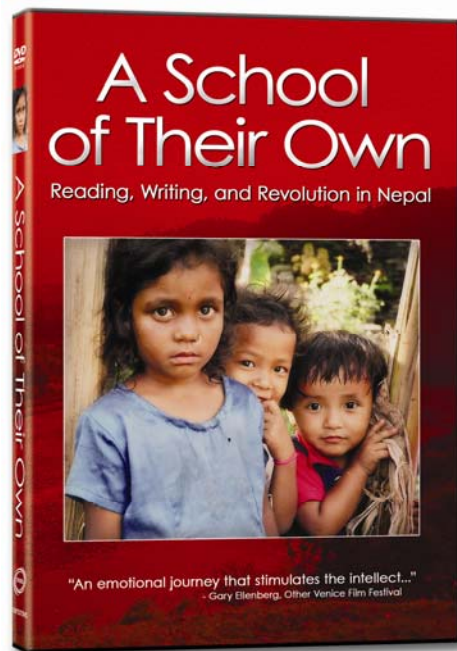




A School of Their Own

Guidebook



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BACKGROUND ON NEPAL

With its ancient culture and the Himalayas as a backdrop, landlocked Nepal has long been the destination of choice for travelers in search of adventure.

It is also one of the world's poorest countries, a situation that has been made worse by a violent Maoist rebellion.

Nepal has been under the sway of a hereditary monarchy or ruling family for most of its known history, largely isolated from the rest of the world.

- AT-A-GLANCE
- Parliament reinstated in May 2006 following popular uprising against king's absolute rule
- King has been stripped of executive powers
- Multi-party government and Maoist rebels have signed a deal proclaiming an end to the insurgency
- Maoists will be included in a transitional government; they launched a violent campaign to topple the monarchy in 1996 and control large parts of the countryside

A brief experiment with multi-party politics in 1959 ended with King Mahendra suspending parliament and taking sole charge.

Democratic politics was introduced in 1991 after popular protests, but it has been extremely factionalized with frequent changes of government. The current monarch has twice assumed executive powers - in 2002 and 2005.

Meanwhile, Maoist rebels intent on setting up a communist republic have been waging a campaign against the constitutional monarchy in a conflict that has left more than 12,000 people dead since it started in 1996.

The UN says the rebellion has displaced more than 100,000 people. Its envoy in the country says the use of torture by government forces and rebels was routine.

When King Gyanendra ended his direct rule in April 2006 the rebels entered talks on how to end the civil war.

Nepal has been at odds with neighboring Bhutan over the repatriation of thousands of refugees living in camps in Nepal. The refugees - Bhutanese of Nepalese descent - fled violence in their homeland in the early 1990s.

With the world's highest mountain, Everest, and spectacular scenery and wildlife, the country has great potential as a tourist destination.

It also boasts a distinctive Hindu and Buddhist culture. But its environmental challenges including deforestation, encroachment on animal habitats and vehicle pollution in the capital, Kathmandu.

Most of the population depend on agriculture, and around 40% of Nepalis are estimated to live in poverty.

Foreign aid is vital to sustaining the Nepalese economy, and the country is also dependent on trade with neighboring India.

- **Full name:** Kingdom of Nepal
- **Population:** 26.3 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Kathmandu
- **Area:** 147,181 sq km (56,827 sq miles)
- **Major language:** Nepali
- **Major religions:** Hinduism, Buddhism
- **Life expectancy:** 61 years (men), 62 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Nepalese rupee = 100 paisa
- **Main exports:** Carpets, clothing, leather goods, jute goods, grain
- **GNI per capita:** US \$270 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Internet domain:** .np
- **International dialling code:** +977

Head of state: King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

King Gyanendra recalled parliament in April 2006 after weeks of strikes and protests against his direct rule.

Weeks later, parliament voted unanimously to curtail the monarch's political powers, effectively rendering him a ceremonial figure.

The king sacked the government in February 2005, assumed absolute power and appointed a mainly pro-monarchist cabinet.

He said the former administration, under Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, had failed to stem Maoist violence and to organize elections. The monarch's actions triggered protests at home and criticism from abroad.

King Gyanendra ascended the throne in June 2001 soon after then Crown Prince Dipendra gunned down his parents King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya and seven other royals.

The 29-year-old prince ran amok at a family dinner in a drunken and drug-fuelled rage before killing himself.

King Gyanendra was born in 1947. He is married and has two children. His youngest son, Paras, is the heir to the throne.

Prime minister: Girija Prasad Koirala

King Gyanendra appointed the veteran politician GP Koirala, an octogenarian, as prime minister on 27 April 2006, ending more than a year of direct rule by the monarch.

The leaders of a seven-party alliance selected him as their candidate to head a new government after the king agreed to reinstate parliament following street protests against his direct rule.

The administration wants to bring the Maoists into the political mainstream and has held peace talks with the rebels. It aims to set up an elected assembly, which will be tasked with creating a new constitution.

Mr Koirala leads the Nepali Congress, the country's largest and oldest political party. He became Nepal's first elected premier in 1991 and began his fourth and most recent term in 2000.

The former trade union leader and exile was detained several times during the latest period of direct rule by the king. He was jailed in the 1960s while campaigning for democratic rule.

Deputy prime minister, foreign minister: Khadga Prasad Oli

Finance minister: Ram Sharan Mahat
Interior minister: Krishna Prasad Sitaula

In May 2006 Nepal's new multi-party government eased some of the edicts that had stifled press freedom during the state of emergency invoked by King Gyanendra in February 2005.

The media watchdog Reporters Without Borders says Nepal accounted for half of the world's censorship cases in 2005 and that more than 400 journalists had been arrested, attacked or threatened. "Security forces stop at nothing to monitor and silence journalists working for the independent press," the organisation added.

Once-outspoken private publications found themselves operating under strict guidelines. Some newspapers left their editorial pages blank, or published editorials on deliberately bland topics. Private FM radio stations were ordered not to broadcast political news.

The Maoist rebellion in Nepal, and the efforts to suppress it, have had a profound impact on the media. Rights groups say attacks on media workers have been perpetrated by both sides in the conflict.

The government publishes a Nepali-language daily and an English-language newspaper. It operates national radio and TV services.

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1166502.stm

Published: 2006/11/21 16:58:49 GMT

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. The Riverside School faced opposition from Brahmin parents who did not want their children to go to school with children of lower castes. Children of lower castes in Nepal have faced obstacles in getting the education they need. How does the caste system in Nepal relate to the issue of desegregation of public schools that occurred in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s? Are they similar? Different?**
- 2. Many children in Nepal are still forced to work as child labor despite the government's efforts to end this practice. How widespread is child labor in Nepal? In South Asia? In the rest of the world? Have students research this and report back to the class.**
- 3. War disrupts every part of society. As shown in the film, the struggle for the children to be educated was delayed by the revolution. Have students discuss the efforts underway to keep the schools open despite the conflict. (Read the Unicef article listed on the links page). Compare the efforts in Nepal to countries with similar conflicts such as Kashmir, Sudan and the Gaza Strip/West Bank.**
- 4. Girls in Nepal face even more obstacles in obtaining an education. What efforts did the Riverside School use to bring more girls into their school? Discuss how these methods could be applied to schools in other countries whether girls have a low graduation or school attendance rate.**
- 5. Nepal's former government was a constitutional monarchy. How did this form help/not help the Nepali people? Were the Maoist rebels offering a better form of government? How will the new coalition government work between these two differing ideologies? Explore how other countries in the region have dealt with political upheaval.**

LINKS

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf> - Library of Congress Country Profile

http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nepal_34452.html - Article on Unicef's "Welcome to School" program for Nepal

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/np.html> - CIA World Fact Book on Nepal

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/educators/lessonplans/lesson.cfm?lpid=122> – Lesson Plan on Nepal from the Peace Corps (Grades 6-8, 9-12)