about this story is that it is not made out to be an explicit embodiment of any nation's or *jati's* bravery. It is simply rendered as an account of the courage and brave deeds of a single individual. Yet we must note that even without explicit statement, this textbook story converted Ghaley into one of the heroes of Nepali school children. When textbooks were nationalized in the latter part of the 1960s, this story did not appear in them. The generations socialized in nationalized textbooks did not learn about Gaje Ghaley or any of the other Gurkha VC winners in their school. I had not heard about Ghaley until after I began to read British accounts of the Gurkhas in 1990.

How may we read the disappearance of Gaje Ghale from the textbooks I and my generation of Nepalis read? As I have suggested the objective of these schoolbooks was to socialize my generation of Nepalis to a vision of the nation without ambivalences. This meant that problematic topics like the recruitment of Nepalis in foreign armies as Gurkhas had to be excised from school textbooks. Just as Balbhadra's later service in the Sikh army and his eventual death fighting for Ranjit Singh had to be filtered out of RI, poor Nepalis working for another state's army as Gurkha soldiers, despite their individual achievements, could not be elevated to the national pantheon of *birs* within RI. Gurkha soldiers and their fame as brave warriors could not be easily reconciled within the master narrative of the *bir* and independent Nepali nation. Recognition of Gurkha bravery by reproducing the story of Gaje Ghaley being awarded the VC raises uncomfortable questions regarding the claims of RI. The fact of a Nepali citizen's blood spilled elsewhere and for someone else's cause directly mocks the RI's *bir to bikas* narrative. The recognition of Gurkha service makes the Nepali nation, symbolically speaking, (as well as the state in more practical ways), dependent on others. RI's claim to Nepal's greatness is compromised. Instead of dealing with this messy and complex issue, the makers of RI decided to just leave it aside (see Onta 1996b).<sup>42</sup>

For students of history familiar with nationalist historiographic traditions of colonial India and elsewhere, the Nepali case provides some surprises. As is well-known for the case of India for instance, one of the main ways in

which nationalist historians described India's colonial encounter was by portraying British rule as the economic exploitation of their motherland (Chandra 1966). Expectations molded by such nationalist writings would anticipate Nepali nationalist narratives to portray the 1814-16 war as a case of colonial excessive violence and talk of Gurkha recruitment by an imperial power as an exploitation of Nepalis and their *bir* tradition in order to bolster the sense of nationalism even further.<sup>43</sup> However, as I have argued here, the desire to read Nepal's independence and sovereignty in its past is so strong that Balbhadra's temporary supremacy over the British becomes the story of Nepali bravery at work. The Gurkhas like Gaje Ghaley have to be erased from public memory so that a non-ambivalent and elegant RI could emerge. If nationalism is a derivative discourse of colonialism in India (Chatterjee 1986), then its genealogy and history in Nepal, although still influenced by the history of colonialism in South Asia, would have to be mapped somewhat differently.

### Conclusion

I have argued here that textbook stories prepared in the 1960s and the 1970s dealing with the history of Nepal were presented in a framework that is in alignment with the objectives of the educational plans as described earlier. While making up lessons on history, textbook compilers drew upon extant narratives of certain events but carefully pruned them to make the final versions reproduced for schoolbooks fashion a *bir* and virile image of the nation. These compilers exercised yet another strategy of selection by omitting popular stories that were present in the textbooks used in the 1950s under the non-nationalized educational systems because they were problematic to the agenda of RI. Nationalism in Nepal, like nationalism everywhere, tried to produce a people as one ethnicity (cf. Balibar 1990). In the textbooks this meant leaving out the story of Gaje Ghaley and those aspects of the Balbhadra story that were problematic to a full-blown celebration of national pride. The selection of heroes and the descriptions of their place in the life of the nation needed a careful story-teller. And the story itself needed to be simple and elegant even as it evoked the grandeur of the nation.

These pruned stories of RI are *part* of the stuff that constitute the collective memory of those Nepalis schooled in the Panchayat era. They are the foundational writings that tried to inculcate in us a sense of belonging to a community sharing a national culture. Textbook history lessons were the instruments designed to fashion a collective memory of the Nepali nation in the *bir to bikas* mode. As the nationalized education system expanded to more areas within Nepal during the three decades of the

Panchayat regime, these textbooks reached places where even state newspapers like the *Gorkhapatra* did not and were read by at least a few million students in the quarter century between the late 1960s and the early 1990s.<sup>44</sup> If nations are "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983), then these textbooks along with other print, audio and visual media have provided the stuff with which the Nepali nation could be imagined during recent decades.

As Anderson emphasized, imagining should be understood to mean *not* fabrication or falsity but a process of creation. The contents of this process of creation provide the mark of differentiation for communities and nations. I have here argued that the *bir to bikas* RI has been the way in which the Nepali nation has been imagined through state-produced educational textbooks. Nationalization of the past in the *bir* mode and that of the future in the *bikas* mode have been critical to the functioning of the state in the post-Rana era. As I showed in the first section of this paper, the past is presented in the *bir* mode in order to facilitate the future in *bikas* mode via projects of citizen-crafting. *Bir* history provided the bearings of an independent land on which *bikas* projects could be enacted. With foreign money and models pouring into Nepal in the name of development, it was *bir* history that made the country's *bikas* "Nepali." It is for this reason that even as the state acknowledged its relative poverty in economic terms as exemplified by several statistical indicators, the independent nation with a gloriously *bir* past could assert its membership in the world community of nations. It is also for this reason that a sense of self-marginality in a world graded by economic development can simultaneously co-exist with a strong pride in the Nepali nation - as evidenced in the quotation with which I began this article<sup>45</sup> - amongst those who have grown up with the *bir to bikas* narrative as one's *own* history (cf. Liechty 1994:33-123).

It is not my argument that the *bir* national history constitutes the totality of the historical consciousness of all Nepalis who grew up in this country under the Panchayat regime. Given the large numbers of Nepali people who did not and still do not have broad access to nationalized education and media, to suggest as much would be absurd. In fact I do not even make the claim that all of the students who actually read the above-mentioned textbooks found the *bir to bikas* mode of imagining the Nepali nation to be totally compelling. To say this would be to grant a totalizing power to the Panchayat state and its educational apparatus. Instead we must assume that this particular mode of imagining the nation was found to be variously compelling across caste, class, gender and locational lines, the intricacies of reception being a complex story that I cannot trace here.<sup>46</sup> But we should remember that the production of student-citizens was not a mere fiction in

the minds of Panchayat planners of national education. While there is no easy way to know who and how many Nepalis identify with the *bir to bikas* RI, we can safely assume that the number is not insignificant. This is also evident to anyone reading newspapers and magazines across the range of political perspectives and in post-1990 debates on ethnicity in Nepal.<sup>47</sup>

The process of pruning away ambivalence and details that do not accord with the *bir to bikas* narrative of the nation show that we must begin our study of nationalism in Nepal by examining the construction and dissemination of its foundational narratives.<sup>48</sup> In his famous 1882 lecture "What is a nation?", Earnest Renan said "Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation" (quoted in Hobsbawm 1991:12). Understanding the partiality and the particularity of the "Nepal" toward which education planners sought to make us feel loyal and patriotic, is a critical step in learning how we 'got our history wrong.'<sup>49</sup> Moreover it is a step toward identifying who was and who was not invited to the nation-building party in more substantive ways. Hence studies that trace the history of Nepali nationalism as if it was a linear growth of an organic entity are clearly inadequate (cf. D. Adhikari 2045 v.s., Stiller 1993).

Others have suggested that, in post-1990 Nepal, it is imperative that a new national narrative be established (Fisher 1993, Shah 1993). In the face of janajati politics and the spectre of a Sri Lanka-like splintering of the nation (Sharma 1992), one strong reaction is to attempt to prune RI to a new shape, one that can somehow encompass all claims to distinctiveness while serving, like past narratives, to inculcate loyalty to the central Nepali state. While one should not set aside the seriousness with which these proposals are put forward, surely the first, and perhaps the most important task that historians can perform is not to rush to create RI for the nineties, but to examine the role of RI in making plausible a heroic account of a harmonious nation that in fact took account of so few, and so select a subset of its citizens. As the autobiographical beginning of this essay should suggest, effects of such a pruned RI, both practical ones and in people's thinking, are real. The Panchayat era was the time in which political sensibilities of all kinds presently evident were forged. Hence without a thorough understanding of RI and other nationalist narratives and sentiments consolidated and disseminated during Panchayat's three decades, it will be difficult to do any adequate analysis of the current politics of culture, ethnicity and nationalism in Nepal (cf. Des Chene 1996).

## Notes

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2. On the first year of its implementation, students of grades one, four and eight were required to read the new textbooks. When students of these grades graduated to an upper class the following year, they read new textbooks and so on (His Majesty's Government [HMG] 2031 v.s.:6-13).
3. For a variety of recent discussions on ethnicity and national politics in Nepal see Ale Magar (2052 v.s.), Bandhu (1989), Dahal (1992, 1995), W. Fisher (1993), G. Gurung (1994), G. Gurung and Bhandari (1993), O. Gurung (1995), K. Malla (1992), Nepal Communist Party - Masal (2052 v.s.), O'Neill (1994), Panjiar (1993), R. Pradhan (1994), Raj (1993), P. Sharma (1994), Sudhindra Sharma (1994), Skar (1995), P. Tamang (1992), S. Tamang (2050 v.s., 1995) and P. Thapa (2052 v.s.). For an earlier statement see P. Rana (1971). See Bhattachan (1995) and his bibliography and P. Tamang (1991) for discussions concerning ethnicity & party-politics. See essays in the journal *Pragya* (2050 v.s.) and Sonntag (1995) for discussions concerning language-policy in post-Panchayat Nepal.
4. When a program in radio education was inaugurated at the Radio Nepal in July 1958, its main objective was "to supplement the adult literacy campaign and provide such knowledge to the illiterate adults which would help them in the possible solution of their day-to-day problems, in a manner both concrete and interesting" (S. N. Sharma 1958:120). Among the topics included for this program were lessons in history (that discussed the "life-stories of historical figures of Nepal") and cultures & religions of Nepal. In the immediate aftermath of the promulgation of the 1962 constitution of Nepal which provided the legal basis for the Partyless Panchayat System, P. M. Singh, who was then the director of Radio Nepal wrote: "The primary goal of Radio Nepal is to inculcate in the Nepali janata a sense of Nepaliness and ever growing patriotic love for Nepal through development of Nepali music" (2020 v.s.). Singh reports that between April 1962 and April 1963, the Radio Nepal broadcasted 46 radio-plays

- related to the Panchayat system in addition to regular commentaries on Panchayat philosophy and organization. A. Bhattarai (2051 v.s.), Gaige (1975), K. Gurung (1993) and Verma (1985) provide various details related to the workings of Radio Nepal. While no comprehensive studies of radio audiences have been done in Nepal limited studies conducted by New Era (1979, 1984) and RIDA (1989) provide some insights. State-owned television was started in Nepal only in the mid-1980s. The use of photography in the making of national culture is also worthy of study.
5. For an analysis of textbook materials to show how an ideology of modernization represents the relationship between national society, development and the village in Nepal in the 1980s, see Pigg (1992). Beach (1990), J. Fisher (1990), Read and Read (1968), K. Malla (1979), Skinner and Holland (1996), K. Thapa (1985) and Vir (1988) provide analyses of other aspects of modern education in Nepal. For a broadside criticism of formal education, see an essay by Laxmi P. Devkota (2050 v.s.[2002 v.s.]:213-20).
  6. Basti (2045 v.s.), Sawanta (2025 v.s.) and Amarendraraj Shrestha (1993) are examples of how the RI was disseminated via comic books. Many stories in Balaka, a popular children's magazine published by the Bal Mandir since the mid-1960s, were also rendered in the RI mode. See also Parajuli (n.d.).
  7. In the 1930s, history of India and Britain were taught at the Durbar School by Rudraraj Pandey and Basudev Bhattarai. By the end of the decade both had produced relevant textbooks. On the lives and works of Pandey and Bhattarai, see respectively, Siwakoti (2049 v.s.) and Bhattarai and Bhattarai (1988). For some interesting facts about the Durbar School during the 19th century, see Sharma Bhattarai (2042 v.s.).
  8. It must be pointed out here that I am highlighting only those aspects of the educational planning scene that deal directly with the reasons and the plans for the nationalization of education in Nepal. For a work that provides other details of the education planning scene of the 1950s, see Wood (1987). See also the issues of the journal, Education Quarterly, published from Kathmadu beginning with its first issue of March 1957. See B. Bhattarai (2025 v.s.) for a cautionary essay on patriotism written in the political context of the 1950s.
  9. Gorkhapatra of 17 August 1960 quoted in Upraity (1962:229). Upraity (1962:230) mentions that HMG of Nepal, Department of Education brought out several notices related to primary education in the Gorkhapatra of 20 November 1960 (Textbooks); 5 December 1960 (Curriculum) and 13, 16, 18 May 1961 (New Syllabus: Grades 2, 3, 4 and 5).
  10. The use of the words bir purusharu - brave men - is very instructive. I shall return to this point below. I have thus far been unable to locate the original report submitted by this Committee. See K. Bista (1962) and V. Jha (1962) for two statements by politicians on "Panchayat and Education." See M. Thapa (1968) for one proposal regarding what the teaching of "social studies" must entail in the context of the Panchayat System. The Government's educational bureaucracy was subsequently reorganized (Aryal 1970:44-8, 54-7).

11. In light of the argument I am making here, it is interesting to note what Shrestha writes: "The text-books should be written with a new emphasis and should be selected with due care. The social study courses should be more carefully planned. For primary classes, only selected parts of history should be taught. History dealing with family feud and class struggles should be avoided and left for college level....[Every student] should be proud of the total Nepalese culture rather than of an aspect of it" (1962:7-8; my emphasis).
12. Between April 1962 and April 1963, Radio Nepal played 225 new rastriya songs. While we need to recognize that the transmission capacity of Radio Nepal was then limited by the topographical constitution of the country and that many Nepalis were too poor to be able to own a radio, this data challenges us to pay more attention to how the RI was dispersed. To counter the second limitation noted, 17 open public listening spots for Radio Nepal had been established during the specified year and more than 40 were planned for the following year (Singh 2020 v. s.).
13. This song appears in a fourth grade Nepali language textbook under the title "Rastra Bandana" that is "Salutation to the Nation" (Khanal et al. 2028 v.s.:111). Om Gurung (who went to a school in central west Nepal) and Basanta Thapa (who went to a school in east Nepal) have generously shared with me their memories of reciting this song as school students in the 1960s. This song is retained in the fourth grade Nepali language textbook compiled in the post-Panchayat era (Pyakurel 2052 v.s.:31-5).
14. Upraity (2030 v.s.) and Sainju (2031 v.s.) defend the NESP and highlight King Birendra's connection with it.
15. Quoting a 1971 USAID/Nepal document, Skerry, Moran and Calavan write: "At the time of its introduction, the NESP was seen as a radical departure from the status quo, a Nepali 'declaration of independence from US policy dominance in education'" (1992: 233). The 'radical departure' in part is a reference to the fact that important persons involved in the making of NESP such as Dr Harka Gurung (then with the National Planning Commission, Ph. D. from the U.K.) and Mohmmad Mohsin (Ph. D. from India) had not been trained in the US unlike their predecessors in the field such as Trailokya N. Upraity. For one evaluation of the first two decades of American aid to education in Nepal, see Sellar et al. (1981)/ In their study of the planning experience in Nepal, Stiller and Yadav (1979) devote a chapter to the "great debates" in planning development in Nepal. It is interesting to note that while they recognize that important and controversial debates had taken place in the educational sector, they omit it from their discussion of the great debates by stating that a "national policy has been established on [this point], and whatever debate remains centres on the problem of execution rather than on the strategy to be adopted" (1979:143).
16. When he wrote this, Mohsin was the member-secretary of the National Education Committee, a body that reported directly to His Majesty the King and was responsible for the overall implementation and evaluation of the NESP (HMG 2044 v.s. a). In the second half of the 1960s, he was first a member of the Panchayat Philosophy Committee and later a research officer on Panchayat at the Home Ministry of HMG. In the second half of the 1970s he was associated with the powerful central committee of Back-to-



the-Village National Campaign. For his early views on the Panchayat system, see his essays in Mohsin and Rana (1966).

17. The leaflet is reproduced as Appendix A in Ragsdale (1989:205-11). Also see HMG (2028 v.s.), N. Jha (2044 v.s.), Mohsin (1975), and K. Shrestha (2034 v.s.). See Mali (1973) and G. Sharma (1980:i-viii) for a general discussion of how the textbooks were put together under the NESP. Yadunandan (1983) discusses some of the difficulties encountered in the production and distribution of NESP textbooks. Subsequent to the announcement of NESP, the phrase "vikasako nimti siksa" - education for development - became the state mantra in Nepal. Series of publications with that title were also brought out (Kasaju et al. 2034 v.s.). As part of NESP's agenda for higher education, masters level students were required to do one year of "National Development Service" as part of their degree requirements (Pokhrel 2034 v.s., Rongong 1975, Vaidya 2034 v.s.). The NESP recognized the potential of using the radio as a teaching medium. See Mayo et al. (1975) for a study done to examine how the radio could be better utilized to fulfill NESP's development agenda. For a sophisticated rendition of the political philosophy of the Panchayat System, see HMG (2023 v.s.).
18. For a summary account of these various plans, see K. Shrestha (1973).
19. As I discuss below, this story of decline characterized as "darkness" was intended more specifically to refer to the century-long rule of the Ranas.
20. It would be a mistake to think that there were no contemporary criticisms of these education plans. For examples of such, see Akhila Nepai Rashtriya Svatantra Vidyarthi Yuniyan (2038 v.s.), Malla (1979:82-100), G. Rana (2051 v.s.:237-243) and Sharma Acharya (2028 v.s.). Harka Gurung (1984) has argued that the NESP's egalitarian agenda - to provide education to the maximum number of Nepali children - failed because no concomitant social reforms and economic transformations necessary for its success took place. He has further argued that the Nepali elites opposed the NESP in the 1970s by sending their children to Indian boarding schools in greater numbers. He suggested that new boarding schools be opened in Nepal to stop this education-related capital flight and added, "It will also eliminate possible social conflict among Nepalesé of tomorrow brought-up with diverse curricula and nurtured by ideals of different national anthems and heroes" (1984:106). See also Verma (1981:130-57).
21. I do not have much to say about the bikas end of this mode in this paper which is devoted to thinking about the bir foundations of RI that make bikas rhetoric plausible.
22. Literary historians have been the ones who have used the term bir kal (brave era) most prominently for this period (e.g. Dixit 2018 v.s., Shrestha 2047 v.s.). They argue that the dominant motif of Nepali literature of this period is bravery.
23. Dehira Dun is a city located in a valley in the hilly region of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. This battle is also referred to sometimes as the battle of Kalanga.
24. M. Pant (2021 v.s.b) has published contemporary letters which give some versions of "what really happened." The letters indicate that when conditions became unbearable inside the fort under British attack, some of Balbhadra's soldiers tried to desert. They were reprimanded by their leader

and most returned but some seem to have actually deserted. For another Nepali historian's rendition of the war at Nalapani, see Baburam Acharya's essay in P. Sharma et al. (2029 v.s.)

25. I return to this phrase below.
26. For one view of the importance of Sārada in the growth of modern Nepali literature, see A. Subedi (2038 v.s.:1-50).
27. Jati can be translated as community or nation.
28. It is important to note that "Jaya Nepal" does not find an entry in Turner's (1931) classic dictionary. Nor does it find an entry in Balchandra Sharma's (2019 v.s.) Nepali Sabda Kosh, published in the early days of the Panchayat System. In a dictionary sponsored by the Royal Nepal Academy and published in the early 1980s, there is an entry where its origin is described to be associated with the anti-Rana movement. It is further stated there that the phrase has become a ritual of greeting in meetings within the police and other nationalistic organizations and a way to invoke patriotic sentiments at the end of public lectures (Pokhrel et al. 2040 v.s.:476). Balkrishna Sama credits Sukraraj Shastri for being the first person to write "Jaya Nepal" in the early 1930s (2029 v.s.:108). Literary historian Tanasharma states that in the immediate aftermath of the execution of four anti-Rana activists in 1941, 'revolutionary poet' Gopal Prasad Rimal started saying "Jaya Nepal" as a form of greeting (2027 v.s.:115). In his autobiography, Rimal's friend and fellow activist in anti-Rana politics, Daman Raj Tuladhar suggests that it was a larger group of people working together that started the tradition of saying "Jaya Nepal" as a form of greeting (2039 v.s.:85-87). It is possible that the line "Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey Nepal" in Madhav Prasad Ghimere's ratriya git quoted earlier was partially responsible for making the phrase "Jaya Nepal" popular. The program for children broadcasted by Radio Nepal – Bal Karyakram – of which I was a regular listener in my childhood also ended by evoking "Jaya Nepal." While I cannot date the beginning of this practice precisely, I remember hearing it in 1975. P. Malla (2045 v.s.:101) ends his play on the Nalapani encounter by making Balbhadra evoke "Jaya Gorakh, Jaya Kali."
29. Suryabikram Gyawali (2018 v.s.[1997 v.s]:6) makes note of this as well. Although J. Gurung (2041 v.s.) mentions the participation of Gurungs in the campaigns prior to and during the 1814-16 war, he does not say how many of Balbhadra's soldiers were Gurungs.
30. For a powerful statement on how exclusive national sensibilities of the recent centuries have limited emotional and physical movements possible in ancient times, see Ghosh (1992). We must also note the precursors to national pruning in Acharyadixit's text. The Dehra Dun memorial placed by the British to honor Balbhadra reads: "This is inscribed as a tribute of respect, for our gallant adversary, Bulbudder, Commander of the fort, and his brave Goorkhas, who were afterwards, while in the service of Runjeet Singh, shot down in their ranks, to the last man, by Afghan artillery" (Williams 1874:136). This memorial was erected after Balbhadra's death on 14 March 1823 (D. Pant 2022 v.s.). Acharyadixit, just like my textbook, reproduces the statement from the memorial by excising the part that mentions Balbhadra's service in Ranajit Singh's army.

31. I have discussed this subject in detail elsewhere (Onta 1996a, 1996b) For more details on the life and work of Surya Bikram Gyawali, see J. Chetri (1993) and Pramod Pradhan (2044 v.s). D. Vajracharya (2044 v.s.) highlights Gyawali's contribution to the study of the history of modern Nepal.
32. The fact that Gyawali's text was written for young adults (2018 v.s.[1997 v.s.]:gha) makes it extremely comparable to my school textbooks. The pruning found in the latter cannot therefore be attributed to further simplification for the targeted audience. For other less detailed versions of the Balbhadra story by the same author see Gyawali (1955, 1956). Two essays by Bengali authors (Basu 1895, Sen 1899) originally published in Bengali magazines have been translated by Gyawali and attached to his text (2018 v.s.[1997 v.s.]:22-54). For an account of Balbhadra and Gorkhali bravery in Hindi, see Vidyalankara (1962).
33. Dines R Pant (2022 v.s.) provides some glimpses of the service of Nepalis in the Sikh army. While one of the documents he reproduces states that the interest to join the Sikh army came from Balbhadra himself, it is silent on his reasons for doing so.
34. On Bhakti Thapa see Mahes R Pant's (2023 v.s.) essay published as a serial starting with No. 10 of Purnima.
35. For examples of the influence of Gyawali's writings on Balbhadra on two generations of Nepali students before me see Shaha (1967[1965]) and S. Onta (2023 v.s.). Shaha (1967[1965]) is a selective and revised english rendition of Gyawali 's 1956 book whose first edition was published in 1949. It is interesting to note that in the preface to his book, Shaha writes, "I had to pen these pages in a rather hurried manner to satisfy the growing curiosity of my boy to learn more about our past and our national heroes. I thought that I owed it to him to do this because I had seriously neglected my responsibility for educating him in our national history. To accomplish my purpose readily, it ocured to me to render into English Shri S. B. Gewali's book Nepali Biraharu, which I had myself read with great profit as a boy" (Shaha 1967[1965]:ix). Shaha (1994) has recently revisited the battle of Nalapani in the pages of a Kathmandu daily. S. Onta's essay was published in Balaka, a children's magazine, at a time when Gyawali was one of the members of its editorial board.
36. In a recent history of the Nepali army brought out by the Royal Nepal Army Headquarters, it is stated that since Balbhadra liked to show bravery on the battle-field, he went to Lahore to join Ranajit Singh's army after the 1814-16 war. The same source speculates that in the context of the later realization that it "was the absence of the friendship between Nepal and the Punjab that led to their defeat in the hands of the English....it might be possible that Bir Balbhadra Kunwar went to the Punjab with the intention of generating friendship between the two sides" (Sharma and Rathaur 1992:503-4). While it acknowledges that no historical evidence has been found to support this line of thinking, it neglects the fact (D. Pant 2022 v.s.) that there were Nepalis serving for Ranajit Singh prior to Balbhadra's joining. Cf. R. Sharma (1992[2017 v.s.]).
37. I hasten to emphasize that the other birs are remembered. See for instance the essay on Amarsingh in a seventh grade textbook which begins with the

- statement "Nepal's history is the history of bravery" (G. Bhattarai 2039 v.s.:48). My point here is that Balbhadra is celebrated more than anybody else.
38. Literary historians such as Dixit (2018 v.s) and Shrestha (2038 v.s) have argued that the trauma generated by Sagauli made bhakti displace bravery as the dominant motif of Nepali literature in the immediate post-war years. See R. Shrestha (2035 v.s) for a slightly different argument. See also R. Subedi (2038 v.s.:25-32).
  39. For instance, Acharyadixit repeatedly cites passages from Vansittart (1896:40-42) and Williams (1874:124-38). One of the passages he cites from Williams reads: "Such was the conclusion of the defence of Kalunga [Nalapani], a feat of arms worthy of the best days of chivalry, conducted with a heroism almost sufficient to palliate the disgrace of our own reserves" (1874:134). For one of the early British accounts of the war at Nalapani, see Frazer (1820:13-31). Pemble's more recent account of the early British reverses at Nalapani puts all the blame on Gillespie (1971:134-66). For the construction of Nalapani as a historical pilgrimage site in Nepali travel literature, see Ghising (1992) and Prem Pradhan (2052 v.s.). For other deployments of the memory of Nalapani and Balbhadra, see D. Bista (2021 v.s.), L. Devkota (2026 v.s.), Giri (1970), P. Malla (2045 v.s.), Nepali (1984), Sama (2025 v.s.), Sharma (2017 v.s.) and D. Thapa (2027 v.s.) among others. I borrow the phrase "excessively plausible" from David Ludden.
  40. I am grateful to Basanta Thapa for convincing me of the importance of the disappearance of the Gaje Ghale story from later textbooks. What I write in this section is informed by conversations I have had with him. Ganesh M. Gurung notes this disappearance as one case of discrimination against the "indigenous peoples of Nepal" (1994:140-41). He does not provide further elaboration.
  41. The authors have made a mistake here. The incident that is described took place in May 1943 and not 1945. I have thus far been unable to figure out why the compilers of Nepali Sahitya chose to include the story of Gaje Ghale in their Nepali language primer over those of the other eleven VC winners (two from World War I and nine from World War II). The fact that he met the then Rana premier Juddha Shumsher in 1944 quite by chance (Paudyal 2050 v.s.:9) and was awarded the "Prajwal Nepal Tara" medal by the latter might have something to do with it (C. Gurung 1994:57-8; 91). For details on Parasmani Pradhan's efforts in the production of Nepali language textbooks from Darjeeling see his (1969:1-7) and (2028 v.s.:94-156).
  42. A political activist and educator in the 1950s, Muktinath Timisina, writes in his autobiography that when discussions were being held to determine the name of the college that eventually opened in Pokhara in 1960, some people suggested that it be named after Gaje Ghaley. But, writes Timisina, "from the perspective of national pride, I proposed that it be named after Prithvinarayan Shah" (2040 v.s.:107). His proposal received support from others and the college was named accordingly. It is also quite significant that the first public reception of Gurkha VC awardees was held in Nepal only in 1994 (C. Gurung 1994).

43. I am grateful to Kaushik Ghosh for pushing me on this point. For examples of analyses of history textbooks used in India and Pakistan see Jalal (1995) and Powell (1996).
44. I have thus far been unable to find cumulative data for the number of students who attended grades four and five in this quarter century. Aggregate enrollment figures for all primary school grades (grades I through III before 1980 and I through V since then) are available in published sources. For instance, about 2.8 million students were enrolled in primary schools in 1990 (Central Bureau of Statistics 1992:156). On the basis of the published data, I feel comfortable in stating that at least a few million students read the textbook stories of RI during this period. Karmacharya (1985) discusses the impact of the growth in textbook production in the Nepali printing industry.
45. The quotation has been extracted from a longer private communication to me from a student who finished high school from Kathmandu in 1991.
46. See Ragsdale (1989) for a case of how the dictates of the NESP were subverted in a Gurung village in central west Nepal.
47. As an example of the re-rendering of some members of the bir pantheon of RI as Magars, see P. Thapa Magar (1993). A response from some well-known academic historians to such efforts can be found in a special issue of the journal *Abhiman* (1995).
48. The almost complete absence of studies on Nepali nationalism – along the lines suggested here or otherwise – in recent collected works of studies related to Nepal (e.g. Kölver 1992, Toffin 1993, Allen 1994) is a telling evidence of how Nepal has until recently been located within the concerns of international scholarship. The contrast with India where there has been an entire industry of scholarship designed around this theme should prove to be an insightful comparative project on the politics that influence research and scholarship on Nepal.
49. Cf. Bhupi Sherchan's famous poem "Galat Lagcha Malai Mero Desko Itihas" (2051 v.s.[2026 v.s.]:25-27). One translation of this poem can be found in Hutt (1991:124-25).

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