NEPAL'S PRE-*BIKĀS* ENCOUNTERS WITH THE WEST: *SABHYATĀ* AND *UNNATI* AS PRECURSORS TO DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Conventionally it is believed that the dawn of "modern," democratic Nepal and the dawn of foreign aided development coincide. This paper looks beyond conventional explanations. It focuses on Nepali words *sabhyatā* (civilization) and *unnati* (progress) as they were used in Rana era Nepal.[1] These precursors were part of an emerging discourse that compared the people of Nepal with the outside world following the country's early encounter with the West even before the era of foreign aided development. While *sabhyatā* and *unnati* antecede *bikās* they were not the equivalent of *bikās*. They are what Reinhart Koselleck (2004), the guru of conceptual history, calls "parallels" that abut and, in this case, precede the protagonist concept.

In popular imagination Rana rule is characterized as a feudal era marked by backwardness, palace intrigues and isolationism. This representation implies a lack of "development" prior to the entry of foreign aid in Nepal. In fact, aid literature usually begins by representing Nepal as a blank slate on which development interventions were executed following the demise of Rana autocracy (see Mihaly 2009[1965]; Stiller and Yadav 1993[1979]; Skerry, Moran and Calavan 1992; Khadka 1997; Panday 1999). In contrast, there have been studies which show that in spite of an iron fisted Rana autocracy, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of political awakening for the people of Nepal (Uprety 1984; Chalmers 2003) and

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[1] Apart from *unnati* and *sabhyatā*, the other word that parallels *bikās* is *pragati*, also translated as progress. In the sources examined here, the resounding absence of *pragati* is only occasionally broken when it stands alongside the then popular *unnati* as a synonym. It is only with the emergence of the anti-Rana dissidents from their underground movement into a consolidated Nepal Praja Parishad that *pragati* begins to diverge from *unnati* and to carve a separate Left aligned existence. This however occurs after the fall of the Rana regime and is outside the scope of this paper.

curiosity towards modernity (Liechty 2010). Similarly, the works of Marxist or Marx-inspired political economists have demonstrated that Rana rule was far from isolationist. These works have illustrated how capitalism had begun to penetrate Nepali economy and society from the earlier portion of the twentieth century and the Ranas had been responding to these and had begun to integrate into the regional capitalist processes (e.g., Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 1980; Mishra 1987; Mikesell 1999[1990]). Nepal's status as a semi-colony of British India is discussed in Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon (1980) and elaborated in Mishra (1987). The latter traces Nepal's peripheral status to the Rana period from 1885 to 1949 when, beginning with the rule of Prime Minister Bir Shamsher (r. 1885–1901), Nepal opened up to unrestricted recruitment of Nepali men into the British Indian army. Simultaneously, the exodus of Nepalis into tea plantations and as daily wage laborers in various Indian towns and the increasing trade with British India due to the expansion of the Indian railway across Nepal's boarder facilitated, according to Mishra, Nepal's integration into the Indian economy. This integration was further expedited through the 1923 treaty with India which Mishra criticizes as being responsible for obliterating Nepal's indigenous craft in spite of it guaranteeing Nepal's status as a sovereign kingdom. Mikesell (1999[1990]) traces the penetration of foreign industrial capital into the small town of Bandipur as early as 1930s when, despite the efforts of the Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher to protect Nepal's cottage industries against the onslaught of foreign goods, a teething textile factory in Bandipur succumbed to foreign capitalist interests.

There have also been other studies which document the initiatives the Ranas had taken in installing hydropower stations or building canals for irrigation, laying pipes for water supply or managing forestry to yield better revenue (see, e.g., Sharma 2001; Ghimire 2015). These studies have refuted notions of Nepal as an isolated *Shangri-La* and have also shed light on the development-like initiatives that had been underway during the first half of the twentieth century. In the light of these studies, this paper is an attempt to look beyond conventional explanations of development and to trace its pre-*bikās* history. This paper contextualizes pre-*bikās* ideas embodied in the words *sabhyatā* and *unnati* in order to chronicle the antecedence to the modern concept of *bikās*.

In spite of the paucity of research on Nepali intellectual history or on the history of Nepali ideas and concepts, noteworthy studies emanating from the

West particularly on ideas of development and progress have informed this paper. Among the earliest is Robert Nisbet (1980) who maps the genealogy of the western idea of progress from the Greek and Roman times through early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance periods up to the works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers. In the process, Nisbet traces the gradual secularization of the idea from its original associations with spiritual and moral betterment.

The concept of progress is also the focus of Koselleck (2002), who argues that progress is a modern concept, one that encapsulates the experiences of a society accelerating into a modern world, a world very different from the bygone era which was dependent on natural biological calibrations. Koselleck sees a discontinuity between the classical notions of progress which he as well as Nisbet claim were based on cyclical rise and fall. Unlike Nisbet however, Koselleck claims that the modern concept of progress is an attempt to map and make sense of an open and unknown future, a future that is increasingly determined by technological advancements. He argues that the modern concept of progress is unconnected to religious faith and to other worldly perfection that was believed to be attainable in the Judeo-Christian notions of Christ's Second Coming. In this regard, he contradicts Nisbet's history of progress which is closely tied to Judeo-Christianity.

Cowen and Shenton (2004[1996]) examine the idea and the practice of development in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Unlike Nisbet who focuses on the metaphysics of progress, Cowen and Shenton argue that in the historiography of Western thought, development was "invented" to counter the faults of progress. They write of progress as being that idea "which was made possible" initially by "the revelation of God through an increasingly scientific understanding of Nature" to a more "secular variant" that relied on the "unlimited capacity of improvement through the human effort of labor" (Cowen and Shenton 2004[1996]: 14). This human effort was manifest in industrialization which had positive as well as negative consequences; the negative consequence being the loss of social, political and economic order. The authors claim that it was up to development to compensate the negative propensity of capitalism and to restore social order on the basis of trusteeship and hence it was "invented."

Koponen (n.d.), in discussing the colonial legacy of development, agrees with Cowen and Shenton's interventionist approach to development adding that it is the interventionist approach that differentiates development from its

parallel progress. He however disagrees with their claims that the lineage of interventionist approach could be traced to Comte. Rather, Koponen argues, interventionist development took place not just in a particular European locale but across Europe in different contexts and in the colonies as well.

Additionally, Koponen writes that under colonialism, development was one among the many competing notions such as progress, improvement, betterment and civilization. Based on his works on Tanzania he writes, "of these, civilization was the most important…and did much the same job during colonialism as development has done after it.…When Africa was colonized, the main legitimizing devise was not development but 'commerce and civilization'" and that development gained more foothold as colonialism withered (Koponen n.d.: 11). As such, the biological notions of development associated with the process of unfolding or unrolling began to include social and political processes as well.

The pre-*bikās* history of Nepal exemplifies a case that is not similar to the West as discussed either by Nisbet or Cowen and Shenton. The genealogy of *unnati* and "development" do not conform either to Nisbet's religious interpretations of progress or to Cowen and Shenton's version that regard development as a response to the perils of industrialization. Rather, it comes closer to Koselleck's thesis which argues that progress is a concept minted as a response to modernity. However, this affinity is not identical. The sources examined here reveal that Rana era notions of *unnati* and "development" were a response to encounters with a different *sabhyatā* and not with *ādhunikatā* (modernity). They were part of a thriving discourse that defined and compared the people of Nepal with the *sabhya* (civilized) world following the country's early encounters with the West.

The paper begins by discussing the Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur's journey to England and France. This was the first purposeful, non-military encounter with the West and was to influence the kingdom's perceptions of itself and the world outside its border and is the earliest example of positive identification with the British Empire. Positive identifications were also pronounced during the reign of Prime Ministers Chandra Shamsher and Juddha Shamsher as is visible in Chandra's slavery abolition speech and Juddha's "industrial development," which is discussed subsequently. By the time Juddha was contemplating Nepal's industrialization, his rational for positive identification were worded through *unnati* and *sabhyatā* and through the English word development, the latter however remaining confined to

Juddha Shamsher's communications. Hence the paper teases out the range of meanings associated with the two Nepali words *unnati* and *sabhyatā* by surveying the magazine *Śāradā*, Nepal's earliest literary magazine. It then discusses the subordination of the word "development" to the more popular *unnati* during the late Rana era. It concludes with a brief comparison between the genesis of the ideas of progress and development in the West and in Nepal.

Encounter with the West: Jang Bahadur's Voyage

In his book *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation,* Winichakul (1994[1988]) speaks of "negative identification," which he describes as the tendency of an ethnic group to define themselves in terms of the differences that set them apart from other ethnic groups and people. He discusses this in reference to the tendency of the Thai people to define Thainess by placing themselves in opposition to what they consider to be un-Thai. Such negative identification is not restricted to Thailand but is ubiquitous, he claims. But what about the opposite of negative identification, the attempts by groups and nationalities to identify themselves according to the qualities they consider worthy of emulating from a different ethnicity or nation? For the sake of convenience let us call this positive identification. Although Winichakul can hardly be unaware of this equally common tendency, perhaps he chooses not to dwell on it since the Thai case in the late 1890s was an attempted hybrid between traditional Buddhism and Western science that tried to incorporate as much of Western science as it tried to retain its Buddhist traditions.

Prime Minister Jang Bahadur's journey to England and France in 1850 is Nepal's earliest case of positive identification. He was the first public figure to undertake such a journey primarily to gauge the strength of the *Aṅgrej bādśāh* and to purposefully observe Western customs, conduct and arrangements *(rīti, thiti* and *bandobasta*) and to determine the kingdom's future policy towards this towering neighbor. However, this voyage was not the first encounter. It was preceded by the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–1816. Although Jang Bahadur became prime minister three decades after the war, it was this collision with the British Empire that was to nurture his desire for first hand assessment of British might. No *rājā, nawāb* or *bādśāh* from *Hindustan* had ever ventured into this land and newspapers were the only

source that could provide an estimation of their strength. It was this gap that Jang Bahadur wished to overcome.[2]

A book titled *Jang Bahadurko Belāyat Yātrā* (Jang Bahadur's Journey to England) describes this journey and is supposedly the first travelogue written in the Nepali language circa 1854 (Dixit 2014 v.s.).[3] Being the first written account of the Gorkha kingdom's encounter with a culture and a political system different from its own, this travelogue captures the Gorkhali's initial impressions of the West, impressions that were to herald the search for *unnati, pragati* and *bikās* in later years.

In England, Jang Bahadur and his entourage were to marvel at the site of a big city and the amenities it offered. Along with descriptions of England's military strength, the travelogue devotes significant number of pages in discussing the British parliament, the procedures of which are described in the following words,

> There is no space for comicality in the *sabhā*. One speaks and is replied to by another. If debate on this subject is over everyone says yes and signs. If the debate is not over (*phālāphāl garī muddā ṭhaharāī*) a lot of books are looked at and answers given. The parment [sic] does not tolerate anybody's misbehavior (*berīt*). It can take revenge on the *bādśāh* (king). It can dismiss the prime minister who

[2] The first encounter between the Gorkhali kingdom and the Western world began with the arrival of the Capuchin mission in eighteenth century Malla era Kathmandu. The impact of these missionaries upon the Gorkhali kingdom has not been explored in great detail so far. Most literature conclude that there was little exchange that was of significance. The missionaries were forced to retreat from the kingdom once Prithvi Narayan Shah ascended to power since the Shah king viewed them with suspicion. A second encounter that preceded the rise of Jang Bahadur was *mukhtiyār* (equivalent to prime minister) Bhimsen Thapa's flirtations with the French to form an alliance to oust the British from the subcontinent along with a similar alliance with Ranjit Singh of Punjab in the 1830s. Both of these were unsuccessful and contributed to Thapa's downfall. What is important to note is that these were military encounters and not "pre-development" encounters, the subject of this paper.

[3] The manuscript that survives at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya does not bear a title. The title, *Jang Bahadurko Belāyat Yātrā* was given by the editor. Details such as the possible authors, the language used, approximate date of the manuscript based on its physical appearance are discussed in the preceding and succeeding sections of Dixit (2014 v.s.).

has misbehaved. It can take revenge on the commander-in-chief who has misbehaved [and] there is no account of the lords, dukes, generals. If the army causes disturbance, another army is used to bomb it. (Dixit 2014 v.s.: 29)[4]

That nobody, not even the king or the prime minister could be above the law was something the writer mentions on more than one occasion. This was in sharp opposition to the Gorkhali case where Prime Minister Jang Bahadur and the Shah kings before him were never under the ambit of the law. That the author was plentifully impressed by the *Aṅgrej* is evident in the many pages. What is also striking is that this retrospectively written travelogue was keen to impress upon its readers that Jang Bahadur was no less than the British rulers. Impressions of Jang Bahadur that were "overheard" at banquets and receptions such as, "The *wazir* of Nepal is wise, in appearance and [in his] attire and jewelry [they] suit him, [he is] young and good looking" (Dixit 2014 v.s.: 34) or elsewhere "… he speaks carefully. The Lord has bestowed him with intelligence suitable to this age (*bakhatko buddhī Iśwarle diyeko rahecha*)" (Dixit 2014 v.s.: 40) reveal how the writer penned Jang Bahadur's image to match the *Aṅgrej* in terms of regality and intelligence—that Jang Bahadur was equally sagacious and no less than the *Aṅgrej* in his capabilities. The following is one more "overheard" description of Jang Bahadur during his sojourn in France,

> The prime minister *sāheb* of Nepal is very *ummedār*, in the sense that he is handsome, rich, wise, brave and agile. Carefully admitting that he should be aware of all kinds of work (*kām-kārkhānā),* not afraid to spend money when required, [and] claiming that he is the one to give to others never to take from them. Observing his activities and having heard that what he speaks comes true, [and] observing his speech, gait, laughter the *kachaharī* declared that he has the qualities of our [French] *bādśāh* and he will be a great man. (Dixit 2014 v.s.: 60)

Thus while the Gorkhali entourage was positively impressed by *Belāyat*, there was keenness to project the prime minister as equal. The "other," the *Aṅgrej* from *Belāyat* and France, definitely held a magnetic allure over

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[4] Unless mentioned, all translations are mine.

the *Gorkhali* but rather than debasing themselves and feeling inferior or incompetent this encounter opened the gates for social appraisal that was otherwise far from the musings of the territory hungry warriors and rulers. That Jang Bahadur was a consummate warrior required little proof but since he was also equal to the English in terms of the "intelligence suitable to this age" that intelligence bid him to cultivate friendship with them and to borrow from their wisdom. This "intelligence" to borrow is twice mentioned in the following ways, "to resent them [the *Aṅgrej*] will not benefit anyone" and "…strong are those *bādśāh*s that draw from the intelligence of the *Aṅgrej* these days" (Dixit 2014 v.s.: 20–21).

Borrowing from their intelligence and identifying positively with the *Aṅgrej*, Jang Bahadur promulgated the *Mulukī Ain* in 1854, the first comprehensive administrative and personal law discussing, among others, the abolition of mutilation, partial abolition of *satī* and limitation of capital punishment to specific categories (Shaha 2001). The objective of the *Ain* was to ensure uniform punishment to subjects, high and low according to the nature of their offense. The *Ain* also created a national hierarchy that legitimized the position of the ruling group (Höfer 1979). Nevertheless the code was the first effort at systematizing civil-administration in Nepal and also the first tangible result of positive identification.

Chandra Shamsher's Slavery Abolition Speech:
An Example of Positive Identification

Chandra Shamsher was the longest ruling Rana prime minister (r. 1901–1929). His regime was marked by comparative amity among the otherwise feuding brothers. Chandra Shamsher ruled with an iron fist and introduced reforms that were only possible because of his unchallenged stature. However, his reforms were partly a continuation of what was initiated by his predecessor Dev Shamsher (r. March 5–June 27, 1901). This section focuses on Chandra Shamsher since his predecessor only ruled for a few months compared to the twenty eight years of Chandra's time in power. The longer duration of his rule meant that Chandra Shamsher was able to enforce reforms both new and old. Although Dev Shamsher initiated reforms, it was Chandra Shamsher's period that witnessed greater social impacts.

Chandra Shamsher provided continuity to Jang Bahadur's policies of friendship with the British Empire. During his reign, Nepal assisted Britain in the "great war" of 1914–1918 by supplying men and materials for which

Nepal was "gifted" an annual present of one million rupees in perpetuity.[5] Apart from his military tactics, Chandra Shamsher is also remembered for promoting novel social and technological endeavors. However, it has often been repeated in writings about the Ranas that the motive was primarily luxury driven with the consumption of luxury goods creating a divide between the Ranas and their subjects (Regmi 1971; Liechty 2003). For instance, the Dhursing-Matatirtha ropeway was meant for ferrying construction materials for palatial palaces and the Pharping power plant was constructed to light up these palaces. Although there was some productive use of technology such as the ropeway being used to transport cheap rice from the lowlands to feed the laborers, these were merely "afterthoughts" and technology was primarily meant to entertain those at the helm of the hierarchical order rather than being used for productive increase (Gyawali and Dixit 2010: 248).

What is not mentioned is that apart from trying to satiate their needs for luxury, this flirtation with technology and social change was a result of Nepal's positive identifications with the *Aṅgrej* across the border. In the case of Chandra Shamsher, this positive identification was straddled with a new element—Nepal's sovereignty. Chandra Shamsher strove for a balance between emulating the British ways and ensuring Nepal's independence vis-à-vis British India. His flirtations with technology and social change were partly a result of the awareness of Nepal's precarious independence and therefore the need to appear distinct without greatly antagonizing the British in India.[6] He attempted to stand apart not by being the polar opposite of the West. Rather, this distinction was crafted by selectively borrowing from the ideas and institutions of the West without letting it radically destabilize Nepali society as well as the friendship with the British. This is evident in Chandra Shamsher's stance on slavery.

Slavery was abolished in Nepal in 1925. Amidst a large gathering of people in Tundhikhel, the open space used then and now mainly for military

[5] Notes on the proposed capitalization of the annual present of rupees ten lakh to the Nepal government, Foreign and Political Department, 373–X, 1925, National Archives of India (NAI).

[6] Discussions held within the British Indian government on Nepal's independence is contained in "Question as to whether Nepal is under the suzerainty of the British Crown." Foreign Department notes, Secret-E, March 1903, No. 228 in File no. 973, Legislative Department, NAI.

parades, Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher delivered a speech sixty one pages in length detailing its moral and financial burdens. Although slavery was entrenched within certain parts of the kingdom, it was not ubiquitous. Nevertheless, it had social functions which Chandra Shamsher was well aware of. Any attempt to uproot slavery violently could prove destabilizing.

The speech is an appeal from the prime minister to his people asking their views on the *amlekh* (manumission) of the *kariyā* (slaves). It is not a speech declaring the abolition of slavery. Rather it is a well thought out invitation to change that is mainly based on everyday realities of early twentieth century Nepal. It makes references to the immorality of slavery and provides compelling calculations to prove its cost ineffectiveness. It speaks to the upper echelons of society who were slave owners and guardians of social order based on Hindu codes as well as the ones preferring status quo. However, the speech does not rely heavily on religious interpretations. There are references to Hinduism, mostly towards the concluding sections. Sanskrit *ślok*s are added to bolster the case along with a reminder about the merit that will be gained if slaves are freed from generations of servitude. Nevertheless these do not form the core argument. The core arguments are based on the "census," on mathematical calculations and on calls for rational judgment.

The speech begins by evoking the heroism of the Gorkhalis, cautioning that it might be defamed if the *muluk* does not take actions to rid itself of the dark blot that is slavery. According to him, "although we should prevent the fame (of our forefathers) from being tainted, today in front of the *sabhyasaṁsār* an ill-repute hounds that name and fame" (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 2). He suggests that it may be appropriate to consider the abolishment of slavery in Nepal since it has "disappeared from all places in the world where *sabhyatā* resides" (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 3). Although he briefly mentions how religious texts do not forbid the abolishment of slavery, he does not elaborate further. Instead the discussion shifts towards the moral and financial burdens of slavery which is interspersed with examples from the *sabhyasaṁsār* along with pleas for empathy.

Citing examples from the Pemba island of Zanzibar and Marishaya (Mauritius?) as well as "many new *Aṅgrej* settlements," Chandra Shamsher states that slavery was discontinued in the *Aṅgrej* world because of its ills. He refers to the case of the slave settlements along the "Cat River" occupied by the "Hatents" to illustrate the difference in productivity among slaves before and after their emancipation. According to Chandra Shamsher,

> When they [Hatent] were slaves, they were considered fools to the extent that even those in Africa, the *habsī,* would call them useless lazy, make fun of them. When they became free (*āphūsukhī bhayepachi)* the same Hatent in the very same settlements became very hardworking [and] converted previously arid land into something like a beautiful garden with a variety of vegetation. It is bondage that prevents the slave from acquiring hardworking habits. This is why they have been made incapable of intelligence, wisdom and contemplation. (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 14)

The speech also cites a comparative "report" that was commissioned by the government of Pemba and was investigated by certain *pañca bhalādmī* (noble men). According to Chandra Shamsher, this "report" calculated the costs and benefits in agricultural production between slaves and non-slaves in Pemba and Seychelles islands. It revealed that a free man who worked according to his will was thrice more efficient than a slave (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 16). Chandra Shamsher then makes a similar assessment of the impact of slavery on Nepal's agriculture. Using mathematical calculations that were annexed to the main text, he argues that a hired laborer, a *jyālādār* is more efficient than a slave.

The speech is composed of two kinds of "facts." The first are everyday examples and social practices requiring the participation of a slave which, the prime minister claims, would not be upset by the abolition. The second are evidences from the *sabhya muluk* demonstrating the obsoleteness of the practice. What also appears possible is that the speech was not only meant to be listened to but studied as well. This conjecture can be made because the speech was also printed in the form of a book with an "annex" of calculations and census data.

It is only after describing these "facts" at length that Chandra Shamsher gave voice to the source that prompted him towards this issue. He asks his audience to,

> forget the fact that [slavery] is considered harsh by the world that has achieved *civilization* (*sabhyatā pāyekā sārā saṁsār*), they even avoid extending ties of friendship with those that continue this practice, the *jāti* that practices this [slavery] is not considered *sabhya* by anyone …even if we only consider what the *sabhyasaṁsār* will say, in this

phase that is renowned as the *yug* of *sabhyatā*, that *sarkār* marching towards *unnati* will immediately do what it has to do to preserve its dignity in the face of other *muluk*. (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 45)

He further states, "when our interactions with other *sabhyajāti* of the world are growing [and] the influence (*naitikbal*, moral strength) of their good thoughts on us is rapidly increasing it has become necessary for us to work on this matter according to the need of the time" (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 48). Additionally, since the practice had been abolished in *muluk*s otherwise considered "*asabhya*" (uncivilized), he urgs the people to unite to "bring an end to this cruel, *asabhya* and useless practice" (Name not mentioned 1981 v.s.: 49).

Hence it is clear that Chandra Shamsher's anti-slavery attempts arose from Nepal's interactions with the *sabhya* world. While the "good thoughts" (*asal vicār*) of the *sabhya* world provided Chandra with the strength to change an ill begotten practice, he as prime minister had to ensure that the discontinuity of slavery would not affect social order. In order to convince his people, he cites examples of the abolition of *satī*[7] which, he claims, did not destabilize social order. Towards the end of the speech Chandra Shamsher also seeks suggestions from his people, asserting that he will act according to their decision. There appears to have been little opposition since it is recognized that slavery was abolished in Nepal in 1925.

In explaining to his people that slavery was barbarous, Chandra Shamsher projected himself as an enlightened ruler who was aware of the *sabhya* practices such as anti-slavery movements. He relied on calculations and everyday examples which he chose carefully. His reference to far flung Zanzibar proves that he was well aware of anti-slavery movements. Since this speech does not refer to the revolt and the long struggle that accompanied the *sabhya* world's emancipation of slaves, it reveals how he selected only a certain aspect of the anti-slavery movement possibly because he feared a backlash from the dominant caste groups who could be emboldened to act against his proposal. Simultaneously, he unhesitatingly expressed his admiration of the *Aṅgrej*. Such admiration was part of Chandra Shamsher's congenial policies towards British India. In spite of it however, the need to be identified as a sovereign kingdom, distinct from the British controlled

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[7] The practice of wife immolating on the husband's funeral pyre.

Indian princely states were also paramount. Since in deciding to abolish slavery Chandra Shamsher outdid the most "progressive" of Indian princely states, this selective borrowing from the *sabhya* world provided Chandra a certain amount of distinction that he sought as a sovereign, enlightened ruler.[8]

Positive Identification under New Circumstances:
Juddha Shamsher's Industrial Pursuits

Nepal's infantile attempt at industrialization is another case of positive identification with the West albeit with adjustments. The desire to industrialize Nepal was strongly evident during the reign of Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher (r. 1932–1945). Unlike Chandra Shamsher however, Juddha was not encumbered by the question of Nepal's sovereignty since, by the time he ascended to power, Nepal had significantly consolidated her independence and was beginning to extend her hand in friendship to previously unconnected countries. Along with strengthening traditional ties with British India, Juddha also received decorations and medals from France, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Japan and Finland. During his rule Juddha Shamsher was also emboldened to court the friendship of Hitler and Mussolini, his son and envoy to England Bahadur Shamsher having met the two in Berlin and Rome respectively (Pande 1987: 64).

This extension of foreign relations beyond India and Tibet was a bold move for a country tied to the "good will" and constant monitoring from British India. It speaks of the success that Nepal had achieved in asserting her independence away from the cautious balancing strategies of Chandra Shamsher's regime. The impact of this was an emboldened prime minister whose self-image was not exclusively tied to the positive identification of

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[8] In writing about the abolishment of capital punishment in Nepal, *The Tribune* of August 1, 1931, published from Lahore mentions Nepal's earlier achievement—the abolition of slavery—in the following words: "Nepal, which some time ago startled those who believed that it was impervious to modern thought or modern influences by abolishing slavery, has now taken a further step along the same line, which has placed it, in respect of vital matter, in the front rank of modern nations. The abolition of capital punishment which has just been announced by the Rana prime minster of Nepal is a momentous step in advance." Contained in "Abolition of capital punishment" Foreign Department, Ext 238–X, 1931, NAI. In Nepal, *Gorkhāpatra*, the then sole newspaper reproduced the *Kariyā Amlekh* speech partially under the heading *Deś Samācār* (see Gorkhapatra 1981 v.s.) but did not carry a "report" or editorial on it.

earlier days. Like his predecessor, Juddha Shamsher believed that Nepal could learn from the West. However, earlier belief that tied the longevity of Rana regime to the benevolent support from British India was replaced by the realization that British India was equally dependent on the Ranas for peace and stability. Juddha's "industrial development" occurred under these new circumstances.

Between 1936 and 1950, a total of sixty three industries were registered in Nepal (Kandel 2009: 273). Most of these were set up with joint investments from the Rana elite and the Indian Marwari community across the border.[9] In a letter to the British envoy, Prime Minister Juddha put forward his reasons for the need for industrial development. The letter states,

> For some years past the Government of Nepal has been anxiously considering the decadent economic situation of the country. The combined effect of various causes, coupled with the dearth of occupation at home and keener competition outside, resulted in worsening of the condition of not only the lower ranks but through natural repercussion also those of middle and even the upper classes of society. This has made it imperative to seek and find ways and means to ameliorate, to some extent at least, the acuteness of the stress. It is hoped that discriminating industrial development on a moderate or small cottage scale, utilizing the local raw materials and cheap power units available in the country will bring some relief and that as capital, intelligence and labour in the country can be combined in

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[9] In spite of these efforts, Nepali goods were unable to compete in a market that was inundated with cheaper goods from British India. Up until the early 1900s, Nepali cottage industries had been thriving mainly due to the restriction on import of foreign goods. These restrictions were relaxed in the 1923 Anglo-Nepal Friendship Treaty during the reign of Chandra Shamsher when the doors to import were opened. Hence although Juddha Shamsher's "industrial development" provided impetus to large industries and tried restoring smaller ones, the pace could not be sustained since Nepal lacked the necessary skills and capital to compete with Indian goods. Additionally, the end of Second World War caused a slump in exports and eventually killed these nascent industries that had relied on the demands for cheap goods during the war. By the end of the 1950s less than a handful of these budding industries survived.

such development such methods gradually introduced may prove of help to that end at this juncture.[10]

Juddha Shamsher believed that industrial development would result in economic betterment and in the welfare (*bhalāi*) of the people. It was the duty of the prime minister to develop industries and the economy. In his capacity as prime minister of an independent country, he negotiated for this industrial development since he had come to understand that a symbiotic relation existed between the two countries in matters of security and political stability. The following two excerpts are from two separate letters written by Juddha Shamsher to Colonel Betham which exemplify the shift from positive identifications emanating from awe and admiration (circa 1850s–1910s) to one that was less adulatory and more assertive. In a letter dated September 13, 1940 Juddha reminds the British minister of the assistance provided by Nepal during the First World War and argues thus,

> On the strength of all these friendly services ungrudgingly rendered from time to time, Nepal may well feel that she has a right to count and rely upon the generous cooperation and help of the British Government in developing her limited resources towards making herself self-supporting as best as she could.[11]

A second letter from Juddha to Betham dated March 24, 1943, countering British anxieties that an industrialized Nepal could encroach Indian markets, reminds the British minister of the assistance rendered by Nepal during the Younghusband Mission to Tibet. Juddha writes,

> Had Nepal stuck to speak of her loss it will not be too much to say that the history of India of the time would have come to be written quite differently from what it is. Much depends upon the will to do …if, as stated, the Government of India's International obligation in respect of Most-Favoured [sic] Nation-Treatment really stand on the way, there can perhaps be no earthly reason whatever at least to

[10] Letter from the Prime Minister of Nepal to H.M.'s Minister in Nepal, External Affairs, 616–X, secret, 1937, serial nos 1–16, NAI.

[11] The letter is contained in "Industrialization of Nepal," External Affairs, 788–X/40, secret, 1940, NAI.

our being plainly told that the traditional usage of levying no tax or custom duty on goods and livestock of Nepal origin imported by land and or by water into India will be adhered to. These usages have never transgressed nor for the matter of that the continuance of the same be a transgression on international obligations. Moustache, says a Nepali proverb, can be no obstacle to a devouring mouth.[12]

Hence, by the time Juddha Shamsher consolidated his hold over the kingdom, the precarious positive identifications of an earlier period was not as encumbered by Nepal's relations with the more powerful British India as it was during Chandra Shamsher's regime. As will be discussed next, while Nepal acknowledged the strengths of Western *sabhyatā*, Juddha's industrial pursuit was the result of positive identification that was as keen to prove its own worth as it was open to emulating from the West. Or as one review of Juddha Shamsher's regime put it, "In the march of progress Nepal is making an earnest effort to keep pace with the other nations of the world. The special characteristic of this progress lies in making changes without disturbing the national ideal and without any apish imitation of other nations. This is the inner spirit of the present regime" (Sen 1939a: 282–283).

Towards Industrialization: The Vocabulary of *Sabhyatā, Unnati* and "Development"

Two significant events need to be mentioned in connection with Juddha's industrialization. The first was the industrial exhibition held in Kathmandu in 1937 which was followed by subsequent exhibitions in 1939 and 1944. The exhibitions aimed at encouraging manufacturing and industries based on locally available raw materials. It also sought to promote locals skills in handicraft and cottage industries as well as to increase the awareness and popularity for local goods. The coordinator Bijay Shamsher's speech on the occasion of the first exhibition emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and local manufacturing but also dwells on such practices in *sabhya* countries. According to him,

[12] This letter too is contained in "Industrialization of Nepal," External Affairs, 788–X/40, secret, 1940, NAI.

Exhibitions are useful for the promotion of skills and commerce. Apart from exhibitions, there is no other place where industrious men and others gather and share their skills. It is an established practice in *sabhya* countries to hold exhibitions on various subjects in order to educate their subjects (*raitīduniyā*) and to encourage them towards *udyog* for the *unnati* of the country. (Gorkhapatra 1994 v.s.a: 4)

Similar reference to *sabhya deś* is also found in the editorial of the *Gorkhāpatra* of the same date according to which,

In the *sabhyatā* of today, the *sabhya* countries have been organizing many exhibitions regularly.…Any country may face conditions where it has to learn many things from foreign [countries]—this is also an enduring truth. Yes but what should be done is—while learning foreign skills [one should not] color ones thought and soul in foreign color such that the pure name of ones ancestor is tainted. The rule is to learn foreign qualities and to mold them to fit the country.… Japan's navigation is no less than any other today but the seeds were sown merely seventy years ago by the hard work of an English sailor. Who knows to what extent the seed of the developmental process of *unnati* may grow (*unnatiko kram bikās katro biubāṭa katro huna āucha—ke ṭhegān*). (Gorkhapatra 1994 v.s.b: 2)

Although *bikās* makes a sudden appearance here, it was not associated with development as "industrial development" but with growth in the biological sense. The social and political connotations of *bikās* were not yet in practice.

While Juddha Shamsher's speeches on the occasion of the three exhibitions do not mention *sabhya deś* or *sabhyatā* but reiterate the importance of self-reliance, the speech delivered by Bijay Shamsher on the occasion of the third exhibition is consistent in terms of the *sabhyatā* rationale. According to this speech,

Among the pertinent problems of the modern (*ādhunik*) world economic problems are the most difficult. It is economic conditions through which the differences between countries become visible. Economic *unnati* is synonymous with *deś unnati*. In other words, that

country in which its people eat well, live in good houses, are educated and informed, where unemployment is low, where production and distribution are well regulated, that country is considered *sabhya* and powerful. Thus the betterment of lifestyle is the main indicator of material (*bhautik*) *sabhyatā*.…Industry makes a country rich. The more wealth a country absorbs the greater the economic awakening of its people.…A country where farmers are not involved in any business, there the farmers will remain in the lowest rung of the ladder of material *sabhyatā*. (Gorkhapatra 2001 v.s.: 2)

Sabyha countries provided inspiration for *udyog* and auxiliary activities such as the exhibitions. *Sabhya* countries were also increasingly associated with *unnati* of the economic and material kind as is evident in the above excerpts. While attempting to emulate the material progress of the *sabhya deś* was a worthy undertaking, Juddha Shamsher's industrial ventures were not only attempting to emulate these countries and create opportunities within Nepal but also prevent Nepal's wealth from draining into British India and beyond. At the inaugural speech of the second exhibition, Juddha Shamsher did not hesitate to state:

No matter how beautiful foreign goods are, there can be no pride among those who import such goods, sell them among kith and kin and accumulate wealth.…It would be praise worthy if the needs of the country can be met through goods made in the country and if we are able to export. (Gorkhapatra 1996 v.s.: 6)

Similarly, his speech at the Udyog Parishad emphasized the importance of self-reliance thus, "We should constantly strive to make ready those good we need within the country itself. The ongoing war shows us the difficulties that can be encountered when basic goods have to be brought from outside" (Śāradā 2001 v.s.: 54). A similar message disseminated by the *Nepal Kapaḍā ra Gharelu Elam Pracār Aḍḍā* states, "Every year crore of rupees are drained out of Nepal…lakhs of rupees drain out only for clothes. If everyone starts using *sārī* and other clothes and goods made here…it would be possible to retain the money that otherwise drains outside" (Śāradā 1996 v.s.: 63).

Like his predecessor Chandra Shamsher, Juddha Shamsher was sensitive regarding Nepal's repute when compared with the *sabhya* world. However,

while Chandra's social reforms were cautious, Juddha's were not gradual attempts by someone who was encumbered by a more powerful neighbor. Instead, in openly airing his desire for self-reliance through accelerated industrialization, a move unwelcomed by British India,[13] Juddha had deviated considerably from the earliest spells of positive identification.

The second significant achievement during Juddha's regime was an experimental survey of industries and economy (*audyogik namunā* survey) conducted in 1944 in order to assess the economic conditions of areas from Sanga to Kabhrepalanchok and to recommend the possibilities of a nationwide survey in the future. It is on the heels of this survey that the "Land Bhorgage [sic] Bank and Co-operative Society" was established to rid the poor from the oppressions of local money lenders, what was described as the cause of degeneration of the agricultural community (Pande 1987: 234). Following this experimental survey, a second nationwide survey was conducted in 1945 in order to gauge the impediments to *unnati* (Pande 1987: 269).

Both endeavors were ministered mainly by two men: Major General Bijay Shamsher Rana and Bhim Bahadur Pande. While both men were educated in Calcutta University, the former was the prime minister's confidant and the latter was his deputy and later the author of the five-volume memoir *Tyas Bakhatko Nepal*. According to Pande, he and his superior, Bijay Shamsher were accustomed to speaking in English and sprinkling Nepali sentences with English words, a habit they had acquired during their student years in Calcutta. He writes that in the mid-1930s, the systematized development of Nepali language was yet a far cry and translating English words into Nepali was a daunting task, even for the educated. "Therefore," he writes, "even if those educated in English used Nepali translation, the listener would not understand quickly—due to the mistranslation of English words into Nepali" (Pande 1987: 240). Hence a preference was given to English words whose Nepali translations were not yet standardized.

In the letters exchanged between Nepali prime minister or his aide and the British envoy stationed in Nepal in circa 1937, the phrase economic and industrial development occur frequently. Similarly, Juddha Shamsher

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[13] British India was wary of Nepal's proposed industrial development and insisted on setting up a customs union with Nepal to protect the interest of India industries which was rejected by Nepal. See External Affairs, file number 788–X/40, secret, 1940, NAI.

is also known to have established a "development board" in 1935 with the purpose of expediting "development" activities.[14] This board was later named the Udyog Parishad (industrial council). Similarly, the establishment of the agricultural council, department of mines, department of cottage industries, bureau for the collection of news on industries and commerce (*audyogik vyāpār samācār saṃgraha aḍḍā*), Nepal museum, department of forestry, department of horticulture, zoo and a technical school were other achievements. Although these latter organizations were given Nepali names, the first "development board" bore the English word. The explanation given by Pande explains Juddha Shamsher's preference for the English word development, the Nepali translation *bikās* not having become the standard then, in spite of the availability of the word *bikās.*

Although it is very likely that Juddha Shamsher and his ministers had learnt of the word development from the British in India, British officials themselves used the term "process of industrialization" instead of "industrial development" or "economic development" to refer to the flurry of industrial activities in Nepal's southern border in the 1930s. In the sources examined here, it was only in 1938 when a note from the commerce department of British India referred to the "industrial development" of Nepal[15] and was subsequently used with reference to Nepal, for example, by the Calcutta based magazine *The Modern Review* (Sen 1939b) in describing Nepal's early efforts at "development."[16] What this suggests is that although the word development was Western, the British themselves were not its active propagators in Nepal.

Nevertheless the English word development had established itself in the limited confines of Nepali administration by the mid-1940s. Interestingly however, instead of its Nepali translation, *bikās*, it was the Nepali word *unnati*

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[14] Letter from the prime minister of Nepal to H.M.'s minister in Nepal, External Affairs, 616–X, 1937, NAI.

[15] Notes by R.K. Nehru, commerce department in the central board of revenue in Industrialization of Nepal. Question of the imposition of excise duty on sugar etc., imported from Nepal into British India. Question of concluding a trade agreement with India, 616–X, 1937, External Affairs, NAI.

[16] Describing the second industrial exhibition, Siva Narayana Sen (1939b: 579) writes in *The Modern Review*, "Nepal, on her march towards progress, is now being engaged in a programme [sic] of industrialization…under the present regime the government is steadily following an enlightened policy of economic development."

that was more common. Unlike these examples from the correspondences between Juddha Shamsher and the British minister which is written in English, the Nepali sources speak of progress or *unnati* and not development. This is evident in the speeches by Rana prime ministers as well as the examples discussed below from the Kathmandu based literary magazine *Śāradā*.

However, before turning to *Śāradā*, the notion of modernity or *ādhunikatā* needs to be addressed. Describing the achievements of Juddha Shamsher, including his industrial ventures, *The Modern Review* wrote the following: "Nepal is fast advancing towards modernization and acquiring international status" and that "the mainstay of Nepal is agriculture. His Highness wants to improve it on modern scientific lines…" (Sen 1939a: 282–283). In spite of the Calcutta based magazine attributing Juddha's endeavors to the influences of modernity, in the sources examined here, the words *ādhunik* (modern), *ādhunikatā* (modernity) and *ādhunikīkaraṇ* (modernization) do not appear prominently. When they do, modernity is mostly associated with the inventions of science and technology (*ādhunik vijñān*) or in connection with the "modern world" (*ādhunik saṁsār*). While the superfluous use of *sabhyatā* and *unnati* is evident in the fiery speeches of Ranas and their subjects who wield these potent words to argue their case and is also abundant in magazine essays and editorials with boldly emblazoned titles bearing either of the two words and where the authors ponder and debate over the meanings of *sabhyatā* and *unnati*, the words *ādhunik* or *ādhunikatā* are neither abundant nor persistent. The point of this is that in the 1930s and 1940s *ādhunik* and its derivatives was not the vocabulary of choice to describe the Rana rulers' interest in industries or foreign goods. While modern inventions and foreign goods invited the curiosity of the rulers and their subjects (Liechty 2010), to be modern was not the end goal. Rather, modern practices and goods were potent symbols of a *sabhyatā* towards which the Ranas aspired.

Defining *Sabhyatā* and *Unnati*

This section looks at the earlier issues of the literary magazine *Śāradā* published from Kathmandu by Riddhi Bahadur Malla between 1935 and circa 1955 for a brief summary of what *sabhyatā* and *unnati* signified. *Śāradā* was published from Kathmandu under the gaze of Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher who is credited for giving wings to literary geniuses such as Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Siddhicharan Shrestha, Balkrishna Sama, Lekhnath

Poudel and other luminaries of Nepali literature. Prior to this, writers and publishers were carefully scrutinized and the *Gorkhāpatra* offered limited space for literary creativity within Nepal. Although *Śāradā* was not free from censors and Rana policing, it heralded a greater degree of creativity and was a momentous "*yug*" in Nepal's early literary developments (Subedi 2051 v.s.[2038 v.s.]: 6).[17]

A survey of the writings in *Śāradā* reveals consistent discussions on *sabhyatā*. While there were some attempts at defining its semantics, there were others that condemned blind imitation in its name. The following are some examples of the latter case.

> …forty years ago blinking fireflies would light our path, today look at the dazzle of electricity. How beautiful was the hallowed land, enveloped by the pure shadow (*punyachāyāle ḍhākeko tapovan*)*, nayã-sabhyatā* you have stolen it away, neither the taintless days, nor the peaceful times, neither the pastures, nor the *samadhvani*. Look! Where has that day gone? Today that pure land has turned arid, like beauty drained of its colors. The absence of the monastery has turned it to a crematory. (Biraktahridaya 1991 v.s.: 21)

A similar criticism is found in the poem titled *Sabhyatā* (Grihastha 1992 v.s.) according to which *sabhyatā* represents commodification and the obsession for spectacles, boots and pantaloons, glass ware, leather goods and fountain pens. *Sabhyatā* is referred to as an endless parade of Western goods and its ensuing indebtedness.

Along with such criticism, there were other less abrasive attempts at defining *sabhyatā*. Essays such as "The Loss of Some Ancient Knowledge in the Search for Novel *Sabhyatā*" (Malla 1993 v.s.), "Impacts of Literature" (Gurung1995 v.s.), *"*The Surge of *Sabhyatā*" (Rana Bahadur 1996 v.s.) and "*Sabhyatā"* (Pradhan 1997 v.s.) are some examples. Instead of berating the mimicry of the West, these attempt to draw parallels between the arts and *sabhyatā*. One example is the essay "One Cannot be *Sabhya* by Distancing from Literature" which argues that the dichotomy between "European Civilization" and "Asian Civilization" is incorrect (Asabhya 1995 v.s.:

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[17] For introductionsto Nepali literature see Shrestha and Sharma (1977), Sharma (1982[1970]) and Hutt (2007[1991]).

401). It claims that one who is able to harness from the riches of science and literature is an exemplar of the *sabhya*.

A lengthier essay titled "In Search of *Sabhyata*" probes into the semantics of *sabhyatā*. Although it begins by asking what the words *sabhyatā* and *saṁskṛti* (culture) mean, the bulk of the essay concentrates on *sabhyatā* and is devoid of any discussions on *saṁskṛti*. According to it,

> Due to the expansion (*phijāi*) of people and ideas from across countries and [expansion] of rails, telegraph (*tār*), business-commodities, people are beginning to recognize each other. If a Nepali and a Japanese…are kept together and are observed for their attire, food, customs it will come to light that different, different people have their own *sabhyatā*.…If the roots of one's own *sabhyatā* is searched for and is compared with other *sabhyatā* one notices the tendency of the world where the effort is towards making one's own [*sabhyatā*] *unnat* by throwing the ills and incorporating the good of another. It cannot be said that the world has one *sabhyatā*. There are different *sabhyatā* but the science that flows beneath them all can be the same. (Pradhan 1996 v.s.: 232)

The essay "*Sabhyatā*" (Pradhan 1997 v.s.), in attempting to elaborate the semantics, argues that *sabhyatā* is a composite of two words: *sabhā* (congregation) and *yogyatā* (qualification). It claims that wise men who participate in esteemed congregations and are able to stir the moral and creative spirits of fellow countrymen towards the *unnati* of the country are worthy of being the bearers of *sabhyatā*. Elaborating further it states,

> …today we wrongly assume that we are gaining a little bit of *sabhyatā* by associating with foreigners and so we are running after Europeans and other foreigners and only praising their work and wasting time. As a result neither have we invented something new nor discovered any essential goods (*āvaśyak padārtha*). Again we have been reverentially surrendering significant portions of our life and our wealth to their league.…However now I am hopeful.…His highness Shree Teen Maharaj Juddha Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana has considered this matter in depth and found that the main causes of the country's *ava-unnati* (lack of *unnati*) is the disrespect for

our hoary skills and the praise of foreign objects and so has shown affection for each [skill and object] and set up various departments for these. (Pradhan 1997 v.s.: 195)

Hence for the Rana era subjects, *sabhyatā* was a demarcation between two worlds. It was common to juxtapose Nepal against a more *unnat sabhyatā* and to gauge the country's achievements or the lack of it. Awareness of the material progress made in different parts of the world resulted in a greater urge to imbibe from these various *sabhyatā*s. However there were differences between undignified pursuits of pseudo-*sabhyatā* and those considered worthy such as the pursuit of Western science and technology. The latter were unanimously agreed to be the mark of *sabhyatā* and the bearer of *unnati*. If so, what did *unnati* mean in Rana era Nepal?

According to the essays published in *Śāradā, unnati* broadly referred to the enhancement of the *jāti* (race) through education particularly by promoting education in the Nepali language. Interestingly, most essays that draw corollaries between the language, i.e., *bhāṣā*, and *unnati* have titles such as "What should Our Literary *Pragati* be Like" (Shyamraja 1992 v.s.) or "The *Pragati* of Nepali Literature" (Kavyatirtha 1996 v.s.). It should be mentioned that although the word *pragati* had become common by the early 1940s, the word *bikās* was rarely used and makes an unusual appearance in one sub-heading, "The *Bikās* of our Nepali Drama" in an essay "What is Drama?" (B.C. 1995 v.s.: 114). This is also among the earliest use of *bikās* in spite of *unnati* being the hegemon during the mid-1930s.

Śāradā was a magazine that brought together an august group of Nepali writers who were also actively engaged with the translation committee, the Bhasha Anuvad Parishad which was responsible for translating Sanskrit and world literature into the Nepali language as well as in the standardization of the Nepali language and in publishing the English-Nepali dictionary (Pande 1987). Apart from the general meaning of *unnati* as progress, perhaps this is why *Śāradā* emphasized *bhāṣonnati* or the *unnati* of the Nepali language.

Unnati as *bhāṣonnati* during the Rana era has been explored by Chalmers (2003). He writes that the discourse enshrined three specific elements: educational, moral and thus socio cultural and finally women's *unnati* and that all three were part of the larger discourse on *bhāṣonnati*. He writes, "Whether abstract or concrete, *vidyā* is rarely mentioned without some accompanying reference to *unnati*, and frequently also to education as the

primary means of achieving *unnati*" (Chalmers 2003: 125). Setting up of libraries was seen as an act of *unnati*, a measure to prevent the *adhogati* or decline of society. He also writes that the notion of *unnati,* although tied to *bhāṣonnati,* was flexible and encompassed a wide spectrum from the very conservative to the radically progressive since it could

> draw inspiration from reassuringly ancient Hindu values or from revolution in Russia: it could depend on great leadership or on the action of the masses: it could extol Vedic knowledge or embrace modern science and technology: it could look to morality or to economics for salvation. (Chalmers 2003: 145)

In demonstrating the ties between *unnati* and *vidyā,* Chalmers also points to the negative image among the Gorkha *jāti* regarding their place in the world. Although he claims that the new middle class felt powerless, disunited and backward, he does not link this negative self-image with the *sabhyatā* discourse that was then in prevalence nor connect it to the word *asabhya,* antonym of *sabhya.* In the sources examined here, the word *asabhya* is not as profuse as *sabhya* or *sabhyatā.* Nevertheless it appears occasionally, for example, in the *Kariyā Amlekh* speech discussed above.

These examples from *Śāradā* and the earlier cases of Chandra and Juddha Shamsher reveal that both the rulers and the *raitī* identified positively with the material progress of the *unnat muluk,* albeit with caveats as is evident in Juddha's call for self-reliance. However, there was a richer debate on the merits and demerits of the cultural and social elements of *sabhyatā* among the *raitī.* As such, the *raitī* appear more ambivalent towards the sociocultural aspects of the *sabhyatā* of *unnat muluk* than do the rulers. Unlike the Rana rulers, the *raitī* were prone to defining themselves in term of the differences that set them apart from the other *sabhyatā.* Additionally, it was the *raitī* who championed the word *unnati* in place of the Rana preferences for the English word development, as will be discussed below.

Predominance of *"Unnati"* in Rana Era Nepal

According to Ralph L. Turner's *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language* published in 1931, Sanskrit is the greatest source of borrowing in the Nepali language with literature and religion being its main pathways (Turner 2007[1931]). Translations of religious texts such as

the *Rāmāyaṇ* and the *Mahābhārat* have provided the Nepali language with a rich assortment of loan words and it is from Sanskrit that words *unnati, bikās* and *sabhyatā* have arrived. He writes:

> Even when the inherited word exists or existed, there has been a tendency to replace it with the equivalent Sanskrit word, to use which is a mark of culture. Such loan words may appear either in their complete Sanskrit form (losing, only in certain cases, a final short *–a* of the Sanskrit stem) or, when widely used by all classes, may have been made to confirm to general phonetic system of Nepali. (Turner 2007[1931]: xii)

Such is the case of *bikās,* its Sanskrit origin being *vikāsa* denoting bloom, blooming, expanding and even development. *Bikās* as development was not unknown in the early 1930s. However, both *bikās* and development were associated with growth and not with what Juddha Shamsher called "industrial development."

Turner claims that *unnati* is a loan word from Sanskrit and denotes elevation, dignity and prosperity. He writes that unlike *bikās*, *unnati* has been appropriated by Nepali without any alterations. Interestingly, *unnati* is not equated with the word progress. *Sabhyatā* is a loanword borrowed from Sanskrit without alteration and is used to denote politeness and good manners while *sabhya* means the act of being civilized or refined.[18]

A second important dictionary of the Rana era is the two-volume *Aṅgrejī-Nepali Koś* (Rana 1938) published by the Nepali Bhasha Prakashini Samiti.[19] Here civilization is defined as the condition of becoming or making *sabhya*, as *sabhya* countries and as social progress. Development is described as *bikās* and as increase, particularly in animal and plant species, as the condition of good growth and *unnati*, as progression, completion and of becoming complete. It is also associated with the development of photograph. The Development Commission established in England in 1909 is also discussed. It is defined as a commission established with donations, the money for which can in turn be donated to the *unnati* of agriculture, animal husbandry,

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[18] Turner's dictionary does not include the word *pragati*.

[19] The Gorkha Bhasha Prakashini Samiti established in 1913 during the reign of Chandra Shamsher was later renamed the Nepali Bhasha Prakashini Samiti (Hutt 2007[1991]). It also worked towards standardizing the Nepali language.

commerce, etc. Unlike Turner's dictionary, progress is associated with *unnati*. It is also defined as forward movement. "Progressional" and "progressionist" are defined as those who support *unnati* in political or social issues and progressive is defined as people who believe in the successive betterment of life on earth.

In spite of these lexical meanings, sources examined here show a near absence of development as *bikās* and the subordination of development to the more popular Nepali word *unnati*. The reason for the popularity of *unnati* over *bikās* or development is associated with attempts at standardizing the Nepali language. Began in the early 1900s, standardization of Nepali *bhāṣā* had gained significant ground by the time Juddha Shamsher was discoursing on "industrial development." Unlike fascinations for the English language among the aristocrats, those non-Ranas at the forefront of the *bhāṣonnati* efforts seem to have taken English as a challenge. Although the main proponents of Nepali language could not have been unfamiliar with the word development, its absence was mainly because they were working against the "encroachment" of Western *sabhyatā*. Therefore rather than concerning themselves with a Nepali translation for development or for other English words, their concern was mostly directed towards strengthening, systematizing and standardizing the Nepali language. As has been discussed earlier, the Ranas identified positively with Western *sabhyatā* whereas the non-Ranas were ambivalent. The result of this ambivalence was a distancing from the language of the "other" *sabhyatā*. While the prime minister picked up words and phrases from the English language and sprinkled them in letters and correspondence with the British, the non-Ranas avoided this since they were the gatekeepers of the Nepali language.

In his essay *"Hāīhāī Aṅgrejī"* (Hail English) the poet and writer Laxmi Prasad Devkota (who was also member of the translation committee, the Bhasha Anuvad Parishad) expresses his disdain for the English language. Writing in 1940, Devkota tells of his early fetish for the English language, "I believed that we Nepali were not *unnat* (progressive) due to our lack of knowledge in the English language" (2010[1946]: 47). His early penchant was due to the belief that knowledge of English would open secrets to a new age, secrets hidden in the many English books written by an inventive and analytical society. However this fetishism wore off as the poet realized that his thirst for English was only turning him into an *anuvād*, a translator devoid of any creative agency. He writes of coming to realize that in the

disregard for the mother tongue, he was merely parroting a worldview very different from the *Ārya-vicār, Āryan* views. Nevertheless, the poet concludes by admitting that in spite of half-baked parroting, English is the language of the twentieth century.

As member of the translation committee and as an eminent vernacular poet and writer, Devkota could not but defend his mother tongue from the intrusions of English. However, the closing paragraph where he admits the supremacy of the English language is a sign of the difficulties faced by an infantile language. By implication then, in spite of the gatekeeping, a complete isolation was impossible.

A contemporary of Devkota, historian Surya Bikram Gyawali (1933) writes that in spite of the lack of proper research, it cannot be denied that Nepali has borrowed not only from local dialects spoken across Nepal such as Newari, Magar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu but from dialects spoken in *Hindustan* such as Persian. However, he writes that this infiltration is prominently visible only after the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–1816 and that prior to the war Nepali literature reveals a greater borrowing from Sanskrit than anywhere. Why should this be so? Gyawali answers,

> When Hindustan was ruled by Muslims, the language of governance was Persian. Since Persian was the language of governance, it also entered other languages of Hindustan. Bengali has 2,500 Persian words according to the Bengali historian Sri Suneet Kumar Chhatopadhyay. While we were divided into small *rājya*s, our kings could manage without the use of Persian words but as Nepal expanded (*ṭhulo sāmrājya sthāpit garepachī*) it had to make use of Persian words to ensure that foreigners would understand our language of governance. (Gyawali 1933: 8)

Gyawali writes that written codes of conduct were uncommon when Nepal was divided into many fiefdoms. However with the unification of the kingdom and increasing interaction with foreigners in the eighteenth century, a greater need was felt for written laws. In this process many Persian words were borrowed by the Gorkha language. Coming closer to his time, Gyawali writes of how the Nepali diaspora settled in India accommodated non-Nepali words into the Nepali language. He writes that it is only natural for the diaspora to "forget" the "purity of the language" and adopt foreign

words because they live in a foreign land where the majority is "stronger, *unnat* and more in number so the need to imitate and to abandon words or the practice of one's own language and adopt their practice" (Gyawali 1933: 18).

Therefore, Nepali writers in the early 1930s and 1940s were not unfamiliar with the cross pollination among contemporary languages. They were all too aware of the loan words Nepali had acquired from Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi and Bengali. However for Gyawali, Devkota and others working on standardization of Nepali language in Rana era Nepal, the task was to elevate Nepali from being a colloquial speech to one that was also rich and sophisticated literarily. Surrounded by the literary traditions not only of Sanskrit and Persian but of Hindi, Urdu and Bengali as well, the pioneers of Nepali standardization would not be too enthusiastic about the infiltration of English, particularly if this enthusiasm was demonstrated by the Rana. Hence while *unnati* and *sabhyatā* were used by the Ranas and their subjects to mean progress in industries and in education respectively, the word development remained confined to the pages of Rana correspondence because it was a word that had not yet captured the attention of the Nepali diaspora in the Indian subcontinent.

Conclusion

While the Rana elites of early twentieth century Nepal were fascinated by English words, for their educated subjects who were not unfamiliar with English, the preferred language of communication was Nepali. In the jostle between languages, it was the Nepali word *unnati* that merged the Western notions of both progress and development. However, in Western historiography of ideas, progress and development do not share a common lineage nor have they been coalesced as in the case of Rana era Nepal. The idea of progress, believed to be initially associated with other worldly pursuits, had an ancestry longer than that of development. The bifurcation between progress and development became prominent after the rise of capitalism with development-as-intervention countering the negative consequences of industrial progress.

Unlike the West, *unnati* in Rana Nepal was distinctly secular. *Unnati* represented an ambiguous assortment of expectations and was not confined to definite goals while development specifically meant "industrial development." It did not refer to educational reforms or the attempts to systematize the Nepali language, *bhāṣonnati*. Development was measurable

and centered upon short term achievements. This is exemplified by Juddha Shamsher's industrial ventures and the keenness to establish natural resource based industries. Additionally, the users of the development vocabulary were limited. The word is only visible in the correspondence between the Rana rulers and British officials. Even the word development written in the Nepali script was absent among the works of non-Rana literate populace.

Regardless of its limited presence, Juddha's "development" was not an "invention" to counter social disorder resulting from the "progress" of industrialization. Although Juddha's regime was marked by increasing political discord which was to stimulate the rulers' concern for the decadence of the youth, industrialization was only partially meant to satiate unruly subjects. Rather, it was *sabhyatā* that legitimized industrial development. Nepali society of the pre-democratic era was conscious of alien societies which it considered more civilized than itself. The ideas examined in this paper, industrial development included, were the results of contacts and comparisons with these alien societies. They resulted from the subordination that was felt, the positive identification and the appraisal of Nepali *jāti* as it encountered different *sabhyatā*. Progress or *unnati* became a process of transformation made possible by "industrial development" but with *sabhyatā* as the end goal.

Acknowledgements

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