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## The choice is yours

*Short-term Panchayat-era nationalism or long-term vision of Nepal owned by all?*

- Pramod Mishra (/printedition/author/pramod+mishra)



SHARES



Feb 16, 2017-

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*The seed of one language, one dress nationalism that Mahendra sowed, KP Oli tries to reseed as the ideological son*

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Nepal stands at a crossroads. At a fork on the road, to be precise. One road you can call Oli Highway; another you can name MJDMK (Madhesi Janajati Dalit Mahila Khas) Path. Oli Highway tries to perpetuate the values, cultures, and practices of Mahendrisim—one language, one dress nationalism. MJDMK led by the Madhesi Morcha attempts to dismantle it and embrace and realise multiplicities, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and equality not just in lip service but in reality, in structure, ideology, and practices. These are the choices before Nepalis. Which side you join will determine the future of Nepal—long term.

### King Mahendra's legacy

Last week, I tweeted “My thesis: King Mahendra saw nothing but his dynasty, and by doing so, destroyed his dynasty. And now Oli utters nothing but rashtra (nation), and by doing so, he might very well destroy the rashtra.” The Twitterati felt outraged by this thesis: “How is this possible?” they said. Indeed, until now, Nepalis have been told by students of Nepali nationalism that Mahendra laid the foundation of Nepali nationalism by getting it out of India's shadow: he removed Indian soldiers from the Chinese border; he jettisoned the convention of Indian ambassadors sitting in on Cabinet meetings; he imposed a Nepali language curriculum in schools and created a Nepali-language centralised bureaucracy after abolishing ethnic zamindaris, and so on and so forth.

But my contention is that Mahendra is responsible for what happened to his dynasty; not just its formal abolition in 2008 after his son Gyanendra's failed attempt to copycat his autocrat father, but also the royal massacre of June 1, 2001. The combination of both brought the undoing of the Shah dynasty.

How was Mahendra's action responsible for the undoing of his dynasty and may very well be the undoing of his country which he obviously loved so much? As Bertrand Russell says in more than one place, it's not enough to love one's

children. One's love must be informed by knowledge. Otherwise, love can blind the parents and they will bring a voodoo cure where modern medicine would be needed to treat the child.

One need not question Mahendra's love for his country. But for lack of knowledge (he wasn't even a matriculate), he went for instant gratification, for a voodoo cure, and for autocracy to establish his dynasty's political supremacy. He found plenty of supporters for his Panchayat experiment from turncoat Congressmen to opportunist communists. They all lauded him, flattered him, sang hosannas about him—and goaded him on his path. Freedom of expression, people's sovereignty and people's expression of discontent with one language, one dress nationalism were all gagged.

The royal palace became an otherworldly entity, beyond people's knowledge, only to be rumoured about. Because of lack of fresh outside wind, rot set in within the palace that the press didn't know about and couldn't talk about even if they had known. Leaders of political parties were banned, banished, and boxed. While the people could love and marry outside of caste legally, the crown prince couldn't because of clan rivalry and stigma related to purity and pollution. The royal

massacre of 2001 was a direct result of this culture of gag, secrecy, and hypocrisy. Then Gyanendra became his father's incarnation in the 21st century, and in doing so, helped complete his father's work to end the dynasty.

Nepal's long-term future

Now, KP Oli tries to be the ideological son of Mahendra in matters of nationalism. The seed of one language, one dress nationalism that Mahendra sowed, KP Oli tries to reseed as the ideological son. In the short term, for instant gratification, he may be a messiah for many, but messiahs of instant gratification have brought nightmares to their countries the world over. Mahendra's poison tree, reseeded and watered and manured by KP Oli, may very well bear its poison fruit in the long term. But the problem is that Mahendra's dynasty belonged only to him and his progeny, and by extension, his courtiers. Nepal belongs to all Nepalis.

That's why Nepalis must ask, short-term instant gratification of Panchayat era nationalism (sloganeering about 'akhandata, purkha le arjekorajya', etc belongs to the same category) or long-term vision of Nepal genuinely owned by all ethnicities, castes, and linguistic groups? Your answer will determine which path Nepal travels in the long term.

Just think, if Mahendra hadn't

dismissed Parliament but allowed BP Koirala, the Nepali Congress and other parties and leaders to rule through multiparty election, dialogue, expression of public outrage, negotiation and reconciliation, people's sovereignty would have been much stronger than where Nepal stands today at this forked road.

Diehard Oli followers, the ideological children of the Panchayat ideology of one language and one dress, would never even have been born in the first place. This would have allowed much flexibility in political negotiation in solving the ethnic and linguistic rights issues of the marginalised. In fact, there is every possibility that after all these years of a dialogic public sphere, there would have been no ethnic imbroglio that we see now. The monarchy might very well have been there like that in Great Britain (I very much recommend the Netflix original *The Crown*, and the American Public Broadcasting Service's masterpiece theatre presentation *Victoria*, for you to get an idea of how the British monarchy earned its longevity by always remaining under people's moral compass and Parliament's control).

So, we have a choice. Follow Oli and his born-again Mahendra Highway for short-term gratification or follow the genuinely multilingual, multiethnic, zigzagging and hard but sustainable path for the long term. The choice is yours, and your choice will determine the long-term future of Nepal, like it or not. History's judgements are very often cruel.

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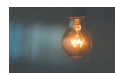
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