

VOLUME 32, ISSUE 2, APRIL - JUNE, 2025

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

A QUARTERLY PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL



A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL FROM INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES

ISSN 0972-5563

Journal of Peace Studies

VOLUME 32, ISSUE 2, APRIL-JUNE, 2025

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PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY
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International Centre for Peace Studies

Printed at:
A.M. Offsetters
Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi
PIN- 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

Office Address:
157/9, Block 4, Second Floor,
Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-
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Annual:	US\$ 60.00

Akbar's Statecraft based on Aristotle's Ethics & Al-Tusi's Doctrine of 'Love'

Adil Rasheed*

Abstract

Building on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, famed Persian physicist Nasir Al-Tusi in the 13th century produced his political treatise Akhlaq-i-Nasiri. This paper focuses on Al-Tusi's contribution to Aristotelian ideal of the 'polis' (madinat al fadila), which in turn inspired Mughal emperor Akbar to build his capital city, Fatehpur Sikri, in India in the 16th century. While retaining salient features of Aristotelean ethics, Al-Tusi's doctrine of 'muhabbat' (love), which he considered more important than justice ('adl) in statecraft, had a major influence in developing Akbar's political doctrine of 'sulh-i-kul' (universal peace).



Akhlaq-i-Nasiri: P r e s c r i b e d R e a d i n g i n t h e M u g h a l C o u r t

Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* has had a remarkable influence in the Judaic, Christian and Islamic scholastic traditions and has also played a recognised role in the ideational and methodological approaches of Muslim political philosophers like Al-Farabi, Al-

Ghazzali and Ibn Miskawaih. However, Khwaja Nasir Al-Din Al-Tusi's political treatise *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (which translates as 'Nasirean Ethics') is recognised to have played a major role in introducing Aristotelian political ideas in Mughal India and in shaping its remarkably pluralistic and secular character.

Written in 1235, Al-Tusi's treatise profoundly impacted Mughal rulers and nobility, who studied the

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The views expressed are his own.

magnum opus assiduously, and a whole new genre of *Akhlaq* literature and *Akhlaq* tradition spawned in its wake. In fact, a large number of Mughal manuscripts of *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* have survived and are housed in several repositories across the globe.

According to the famous Mughal historian Abul Fazl, Mughal Emperor Akbar fondly listened to the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* in court.¹ Noted historian Muzaffar Alam goes further: "Tusi's book was not simply among the five important books that Abul Fazal wanted Emperor Akbar to have read out to him regularly, it

was among the most favoured reading of the Mughal political elites: the emperor issued instructions to his officials to read Tusi and Rumi, in particular".²

In fact, two simplified versions of Al-Tusi's book were published as practical manuals for Mughal officials, one by Qazi Ikhtiyar Al Hasan Al-Husaini titled *Akhlaqi-i-Humayuni* and the other by Husain Wais Al Kashifi with the name *Akhlaqi-i-Muhsini*. Another recension from Safavid Persia of Tusi's book was written in the late 15th century and is known as Ak-Dawwani's *Akhlaq-i-Jalili*, while



A Court Atelier, Folio from a Mughal Manuscript of The Ethics of Nasir (Akhlaq-i-Nasiri). This painting falls in the third section of Nasir al-Din Tusi's text, focusing on politics.

Nurul Din Qazi Al Khaqani wrote his version of the treatise at a later date under the title *Akhlaq-i-Jahangiri*.

Still, Mughal rulers preferred to read Tusi's original text and considered it a legacy of Persianate rulers,³ who embraced the philosophy of the controversial polymath.

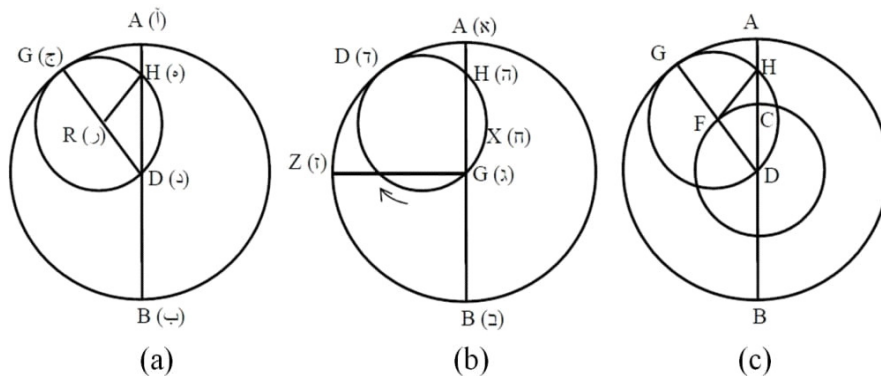
Trigonometry and the 'Tusi Couple'

The author of *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, or popularly known as Khwaja Nasir Al-Din Tusi, was born on 18 February 1201 in the ancient city of Tus in the so-called Greater Khorasan (today's north-eastern Iran). An astronomer, chemist, mathematician, philosopher, physicist, architect, theologian and physician, Nasir Al-Din Tusi is both a highly admired and

equally hated figure in Muslim history.

His detractors accuse him of treason and betrayal, who divulged state secrets of the Shia Nizari State and joined the forces of the Mongol conqueror Hulagu Khan, who then decimated the hill fortress of Alamut and subsequently marched towards Baghdad and plundered the Abbasid capital in 1258.

Those who support Al-Tusi contend that the polymath knew that Muslim rulers stood no chance against the invading Mongolian hordes, as he had himself witnessed early in life the destruction wreaked by Genghis Khan, when the Mongol conqueror decimated his hometown of Tus in 1220. In fact, a young Al-Tusi then had to migrate to Nishapur to seek refuge, where he eventually got introduced to philosophy. However, Al-Tusi remained a displaced



migrant and had moved on to Mosul, where he received education in mathematics and astronomy.

In the field of physical sciences, Al-Tusi made several breakthroughs. For one, he is considered the creator of trigonometry as a mathematical discipline in its own right⁴ and is believed to have influenced Copernican helio-centrism.⁵

In astronomy, al-Tusi created very accurate tables of planetary motion and successfully critiqued Ptolemaic astronomy.⁶ In planetary modelling, Al-Tusi is well known for inventing a geometrical technique called the 'Tusi-Couple', which refers to the linear motion emanating from the sum of two circular motions. He used this technique to replace Ptolemy's problematic equant for many planets.⁷

Some historical sources claim that when Al-Tusi (who was a Twelver Shia) betrayed his Shia Ismaili brethren at the fortified city of Alamut and sided with the invading forces of the Mongols, Hulagu rewarded him⁸ by making him his scientific adviser and permanent member of his inner council.⁹ It is reported that Tusi then accompanied Hulagu in the infamous sacking and massacre of Baghdad in 1258, which

brought the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate to a virtual end. Following the attack, Al-Tusi enjoyed a position of authority in Baghdad, and Hulagu approved the construction of the famous Maragheh observatory in Azerbaijan around 1259.

Although Sunni scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim and Al-Subki (along with Western historians like Edward Brown and A.J. Arberry)¹⁰ have criticised Al-Tusi's sectarian role in aiding Hulagu for the sacking of Sunni Abbasid Baghdad, they forget that Al-Tusi had made a similar political compromise in the destruction of the Shia state of Nizari Ismailis earlier. To his supporters, Al-Tusi acted pragmatically in self-defence to preserve his scientific work from the Mongolian onslaught. Surprisingly, the most ardent follower of Al-Tusi's bitter critic Ibn Taymiyya is the renowned Hanbali scholar Ibn Kathir, who absolves Tusi of the charge of treason and writes:

"Some people (obliquely referring to his mentor Ibn Taymiyya) imagine that the Khawajah (Al-Tusi) had induced Hulagu to kill the caliph (of Baghdad). However, my own belief is that such an act is not committed by an intellectual and a learned man."¹¹

To Dennis Overbye, Al-Tusi's pragmatism helped the progress of science in human history. He states:

"Al-Tusi's deftness and ideological flexibility in pursuit of the resources to do science paid off. The road to modern astronomy, scholars say, leads through the work that he and his followers performed at Maragha and Alamut in the 13th and 14th centuries. It is a road that winds from Athens to Alexandria, Baghdad, Damascus and Córdoba, through the palaces of caliphs and the basement laboratories of alchemists, and it was travelled not just by astronomy but by all science."¹²

Al-Tusi's political pragmatism also helped him open up to wisdom beyond the Islamic world. Although

written before becoming an official for a non-Muslim Mongol ruler, Al-Tusi's political treatise *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* presented a cosmopolitan worldview by making a departure from the hidebound Shariah-fixated views of Fakhr-i Mudabbir's *Adab-ul Harb wa Shujaat* and Ziauddin Barani's *Fatawa-i Jahandari*.

Aristotelian 'Polis' and Al-Tusi's 'Tamaddun'

Like Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Al-Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* is a practical and rational study of ethics: the science that Aristotle states investigates all that is good for human life, with "the good being that at which all things aim".¹³ To Aristotle, the highest good is what brings enduring 'happiness' and comes with the observance of moral virtue.



In line with many of his preceding Muslim philosophers, mainly Al-Farabi, Ibn Rushd and Al-Miskawaih, Al-Tusi has an Aristotelian outlook on ethics and politics and echoes at the outset of his treatise the Aristotelian phrase "*Man is by nature a civic being*". This Aristotelianism is reflected when he says that in order to attain collective happiness, humans require civilisation, which is realised in its most advanced and sophisticated form only in an urban environment. It is only in a city that various social classes with different skills

commingle and cooperate to provide for each other's needs, bringing out the best in community living.¹⁴

Azerbaijani stamp on Al-Tusi (the globe and telescope are anachronistic)

It is noteworthy that Aristotle deemed the city-state (polis), such as Athens, as the highest form of community in that it sought to attain the highest form of collective good and thereby happiness. In fact, the term 'politics' is itself derived



Azerbaijani stamp on Al-Tusi (the globe and telescope are anachronistic)

from the Greek word 'polis', which means the city state. The other word Plato and Aristotle used was 'politeia', which is also derived from the word polis ("city-state"), although its connotations range from the rights of citizens to forms of government.¹⁵

Inspired by Al-Farabi (870-950 AD), Al-Tusi states that civil society (*tamaddun*) can be divided into two categories: first is the ideal city or state (*al-madinat al-fadila*), while the second is the unrighteous city that is sub-divided into misguided city (*al-madinat al-zalla*) in that it has lost the vision for peace and progress, the evil-doing city (*al-madinat al-fasiqa*) that is prone to corruption and iniquity, while the third is the ignorant city (*al-madinat al-jahila*) that has lost its sense of good and evil, virtue and vice.

Although Al-Tusi lists the Aristotelian categories of governments — kingship, aristocracy and community rule (*jamaati*), he believes that all four co-exist in the ideal city-state, with the king being a kind of "government of governments", who organises the other three.¹⁶

Interestingly, Al-Tusi refers to Aristotle's 'politea' or the 'rule by the many for the common good', yet does not recognise it as government by the

community, but as one having a leader from within the community who is "a person distinguished from others by divine inspiration, in order that they should follow him". This is the one whom Al-Tusi says the ancient Greeks called "the possessor of the law (*sahib-i namus*) and the Muslims see as the religious law-giver (*shari*)."¹⁷

Love Greater than Justice in Statecraft

In order to achieve an ideal 'polis' (*al-madinat al-fadila*), *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* stresses on the importance of 'cooperation', which is to be achieved through justice (*adl*), administered through the impartial enforcement of law, and protected and promoted by a king.

According to Al-Tusi, the principal instrument of control for the king is *not* forced obedience (*amr-o-imtisal*), but affection and favours (*rafat-o-imtinan*). In *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, the Shariah does not connote the dogmatic interpretation of a conventional Islamic jurist that seeks to implement theological strictures strictly, but a legal code that employs reason and avoids inter-religious disputes and conflicts. In the *Akhlaq* philosophy, justice is not derived from religious law but from the spirit of 'cooperation' within a social organisation as fostered by the



Postal stamp on Al-Tusi and a page of his political treatise

Philosopher King, whose role is to avoid the conditions of conflict:

“To avoid this conflict, there is a need for the perfect person (the Philosopher-King), God-sent and God-supported. The philosophers call him *namus* (ordained), and the method he adopts is *namus-i-ilahi* (divine order).”¹⁸

Thus, Al-Tusi adds to the Philosopher King of Plato and Aristotle some of the divine attributes of the Sassanid Emperor and the Hebraic Prophet, making him something of a Prophet-like King. Taking Al-Tusi’s line of thought further, the Indo-Islamic *Akhlaq* scholar Nur-Al Din Qazi Al-Khaqani in his treatise averred that be it a Muslim or non-Muslim, a ruler must

be just. A non-Muslim but just ruler will serve society better than an unjust Muslim sultan.¹⁹

In fact, *Akhlaq* literature that spawned out of Al-Tusi’s magnum opus in Mughal times, writes Jayshree Vivekanandan:

“propounded a rational view of justice, according to which its latent virtues were revealed to human understanding through reason. This assertion of akhlaqi norms was significant for they ceased to draw their relevance and sustenance from any religious interpretation but were upheld for their intrinsic value. Justice was understood in akhlaq literature to imply a dynamic state of

harmonious balance in society among contending groups. The entire apparatus of the state and its resources were to be devoted to the pursuit of this secular conception of justice."²⁰

It is remarkable that Al-Tusi speaks of mutual love (*muhabbat*) as a much higher and nobler ideal for achieving social and state organisation than justice itself, in that love enhances cooperation across all sections of society and religious/ethnic denominations. Justice occupies only the second position for Al-Tusi when it comes to the Philosopher-King's order of preference, as justice to Al-Tusi is somewhat artificial, always enforced through regal exercise of power and coercive government machinery. However, love inspires involuntary participation from subjects belonging to all communities. Thus, Al-Tusi says:

"Justice leads to artificial union (of the state), whereas love generates natural unity, and the artificial in relation to the natural is compulsive, like an imposition. The artificial comes after the natural, and thus it is obvious that the need for justice, which is the most accomplished human virtue, is because of the absence of love."²¹

Akbar's Fatehpur Sikri as Tusi's 'Virtuous City'

The Mughal adoption of *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* as their source for political governance helped the rulers open up to non-Muslim traditions of both Persia and India, as well as in retaining their own pre-Islamic Mongol observance of *Tura-i-Changezi* (or the Law of Genghis Khan). In his biography, Humayun bears out this fact:

"My forefathers had always sacredly observed the rules of Changez (Genghis Khan). In their parties, their courts, their festivals and their entertainments, in their sitting down and their rising up, they never acted contrary to the *Tura-i-Changezi*."²²

Despite being a Hanafi Sunni, Humayun was an ally of the Twelver Shia rulers of Safavid Iran, right from his political struggles in Central Asia. This association introduced him to the Shia Nasir-Al-Din Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, which he used to read repeatedly. According to Antony Black,²³ Humayun was told that:

"The realm of Hindustan is full of diverse creeds ... It is but proper that thou, with heart cleansed of all religious bigotry, should dispense justice. According to the tenets of each Community ... And

the temples and abodes of worship of every community under the imperial sway, you should not damage ... The progress of Islam is better with the sword of kindness, not with the sword of oppression. And bring together subjects with different beliefs in the manner of the four elements, so that the body politic may be immune from the various ailments."²⁴

This spirit of tolerance imbued in Nasirean Ethics and the social norms of *Tura-e-Changezi* helped guide early Mughal rulers, particularly Akbar, to establish an empire based on universal and humane values. However, it was only in the reign of Aurangzeb that a full-scale revolt by the Shariah-oriented theological elite started challenging the *Akhlaq* tradition.

The extent of Mughal fascination with Tusi's city-state, which was itself a direct philosophical derivative from the Aristotelian ideal 'polis', can be understood from Akbar's ambitious attempt to build his capital city at Fatehpur Sikri. In this respect, Santhi Kavuri-Bauer claims that the four spaces of interaction at Fatehpur Sikri — the Jami Masjid, Diwan-i Aam, Ibadat Khana, and markets — demonstrate the phenomenology of Aristotle's Peripatetic philosophy, as

introduced to Mongol kings by Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–74), accorded a specific meaning to Akbar's city.

Impact of Al Tusi's Doctrine of 'Muhabbat' (Love) on Akbar's Rule

The qualities of a virtuous city, as outlined in Tusi's *Akhlaq*, where diversity and cooperation are supported by a Philosopher-King and his power of reason, can be detected in an illustration from Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which shows the Mughal emperor overseeing the city's construction.

Santhi Kavuri-Bauer states that:

"The image mirrors Abu'l Fazl's textual representation of Akbar in the mould of Tusi's Prophet-King, by whose existence the ordering of civilised life is effected. Furthermore, in light of the famous religious innovations and new forms of governance he introduced, Akbar was what Tusi would call the Possessor of the Law (*sahib-i namus*). Unlike rulers who merely promote the law, the Possessor of the Law is one who can innovate, experiment, and invent novel ways to govern. Only such a king can perfect mankind and bring them to order

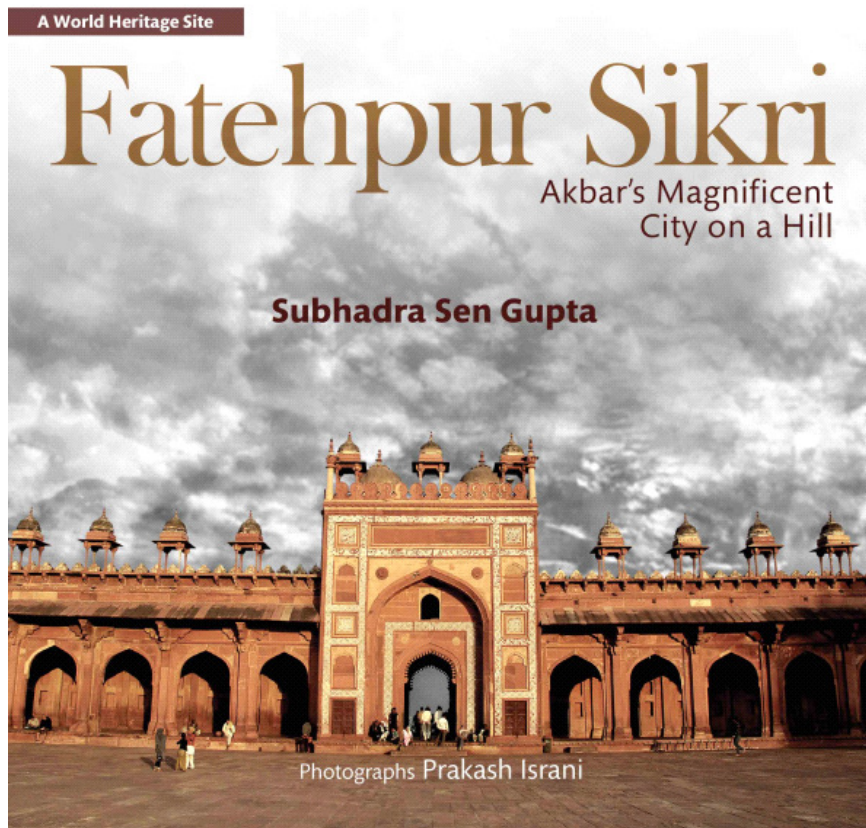
because, as Tusi states, he is a person distinguished from others by divine inspiration".²⁵

In fact, Akbar did attempt to become the Possessor of the Law (*sahib-i namus*) by instituting his own new faith, *Din-i-Ilahi*, in 1582. Akbar took inspiration from various faiths in the forging of this syncretic religion. It is believed that Akbar was himself greatly influenced by the teachings of Jain Acharya Hir Vijay Suri and accordingly gave up non-

vegetarian food. Similarly, Akbar's son Jahangir was in thrall of Vaishnavite guru Jadurup of Mathura, while his grandson Dara Shikoh was greatly influenced by Vedanta philosophy.

Akbar's famous Ibaadat Khana

The building of the *ibadat khana* in Fatehpur Sikri, a meeting house built by Akbar in 1575, aimed at assembling seers and scholars of



various religious and spiritual persuasions to understand the wisdom and common truths found across various belief systems of India and the world. As the grand vizier of Akbar, Abul Fazl states that the *ibadat khana* was not for the participants to subject others' beliefs to the tests of reason and logic, but rather to inculcate a culture of self-examination and rational critique of one's own traditions.

Thus, as Abul Fazl explains in *Akbarnama*, at the *ibadat khana*, "the just and truth-perceiving ones of each sect emerged from haughtiness and conceit, and began their search anew," whereas those who possessed only "the garb of wisdom... who reckoned themselves among the chiefs of philosophies and leaders of enlightenment, found their position difficult." He concludes by saying, "Reason was exalted, and the star of fortune shone for the acquirers of knowledge."²⁶

It would not be a stretch to argue that the *ibadat khana* initiative could have been influenced by Aristotle's *peripatetic* method of engaging in a rambling and informal discussion with scholars. No wonder Abul Fazl

writes, "I acquired many of the secrets of the Illuminationists, the mysteries of the Sufis, and the marvellous observations of the Peripatetics".²⁷

Conclusion: 'Sulh-i-kul' in line with 'Vaasudhaiva Kutumbukum'

It was from this exercise of syncretism that Akbar enunciated his policy of '*sulh-i-kul*' (Universal Peace), which seems to be the echo of the Upanishadic ideal of *vaasudhaiva kutumbukum* (which roughly translates to 'the world is one family'). According to Rajeev Kinara, '*sulh-i-kul*' was not a policy for Akbar to be implemented, nor was it a philosophical approach to start intellectual debate and dissent, "but rather a state (or more precisely a stage) of being that one needed continually to work toward, and in fact ultimately transcend in order to achieve an even higher stage of consciousness."²⁸ However, the scholar places '*sulh-i-kul*' on a lower pedestal than Al-Tusi's '*muhabbat-i-kul*' in that the former merely constitutes a recognition and tolerance for diversity, while the latter espouses a higher state where only unity exists. ■

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Democracy Vs Monarchy: The Unfolding Crisis in Nepal

**Sneha M* &
Nihar R Nayak****

Abstract

This article analyses the resurgence of pro-monarchy protests in Nepal since March 2025. It links the movement to growing public frustration over political instability, corruption, and economic decline. The protests are supported by monarchist groups and have attracted thousands of people, including many young and urban middle-class citizens. While the movement reflects deep disillusionment with the federal democratic system, return to monarchy remains unlikely due to strong political resistance and ongoing state crackdowns. Additionally, the article revisits the historical role of the monarchy and examines India's response, arguing Nepal's future lies in democratic reform and hence addressing governance failures is key to restoring public trust and political stability.



Introduction

Nepal's political landscape has long been defined by upheaval and transformation in the pursuit of democratic stability. It has once again entered a period of

political churning, with pro-monarchy protests emerging in Kathmandu and beyond since March 2025. Unlike previous crises that were mere manifestations of power struggles within parties, the 2025 unrest is a form of deeper public expression of frustration bucking

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The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments. The views expressed in the article are their own.

against the parliamentary system that was painstakingly created after the 2006 Jana Andolan II.

The movement to restore the constitutional monarchy gained significant momentum in early 2025, manifested through widespread street demonstrations that many perceived as a potential remedy for the country's enduring political instability. On 9 March, over 10,000 citizens assembled near Tribhuvan International Airport to welcome former King Gyanendra Shah after his tour of western Nepal (Kathmandu Post, 2025). Led by businessman Durga Prasai and some leaders from the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), protesters held placards with slogans like "Come back King, save the nation" and "Abolish the federal republican system".¹ The rally, fuelled by monarchist sentiments and widespread frustration among youth and the urban middle class, highlighted growing concerns over political instability and economic decline. The movement, whose momentum had been gathering in preceding weeks, reveals an emergent political undercurrent marked by growing public discontent and a reinvigorated debate regarding the viability of Nepal's current republican governance model.

While there have been monarchist sentiments in Nepalese politics ever since the monarchy was abolished in 2008, the recent surge in protests denotes a shift in the political atmosphere. Though the pro-monarchy demonstrations of March-April 2025 highlight deeper democratic drawbacks, any imminent prospect of restoring the monarchy remains unfeasible. The movement faces strong opposition from major parties; the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC), Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), here onwards the CPN-UML, the Nepali Congress (NC), factionalism within the royalist groups, and government crackdowns, limiting its momentum. This article attempts to critically analyse the pro-monarchy movement in Nepal and its prospects, if any.

Methodology

This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of monarchical protests in Nepal through an explanatory framework, scrutinising the sudden surge in demonstrations advocating for the restoration of the monarchy and the replacement of the existing republican system. The study is interpretive in nature, aiming to understand political behaviour,

discourse, and the factors contributing to the significant increase in pro-monarchist rallies in Kathmandu, as well as the extent of public support for these movements

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What factors contributed to the emergence of pro-monarchist rallies in March 2023, and what conditions led to their intensification by March 2025?
2. How did republican factions and political parties respond to the resurgence of pro-monarchy demonstrations?
3. How did external actors, including neighbouring states and international organisations, react to the renewed pro-monarchist mobilisations?
4. What motivations underpinned the pro-monarchists' demand to replace the republican system with a constitutional monarchy, despite the absence of conclusive evidence of systemic failure?

However, the study is limited to analysing the pro-monarchy developments between 2023 to 2025, with a particular focus on the monarchist protests that intensified from March 2025 onwards. It draws

on varied reported data and interpretive analysis. While the reliance on qualitative data constrains the generalisability of the findings, it facilitates a deeper, contextually grounded understanding of Nepal's evolving political dynamics.

The Context

On 19 February 2025, on the eve of Nepal's "Democracy Day", former King Gyanendra issued a video statement where he shared his worries about the direction the country was taking. In his address, he criticised the prevailing political mindset as being "rooted in exclusion" and warned that the nation's very survival was at risk. He highlighted rising national debt, the collapse of industries and businesses, and the deterioration of educational institutions as major factors driving an excessive brain drain and deepening public despair.² His message resonated widely across different segments of society, reflecting widespread frustration with ineffective political leadership and persistent governance failures.

On 28 March 2025, tensions escalated when another wave of monarchist demonstrations erupted in Tinkune, Kathmandu.³ The unrest turned violent as protesters clashed with police, set a house on fire, and

attempted to breach security barricades. Authorities responded with arrests and a heavy security deployment. The clashes resulted in two fatalities and over 110 injuries, marking a sharp rise in hostilities between monarchist supporters and the state apparatus, raising concerns over the government's ability to manage growing dissent.

After several weeks of silence, on 13 April 2025, former King Gyanendra broke his silence over the incident, stating, "We are deeply saddened to hear about the violence, arson, and vandalism during the recent public protests, which caused significant human and material losses".⁴ Earlier during the 8 April demonstration at Balkhu, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) had demanded systemic change under the slogan, "Let's change the system to change the situation". The party also called for the release of its Vice-Chair Rabindra Mishra and General Secretary Dhawal Shamsher Rana, both arrested during the 28 March protest.⁵ Subsequently, at its meeting on 18 April, RPP Chairman Rajendra Lingden announced plans to hold rallies in prohibited areas of Kathmandu on 20 April, alongside protest meetings, sit-ins, and demonstrations in all 77 districts on 22 April.⁶

However, these demonstrations were delayed due to restrictions imposed following the violent protests of 28 March. The monarchists eventually organised a motorcycle rally in Kathmandu on 9 May. Before that rally, on 8 May, the Joint People's Movement Committee declared an indefinite nationwide protest to commence on 28 May 2025, Nepal's Republic Day, asserting that it would garner support from Rastriya Shakti Nepal, Nepali Congress (BP), Shiv Sena, and other aligned groups (see Annexure II).

This sequence of events does not imply that public sentiment favouring the restoration of the constitutional monarchy has subsided. On the contrary, demands for a return to monarchy have gained traction in Nepal over the past two years (see Table 1), with recurring public rallies in and around Kathmandu led by RPP and other royalist groups calling for the reinstatement of the monarchy and Nepal's status as a Hindu state.

Historical Backdrop

Nepal's monarchy is often remembered by people with a sense of nostalgia as a symbol of national unity and political stability, despite its historical record of facing several

Table 1: Pro-monarchy Demonstrations in Nepal Since 2023

Date	Place	Remarks
23 November 2023	Kathmandu (Balkhu, Tinkune)	10,000 protesters, led by Durga Prasai's group and RPP, demanding monarchy restoration and Hindu state status. Turned violent with clashes against police and CPN-UML supporters; riot police used tear gas, batons, and water cannons.
24 November 2023	Kathmandu (Tinkune)	Follow-up protests by Prasai's supporters after his house arrest. Demonstrations remained large but less violent; focused on the demands of the monarchy and the Hindu state.
21 February 2024	Kathmandu	RPP-organised protest, part of the ongoing pro-monarchy movement, demanding the restoration of monarchy. Relatively peaceful, with national flag-waving and slogans supporting Gyanendra Shah.
9 April 2024	Kathmandu	RPP-led demonstration calling for monarchy reinstatement and a Hindu state. Peaceful, with thousands chanting pro-Gyanendra slogans; met with a heavy police presence.
9 March 2025	Kathmandu (Tribhuvan Airport)	Ten thousand supporters welcomed Gyanendra Shah, blocking airport access and demanding restoration of the monarchy and Hindu state. Peaceful, with riot police deployed but no violence reported. RPP-organised, with slogans like "Vacate the royal palace." UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's poster was seen.
28 March 2025	Kathmandu (Tinkune, Baneshwor)	Violent clashes with police; 2 killed (a protester, journalist), 35 protesters and 53 police injured. Protesters torched buildings, vehicles; demanded monarchy and a Hindu state. Curfew imposed; 105 arrested, including RPP leaders.
5 April 2025	Kathmandu	RPP-led protest, led by Pashupati Shumsher Rana and Prakash Chandra Lohani, demanding the release of arrested royalist leaders and free medical treatment for those injured on March 28. Focused on monarchy restoration; peaceful but tense.
8 April 2025	Kathmandu	Moderate RPP demonstration continuing pro-monarchy demands. Planned indefinite protests from April 20, but no further reports confirm continuation. Peaceful, with a focus on the Hindu monarchy.

Data compiled from various Nepalese newspaper reports from November 2023 to April 2025

revolts that eventually led to its replacement by a constitutional democratic republic. Established by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768, the Shah dynasty unified the country by integrating various tribal regions under an absolute monarchy lasting over 240 years. The hereditary succession system ensured political continuity, with monarchs revered as incarnations of the Hindu God Vishnu. This historical and religious legacy continues to resonate with Nepali people, particularly among its majority Hindu population.

However, the monarchy's centralising tendencies significantly hindered Nepal's democratic evolution. Resistance to royal authority emerged as early as the country's unification period, with Janajati groups criticising the monarchy for imposing cultural and economic dominance of a Hindu ruling elite. Notably, during 1846–1951, the monarchy was relegated to a ceremonial role as real power resided with the Rana prime ministers. The Ranas replaced absolute monarchy with an autocratic oligarchy, marginalising the King's authority. Interestingly, during this period, the monarchy aligned with democratic forces to end Rana rule, culminating in the 1951 Delhi Agreement that restored the monarchy while displacing the

Ranas. Democratic resistance, including armed movements, was instrumental in these changes, and by the 1950s, demands for democracy expanded, supported by marginalised Madhesi communities in the Terai region.⁷

Although the monarchy regained prominence in the mid-1950s, King Mahendra (reigned 1955–1972) suspended the 1959 constitution and dissolved the democratically elected Parliament in 1960 and introduced the party-less Panchayat system, promoting a homogenised national identity under the slogan *Ek Raja, Ek Bhesh, Ek Bhasa* (One King, One Dress, One Language). This policy was an affront to Nepal's diverse social landscape by marginalising ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups. While Tribhuvan and Mahendra initially facilitated democratic transitions, Mahendra's 1960 coup entrenched autocracy, banning political parties and suppressing democratic aspirations for three decades. During the Panchayat era (1960–1990), the monarchy consolidated its rule while Ranas were relegated to minor elite roles. Persistent underground resistance, however, kept democratic aspirations alive, leading to the First People's Movement (*Jana Andolan I*) in 1990. Mass protests and strikes led by the Nepali Congress (NC) and

communist factions demanding multiparty democracy paralysed Kathmandu, forcing King Birendra to lift the ban on political parties and accept a constitutional monarchy in 1991. Despite this change in constitutional limits on his power, he continued to assert his autonomy, which became a major issue of contention as it hindered the democratic trajectory of the country.

Subsequently, during the Maoist insurgency and political instability of the early 2000s, King Gyanendra made a final bid for absolute power by dissolving Parliament in 2002 and again in 2005, assuming full executive authority. His actions provoked strong resistance from mainstream political parties and the Maoist movement, leading to a unified 12-point agreement of November 2005, which called for republican rule and the abolition of the monarchy. As King Gyanendra attempted to undermine the republican move, the Second People's Movement (Jana Andolan II) in April 2006 forced him to restore Parliament, which eventually led suspension and formal abolition of the monarchy in May 2008.

Although royal rule formally ended, the monarchy's legacy continues to influence Nepal's political discourse. While for some, it remains a symbol of national unity,

identity, and guaranteed political stability, for others, it represents an exclusionary and autocratic institution resistant to democratic and inclusive governance. As a result, the monarchy's historical role remains deeply divisive in Nepal's evolving political landscape.

The Tipping Point: Timing and Underlying Tensions

Over the past 17 years, Nepal has experienced 14 governments and frequent shifts in political alliances, fuelling persistent instability (See Annexure I). During this period, the country has cycled through 13 prime ministers and more than 20 deputy prime ministers, underscoring the volatility of coalition politics. The continued dominance of three key political figures, such as Sher Bahadur Deuba (Nepali Congress), KP Sharma Oli (Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist), and Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre), have perpetuated a revolving-door system with little meaningful progress, significantly undermining governance effectiveness and contributing to systemic failures.

This pattern of frequent leadership change, coupled with a lack of accountability and meaningful reform, has fostered widespread

public frustration over nepotism, favouritism, and entrenched corruption. High-ranking political figures have been implicated in major scandals, reinforcing perceptions of impunity and selective justice. For instance, Sher Bahadur Deuba, a five-time prime minister, has faced allegations of accepting illegal commissions in an aircraft procurement deal for Nepal Airlines⁸. His wife, Arzu Rana Deuba, has also been linked to the fake Bhutanese refugee scam, with leaked audio suggesting financial transactions with a suspect. The scandal has implicated several senior leaders, including former Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand and Deputy Prime Minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi.

Allegations of corruption have similarly overshadowed KP Sharma Oli's tenure. His government's approval of the controversial Giri Bandhu Tea Estate land-swap deal was widely criticised for benefiting private interests, prompting opposition calls for investigation.⁹ Additionally, former UML Vice-Chair Bhim Rawal accused Oli of shielding key allies involved in the Lalita Niwas land scam.¹⁰

Corruption allegations have transcended party lines. The Cooperatives Scam has implicated

figures across Nepal's political spectrum, including Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) Chairman Rabi Lamichhane, Nepali Congress Deputy President Dhanraj Gurung, Maoist Centre MP Bahadur Basnet, and CPN-UML MP Rishikesh Pokharel, either directly or through associated individuals.¹¹

Similarly, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, widely known as Prachanda, has also faced scrutiny over financial irregularities. In October 2024, Yubaraj Paudel 'Safal' filed a formal complaint with the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), demanding an inquiry into alleged embezzlement of funds allocated for Maoist fighters stationed in temporary camps during the post-conflict peace process. The complaint names 13 individuals, including Prachanda himself, along with Deputy General Secretaries Barshaman Pun 'Ananta' and Janardan Sharma 'Prabhakar'.¹² Although the investigation remains ongoing, the case has reignited concerns over financial mismanagement during Nepal's transitional period.

Nepal's enduring corruption challenges are reflected in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, where it ranked 108th out of 180 countries

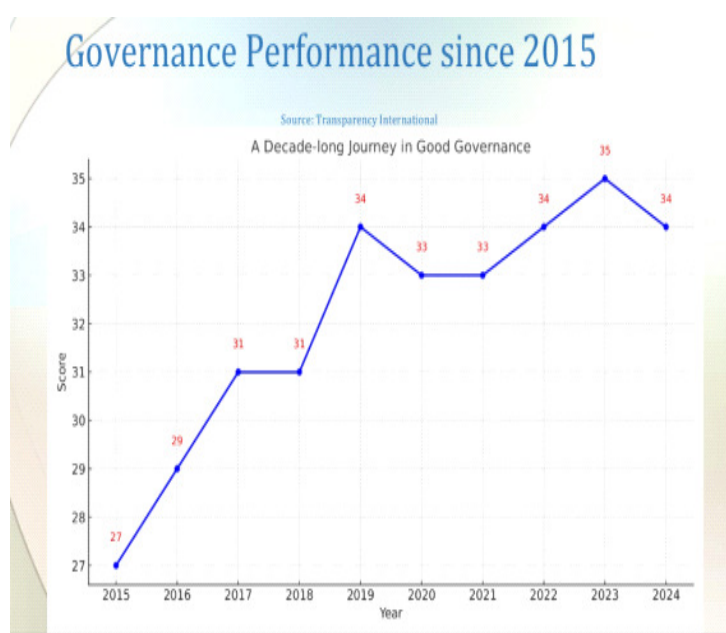
in 2023. Since the establishment of democratically elected governments in Kathmandu in 2017, Nepal has never scored above 50 out of 100. As illustrated in the graph below, its score has remained at or below 35 since 2015, indicating pervasive corruption within its political system.

Shifting Sentiments, Economic Strains and Anti-Govt. protests

The decline of trust in alternative political forces, particularly the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), has marked a significant turning point in Nepal's political landscape. In December 2024, allegations against

RSP leader Rabi Lamichhane severely damaged the party's credibility, prompting a shift in youth support towards pro-monarchy platforms backed by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and its affiliate, RPP-Nepal. Without a credible opposition capable of articulating public grievances in Parliament or leading impactful protest movements, many citizens have turned to the monarchy as a symbolic stand-in for strong leadership.

Economic hardship has further fuelled this discontent. Nepal's stagnant economy, high unemployment (12.6%), and soaring



Source: Transparency International

inflation (7% in early 2025) have strained livelihoods, compelling tens of thousands of young Nepalis to seek employment abroad (The Kathmandu Post, 2025). According to a 2024 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Nepal witnessed the highest surge in labour outmigration among the 13 Asian countries it analysed. The report further documented a 102% increase in the number of Nepali workers migrating abroad between 2019 and 2023.¹³

Further compounding economic vulnerabilities, Nepal was placed on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list for the second time in February 2025.¹⁴ Since remittances contribute nearly 25% of Nepal's GDP,¹⁵ any disruption in financial flows resulting from heightened international monitoring or sanctions would directly impact millions of households. Meanwhile, public disillusionment has manifested in frequent protests against government policies; since February 2023, at least 17 demonstrations have been recorded, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction and perceptions of governance failure (see Annexure IV).

Amidst this discontent, former King Gyanendra's increased visibility has further influenced

Nepal's political discourse. His nationwide visits to religious sites, which attract large crowds, have unsettled mainstream political parties.¹⁶ Once regarded merely as a historical figure, some now interpret his renewed public presence as a potential symbol of unity and alternative leadership.

Regional Significance and Political Symbolism

At this juncture, former King Gyanendra appears to have sought to convey the monarchy's regional relevance alongside efforts to consolidate domestic support. His cultural visits to India, where he received royal receptions at Niranjan Peeth in Haridwar in April 2021, were widely interpreted as attempts to bolster favourable perceptions within Nepal.¹⁷ During these trips, he met Hindu saints and seers with substantial followings in Nepal, reinforcing his politico-cultural appeal.

In October 2024, Gyanendra made a historic first visit to Bhutan, where he engaged with both former and current Kings. Despite Nepal's Hindu majority and Bhutan's Buddhist identity, his red-carpet welcome highlighted shifting diplomatic optics. Given historical tensions over the Bhutanese refugee issue between the two countries, the

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