

DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES OF KING PRITHVI NARAYAN SHAH IN UNIFICATION OF NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the essential role of diplomatic strategies in the growth of the Gorkha kingdom and the eventual consolidation of Nepal under the leadership of King Prithvi Narayan Shah. The study analyzes Prithvi Narayan Shah's diplomatic approaches, including their objectives, methods, and outcomes. The findings underscore the crucial impact of diplomacy in uniting a historically fragmented region comprising over 50 small states during the medieval period, enabling Gorkha's leadership in the Nepal unification initiative. Prithvi Narayan Shah implemented various diplomatic strategies to achieve his objectives. Recognizing the economic significance of the Kathmandu Valley, he initiated an economic blockade to undermine its stability, increasing discontent among its inhabitants and prompting them to consider aligning with the Gorkhas. The Gorkha state employed a network of spies to manipulate conflicts among the Malla kings of the valley, fostering mistrust and discord, ultimately destabilizing the region, and facilitating unification. Additionally, he maintained ambiguity about his intentions, neither presenting himself as an enemy nor a friend to the British government. This article underscores how these diplomatic endeavors, coupled with strategic military actions, significantly contributed to the expansion of the Gorkha kingdom and the eventual unification of Nepal.

KEYWORDS:

Diplomacy, Economics Blockade, Gorkha, Policy, Unification

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy, defined as the art and practice of negotiating and communicating between governments, organizations, or individuals to advance interests, resolve conflicts, and achieve common goals through peaceful means, encompasses dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. It plays a crucial role in maintaining international relations, managing disputes, and fostering cooperation, all while avoiding the use of force or aggression (Upraty, 2010, p. 14). Nepal, presently a landlocked country in South Asia, has a historical context echoing its current situation. References to Nepal can be traced back to the *Atharva Parisista* (Appendix) believed to be constructed between 800 and 600 BC (Sharma, 1976, p. 48). The name 'Nepal' gained prominence around three thousand years ago, as evidenced by records from Samudra Gupta (330-375), the ruler of ancient India, who mentioned Nepal's location from Sikkim in the east to Garhwal in the west (Regmi, 1996, p. 13). Throughout antiquity, Nepal existed as an elongated region along the Himalayan axis, fragmented into over 50 small states until the Medieval period, categorized as the ancient era up to 879, followed by the medieval and modern eras.

Gorkha, situated to the west of the Kathmandu Valley, holds historical significance as the birthplace of the Gorkha kingdom during the medieval period. Dravya Shah, a member of the Shah dynasty, descended from Manmath

Ranaji Rao, arrived in Nepal in 1559 after facing the Muslim invasion during his rule in Chittor, India (Stiller, 1975, p. 61). King Prithvi Narayan Shah, in 1762, constructed a palace in Nuwakot, citing his ancestor Prithvipati Shah as the originator of the idea of unifying Nepal (Regmi, 1992, p. 27). Despite earlier attempts at territorial expansion through warfare, King Prithvi Narayan Shah realized the necessity of diplomacy for the unification of Nepal, especially in engaging with the British government of India (Gurung, 2015, p. 15).

Examining global historical events of state unification and independence it is evident that leaders played pivotal roles in their countries' destinies. In the case of Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah emerged as the driving force for unification, akin to leaders like George Washington, Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour in the American and Italian contexts (Adhikari, 2021, p. 431). The diplomatic strategy of Prithvi Narayan Shah was instrumental in the successful integration of the Kathmandu Valley into the Gorkha state in 1768, providing a blueprint for later unification efforts (Jyanwali, 1976, p. 52). Gorkha State, despite its geographical and economic vulnerabilities, succeeded in leading the unification of Nepal, primarily due to diplomatic prowess (Thapa, 1989, p. 5). In the 11th and 12th centuries, Nepal's extensive territory comprised three regions: Simraungadh in the eastern Terai, the Khas kingdom in the western Karnali region, and the Nepalmandala in the Kathmandu Valley (Shah, 1992, p. 39). Over time, these regions further fragmented into separate kingdoms, exceeding 50 in number (K. C., 2002, p. 30). Faced with the global colonial competition brought by the Industrial Revolution, the King of the Gorkha kingdom initiated diplomatic efforts to shield Nepal from external influences (Subadi, 2004, p. 170). Following Babu Narbhupal Shah's passing in 1743, Prithvi Narayan Shah formulated a vision for Gorkha to lead and unite the entire nation of Nepal.

Recognizing Nuwakot as a key entry point to the Kathmandu Valley and a crucial trade route between Tibet and India, Prithvi Narayan Shah strategically sought its control. This involved strengthening ties with the Chauvise kingdoms to the west, securing weapons, and diplomatically misguiding the Malla rulers of the Kathmandu Valley. During his visit to Bhaktapur in 1741, Prithvi Narayan Shah cultivated friendship with Birnarsingh Malla, the crown prince (Kshatri & Rayamajhi, 2003, p. 464). His diplomatic tactics extended to establishing family connections with Makwanpur, signing a friendly treaty with Lamjung, and fostering relationships with other Chaubise kingdoms like Kaski, Palpa, and Parbat. This study aims to shed light on the diplomatic efforts that expanded the Gorkha kingdom and ultimately united Nepal, both domestically and in its interactions with the British government in India.

METHODOLOGY

In this study lookout as a qualitative research design, incorporating various subgroups such as Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study approaches. Specifically, the historical research design approach is chosen for this investigation. The data collection process involves gathering information from No. Following the data collection phase, a descriptive and analytical methodology is applied to synthesize and analyze the collected data. This method serves to extract meaningful findings and formulate well-supported conclusions from the extensive body of relevant documents. The focus is on employing a systematic approach to navigate through the gathered information, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. By adopting this research and methodology framework, the study aims to provide a robust foundation for drawing insightful conclusions and contributing to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As the crown prince, Prithvi Narayan Shah, with the aim of expanding the Gorkha kingdom into a larger unified Nepal, embarked on a crucial meeting with King Ripumardan Shah of Lamjung in January 1740. This significant rendezvous took place on the banks of the Chepe River, which served as the boundary separating the two realms. Lamjung and Gorkha have been living as enemy states since historical times (Acharya, 2004, p. 159). Extensive talks were held between the two states to maintain internal relations. In the end, Lamjung will stay neutral when Gorkha attacks Kathmandu Valley, when Lamjung attacks Kaski's Argha, Gorkha will support Lamjung by giving troops, and if Gorkha violates the treaty, Lamjung will get 40,000, also Gorkha will not attack Tanahun and those

states were agreed to live together on January 21, 1740. A treaty was concluded between Gorkha and Lamjung (Stillier, 1975, 109). In this regard, Prithvi Narayan Shah appears to demonstrate diplomatic acumen at a young age.

Nepal's trans-himalayan trade has been maintained since ancient times through the Makwanpur, Kathmandu and Nuwakot routes. Prithvi Narayan Shah had already planned to secure that commercial route. Therefore, he was married at the age of 14 to Indra Kumari, the daughter of King Hemkarna Sen of Makwanpur. Makwanpur was the main gateway from India to enter the valley through Nepal's Terai. Kathmandu Valley could be surrounded only if the Gorkha kingdom had a strong relationship with Makwanpur (Regmi, 1975, p. 98). A conflict broke out between Gorkha and Makwanpur after Prithvi Narayan Shah got married. Traditionally, Madhesh brides were kept in their homelands after marriage, but Gorkhalis considered this an insult and took the bride with them. As a remedy, Prithvi Narayan Shah married Narendra Lakshmi, a Rajput girl from the Banaras district in India whose father was Ahiman Singh. This marriage expanded Prithvi Narayan Shah's presence in India, where English influence was on the rise. His new connections through this marriage helped him gain valuable insight into English power in India (Sharma, 1976, p. 216). The expansion of his marital ties with India can be viewed as a noteworthy diplomatic achievement on the part of King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha.

When Prithvi Narayan Shah visited Bhaktapur, he had a clear goal: to strengthen the Gorkha kingdom not only through military power and weapons but also through his diplomatic skills. At that time, tensions existed among the Malla kings ruling the Kathmandu Valley. Prithvi Narayan Shah, being astute, saw this tension as an opportunity. He devised a clever diplomatic plan to exacerbate disagreements among the Malla kings. His aim was not merely to maintain the status quo; he intended to intensify their conflicts to benefit the Gorkha kingdom. Skillfully creating divisions among the Malla kings, he played a crucial role in unifying all of Nepal under Gorkha's rule (Acharya, 1990, p. 7). Ranjit Malla, the king of Bhaktapur, feeling oppressed by other Malla rulers, saw an opportunity to seek revenge on them by fostering friendship with Gorkha. He welcomed Prithvi Narayan Shah with a willingness to accept any terms (Bazaracharya & Shrestha, 1980, p. 47-48). Seizing this opportunity, Prithvi Narayan Shah researched the economic, political, religious, cultural, social, military, and geographical conditions of the valley during his three-month stay (Vaidya, 1996, p. 150.). The Gorkha's implementation of the divide-and-rule policy in the valley became the strongest diplomatic foundation for the Gorkha kingdom's expansion and, ultimately, the unification of Nepal.

Prithvi Narayan Shah dispatched an army, led by the Magar tribe general Biraj Thapa, to launch an attack on Nuwakot. However, the Gorkhali forces suffered a significant defeat in this conflict. The defeat at Nuwakot proved to be a crucial turning point for the Gorkha kingdom's expansion and the unification of Nepal. Following his setback in Nuwakot in 1743, Prithvi Narayan Shah recognized the importance of building a formidable army and acquiring modern weaponry. He believed that a strong military force was essential for the Gorkha kingdom's success, so he ventured to his in-laws' residence in Banaras to purchase weapons and enlisted the expertise of Muslim mechanics. Upon returning to Gorkha, he appointed Kalu Pandey, a politically experienced and respected figure among the people, mature in age, as the Kaji (Prime Minister). This marked a significant step in his strategy to strengthen the Gorkha kingdom (Bazaracharya, 1962, p. 269). After being appointed as Kaji (Prime Minister), Kalu Pandey first suggested to Prithvi Narayan Shah that he should expand the relationship with Lamjung and advance the state expansion campaign to the east. The Sen kingdom of the Kathmandu valley, its surrounding area, and the Terai were in the eastern part of Gorkha. Therefore, the fact that the twenty-four states of the Gandaki province in the west could avoid the threat of attacking Gorkha while moving eastward was considered the most important diplomatic success for the time being (Jyanwali, 1976, p. 57). After ensuring that Lamjung, connected to the western border of Gorkha, would not attack Gorkha and completing army preparations, in 1744, Prithvi Narayan Shah attacked Nuwakot, a strategically important place under Kantipur, and emerged victorious. The victory at Nuwakot proved to be a milestone for the expansion of the Gorkha kingdom and the unification of the Nepal kingdom.

After the victory at Nuwakot, Prithvi Narayan Shah's self-confidence and ambition began to soar. Subsequently, he was prepared to lead not only the expansion of the Gorkha state but also the unification of Nepal. His aspiration

to construct a vast Nepalese nation by gradually conquering over fifty states within Nepal's territory was intensifying. Recognizing that the ancient capital of Nepal and the Nepal Mandal state, rich in resources during the Middle Ages, couldn't be secured by war alone, he realized that diplomacy was essential for this purpose. Following the Gorkha kingdom's success in acquiring Nuwakot, which was under the control of the powerful Malla kingdom of Kantipur in the Kathmandu Valley, the twenty-four kingdoms in the West Gandaki region grew anxious. Consequently, Lamjung, Tanahun, and Parbat Rajas formed an alliance and agreed to attack the Gorkhas together. According to the treaty, in 1755, they attacked Siranchok in Gorkha and emerged victorious (Panta, 1984, p. 170). Prithvi Narayan Shah recognized the need for another diplomatic move, understanding that the united twenty-four kingdoms couldn't be defeated by war alone.

In line with this strategy, given that his guru Gaureshwar Pant was also the guru of King Trivikram Sen of Tanahun, Prithvi Narayan Shah requested a meeting with the kings of Gorkha and Tanahun at a location called Jamir Ghat on the banks of the Masryangdi River. Accepting the invitation, King Trivikram Sen of Tanahun was lured into a trap orchestrated by Prithvi Narayan Shah. Unbeknownst to him, weapons had been concealed in the sands of Jamir Ghat. Upon Trivikram Sen's arrival, they deceived and kidnapped him, taking him to Nuwakot and imprisoning him. He was released from captivity only at the end of 1753 (Regmi, 1975, p. 130). Thus, Prithvi Narayan Shah engaged in various diplomatic maneuvers while advancing the expansion of the Gorkha kingdom and the unification campaign of Nepal.

After weakening the Chaubase kingdoms, Prithvi Narayan Shah initiated plans to conquer the Kathmandu Valley. He didn't perceive the valley as the central power of Nepal and believed that conquering it required more than military might alone. To implement his strategy, he devised a diplomatic plan involving the encirclement of the valley by conquering the surrounding kingdoms and imposing a complete siege to halt goods from entering the valley (Stiller, 1975, p. 123). This entailed securing control over territories in the north, east, and west. However, the southern Sen kingdom named Makwanpur remained to be conquered due to its affiliation with the friendly Malla kings of the valley. Despite being Prithvi Narayan Shah's Shasurali kingdom through marriage, the relations were not amicable. Following the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah's father-in-law Hemkarna Sen in 1759, his eldest son Digbandhan Sen assumed the throne of Makwanpur (Acharya, 2004, p. 20). Since Digbandhan Sen was an opponent of Prithvi Narayan Shah and supported the Malla kingdom, Prithvi Narayan Shah had a diplomatic plan to swiftly conquer Makwanpur and encircle the valley.

During this time, the king of Kantipur, Jayaprakash Malla, was fostering friendship with the British government based in Bhatar. Recognizing the potential threat that the British army could pose if they came to Nepal through Makwanpur, Prithvi Narayan Shah aimed to capture Makwanpur promptly. Additionally, there was a risk that Nawab Mirkasim Ali Khan of Wangal and the British government might attack and occupy Makwanpur. Therefore, on 21 August 1762, the Gorkhali army attacked Makwanpur and emerged victorious. Digbandhan Sen, after being defeated, fled and sought refuge in Hariharpur (Jyanwali, 1976, p. 130). Prithvi Narayan Shah, anticipating that the king of Makwanpur might attempt another attack with military support from Bengal in India, deployed spies to various locations.

As predicted, Digbandhan Sen sought military support from Nawab Mirkasim Ali Khan of Wangal and attacked Makwanpur. However, Prithvi Narayan Shah had already planned for a war against the Muslim army, resulting in a significant defeat for the Gorkhali Muslim army (Bista, 1963, p. 33). Following the victory at Makwanpur, Prithvi Narayan Shah's plan to impose an economic blockade on the valley was executed. This economic blockade compelled the valley to surrender. Prithvi Narayan Shah, even though economic measures, continued to destabilize the Malla rulers of the valley.

In March 1765, with the Kathmandu valley weakened due to the economic blockade, a crucial part of the Lalitpur state was captured, including Kirtipur. Alarmed by this, King Jayaprakash Malla sought military assistance from the British government in India against the Gorkha kingdom. For this purpose, he sent envoys Muktanand Bairagi and Ramdas to Lord Golding, the representative of the company government in Beitia (Acharya, 1965, p. 49). Learning of this, Prithvi Narayan Shah also sent a letter to Rumbold for friendship, a significant diplomatic move aimed at confusing the British and gaining control over the valley. Rumbold forwarded the letters of both kings to Werilst, the chairman of the select committee in Calcutta. Following extensive discussions, the committee

decided to provide spiritual support to Jayaprakash Malla, with all war expenses to be borne by him. In line with this decision, Captain Kinlock arrived in Janakpur in September 1767 to wage war against the Gorkha kingdom. Around 2,400 English troops were dispatched towards Nepal to assist King Jayaprakash Malla in attacking the Gorkha kingdom, advancing towards Sindhuli. Prithvi Narayan Shah's spy, led by Birbhadra Upadhyay and Vanshu Gurung, positioned their army at Pauwagadhi and Dhugrebas to intercept the approaching English army (Acharya, 1965, p. 49). Upon the English army's arrival, the Gorkha forces launched a sudden attack, resulting in significant casualties. General Kinlak managed to escape and sought refuge in the Bara district of Nepal Terai. In this conflict, the Gorkhali army captured 300 rifles abandoned by the British forces (Panta, 1983, p. 170). Prithvi Narayan Shah's diplomatic prowess played a pivotal role in this episode, particularly in his ability to integrate individuals from various castes into the Gorkha state army.

The contribution of Banshu Gurung in the Battle of Sindhuligarhi is noteworthy. The Gorkhali army gained substantial strength after acquiring the weapons left behind by the English army. Notably, the success of the Gorkhali army, capable of defeating the British government's forces, which held a significant position in terms of economic, political, and military power in India, was primarily attributed to diplomatic efforts. The battle involved a guerrilla warfare strategy, with the Gorkhali army executing a sudden attack from higher ground on the British forces marching uphill on a slippery road. Under Prithvi Narayan Shah's leadership, the Gorkha state pursued four major diplomatic strategies to establish a unified Nepal, as follows:

ECONOMIC BLOCKADE

From ancient times, the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal has served as the trade hub between Tibet and India, fostering economic prosperity through favorable customs. The valley's wealth was amplified by fertile soil, ensuring substantial agricultural income. This economic affluence translated into robust manpower and military power. Recognizing the strategic importance of gaining control over the valley, Gorkhadhipati Prithvi Narayan Shah devised a policy to weaken its economic standing. To implement this, he initiated an economic blockade, seizing lands outside the valley and prohibiting the movement of traders and goods. The enforcement extended to searching for and eliminating individuals attempting to bring items like salt and cotton into the valley.

The economic embargo resulted in a shortage of essential commodities, causing unemployment among traders. Faced with a crisis, some traders began aligning with the Gorkhas, foreseeing relief from the blockade if the Gorkha state successfully invaded and took control of the valley (Right, 1965, p. 27). Despite the economic turmoil affecting all three states due to halted goods entering the Kathmandu Valley from various directions, Gorkha achieved success in maintaining a stringent blockade. This represented a diplomatic triumph for Gorkha. As the economic crisis intensified, affluent individuals, high-ranking people, and merchants in the valley exerted pressure on the Malla rulers. They urged the rulers to engage with the Gorkhas, negotiate a treaty, and if necessary, alleviate the crisis even if it meant ceding control of the state. This illustrates how Gorkha's diplomatic maneuvers effectively influenced the decision-making landscape in the valley.

DETECTIVE POLICY

The Gorkha State, with the strategic goal of fully expanding its influence and incorporating all the states within Nepal's geographical area, deployed over two thousand intelligence agents to capture the valley (Adhikari, 2021, p. 450). These agents orchestrated conflicts between the Malla kings and ministers of the valley, fueling discord between the king and queen. They also worked to psychologically sway merchants, affluent individuals, and select politicians in the valley to align with Prithvi Narayan Shah. Concurrently, King Jayaprakash Malla of Kantipur accused those expressing suspicions of colluding with the Gorkhas and took successive actions against them, heightening panic in the valley.

Under the control and oppression of the Malla kings, the populace became increasingly perplexed. Jayaprakash Malla began to view his employees, army, and most of the people with suspicion. This behavior led to a rise in opposition against Jayaprakash Malla. Ultimately, Prithvi Narayan Shah's second diplomatic maneuver, aimed at capturing the valley, proved highly effective for the Gorkha kingdom.

CONFRONTATION AMONG THE MALLA KINGS OF KATHMANDU VALLEY

A historically prosperous valley, the Gorkhas, situated in mountainous terrain like Gorkha, faced vulnerability when the Malla rulers of the Middle Ages united. Given their economic weakness, they risked becoming defenseless against the neighboring kingdoms. In response, King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, driven by the goal of unifying Nepal through state expansion, devised a diplomatic strategy to divide the Malla rulers of the valley.

To execute this plan, King Prithvi Narayan Shah identified King Ranjit Malla of the Bhaktapur Kingdom as a key player. Employing a mix of threats, he alternately targeted Bhaktapur with Lalitpur to weaken Kantipur and vice versa. By appeasing Bhaktapur through territorial concessions taken from Kantipur, Prithvi Narayan Shah heightened tensions among the Malla kingdoms. Secretly aiding one Malla kingdom in capturing parts of another further fueled enmity, leading to the perception of each other as enemy states.

In this intricate web of alliances and conflicts, the state with favorable ties to the Gorkha state gained prominence as the most powerful in the valley. These states found security in their friendship with the Gorkhas, a situation carefully cultivated by Prithvi Narayan Shah himself (Adhikari, 2018, p. 203). However, these actions instilled panic among the valley's employees, army, businessmen, and common people. The prevailing sentiment was that the Gorkhas' swift takeover could restore peace and stability in the region.

GORKHA POLICY WITH BRITISH INDIA

King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha highlighted remarkable diplomatic acumen as a clever and visionary ruler who adeptly adapted to evolving times. During the expansion of his state and the eventual unification of Nepal, he pursued a moderate policy, avoiding direct enmity with the British government in India while refraining from deep friendship. Upon gaining control of Makwanpur, Chaudandi, and Vijaypur states in the eastern Terai, the border of Gorkha State connected with British-ruled India, sparking border and tax collection disputes with the Sen states in the Eastern Terai regions like Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, and Mahottari.

The territories of Makwanpur, which had been paying an annual amount to the Sultan of Delhi and later to the Muslim ruler since the fall of Simraungadh, came under Prithvi Narayan Shah after its conquest. To avoid entanglement in prolonged disputes, he dispatched Dinanath Upadhyay to India in 1771 to negotiate and settle the conflicts, successfully resolving the issues (Regmi, 1978, p. 6). This strategic move exemplifies Prithvi Narayan Shah's diplomatic prowess in handling minor problems.

Similarly, when King Jayaprakash Malla of Kantipur sought military assistance from the British against the Gorkhas, Prithvi Narayan Shah, in a clever maneuver, also requested military support from the British, keeping them uncertain. Despite a threatening letter from the British government warning against attacking their ally Jayaprakash Malla, Prithvi Narayan Shah paid no heed. Throughout the unification campaign, the British government consistently supported Gorkha's enemy states, yet Prithvi Narayan Shah, recognizing the potential hindrance to his expansion, maintained a stance of neither considering the British as enemies nor as friends. This diplomatic finesse played a pivotal role in the Gorkha state's expansion, underscoring Prithvi Narayan Shah's exceptional ability to adopt effective policies (Adhikari, 2021, p. 453).

CONCLUSION

King Prithvi Narayan Shah's diplomatic domination proved decisive in the expansion and unification of the Gorkha state, ultimately giving rise to Nepal as a unified nation. Employing a nuanced economic blockade policy on the Kathmandu Valley and executing a divide-and-conquer strategy among the Malla kings. He skillfully manipulated internal conflicts and vulnerabilities to Gorkha's advantage. His balanced approach towards British India displayed diplomatic acumen, avoiding outright antagonism while maintaining strategic ambiguity. Additionally, the deployment of intelligence agents played a crucial role in sowing discord among the Malla rulers, weakening their collective resistance to Gorkha expansion. Through a strategic blend of military strength and tactful diplomacy, Prithvi Narayan Shah effectively orchestrated the unification of Nepal, laying the groundwork for the unified nation we recognize today.

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