



History of Nepal

The Kiratis & Buddhist Beginnings

The recorded history of Nepal begins in the 7th century BC with the arrival of the Kiratis, a Hindu people who worshipped Shiva. These mongoloid peoples arrived from the east and were the first known rulers of the Kathmandu Valley. Buddhism arrived during the Kirati times and it is claimed that the Buddha visited the Kathmandu Valley and stayed for a time in Patan. In 250 BC, the Kathmandu Valley came under the influence of the Mauryan Empire of northern India, and later became a vassal state under the Gupta Dynasty in the fourth century AD.

Early Indian Influences

From the Mauryan Empire on, Nepal's culture was heavily influenced by Indian religion and customs. From the late 5th Century until the late 8th Century AD, Nepal was ruled by an Indian influenced dynasty called the Licchavis. These kings brought the Indian caste system to Nepal.

The Thakuris and then the Darkness

In the late 8th Century, after the fall of the Licchavis Dynasty, the Thakuris came to power. This era is marked by a period of darkness and a loss of knowledge due to military strife. The Tibetans invaded in 705 and then the Kashmiri peoples in 782. The Kathmandu Valley's strategic position ensured the kingdom's growth and survival. The city of Kathmandu was founded during the 10th century and was originally named Kantipur.

The Golden Age of the Mallas

At the beginning of the 12th Century AD, a group of kings who have come to be known as the Mallas came to power in Nepal. These warrior kings brought peace and stability to Nepal by consolidating the state system and creating standardized currency and safe trade routes to encourage expansion. However, this time of peace and prosperity was short lived. In 1432, the kingdom was divided into three distinct states Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon, and centuries of rivalry ensued.

Unification under the Shahs

In 1765, Prithvi Narayan Shah set out to realize his goal of unifying the three kingdoms of Nepal and he accomplished this mission in 1768. He encouraged a strong sense of nationalism among the population which was rooted in their need to protect Nepal's lucrative trade position and a desire to create a strong, unified defense against the British colonizers in India. The Kingdom's power continued to grow until 1792. A battle between the Chinese and the Nepalese over territories in Tibet culminated in Nepal becoming a tributary state of the Emperor until 1912.

The power of the British colonizers in India grew during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Nepali state boundaries, stretching from Kashmir to Sikkim by the early 19th century, caused tensions and disputes over the ownership of the Terai (the lowlands south of the Himalayan foothills) and these tensions eventually led to war. In 1816, the Sugauli treaty with the British ended Nepal's growth and established the present-day eastern and western borders. Some of the Nepali land that fell to the British was restored to Nepali control in 1858, in exchange for support during the Indian War for Independence. During the later half of the 19th Century, Nepal faded from international view.

The Ranas

Factionalism within the Nepali royal family led to the Kot Massacre in 1846. Armed clashes between competing family members led to the execution of several hundred princes and prominent royal cabinet members on the Queen's orders. The new Prime Minister changed his name from Jang Bahadur to the more prestigious Rana. It was Jang's military expertise that had kept the Queen in power and, as a result, he became the real power behind the throne. While the Shah Kings were kept as figure-heads, the Ranas held true control over the political climate of the country. The Ranas abolished *suttee*, the Hindu practice of casting widows on their husbands' funeral pyre, they ended forced labor, and a school and college were established in Kathmandu. However, their power diminished when Nepal was turned into a buffer zone between China and India during WWII.

Restoration of the Shahs

Around 1950, the Nepali Congress Party managed to take most of the Terai from the Ranas and established a new government. A new constitution provided for a parliamentary system of government and in 1959 Nepal held its first general election. The Nepali Congress Party won a clear victory. In 1960, however, the king decided the government was not to his taste and had the cabinet arrested and political parties banned. He installed the *panchayat* (council) system of government, which allowed a secret vote and universal suffrage and did not appear to be dictatorial. In reality, though, Nepal's military and police apparatus was omnipresent and there was strict censorship. Mass arrests, torture, and beatings of suspected activists are well documented. It is also known, that a huge portion of foreign aid went to royal and ministerial accounts.

People Power

In 1989, the opposition parties formed a coalition to fight for a multiparty democracy with the king as constitutional head. This party was called Jana Andolan, or People's Movement. In 1990, the government responded to nonviolent protest meetings with bullets, tear gas, and thousands of arrests and torture. In the end, the government was forced to back down after the deaths of over 300 people in the riots. The king lifted the ban on political parties and announced his readiness to accept the role of constitutional monarch.

Democracy & the Maoist Uprising

In May 1991, 20 parties vied for a seat in the 205 member parliament. The Nepali Congress won power with around 38% of the vote. In the years following the election, the political atmosphere was uneasy. Even after some years of stability coalitions were formed and broken with alarming frequency. Governments came and went. Opportunism and corruption thrived in the volatile political climate. In 1996, the Maoists (of the Communist Party of Nepal), fed up with the government corruption, declared a 'People's War'.

On June 1, 2001, the Crown Prince Dipendra gunned down almost every member of the royal family during a get-together at the presidential palace in Kathmandu. Among the victims were the king and the queen, leaving the future of the country uncertain.

In April 2002, a five-day strike called by the Maoists paralyzed the country and intense clashes between the military and rebels continued. By the end of 2002, nearly 8000 people, including many civilians, had been killed in the Maoist uprising. Amnesty International accused the Nepali Army and police of human rights abuses when trying to control the uprising, while the Maoists were accused of recruiting children as soldiers. On January 29, 2003, the Nepali government and the Maoists reached a cease-fire agreement in which they agreed to solve their differences through controlled negotiations.

In May 2006, King Gyanendra's direct rule ended and a parliament was re-instated. In November of that year, a significant peace deal was brokered. In early 2007 the Maoists joined an interim government, and since, the country has been on the road to healing and recovery.