
THE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION FROM TRADITIONS TO FORMAL SYSTEMS UNDER THE RANA REGIME IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical evolution of education in Nepal, particularly focusing on the transition from non-formal to formal education during the Rana period (1846–1951). The purpose of the study is to analyze how education, initially confined to family traditions and religious teachings, was systematically introduced by the Ranas, primarily for their own elite class, while public education was deliberately suppressed to maintain political control. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data was collected from secondary sources including books, articles, and online databases, and analyzed using descriptive, analytical, and historical methods. The findings highlight that while Junga Bahadur Rana initiated formal education following his visit to Britain, these efforts were limited to benefiting the Rana family. Subsequent rulers made minimal reforms under external pressure, yet the overall Rana regime left Nepal largely illiterate, with two generations deprived of educational opportunities. The study underscores the need for further exploration of the long-term impacts of this suppression on Nepal's socio-economic development and suggests that future research could investigate the post-Rana educational reforms and their role in shaping modern Nepalese society.

KEYWORDS

Formal education, Gurukul tradition, Lichchhavi period, Non-formal Education, Rana regime.

INTRODUCTION

The development of non-formal education in Nepal has been ongoing since ancient times. During that period, there was a tradition of family-based education, shaped by customs, behaviour, beliefs, life ideals, attitudes toward religion, and social norms (Shahi, 2020). Education was passed down from one generation to the next. Nepali individuals who pursued higher education at Nalanda and Vikramshila universities also gained recognition (Sharma, 2015). It is understood that providing education during the Lichchhavi period was optional

for the state, which meant that the common people were rarely educated. King Ratna Malla of Kantipur recruited Brahmins from Tirhute and appointed them as teachers in various schools. Many schools were established at that time to expand education (Upadhyay, 1995). Religious places and pilgrimage centres served as the main hubs of learning, but Buddhacharyas of Viharas who performed rituals were not educated. Apart from that, religious sites and places of pilgrimage served as major centres of education. The Brahmins and Buddhist teachers (Vaudhacharyas of Vihara) who performed religious duties did not engage in the teaching sector (Sharma, 2015) The Gurukul system of education was prevalent during these ancient and medieval periods.

Education and awareness are interrelated. Over time, the state has adopted various methods and styles of delivering education. Information about Nepal as an ancient state can be found in several sources. Different types of educational activities took place during the Satya, Tetra, Dwapara, and Kali Yugas (Sharma, 2015). Janga Bahadur, the founder of the Rana regime, recognized the potential threat that public education posed to his family and formulated a policy to restrict it. His principle was to disregard the education of others while teaching English to his son, a policy followed by later Rana prime ministers. Analyzing the educational policies of the Rana period using historical methods reveals that the suppression of education, present in the early Rana era, continued almost unchanged until the regime's fall (Pande, 1977). However, any educational reforms introduced during the Rana period were largely driven by national and international pressures.

During Prithvi Narayan Shah's reign, education was not widely spread beyond the Kathmandu Valley. In Brahmin families, subjects like grammar, the Vedas, and philosophy, all written in Sanskrit, were studied (Sharma, 2015). Prithvi Narayan Shah appointed Gorkhali scholars to provide literary education to his children (Acharya, 1965). Over time, the education system and subjects of study were updated. Prithvi Narayan Shah also made special provisions for military education for the children of soldiers who had died in battle during the unification of Nepal (Pande, 1977). Following his reign, political instability at the court hindered further progress in education. After the 1903 Kota Parva, the Ranas assumed control of Nepal. The first Rana prime minister, Janga Bahadur, ended Nepal's informal education system and introduced formal education. This study aims to explore the achievements in education during the Rana period and the beginning of formal education in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on the exploration and analysis of the development of formal education in Nepal, particularly during the Rana period (after 1846). Though informal education has a long-standing history in Nepal, formal education was systematically introduced by Junga Bahadur Rana following his visit to Britain in 1850. Recognizing the importance of education, he initiated formal schooling upon his return. In this research, data collection has been carried out through secondary sources. These include a range of resources such as materials from libraries, private collections, books, articles, and online databases. The collected data has undergone careful selection and cleaning to ensure only relevant and credible sources are utilized in the study.

In the process of writing, both descriptive and analytical methods have been adopted, providing a detailed examination of the historical context and impact of formal education in Nepal. Given the historical nature of the subject, the historical research method has also been applied, emphasising the chronological development of education policies and practices during the Rana period. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the topic within its historical framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Kot Parva event of 1846 was the immediate cause for the rise of Rana rule in Nepal. The British East India Company in India also played a pivotal role in the ascent of Jungaa Bahadur as Prime Minister in Nepal. Representatives of the Company in Nepal silently supported major events such as Kot Parva, Bhandarkhal Parva, and Alau Parva, all of which were significantly influenced by Junga Bahadur. Against this backdrop, to strengthen relations between British India and Nepal, Junga Bahadur returned to Kathmandu in 1850 after a year-long visit. During his visit, he was greatly impressed by Britain's development and realized the importance of education in that progress. He also recognized the need for English to study Western education (Dixit, 1973). As a result, he began promoting English education for the children of elite families.

Junga Bahadur's rise to power marked the beginning of Rana's rule, which ended a long period of political instability. The resulting political stability created a favourable environment for the revival of education. Although Junga Bahadur himself could barely write his name, he had others read newspapers in different languages to him. In 1854, shortly after returning from Britain, he established a school to educate the sons and brothers of the Rana family in English. The school was located in a room called Dakhchok on the ground floor of the Thapathali Palace. As the Thapathali Palace became the centre of Rana's power, the school became known as Darwar School (Upadhyay, 1995). The first principal of the school was Mr. Rose, and teachers were brought from abroad. Initially, subjects such as history, geography, mathematics, and logic were taught in English, along with Sanskrit and Hindi. Over time, the number of subjects and teachers increased. However, the school was only accessible to the sons, nephews, and close relatives of the Rana prime ministers, as well as their favoured associates (Gautam, 1993). As a result, most of Junga Bahadur's sons and nephews were able to speak and write English fluently.

After the Darwar School was established in 1858, Junga Bahadur created the Department of Education and appointed his fifth son, Babar Junga, as the Director of Education. Within seven years, the school offered education from pre-primary to lower secondary levels. In 1875, Dhir Shamsher became the Director of Education, and under his leadership, the school expanded to offer education up to the tenth grade (Upadhyay, 1995). Ranoddeep Singh, who succeeded Jungaa Bahadur as prime minister, attempted to make the court-centered education system more independent. During his tenure, the Pathshala, originally located inside Thapathali Palace, was moved to a newly constructed building on the north side of Ranipokhari. At this time, other members of the Rana family, as well as the sons of Bhardars (Rana relatives and allies), were allowed to enrol in Darwar School with government approval.

In 1885, the sons of Junga Bahadur's younger brother, Dhir Shamsher, assassinated Prime Minister Ranoddeep Singh. Afterwards, Dhir Shamsher's eldest son, Bir Shamsher, became Prime Minister and Shri Tin Maharaj. Bir Shamsher was well-versed in English, Urdu, and Persian. During his tenure, he established a Triveni School to expand Sanskrit education. In this school, subjects such as the Vedas, grammar, poetry, astrology, and Smriti were taught, with Pandit Bishnuhari as the head teacher. At that time, ordinary citizens, particularly Brahmin boys, acquired Sanskrit education in Triveni Schools, while the sons of the Rana family were educated in the English medium at Darwar School (Upadhyay, 1995). Bir Shamsher allowed students to choose their preferred subjects and arranged for those studying at Triveni School to take intermediate-level exams at the Government Sanskrit College in Banaras. He also provided scholarships to ten talented students who excelled in grammar, astrology, and the Vedas, allowing them to pursue higher studies in Shastri and Acharya programs.

During Bir Shamsher's reign, 16 ordinary schools were established, and in 1900, he founded Bir Pustakalaya (library) to promote education. Additionally, a monthly magazine called Sudhasagar was published during this period (Gautam, 1993). Through his efforts, Bir Shamsher reformed schools, opened new educational institutions, established a library, provided scholarships for deserving students, and maintained academic

standards by conducting mid-term exams in collaboration with Banaras.

Bir Shamsher appointed his brother, Khadga Shamsher, as the Director of Education to oversee the schools. However, Khadga Shamsher was accused of conspiring against Bir Shamsher while working in the education sector, leading to his reassignment as the chief of Palpa. Following this, Bir Shamsher appointed another brother, Chandra Shamsher, as the Director of Education. Despite Bir Shamsher's efforts to develop education during his reign, the standard of education did not reach the local level.

After Bir Shamsher, Dev Shamsher became Prime Minister and Sri Tin Maharaj. One of his first actions was to open Darwar School to the general public. As a result, the number of students quickly rose from 100 to 500 within two weeks (Gautam, 1993). Previously, students had been required to stay in Sanskrit Pathshalas, but Dev Shamsher allowed daily attendance from outside, increasing the number of students. With the support and advice of King Jai Prithvi Bahadur Singh of Bajhang, 50 schools were opened in the Kathmandu Valley and 100 outside, expanding education through the Nepali language. In these schools, teachers were assigned based on student numbers, one teacher for more than 50 students, and two teachers for larger groups, with government support (Gautam, 1993). Educational materials were distributed for free, and while teachers from India taught in the Terai region, there was a shortage of teachers in the hilly areas. Dev Shamsher aimed to establish at least one school in every village, with plans for high schools, colleges, and eventually a university. In 1901, he launched the weekly newspaper Gorkhapatra to provide people with news from Nepal and abroad, with copies sent to the King of England and the British ambassador in Kathmandu (Sharma, 1978).

However, Dev Shamsher's progressive educational initiatives alarmed his successors, leading to a conspiracy to overthrow him. He was forced to resign, and the schools he opened were shut down. The closure of Nepali language schools delayed the promotion of the Nepali language (Subedi, 2021), and his efforts to educate the people were halted.

After Dev Shamsher's resignation in 1901, Chandra Shamsher became Prime Minister and Sri Tin Maharaj. He was educated, having passed the matriculation (SLC) exam, making him the first in the Rana priminister to do so (Dangol, 2006). Despite his education, Chandra Shamsher did not favour expanding education in Nepal, and numerous obstacles arose in the education sector during his reign. Many of those who had supported Dev Shamsher's educational initiatives fled abroad due to pressure from the Rana government, but they continued to promote education from abroad. Chandra Shamsher feared that Western education could give rise to revolutionaries who would threaten the autocratic rule of the Ranas. As a result, while education could not be completely opposed due to global changes, it was stifled indirectly. Schools that taught the Nepali language were closed or converted into Sanskrit schools. However, Gorkhapatra, established by Dev Shamsher, remained in circulation because of its connections to the British (Gautam, 1993).

In 1908, Chandra Shamsher visited Britain and became aware of global educational advancements. Despite this, he believed that educating the masses could endanger the Rana regime. However, when the British declared that they would no longer accept illiterate Gorkhali recruits, Chandra Shamsher reluctantly opened a few primary schools to please the British (Gautam, 1993). His primary motivation was to train soldiers rather than educate the general population. The spread of education in India also had an impact on Nepal's Terai region, leading to the establishment of schools in both the hill and Terai areas (Upadhyay, 1995).

In 1904, Chandra Shamsher introduced a civil examination as a requirement for entry into government service, mandating that candidates complete their studies at Shrestha Pathshala. In 1912, Baburam Acharya wrote the book Nepali Shiksha Darpan. Out of the 1,200 published copies, 1,000 were confiscated, and the remaining 200 were secretly distributed outside Kathmandu (Gautam, 1993). In 1913, Chandra Shamsher established the

Gorkha Bhasha Prakashini Samiti, believing that independent writing could inspire nationalism. After its formation, a policy was introduced to review and approve all books written in Nepali before publication.

However, in 1914, Krishna Lal Adhikari, the author of *Makaiko Kheti* (Cultivation of Maize), was arrested and sentenced to nine years in prison after publishing the book, which was deemed treasonous (Pradhan, 1990). A language translation committee was also formed, requiring the translation of all organizational and shop names into Nepali (Pokharel and Dhakal, 2003).

On August 28, 1918, Chandra Shamsher established Tribhuvan Chandra College, named after King Tribhuvan. Despite this, he believed that promoting education could threaten the Rana regime, fearing that exposure to ideas from India could fuel a freedom movement in Nepal (Bhandari, 1989). Though the college was initially affiliated with Calcutta University, exams were later transferred to Patna University in 1920. Graduation-level studies began in 1924, and in 1929, Patna University opened an exam centre in Kathmandu, inspected by Babu Pannalal of Patna University (Gautam, 1993).

In 1915, Trichandra English Middle School was established in Siraha, alongside the Trichandra Library. The library, however, closed after a year due to a lack of resources. In 1926, a group of youths established the Dalan library in Palpa without government approval, but it was soon shut down under government pressure (Pangeni, 1992: 8). That same year, the *Buddhadharma* magazine in Newari was published to promote Buddhism, followed by the *Gorkha Sansar*, a Nepali-language newspaper that became the mouthpiece of the Gorkha League (Upadhyay, 1995). Despite Rana control, education in Nepal expanded, influenced by the global environment.

Many Nepali students completed their schooling and enrolled in Trichandra College or pursued higher education in India. By the end of Chandra Shamsher's rule, one college, 22 lower secondary schools, 40 language schools, and other institutions had been established, though the most renowned was Darbar School (Pande, 2019). Although Chandra Shamsher had the power to significantly advance Nepal's education sector, his fear of public enlightenment and the potential downfall of the Rana regime led him to restrict educational development.

After Chandra Shamsher's death, Bhim Shamsher became Prime Minister in 1930. Following a petition by 45 youths to establish a library, they were arrested and fined for alleged political motivations. This event is known as the "Library Parva" in Nepal (Yadav, 1985). Nonetheless, Bhim Shamsher was forced to establish several schools as public interest in education grew. He appointed Major General Mrigendra Shamsher as Director General for English schools and Pandit Hemraj Pandey to oversee Sanskrit and other schools (Upadhyay, 1995).

After Bhim Shamsher died in 1932, Juddhashamsher became Prime Minister. He expanded Sanskrit schools, increased teachers' salaries, and doubled student enrollment. In 1934, Juddhashamsher established the SLC Board, allowing Nepali students to take exams in Kathmandu for the first time (Swar, 1973). He also encouraged private school openings but simultaneously imposed strict control over them. Under his leadership, various educational policies were implemented, including the creation of the Nepali-English dictionary and financial support for literary magazines like *Sarada* and *Udyog* (Devkota, 1967).

Juddhashamsher's successor, Padmasamsher, took a more progressive approach to education. After becoming Prime Minister, he declared himself a servant of the nation and focused on improving existing educational institutions. He sent graduates to India for teacher training and established a teacher training centre in Kathmandu to develop skilled educators (Gautam, 1993). By October 2, 1947, 14 Aadhaar schools (basic schools) were approved in different locations throughout the kingdom. However, basic education did not develop as expected and remained largely nominal. The primary reason for this was to suppress the political awareness of the Nepali people rather than to genuinely provide basic educational knowledge.

Padma Shamsher established the first government girls' school in Kathmandu to promote women's education, naming it Padma Kanya High School. On December 28, 1946, Prem Bahadur personally established a library in his home without royal permission, making it the first privately established library in Nepal (Gautam, 1993). Influenced by the nationwide awakening against the Rana regime, which had been developing since 1943, the students of Tindhara Pathshala started a movement called Jayatu Sanskritam. As a result, the Rana regime began monitoring the Batuks (Sanskrit students) (Pradhan, 1990).

During Padma Shamsher's rule, libraries were established in different parts of the country, including Janak Shiksha Niketan in Dhankuta, Sarada Library in Gaur, Himalaya Public Library in Birganj, Padma Library in Bandipur, and Mahavir Library in Butwal. Literary magazines like Sahitya Sarat, the domestic Ilam magazine, and the Kathmandu Municipal Magazine were also published. Additionally, the newspaper Gorkhapatra began publishing three times a week (Sharma, 1976). Thus, some educational development took place during Padma Shamsher's and Dev Shamsher's tenures.

After Padma Shamsher, Mohan Shamsher became the Prime Minister of Nepal. However, his time in office was marked by political struggle, and there was little significant progress in education. Nevertheless, some efforts were made. In 1948, Mohan Shamsher introduced a B.Sc. program at Tri-Chandra College and established a University Commission, allocating five lakh rupees for the establishment of a university (Gautam, 1993). However, the university could not be founded during his time.

Education development during the Rana regime was slow. From the establishment of the SLC Examination Board in 1934 to the 16th annual examination, only 2,103 students appeared, with just 1,144 passing (Upadhyaya, 1995). The public was more eager to pursue education than the Rana rulers. Fearing that Western education would fuel opposition to their rule, the Ranas were reluctant to make education widely accessible. Due to numerous obstacles, education could not spread effectively or systematically during the Rana period, leaving 99 percent of Nepal's population without formal education. By the end of the Rana regime, only one percent of the Nepali population was educated.

CONCLUSION

After the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah, political instability increased due to the young and inexperienced ruler on the throne of Nepal. Power struggles and political manoeuvring within the palace became common. The period between 1837 and 1846 marked the height of political instability, making the development of education nearly impossible. Following the Kot Parva in 1846, the Rana family ruled Nepal for 104 years. Though this brought a stable government, it was a family dictatorship where the Ranas usurped all political power from the king. Neither the king nor the people could challenge their decisions. In such a situation, while the Ranas had the opportunity to promote education, they intentionally suppressed it, fearing that an educated population would pose a threat to their rule. Junga Bahadur Rana's contributions to education were aimed at benefiting only his descendants. Chandra Shamsher's efforts in education were merely for international appearances. The gradual educational reforms made by subsequent Prime Ministers were the result of rising public awareness and pressure. The 104-year-long Rana rule kept nearly two generations of Nepalese people in the dark, leaving them largely illiterate.

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