

The Spirit of 1950 : A Social Analysis

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The revolution of 1950 has been the most important event in the making of modern Nepal. The forces of liberty and equality set in motion by the revolution will guide the Nepalis for all times to come. The manifestation of this spirit is seen in two directions. First, in the creation of democratic institutions like the free press, independent judiciary, and the Auditor General's Office to check the arbitrary spendings and the other short-sighted activities of the government; and secondly, the evolution of the social consciousness of the people. It is true that the multi-party system envisioned by the Delhi Accord was thwarted till 1990, yet, the social aspect of the revolution took a more permanent character.¹ The creation of a more egalitarian, secular society was the most lasting achievement of the revolution. The mood and feeling of 1950 was more of a new social consciousness that instilled a new courage and a new confidence in the hearts of the people. The society felt that the people's power had dawned. The weekly journal *Jagaran* of Falgun 2007 (February, 1951) epitomizes the spirit of 1950 in these carefully chosen words:

*Now we should not just settle down for the post of the Subba or Sirdar but be prepared to take over the high offices of Minister and Prime Minister.*²

However, more than in politics the real spirit of the revolution of 1950 is reflected in the social and psychological changes that moved the society or in other words it was manifested in the head and heart of the Nepali people. The social changes brought about by the revolution was a very complex phenomenon and the Nepali historians have begun to realize its complexities and its ultimate meaning. This paper intends to analyze the social aspects of the revolution. It was in the month of February that *Nepali Socialist Society* began to publish a weekly pamphlet entitled *Hamro Nepal* (Our Nepal) with the aim to rouse the social consciousness of the people. The pamphlet issued on February 18, 1951 opens with this goodwill prayer:

*Bhoka nanga narahun kio sathai basabinako,
Swatantra ho bhane sablae paun nyayapakshya binako.*³

In other Words -

None should go hungry or without shelter,
If independent receive we must the flow of justice.

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1. More on the revolution of 1950 see Prem R. Uprety, *Political Awakening in Nepal: Search for a New Identity*, New Delhi: Commonwealth, 1992, pp. 132 -180.

2. *Jagaran*, Falgun 4, 2007 (February, 1951), p. 4. The editor of this weekly was the poet Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan.

3. *Hamro Nepal (Our Nepal)*, (A Pamphlet), edited by Chandra Prakash Sharma, February 18, 1951, p. 1.

The poem further narrates the story of how the babies of the masses go without milk while the dogs of the affluent live in mansions drowned in a pool of milk.⁴

The aftermath of the revolution as well as the months that immediately preceded it was distinguished by an unprecedented flow of thoughts and emotions that very well reflects the rise of the social consciousness of the people. A pamphlet issued by anonymous Congress Party worker entitled *Aba Hami Jagrit Chhoun* (Now We Are Conscious) on Kartik 2008 may be taken as illustrative. It laments over the doom of the Nepali society for the Congress triumvirate (B.P. Koirala, Ganesh Man and Subarna Shumsher) have failed to give an effective leadership to the society. To quote

This is not the fault of our leaders but of our society
that has placed them in the helm of leadership.⁵

A tradition that was evolved in this period was that any one who had something to communicate did so freely and frankly by bringing out a pamphlet or a leaflet or a mini-leaflet, that was printed in the press. This became a fashion of individual or collective expression during the first half of the decade of 1950s. Such pieces of communication had a hypnotic effect on the readers for the common mass took what was printed as expression of truth. To many it was the gospel truth. It is true that the literacy of Nepal in the period was only two percent⁶, yet, the impact of these pamphlets and leaflets was many times greater for the literate read them loud among the illiterates, who took its message as the words of wisdom.

An important social aspect of the revolution of 1950 was that there was an outburst of professional, non-governmental and other social organizations which carried with them a democratic stamp both in style, structure, composition and values. It is this secular stamp that distinguished them from the traditional non-governmental organizations like the *guthi*, *thakali*, and the *phuki* systems, which had a religious colour. As the democratic spirit of 1950 penetrated these new organizations each evolved its own constitution, which laid its specific and general objectives, laid down the provision of membership open to all irrespective of their caste, creed or colour, and built a structure of duly elected office bearers. The posts like president, vice-president, general secretary, secretary, treasurer, and joint secretary instituted even in a small organization the *tole sangha* or *byayam sangha*, which had sprouted all over Kathmandu valley. They all embodied the "sacred" objective of seeking the welfare of the common man. This was the first exposé of the Nepali society to a democratic exercise. They all passed the annual budget and reviewed its achievement or the lack of it.

4. *Ibid.*

5. A Congress Worker, *Aba Hami Jagrit Chhoun (Now we are Conscious)*, April 14, 1952, p. 1-2.

6. Chester Bowl, *Ambassador's Report*, New York: Harper & Row, 1959, Read section in "Four Point Program in the Himalayas", p. 282.

An attempt is, thus, made in this paper to review the social and professional organizations that appeared in the atmosphere generated by the democratic movement in Nepal.

a. Paropakar

This was the first modern organization set up in Nepal in the social sector with the view to serve the needy and destitutes. The date was Aswin 10, 2004 (September 1947) and the historical timing was the premiership of *Maharaja* Padma Shumsher, one of the last Rana rulers of Nepal. Five members under the leadership of Dayabir Singh Kansakar of Kel Tole were instrumental in founding this organization.⁷ The basic objective of this organization was to raise money through public donations by keeping Paropakar Boxes in houses and public places. The money raised in this process would be used to import medicines; and establish a medical store-cum-clinic, which would not only examine the sick and the wounded but also distribute free medicines. If the Paropakar could raise enough money then it would also establish a hospital in the non-governmental sector. Thus, to raise a lot of money it should make a drive for its membership. As the *Sanad* (charter), which consists of sixteen articles, goes every year the annual expenditure and income of the organization was to be submitted before the general body of the members, which would also review the past activities of the body and plan for future activities. The general body was to be called according to the Company Act. The *Sanad* further went on to say that in order to facilitate the functioning of the organization the Government of Nepal would provide services of a clerk, who would receive a salary of thirty rupees a month from the government's exchequer.⁸

Thus, the Paropakar commenced its work by providing the free medi-care to the people. To be illustrative the number of the sick and the wounded attended by this charity organization during Chaitra 2004 (1948) to Aswin 2005 (1948) were 27,922. The Paropakar also opened its camp during the Shivaratri festival of February 1948 in the Pasupati Kshetra of Kathmandu and the total number of sick people it attended were 3,920. Again the number of the sick attended by the Paropakar during the first six months of 1948 were 17,303.⁹ However, with the conclusion of the revolution of 1950 the democratic spirit of 1950 entered into the organization and the Paropakar came up with its duly elected office-bearers like the president, vice-president, general secretary, joint secretary and treasurer.¹⁰ Then with the advent of time the Paropakar, which started with the purpose to provide

7. The other members were: Chandra Bir Kansakar - Masang Galli, Govinda Prasad Vaidya - Bhimsenasthan, Padmadhisandha - Bhotahiti and Tulak Man Nuchhe Pradhan - Maruhiti. *Shri Nepal Sirkar bata Paropkar Ausadhalaya lai Bakseko Sanad (Sanad given to Paropakar Dispensary by Nepal Government)*, Kathmandu: Paropakar Ausadhalaya, 1948. See Appendix A.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

10. See a leaflet issued by the Paropakar on Magh 1, 2011 (January 1955). See Appendix B.

medi-care services to the needy expanded its social activities to areas like maintaining maternity homes and schools for the orphans.

b. Lalitpur Rakyash Mandal Kendra

The period between 1950 to 1955 was one of transition in Nepali politics during which the successive governments found it difficult to plan, govern and administer. Thus, many social organizations sprouted in Kathmandu valley with the purpose of giving security and carrying on relief works for the people. The one opened in Patan known as the *Lalitpur Rakshya Mandal* is typical among them. It worked in cooperation with the other *tole sanghs* in the vicinity. The *Rakshya Mandal* took part not only in the selling and distribution of food grains supplied by the government at a subsidized rate but also protected the shops and the houses of the people from criminal elements by patrolling the streets at night. It also helped to rouse the social consciousness of the people by asking the common man to cut down their expenses in ritualistic ceremonies and during festive occasions. Leaflets issued by the Rakshya Mandal in 2007 (1951) and in 2009 (1953) makes an appeal in this direction. It asked the people to lower their family expenses in the coming *Bhai Tika* ceremony both in kind and in cash. It also makes a list of fruits and sweet meats the sisters should offer to their brothers and the dieties, while the brothers should give to their sisters only two rupees and a *Choli* (upper garment).¹¹ A study of the items prescribed by the appeal showed that it did drastically reduce the expenditure of the common man during the *Bhai Tika* festival.

c. Nepal Driver Sangha

The democratic spirit of 1950 is also clearly manifested in the opening of the Nepal Driver's Association on Magh 10, 2007 (January 1951), even before the revolution of 1950 had come to the conclusion. Its national headquarters was opened at Juddha Sadak, Kathmandu, with the general objective to promote the democratic spirit that was pervading throughout the country and with the specific objective to cater to the needs and the problems the drivers had to face throughout the country. The Sangha functioned in a democratic way with duly elected office bearers. The principal objectives of the Sangha were as follows:

- i. To improve the lot of the drivers population in Nepal.
- ii. To help mitigate the suffering of the drivers and their families, through economic assistance, when they fall into unfortunate accident.
- iii. To build contacts with the other Driver's Associations of the world.
- iv. Membership fee was mandatory, yet, if a driver due to lack of money could not afford to be a member could be exempted from the fee.¹²

¹¹. See a leaflet issued by the Food Committee of the *Lalitpur Rakshya Mandal*, March 1951; also a leaflet issued by the organization on 2009 (1953). See Appendices C and D.

¹². See a leaflet issued by Nepal Driver's Association, Magh 10, 2007 (January 1951). See Appendix E.

d. Vidya Byayam Sangha

This was an association that was built to coordinate the activities of the centres of physical education in the country. It was opened in Kamal Pokhari in 2008 (1952), and the students were instrumental in founding this organization. Its aim was confined not only in training the human body by physical exercise and games but also to provide food for thought by opening a library. It laid down two basic objectives. First, to train the mind and body of the student population of the country without being affiliated with any political organization; and second, to promote the wave of democratic culture that had swept the country. The *Sangha*, thus, functioned in a democratic way as laid down by a constitution. The members constituted the general body which elected its office bearers and passed the annual budget and programmes. As egalitarian spirit entered the organization membership was open to all irrespective of caste, creed or colour.¹³

e. Nepal Mahila Sangha

It was August 12, 1951 Her Majesty Shri Panch Bada Maharani (first wife of King Tribhuvan) inaugurated the *Nepal Mahila Sangha* in an audience of ten thousand. Among them were King Tribhuvan, Premier Mohan Shumsher and Mrs. Mangla Devi, the wife of Commerce Minister Ganesh Man Singh. The assembly elected Mrs. Mangla Devi as its chairperson. It also elected other office bearers like the vice-president, secretary and treasurer and other members of the executive. The Sangha had two objectives - general and specific types. The general objective was to promote the all-round development of the women was to promote the all-round development of the women folks of Nepal, while specific objectives were to start institutions to teach short hand, typing and nursing skills to Nepali women for there were no such institutions existing in the then Nepal.¹⁴

When the level of social consciousness began to rise, individual appeals began to echo in the social horizon of Nepal. These individual appeals above all asked their countrymen to develop in themselves the "new courage" and be self-reliant without falling into the net woven by the politicians. To be illustrative a leaflet issued on Chaita 10, 2008 (March 1952) by Bhim Bhakta Man Singh, the president of Zilla Sheva Sangha, contains a personal appeal entitled "My Personal Appeal Number Two to the People". The appeal above all asked the people to be self-confident and engage themselves in income generating activities. Even when living on "corn meal musk" and wild vegetables like *sisnu* one can still be productive by making ropes out of hemp fibre. This will not only give additional income to the family but it would instill a new confidence in the household.¹⁵

¹³. A leaflet issued by *Bidya Byayam Sangha* and printed in Bagavati Press, Thahiti, dated Baishak 4, 2008 (April 1952) (Author's collection).

¹⁴. See *The Hindu*, August 14, 1951, p. 7.

¹⁵. A mini-leaflet issued by Bhim Bhakta Man Singh, President, *Zilla Sheva Sangha*, Chaitra 10, 2008 (March 1952). (Author's collection).

Another example of the spirit of 1950 is seen in the founding of the Association of the Students of Western Nepal on July 1, 1951. The aim was to promote the national integration process through the instrument of music for nothing could bring people closer to each other than music. As music has the charm to soothe even a savage heart, the organization would stage frequent musical concerts in Kathmandu and other parts of Nepal and thereby bring the Nepalis people closer to each other. Furthermore, the money generated from the concerts would be used to open educational institutions in western Nepal where the literacy rate was the lowest.¹⁶

As the spirit of 1950 took a firm grip on the Nepali students, the students of Kathmandu valley had organized students' associations in the three cities as early as 1949 but by March 2, 2007 (November 1950) the three associations of the valley joined together to form the Nepal Students' Federation. Though the main aim of the student organization was to promote the welfare of the student community, yet, the times were such that in an effort to promote the egalitarian democratic spirit of the time they decided to join their hands with the Congress President who started an armed revolution to end the Rana oligarchy. It asked the students to be members of the organization and donate liberally.¹⁷ The College Students' Union also made protest over the Singh Durbar football incident of Aswin 5, 2008 B.S. (1951) through leaflets.¹⁸

Conclusions

The impact of the revolution of 1950 proved to be more social than political. Except for a brief period of the experiment in parliamentary democracy for eighteen months (1959-1960) democratization of the Nepali polity was choked and stifled till 1990, yet, the attempts made to create a more egalitarian, secular and social order, though slow, was steady and continuous. A number of factors like the surge in education, Nepal's increasing contacts with the West and international bodies, the entry of egalitarian values in the social and professional organizations helped to mould a new democratic culture in the society. So, if the democratic culture that had penetrated the society was taking Nepal in one direction then the authoritarian centralized political system was pulling Nepal into other direction. Thus, one has to say that though the democratic elements in the Nepali polity after 1950 was very much dwarfed and subdued, yet, the democratization of the Nepali society moved ahead, especially in the social and professional organizations. So as time rolled on caste hierarchy and the concept of pollution was increasingly diluted. By 1963 caste system was abolished by law, which proved to be a milestone in the creation of an egalitarian society. However, though it is one thing to legislate yet it is quite another thing to implement.

¹⁶. See a leaflet issued by the Association of the Students of Western Nepal, July 1, 1951 (Author's collection).

¹⁷. See a leaflet issued by *Nepal Chatra Sangha*, Marga 2, 2007 (November 1950). (Author's collection).

¹⁸. See a leaflets issued by College Students' Union. See Appendix F.

Nepal, however, still remains a Hindu state where the monarch has to be the adherent of the Hindu culture, where conversion to another religion is a crime against the state, yet, the post-1950 Nepali society was not the same as the pre-1950 Nepali society. The democratic spirit did enter the social and professional organization. These organizations did help to create a more secular social order and enabled Nepal to enter into the era of mass-culture, which distinguished modern Nepali from his medieval predecessor.

Appendix - A

Shri Nepal Sirkar bata Paropkar Ausadhalaya lai Bakseko Sanad
(Sanad given to Paropakar Dispensary by Nepal Government)

Appendix-B

Leaflet issued by the Paroparkar on Magh 1, 2011 (January 1955)

Appendix-C

Leaflet issued by the Food Committee of the
Lalitpur Rakshya Mandal, March 1951.

Appendix-D

Leaflet issued by Food Committee of the
Lalitpur Rakshya Mandal on 2009 (1953)

Appendix-E

Leaflet issued by Nepal Driver's Association,
Magh 10, 2007 (January 1951)

Appendix-F

Leaflet issued by College Students' Union
