

Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala. 2063 v.s. *Rājā, Rāṣṭriyatā ra Rājñiti*.
Compiled and edited by Ganesh Raj Sharma. Lalitpur: Jagadamba
Prakashan.

BP Koirala's latest book *Rājā, Rāṣṭriyatā ra Rājñiti* has come out at a time when the *rājā* is suspended and is awaiting the election of the Constituent Assembly to decide his fate, when *rāṣṭriyatā* is 'under threat,' and *rājñiti* is tumultuous. The book should have been a runaway hit – it was perfectly timed, provocatively titled and, most importantly, was by BP, a highly acclaimed author and one of the central figures of Nepali politics. But, it is not. Given the republican mood of the country, it is no surprise that the book has not found many compassionate readers, and some have already derided BP for his pro-monarchy stance.

Even though the country is all set to get rid of the monarchy, some sections of the society are actively and some are subtly working to avert this end for an institution that has been at the centre of Nepali politics for centuries. Emotional and scare tactics are being deployed for this purpose. Those engaged in this work think that the kingship could still survive if Nepali Congress doesn't take a republican stand. So, they are invoking '*mahāmānav* BP' and are propagating the equation: "absence of monarchy means chaos and disintegration of the country." The book under review, unfortunately, is also a part of this project. This is evident from the title of the book (deconstruct, and ask why *rāṣṭriyatā* and not *rājñiti* follows *rājā*), the title of the individual chapters and from the very selective reading of BP provided by the editor Ganesh Raj Sharma and the publisher Kamal Dixit (on behalf of his company Jagadamba Prakashan).

It is true that when BP returned home in 1976 (2033 v.s.) from eight years of exile in India with the slogan/policy of 'national reconciliation,' he unilaterally tried to make peace with the king (i.e., Birendra), and to continually justify the relevance of monarchy till his death in 1982 (2039 v.s.). But, just before his return, BP and his party were involved in an armed struggle against the regime led by the king. What could then be the reason for such sudden u-turn? In order for us to understand BP's new-found love for his bete noire, we have to contextualise it; we have to

analyse the national and international political scenario of the period, which the publishers have not done. Because of space constraints, I will not go into details but just remind the readers the fate of Sikkim, Afghanistan, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the era of cold-war politics. In 1976, BP saw the possibility of Nepal losing its independence as had happened to some of her neighbours. To thwart that possibility and to fight with the external enemy, he tactically aligned himself with the internal enemy, the king,

Is there not a threat to Nepal's independence, now? The answer is, no. The age of territorial annexation is over – just think of the failure of America and its coalition partners in Iraq. 'Sikkimization of Nepal,' thus, is just a hoax, a scare tactic. Yet, with the increasing fissures among the people and if the recent upsurge in sectarian conflict is any indication, the possibility of the disintegration of the country can not be completely ruled out. And monarchy, as long as it exists, will work as a destabilising force rather than one that unites Nepalis as the history of the past six decades has shown.

BP's political analysis of the period and the rationale for reconciliation with the king are convincing. However, his over emphasis on the 'foreign forces' is less convincing. There is no doubt that Panchayat-era politicians like Tulasi Giri or Surya Bahadur Thapa were/are pawns in the hands of foreign forces. But it is also true that these people or for that matter the palace would have always tried to prevent democratic forces from assuming political power whether or not they received any foreign backing. This is so because mainstreaming of BP and his party would have resulted in the relegation of the above-named politicians and monarchy to the footnotes of Nepali history. In other words, their politics was for their own survival. It was as simple as that. Hence BP's emphasis on the 'foreign forces' is unnecessarily convoluted.

BP however appears best when he talks about his vision of socialism and progress, of religion and spirituality. Rebuffing the "American model" of development as inappropriate for our country, BP turns towards Gandhi, who he says is "the greatest original thinker," for the alternative, and elucidates priorities of his "socialist program." For him the number of towns electrified is not of much interest and he is also against big industries. "If we can provide clean drinking water in every village," says BP, "there will be no need for us to invest in big hospitals." The Gandhian model of democracy and development or *swarāj* is reflected in BP when he says it is the locals, not the government, who should decide the programs and priorities of development.

Rājā, Rāṣṭriyatā ra Rājñiti is an unedited transcript of what BP spoke and told visitors and party workers during the last phase of his life. With an exception, these were mostly recorded by the editor Ganesh Raj Sharma. Being a verbatim transcript, some ‘mistakes’ are inevitable as spoken language differs from the written, a fact that the publisher also acknowledges citing several examples. Yet, the argument for not editing the text – “to retain BP’s flavour” – is hard to digest for there are ways to clean the text without changing its originality. Use of parenthesis and footnotes to denote what was edited as well as providing additional inputs (to explicate the contexts) are standard practices when such spoken texts are published. A sentence like “मैले दिएको रविवार मन्तव्य पत्रिकामा छापिएको छ।” will definitely not provide a BP-flavour! A reversal in the position of the words *ravivār* and *mantabya* would have done justice to the sentence. An additional footnote about the Hindi magazine *Ravivār*, which at that time was both popular and influential, would have provided the readers enough clue to further their research, if they so wished. Likewise, there are instances when a lay reader would find the text difficult to comprehend because its context is missing.

In the name of “originality” the quality of the book has been severely compromised – different spellings are used even in the same sentence/paragraph (e.g., रोबर्ट/रबर्ट, क्याम्प/कैम्प, एडिट/एडित, जिसस/जेसस, etc.). It can’t be assumed that BP spoke the same words so differently for them to require different spellings. The use of punctuation marks as well as paragraphing is haphazard. There is no table of contents. The rationale for the order of appearance of the chapters is hard to understand as chronological order is not maintained. In some, the date of recording is missing whereas in a few, the dates provided are apparently wrong. For instance, in one, the date mentioned is 2032 v.s. but the contents show that the record was of a later period, and in another, the date printed is 2042 v.s. by when BP was long dead. Rather than making the book more readable – helping readers understand BP more by providing the context or contributing to the discourse on monarchy, which at the moment is highly polemic – the book was “hastily published” to save the moribund institution of monarchy. This petty politicking on the part of the editor and publisher has come out in poor taste and has done disservice to the memory and legacy of BP. Yet, the book deserves a thorough read from those interested in Nepali society, politics and BP.

Ramesh Parajuli
University of Bielefeld