

1990

The Impact of Education During the Rana Period in Nepal

Gopi Nath Sharma

Ministry of Education and Culture, Kathmandu, Nepal

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya>

Recommended Citation

Sharma, Gopi Nath (1990) "The Impact of Education During the Rana Period in Nepal," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 10: No. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol10/iss2/6>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by the DigitalCommons@Macalester College at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.

THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION DURING THE RANA PERIOD IN NEPAL

Gopi Nath Sharma
Ministry of Education and Culture
Kathmandu, Nepal

Education in Pre-Rana Nepal

The Lichhavi period at the beginning of the current millennia has been considered a period of renaissance in Nepalese arts, crafts, architecture, education, and culture. Despite this, the Lichhavi Kings looked upon education as an optional rather than requisite function of the State. Priests and monks imparted skills and values in various disciplines to a small number of pupils and disciples in their *Gurukul* and monasteries. The *Gurukul* system was a similar system to the modern boarding schools except that the pupils were usually Brahmins or the sons of the ruling elite. *Gurus* were the spiritual directors in the *Gurukul*. The rulers would donate land, the principal form of property at the time, for the daily worship of deities. Trusts or *Guthis* were organized to look after and manage such landed property. Hermits, mendicants, and pilgrims were fed out of income from the trusts. These same trusts supported the *Gurukuls* and were organized as early as the 7th century A.D. Trusts from temples also supported education during this time.

During the Malla period (1243-1769 A.D.), King Jayasthiti Malla believed in education as preparation for life while a later King of Patan, Siddhinarsingh Malla, attempted to implement secular education.

The unification of Nepal was initiated by King Prithivi Narayan Shah of the House of Gorkha, the current Shah dynasty's first monarch under a unified Nepal. During the unification process little attention was paid to education, though Prithivi Narayan Shah's policy statements compiled in the *Divya Upadesh* covered many areas of statecraft. His sons and grandsons were also preoccupied with the unification process which ultimately came to a halt after the defeat at the hands of the British Empire in 1814. Thereafter and until 1846 the Court of Nepal was an imbroglio of intrigues and conspiracies. This culminated in a bloody coup led by Jung Bahadur Rana who put the monarch in prison and placed his son on the throne from whom he wrested all the powers of the State. In August of 1856 he was bestowed the title of Maharajah (Bhandari, 1981).

Education in Rana Nepal

Though not formally educated, Jung Bahadur Rana had assessed the impact of education on the general populace and its potential threat to his rule. He was determined that the populace would not be educated. This principal was followed by his successors and was similar to the policy of the Japanese shoguns. However, after his trip to Europe Jung Bahadur realized the importance of English for communication with the outside world and felt that his sons should be given a "western" education. He brought two teachers from England and established an elementary English school at his residence in 1853. Other teachers were recruited for the school from Bengal, India. Jang Bahadur's school was later named Durbar School as it was shifted from one Rana *darbar* or palace to another. During this time only the ruling Ranas and their nobles' sons could attend the school. This school represents the beginning of modern education in Nepal. No other school was opened during Jang Bahadur Rana's tenure from 1846 to 1877. Wright (1877) observed that within the general populace of the time "Everyone teaches his own children or employs the family priests or pundit for the purpose. The lower classes are simply without education of any kind."

The Durbar School was later affiliated with Calcutta University. Hence the University curriculum, rules, and regulations were strictly adhered to within Durbar School. English was both the medium of instruction and examination. Students had to travel to Calcutta for their high school entrance examination prior to the opening of an examination center in Kathmandu in 1929. By this time Durbar School had been opened to the public. Students were given traveling expenses and were rewarded on the basis of their performance on the examination (Sharma, 1981). These expenses were covered out of the income of the *Guthis*.

Department of Education The Department of Education (DOE) was established in 1858. General Babar Jung, one of the sons of Jung Bahadur Rana was appointed its first director (Subba, Uprety, & Wood, 1958). Durbar school was opened to the public for the first time in 1885 when Kedar Narsingh became director of the DOE during the prime ministership of Bir Shumshere Rana. This had an adverse effect on the Rana boys as they considered themselves to be a class apart from the "commoners" whereas the common people were reluctant to enroll their sons as they might be a unwitting victim of the Ranas' wrath.

Failure to Universalize Education With the support of a handful of energetic youths, Prime Minister Dev Shumshere declared primary education universal and free at the beginning of the present century (Acharya, 1957). He issued an ordinance to open schools throughout Nepal. Nearly fifty *Bhasa Pathshalla* or elementary language schools were opened within Kathmandu Valley and a few beyond the Valley. Pundits were provided by the government to those communities that could collect 24 students and arrange places for the students to sit and read. *Patis* that were otherwise used as shelter for travelers were also used as schools. *Aksharanka Siksha* was the first language primer book and was published and distributed free by the State. The first weekly newspaper, *Gorkhapatra*, which is presently a daily, was also published by the State. All of these educational measures were against the dictate of Jung Bahadur Rana who had stated, "Impart English education to your sons and keep mum for others." Dev Shumshere became a thorn in the side of his brothers and the Rana clique, particularly Chandra Shumshere who did not want the people to demand fundamental rights and raise their voices against the autocratic Rana rule.

As commander-in-chief of the military, Chandra Shumshere engineered a bloodless coup to oust his elder brother Dev Shumshere in 1901, barely three months after the later had become Prime Minister. Ironically, Chandra Shumshere Rana was the first Rana student of Durbar School to pass the high school entrance examination. When he took over the reins of power he did not fill the vacancies of teachers in the *Bhasa Pathsahlas*. Free distribution of education materials such as slates and the *Aksharanka Siksha* were also stopped. *Aksharanka Siksha* was later replaced by Sanskrit grammar, morals, and rituals. In order to avoid being charged with the closing of the *Bhasa Pathshalla*, Chandra Shumshere saw that a few were reopened at district headquarters. In order to make inspection of the *Bhasa Pathshalas* necessary he established the *Bandobasta Adda* or Controller's Office with two sections: the *Nagari Phant* (Nepali Section) and the *Angrezi Phant* (English Section). The *Bandobasta Adda* was established in 1902 under the Department of Education.

Chandra Shumshere opened *Shrestaa Pathsala*, the first civil servant's school, in 1905 to produce clerks to work in the newly organized offices in the capital and district headquarters. He did not want overly qualified individuals for the clerical jobs. Therefore the curriculum consisted largely of Nepali writing, arithmetic and law and governmental procedures which were collectively called *Shrestaa*. There was only one such school in the Kingdom and young men were encouraged to join by providing a stipend of thirty-six rupees per annum. The *Pass Jaanch Adda* (Controller of Examinations) was opened in 1910 to conduct examinations and certify successful candidates from the *Shrestaa Pathsala*.

Chandra Shumshere had two purposes behind the opening of the *Shrestha Pathsala*. One was to suppress the aspirations of the young people with respect to obtaining higher education. He understood that when the people were not properly educated there would be a decreased likelihood of their educating others and indulging in political activities. Secondly, the graduates from the *Shrestaa Pathsala* became loyal to the Rana Prime Minister once they obtained civil service jobs.

Gorkha Language Publication Council The newly opened *Shrestaa Pathsala* and the *Bhasa Pathsalas* needed books. There was a need for an organization to produce books as *Aksharanka Siksha* was no longer being printed. An office was set up in 1903 to write books for children, but little is known about its publications (Mainali & Lamichhane, 1988). The *Gorkha Bhasa Prakashini Samittee* was instituted by the statute of 1912. Only thirty-two titles were published over a period of twenty years (1921-1932). Each manuscript was strictly edited by a seven member board of censors prior to its printing (Kunwar, 1981). The Council was not established with the intention of publishing standard Nepali books to promote education. Rather, it was created to show that the government had encouraged Nepali writers to publish and had provided the opportunity.

Intermediate Colleges Indian students became involved in political activities for the independence of India with the establishment of the Indian National Congress. The Rana government did not want the few non-Rana Nepali students studying in India to return with a political consciousness and agitate against the autocratic Rana regime. Chandra Shumshere tried to retain students in Nepal by either appointing them to civil service or promising them opportunities for higher education in Nepal.

Tri-Chandra College, Nepal's first college, enrolled only six students in 1918. There was only one secondary school in the Kingdom that served as a feeder institution: Durbar School. Among those from the school who successfully completed their entrance examinations in Calcutta, those from influential families would get a stipend for higher education. The number of teachers at Tri-Chandra College was six as well (Nisamati Darta Kitaab, 1919). There were two graduates in medicine and two in civil engineering among fifteen other graduates during this time.

Chandra Shumshere visited England in 1908 and felt he was at a disadvantage when asked about the state of education in Nepal. Chandra Shumshere met with King George V in Delhi in 1911 and invited the King for sport and hunting in the Terai jungle of southern Nepal. During his visit King George V inquired about education in Nepal on a number of occasions. Chandra Shumshere felt increasing pressure to show that his government was making a serious attempt to educate the people. In partial response to this Chandra Shumshere's government opened an intermediate arts college in Kathmandu in 1918. Three classical languages, philosophy, mathematics and history were offered and affiliation was sought from Calcutta University. While addressing the opening ceremony Chandra Shumshere was heard to state, "I am not sure whether this day will be a day of happiness or a day in the beginning of the end for the Rana regime. I do not see that the result of opening a college will be good to them. I am compelled to do it because of the time and circumstances." The students of the college were provided with traveling expenses and a subsistence allowance to go to Calcutta to appear in the examinations. This system examination was ended after 1923 when all of the students taking the examination passed with good marks.

An Attempt to Open a Public Library In 1930 a group of people ventured to open a public library in Kathmandu, though it was illegal to establish a public reading room or library at the time. At the same time Nepalis living in India were trying to make those in Nepal politically aware by publishing fortnightly and monthly magazines such as *Gorkha Sansar*, *Tarun Gorkha*, *Gorkha Sewak* and *Gorkhali* out of Dehradun, Shillong and Darjeeling, India. These and others were made available through the library. Some of those who began the public library were imprisoned and others were fined after signing a bond that they would not attempt to open another library in the future.

Attempts to Open Public Schools During 1935/36 a public school was begun in Kathmandu by several young men who later become martyrs. The objective of setting up the school was to begin to educate the general populace and assist them in developing a political consciousness that would lead to change. Others began to open schools as a result. During this same period of time a board consisting of twenty-two members was constituted by the Ranas to discuss and recommend changes in various aspects of the curriculum, examinations, and management of the *Shrestaa Pathsala*.

A plan was devised by the Rana government to control the expansion of public schools by Prime Minister Juddha Shumshere. The *Siksha Istihar* or Education Ordinance of 1939 permitted the government to control both the administration and finances of these schools. Permission to open a school had to be granted by the government and the school headmaster and clerk were registered with

the civil service. The Rana government granted a token sum of 1200 annually in addition to the salary of the school headmaster and the clerk. The remaining cost of running the school had to be borne by the school management committee. Every decision of the school management committee had to be reported by the headmaster to the director general of the Department of Education. The Office of the Inspector of Schools was established. An inspector was appointed to inspect the English schools and to report on any political activities. Power over the schools was further centralized by the Rana government through the appointment of military generals as directors of public instruction and by requiring teachers' tenure to be reviewed on a yearly basis.

Recognition of Education as a Fundamental Right Once India had achieved independence the Ranas quickly recognized that to retain power they must remain in favor with the Indian leadership. One method of remaining in their favor was to spread basic education as it had been practiced in India. In addition to giving the public permission to open new public schools, Padma Shumshere declared in 1947 that he would enact a series of constitutional acts. The relatively liberal attitude of Padma Shumshere became detrimental to the interests of his younger brothers who were in line to become Prime Minister. They consequently forced Padma Shumshere to resign and Mohan Shumshere became Prime Minister.

In May 1948 Mohan Shumshere addressed his court on the occasion of his becoming Prime Minister. Among the topics he addressed were the right of universal education, the organization of a university commission, the opening of a Sanskrit college, and the creation of adult education centers. The first university commission, consisting of twenty-five members, met on August 26th of 1948 and formed sub-committees to discuss a number of issues including the formation of a teaching or affiliated university in Nepal, the medium of instruction, and coeducation.

Conclusion

Despite Mohan Shumshere's recognition of education as a fundamental right and his expansion of educational institutions, or perhaps partially as a result of this, the century old Rana oligarchy was overthrown in 1951 and King Tribhuvan assumed leadership. At the time of their overthrow the Ranas had increased the national primary enrollment to only 0.9 percent of the 6-10 year old age group and the overall literacy rate to only 2 percent (Wood, 1959). Nonetheless, education was acknowledged to have been a force for social change in Nepal, both by the Ranas and by their adversaries.

References

- Acharya, B. (1957). *Nepalma Sikshako Bikashkram*. *Navin Siksha*, 1(4), Kathmandu, Nepal: Bureau of Publications, College of Education.
- Bhandari, D. (1981). *Nepaliko Aitihasik Bibechana*. Varanasi, India: no publisher.
- Kunwar, U. (1981). *Srasta ra Sahitya*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Sajha Publications.
- Mainali, M.P. & Lamichhane, S.R. (Eds.). *Bikashko Nimti Siksha*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Centre for Education, Innovation, and Development, Tribhuvan University.
- no author. (1981). *Statistical Pocket Book*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Dept. of Statistics, HMG/Nepal.
- no author. (1919). *Nizamati Darta Kitaab*. (Record of the Civil Servants), No. 370.
- Sharma, G. (1986). *Nepalma Sikshako Itihas*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Hem Kumari Sharma.
- Subba, R.; Uprety, T.; & Wood, H. (1958). Report on the Ministry of Education. *Education Quarterly*, 2(3), Kathmandu, Nepal: Bureau of Publications, College of Education.

Wood, H.B. (1959). *Six years of educational progress in Nepal*. Kathmandu Nepal: Bureau of Publications, College of Education.

Wright, D. (1877). *History of Nepal*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press