

NEPAL. Bordered to the north by the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China and to the east, south, and west by the Republic of India, Nepal is a landlocked country of great geographical and cultural diversity. From the fertile Tarai plains in the south to the snowy Himalayas of the north, Nepal is characterized by rugged and inhospitable terrain making travel and basic communications an ongoing challenge. Nepal's geostrategic importance as a territorial and cultural buffer of 90 to 150 miles (145 to 240 kilometers) between Asia's fastest-growing economic giants—India and China—has only grown more apparent since the mid-1990s, as the country has been rocked by political instability and civil war.

More than one hundred languages from four different language families are spoken in Nepal by more than sixty different ethnic and caste groups. While the Nepali language (Indo-Aryan) is spoken as a mother tongue by more than 48 percent of the population according to the 2001 national census, most of Nepal's more than 27 million people are conversant in two or three languages. Increasingly, Nepal's minority communities have become aware of their marginalization and are demanding some form of increased political representation and federal autonomy, more akin to the Indian system.

Marriage customs are still largely traditional, with social and family pressure to marry within the community. In terms of economic, educational, and health indicators, the status of women across Nepal is still low and gender relations remain unequal. Nepal is one of the few countries where men routinely outlive women, and low female literacy (4 percent in 1971, increased to 27 percent in 1996) combined with a high fertility rate (6.3 in 1976, declining to 4.2 in 1996) continue to restrict the inclusion of women in many sectors of professional life. After hundreds of years of state-supported Hinduism, during which time non-Hindu (that is, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and tribal) religious communities were sidelined, and Hindu dietary norms such as the injunction on the consumption of beef were enforced, Nepal was declared a secular state in 2006.

Administratively, Nepal is divided into five development regions, fourteen zones, and seventy-five districts. Each district is headed by a chief district officer (CDO) who is responsible for maintaining law and order and coordinating the work of all government ministries. The rural economy is still overwhelmingly agricultural, with rice, corn (maize), and wheat largely cultivated for domestic consumption. Agricultural productivity remains low, despite the introduction of chemical fertilizers and improved seed

grains. The breadbasket of the nation is the Tarai region, which, being flat and fertile, stands in marked contrast to the hill regions where terracing and soil erosion constrain production. Industry remains limited in Nepal, with the traditional production of jute, sugar, and bricks giving way to cosmetics, medicines, and packaged foods. While most cross-border trade is with India, growing imports from China are changing markets, and the tourism industry—which peaked in the mid-1990s—continues to be an important source of income for many urban and rural Nepalis alike.

Political History. Where studies of the early and middle periods of Nepalese history primarily document the growth and artistic splendor of the Newar cities of Kathmandu (the present capital) and Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, and Lalitpur, the modern period is a notable departure with a focus on military expansionism and intrigue. The Licchavi dynasty that rose in the fourth century gave way to the Malla kings, who ruled from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries and who introduced cultural practices and social norms strongly influenced by their devout Hinduism. The Newars, at over 1.2 million according to the 2001 population census, are a highly stratified and largely urban community, many of whom still speak their own Tibeto-Burman language. Practicing both Hinduism and Buddhism, the Newars have elaborate and ornate architectural, ritual, and scriptural traditions.

Outside of the Kathmandu valley, both to the east and west, minor principalities and fiefdoms held local power and had varying contact with the Kathmandu valley until the early eighteenth century, when the House of Gorkha, ruled by the Shah dynasty, began its expansion. Despite early military failures in the 1730s, by 1750 the Gorkhas—under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah (1722–1775)—had gained control of Nuwakot and Tanahu by force and negotiation. Prithvi, who had succeeded his father as king of Gorkha in 1743, is widely perceived to have been a shrewd strategist who either unified or conquered—depending on one's perspective—the territories of the emerging nation.

Under relentless military pressure from the Gorkhas, the rule of king Jayprakash Malla ended with his death in 1769; the Shah campaigns to conquer Kirtipur (1766), Kathmandu and Patan (1768), and finally Bhaktapur (1769) concluded with their complete control of the valley. The nation was nominally unified, but Nepali politics now entered a tumultuous period in which Shah rulers sought both to centralize control of national administration and revenue collection in Kathmandu and at the same time to

expand their empire—to the east as far as the Teesta River in Sikkim and to the west as far as Kashmir.

This aggrandizement led to domestic and regional tensions: nobles and local elites found their authority challenged at home, and wars broke out with neighboring powers who resisted Gorkha expansionism abroad. A series of military campaigns—first against Tibet over control of the trans-Himalayan trade, and then against China, who came to Tibet's aid—lasting from 1788 to 1792 were political and military setbacks for the Shahs.

It was unavoidable that as the fledgling kingdom of Nepal flexed its muscles, it would come into conflict with British India. Tensions with the British East India Company came to a head with the short but violent Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814–1816. The subsequent Treaty of Sugauli constrained Nepal to the Mechi River in the east and the Mahakali River in the west, which function as the nation's borders to this day. While a loss of face for the Shahs, the Sugauli Treaty also effectively guaranteed Nepal its sovereignty and territorial integrity, which given the strength and reach of British India at the time was a concern for Nepal's rulers. It is still a point of historical pride for many citizens of Nepal that their country was never colonized by a foreign power and that it has succeeded in maintaining its independence since its unification.

Nepal's foreign adventurism in the early nineteenth century was matched by turbulent power plays at home. Nepotism and public competition between ruling factions culminated in an 1846 plot to overthrow the ruthless military leader Jang Bahadur Kunwar. The subsequent Kot Massacre, in which Jang Bahadur's troops eliminated virtually all political opposition by assassination, marked a new departure in domestic politics: the foundation of the Rana regime (1846–1951). The primary feature of this 105-year-long dynasty was the demotion of the king to a symbolic or titular ruler and the creation of the institution of hereditary prime ministership. Aside from a working relationship with British India, extending even to Nepalese military support to assist in the suppression of the Revolt of 1857 (also called the Great Mutiny or the Sepoy Mutiny) and later support for the British effort in both world wars, the Rana autocracy was overwhelmingly inward-looking. Nepal's borders were firmly closed and virtually no infrastructural development took place during Rana rule, with Nepal's society and culture remaining characterized by rigidly feudal and hierarchical labor relations. The Rana period also saw the beginning of the formalized recruitment of Nepali soldiers—known as

“Gurkhas”—into the British army, a practice that continues to this day.

Just as World War II changed the political landscape of Europe, the Indian independence movement that had gathered momentum in the 1940s had considerable impact on political life in Nepal and across South Asia. First, with the British withdrawal from the subcontinent in 1947, the Rana rulers were deprived of a strong ally, leaving their regime regionally isolated. Second, Nepalese political activists who had been driven underground in their own country or exiled to India had come of age alongside the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement, forming a party called Nepali Congress that was modeled on that of India. Building an alliance with King Tribhuvan, marginalized since his reign began in 1911, the anti-Rana insurgents launched a revolution in the final months of 1950. With strong support from New Delhi, the Nepali Congress party reached a settlement with the Ranas, which heralded the birth of a democratic political system and returned Tribhuvan to the throne as an active monarch.

The 1950s saw the emergence of a more modern Nepal. The country's borders were opened for the first time in its history, bringing in foreign missions, international aid organizations, and the first tourists, who traveled overland from India. However, lack of political experience among its leaders and the absence of substantive democratic traditions posed real challenges to effective governance in Nepal. Despite the promulgation of a constitution in 1959, and the subsequent general elections for a national assembly, relations between King Mahendra (r. 1955–1972) and the Nepali Congress government became increasingly strained, culminating in the imposition of direct royal rule in December 1960 and the dismissal of the first government. A new constitution was promulgated in 1962, investing authority in the crown, and opposition political parties were outlawed. The following years saw considerable investment in national infrastructure and planning, along with the signing of a number of political and economic agreements with Nepal's regional neighbors.

The accession of Birendra to the throne after his father's death in 1972 did little to change the “nonparty” *panchayat* political system, and economic stagnation and rising political tensions combined to force the king's hand to concede to a national referendum. Designed to decide between the established “nonparty” and a multiparty political system, the May 1980 vote was in many ways inconclusive, leading to a period of political uncertainty and semantic confusion: while technically illegal, political parties could exist even

though they had little room to maneuver, and while a partyless political system was still in effect, elections to the National Assembly would be by direct popular vote.

This compromise turned out to be satisfying to neither side, and throughout the 1980s popular discontent with the regime grew into a national campaign for a democratic parliamentary system with a constitutional monarch at its head. A coalition of various parties finally united in 1990 to demand political reforms, and sporadic protests and strikes throughout the spring gained enough momentum to be classed as a "People's Movement" for democracy. In April 1990, King Birendra lifted the ban on political parties and dissolved the Rastriya Panchayat, or National Assembly, paving the way for an interim coalition government led by the Nepali Congress. Public debate and political bartering characterized the following months as a more representative new constitution reigning in royal powers was drafted and finally promulgated in November 1990. General elections followed in May 1991, with a narrow victory for the Nepali Congress Party, which named Girija Prasad Koirala as the country's prime minister. A strong united leftist opposition held one-third of the seats in Parliament.

The 1990s were marked by short-lived fragile governments, increasingly vocal demands from ethnic and linguistic minorities who continued to feel underrepresented, and countless corruption scandals involving politicians and government officials. While there was noticeable economic growth in the cities, not to mention a vibrant tourist economy, with Western consumer goods and modern amenities becoming readily available, most of the country still lacked access to basic health care, education, and political representation. Increased administrative centralization under political leaders who saw their parties as private fiefdoms only served to accentuate the divisions between rich and poor, urban and rural. While the rhetoric of democracy promised a great deal, inexperience and nepotism combined with an ever-persistent caste system to create a shortfall between people's expectations and government delivery. In many ways, the growth of radical leftist politics was the result of these unchanged social inequalities, which despite the growing discourse of inclusion and enfranchisement were not being addressed.

In terms of foreign relations, Nepal's growing confidence in the 1990s led to sporadic tensions with India, a relationship fraught by the proximity and similarities between these two largely Hindu nations. Starting in 1991, for complex political reasons relating to cultural purity, the government of Bhutan expelled close to 100,000 people of

Nepali origin—the vast majority believed to be citizens of this Buddhist kingdom. When India took no responsibility for their welfare, these stateless refugees made their way to the eastern lowlands of Nepal to settle in seven camps constructed under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Over fifteen rounds of high-level negotiations between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan have not yielded results, with continued disagreements about numbers and verification methods. In October 2006, the United States government offered third-country resettlement to sixty thousand Bhutanese refugees, an offer that some refugees have rejected, demanding repatriation to Bhutan at all costs.

Maoist Insurgency. While most of the leftist groups had united under the banner of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and embraced parliamentary democracy, resulting in short-lived minority governments led by the United Marxist Leninists (UML) in 1994 and once again in 1997, the Central Committee of the Maoist faction of the CPN was preparing to launch a "People's War." Believing that a deep restructuring of the state could only be achieved by rural revolution, the Maoists—led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (who goes by the nom de guerre "Prachanda"—"the fierce one") and Baburam Bhattarai—were inspired by Mao's aims as well as the means by which to achieve them. Contrary to some initial speculation, there was no direct support from China for their movement, and their struggle was homegrown, albeit with links to radical leftist movements in India. In February 1996, Bhattarai presented the Nepali Congress prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba with a list of forty demands, threatening armed uprising if they were not accepted. The government ignored the demands—many of which resembled the goals, although not the methods, of international development agencies—and the "People's War" was formally declared.

During the initial phase of the uprising, the ruling parties refused to take the Maoists seriously, either politically or militarily, and characterized them as rebel outlaws. As the Maoists took hold of ever larger parts of western Nepal, in particular districts such as Rukum and Rolpa, the government rebranded them as terrorist insurgents and launched police operations against them, including the disastrous "Kilo Sierra 2" in May 1998. When daily life in Nepal's urban centers began to be affected by strikes, blockades, assassinations, and a growing climate of fear, the government formed an armed police force to tackle the insurgency and the international community began to take notice and suspended some aid projects. Becoming

increasingly emboldened by their strategic advances, the Maoists launched a succession of attacks on district headquarters and medium-sized towns such as Dunai (2000) and Rukumkot (2001), albeit with mixed results. The death toll on both sides continued to mount.

By the middle of 2001, the political crisis in Nepal had become so severe that observers were talking of civil war. On the evening of 1 June 2001, in a wholly unexpected and macabre turn of events at a family dinner in the royal palace, the twenty-nine-year-old crown prince Dipendra shot dead his father and mother, King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, along with seven other members of his family before turning a weapon upon himself and committing suicide. While speculations and rumors continue to circulate about the details of the massacre, particularly since the bodies of the slain royalty were cremated before rigorous postmortems could be conducted, it is widely believed that Dipendra was under the influence of alcohol and drugs and was bitter about his mother's rejection of a woman he wanted to marry.

The consequences of the royal massacre were profound: on 4 June 2001, Prince Gyanendra—the brother of the late Birendra—was crowned king of Nepal. Known previously more for his business interests, it soon became clear that Gyanendra was a more uncompromising monarch than his brother. The third round of peace talks between the government and the Maoists broke down in November 2001, and renewed hostilities left hundreds dead. Gyanendra declared a state of emergency and mobilized the previously undeployed Royal Nepal Army to crush the insurgency. From 2001 to 2005, Nepal's political crisis continued to deepen, with Gyanendra appointing and firing prime ministers in rapid succession and the Maoists pulling out of a short-lived and fragile seven-month truce in August 2003.

On 1 February 2005, once again declaring a state of emergency, Gyanendra dismissed his prime minister, appointed trusted advisers to ministerial positions in his royal cabinet and assumed direct power to destroy the Maoist "terrorists." Three months later, after sustained international pressure, the emergency was lifted but rights remained curtailed, and civil society groups together with representatives of all political parties launched a sustained program of demonstrations to restore democracy. These demonstrations came to a dramatic head in April 2006, when weeks of violent protests and strikes against royal rule—if united by little else—forced the king to reinstate Parliament.

The Maoists immediately called a three-month ceasefire, which was effectively parlayed into peace talks with the

government. A June 2006 agreement stating that the Maoists would be brought into an interim government paved the way for the signing of a comprehensive peace accord in November 2006, bringing a formal end to the decade-long rebellion that had cost the lives of more than twelve thousand Nepalis. The United Nations mandated a special political mission to Nepal to support the peace process and monitor the ceasefire, and the transitional government was charged with formulating an interim constitution. Elections to a long-awaited constituent assembly—Nepal's first—which purports to be more inclusive, representative, and fair, were slated for November 2007 but then postponed. At the same time, growing political tensions mounted in the southern Tarai belt among marginalized plains communities who believed their rights were insufficiently guaranteed in the new constitution.

In retrospect, the brutal ten-year conflict changed the political landscape of modern Nepal. Popular support for parliamentary leftism and militant Maoism focused on the formation of a republic was only strengthened by Gyanendra's political adventurism and his assumption of unilateral power in 2005. While the mainstream political parties, Nepali Congress in particular, had long advocated constitutional monarchy, the pendulum has swung so far against the royalty that the constituent assembly elections set for November 2007 were likely to mark the end of this 240-year-old monarchic lineage. At the very least, the monarch was expected to be effectively corralled, with little parliamentary role. Whether Nepal will also become a more equal and representative democracy remains to be seen.

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NESTORIAN CHRISTIANS. Nestorian Christians separated from Orthodoxy in 431 after the Council of Ephesus anathematized the patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius. Also known as "Assyrians," they adhered to the doctrine that there were two separate persons of Christ, human and divine, as opposed to the Orthodox doctrine of two natures in one person. Under benevolent Persian and later Arab Islamic rule, they spread as far as Yemen, Mongolia, China, and southeast India. Following the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258, Nestorians gradually retreated to the remotest regions of Kurdistan, where they remained in isolation from the rest of the Christian world until the Archbishop of Canterbury sent an educational mission in 1885. Following the massacre of Christians in eastern Anatolia by the Ottomans during World War I, surviving Nestorians, including their patriarch, fled to the British mandate of Iraq. After Iraqi independence in 1932, more persecution and massacres led many to flee to French-ruled Syria, where they established permanent settlements. In the same year their patriarch, Mar Shimun XXIII, also left Iraq, reestablishing his seat in Chicago in 1939. He later moved to California, where he was murdered in 1975 after marrying against the wishes of his community. His successor, Mar Dinkha IV, returned to Chicago in 1976. Since the mid-sixteenth century the Catholic Church worked actively to convert Nestorians, and a large majority now adhere to their Chaldean Catholic rite. The remaining Nestorians number about 250,000, centered in Iraq (90,000), India (30,000), Iran (25,000), Syria (25,000), and Lebanon (5,000); 75,000 are in diaspora, primarily in the United States, but with important centers in Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands.

[See also Assyrians; and Christianity, subentry The Middle East and Adjacent Regions.]

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NETHERLANDS, THE. The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, which emerged somewhat fortuitously at the end of the sixteenth century after the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish, was an unmitigated success, ushering in the vibrant economic, cultural, and political heyday of the Golden Age. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the republic became increasingly plagued by problems and saw its powerful position in international relations slip away. Though Amsterdam was still a crucial hub of international finance, relative economic decline had set in, accompanied by growing poverty. Though most of the institutions had been redefined, the strongly provincialized and complex system of government dated to the period before the revolt. Calls for reform, heard so often in the past, assumed a new urgency.

Everyday politics revolved around the tension between factions in the top layer of society, the regents. The Orange Party, which favored the stadtholdership—an institution that dated from the Middle Ages but that had undergone fundamental changes—of the House of Orange-Nassau, was lined up against the States Party, which maintained that the republic could run its affairs without a stadtholder. Enlightenment concepts were also gaining ground and setting the scene for a democratic movement, comprising a broad swathe of citizens who wanted more efficient and centralized government. These democratic convictions were frequently accompanied by a strong sense of nationhood—a new, international phenomenon that also found expression in the American and the French revolutions. In the Republic, this new movement chose to join forces with the States Party because the Orange Party held the reins of power. This was not exactly a logical partnership; strictly speaking, an alliance with the Orange Party offered more potential. But the Orange Party would have had to reform—and reform was not on the agenda, given that Stadtholder William V (r. 1751–1795) was particularly attached to the old regime.

From Republic to Constitutional Monarchy (1780–1848). The inextricable entanglement of economic problems and internal and foreign policy became clear