



HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

Volume 21
Number 1 *Himalayan Research Bulletin; Nepal
After the Revolution*

Article 23

2001

Comments on Adhikari and Mathe by Parajuli

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Recommended Citation

Parajuli, Ramesh. 2001. Comments on Adhikari and Mathe by Parajuli. *HIMALAYA* 21(1).
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol21/iss1/23>

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Bipin Adhikari and S. B. Mathe's paper is both shallow and un-analytical. The authors blame the international media for misusing its power while reporting the royal massacre of June 1, for not having good faith, for not expressing concern about Nepal's independence, democracy and human rights and other critical issues, and for propagating what they were asked to serve to the rest of the world. The authors, however, do not clarify who did the 'asking'. Terms like 'misuse' and 'good faith' are subjective, and to justify these accusations one must supplement them with thorough textual analysis, which this paper lacks. The paper has simply compiled the same questions that the media - Nepali and/or international - had already asked by August 2001, and branded them as 'questions unasked'.

Adhikari and Mathe's assertion that the international media should show concern for Nepal's democracy is nothing but naïve. The authors do not seem to understand why the death of hundred Humlis from hunger is not news for the international media but George Bush's daughter drinking alcohol illegally is first page material. In his book, *Dateline Earth: Journalism as if the Planet Mattered*, Nepali journalist Kunda Dixit aptly stated, "... radio and newspapers have less and less time for serious analysis ... the mainstream media is littered with bias—for the simplistic, the sexy, the orthodox or the scandalous." For the international media, a 30-yr-old, foreign-educated would-be-King supposedly killing his family, including the King and Queen, simply for "not being allowed to marry his chosen girl", is news because it is sexy copy. It is glitzy. These media outlets will always be interested not in the future of democracy in Nepal but in *daam cadhaune*, *katto* ceremony and similar exotica in an erstwhile Shangrila-Kingdom.

What about the Nepali media? It is the Nepali media that most directly impacts the people of Nepal. However, the authors do not bother to utter a word about the Nepali media, not to mention providing an analysis of its efficacy in informing the people. Nepali media, which likes to call itself independent and *nirvik*, was helpless, especially in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. *Kantipur*, the most influential newspaper in Nepal, published no news about the *darbar kanda* on June 2. It is not that they didn't know what had happened; they couldn't dare publish. Some other dailies were also in a dilemma but they did indicate that some accident had happened in the palace. The electronic

media, except the Internet, didn't do anything but play the *shok-dhuns*. Some influential Nepali media wallahs believed that democracy was over and they played it safe, not wanting to offend new masters, even when it was not clear who they were. So they didn't ask too many questions, but simply relayed what they had been fed. Only subsequently, when they and the rest of the country had overcome the initial trauma, did they ask many of the questions that the authors have also compiled in their paper.

The authors eulogize the Shah dynasty, which in their words, "defended the country from all imperialist forces, championed national independence and patriotism, gave Nepal a tradition of sustainable diplomacy, learnt to legitimize itself by changing according to democratic aspirations of people." By applauding the Shah dynasty that has ruled Nepal for nearly 230 years, the authors legitimized the autocratic move of the late King Mahendra, who jettisoned the people-elected (by two third majority) government of Nepal, headed by B P Koirala in 1960. If the Shah dynasty in fact can be eulogized in these terms then it is also responsible for Nepal's poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment.

The Shahs kept distance from the Nepali people, who had freed them from the captivity of the Rana regime. Even after the advent of democracy, the *darbar* retained distance from the people and the elected government. King Birendra was not willing to clarify the role of the army. He didn't want the army under the sovereign people-elected government. Had the army been under the elected government's control, and had the *darbar* not been made so inaccessible to the public, we would have known the assassin or at least a thorough investigation could have been done by now. If we follow the official version, we have set a precedent by making the alleged murderer of a King, the King of Nepal. Tomorrow, if Prince Paras kills his father, he could easily become the King by the same token.

Referring to the clean-shaven heads and the *julus*, the authors claim that the monarchy has become quite popular. Did the authors bother to ask the people why they had shaved their heads or taken part in *julus*? People organized *julus* when they felt that injustice had been done to the late monarch and his family, as they didn't see any reasonable justification for the brutal killings. People came out in the streets to express their sheer frustration at seeing King Gyanendra (whom they suspected as having masterminded the event) as the head of state. Moreover, they were agitated by the thought that his son, Paras, the alleged murderer of Praveen Gurung and others, could one day be King of Nepal. Interpreted

another way, the monarchy's popularity had not increased absolutely during the 1990s. It only seemed that way because the image of our political leaders, who once stood tall, took a beating during the post-1990 years.

In his first speech after becoming the monarch, King Gyanendra said, "we had faced constitutional and legal difficulties to bring forth actual facts in the message regarding the incident of Friday June 1. As that situation no more exists, we'll bring forth the facts before our countrymen after an investigation about the incident." What does this mean? It means that Dipendra was the person behind the carnage, but since, at that time, Dipendra was the King, our constitution prohibited Gyanendra from telling the truth. By that speech Gyanendra not only indicated the name of the murderer but also made clear that nobody, not even a powerful regent, could call the King a culprit. Going by this speech, even if Gyanendra masterminded the carnage (as many still suspect), constitution and law prohibits all and sundry from pronouncing the truth. It is therefore foolish to expect anything other than the previously disseminated information to come out from the report of the commission. Who is then to blame: the commission, the government or the monarch?

Of course, as the paper states, there are a few questions unasked and many unanswered. The authors, however, fail to analyze why the questions could not be answered. The authors, it seems, were in a hurry and have therefore allowed factual errors to be present in their paper. For instance, Neer Shah's brother was married to Princess Shruti; Prime Minister got the information at 1.30am; no video camera was used to record the scene of the crime etc.

