Visions and agents of development in twentieth century Nepal

Author(s):
Elmer Udry, Sara S.

Publication Date:
2014

Permanent Link:
https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-010168144

Rights / License:
In Copyright - Non-Commercial Use Permitted
Visions and Agents of Development in Twentieth Century Nepal

A thesis submitted to attain the degree of

DOCTOR OF SCIENCES of ETH ZURICH
(Dr. sc. ETH Zurich)

presented by

SARA SANGITA ELMER UDRY

lic. phil. University of Fribourg (Switzerland)
born on 30.09.1981
citizen of Glarus Sued (GL) and St. Antoni (FR)

accepted on the recommendation of

Prof. Dr. Harald Fischer-Tiné
Prof. Dr. Daniel Speich Chassé
Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenszle

2014
# Contents

List of Illustrations .................................................................................................................. III  
Summary ........................................................................................................................................ IV  
Zusammenfassung ........................................................................................................................... VII  
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................... X  
Note on Transliteration and Terminology ..................................................................................... XIII  
1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 Aims and Scope of the Thesis ................................................................................................. 5  
  1.2 State of Current Research and Conceptual Framework ....................................................... 7  
  1.3 Sources ................................................................................................................................... 14  
  1.4 Outline of Chapters ............................................................................................................... 16  
2 The Ruler ...................................................................................................................................... 20  
  2.1 Nepal in the Making: National Heroes and Bloody Coups .................................................. 22  
  2.2 Jang Bahadur Rana: Protector of National Sovereignty or Embodiment of Oriental Backwardness? ........................................................................................................... 27  
    2.2.1 The Strongman .................................................................................................................. 27  
    2.2.2 Belait Yatra: Nepal Gets in Touch with the “Modern World” ........................................... 29  
    2.2.3 Jang Bahadur’s Rule and Reforms ................................................................................... 33  
  2.3 Chandra Shamsher Rana: Relentless Despot or Civilised Reformer? ................................. 36  
    2.3.1 The Anglicised Moderniser and the Rule of Difference ................................................ 37  
    2.3.2 The Abolition of Slavery and the Test for Civilisation ................................................... 44  
  2.4 The (De)legitimising Power of “Development” .................................................................... 55  
    2.4.1 The Anti-Rana Movement and the Quest for Unnati ....................................................... 55  
    2.4.2 The Promise for Vikās and the End of Rana Rule .......................................................... 58  
    2.4.3 The Royal Take-over ...................................................................................................... 63  
  2.5 King Mahendra: Traditional Hindu King or Father of Development? ............................... 67  
    2.5.1 The Partyless Panchayat Democracy ............................................................................. 67  
    2.5.2 Vikās in a Hindu Kingdom ............................................................................................... 74  
    2.5.4 “The Call of the Times” .................................................................................................. 81  
  2.6 The Ruler as an Agent of Development? ............................................................................. 85  
3 The Development Worker .......................................................................................................... 89  
  3.1 Nepal in the “Age of Planning” ............................................................................................. 90  
  3.2 The Universal Village .......................................................................................................... 95  
    3.2.1 Colonial Development .................................................................................................... 97  
    3.2.2 Community Development ............................................................................................. 101  
  3.3 The Tribhuvan Village Development Programme ............................................................ 104  
    3.3.1 Village Nepal .................................................................................................................. 104  
    3.3.2 The Multitalented Village Development Worker .......................................................... 109  
  3.4 Diverging Reviews of Village Development ...................................................................... 114  
    3.4.1 Cool: An Effective Stimulus .......................................................................................... 116  
    3.4.2 Mihaly: A Complete Failure .......................................................................................... 118
List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Jang Bahadur Rana ................................................................. 33
Figure 2: Singha Durbar ................................................................. 42
Figure 3: Chandra Shamsher Rana................................................. 44
Figure 4 King Mahendra on the first Vikās Titlepage......................... 81
Summary

This doctoral thesis examines the history of visions and agents of development in Nepal in order to shed light on the inception of the mighty and rapidly expanding development industry in Nepal and the corresponding emergence of an influential, elite social group of development professionals in the second half of the twentieth century. With focus on Nepalese actors, this study breaks up the commonly perceived dichotomy between “foreign donors” and “local recipients,” and aims at raising awareness for the crucially significant group of local actors who shaped the visions of development as insiders of the global development industry. This thesis thus contributes not only to a better understanding of the pervasiveness of the Nepalese development sector, but also to a critical histori- cisation of twentieth century international development endeavours.

This thesis is primarily based on information obtained from various published and unpublished writings produced by development agencies and the Nepalese state, as well as from other archival materials and from a few qualitative interviews. The predominant historical scope of this study constitutes the period between 1950s and 1970s, which were formative decades in the establishment of the Nepalese development sector. In order to gain a better understanding of the way “development” became a constitutive element of the Nepalese nation and of its state-building process, this thesis also considers how ideas of civilisation, modernity, and development influenced Nepal’s politics and reputation before 1950. Though in lesser details, this study also looks at the 1980s when the relatively strong structures of the state-centred development sector started to loosen up and criticism of development policies and practices began characterising the discourse on development.

The thesis is structured thematically along four major groups of actors, who saw themselves, or were seen by others, as “agents of development”: the
ruler, the development worker, the bureaucrat, and the broker. Each of these four groups has played major roles within the Nepalese development sector, each functioning in unique ways within it. In this study, they also serve as anchors to explore the wider waters of changing ideas and policies of development. The chapter on the rulers shows how from the early twentieth century onwards, the promise of modernisation and development became an increasingly important tool in legitimising rule. It further discusses how the nationalistic ideology of “panchayat development” under King Mahendra needs to be understood as an outcome of Nepal’s position as a non-colonised nation in a globalising world dominated by imperial powers. The chapter on development workers scrutinises how development work became a new professional field of activity in the second half of the twentieth century. Using the example of a village development programme, it also discusses how globally circulating visions of development were made to appear local against the background of political interests of both the donor countries and of the Nepalese government. The chapter on the bureaucrats sheds light on the Indian aided reform of public administration in Nepal and on the role of bureaucrats as development experts. The role of bureaucrats as counterparts of foreign development advisors is looked at in the chapter on the brokers. By analysing the concept of brokerage in development work, this chapter looks at the mediating role of those development professionals who acted as direct points of contact for foreign development advisors working in Nepal. Apart from government counterparts, the discussion also includes employees of foreign aid agencies and free-lance development consultants. From around 1970, this group of influential development professionals who are looked at in the chapters on the bureaucrats and on the brokers, came to constitute a new elite social group that decisively influenced development policies in Nepal. In the conclusion, it is suggested that this group be metaphorically called a “development caste,” significantly so, because the “caste” metaphor implies certain prestige, exclusiveness, and informal networking thread that characterised development
work in Nepal. The members of the “development caste,” however, were not just involved in supporting the development sector through their expertise and brokerage. Some of them also became, by virtue of their insider’s knowledge, fierce critics of development planning and foreign aid. However, despite increasing criticism and disillusionment, the idea of development, and with it the Nepalese development sector, has remained powerful until today and still continues to strongly influence the social and political life in Nepal.
Zusammenfassung


Acknowledgments

This thesis has been written with the generous support of the Chair of History of the Modern World, ETH Zurich, and the Swiss National Science Foundation. I want to thank my first supervisor, Prof. Dr. Harald Fischer-Tiné for his constant guidance through my entire doctoral studies and for providing helpful advice at key moments. He always asked the right questions to push my limits and sharpen my analytical skills, and created a stimulating and pleasant research environment at ETH Zurich. I am also grateful to my second supervisor, Prof. Dr. Daniel Speich-Chassé for his valuable support and scintillating discussions. I benefitted a lot from his expertise in the history of development and enjoyed organising workshops and preparing publications with him. My thanks goes further to Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenszle for being on my dissertation committee and for his much appreciated comments.

I owe special thanks to my colleagues at the Chair of History of the Modern World. They helped me improve my thinking skills in various areas of study and over time became good friends through the many after-work get-togethers. In this regard, I would especially like to thank Béatrice Schatzmann, who always helped me with all the administrative nuisances that saved a lot of time for my research. I further thank all my other colleagues at ETH Zurich and other Swiss Universities with whom I was able to share my thoughts and ideas on many occasions, especially Prof. Dr. Corinne Pernet for her inputs on my research plan.

I was fortunate to study nine months at the Faculty of History of the University of Cambridge. My supervisor at Cambridge, Dr. Shruti Kapila, helped me with her valuable insights and fresh perspectives. I thank the administrative staff at the Faculty of History and at the Corpus Christi College for facilitating my stay at Cambridge, as well as my colleagues at the Centre of South Asian Studies for making me feel comfortable and for expanding my academic horizon.
During my research trips to Nepal, I met many people without whom this doctoral project would never have materialised. I am particularly indebted to Sudeep Nakarmi, Harsha Man Maharjan, and Pramod Bhatta for their invaluable support during and after my stays in Nepal. They were immensely supportive in finding sources for my research and also in increasing my network with Nepalese scholars and development professionals. I found the brilliant discussions with these scholars about common research interests to be extremely helpful. I also thank all the scholars and development practitioners I met in Nepal for sharing their thoughts, which was very helpful in sharpening my analytical skills on Nepal. I would especially like to mention Pratyoush Onta, Deepak Thapa, Dev Raj Dahal, Sudhindra Sharma, Mrigendra Bahadur Karki, Rhoderick Chalmers, Susi and Robert Groeli, Nirmal Man Tuladhar, Rajendra Pradhan, Kul Chandra Gautam, and Bishnu Bhusal. My sincere thanks goes to the people I interviewed, for willing sharing their time, insights and experiences with me: Devendra Raj Panday, Krishna Kumar Pandey, Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Dev Jang Rana, Annemarie Spahr, Andreas Schild, and Rudolf Högger. My research would have suffered without all the help I received from Rolf Wilhelm regarding information on development policies and practices in Nepal and the contacts he provided to support my research. I am further grateful to the staff at Martin Chautari, the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (Tribhuvan University), the Central Library of the Tribhuvan University, the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (Tribhuvan University), the Kathmandu branch office of the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg, and the staff of many other institutions, who helped me locate the source materials during my field trips.

I am thankful to Laxmi Nath Shrestha for helping me improve my Nepali language skills and Sreyoshi Bose for her thorough proofreading. I am also grateful to my family in Patan for warmly hosting me during my research stays in Nepal and for making my research a very sociable experience. Last but not least, I deeply thank my parents for always supporting me and believing in me, as well
as my husband Frederik and my closest friends for their patience and moral support without which I would not have made it through all the years of research and thesis writing.
Note on Transliteration and Terminology

Nepali words are transliterated according to the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST). Inherent a-vowels are generally ignored except where they are pronounced. Although a written va in Nepali is often pronounced as ba and subsequently in many writings of Nepalese authors transliterated as ba, I opt for the Sanskritic transliteration rendering it as va. This applies, for example, to vikās, which is in many writings of Nepalese authors transliterated phonetically as bikas. Any exceptions to the use of transliteration are indicated in the respective footnotes. Names of places and other words that are presently used in regular English language (e.g. Kathmandu, panchayat, maharaja) are written without diacritical marks following the standard UK spellings. Names are also given without diacritical marks according to the people’s own usage or the most common usage in the English literature. The name Śāha can thus appear as Shah or as Shaha, the name Pāṇḍēya can appear as Panday, Pandey or Pande, etc.

The name “Nepal” is used throughout the thesis to refer to the whole Kingdom (respectively the Republic) of Nepal, even though up to the early twentieth century, “Nepal” often referred to the Kathmandu valley only (whereas today’s “Nepal” was generally called “Gorkha”). “Nepali” denotes the national language, and “Nepalese” denotes the inhabitants of Nepal. The English adjective “Nepalese” further denotes events or things relating to Nepal.
1 Introduction
Throughout the past sixty years, Nepal has been exposed extensively to foreign aid and development initiatives. In 1951, the Nepalese government signed its first foreign aid agreement and soon after, launched the first development programmes. Inspired by the Soviets and the Indians, the Nepalese government presented its first draft of National Five-Year Plan in 1956.¹ The plan drew a miserable picture of Nepal by outlining the “problems” and “low level poverty” of Nepal and its people. Yet, the plan also expressed confidence and optimism, as there seemed to be clear solutions at hand to overcome poverty. The key to economic progress, claimed the plan, was economic growth, an objective that could be achieved through concerted national development programmes. The plan admitted that this was no simple task. But it was hopeful that with the initial assistance of foreign capital and foreign advisors, the preconditions of economic growth – infrastructures, communication facilities, schools, etc. – could be created, subsequently facilitating the Nepalese government’s ability to manage the nation’s development on its own.² As the First Five-Year Plan reveals, the technocratic modernisation discourse of international aid agencies was adopted promptly by the Nepalese state administration. Nepal was now no more portrayed as a “mysterious forbidden Kingdom”³ as described in earlier travelogues of foreign visitors. With the dawn of the “age of development,”⁴ Nepal gained a new label: that of a “backward,” “underdeveloped” country. Against this background, vikās (development) instantly became a magic word that Nepalese policy makers presented as a solution to almost all problems.

Within six decades of the launch of the first development programmes, the initial optimistic surge of faith and confidence in progress through planned development waned, giving way to disillusionment and frustration among many Nepalese people. Today, Nepal seems light years away from achieving the initially anticipated stage of “self-sustained growth.” In the fiscal year 2011–12, the loans and grants of multilateral and bilateral donors amounted to about USD 1.2 billion. This indicates that foreign aid represents about 26 per cent of the national budget and about 5.4 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In comparison to the officially recorded migrant workers’ remittances of the fiscal year 2013, which amounted to 25.5 per cent of the GDP, the share of foreign aid might look less dramatic. Nonetheless, the two figures indicate a very high dependency of external resources.

In view of Nepal’s heavy dependency on external resources, the prominent Nepalese civil society activist, development consultant, and former secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Devendra Raj Panday rendered in 1999 the scathing verdict of “Nepal’s Failed Development.” Analogous to the debate of Nepal as a failed state, Panday stirred a debate among the Nepalese intelligentsia about “development” as something that has clearly “failed” in Nepal. For Panday, the development endeavour has failed because it has not led to the promised levelling of social inequalities but has instead triggered social unrests of those who felt left out in the process of development, sentiments that were most vio-

---


lently manifested in the Maoist rebellion. In his book, he does not specifically blame any single group for the “maladies,” but it is evident that his critique is aimed at corrupt political elites who gained personal profits from foreign aid at the expense of the poor. Panday also hinted at psychological effects of the “failed development” that appeared to grip Nepal, apart from the economic and political disasters that it was already facing at the turn of the millennium. The overwhelming dependency on foreign aid, he argues, resulted in the Nepalese society’s loss of self-esteem and self-consciousness, two attributes that he considers essential for any meaningful and long-lasting development to occur.

Nanda Shrestha, Nepalese intellectual and professor for world cultures and resources at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), agreed completely with Panday’s verdict of failed development. In his 1998 book *In the Name of Development*, he locates the problems within the idea of development itself. He describes development, specifically in its pseudo-Nepalese disguise as *vikās*, as a Western ideology serving as an instrument to colonise the minds and bodies of the people in Nepal. The ideology of *vikās*, says Shrestha, unquestioningly supposes the Western development models as superior and divides the Nepalese society along a status line between supposedly “developed” and “underdeveloped” people. Through a series of anecdotes, he narrates how the idea of development and foreign aid has in effect colonised Nepal and has

---

9 From 1996 to 2006, Nepal witnessed a civil war between Maoist rebellions and government forces. In the first edition of 1999, Panday discusses the Maoist insurgency only marginally since it had not yet fully escalated. The Royal Army only intervened from 2001 on, when King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency. In his revised 2009 edition, Panday explains in more depth why he considers the “failed development” to be one of the main causes of the civil war. See Panday, *Nepal’s Failed Development: Reflections on the Mission and the Maladies, 10th Anniversary Edition*, 411-57.


produced nothing but a “trail of victims.”\textsuperscript{12} The victims, for Nanda, include the poor, of course. But in contrast to other narratives on aid profiteers, he considers the privileged classes that benefit from the flow of funds in the pretext of foreign aid as victims as well. He perceives them as victims because he predicts that the visible social disparities resulting from their profiteering would leave them with guilt and fear, and with little sense of pride and dignity.

The publications of Panday and Shrestha clearly express how very emotionally charged and politically explosive the topic of “development” had become in Nepal by the end of the twentieth century. Unlike the other debates on development, the contributions of Panday and Shrestha do not merely look at what development planning has not been able to achieve, but also stir a debate on the (unplanned) effects of development on the Nepalese society.\textsuperscript{13} However, despite today’s openly articulated complaints and claims of Nepal suffering from an overdose of aid, the idea of development is as vital as ever and is manifest in an extensive, foreign aided development sector, a condition that does not seem likely to change any time in the near future.

It must nevertheless be noted that although dominant and highly visible, the development sector in Nepal still remains an obscure “black box.”\textsuperscript{14} The myriad of reports, plans, and research papers produced by and for the development industry look mostly at the inputs and outputs of the development industry and shed little light on its complex internal mechanisms.\textsuperscript{15} As the examples of Panday

\textsuperscript{12} Shrestha, \textit{In the Name of Development: A Reflection on Nepal}, xix.

\textsuperscript{13} In more recent publications, both authors confirmed their negative verdict of the history of development in Nepal: Seira Tamang, ed. \textit{Looking Back at Development and Donors: Essays from Nepal} (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2011); Nanda Shrestha, “‘Misery is My Company Now’: Nepal’s Peasantry in the Face of Failed Development,” \textit{Journal of Peasant Studies} 35 (2008).


and Shrestha illustrate, there are indeed some Nepalese as well as foreign intellectuals looking inside the black box of development with the aim of turning the gaze on the development industry itself instead of on the poor. But there is still little that is known about the history of the powerful idea of development in Nepal, and about how it stimulated the emergence of a vast and pervasive development sector.

1.1 Aims and Scope of the Thesis
In this thesis, I look inside the black box of the Nepalese development sector. The aim is not to evaluate the success or failure of development projects, nor to judge whether development planning and foreign aid are good or bad. Rather, I aim at shedding light on some of the unintended side effects of development in Nepal – the coming into being of a powerful development sector and the emergence of a new social group of Nepalese development professionals. In order to gain insights into these effects, I question the visions of development in Nepal, as well as the identity and role of Nepalese agents of development from a historical perspective. With focus on Nepalese actors, I further aim at breaking up the common dichotomy of “foreign donors” and “local recipients” that is widely prevalent in political and academic debates on development, and aim at raising awareness for the significant group of local actors who shape the visions of development as insiders of the global development industry. The thesis will thus contribute to a better understanding of not only the pervasiveness of the Nepalese development sector but also to a critical historicisation of the twentieth century international development endeavour, and thus to a better comprehension of today’s challenges in development work.

The temporal focus of the thesis is on the 1950s to the 1970s. These were formative decades in the Nepalese nation-building process as well as in the establishment of the Nepalese development sector. During this period, the development sector emerged as an increasingly important workplace, and by the
early 1970s, the well-educated and trained Nepalese development professionals had reached a critical mass, sufficient enough to constitute a new and influential social group. Also, it was in the 1970s that Nepal corresponded most to what political scientists define as a “developmental state.” By then, the autocratic Nepalese government, with the assistance of foreign aid, had built up an extensive bureaucracy in charge of macroeconomic development planning. However, 1951, which was the year of Nepal’s first foreign aid agreement as well as of the end of the hundred-year autocratic regime of the Rana family, does not mark a point zero in the history of the Nepalese development regime. The emergence of the development sector in the second half of the twentieth century cannot be adequately understood without considering the preceding Rana period. The thesis, therefore, also takes into account of how ideas of civilisation, modernity, and development influenced Nepal’s politics and reputation before 1951, and how post-1951 governments utilised the historical representation of the Rana period to justify development policies. Though in lesser details, the thesis also covers the 1980s, when the relatively strong structures of the state-centred development sector loosened up again. The autocratic monarchical system and its bureaucratic apparatus were increasingly challenged and criticism of development policies and practices became louder and louder. The development sector, however, did not lose its significance in the 1980s. On the contrary, it continued to grow with larger foreign aid funds and a more diverse range of local and foreign actors. My analysis of the visions and agents of development goes not beyond 1990. The year 1990 marks not only the end of the Cold War but also the end of the autocratic monarchical system in Nepal. Since then, political life in Nepal has been characterised by the unsuccessful attempt to institutionalise a stable democratic system. At the same time, the development sector became even more opaque and obscure due to the weaknesses of the public sector and the mush-

rooming of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The new face of the development regime in post-1990 Nepal would be the object of a separate study. Yet, as Nanda Shrestha and Devendra Raj Panday argue, many of the post-1990 challenges and problems of development have their roots in the earlier decades, which are objects of study in this thesis.\\footnote{Apart from the above-mentioned works of Shrestha and Panday, see also the discussions on the development sector in post-1990 Nepal in: Heather Hindman, “The Everyday Life of American Development in Nepal,” \textit{Studies in Nepalese History and Society} 7 (2002). And in “In the Name of Bikas: Special Issue on Development” \textit{Studies in Nepalese History and Society} 1 (1996).}

### 1.2 State of Current Research and Conceptual Framework

Scientific research (based on social-evolutionary ideas of development) on causes and effects of social inequalities, as well as on ways of influencing processes of development dates back to the nineteenth century.\\footnote{Michael Cowen, and Robert W. Shenton, \textit{Doctrines of Development} (London; New York: Routledge, 1996).} In the nineteenth century, philosophers and social scientists like Karl Marx or John Stuart Mill were primarily interested in problems of economic development in Europe. But in the twentieth century, development and social inequalities came to be increasingly looked at as problems plaguing non-European societies. When after World War II, foreign aid and development planning became major fields of national and international action, social scientists became increasingly interested in the sociology and processes of development, giving rise to the new academic discipline of development studies. Initially studied predominantly under macroeconomics, development studies soon became interdisciplinary, including political sciences, geography, anthropology, and other social sciences. Historical studies are generally not included in the academic parameters of development studies. But studies on development issues often refer to historical narratives of progress in order to explain processes of development and to support theories such as the modernisation theory or the dependency theory.\\footnote{See for instance Walt W. Rostow’s famous account of historical stages of development, or Andre Gunder Frank’s study on the history of “underdevelopment” in Latin America: Andre Gun-}
opment primarily focused on producing “useful” development knowledge by targeting so-called recipient societies and economic systems as the main objects of research. But since the 1990s, social scientists and historians have been showing increasing interest in scrutinising the very idea of development, along with its institutions. Three sets of these newer approaches to development are outlined here, which also provide some conceptual guidelines for the present thesis.

**Post-development:** Since the late 1980s, post-development critique has gained ground through works of social scientists like Arturo Escobar, Wolfgang Sachs, James Ferguson, Gilbert Rist, and Jonathan Crush. Inspired by Foucault as well as by postcolonial studies, post-development authors use a post-structural approach to analyse knowledge production, representation, and power in North-South relations. Analysing the threads of continuity between the colonial discourse and the development discourse, they argue that the latter is basically a continuation of the former. The development discourse would, for example, reproduce colonial binaries by its division of the world in “developed” and “underdeveloped” people and places. The more populist and more radical post-development authors therefore generally dismiss development as a neo-colonial discourse of Western origin that supports the Euro-American hegemony. Some authors even tend to reproduce the criticised dichotomy between “donors” and

---


“recipients” by demonising “the West” while romanticising “traditional” societies.\textsuperscript{22} Nanda Shrestha’s post-development critique of the culture of development in Nepal, for example, produces an overly idealised image of indigenous values and of a rural economy, which in his view was being destroyed in the name of development. With its strong focus on the deconstruction of the development discourse and its tendency to look at the history of development as a story of diffusion from “the West” to “the Rest,” the post-development critique tends to neglect the local agency, in which precisely, this thesis is interested. This approach is therefore only of limited use in conceptualising the role of Nepalese development professionals. Nevertheless, post-development does provide inspiration for analysis of the visions of development in Nepal as well as for questioning representation and self-fashioning of Nepalese actors.

\textbf{Global History of Development:} While the history of leading development doctrines is already well researched,\textsuperscript{23} critical historical research on development practice is still a young discipline. Yet, in the increasingly popular course of global history writing, development planning and foreign aid has attracted interest as historical phenomena, which decisively structured international relations and local societies in the twentieth century. The approaches to a global history of development are manifold though. Many of the studies, which are mostly produced by historians with a background in area studies or global history, are however clearly influenced by post-development and postcolonialism. Since the 1990s, the often theory-ridden, post-structural approach to development has, for example, been enriched by empirical historical studies on colonial develop-


ment and its legacies in postcolonial foreign aid. Other studies focus more on political implications in the context of the Cold War, on the production of development knowledge and expertise, or on local experiences of development interventions, just to name a few approaches. The bulk of these studies look on a “donor” perspective and/or on corresponding experiences in (post) colonial societies. Nonetheless, the recent studies on global history of development still provide valuable insights, which help in understanding the history of development and its actors in Nepal and help in situating Nepal’s history in a global context.

**Aidnography:** Anthropology has contributed much to the production of development knowledge through studies on “recipient societies.” However, since the late 1990s, anthropologists have increasingly turned their gaze towards “aid work” and “aid workers” as their objects of research. Unlike post-development

---


studies that primarily look at the development discourse, the so-called “ethnography of aid”\textsuperscript{26} or in short “aidnography”\textsuperscript{27} applies ethnographical field research to scrutinise the practice of aid work and the lives of aid workers. Aidenography looks at people working in the development sector not as mere conduits or tools to implement projects but as human beings with families, professional networks, needs for consumer goods, and with own interests and ideas of development.\textsuperscript{28} Whereas some studies primarily focus on the ethnography of donor agencies or on the cosmopolitan space of “Aidland” inhabited by expatriate development workers,\textsuperscript{29} others also consider the role of locals working in the development sector.\textsuperscript{30} As Nepal has been, since long, offering a popular field for anthropological research, there has been some remarkable work on the ethnography of the aid sector in Nepal.\textsuperscript{31} Even though aidenography primarily focuses on contempo-

\footnotesize
rary (not historical) issues, it raises many questions that are relevant to the present thesis, such as the identity and agency of local actors or the social spaces created through international development co-operation.

Development studies on Nepal are, of course, as vast and diverse as is the development sector itself. But the development literature written by Nepalese and foreign development professionals primarily focuses on contemporary plans and projects as well as on descriptions of Nepal and its society. It uses historical accounts only marginally and superficially to support the arguments. The development literature produced during the 1950s until the 1980s is very relevant for the present thesis – not as reference literature but as historical source material. There are also a few in-house publications on the history of development agencies working in Nepal. But unbiased, critical historical studies on development and foreign aid are conspicuous by their absence. It must be noted however that not only development history, but history in general is poorly represented in academic research on Nepal. History as an academic discipline has only evolved in Nepal in the 1960s after the foundation of the first Nepalese university. For a long time, it not only almost exclusively dealt with political history but was also biased, being used as an instrument of nation-building politics. In recent years, critical historical research on questions like nation building and

---


33 Pratyoush Onda, “Ambivalence Denied: The Making of Rastriya Ithias in Panchayat Era Textbooks,” in 60 Years of Educational Development in Nepal, ed. Pramod Bhatta (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2009). Prior to 1990, social and economic history was practiced almost exclusively by Mahesh Chandra Regmi and to a certain extend also by Ludwig Stiller who was the first to receive a PhD in history from the Tribhuvan University.
identity has gained ground, however. But the history of the practice, ideas, and actors of development is still widely understudied despite its critical significance in understanding today’s Nepalese society.

In this thesis, I address this gap and aim at contributing to a critical historiography of Nepal. I follow a post-structuralist approach for pointing out contradictions and tensions of the development discourse and for showing how Nepalese and foreign actors create sense of (and legitimacy for) development interventions. This thesis will also contribute to a global history of development. Although my geographical scope is limited to Nepal, the study examines Nepalese local history with a “global consciousness.” This means I look at the visions and agents of development in Nepal against their specific local background as well as against the background of the global development endeavour. The focus of this study on non-Western actors will further enrich the existing historical studies on development, since non-Western perspectives are still largely underrepresented. However, my thesis should not be mistaken as an attempt to represent “authentic indigenous voices,” neither as an attempt to write a history of subalterns. The thesis rather takes an anti-essentialist approach by asking how identities are created through development work and by asking in whose hands the power to speak for Nepal and the Nepalese lies. While not denying the influence of European enlightenment-based thoughts, development is not assumed to be an exclusively “Western” idea that was uncritically adopted by Nepalese planners. Development is rather looked at as an idea whose meaning was constantly negotiated and appropriated by Nepalese policy makers and by the various local and foreign actors working in the Nepalese development sector. “For-

---

eign,” in the context of this thesis, does not designate a homogeneous group of actors (nor does “Nepalese”), and is also not synonymous to “Western.” It is merely used as a pragmatic term to designate actors arriving from abroad, including the significant body of Indian advisors. Furthermore, drawing inspiration from aidnography, development is looked at not only as a contested field of political action but also simply as a workspace, which has been creating new jobs and career opportunities since the 1950s. Hence, this thesis presents not an economic or social history of Nepal but rather a cultural history of Nepalese elites that is imbedded in a global history of development.

1.3 Sources

One factor that explains why the history of development in Nepal is still under-studied is the state of source material. Collecting useful historical data is a challenging task since the Nepalese state administration has not practised systematic filing and archiving. Hence, although the National Archives of Nepal are in operation since 1967, only little source material for the present thesis could be found there.\(^{35}\) Although fragmentary and badly organised archives are a problem for historians dealing with Nepal as well as with other Asian or African post-colonial states,\(^ {36}\) yet, the situation in Nepal is somewhat different due to its non-colonial history. In the case of many post-colonial countries, there are substantial and relatively easily accessible archives in the former colonial metropolises. The British colonisers have, for example, diligently collected government records and statistical data on British India, which can be found in the British Library and the National Archives in London. These archives also hold some materials on Nepal

\(^{35}\) The National Archives of Nepal hold only two relatively well organised collections: First, a substantial collection of manuscripts (religious scripts and royal decrees) from the 11th to the 19th century, which is not used for this thesis. Second, the Archives also hold an almost complete collection of the two government owned newspapers, the Nepali language Gorkhāpatra (founded in 1901) and the English language Rising Nepal (founded in 1969). Other collections are not properly filed and organised.

for the period of colonial rule in South Asia. But since the British did not directly penetrate the Nepalese administration and society, and was only represented in Nepal with a handful of staff of the British residency in Kathmandu, the British colonial archives contain very little material on Nepalese internal affairs.

As a consequence, the body of source materials used for the present thesis is a patchwork of published and unpublished materials found in numerous archives, libraries, and documentation centres of various institutions within and outside Nepal. For the time period until the 1950s, I have relied on a broad spectrum of documents such as Nepalese and Indian newspapers, records of the British legation in Kathmandu, some materials from the League of Nations Archives, as well as on single documents collected randomly in various libraries in Nepal. In contrast to the sparse and scattered older records, the collections of grey literature on development issued after 1960 are enormous and can be found in the offices of the vast development administration as well as in university libraries in and outside Nepal. Much of the material has been, for example, collected at the Central Library of the Tribhuvan University, the Centre for Economic Development and Administration of the Tribhuvan University, the National Planning Commission of Nepal, the Nepal Administrative Staff College, as well as in the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg and the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Zurich. In addition to the documents written by Nepalese authors, reports of foreign aid agencies have been collected from Nepalese development institutions as well as from the Swiss Federal Archives. Hence, the main body of sources comprises published and unpublished writings produced during the Panchayat Period (1961–1990) by representatives of the Nepalese state or representatives of development agencies working in Nepal. Most sources that I have used are in English, the language of development. A few are written in Nepali and some in German. To complement the written sources, I have also conducted qualitative interviews with seven de-
velopment professionals, both Nepalese and foreign, who have been involved in several decades of development work in Nepal.

Most source materials have been collected during a four-month research stay in Kathmandu in 2010. During this research stay, I first needed to identify the best place to obtain materials relevant to the topic of my thesis. The archival research thus became a kind of historical field study in itself, as I visited numerous development institutions in and around Kathmandu to investigate their documentation centres. Many of these development institutions are run by the government and had been set up during the Panchayat Period but have lost their former significance. They are mostly housed in badly maintained neo-classical palaces constructed during the Rana period (1846–1951). These buildings exude pomp and splendour reminiscent of the former era as well as a yearning for a European-oriented modernity and prosperity. It was merely by chance that I could obtain dusty files of development reports and plans in these places. Most of the institutions I visited have poorly organised documentation centres and have only randomly collected older records. Thus, if not the content, the mere physical appearance of these Nepalese development institutions appeared to me as “monuments,” symbolising the rise and fall of the public development administration as well as the former optimistic belief in progress that had eventually given way to bitterness and disillusionment.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

The thesis is structured not chronologically but thematically along four major groups of actors, who see themselves, or are seen by others, as “agents of development”: the ruler, the development worker, the bureaucrat, and the broker. These four rhetorical figures cover not all but some major roles and functions within the Nepalese development sector. They are not to be understood as fixed social groups but represent constructed categories to analyse the history of development in Nepal. The four groups of actors thus serve as anchors to explore
the wider scope of the thesis: the changing ideas, politics, and trends of development; the scrutiny of the evolution of the development sector as an integral part of the political, economic, and social life; and the examination of power and interests of people working in and for development.

The chapter “The Ruler” covers a broad span of time from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1980s. It is centred on three rulers of Nepal: Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana, and King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana established the hereditary rule of the Rana family in 1846 and was the first Nepalese ruler to travel to Europe. The contemporary European press presented Jang Bahadur as the embodiment of barbaric oriental otherness. In a similar vein, during the later Panchayat Period, he served as a projection screen of Nepalese backwardness that needed to be overcome through development. Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana ruled Nepal in the early twentieth century. He selectively appropriated the colonial discourse of civilisation and modernisation as a strategy to strengthen Nepal’s sovereignty and legitimise his rule. As shown in an intermediary part of the chapter, in discussing the end of the Rana rule, since the beginnings of the twentieth century, the promise for modernisation and development became an increasingly central aspect for legitimising rules. King Mahendra ruled over Nepal from the mid-1950s. He based his authoritarian regime on the nationalistic “Panchayat” ideology that promoted a “Nepalese” version of modernity and development. Examining these three rulers shows different perceptions of modernity, development, and backwardness to be found in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The three rulers also provide a frame to discuss Nepal’s position as a non-colonised nation in a globalising world and to question what role “development” plays in this context.

The chapter titled “The Development Worker” looks at a very different set of agents of development. In the context of this thesis, the term develop-
ment worker does not designate everyone working for development but only those who were trained as low-level project staff in order to implement rural development projects in collaboration with villagers. Through the example of Nepal’s first foreign aided development programme – a village development programme – this chapter demonstrates how development work became a new professional field of activity in the second half of the twentieth century. It particularly discusses the great demands on the development workers and the wide gap between the idealised image of development workers and the reality. The village development programme was based on the concept of community development, a concept that was popular all over the world, and that put much emphasis on people’s participation. The chapter thus also discusses how globally circulating visions of development were tried to appear local against the background of political interests of donor countries and the Nepalese government.

The chapter “The Bureaucrat” examines the history of public administration and the role of bureaucrats in development planning. As until the 1980s development was conceived as being primarily the task of the state, the state bureaucracy and the bureaucrats inevitably played a crucial role in the history of development in Nepal. Accordingly, the thorough reform of the public administration was seen as one of the most urgent tasks after the change of regime in 1951 and during the beginnings of national development planning. The chapter sheds light on the Indian aided reform of the Nepalese bureaucracy and on the constructed role of bureaucrats as development experts. Furthermore, it looks at the identity, social background, and careers of “bureaucrats—cum—development experts” and thereby discusses the impact of development planning and foreign aid on the continuities and changes of the composition of the policy-making Nepalese elites.

The chapter titled “The Broker” is centred on those development professionals who acted as direct points of contact for foreign development advisors
working in Nepal. The label of “broker” thus designates not people with a specific job but designates those who, through their knowledge of Nepal and of the Nepalese development industry as well as through their ability to cope with foreigners, were able to act as mediators between foreign experts and the Nepalese development administration. Accordingly, the chapter explores the role of development bureaucrats, of employees of foreign aid agencies, or of free-lance consultants within the international sphere of development. By structuring the chapter along different types of brokers, it points out how some Nepalese actors supported foreign aid through their personal skills and dedication without being specifically trained or employed as development experts, on one hand. On the other hand, it shows how actors with typical broker jobs, such as the official counterpart of a foreign advisor, were not necessarily fulfilling their expected role as development brokers, or how they could, by virtue of their insights and experience, actually become fierce opponents of foreign aid. The chapter further discusses how the Nepalese development sector had taken on a life of its own since the 1970s and how it changed its face towards the end of the “age of development.”

In the Conclusion, I finally wrap up my analysis by summarising chronologically how ideas of development changed over time and how they had changed the Nepalese society. I question if the growing group of Nepalese development professionals might metaphorically be called a “development caste.”
2 The Ruler

Something must be done to stay the rot. Somebody must take a bold step to restore the people and galvanise them to energetic action to open the gateway to plenty, progress and prosperity. This was the historic necessity. And history singled out His Majesty the King to answer the call of the times. Under the dynamic leadership of His Majesty, Nepal is now marching forward towards the goal of stable economic development. (Tirtha R. Tuladhar, 1961)\(^{37}\)

Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev was the king of Nepal from 1955 to 1972. He ascended the throne at a time when Nepal had just entered the postcolonial “age of development.”\(^{38}\) In order to “answer the call of the times,” he promoted the setup of a developmental state on the basis of a strong nationalistic ideology, which singled out his personality as the ideal spiritual and political leader of Nepal. The three decades encompassing King Mahendra’s reign represent the main temporal focus of this dissertation. In the subsequent chapters, I will look at the various development projects and actors that emerged from this period or shaped it. But before investigating these projects and actors, I will, in this chapter, outline the political and ideological setting of Nepal in the 1950s to 70s and the Nepalese rulers’ role in the burgeoning field of international development planning. This will be done concurrently with an analysis of the personality of King Mahendra and his self-ascribed role as a driver of change and “father of development.”\(^{39}\) However, for a better understanding, the state-led development policies and ideologies during this period need to be put in historical and


\(^{38}\) Sachs, “Introduction.”

global perspective. The present chapter, therefore, covers a much wider period of time than the subsequent chapters and also sheds light on Nepal’s entry into the world of modernity and development in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

After a brief overview of the early history of the Nepalese state, in the first part of this chapter (2.1 and 2.2) I will portray two other prominent rulers of Nepal, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana (in office: 1846–1877) and Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana (in office: 1901–1929). They had been the two most powerful rulers during the hereditary premiership of the Rana family, which lasted from 1846 to 1951. As will be shown, the Rana period was shaped considerably by the British colonial dominance in South Asia, although Nepal always remained an independent kingdom. In the intermediary section (2.3), I will look at the changes in regime from the autocratic Rana premiership to a short-lived multiparty democracy, to the absolute Shah monarchy. Special attention is given to the political significance of the quest for development, its shifting meanings, and its articulation by various groups with different interests. In the last section (2.4), I will discuss the rise of King Mahendra and the creation of a nationalistic developmental state labelled as Panchayat Democracy.

I have chosen to focus on Jang Bahadur Rana, Chandra Shamsher Rana, and Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev not only because they are among the best-known political figures of modern Nepal and because they allow an intensive focus on three different points in history, but also because of the contrast in their personalities as well as in their reactions to global politics and imperial threats. I will examine the three rulers along a set of pertinent questions: How did they position Nepal in the global community? What image of Nepal did they promote abroad and at home? What visions of modernity or development did the three rulers convey and symbolise? How did the global discourse on development (and previous discourses on civilisation and modernisation) influence
the politics of the rulers of a nation that was at the periphery of a globalising world dominated by imperialistic powers?

These questions will be examined both through writings that have been produced at the time of the respective ruler, and writings that have been produced during the Panchayat Period (1961 to 1990). There are two significant reasons for examining both King Mahendra and the Rana Prime Ministers Jang Bahadur and Chandra Shamsher through the lens of Panchayat Era sources. First, the Panchayat Period was the time when Nepalese national historiography, which also became an academic discipline in Nepal around this time, was most actively promoted by the government. Thus, the bulk of historical writings on the Rana period was produced during that time. Second, as the dissertation mainly focuses on the post-1950 development endeavours, it is imperative to investigate how all three rulers were represented during that time and to ask what functions and roles they were assigned in the discourse on development in the Panchayat Period.

2.1 Nepal in the Making: National Heroes and Bloody Coups

_Heroes and Builders of Nepal_ is the title of a well-known book published in 1965 by Rishikesh Shaha, one of Nepal’s most eminent statesmen and scholars.

---

40 Onta, “Ambivalence Denied: The Making of Rastriya Ithihas in Panchayat Era Textbooks.”


42 Among other activities, Rishikesh Shaha (1925-2002) was an anti-Rana activist and a founding member of the Nepal Democratic Congress (which later merged with Nepali Congress) in the late 1940s; Nepal’s first ambassador to the United Nations and to the USA (1956-60); Minister of Finance (1960-64); member of the constitution drafting committee in 1962; and Foreign Minister of the Panchayat government. His political career was ended in 1967 with a 14-months prison sentence after demanding for democratic reforms of the political system. Since then he focused on his academic career as professor at Tribhuvan University Kathmandu. He was visiting professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University Delhi (1970), and Regent’s Professor at the Berkeley University California (1971). From the late 1980s he entered politics again as a human rights activist and took part in the 1990s democratic movement. Later in his life he was suspected and criticised for both, for being too close to the Maoist movement and to close to the monarchy. About the life and career of Rishikesh Shaha see: Rishikesh Shaha, _Looking Back at My Own Career_ (Delhi Kathmandu: Book Faith India Pilgrims Book House, 1997); Thapa, Deepak, “Rishikesh Shaha, 77.” _Nepali Times_, (119) 2002.
The book epitomises the government’s strive for a common national history in the course of the nation building policy of that time. Like most historical accounts published during the Panchayat Period, *Heroes and Builders* narrates a more than two-thousand-year-old history of the kingdom of Nepal, centred on the achievements of “great men.”

The writing of Nepalese history was for a long time dominated by a political history approach with a strong focus on ruling elites, without much explicit reference to any specific historiographic tradition. Similar to Thomas Carlyle’s nineteenth century *Great Men Theory*\(^\text{43}\), the historical developments are largely explained by the impact of the so-called ‘national heroes.’ The local belief was that these heroes shaped the Nepalese nation with their intelligence, bravery, skills, and wisdom. In this chapter I also focus on three of Nepal’s best-known “great men.” I do not look at them as national history-making heroes but rather as products of their time, and of their representation during the Panchayat Period. Most Panchayat Era history books neglect the fact, however, that these “heroes” were as much the products of their society, as of local and global events outside their sphere of influence, and also, products of historical interpretations.

With his publication *Heroes and Builders of Nepal*, Rishikesh Shaha made the contemporary reign of King Mahendra appear to be the natural outcome of a long line of so-called “national heroes.” Even though the idea of a Nepalese nation was relatively young when his book was published, Shaha reached far back in time. He began his narration of the pantheon of national heroes with the mythical King Sirdhwaj Janaka from the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, and Siddhartha Gautama, on whose teachings Buddhism was founded.\(^\text{44}\) The references to King Janaka and to Gautama Buddha were apt for the contemporary Panchayat mon-

\(^{43}\) Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, the Heroic in History.* (London: J. Fraser, 1841).

\(^{44}\) King Janaka, father of Sita according to the Ramayana, is believed to have lived in Janakpur. Siddharta Gautama was born in Lumbini. Both are towns in present Southern Nepal, near the border to India.
archy, which drew its legitimacy from a divine mandate and claimed to peacefully unite all Nepalese people of Hindu and Buddhist faiths.

Shaha also assigned an important place to King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the pantheon of Nepalese national heroes. Prithvi Narayan Shah ascended the throne of the small but militarily strong central Nepalese kingdom of Gorkha in 1743. With “prowess and foresight”45 Prithvi Narayan progressively conquered many other Himalayan kingdoms until he had subjugated a territory larger than today’s Nepal. The conquest of the Kathmandu valley and shift of the kingdom’s capital to Kathmandu in 1769 is reckoned as the founding moment of the Nepalese national state. The submission of the many petty kings and unification of different ethnic groups was only possible through the use of severe violence. But the history books and state propaganda that was produced during the Panchayat Period downplayed the violence as a necessary evil in the achievement of a greater cause.46 King Prithvi Narayan Shah, ancestor of King Mahendra, was rather acclaimed as the founding father of Nepal who defied the British East India Company and saved the weak petty kingdoms from colonisation. Moreover, in order to conjure a sense of unity in the multiethnic state, the propaganda of King Mahendra’s Panchayat government referred to King Prithvi Narayan’s Divya Upadesh (Divine Counsel), in which he had described the unified kingdom of Nepal as a flower garden of the four varna (castes) and thirty-six jāti (sub-castes or ethnic groups). Prithvi Narayan was in fact not at all advocating multiculturalism with this statement, but was rather concerned about keeping non-Hindus out of his realm. Nonetheless, he has often been quoted by Panchayat Era politicians and in recent years even in tourist brochures to underline the cliché of ethnic

45 Shaha, Heroes and Builders of Nepal, 58.
and religious tolerance in Nepal and to block out the reality of actual discrimination against the lower castes, which is still prevalent. After Prithvi Narayan’s death in 1775, the Nepalese territory was further expanded. But the power of the Shah kings rapidly declined. The succeeding short-lived or infant kings, as well as their often-influential mothers and wives who safeguarded the survival of the Shah dynasty did not enter Rishikesh Shah's list of heroes and builders of Nepal. Instead, Amar Singh Thapa and Balabhadra Kunwar, both commanders of the royal army during the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–16), became celebrated national heroes despite Nepal’s eventual defeat by the expansionist British East India Company. As a consequence of the defeat, Nepal lost about one-third of its territory and was forced to accept a permanent British resident in Kathmandu as well as the regular recruitment of Nepalese (Gurkha) soldiers in the British Army. But even though Nepal lost the war, it played a significant role in the construction of what Onta calls the bir history of Nepal. During the first half of the twentieth century, expatriate Nepalese in India established a nationalistic historiography with bir (bravery) as a central attribute of Nepalese identity. The theme of bravery was further accentuated in Panchayat Era textbooks and became a vital topic in the nation-building politics under King Mahendra. Accordingly, the Anglo-Nepalese war was not primarily interpreted as a defeat. On the contrary, the nationalistic bir historiography emphasised the fact that the British East India Company was not able to conquer all of Nepal and interpreted the latter’s quest for Gurkha soldiers as proof of the bravery and gallantry of Nepalese men. As a result of the bir history, the orientalist stereotype of the heroic and loyal Gurkha soldiers is still very vivid. Even today, Nepalese soldiers are the most-recruited military per-


sonnel among the ethnic groups that had been classified as “martial races” in late nineteenth century British race theories. But the Gurkha soldiers’ role as globalising agents, connecting the Nepalese hills with the rest of the world, has hardly been recognized among the masses.49

The Shah dynasty of Nepal survived for 240 years, until 2008. But the Shah kings had lost real power within a few decades following the foundation of Nepal. Life at the royal court was marked by weak kings and destructive rivalries. As a consequence, instead of King Girvan Yudda and his heir,50 Mukhtiyar (Prime Minister) Bhim Sen Thapa was the de-facto ruler of Nepal from 1806–1837. Due to his good relations to the royals, and facilitated by the assassination of some adversaries, he managed to stay in power until he eventually fell from royal favour and committed suicide in jail.51 About ten years later, one of Thapa’s grand-nephews, army general Jang Bahadur Kunwar began to take advantage of the many intrigues and rivalries at the royal court. After a bloody coup d’état in the autumn of 1846, he expelled the plenipotentiary Junior Queen Lakshmidevi to Benares. With the expulsion of the Queen and her husband King Rajendra, the way was clear for Jang Bahadur to seize full power. He changed his name Kunwar to the more prestigious “Rana” in order to accentuate his claimed lineage from the north Indian Rajput nobility. In 1856, he was also bestowed the title of Maharaja (great king) of Lamjung and Kaski52 by a royal deed. However, Jang Bahadur Rana was careful not to destroy the Shah dynasty completely. He retained Surendra, son of the former king Rajendra, as the puppet king while he himself

50 Born in 1797, Girvan Yudda was king of Nepal from 1799-1816 and died at the age of 19. He was succeeded by his 1813 born son, Rajendra Bikram who was king of Nepal from 1816-1847: Rishikesh Shaha, Modern Nepal: A Political History 1769-1955 (Delhi: Manohar, 2001).
52 Kaski and Lamjung are two central Nepalese districts.
ruled the country using the English title ‘Prime Minister’ to designate his function. Furthermore, he consolidated the power of his family by systematically intermarrying Ranas with Shahs, a policy that remained in practice until long after the end of the Rana rule. Formally, the Shah kings remained superior to all, carrying the title of Maharajdhira\(j\) (great king of king) and using the honorific title Shri five times as opposed to only thrice for Maharaja Jang Bahadur Rana and his heirs. But Jang Bahadur systematically isolated the Shahs from politics as well as from free access to information and education. Henceforth, he established an autocratic system of hereditary premiership, which lasted for more than a century until 1951.

2.2 Jang Bahadur Rana: Protector of National Sovereignty or Embodiment of Oriental Backwardness?

2.2.1 The Strongman

The depiction of the Rana period as a dark hole in the glorious history of Nepal was part of the post-1951 politics. The re-empowered Shah monarchy, especially, promoted the picture of the Ranas as evil power-hungry clan who obstructed national development and exploited the people in order to create a contrasting, evidently negative counterpart of themselves. Thus, despite their historical significance, none of the Rana rulers were included in the list of national heroes. Rishikesh Shaha, however, wanted to go beyond common anti-Rana sentiments and tried to draw a more objective picture of Jang Bahadur. He did not list him in *Heroes and Builders* either, but he did publish a separate book with the title *Jang

---

53 Surendra was the son of the late Senior Queen. Queen Lakhsmidevi asked Jang Bahadur to kill Surendra and place her own son Ranendra on the throne but Jang Bahadur ignored her request (John Whelpton, “The Background to the 1850 Mission and to the Belait-Yatra,” in *Jang Bahadur in Europe: The First Nepalese Mission to the West*, ed. John Whelpton (Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press, 1983), 84.)

Bahadur, the Strongman of Nepal. Shaha recognised Jang Bahadur as one of the three major political figures of modern Nepal along with King Prithvi Narayan Shah and King Mahendra Bikram Shah. Rishikesh Shaha never openly criticised his patron King Mahendra and also appeared cautious in his review of other Shah kings. Hence, it is hardly a surprise that of the three “history-making great men,” Jang Bahadur clearly appears to be the ‘bad guy.’ Shaha characterised him as an illiterate gambler with a violent temper and leading a whimsical, undisciplined life, but also as a dauntless leader, a fine wrestler, and “a first-rate shot” who “impressed his Western guests by bowling a flying wild boar clean at two hundred yards.” To underline Jang Bahadur’s crude masculinity he also stated that as much “one may condemn the method by which he climbed to power, there seems to be something about this lonely and terrible autocrat that evokes the same feeling of awe and admiration as a hero in a Greek tragedy.” Shaha further put Jang Bahadur’s bad reputation into perspective by pointing out that at that time, intrigues, assassinations, and exploitations were part of the common political culture. In his book, Shaha argued that though none of the governing elites were singularly or predominantly concerned about the welfare of the people, yet the brave and daring strongman Jang Bahadur at least safeguarded the independence and security of Nepal through his opportunistic diplomacy with the British Raj. Jang Bahadur strove after friendly relations with the British and offered them what they sought: free trade, supply of soldiers, and backup against Indian insurgences, most notably during the Mu-

55 Shaha, Jung Bahadur, the Strongman of Nepal (1817-1877): His Life, Time and Achievement.
57 Shaha, Jung Bahadur, the Strongman of Nepal (1817-1877): His Life, Time and Achievement, 4.
tiny of 1857. At the same time he kept Western influences to a minimum by enforcing Nepal’s isolation policy.\(^58\)

Despite such criticism of repressive Rana policies, Rishikesh Shaha and others described Jang Bahadur also as a relatively progressive statesman in comparison to his contemporaries. His progressiveness was primarily put down to his personal interest in European politics and fashion as well as his readiness to travel across the *kālā pānī* (“black water,” meaning the ocean) in spite of the common belief that crossing the sea is an act of polluting oneself and has degrading effects on one’s caste status. Thus, long before it became common for high-caste Hindus to travel overseas, Jang Bahadur travelled to Europe and was the first Nepalese policy-maker to do so.\(^59\)

### 2.2.2 Belait Yatra: Nepal Gets in Touch with the “Modern World”

In January 1950, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana left Kathmandu for a year-long voyage to India and Europe. During his absence, he entrusted his brother Bam Bahadur to temporarily act as prime minister. The details of the voyage are known from the travel account of one of Jang Bahadur’s courtiers.\(^60\) After visiting some pilgrimage sites in northern India, Jang Bahadur and his entourage stayed in London for about three months and thereafter for about six weeks in Paris. In October 1850 he departed from France. After going through purification rituals in Rameswaram and, as mentioned casually in the travel account, marrying the


\(^{59}\) By 1850 not many other high-caste Hindus of political significance have travelled to Europe.

\(^{60}\) “Jāṅg Bahāḍurko vilāyata yātrā” is published as an English translation in full length in Whelpton, *Jang Bahadur in Europe: The First Nepalese Mission to the West*. Instead of the IAST transliteration “vilāyata yātrā”, Whelpton and other authors use the simpler spelling “Belait Yatra”, which corresponds more to the Nepali pronunciation. As the following account is based on the English translation, the simpler transliteration “Belait-Yatra” is also used throughout this thesis. The author of the travel account is unknown but it must be a member of Jang Bahadur’s entourage accompanying him on the journey to Europe. John Whelpton suggests that the most likely author was Jang Bahadur’s travelling secretary Subba Prithvidhar Padhya.
daughter of the ex-Maharaja of Coorg in Benares, he finally returned to Kathmandu in February 1851.\(^{61}\)

The travelogue with the title *Jang Bahadurko Belait Yatra* (Jang Bahadur’s voyage to England) offers a unique description of mid-nineteenth century Europe from the perspective of an “exotic” traveller and is also an insightful source about the behaviour and attitude of Jang Bahadur. *Belait Yatra*, together with the European press coverage, tells a very colourful story of mutual gaze and astonishment.\(^{62}\) “They came, they were seen, and forthwith they conquered,” commented a British journalist on Jang Bahadur and his entourage who with their “diamonds, which sparkled on their brown skins,” and “gemmed turbans” seemed like “an incarnation from the ‘Arabian Nights,’ [...] enshrined in a halo of oriental mystery.”\(^{63}\) Being the first government representative from the Indian sub-continent on an official visit to Europe, Jang Bahadur stirred up much curiosity and talks among the high society of London and Paris, especially for his eating habits and physical appearance. Rumours had it that Jang Bahadur would kill a bullock every morning and eat it raw.\(^{64}\) He also propelled the notoriety of the then nineteen-year-old Laura Bell as the “queen of London whoredom” because he was said to have spend the incredible sum of £250,000 for her company dur-

---

\(^{61}\) The journey back home is recollected only very briefly in Belait-Yatra, and the wedding is just mentioned in the last sentence. A more detailed, very colourful account of the journey back home (including the spontaneous wedding) is written by Laurence Oliphant, son of the British Chief Justice to Ceylon and later author and diplomat who accompanied Jang Bahadur from Ceylon to Kathmandu: Laurence Oliphant, *A Journey to Katmandu (the Capital of Nepaul) with the Camp of Jung Bahadoor* (London: John Murray, 1852).


\(^{64}\) Whelpton, *Jang Bahadur in Europe: The First Nepalese Mission to the West*, 271. Rumours of strange food habits arose from the fact that due to caste restrictions, Jang Bahadur and his courtiers always ate their meals in the absence of Europeans.
ing his stay in London.\footnote{See: Anthony S. Drennan, Laura Bell: Courtesan & Lay Preacher (Belfast: Anthony Drennan, 2008), 22-29. Conspirators under the leadership of General Badri Nara Singh also spread rumours of Jang Bahadur’s sexual affairs with several European women (including Bell) as well as of consumption of food prepared by Christians in order to threaten Jang Bahadur’s reputation as a pious Hindu (Purushottam Sham Shere J.B. Rana, Jung Bahadur Rana: The story of His Rise and Glory (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1998), 73-75.)} Uprety\footnote{See the unpublished PhD thesis: Sanjeev K. Uprety, “Mimicry, Masculinity and Modernity: Representation of Effeminacy and Hypermasculinity in Imperial and Native Narratives,” diss., Brown University, 2003), 184-87, 196-98.} suggests in his PhD thesis on mimicry, masculinity, and modernity in imperial and native narratives that Jang Bahadur deliberately self-staged himself in Europe as a picture-perfect hyper-masculine oriental ruler. He argues that Jang Bahadur’s ‘oriental’ getup was a strategy to distinguish himself from the anglicised Indian *Rajas*, who had been considered as being rather ‘effeminate’ by British colonisers and Indian critics. Uprety further argues that the obvious mimicry of Englishness would not only have threatened Jang Bahadur’s prestige as a ruler of a non-colonised country but also his authority at home where his opponents accused him for betraying Nepal to the British and for polluting his caste status through his contacts with foreigners. The issue of ascertaining if Jang Bahadur really utilised his oriental otherness as a deliberate political strategy remains largely speculative, in absence of conclusive evidence. But, according to his secretary’s travelogue, it seems as if Jang Bahadur and his entourage immensely enjoyed the excitement of the travels, especially the female attraction they provoked for their exotic and jewellery-loaded appearance.

Even though much of the travelogue is dedicated to the description of European fashion, architecture, and beautiful women, as well as to the fancy entertainments they were offered as guests of English and French socialites, Jang Bahadur also pursued political and economic interests while in Europe. The plan, according to the travelogue, was that Jang Bahadur “would visit the four shrines of Hindustan and would then learn about the rulers of the eleven islands of Belait and their industries and that after gaining that knowledge he would make
the rulers his friends." Belait means England but could also refer to foreign countries in general. In this context Belait refers to Europe, which Jang Bahadur thought to be a collection of islands. Jang Bahadur did not literally meet the heads of state of eleven European countries, but both Queen Victoria and President Louis Napoleon received him in audience as a visiting ambassador of a sovereign state. Particularly the official audiences with Queen Victoria were of great importance, because they helped not only to mark Nepal’s stance as a sovereign state but also to strengthen Jang Bahadur’s authority at home through to the official approval of the British.

The plan to gain knowledge about European industries and means of economic modernisation was, however, only realised to some degree. The travel account records various observations on the British society, economy, organisation of the police force, and the governmental system. But the mostly uncritical and often wrong impressions that Jang Bahadur appeared to have gained from his host countries is quite striking. Apparently, Jang Bahadur and his companions were so overly impressed by the wealth and beauty they encountered in Europe that they thought everyone, regardless of class, was affluent and lived in a utopian social system of equality and harmony. Particularly surprising seems the repeated emphasis on the cleanliness of mid-nineteenth century London, to the extent that the writer of the travelogue even dared to conclude that “it is [in England] that Ramrajya is today to be found.” A rather inaccurate description is also given of the political institutions in Britain. The parliament was understood as a religious institution and the sovereign’s role was recollected as follows: “[T]o issue orders, on the Prime Minister’s recommendation concerning the organisation of, and the review of appointments in the country’s armed forces, and con-

---

69 N. N., “Jang Bahadurko Belait-Yatra,” 171. Ram, the hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana, is regarded as the perfect king. The expression “Ramrajya” (the rule of Ram) refers to a utopian, ideal society.
cerning the administration of justice; to invite and entertain the nobility on ceremonial occasions; to give banquets; to watch dancing; to reward anyone who pleases him; always to be happy; to treat people compassionately and not to be violent or insulting to anyone.”⁷⁰

2.2.3 Jang Bahadur’s Rule and Reforms

The travel account does not mention what conclusions Jang Bahadur drew from his observations in Europe for his own reign in Nepal. However, the ensuing friendly relations with the British, the new architectural style of government buildings, and the establishment of the first school teaching the English language in Nepal seem all to be the result of his experiences in Europe. But the English school, which was accessible exclusively to the sons of the Rana clan, and the

⁷¹ This is one of the most popular depictions of Jang Bahadur Rana. Source: Wright, Daniel. History of Nepal: With an Introductory Sketch of the Country and People of Nepal (Translated from the Parbatiya by Munshi Shew Shunker Singh and Pandit Shri Gunanand) (New Delhi, Chennai: Asian Education Services, 1993). Wright’s History of Nepal was published first in 1877.
new neoclassical Rana palaces were only superficial measurements that catered to a very small ruling elite. Despite Jang Bahadur’s interest in European industries, he did not initiate any significant steps for the industrialisation of Nepal. He rather focused on reforming the state by expanding and formalising the army and bureaucracy as well as by codifying the Nepalese law.72

Shaha and Whelpton both argued that Jang Bahadur was inspired by the Napoleonic Code when he commissioned the compilation of Nepal’s first legal code, the Muluki Ain.73 The (almost) 1400-page Muluki Ain (national code) of 1854 is a collection of all public and civil laws based on the dharmaśāstra (Brahmanical religious law) and on prevalent social and governmental practices. To a great extent, it is dedicated to the very detailed regulation of the Nepalese caste system, which notably encompassed all people living in Nepal, including non-Hindu Nepalese and foreigners.74 But apart from its nationwide validity, the Muluki Ain had little in common with the Napoleonic Code, neither with regard to its content nor to its formal structure.

The question of whether the Muluki Ain and other reforms were really patterned after European models or not cannot be answered conclusively due to lack of evident sources. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that supposedly European-influenced processes of systematisation, codification, and control, as well as Jang Bahadur’s general interest in Europe, and his modest disregard of caste rules are commonly interpreted as signs of modernity and progress. Europe as

73 Shaha, “Introduction,” 4-7; Whelpton, “The Background to the 1850 Mission and to the Belait-Yatra,” 120-23.
the benchmark of modernity and civilisation was hardly questioned, neither by the author of the travelogue Belait Yatra, nor by later authors. Yet, Jang Bahadur is only described as being modern in comparison to his contemporaries. Otherwise, the image of Jang Bahadur as an archetypical pre-modern, oriental despot dominates his representation in Rishikesh Shaha’s and other historical accounts. Due to his foreign policy, the historical reception of Jang Bahadur is ambivalent as well. He maintained friendly but distant relations with the British and thus continued supplying soldiers to their army, and accepted their permanent residency in Kathmandu. But he restricted the residents’ freedom of movement and further enhanced Nepal’s existing isolation policy. Regarding Nepal’s national development, closing up the country to foreigners was judged as an ambiguous policy by the post-Rana governments. While on one hand, it was considered as a necessary measure to shield Nepal from colonialism during the peak of the British Raj in India. On the other hand, the post-Rana governments criticised the isolation policy as a major obstacle for economic development as well as a deliberate strategy to keep the Nepalese people in ignorance and thus potential opposition at bay. For instance, both the first National Five-Year Plan as well as the first report of the National Education Planning Commission blamed the former Rana regime for Nepal’s relative “backwardness” since it “cut [the country] off from effective contact with modern influences” and “kept [it] in

---

75 Apart from Shaha, Jung Bahadur, the Strongman of Nepal (1817-1877): His Life, Time and Achievement., see for example also the descriptions of Jang Bahadur in: Landon, Nepal, 107-18; Shaha, “Introduction.”; Stiller, Nepal: Growth of a Nation.


total darkness, uncontaminated by the present day civilization.”  

The word choice shows not only the ambivalent interpretation of Nepal’s non-colonial past. It also perpetuates the colonial image of the noble savage who is not “contaminated” by civilisation.

Hence, although Jang Bahadur was appreciated as a protector of Nepal’s sovereignty, he gained no reputation as a benevolent ruler in Panchayat Era historiography. He was rather blamed responsible for Nepal’s “backwardness” and also served as a projection screen for the idea of the Nepalese as the oriental other, or the noble savage. The image of the “crude strongman” Jang Bahadur further served to illustrate the cruelty of the Rana regime and was also used as a contrasting figure to King Mahendra. As will be shown later in this chapter, Mahendra presented himself as a development-oriented king, able to use the best of Western and native culture for the welfare of Nepal.

Before turning the attention to the post-Rana period and King Mahendra, another outstanding ruler, Jang Bahadur’s nephew Chandra Shamsher Rana, is worth examination. A look at Chandra Shamsher’s long reign shows how Nepal at the beginning of the twentieth century became increasingly influenced by the worldwide call for modernisation and development despite its distinction of keeping itself isolated from global politics.

### 2.3 Chandra Shamsher Rana: Relentless Despot or Civilised Reformer?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, foreign observers situated Nepal in the “contented backwater from the turbulent stream of modern history” because of its noncolonial status and little contact with Western cultures. As if

---

there could occur no changes and developments without Western intervention. Nepal had a reputation of being captured in a seemingly permanent condition of pristine, unexploited medieval times, presenting a fossilised “picture of an older India.” Little was known abroad about the internal affairs of this Himalayan kingdom, which hardly ever gained any attention in international politics. Thus, it came as a great surprise to the so-called international community when Nepal suddenly hit the headlines of English newspapers in 1925 for its blanket ban on slavery. The abolition of slavery in Nepal would probably have remained unnoticed abroad, if it had not coincided with the reinvigorated anti-slavery debate of the League of Nations, and if Prime Minister Maharaja Chandra Shamsher Rana had not taken the steps to spread the word in English. Who was this Nepalese Maharaja who suddenly gained attention in foreign press as a great reformer, and whose “good work” was discussed in international anti-slavery committees?

2.3.1 The Anglicised Moderniser and the Rule of Difference
Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana ruled Nepal with firm hands for thirty-one years until his death in 1877. He left a power vacuum behind, which could only be filled a quarter century later by his nephew Chandra Shamsher Rana. The years between Jang Bahadur and Chandra Shamsher were marked by often-violent power struggles between Jang Bahadur’s brothers, sons, and nephews. Yet, despite political instability, the Rana family was able to uphold its regency, not least due to their rigid suppression of any opposition. Both Rana and non-Rana antagonists of the acting prime ministers were systematically eliminated, either by killing or by exiling them to India. However, the latter measure only

---

82 Landon, Nepal, 156. Landon referred to the ideas of French orientalist Sylvain Lévi, author of the 1905-08 three volume classic “Le Népal: Étude Historique d’un Royaume Hindou”, who coined the idea of Nepal as “India in the making” (“Le Népal, c’est l’Inde qui se fait.”): Sylvain Lévi, Le Népal: Étude Historique d’un Royaume Hindou (Paris: E. Leroux, 1905). Although Lévi thought Nepal to be the place of origin of Indian culture, Landon interpreted Lévi’s analysis differently and considered Nepal to be an appropriate field for studies of a pre-colonial Indian society.
ostensibly eradicated the opposition. Over the years, a significant diaspora of politically conscious elite Nepalese settled in Benares and Darjeeling. Second-generation exiled Nepalese, especially, enjoyed good education in India and many of them maintained close contacts with Indian nationalists. Inspired by the Indian independence movement, these exiles were driven by a strong quest for a national Nepalese identity and also aspired for a more democratic regime in Nepal. As a consequence, it was not in Nepal, but in Benares and Darjeeling, where a critical Nepalese civil society and anti-Rana movement emerged in the early twentieth century.84

But it was only around the 1940s that the India-based anti-Rana movement enhanced its activities on a wider and popular base and entered in an open conflict with the government of Nepal. This was in contrast to previous anti-Rana activities, which were rather scattered and not much effective. Pressure for reforms from civil society activists, in combination with the constant threat of possible colonial domination, and claims of the imperial civilising mission provoked the Nepalese government to introduce some reforms, especially after the turn of the century. In March 1901 Jang Bahadur’s nephew Dev Shamsher Rana became the prime minister of Nepal and, soon after, introduced several political, social, and economic reforms. He launched the government-owned weekly *Gorkhāpatra*, Nepal’s first national newspaper. The first issue of *Gorkhāpatra* published Dev Shamsher’s plan for universal education. This was a remarkable plan in a country where formal education had so far been the privilege of a select few. Dev Shamsher was particularly fascinated by the developments in Japan and therefore not only opened new schools in Nepal but also wanted to send Nepalese youth to Japan for higher education. He further aimed at governmental re-

forms with more parliamentary rights and announced the emancipation of all female slaves in three districts. However, Dev Shamsher was well-known not just for his reforms, but also for his luxurious lifestyle, which was extravagant even by Rana standards. His fast-paced reform plans and lavish lifestyle affected his popularity. Ultimately, his own brothers withdrew support from his reign, and just after 144 days after his installation, he was pulled down and send to exile by his brother and chief of the army, Chandra Shamsher Rana.\textsuperscript{85}

Chandra Shamsher was the only Rana ruler able to attain a position as powerful as Jang Bahadur. He held the reins of the government for twenty-nine years until his death in 1929 and like his uncle, remains an ambiguous figure in Nepalese history. He is described both as a despot who was relentless with his opponents, as well as a social reformer and moderniser. He selectively continued some of Dev Shamsher’s reform plans at a slower pace and with a keen sense of political necessities. For instance, Chandra Shumsher did not follow up Dev’s plan for universal education but, instead, opened some new schools and sent the first eight students to Japan. The young men with close relations to the ruling family were expected to learn about the Meiji-system and industrialisation.\textsuperscript{86}

The Nepalese government’s interest in Japan as a useful model for economic development continued without disruption until the scheme had to be

\textsuperscript{85} Landon, Nepal; Krishna B. Thapa, Main Aspects of Social, Economic and Administrative History of Modern Nepal (Kathmandu: Ambika Thapa, 1988), 32.

\textsuperscript{86} See the reports of the British resident in Kathmandu: F.M. Bailey, Report of the British Legation on Nepal for the Year 1937, 12 February 1938. IOR/L/PS/12/3063A, Coll 21/51, British Library; Bethem, G.L., Letter on the Anti-Rana Movement in Nepal to the Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs Department New Delhi, 7 February 1941. IOR/L/PS/12/3012, Coll 21/6, British Library. The Nepalese Government also intended to invite Japanese experts to assist with the industrialisation of Nepal in the 1930s. But this plan could not be realised not only because of the Pacific War but also because of the high costs. Foreign assistance of Japan resumed only around 1970. Thereafter Japan soon became one of Nepal’s most important bilateral aid donors. About the first batch of Nepalese students in Japan see also: Embassy of Japan in Nepal, \textless http://www.np.emb-japan.go.jp/history/student.html\textgreater accessed April 23, 2013. After learning the language, the first eight Nepalese students were commissioned to study “useful” subjects: ammunition technology, mining, agriculture, mechanical engineering, ceramics and lacquer, and chemistry.
abandoned due to the outbreak of the Pacific War. Meanwhile, Chandra Shamsher, who was also interested in European modernisation, became the second Nepalese prime minister to travel to England. Unlike Jang Bahadur, he was not accorded the status of ambassador of a sovereign state though. He was only received as “Prime Minister and Marshal of Nepal and as representative of the Maharajadhiraj.” The refusal of the British to grant the status of ambassador was a setback for Nepal’s pride of its independent status. A few years back, at the 1903 Delhi Durbar, Chandra Shamsher had managed to successfully stand up against the British offer to be seated above the Native Princes of India. He insisted on being seated in the “Foreign Block” in order to clearly separate Nepal from the colonised Indian states. But for his 1908 voyage to England, he finally gave in to the British decision of being treated similarly to the native rulers of the Indian princely states. Yet, his travel to England differed in many other ways from Jang Bahadur’s Europe tour. Although Chandra Shamsher and his entourage were also travelling in a luxurious manner and participated in many official and social events in London, they did not provoke the same attraction from the European public as Jang Bahadur did.

Almost six decades after the first Nepalese delegation travelled overseas, the European public had become more used to guests from South Asia and other distant places so Chandra Shamsher was no more regarded as a unique embodiment of a stereotypical oriental prince. Moreover, Chandra Shamsher himself did not exhibit or promote the image of an exotic oriental prince. In comparison to Jang Bahadur, his appearance was much more anglicised. He was the first Nepa-

---

87 Telegram from Major J. Manners-Smith, V.C., C.I.E, Resident in Nepal to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, 3 December 1907; and Telegram from the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department to Major J. Manners-Smith, V.C., C.I.E, Resident in Nepal, 4 December 1907; both to in: “File 3955/1908 Nepal: Visit of Prime Minister to England.” IOR/L/PS/10/161, British Library.

88 See the correspondence between Chandra Shamsher Rana, the British Resident in Nepal, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, and the India Office in London, in: “File 3955/1908 Nepal: Visit of Prime Minister to England.” IOR/L/PS/10/161, British Library.
ese prime minister with an English education from Calcutta, and he also adapted his manners and attires more to European fashion. English journalist and writer Perceval Landon, whom the Maharaja had commissioned to write a book on Nepal, described Chandra as a progressive statesman with a character morally less dubious than other members of the ruling Rana clan. Landon specifically lauded Chandra’s monogamous lifestyle and his seeming renouncement of pomp and personal luxury. He apparently turned a blind eye toward Chandra Shamsher’s construction of the neo-classical Singha Durbar Palace in 1904, supposedly the biggest and the most luxurious palace in Asia of its day. Landon rather illustrated how Chandra Shamsher was rigorous with others as well as with himself by pointing out that the Maharaja gave up smoking within one day and became a strict teetotaller. He described Chandra not as a crude, hypermasculine oriental despot as Jang Bahadur was, but more as an enlightened, anglicised ruler who was “inclined to press forward the conveniences and comforts of Western civilization” in Nepal. By this, he was referring to infrastructural development projects such as the first small hydropower plant, the first telephone line, and the construction of roads, suspension bridges, a ropeway, and Nepal’s only railway track connecting Raxaul at the Indian border with Amlekhganj in southern Nepal. Landon also referred to the opening of the Tri Chandra College, Nepal’s first institution for higher education, in 1919. However, the college was not primarily meant to be a catalyst for modernisation at all. Chandra Shamsher had opened Nepal’s first college after realising that many young Nepali students became “corrupted” with subversive, anti-imperial ideas at the University of Cal-

---

89 About Chandra’s English education see: Agrawal, The Administrative System of Nepal: from Tradition to Modernity, 16-18. Chandra Shamsher was the first member of the Rana clan to matriculate and to receive a honorary doctoral degree from the University of Oxford.
90 Landon, Nepal, 93-96.
91 Landon, Nepal, 96.
cutta, which was to date the most popular place for Nepalese youth to obtain higher education.  

As already mentioned, Chandra Shamsher’s reputation as a West-oriented, anglicised ruler was not only nurtured by his reform projects but also by his (and his sons’) taste in European fashion. Few portraits show him in a Nepalese or Chinese robe, as he mostly preferred to pose in a highly decorated European style uniform with knee-length leather boots. Only the jewelled head-dress reminded of Jang Bahadur’s lavish oriental robe. Chandra Shamsher’s appropriation of colonial aesthetics is even more visible in illustrations of tiger-hunting expeditions, which he organised often, for British royals and high-

---

92 About Chandra Shamsher’s and other Rana’s reform projects see the pro-Rana biased article of the Indian tutor of Chandra Shamsher’s sons: Chowdhury, Animesh Chandra Ray, “Nepal’s Ancient Kingdom Ready for Important Role in New Asia.” The Sunday Statesman, 1947. For a post-Rana description of Chandra’s reform projects see the classic: Shaha, Modern Nepal: A Political History 1769-1955, 28-34, 51-52. About Chandra Shamsher’s “hidden agenda” see: Stiller, Nepal: Growth of a Nation, 151-56. Similarities in the accounts of Landon and of historians of the post-Rana period such as Rishikesh Shah not least draw from the fact that many Nepalese historians referred in their own studies to earlier works of British authors and of Sylvain Lévi.  
ranking colonial officers. These big games were good occasions to cultivate the friendly relations between the Rana rulers and the British imperial government and to assure each other of mutual support. They were also occasions to showcase how “modern” the Nepalese ruling class was and how they have learned to cope with the colonial discourse and its inherent “rule of difference.” In his study on nationalism in colonial India, Partha Chatterjee points out the importance of the discursive dichotomy between supposedly superior colonisers and inferior natives as a basis of colonial rule. Colonial rule could only be legitimised as a benevolent civilising mission as long as long as there seemed to exist a binary difference between the colonisers and the colonised subjects. In the daily encounters between anglicised locals and middle or lower class Europeans this “rule of colonial difference” often became challenged. Homi Bhabha argues that the Anglicisation of Indian middle class as a form of mimicry was a strategy of colonial resistance. Mimicry was never far from mockery and threatened the clear difference between colonisers and colonised on which the legitimisation of colonial rule was based upon.

Chandra Shamsher’s selective mimicry of Englishness can also be interpreted as a form of resistance against the imperial threat. His anglicised outlook was most probably not meant as a mockery but as a sign of sincere appreciation of European lifestyle and also a sign of the cultural influence of anglicised Indian

94 Chandra Shamsher Rana went on tiger shooting tours in the Tarai with Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India (1901), King George V (1911), and Crown Prince Albert (1921, later to become King Edward VIII). The “tradition” of royal tiger hunting in the Tarai already started in 1876 with Jang Bahadur Rana and Crown Prince Albert Edward (later King Edward VII) and was kept alive until the postcolonial period with the big game of King Mahendra and Queen Elizabeth II in 1961. Photographs of Chandra Shamsher and the big game expeditions are collected in: HE the Viceroy’s Shooting Tour, Nepal, Tarai, April 1901. Curzon Collection, India Office Selected Material, British Library; and also the pictures in: London, Nepal.
96 The often blurred boundaries between colonisers and colonial subjects as well as the dilemma of the colonial civilising mission are for example discussed in: Harald Fischer-Tiné, Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class, and “White Subalternity" in Colonial India (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009).
97 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994).
middle class in Nepal. Yet, his mimicry can be seen as an act of indirect resistance against the constant threat of colonial domination as it offered a way to demonstrate that there was no need for foreign interventions in Nepalese affairs, neither in the form of a civilising missions nor in the form of development projects. Chandra Shamsher showed that he was sufficiently “modern” and “civilised” and able to induce necessary reforms by himself. Similarly, the above-mentioned infrastructural development projects can also be interpreted as a reaction against the British as they allowed the Rana government to demonstrate how the latter fulfil the role of agents of modernisation without foreign assistance. A look at Chandra Shamsher’s most prominent reform project, the abolition of slavery, evidently shows how he selectively appropriated the colonial discourse in order to defend Nepal’s independence and to legitimise his own rule.

![Figure 3: Chandra Shamsher Rana](98)

2.3.2 The Abolition of Slavery and the Test for Civilisation

On November 28, 1924, Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana made a public appeal for the abolition of slavery in Nepal. When the news of the abolition

---

reached the international public a few months later, it came as a great surprise and seemed to appear from nowhere. This, of course, does not mean that slavery and abolition were absent as topics on the agenda of international organisations such as the newly founded League of Nations. On the contrary, almost one hundred years after the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, the anti-slavery debate witnessed a revival with the enactment of the 1926 Slavery Convention under the auspices of the League of Nations. Strongly influenced by Social Darwinism and Enlightenment concepts of progress, the idea of a colonial civilising mission, based on a civilisational ranking of societies had become an inherent part of the colonial discourse. Gerrit Gong has analysed and laid out five prerequisites for being considered “civilised” in this ranking. The fifth tenet affirmed that a “civilised” state by and large conforms to the accepted norms and practices of the ‘civilised’ international society, e.g., suttee [also ‘sati’, self-immolation of widows in South Asia], polygamy, and slavery were considered ‘uncivilised’, and therefore unacceptable.” Hence, in the early twentieth century, slavery had become a clear benchmark of civilisation and its abolition a vital condition to pass the “civilisation test.” The anti-slavery debate of the League of Nations focused on slavery in Africa and was particularly ignited by Abyssinia’s application for membership. Apart from Liberia, Abyssinia was the only independent African state to apply for membership to the League, which was dominated by colonial powers. Unlike Liberia, Abyssinia had no distinct history of abolition, and slavery was still in practice. The question whether Abyssinia should be allowed to join

---


100 Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Michael Mann, eds. Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India (London: Anthem Press, 2004). Lord Frederick Lugard, for example, outlined such a ranking in the opening sentences of The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa and explicitly and implicitly refers to this idea throughout his handbook of indirect colonial rule: Frederick Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh, London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922).

the League or not was therefore made dependent upon “proof of civilisation”\textsuperscript{102} and spurred the debates around the preparations of the Slavery Convention.

While the reinvigorated anti-slavery debate of the League fully focused on Africa and Abyssinia, abolition in Nepal looked like a sudden, isolated act for foreign observers. Because the system of slavery in Nepal was home-grown and not bound to the history of colonialism, previous attempts to regulate and restrict unfree labour in Nepal had remained unnoticed abroad. In the nineteenth century, several laws had been passed to restrict slavery for certain castes or in certain regions. The Muluki Ain, the 1854 legal code, for example, regulated slavery and slave trade in great detail and addressed the issue in no less than thirty pages.\textsuperscript{103} It placed many non-Hindu ethnic groups, which had previously not been part of the caste system in the hierarchy between the “pure” and “impure” Hindu castes and further divided them into “enslavable” and “non-enslavable” groups. Thus, enslavability became one of the major characteristics to categorise Nepalese society. As already indicated, another attempt to regulate and restrict slavery was taken by Dev Shamsher Rana in 1901. He had planned to emancipate all female slaves in three districts, including the capital Kathmandu. But not only slave owners but also his kin adamantly objected to the emancipation of female slaves.\textsuperscript{104} Dev Shamsher’s plan made him so unpopular that it was not difficult for his brother Chandra Shamsher to disempower him and take over the premiership in less than five months of the former’s time in office. Hence, restrictions and abolition of slavery had been issues among Nepalese elites long

\textsuperscript{102} Count Bonin-Longare, Italian member of the Sixth Committee, clearly formulated this demand: “she [Abyssinia] should accept the principles adopted by the other States with regard to slavery in their most recent contractual form, namely, that found in the Convention of St. Germain. That request contained nothing to wound Abyssinia’s susceptibilities, since other States, which had arrived at a higher degree of civilisation, had already consented”. See: Record of the Fourth Assembly, Meetings of the Committee, Minutes of the Sixth Committee (Political Questions), 19 September 1923, p. 18. League of Nations Documents Collections, Archives of the League of Nations, Geneva.

\textsuperscript{103} Höfer, The ‘Caste’ Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854, 97-105.

\textsuperscript{104} Thapa, Main Aspects of Social, Economic and Administrative History of Modern Nepal, 28-32.
before the 1920s, but since earlier actions were disconnected to the debates that were taking place within colonial empires, the abolition of 1924/25 seemed to appear from nowhere. But a closer look on Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana’s appeal for the abolition of slavery strongly suggests that it was not an isolated act but a reaction to global power politics and indeed very much entangled with the international slavery debate.

Having said this, it is important to note that the abolition act of 1924/25 was special in comparison with the former attempts to regulate slavery not simply because it was a blanket ban on slavery in the whole of Nepal. The crucial difference was that Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher had adopted the abolitionist language of Western anti-slavery activists and made efforts to spread the news of abolition outside Nepal. A few months after the delivery of the abolition speech in Kathmandu, Chandra Shamsher published an English translation of his speech. Considering that at that time only very few Nepalese people were literate and even fewer had mastered the English language, an English publication strongly implied that the speech was probably intended less for the Nepalese and more for an international audience, in particular the British neighbours in India.

The English appeal for the abolition of slavery, moreover, is not simply a translation of the Nepalese speech. It also clearly reflects how Chandra Shamsher had adopted the arguments and the language of Western anti-slavery activists. The English version of the speech shows many similarities to Lord Frederick Lugard’s discussion of slavery in The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa. Lord Lugard was at that time the British representative on the League of Nations’ Permanent Mandates Commission and a well-known activist on slavery.

\footnote{Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa.}
Chandra Shamsher began his over fifty-pages-long appeal for abolition by referring to the world’s progress and to global changes. He pointed out that Nepal could not isolate itself from the developments in “the civilised world” and therefore needed to abolish “the hated institution of slavery.” Most of his arguments explained why slavery must be objected to on both economic and moral grounds. First, he provided a detailed cost-benefit analysis to demonstrate why slave labour is less profitable than free labour. Like Adam Smith, and more recently Lugard, he concluded that even well-treated slaves do not work as hard as paid free labourers. To strengthen his argument he also pointed out that slaveholders had to take care of their slaves like their own children, which made the practice of keeping slaves generally more expensive than using hired labourers. Slave masters not only had to provide shelter, food, and healthcare, but also often take the responsibility of arranging marriages for the slaves. Second, he illustrated with horrifying examples why slavery was a serious moral danger for the people of Nepal. He claimed that even though slaves were not abused as badly as in other places and were, in fact, often treated like secondary family members, slavery was simply not acceptable in any “civilised” nation. He specifically highlighted the enslavement of children, human trafficking, and prostitution, which he considered to be abhorrent and morally intolerable practices. According to Chandra Shamsher, only complete abolition could rescue slaves and owners from further moral degeneration. Very similar moral considerations can also be found in Lugard’s *Dual Mandate.*

110 Anti-Slavery Office of Nepal, “A note on the Emancipation of Slaves and abolition of slavery in
Although the League’s anti-slavery debate was not mentioned in the abolition speech, Chandra Shamsher might have been aware of the increasing significance of international law and global governance in general and of the peril of foreign intervention into Abyssinia due to its practice of slavery in particular. Being under close observation and control of the neighbouring British superpower, the Nepalese Prime Minister was cautious about maintaining Nepal’s independence and repelling any external interventions. He realised that in order to pass the “civilisation test” and to gain international recognition, there was no other way but to abandon the barbaric practice of slavery. His political concerns become clear in his abolition speech, in which he asserted the following:

*It is so repugnant to the civilised world that they feel disinclined to have friendly intercourse with nations who retain the institution [of slavery]: they oppose recognition of such nations as civilised till an end is put to it. Apart from questions of morality, […], this consideration alone is enough to compel any progressive Government to take immediate action to maintain its position in the estimation of other nations in this age of civilisation.*

Considering the criteria of the civilisation test and previous debates in British India, it is of no surprise that Chandra Shamsher also mentioned Nepal’s 1920 abolition of the “heinous practice of Sati” in his emancipation speech. Sati had been a highly politicised issue in British India in the 1820s when its legal abolition had been used by the colonial authorities to demonstrate moral superiority and

---

111 The argument recurs throughout his two chapters on slavery in British Africa: Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa.
112 Rana, Appeal to the People of Nepal for the Emancipation of Slaves and Abolition of Slavery in the Country (28.11.1924), 38.
113 Rana, Appeal to the People of Nepal for the Emancipation of Slaves and Abolition of Slavery in the Country (28.11.1924), 41.
to legitimise colonial control and regulations. Although the abolition of Sati in Nepal never gained as much public interest as the Indian case, the British press put it in line with Lord William Bentinck’s ban on Sati in 1829 and regarded it as an important step towards a higher plane of civilisation.

To underscore his rational, enlightened approach, Chandra Shamsher also explained his careful preparatory work. He mentioned a nationwide census, which resulted in a detailed register of slaves and slaveholders. This register reports 15,719 slaveholders and 51,419 slaves out of the total Nepalese population of 5,573,788. These are unrealistically precise figures that almost seem like a mockery of the British colonial bureaucracy’s obsession with statistics. By contrasting these figures to the number of former slaves in the West Indies and in Zanzibar, Chandra Shamsher argued that slavery was only a minor phenomenon in Nepal and also demonstrated how well-informed he was about other countries. He further presented a schedule for compensation payments for slaveholders and other regulations for the transition period. The astoundingly detailed calculations of maintenance costs of slaves in the annex of the published speech again well illustrate the “modern,” quasi-scientific approach of the Nepalese abolition process.

Significantly, what is missing in the Nepalese emancipation story is the history of the slaves themselves. The 1924/25 abolition in Nepal tells not a history of slaves, but rather a history of local appropriation of global discourses of civilisation and modernisation. A look at the international responses to the

---

events in Nepal further suggests that the abolition was also a well-calculated and successful image campaign of Maharaja Chandra Shamsher Rana. Most of the feedback in international media was very positive and in praise of the ruler of Nepal. “Never has there been any great act of liberation quite so remarkable as the liberation of the 60,000 slaves of Nepal, [...]. The story of its accomplishment is a great one and the facts now available are romantic in detail,” commented the British weekly The Observer, and another British newspaper run an article on the subject, headlined “A Maharaja’s War on Slave Trade.” Less flattering for the Nepalese government was the fact that many British newspapers mistook Nepal for an Indian Princely state despite the hopes that the self-declared abolition would bolster Nepal’s independence. However, not only the Nepalese but also the British side showed efforts to rectify this misconception, although out of different motivations. To maintain Britain’s reputation as the leading force in the global fight against slavery, British journalists highlighted that there was “no slavery under British flag” and that Nepal could only uphold the practice of slavery for so long because it was formally independent. The confusion was clarified by explaining that while Nepal was very closely and amicably bound to the Empire, it regulated its internal affairs independently.

The British Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society provided specific support for Chandra Shamsher’s cause. It circulated the English translation of the abolition speech in Europe and considered the Nepalese emancipation legislation to be a good example for other nations. In a letter to Haile Selassie I, the Society even explained to the Emperor of Abyssinia the process of abolition

---


in Nepal with its regulations for compensation payments and suggested it as a reasonable model to follow. In response, the Emperor merely thanked them diplomatically for the suggestions. He pointed out how the Nepalese abolition demonstrates the importance of compensation payments to actualise such a difficult process, but did not further address the issue.

At the annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1925, the abolition of slavery in Nepal was one of the central topics. It gained extensive appreciation and was especially welcomed by Lord Frederick Lugard, who was at that time member of the League of Nation’s temporary committee on slavery, which was in charge of drafting the first international anti-slavery convention. Lugard called Chandra Shamsher’s publication an invaluable guide for other countries, and a helpful document for the Slavery Commission at Geneva to formulate some constructive ideas for Abyssinia, since both countries were governed by “native rulers.” For Lugard, “(i)t was one thing to make a suggestion to Abyssinia, for instance, on possible methods of abolishing slavery, and quite another to say ‘Here is a document from another ruler who is in a similar position to yourself, and this is how he is dealing with it’.”

Although Lord Lugard publicly appreciated how Nepal fought on its own against slavery, Sir William Vincent, the representative of India at the League of Nations, was rather sceptic about Nepal’s role and claimed in 1926 that the abolition in Nepal had clearly been influenced by the League’s work. The Nepalese government reacted forcefully and highlighted its independent decision in its communication with the British officials and the press. To consolidate its position as a sovereign and civilised nation, it was important for Nepal to convince the

international community that the abolition “has been entirely due to a spontaneous act of generosity and heroism of Maharaja Chandra Shamsher,” and not to any “moral pressure from the League or any other body.”\(^{122}\) After this minor discord, the British authorities acknowledged the Nepalese version of the emancipation story as a truly independent act, but the question of external influences still looms large.\(^{123}\)

To what extent the Nepalese ruler was really influenced by the global anti-slavery discourse must, ultimately, remain speculative. Yet, Chandra Shamsher’s appropriation of the common abolitionist rhetoric, his many references to other countries, and his efforts to spread the news in the international press nourish the assumption that Nepal, although maybe not directly under pressure by the League of Nations, was influenced by an all-pervasive global anti-slavery discourse and was not so isolated from international trends as conventional histories of Nepal suggest. Abolition in Nepal can therefore be interpreted as a deliberate reaction and indirect form of resistance against imperial domination. Yet, abolition could only become an effective form of resistance through the appropriation of the colonial language and civilising discourse, otherwise it would have remained unnoticed abroad, in all probability.

Hence it becomes evident that the history of abolition of slavery in Nepal is not at all a history of slaves, but a history of the Nepalese government’s concern for international reputation and independence, as well as a history of the power of the imperial civilisation discourse. Although at the fringes of European imperialism, Nepal could not escape the pressure of this global discourse, and Chandra Shamsher was forced to abolish slavery in order to pass the “civilisation test.” But the emancipation of slaves was a pure top-down operation, a show-piece of progress and modernisation. Within all the rhetoric, the fates of slaves

and bonded labourers were forgotten, and despite legal abolition, various forms of unfree labour continue to exist until today.  

Apart from its function to repel foreign intervention in Nepal, abolition of slavery also turned out to be an effective personal relations campaign for Chandra Shamsher Rana. Not only did he gain recognition as a “civilised” statesman among the international community represented in the League of Nations, but he also managed to earn a reputation as a modern reformer in Nepalese history. Although the historical reception of his personality is mixed, as he was also portrayed as a very repressive, autocratic ruler during the Panchayat Period, the measurements he initiated in the name of modernisation are generally received positively. Apart from his reforms, his selective mimicry of Englishness and appropriation of the global discourse of civilisation and modernisation also strengthened his reputation as an initiator of change. Noticeably, while the call for civilisation and modernisation took a great part in Chandra Shamsher’s rhetoric, he did not refer to “development” as an aim of his reforms. The discourse of development, with its associated miserable picture of Nepal as a backward nation suffering from many shortages only became powerful in the decades after the death of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana in 1929.


125 King Mahendra’s biographer Tirtha R. Tuladhar, for instance, wrote in 1961 that Chandra Shamsher „is unanimously one of the shrewdest and most crafty of the Rana Prime Ministers ever to rule the Kingdom. […] Dictatorial, authoritarian regime was at its zenith. Repression was at its worst. […]” (Tuladhar, Mahendra: The King of Nepal, 3-4.).
2.4 The (De)legitimatising Power of “Development”

2.4.1 The Anti-Rana Movement and the Quest for Unnati

As has been shown, Nepal’s history is inseparably entangled with the history of British imperialism. British imperialism put the Rana government under a latent but constant threat. Ironically, the anti-colonial movement in India also threatened the power of the Ranas. Since the time of Jang Bahadur Rana, Nepal’s foreign policy had been based on friendly relations with the British. Their cordial neighbourly relations were legally confirmed in the 1923 treaty of friendship, which assured mutual respect of internal and external independence. Hence, with the British Indian government as its most important foreign ally, the Ranas had little interest in Indian independence. Moreover, in view of the rising anti-Rana activism since the 1920s, British backing became more and more important to sustain the Rana regime. While domestic critics of the system, such as the Gandhian Tulsi Meher Shrestha, could be inhibited without much difficulty, the Ranas were not able to suppress the growing opposition of expatriate Nepalese. As mentioned before, the Ranas used to drive their opponents to exile, a policy that eventually backfired with the emergence of a politically conscious Nepalese civil society in India. Influenced by Indian nationalists, expatriate elite Nepalese were in search of a common national Nepalese identity and also increasingly began to question the legitimacy of the Rana rule.

A central concept in their search of a Nepalese identity was unnati. Unnati denotes the condition, action, or quality of being tall, arisen, or uplifted. The social reformer Tulsi Meher Shrestha (1896 – 1978) had in his early life been inspired by the Indian religious reform movement Arya Samaj and later became a close follower of Mahatma Gandhi. When he started to promote Gandhian ideas and the use of the charkha (handloom) in Nepal, he was exiled for “anti-national” behaviour but was allowed to return to Nepal in 1923. In accordance with the government he eventually established the “Shri Tin Chandra Kamdhenu Charkha Pracharak Mahaguti” in 1927, one of the first Nepalese social service organisations of Nepal. See: Jevan Chandra Koirala, ed. Tulisimeher Shrestha Smritigrantha (Kathmandu: 2061).

Monier Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899). About the meaning of unnati in Hindi and the Hindi speaking public sphere in the late 19th centu-
can also be translated as “progress”, “advancement”, or “development”, but more specifically, refers to moral and personal development than to economic or infrastructural development. By analysing Nepali language journals published in Benares, Chalmers pointed out how expatriate Nepalese writers applied the concept of unñati for the development of a Nepalese national consciousness during the 1920s and 30s. The well-educated writers’ call for unñati was fuelled by their opinion that Nepalese people were backward in comparison to English and Indian people. Although physically strong and brave, the Nepalese generally lacked self-consciousness, education, and the ambition to improve themselves and their society, they argued. They blamed the Rana government for not promoting education adequately because they saw the key for the unñati of capable and proud Nepalese citizens in the promotion of literacy and a common national language.\textsuperscript{128} Yet, although the discourse of unñati centred on questions of language, identity, and morality, some writers also linked it to economics and to the svadēśi movement inspired boycott of imported goods and claim for industrialisation of Nepal.\textsuperscript{129}

However, the discourse of unñati of the India-based Nepalese public was widely disconnected from the discourse of modernisation and civilisation of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana. Since Chandra Shamsher’s strong position was not seriously threatened by Nepalese nationalists, his social reform and infrastructural projects were rather reactions to global imperial discourses than to activities of the emerging Nepalese civil society. Neither did this change signif-
icantly during the first years under Juddah Shamsher Rana, who held premiership from 1932 to 1945. Unlike his brother Chandra, Juddah gained no reputation as a reformer. On the contrary, Bhattarai and Shrestha characterise him in the Historical Dictionary of Nepal as “perhaps the most ruthless of all Rana prime ministers with the exception of Jang Bahadur.”\textsuperscript{130} Juddah Shamsher’s bad reputation stems mainly from his strict rejection of a constitutional form of government and his rigid suppression of political opponents, which in his historical reception, clearly outweighs his efforts for economic development. He organised Nepal’s first industrial exhibitions in 1937 and 1939 and also set up cottage industries and a few factories (jute, matches, rice, vegetable oil).\textsuperscript{131} Probably inspired by the Indian svadēśi movement, Juddah Shamsher further encouraged the production of homespun clothes and supported training schemes for cloth production.\textsuperscript{132} But like Chandra Shamsher’ reforms, Juddah Shamsher’s measures for economic development were not in any way reaction to the Nepalese expatriates’ claim for unnati. As Whelpton argued, they were rather motivated by the will to increase government revenues from foreign trade.\textsuperscript{133}

Hence, the civil society’s quest for unnati and the Ranas’ efforts for modernisation and industrialisation came together only from the late 1930s onwards, when the Indian-educated Nepalese nationalists increasingly turned their attention to politics. While previously they had primarily been occupied with questions of identity and of moral and social development, now they began standing up against the autocratic Rana regime. The anti-Rana movement eventually

\textsuperscript{132} Whelpton, \textit{A History of Nepal}, 77.
\textsuperscript{133} Whelpton, \textit{A History of Nepal}, 77-78. See also the excerpt of Juddah Shamsher’s outline of his programme of development printed in: Stephen Lawrence Mikesell, “Cotton on the Silk Road: Subjection of Labor to the Global Economy in the Shadow of Empire (or the Dialectic of a Merchant Community in Nepal),” diss., University of Wisconsin, 1988), 419-20.
gained momentum with the secret foundation of the first political party in Kathmandu, the Prajā Pariṣad [People’s Council] in 1937. But by as early as late 1940, the efforts to denounce the Rana government and to promote democracy relapsed when the leaders of the Prajā Pariṣad were arrested and some of its non-Brahmin members were executed.\textsuperscript{134} However, the dissolution of the Prajā Pariṣad did not prevent the slow but steady downfall of the Rana clan. Nepalese nationalists continued to question the legitimacy of the Rana regime on the grounds of lack of democracy as well as lack of social and economic development.\textsuperscript{135} The anti-Rana movement threatened the Rana government and implied threat to the general political changes in South Asia as well.

2.4.2 The Promise for Vikās and the End of Rana Rule
When the end of British rule in India became more and more apparent, the Ranas realised the need for new foreign allies. Not only were they about to lose their most important regional ally, but were also under potential threat from many Indian nationalists, especially Congress politicians working closely with Jawaharlal Nehru, who supported the anti-Rana activists. Given such conditions, development became an increasingly important issue on the political agenda of the Rana government, primarily for two reasons: firstly, to legitimise their rule, and secondly as a means to diversify foreign relations beyond the existing British-Indian ones.

The first reason reflects a general trend in the late colonial period. Since the interwar period, colonial development projects became a common means to encounter social unrests in French and British colonies and to legitimise colonial rule.\textsuperscript{136} Particularly influential on Nepal was the case of India, where develop-

\textsuperscript{136} Frederick Cooper, “Writing the History of Development,” \textit{Journal for Modern European History} 8 (2010), 9-12.
ment had been a central topic in the independence movement. The nationalists’ claims and plans for national development put the colonial government under pressure to promise social and economic welfare for the Indian people. A similar policy, intended to present oneself as a benevolent ruler through social reform and infrastructural projects, was already practiced by Chandra Shamser Rana. But the last Rana prime ministers intensified these efforts in the 1940s with more concrete development plans. These plans also included the end of the strict isolation policy because of the second reason, diversification of foreign relations. Considering Nepal’s position as a relatively small and economically weak state, and the Western government’s rising interest in foreign aid as a means to maintain or gain influence in a decolonising world, foreign aid offered the easiest way for Nepal to establish new relations with Western countries. Before 1940, the Nepalese government had occasionally employed individual foreign experts like British engineers or Indian medical doctors. But it had done so at its own expenses and not in the form of foreign aid. Even when a severe earthquake hit the Kathmandu valley in 1934, Prime Minister Juddah Shamsher clearly declined the British offer for humanitarian aid in order to avoid fuelling the erroneous impression that Nepal belongs to British India. Only when India’s independence became more apparent and when the Nepalese government wanted bigger and more cost-intensive national development projects, Juddah Shamsher and his successors actively started to reach out for foreign financial

137 Bose, “Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development: India’s Historical Experiences in Comparative Perspective.”; Ludden, “India’s Development Regime.”
138 The Home Department of the Government of India reported in a telegram that the Nepalese Government rejected aid from a relief fund for British India since this would strengthen the erroneous impression that Nepal belongs to India. On the Earthquake and the rejection of foreign assistance see: Government of India, Home Department “Telegram on the Nepal Earthquake to the Secretary of State for India”, 1934; “Juddha Shum Shere Rana, Translation of the Text of Maharaja’s Speech on Nepal Relief Measures Made on March, 1st 1934”, 1934; Smith, C.H., Lieutenant-Colonel, Assistant British Envoy at the Court of Nepal, Report on the Earthquake in Nepal Valley on 15th January 1934 to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department New Delhi, 1934. All these documents are collected in: IOR/L/PS/12/3036, Coll 21/25 Earthquake 1934, British Library.
and technical aid. As soon as the Second World War was over, the Rana government began establishing contacts with the USA and some European countries.\textsuperscript{139}

Against this background, the discourse of \textit{unnati} was now replaced by the newly emerging discourse of development planning and foreign aid, for which not the term \textit{unnati} was used but \textit{vikās}\textsuperscript{140} (meaning growth, evolution, development). The shift from the Nepalese nationalist discourse of \textit{unnati} to the discourse of \textit{vikās}, in which the government took the lead, becomes well visible in the 1948 inaugural speech of the last Rana prime minister, Mohan Shamsher.\textsuperscript{141}

While outlining his vision of future foreign policies and developments in this speech, Mohan Shamsher referred to both \textit{unnati} and \textit{vikās}. He used \textit{unnati} in relation to the people’s attitude and considered their enthusiasm and participation in development efforts to be an important prerequisite for \textit{unnati}. He referred to \textit{vikās}, on the other hand, when speaking about development plans and about external help (\textit{sahāyatā}). Throughout the entire speech, Mohan Shamsher emphasised that a “new era” is coming up. He stated that Nepal needs to give up its isolation policy in view of the reconfiguring world order and described \textit{vikās} as a novel endeavour in Nepal, which must essentially be a priority in this new era. Hence, the shift of focus from \textit{unnati} to \textit{vikās} was not simply a process of renaming but of marking a divergence from the claims of civil society activists to the beginning of the new era of state-centred foreign aid in Nepal. The question of to what extent Mohan Shamsher’s claim for \textit{vikās} was also part of a global shift.

\textsuperscript{139} Earl of Halifax, Telegram from Washington to Foreign Office, 16 February 1946; G.A. Falconer, Letter from the British Legation Nepal to His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Office London, 27 November 1946; Reply by His Highness the Maharaja to the Speech made by Mr. George R. Merrell at Kathmandu on the occasion of presenting the American Legion of Merit to His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal, 20 November 1946. All documents are collected in: IOR/L/PS/12/3103 A, Coll 21/81, Relation with USA: American Mission to Nepal, British Library.

\textsuperscript{140} Most Nepalese authors spell \textit{vikās} in English texts as \textit{bikas} because the latter corresponds better to the Nepali pronunciation. But throughout this thesis, the IAST transliteration \textit{vikās} is used.

from claims of a colonial civilizing mission to colonial and post-colonial technocratic development cannot be fully answered due to lack of evident source material. But the intensified contacts with US diplomats and development experts suggest that the Nepalese government was well aware of the political importance of the international post-war development paradigm.\(^{142}\)

In order to materialise his visions for vikās, Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher Rana set up a National Planning Committee (NPC), which drafted Nepal’s first Five-Year development plan in mid-1949. This plan, however, was not very sophisticated and was based on rather optimistic premises. Its declared goal was to make Nepal economically self-sufficient by using its natural resources and by building up modern industries. The plan foresaw investments in industries, transportation, agriculture, mining, power, and health. According to the NPC’s astoundingly detailed calculations, a total investment of NPR 90,767,975\(^{143}\) was needed for the upcoming five years. Such investments exceeded Nepal’s previous national budgets and, as the government was not able to raise enough domestic funds, Nepal sought foreign loans for the first time in its history. But similar to the economic modernisation theory that was the leading doctrine in international post-war development politics, the NPC believed that foreign loans were only needed as an initial stimulus. The NPC predicted self-sufficiency within fifteen years\(^{144}\) – an assumption that turned out to be completely utopian: in

---

\(^{142}\) About the establishment of US-Nepalese diplomatic and aid relations see: Speech made by Mr. George R. Merrell at Kathmandu on the occasion of presenting the American Legion of Merit to His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal, 20 November 1946; Reply by His Highness the Maharaja to the Speech made by Mr. George R. Merrell at Kathmandu on the occasion of presenting the American Legion of Merit to His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal, 20 November 1946; Press Release of March 22, 1947, on the Special United States Diplomatic Mission to Nepal. All documents are collected in: IOR/L/PS/12/3103 A, Coll 21/81, Relation with USA: American Mission to Nepal, British Library.

\(^{143}\) In 1951, the exchange rate of the Nepali Rupee to USD was 5.2 (RS 90’767’975 = 17’455’380 USD).

\(^{144}\) Committee, *Five Years National Development Plan*. 
1964/65, the total of foreign aid (loans and grants) accounted for more than forty per cent of the national budget with a clear tendency to rise.\textsuperscript{145}

However, the first national development plan never took shape as the Rana system was already clearly on the wane by the time of its announcement. Mohan Shamsher Rana’s attempt to strengthen his rule by presenting himself as a benevolent ruler and by establishing new foreign relations did not prevent his ultimate downfall. After the Indian independence, more and more Nepalese political parties were founded in India. Although based on different ideologies, they pursued the common goal of ending the Rana rule. The best-organised and strongest party was the Nepali Congress, whose leader Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala maintained close relations with leaders of the Indian Congress Party. With the Indian Congress in power after India’s independence, the anti-Rana movement gained decisive support in their fight for a political change in Nepal. The situation eventually escalated in the autumn of 1950 when the Nepali Congress party started an armed rebellion. King Tribhuvan Shah Dev, who was so far excluded from politics, sympathised with the anti-Rana activists and established contacts with the Nepali Congress and the Indian government. On November 6, 1950, the king and his family eventually flew to the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, which helped them to escape to Delhi with an Indian military aircraft. After this surprising act, the events followed in quick succession during which the Indian government played a leading role. The Nehru government proposed to Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher Rana and King Tribhuvan the so-called ‘Delhi Compromise,’ which foresaw the formation of a new cabinet with representatives of the old Rana government and members of the Nepali Congress. Although unhappy with the demands, Mohan Shamsher sent two of his brothers to Delhi for negotiations but gave in on January 8, 1951, in view of

his dramatic loss of popularity. The Nepali Congress, which had so far been excluded from the negotiations between the Rana government, the King, and the Indian government, was not satisfied with the not very far-reaching Delhi Compromise. A small fraction of its armed wing, the Mukti Sena, therefore continued its combat for more radical changes, but the Congress leaders and more moderate faction showed cooperativeness and joined the subsequent negotiations.

The four negotiating parties – the Ranas, the King, the Nepali Congress and the Indian government – assigned an interim government and worked out the basic structures of the future national administration. The negotiations in Delhi further resulted in the promulgation of an interim constitution that outlined the principles of a future democratic welfare state. It thus stipulated that the government will provide “all the necessities of life in order to raise the standard of living, and in order to maintain the economic order in the country.”

2.4.3 The Royal Take-over

The 1950s were a decade of new departures and optimism, but also of unrests and disorientations in Nepal. When King Tribhuvan triumphantly returned to Nepal after bringing the Rana rule to an end in February 1951, he announced in a public speech a new democratic era, in which people shall work together for Nepal’s progress and prospect, and promised free elections and a democratic constitution. But at the time of his death in 1955 his promise was still not fulfilled. Heir Mahendra ostensibly upheld his father’s promise and paid lip service to multiparty democracy. Nonetheless, he postponed elections several times and sub-

---

147 Prachanda Pradhan, ed. Aspects of Development Administration (Kirtipur, Kathmandu: Center for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, 1971); Thapa, Main Aspects of Social, Economic and Administrative History of Modern Nepal.
149 Sīrī Pānca Tribhuvan Smṛtigrantha (Kathmandu: Tribhuvan Smārak Samiti, 2011), 651-53.
sequently strengthened his position as a political leader vis-à-vis the frequently changing interim governments. The political party leaders, on the other side, also had their share in the political instability. The political parties were all relatively young and were lacking a firm base since most of them were either founded only after 1950 or during the 1940s by exiled Nepalese politicians in India. Thus, many of the newly emerging political parties were rather patronage networks of a few ambitious leaders than popularity-based organisations working for political change. Even the most influential party of the 1950s, the Nepali Congress Party, was constantly weakened by personal ambitions and internal rivalries of its leaders, especially the ones between the two competing Koirala brothers, Matrika Prasad (M. P.) and Bishweshwar Prasad (B. P.).

The factional rivalries of all political parties continued throughout the 1950s and increasingly destabilised the political system and enabled the king to gain political influence. The spans between different government coalitions, for example, were often bridged by direct monarchical rule and moreover, the king often chose the cabinet leaders according to his current political needs. For instance, when King Mahendra was seeking greater independence from India, he appointed Tanka Prasad Acharya, the leader of the Prajā Pāriṣad Party as prime minister in January 1956. Tanka Prasad Acharya was not only known as a former anti-Rana activist but also as an outspokenly anti-Indian and China-friendly politician. After Tanka Prasad Acharya resigned in July 1957 due to pressure from other parties and from within his own ranks, King Mahendra appointed Kunwar Inderjit Singh as the new cabinet leader. Singh was the head of the United Dem-

---

151 Tanka Prasad Acharya founded the Praja Parishad in 1935 as an anti-Rana, pro-democratic political party and subsequently organised anti-Rana campaigns with his colleagues. Acharya and some of his colleagues were captured in 1940 and sentenced to deaths because of treason. Because of his Brahmanical caste status, Acharya, however, could elude the death sentence and became a “living martyr”. For more information about the life and politics of Tanka Prasad Acharya see: Fisher, Acharya, and Acharya, Living Martyrs: Individuals and Revolution in Nepal.
ocratic Party whose setup was supposedly funded by King Mahendra himself. The suspicion that Singh was a mere puppet of the king was fuelled by Singh’s pro-royalist policy and his announcement to postpone the parliamentary elections indefinitely in October 1957.\textsuperscript{152}

The manipulative interventions into cabinet formations made evident the amount of influence King Mahendra had acquired whilst the political parties were preoccupied with internal conflicts. The political parties, however, were not totally impotent. Together with two other parties, the Nepali Congress created the pressure group ‘United Democratic Front’ to demand free elections within the next six months through a Gandhi-inspired civil disobedience campaign. Even though the United Democratic Front did not fully achieve its goal, it at least imposed enough pressure upon King Mahendra to finally announce parliament elections to be held on February 18, 1959, the eighth anniversary of King Tribhuvan’s ‘democracy speech.’ The claim for an elected constitution-drafting body, however, had to be abandoned. Instead, King Mahendra himself appointed a constitution-drafting commission. The commission included members of the royal palace as well as members of the biggest political parties and was assisted by the British constitutional law expert Sir Ivor Jennings.\textsuperscript{153} On February 12, 1959, only one week before the parliament elections, King Mahendra presented a new constitution to the people, which granted far-reaching competences to the monarch. According to the new constitution, all executive power was vested in the king and the sanctity of the monarchy was insured with a legal distinction between the actions of the king and those of his government.\textsuperscript{154} While the cabinet’s actions could be questioned on the ground of lack of proper authorization,

\textsuperscript{152} Whelpton, A History of Nepal.
\textsuperscript{153} Sir Ivor Jennings was at this time already well known for his work on the constitutions of Pakistan and of Malaysia. See: Benjamin N. Schoenfeld, “Nepal’s New Constitution,” Pacific Affairs 32 (1959), 392-401.
“[t]he person of the King for all acts done by him [was] given protection because the King can do no wrong.” Further, the king was granted extensive emergency rights in case of war or any other “grave emergency.”

Nonetheless, the political parties were occupied with the upcoming elections and did not object to the new constitution. With not much surprise, the first popular election of Nepal resulted in a landslide victory of the Nepali Congress. Although the other, clearly lagging behind parties accused the Nepali Congress of malpractices and manipulations, they did not contest the Nepali Congress’ right to form a government cabinet under its leader B. P. Koirala. The beginning of B. P. Koirala’s tenure as the first-ever elected prime minister of Nepal was promising. His cabinet was able to initiate three major reforms without opposition from the king, namely a land reform, the nationalisation of forests and the abolition of the rajyauta-system (quasi-autonomy of local nobility in return of an annual tribute to the central government). But as all three reforms were detrimental to privileges of traditional elites, the Congress government soon faced opposition. At the same time, B. P. Koirala’s government was also attacked from other political parties and was even questioned within their own party. Once more, one of his foremost opponents was his brother Matrika Prasad who now supported the National Democratic Front. In addition to the quarrels among the political elites of Nepal, the growing tensions between China and India also posed challenges to Nepal’s first democratically elected government. As the situation of the Congress government became more and more uneasy,

157 The Nepali Congress won 67.9 per cent of total seats, the Gorkha Parishad 17.4 per cent. The rest of the seats were assigned to the United Democratic Party, the Nepal Communist Party, the Praja Parishad, and to few impartial politicians. See: Whelpton, A History of Nepal, 95-96.
King Mahendra took advantage of the uncertainties in December 1960 and made use of his emergency rights. Arguing that the Congress government was not able to provide national security and accusing the political parties of malpractices, corruption, and anti-national behaviour, the king dissolved the parliament and the cabinet, put a ban on all political parties, arrested the party leaders, and took over full governmental power himself. Apart from national security threats, the other key argument to legitimise the royal take-over was the (unfulfilled) promise for development. The king blamed the Congress government for having neglected “the miserable and poverty-stricken conditions of the people” and for not having undertaken steps to ensure economic development “on the basis [...] of scientific analysis and factual study but in pursuance of purely theoretical principles.” Hence, for the second time within just a decade, (the lack of) development proved a critical factor in depriving the government of power and introducing a new governmental system.

2.5 King Mahendra: Traditional Hindu King or Father of Development?

2.5.1 The Partyless Panchayat Democracy
After the royal take-over, King Mahendra declared national security and development the central goals of the new government led by the king himself. He grounded his arguments on the basis of common concepts of the economic modernisation theory, such as linear progress, time-compression, and the need to fight endogenous obstacles to development. He also applied a language that was clearly influenced by the common technocratic development discourse of

---

161 Shah Deva, “The Royal Proclamation (December 15, 1960).”
the 1950s with its emphasis on a binary difference between “backward” and “developed” people and nations.\textsuperscript{162} The king displayed ample optimism and declared that “[t]here is nothing to despair of, for in these days of international economic co-operation it is not so difficult to acquire and master techniques of progress.”\textsuperscript{163} Yet, despite his faith in foreign development cooperation, King Mahendra refused to fully depend on foreign development models. He declared that “[f]or national development and reconstruction, we have to open up a new spring of power which will remove the centuries old poverty, ignorance and backwardness of the country and which will nourish to maturity and fruitfulness of the tree of democracy rooted in our soil and suited to our conditions.”\textsuperscript{164}

Hereby, King Mahendra referred to the introduction of a new governmental system that should be based on the “traditional” institution of panchayats.

In December 1962, King Mahendra promulgated a new constitution and officially proclaimed the Partyless Panchayat Democracy.\textsuperscript{165} This naming was a significant move. “Partyless” simply meant that formation of or participation in political parties was forbidden. King Mahendra and his government justified the ban on parties by pointing out the alleged corrupt, selfish, and elitist character of party politicians evident in their many speeches and publications. They further argued that the parliamentary system of democracy has proved to be unsuitable for Nepal and therefore needs to be replaced by the panchayat system of de-
mocracy. With the combination of the two notions of “panchayat” and “democracy,” King Mahendra made use of two popular but also ideologically highly loaded concepts. Since the end of World War II, it was undisputed among governments of the Western Bloc that all nations should aspire for a democratic system. As US President Truman prominently expressed in point four of his inaugural speech, democracy was not only seen as a guarantor of freedom but also as a necessary precondition of modernisation and prosperity because “[d]emocracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the people of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies – hunger, misery, and despair.” With its unchallenged positive connotations, “democracy” seemed to be a clearly advantageous label for Nepal, in view of the increasing importance of its relations with Western countries.

In contrast to the “Western” idea of democracy, “panchayat” (pāncāyat) was understood as a genuine South Asian form of local self-governance based on Hindu traditions. The word panchayat derives from Sanskrit pāncā (five) and literally means assembly of five (elder and respected members of a community), even though the effectively implemented panchayat organisations were often composed of more than five members. This decentralised system of village self-governance was to be found in various forms in the territories of former British India and Nepal. In recent history, Mahatma Gandhi had popularised the idea of

panchayat in India as part of his campaign for swaraj (self-rule).\textsuperscript{168} And, like many of the Gandhian ideas and ideals, the notion of panchayat subsequently evoked clearly positive connotations in South Asia. Against this background, the introduction of panchayats as local deliberative bodies was politically a very symbolic act of the postcolonial Nehru government in India.\textsuperscript{169} Newly independent Pakistan, on the other hand, did not introduce panchayats in its postindependent governmental structure.\textsuperscript{170} However, President Ayub Khan proclaimed the system of ‘Basic Democracy’ in 1959, which was based on panchayat-like bodies for local self-government.\textsuperscript{171} King Mahendra was apparently even more attracted by Ayub Khan’s ‘Basic Democracy’ than by the Indian village panchayats and claimed to have patterned the Nepalese panchayat system after the Pakistani model to a great extent.\textsuperscript{172} The Basic Democracy’s influence becomes, for instance, evident in the emphasis on planned rural development works to be carried out by the lower tiers in both systems.

In Nepal itself, panchayats had existed before 1962 as well. But it is difficult to define how old the institution of panchayats in Nepal actually was. Panegrists of King Mahendra, however, trace it back to “time immemorial,” or at least back to the Licchavi period (ca. 400–800 CE). Sinha, for instance, claimed that the word \textit{pāncālī} for village assemblies was in use since 100 CE in the territory of today’s Nepal while it was only much later that it came to be used in the Indian states. He interpreted this as evidence for the concept of panchayat to be historically of genuine Nepalese origin. Sinha further argued that the institution


\textsuperscript{170} But the name “pāncāyat” is used by the “Pakistan Hindu Pāncāyat”, the political organisation of the Hindus in Pakistan.


of village panchayats existed in different forms over the centuries and had been working well until the Rana family came into power in 1846. Sinha’s narrative fits well to the common narrative of the rāṣṭrīya itihās, the nationalistic historiography produced during the Panchayat Period. The rāṣṭrīya itihās commonly depicts the Rana period as the dark, destructive era, encompassed by the glorious era of Nepalese kings and the contemporary, auspicious Panchayat Era when supposedly ancient traditions like the panchayat rule were reinvented.

Historically better sourced, however, are the top-down attempts of the later Rana rulers to implement state-led local and district panchayats. After Chandra Shamsher Rana had unsuccessfully tried to institutionalise panchayats for local administrative tasks, Padma Shamsher Rana announced a new constitution in January 1948, which foresaw village and district panchayats as local administrative bodies. But this constitution never came into force so that only a few panchayats had been introduced until the overthrow of the Rana regime. Moreover, the few panchayat organisations set up during the Rana period were dominated by local elites who primarily used them for judicial functions and not to administer public developmental works. The interim constitution of 1951 also announced the setting up of village panchayats for local self-government, but they failed again to gain ground throughout the 1950s.

Hence, the concept of panchayat was not new to Nepal. But it was not very popular until 1960 and was, therefore, rather a ‘newly invented tradi-

174 Pratyoush Onta coined the notion of “rāṣṭrīya itihās” to particularly designate the nationalistic historiography of the Panchayat period Onta, “Ambivalence Denied: The Making of Rastriya Itihas in Panchayat Era Textbooks.”
tion.' But even if the concept of panchayat had no broad popular base it still evoked positive associations, thanks to its recent Gandhian use and this granted the newly proclaimed governmental system a locally rooted and popularly legitimized appearance. Furthermore, through the combination of ‘panchayat’ with ‘democracy,’ King Mahendra created a nationalist ideology that embraced both the claim for being a modern state as well as an emancipatory element, demonstrating that Nepal was not merely aping Western ideals but was following its proper path of development as well.

After the royal take-over and the proclamation of the panchayat system, the government of Nepal issued numerous publications explaining the meaning of panchayat in Nepal. The publications encompassed Nepali and English language newspaper articles, school textbooks, booklets, and academic journals and thus aimed at informing Nepalese citizens with a certain educational level, as well as foreigners living and working in Nepal. Yet, despite the manifold propaganda material, the explanations of the functioning of the panchayat system remained superficial and rather obscuring than clarifying. The publications, for example, repeatedly pointed out the people-oriented character of the four-tier panchayat democracy with locally elected village (gāu) and town (nagar) panchayats on the lowest tier of the system. But the information provided was limited to explanations about the formal structure and theoretical aspects of the system.


\[\text{179}\] Borgström argues that the King used the rhetoric of “Panchayat Democracy” to bridge the opposition of traditional rule and democracy by simply ignoring the gap between them. He also argues that the King only vaguely defined the Panchayat system in order to have the flexibility to act according to the exigencies that may occur. See: Bengt-Erik Borgström, “The Best of Two Worlds: Rhetoric of Autocracy and Democracy in Nepal,” Contributions to Indian Sociology 14 (1980), 39-41, 45.

\[\text{180}\] The official information material did, for instance, not explain who had the right to become a member of the village assembly, which elected the local Panchayats, and omitted the fact that
Instead of discussing the practical implementation of the new system, the official propaganda rather elaborated on its ideological aspects. Government publications depicted the four-tier panchayat system as a guarantor of decentralised power and “the first cornerstone of the Natural Democracy that will eventually come into being in the country.” This “Natural Democracy” could not function under the leadership of any political party but only under the guidance of the king. Like a mantra, the Press Secretariat of the Royal Palace typically praised King Mahendra for “taking full note of the spirit of the people and the age” and for initiating the panchayat system after the unsatisfactory experiences with “[t]he parliamentary system of government imported from abroad [which] proved to be incompatible with the genius of the Nepalese people.”

Yet, the euphemistic descriptions of the home-grown and people-oriented character of the panchayat system did not reflect the status quo but rather served to conceal the limited competences of the panchayat organisations and the concentration of power in the king and his advisors. Although the national (rāṣṭrīya) panchayat was competent to draft laws, all laws had ultimately to be approved by the king. There was no separation of powers as the king was vested with all powers: executive, legislative, and judicial. In addition to this clear violation of democratic principles, the claim for decentralisation through panchayats was also little more than a false promise. The local and district panchayats served rather as extensions of the steadily growing central administration than as representative bodies of the people. Hence, despite the emphasis on

---


the participatory and democratic character of the new system, panchayats on all
levels had only very limited power.

2.5.2 Vikās in a Hindu Kingdom

The significance of the panchayat system, however, lay not so much in its real
political weight but in its ideological function, which allowed the strengthening
of the monarchy and gaining state control. Not surprisingly, the official publica-
tions on the Partyless Panchayat Democracy dealt largely with the Nepalese
monarchy and praised the king as the ideal leader of the country. It is note-
worthy that the king drew his legitimisation primarily from two sources, which
he adopted as central aspects of his nation building policy. These two sources are
tied together in the popular slogan of “panchayat development”: Hinduism as
the state religion and basis of national culture, and the promise for national de-
development.

Hinduism as the official state religion did not mean legal discrimination of
citizens of other faith as the constitution explicitly guaranteed freedom of reli-
gion. But the constitution defined Nepal as a monarchical Hindu state and called
the king an adherent of Aryan culture and Hindu religion. This reference to
Hinduism as the legitimating source of rule was not novel to the Panchayat era.
Burghart traces the idea of Hindu kings back to the sixteenth century or even
earlier, when today’s Nepal consisted of numerous petty kingdoms. In this
historical context, the notion of Hindu was used as a collective term for non-
Muslim and for the rulers of the Himalayan kingdoms, primarily served to distin-
guish themselves from the Mughal rulers of the Ganges basin. Burghart notes

---

184 About the lack of power of panchayat institutions vis-à-vis the public administration and the
King see also: Prachanda Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal,” diss., Claremont
Graduate School and University Center, 1969), 56-64; Indra Prasad Kaphley, Fundamental Bases
186 Richard Burghart, “The Category ‘Hindu’ in the Political Discourse of Nepal,” in The Conditions
of Listening: Essays on Religion, History, and Politics in South Asia, ed. C. J. Fuller, and Jonathan
Spencer (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
that the idea of Hindu kingdoms helped to bring the “double identity” of the petty kings together in one single narrative. Amongst their own people, identification as high-caste Hindu king legitimised their rule by affirming superiority over the common people. Especially, the construction of ancestral lines to high-caste Rajput families of the Indian plains, whom they regarded as more civilised than the inhabitants of the Himalayas, clearly aimed at demonstrating the kings’ superiority in comparison with their subjects. To the culturally and politically predominant Mughal Empire, on the other hand, the Himalayan kings projected their superiority by identifying themselves with the Himalayan locals, who had not been “contaminated” by Muslim invaders and were thus somewhat more “pure” than the population of the Mughal Empire.187

There is a certain form of continuity, from the sixteenth century up to the Panchayat Period, in the narrative of “Gorkha”188 as the home of Hindu kings as well as in their double role in the category of “Hindu,” as an internal and external marker of difference. Yet, the underlying meaning of the idea of a “Hindu kingdom” changed over the course of time. In the 1770s, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the forefather of King Mahendra and founder of modern Nepal, wrote down his vision of Gorkha as a “true Hindusthan,”189 in which the four varṇa (caste) and thirty-six jāti (sub-caste) were unified under the dharmic (religious) order. He conceived Hindusthan not as a place exclusively for Hindus but the rule through Hindu kingship was essential to him to guarantee the dharmic order.190

188 Until the 1920s, today’s Nepal was referred to as “Gorkha” by its rulers.
189 In his teachings, the “Divya Upadesh” (divine instructions), Prithvi Narayan Shah used the Persian term “asal [true] hindusthan” instead of some Sanskritized form of speech. Burghart guesses that Prithvi Narayan Shah had used the inauthentic sounding Persian term because his vision of Hindusthan might have been largely inspired by his observations on the defeat of the Mughals by the British East India Company. See Burghart, “The Category ‘Hindu’ in the Political Discourse of Nepal,” 268-69.
The Rana rulers perpetuated the idea of a Hindu kingdom but gave a different twist to its dual meaning. To the British in India, the first Rana Prime Minister, Jang Bahadur Rana, presented himself as a progressive, humanist ruler and claimed to be held back by the tradition-ridden priests and members of the royal court. At the same time, Jang Bahadur and his successors played up the Hindu nature of the kingdom amongst their own population. They, for instance, affirmed the divinity of the Shah dynasty and secluded the country from foreign influences on the grounds of purity of the realm. It goes without saying that these two acts strengthened the Rana family’s political power since the divinity of the king was a pretext to isolate him from worldly politics and the seclusion of Nepal served to keep political opposition at bay. Hence, the idea of the “Hindu kingdom” once more played a double role: in internal politics it served to consolidate and legitimise power whereas in foreign politics it underlined Nepal’s sovereignty and independence by constructing a unique national character, which clearly differed from neighbouring Buddhist Tibet and secular British-India.

For King Mahendra it appeared wise to make use of this long tradition of the idea of the Hindu kingdom in order to add weight to his reign. Although he did not explicitly claim to be of divine nature, many of the propagandistic publications on the panchayat system pointed out the popular belief that the kings of the Shah dynasty were mortal incarnations of God Vishnu. Yet, unlike the Rana rulers, the panchayat government, of course, did not use this belief to keep the king away from politics but to emphasise the king’s divine right to rule. The king was now presented not only as the spiritual but also the political leader of Nepal.

---

who was bound to the Hindu rājdharma. The rājdharma was understood as a divine and eternal law regulating the spiritual and worldly duties and rights of a Hindu king and was supposed to be superior to all secular laws. This implied that the king was only bound to the rājdharma and not to the worldly national constitution drafted by himself.

Yet again, the emphasis on the Hindu character of the kingdom fulfilled different functions for different audiences. As has just been showed, the internal function was to strengthen the legitimacy and political power of the king by fostering his stylised image as a superhuman benefactor and protector of the people. On the other hand, the outward function of the discourse of Nepal as “the only Hindu kingdom in the world” was to sharpen Nepal’s profile as a sovereign nation by making it unique and different from its dominant neighbouring countries. Although the British colonial expansion posed no more a threat on Nepal, its sovereignty was still vulnerable in view of the aggressive politics of its powerful neighbours. Particularly worrying were the violent occupation of Tibet through China and later the annexation of Sikkim through India but also the increasing influence of Western powers through foreign aid. Hence, the emphasis of supposedly Nepalese traditions in development politics served as a kind of mental shield against the cultural and ideological influences from abroad.

The most conspicuous novelty to the category of “Hindu” in national politics was its combination with the second source of royal legitimacy: the promise for development. As already mentioned, the panchayat propaganda emphasised the necessity of economically developing Nepal on the grounds of its own traditions, which included the Hindu nature of the monarchy. Against this background, the king’s biographers presented him as the ideal leader who was able to incor-

194 Burghart, “The Category ‘Hindu’ in the Political Discourse of Nepal.”
porate both development and the conservation of Nepalese traditions.\textsuperscript{195} Mahendra himself also often added a “religious flavour” to his development rhetoric and combined spiritual and developmental aspirations. For instance, he claimed it to be the panchayat government’s “selfless and sacred desire to bring about [...] mental and spiritual regeneration in the people and to associate them in the task of all-round development of the nation under [the Royal Government’s] leadership.”\textsuperscript{196} The development vocabulary was also often translated from English into Nepali with terms that derived from a religious context. One of the keywords to link and tighten the distinct worlds of modern development and native tradition together was sevā. The primary meaning of the Sanskrit word sevā is to render selfless service without expecting personal rewards in order to please the gods. In India, the Brahmanic notion of sevā had witnessed a significant shift at the turn of the twentieth century under the influence of the globally circulating Western idea of charity and social service. Nationalistic associations for social services and religious reform such as the Arya Samaj or the Ramkrishna Mission adapted the notion of sevā to express the concept of selfless service to the community, the society or the nation. The notion of sevā was thus not secularised but was still conceptualised in religious terms as service to the community and the nation, and was hence interpreted as a pious duty.\textsuperscript{197} In Nepal, the semantic shift of the meaning of sevā from an individual religious practice to a patriotic, community-oriented practice gained momentum only later, mainly because of the absence of civil society associations with profiles similar to the ones in India. It was with the new focus on national development planning in the 1950s, that the notion of sevā came to be applied for developmental work. Village development workers, for instance, were called grām sevaks (rural serv-

\textsuperscript{195} For example Krishnamurti, \textit{His Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shaha Deva (An Analytical Biography)}; Tuladhar, \textit{Mahendra: The King of Nepal}.
\textsuperscript{196} Shah Deva, “Royal Message (January 5, 1961).”
ants), deś sevā (service to the nation) was defined as the citizens’ efforts for the development of the nation. Like in India, the notion sevā did not lose its religious connotation. Thus, the application of the notion of sevā not only accentuated the local appropriation of Western development ideas but also the important role of development work in nation building politics as it was compared to the religious duties of every pious Hindu. In line with this idea, the state propaganda promoted the Panchayat Democracy as the best suited system for Nepal because its decentralised institutions would not only enable the implementation of development plans, but would also pay respect to “Vedic polity” and channelise dharmic power in order to avoid social chaos.

The fortification of West–influenced modernisation rhetoric with references to ostensible local traditions was not completely new to the Panchayat Era. King Mahendra had occasionally played up these two elements before. In 1958 for instance, he visualised this idea on the cover page of the very first issue of the official journal of the National Planning Commission named Vikās (development). The cover is framed with small drawings of what was thought to be manifestations of vikās: farming and cottage industry, a tractor, a solid bridge, a train, electric light, and more. In the centre is a photograph of the king inaugurating the Mahendra Charkha, a spinning wheel named after the king. The charkha had been popularised by Mahatma Gandhi as a symbol of the Indian independence movement and of self-reliance. Gandhi had encouraged the Indian people to use the charkha not only as an act of protest against the hegemony of British textiles but due to its meditative use as a means of moral and spiritual

---

199 Richard Burghart, “The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal,” The Journal of Asian Studies 44 (1984), 120. Heaton Shrestha further points out that during the 1990s, actors of the mushrooming NGO-sector highlighted the “sevā”-character of their work in order to decline common critique of NGOs as being selfish and corrupt institutions: Heaton Shrestha, “NGOs as Thekādārs or Sevaks? Identity Crisis in Nepal’s Non-Governmental Sector.”
200 Krishnamurti, His Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shaha Deva (An Analytical Biography), 201-15.
201 See illustration below.
rejuvenation. Hence, King Mahendra used the symbol of the *charkha* to add a spiritual dimension to the notion of *vikās* and to demonstrate that Nepal was not simply copying a Western model of development, even though the *charkha* had never taken root in Nepal as a symbol for self-reliance and national independence.

Nonetheless, the cover illustration of the first *Vikās* journal is also remarkable in relation to the self-staging of King Mahendra. It portrays the king at the centre of *vikās* and as the one leading Nepal on its own path of development. This image puts King Mahendra’s self-cultivated image as a people-oriented, benevolent ruler in a nutshell. He also made use of other new means of mass communication to present himself as the spiritual and political leader of Nepal. It is of no surprise that Mahendra’s populist representation as Nepal’s “father of development” showed in many ways his paternalism vis-à-vis the “backward” people. One of Mahendra’s panegyrists bluntly expressed the underlying constructed binary difference between the “immature” people and the “potent”

---


203 The civil society activists Tulsi Meher Shrestha, also known as the “Nepali Gandhi”, tried to promote the charkha during the late Rana Period. But he only achieved to stimulate a very marginal religious reform movement. Shrestha had first been inspired by the writings of the Indian religious reformer Dayananda Saraswati (founder of Arya Samaj) and then became a close disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1927, after initially opposing the Rana autocracy, he founded the “Shree Tin Chandra Kamdhenu Charkha Pracharak Mahaguthi” in accordance with the Rana government. For more information about Tulsi Meher and his so-called Charkha movement see the collection of works written by his friends and followers: Koirala, *Tulsimeher Shrestha Smrtigranth*.

204 His populism became particularly visible in his extensive journeys through Nepal. See the royal speeches delivered during a PR-tour in: *Department of Publicity and Broadcasting, The Panchayat Way to Prosperity: Collection of the five speeches delivered by His Majesty King Mahendra, February 5 to 18, 1963*.

monarch with the idea of different stages of development: “The present stage of the Nepalese society is almost in its infancy, it needs protection and training. The people have still to be socialized into the process of political decision-making. The crown, therefore, guides the people as its proper guardian.”

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 4 King Mahendra on the first Vikās Titlepage

2.5.4 “The Call of the Times”
The seemingly authentic Nepalese appropriation of the Euro-American development discourse, which centred on the religiously flavoured slogan of “panchayat development,” served to consolidate the monarchical power and to underline the leading role of the king. Yet, apart from its significance in domestic politics, it also needs to be interpreted in the wider context of the burgeoning “Third-Worldism” and the reconfiguration of the so-called “North-South” relations in the postcolonial period. Many other newly independent or still colonised nations shared the Nepalese government’s concern to build a strong, sovereign nation through a nationalistic development policy. The introduction of an autocratic state with a populist leader on the grounds of the promise of development was

---

207 Photograph taken by the author.
not unique to Nepal but reflected a global trend at the time of King Mahendra’s reign. Well documented, for example, is the case of *Ujamaa* developmentalism in newly independent Tanzania. Similar to the Nepalese panchayat ideology, president Nyerere promoted *Ujamaa* as a genuine African concept of national development.\(^\text{208}\)

Evidently, King Mahendra was in good company with his promotion of a developmental state. Development policy offered Nepal an important means to underline its national sovereignty, more than what such policies could offer in terms of sovereignty, to formerly colonised nations. As Pigg states, due to Nepal’s non-colonial history and isolation policy, “development – rather than the residues and scars of imperialism – [became] the overt link between [Nepal] and the West.”\(^\text{209}\) If Nepalese actors wanted to be heard by the international community, they had to do it through the new channels offered by the international development endeavours. King Mahendra had realised “the call of the times”\(^\text{210}\) and managed to integrate Nepal into the international community by branding it as an archetypical developing country and by attracting several foreign donor agencies.

In the context of Cold War rivalries, Western countries promoted liberal democracy as the best form of government. But in many cases they accepted “development oriented dictatorships” as long as they were not following communism. Some development theorists even considered a period of dictatorial leadership to be a necessary phase in the path of development. An authoritarian


ruler could guarantee the necessary stability for the transition from a “traditional,” “underdeveloped” society to a “modern,” “developed” one, so went the argument.\(^\text{211}\) This idea was prevalent in Nepal too. Foreign donors widely recognised the legitimacy of the king and only sporadically criticised the autocratic regime and the ban on political parties. A significant reason was the panchayat system’s relative stability that made it easier for foreign agencies to cope with local institutions than the former multiparty system with its constantly changing persons-in-charge. Yet, neither the question of what the slogan of ‘panchayat development’ actually meant, nor the question of whether it really offered an authentic native appropriation of the West-influenced idea of development as promised by King Mahendra, was publicly debated in the Kathmandu-based development community.\(^\text{212}\) King Mahendra’s development rhetoric very similar to the rhetoric of leaders of other developing countries. Also the definition of the concept of “panchayat development” remained unclear. Sometimes it referred to the development of panchayat institutions, and sometimes to the development of people and the nation through panchayat institutions.\(^\text{213}\)

However, although King Mahendra attempted to establish himself as a respected statesman through the promise of development, he was still regarded as a rather old-fashioned and exotic ruler among the rising number of expatriates in Nepal. Born in 1920, he had spent his childhood and youth in the gilded


\(^{213}\) A government publication that addressed foreigners defined the goals of Panchayat development as: 1. Institutional development (establishment of local administration), 2. Social Mobilisation (of labour force for development work), 3. Attitude change (of the Nepalese people). See: Ministry of Panchayat, Publicity Section, Panchayat Development Program in Nepal, 6-7.
cage of the Narayanhiti Royal Palace where the Rana prime ministers had deprived him from modern English education. Though his promise for development seemed to be sincere, his anti-democratic and sometimes anti-Western methods raised suspicions. Rather than on King Mahendra, the foreign expert’s hopes for Nepal’s development were therefore pinned on his son and successor Birendra. Born in 1945, Birendra was educated in Eton, Tokyo, and Harvard before he ascended the throne at a relatively young age in 1972. Foreign experts and Western educated Nepalese appreciated that King Birendra shared their concepts of development and aimed to modernise Nepal on the basis of Western methodologies. Yet, as described by Högger, foreign development experts also thought that the “tradition-ridden” courtiers and the obligations as a Hindu king constantly hampered Birendra’s good intentions eventually rendering him unable to realise many of his visions for a prosperous Nepal.\textsuperscript{214} The idea that certain “traditions” or “cultures” are more hostile to innovation and development than others was a central argument of the mainstream modernisation theory.\textsuperscript{215} King Mahendra and his successor King Birendra did make use of this orientalist argument, which implied the existence of certain “good,” “development friendly” traditions and other “bad,” “backward” traditions. The definition of favourable and unfavourable traditions remained very vague even though the kings repeatedly claimed the importance of “Nepalese traditions” as the basis of development and at the same time called for the eradication of “social evils” for the sake of national development.\textsuperscript{216} But it was not at least this vagueness and flexibility of

\textsuperscript{214} Rudolph Högger was in the early 1970s head of the Swiss Development Cooperation office in Kathmandu and published his personal observations of the Kathmandu based development sector in: Rudolf Högger, \textit{Die Schweiz in Nepal: Erfahrungen und Fragen aus der schweizerischen Entwicklungs zusammenarbeit mit Nepal} (Bern, Stuttgart: Haupt, 1974). About the expatriates’ view on King Mahendra and King Birendra see pages 51-53. Högger confirmed King Birendra’s positive reputation as an advocate of development among locals and foreigners in an interview with Sara Elmer on November 19, 2010 in Zurich.

\textsuperscript{215} Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept,” 81-84.

\textsuperscript{216} The argument was for example often used in the propaganda material of the 1967-75 Back-to-Village National Campaign (gāũ pharka rāṣṭriya abhiyān). Caste and gender discrimination are often mentioned as examples for “social evils”, but otherwise “social evils” are not further defi-
the concepts of tradition and development that allowed King Mahendra to create an autocratic system for his own needs.

The next few chapters will show that there was, however, a wide gap between the panchayat development rhetoric and the implementation of actual projects. They also show that the power of the state and the position of the king should not be overestimated. Although there was a strong and stable leadership during the Panchayat Period there were also many other actors involved in the creation of the extensive Nepalese development sector. Moreover, the growing anti-panchayat movement of the late 1970s and 1980s show how weak and how risky the promise for development as the foundation of the absolute monarchical reign was. With the increasing dependence on foreign aid and the government’s failure to show significant progress through national planning, the previous optimist belief of educated Nepalese in development planning turned into frustration and anger about the political leadership. Thus, the quest for development, which initially served as a major argument in setting up the panchayat system, backfired as a central issue in the jana āndolan (people’s movement), which finally led to the end of the panchayat system and the announcement of a parliamentary monarchy in 1990.217

2.6 The Ruler as an Agent of Development?

In this chapter I have presented three of Nepal’s best-known historical figures: Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana, and King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. I have not merely looked at them as “history-making great men” but rather as products of their time and of their historical

---

217 About the jana āndolan and the political changes of 1990 see: Brown, The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History.
representation. They were all rulers of a nation at the periphery of a globalising world but they all reacted differently to imperial threats and to the global discourses of civilisation, modernity, and development. They also differed in their self-representation as well as in the images they have been cast into, in the nationalistic historiography produced during the Panchayat Era.

The first Rana prime minister, Jang Bahadur Rana, was the one to introduce Nepal to the European public in the mid-nineteenth century. With his hypermasculine, exotic appearance he contributed to the stereotype of the Nepalese as the unworldly, oriental “other,” an image that lived on in the post-1950 development discourse. Despite Jang Bahadur’s interest in England and his admiration of European modernisation, he made no political use of the colonial discourses of civilisation or modernisation and initiated no significant economic development schemes. In foreign politics, he addressed the issue of British colonial expansion in South Asia by isolating Nepal from foreign influences and by maintaining friendly but distant relations with the British. As a consequence, in the later Panchayat Era, he was represented as a protector of Nepalese sovereignty but also as a despotic ruler who hindered change and development.

Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana, who ruled Nepal about half a century later, basically continued Jang Bahudur’s foreign policy but selectively appropriated current trends of colonial politics. He particularly reacted to the claims of the colonial civilising mission and colonial development programmes by presenting himself as an anglicised, modern reformer. Most significantly, Chandra Shamsher managed to use the abolition of slavery to present himself as a

---

benevolent and “civilised” ruler in the ongoing League of Nation’s anti-slavery debate and to mark Nepal’s position as a sovereign nation. A look at Chandra Shamsher’s abolition rhetoric and at his later historical reception further illustrates how Europe became the uncontested benchmark of modernity in Nepal. His selective appropriation of English fashion and the few well-directed reform projects also suggest that he had realised the power of the colonial discourses of civilisation and the political value of presenting oneself as a progressive initiator of change. He thus gained the reputation of a dictatorial but reform-minded ruler in national history. Furthermore, both Jang Bahadur’s show off of his oriental “otherness” as well as Chandra Shamsher’s presentation of Englishness can be interpreted as strategies of resistance against imperial domination: the first because it underlined the Nepalese government’s rejection of colonial expansion in South Asia, the second because it threatened the colonial “rule of difference.” Hence, although Nepal has never been colonised, its national history has to be seen in the wider context of imperial politics.

The end of the Rana rule was concurrent with the end of British colonial rule in India and entailed many political changes. Like in India, the idea of development became an increasingly important argument to legitimise power in the inter-war period and became a constitutive element in state and nation building after the change of regime in 1951. King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev realised this like no other Nepalese politician. He thus enforced the creation of a developmental state under the label of ‘Panchayat Democracy,’ which combined a technocratic development concept with a nationalistic ideology. Unlike Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana, who demonstrated his “Englishness,” King Mahendra promoted a “Nepaliness” that suited his nationalistic development ideology. In the political propaganda and national historiography of the Panchayat era, the Rana rulers also served as contrasting figures to King Mahendra. The King was not only portrayed as more enlightened and development oriented but also as more patriotic than the Rana rulers. The emphasis on the idea of Nepal as
a Hindu kingdom further strengthened King Mahendra’s self-attributed role as the supreme agent of development who guides his subjects in a prosperous future. But despite the important symbolic role of the king, the panchayat ideology and the associated developmental state remained superficial and weak. The promise of development turned out to be a perilous fundament to legitimise power. As the next few chapters will illustrate with examples of some concrete development projects, there was also often a wide gap between the discourse of development and the practice on the field. Furthermore, the king was neither almighty nor the only player who had an impact on the emergence of the vast development sector in Nepal. Hence, although the rulers of Nepal shaped the development policies and featured prominently in the development discourse, their agency was limited by other actors and by the complexity of the actual development work.
3 The Development Worker

The present age is called an age of planning! ‘Planning’ has become the main tool of development of many countries, small and big, in the world. These countries have progressed industrially and in other respects, and have thereby added to their and their people’s happiness and prosperity. But, our country Nepal is underdeveloped. Due to the unfavourable geographical situation of our country, lack of literacy among our people, and the past autocratic rule, we did not get the opportunity to make progress like the other countries of the world. It was in the year of 2007 [1950–51] that our country has found in its democratic set up a reason for changing itself to the better. (Department of Publicity, His Majesty’s Government of Nepal, 1957)219

The first foreign-aided development programme of Nepal was the Tribhuvan Village Development Programme (TVDP). Its launch in 1952 marked a decisive step in Nepal’s progress into the “age of planning.” But the TVDP is not merely of interest because it was Nepal’s first large-scale development planning scheme. It is also of interest because it opened up a new field of professional activity. Government officials, specifically trained experts, foreign advisors, and development workers were all recruited for the realisation of the village development programme.

In this chapter, after having examined the role of the Nepalese ruler as an agent of development, I will consider the role of the actors at the other end of the spectrum, namely the development worker as the lowest-level development professional. In the context of the TVDP, the development worker was called the village development worker (VDW). The role of Nepalese village development

---

worker was created only in the early 1950s as the profession did not exist in Nepal before this. Their female counterparts, called the women worker, were introduced in the TVDP as the key actors. The implementation of the programme rested on their shoulders for a good part. This chapter considers the demanding role of the development worker within the Nepalese village development programme. It also looks at the worker’s function in the development discourse and for the village programme’s significance in the wider context of the emerging development sector in Nepal.

After showing how Nepal entered the “age of planning” and became a “developing country,” I trace the global origins of village development planning and the concept of community development. I then present the scope and goals of the TVDP and discuss how late colonial development initiatives influenced the Nepalese programme. Thereby, I focus specifically on the idealised image of the village development worker as an agent of development. Through a comparison of three different studies on the performance of village workers, I further question their function against the backdrop of the burgeoning discourse on “village Nepal.” Finally, I shed light on the political context, which helps in better understanding of the wider significance of the programme and of the village workers, and conclude by discussing the planned and unplanned impacts of the Nepalese village development programme.

3.1 Nepal in the “Age of Planning”

In mainstream historiography as well as in the development literature on Nepal, the year 1951 marks a clear-cut caesura between the autocratic, backward Rana regime and the modern era with its promise for democracy and development. Yet, as has been shown in the previous chapter, the last Rana rulers had already expressed the need for planned development in their attempts to avert loss of power. 1951, however, marks a break as development planning and foreign aid arrived in full swing only under the post-Rana governments. But the increasing
significance of development in the national life of Nepal during the 1950s cannot merely be put down to the changes in the domestic policy. The end of the Rana regime coincided with the worldwide dawn of the post-World War “age of development,” or as the Nepalese Department of Publicity named it, the “age of planning.”

Declining empires, newly independent nations, and escalating Cold War rivalries urged for a new world order in the post-World War era. In this context, the idea of planned development offered a conceptual framework to reorganise international relations, one that was convincing to both leaders of industrialised, affluent nations as well as leaders of poor, emerging nations. This new framework of development and aid relations was build upon the conviction that the alleviation of poverty would not occur simply by regulating processes of economic growth or social change but “by concerted intervention by the national governments of both poor and wealthy countries in cooperation with an emerging body of international aid and development organisations.”

This concept of post-war development planning was scientifically rooted in the macroeconomic modernisation theory. The modernisation theory, which emerged from the modernising discourse of colonial bureaucrats, explained modernisation as a universal and linear transformation process from a traditional and pastoral to an industrialised, Western-styled society. The in-

---

224 On the colonial discourse of modernisation and colonial development initiatives in French and British African colonies see: Cooper, “Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept.”
Industrialised Western society was defined as the desirable norm, and poverty was declared to be an anomaly. According to this theory, not all nations were in the same stage of development. But the development of the “backward” and poor nations could be accelerated by planned interventions in the form of transfer of capital and know-how from relatively advanced nations. The history of Europe seemed to testify the modernisation theorists’ and development planners’ assumption that economic and social change can be engineered, directed, and produced at will. Especially, the introduction of town-planning and social welfare schemes by city governments and philanthropic organisations during the industrialisation in nineteenth century Europe were regarded as successful measures to rein-in the fast growing industrial centres and to reduce proletariat poverty.225 Yet, as the post-development author Arturo Escobar has argued, the coercive side of nineteenth century planning was widely disremembered by the planning enthusiasts of the post-World War period. He explains in Foucaultian terminology, that it was not a natural, smooth, and painless process to “discipline” urban dwellers in industrialising Europe and turn them into governable subjects in order to make the plans work effectively. But the emergence of the modern welfare state in Europe, the Soviet Union’s Five-Year Plans, and finally the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan) seemed to sufficiently prove the effectiveness of development planning, so the hitches were buried in oblivion. It therefore appeared logical in the post-World War era to imitate these planning experienc-

es in the so-called developing countries. Particularly influential on Nepal was the planning enthusiasm in neighbouring India. As indicated in chapter two, development planning was a highly debated issue in later years of colonial India and was used as an argument to legitimise power by both the colonial government as well as Indian nationalists. With Jawaharlal Nehru as prime minister, national development through socialist planned economy was eventually given high priority in newly independent India.

Irrespective of who articulated it: the Nepalese administration, or Indian, American or other foreign advisors, the visions for Nepal’s development were clearly shaped by this social-evolutionary understanding of modernisation and its fixation on “deficiencies” and “scarcity.” As the state of Nepal differed substantially from the western European ideal, it was consequently regarded as lacking far behind “normal” development. Nepalese officials, as well as foreign advisors, diagnosed a whole range of deficiencies – deficiencies in industrialisation, education, infrastructure, agricultural production and many other aspects. These deficiencies were commonly explained by Nepal’s topography, its non-colonial past, and the isolation policy of the Rana regime. Arguments claimed that as the Ranas allowed few Westerners to enter Nepal, the country was cut-off from Western influences and thus missed crucial modernisation processes. Missing the “white man’s” influence through colonisation, Nepal was portrayed as a fossilised state with a society and economy that had “remained virtually static”

226 Escobar, Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World, 145-48. See also James Scott on “high-modernist” city and village planning; Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.
228 Esteva, “Development,” 14-16.
during the previous “dark ages.”

Throughout the “age of development” similar arguments and characterisations could be found in the descriptions of many other developing countries. James Ferguson, therefore, pointed out in his study on Lesotho that “[t]he homogenizing results of such representations can be almost comical – many reports on Lesotho look as though they would work nearly as well within the word ‘Nepal’ systematically substituted for ‘Lesotho’.”

Hence, planning seemed to be a promising instrument for Nepalese officials and foreign experts to tackle the diagnosed shortcomings of Nepal. Yet, in June 1952, a delegation of experts of the Indian Planning Commission concluded Nepal was still not ready for a comprehensive national development plan. After their one-month visit to Kathmandu, the Indian experts recommended that Nepal’s foremost task was to build up a strong administrative system, collect basic statistical data on the country, and develop its means of communication before it could work out a thorough Five-Year Plan and follow the Indian pattern of development. Interestingly, at this time, India administered its assistance to Nepal through its own Planning Commission and not through the Ministry of External Affairs. This implied that development assistance to Nepal was not treated as an entirely external matter, but was geared to the existing planning efforts in the Indian states. Like the Indian Planning Commission, the first director of the United States Technical Co-operation Mission (USOM) in Nepal, Paul W. Rose, declared Nepal not yet to be ready for a thorough national development scheme. After establishing the USOM Nepal headquarters in Kathmandu in January 1952, Rose made a six-weeks tour in the Kathmandu and Pokhara valleys to explore the

---


country and its needs. Rose left Pokhara “with a feeling that time had been moving slowly here for centuries, but people were aching for change.”\(^\text{236}\) In a memorandum to Prime Minister M. P. Koirala, Rose defined food security, health, education, and transportation as the most urgent development targets for Nepal. Furthermore, he also identified the necessity for hydro-electricity, irrigation, land reform, and for the development of mineral resources. Last but not least, Rose also acknowledged the need for “the development of a sense of unity, of love of liberty, and of respect for the individual.”\(^\text{237}\) On whatever observations Rose’s image of backward, passive Nepalese people with an apparently insufficient sense of unity, liberty, and respect for the individual might have been grounded, the image clearly underlined the necessity for US assistance.

Previous to their employment in Nepal, Paul Rose and most of the other USOM-team members had worked in rural welfare and agricultural extension programmes in the United States under the New Deal politics.\(^\text{238}\) The expertise of the USOM-team in agricultural extension met the Nepalese government’s interest in reaching out to its vast rural areas, which had so far hardly been under control of the central government. As a result, the very first foreign aided development programme of Nepal was the Tribhuvan Village Development Programme (\textit{Tribhuvan grām vikās kāryakram}), named after the then king of Nepal.

**3.2 The Universal Village**

The Tribhuvan Village Development Programme was launched in spring 1952, one year after Nepal signed a Point-Four agreement with the United States Op-

---


\(^{237}\) Mihaly, \textit{Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study}, 34.

erations Mission (USOM). Initially, the programme was attached to the Ministry of Agriculture. USOM assistance was only foreseen in the form of technical advice and supply of commodities. But a few months later, in the summer of 1952, the programme was reorganised under the Ministry of Planning within its own Village Development Department. From that time onward it was a joint programme of the Nepalese government and the USOM, with two co-directors, one Nepalese and one American. This reorganisation under the Ministry of Planning not only highlighted the high priority given to the programme within the new national planning efforts but also enhanced the USOM’s influence in its planning and implementation. Later on, the American Ford Foundation joined in the programme and in 1958 the Indian Aid Mission also became an official partner.

The official evaluation report of the programme, which was compiled by the Himalayan Studies Centre twenty years after the programme was ended, states that Nepalese village development planners and decision makers were inspired by rural development efforts in other places around the globe. According to this report, Nepalese planners were informed about the Chinese Commune, the Israeli Kibbutzim, and the Indian Community Development Scheme, and as a consequence, they wanted similar schemes at home. This retrospective interpretation of the intentions of the Nepalese government might not be fully accurate, not only because it overlooks the inspiration driven from agricultural extension programmes in the United States, but also because the concept of Chinese Communes was only introduced in 1958 and could therefore not been known to Nepalese planners in 1952. However, although the available historical source material does not allow drawing an exact picture of all the conceptual influences on the TVDP, the examination of the programme’s outline strongly

---

suggests that it was patterned according to rural development programmes found elsewhere. As mentioned by the Himalayan Studies Centre and as it will be demonstrated in here, the community development programme in neighbouring India decisively influenced the conception of TVDP.

3.2.1 Colonial Development

Village development planning in Asia and Africa was no new invention of the post-war age of development, but had its roots in the late colonial period. With the increasing criticism of imperial and colonial policies after World War I, France, Great Britain, and other imperial powers launched a series of so-called colonial development projects. The object of these colonial development projects was manifold: to make colonies economically more profitable (mise-en-valeur241), to encounter increasing social unrests in the colonies, to morally legitimise the empire at home and in the colonies, and increasingly also to encounter the communist threat.242 French colonial bureaucrats at the Office du Niger, for instance, designed a largescale rural development programme in the late 1920s with the aim to economically develop a scarcely populated area in French Soudan (Mali). The central feature of the programme was an ambitious resettlement project called “colonisation indigène” (native colonisation). African families were, often forcibly, made to settle in newly founded model villages where they had to live and work according to French ideals of a rural but civilised lifestyle featuring mixed farming, private property, and nuclear families.243

241 The French radical socialist, Governor-General of French Indochina and member of several governments, Albert Sarraut, coined during his term as Minister of the Colonies the idea of “mise-en-valeur”: Albert Sarraut, La mise en valeur des colonies françaises: avec onze cartes en noir et en couleurs (Paris: Payot & Cie, 1923).
Yet, more relevant to Nepal than the development experiments in distant Africa was the transnational rural reconstruction movement in Asia, which evolved in the 1920s. The movement was made popular by an odd mix of actors with different motivations: Anglo-American protestant missionaries, colonial administrators, youth organisations as well as nationalistic reformers. The idea of the village as the fundamental organisational unit of the nation and hence as the key site for the revival and strength of the whole nation was particularly popular in republican China. Urban, often Western-educated intellectuals like the Confucius-influenced philosopher Liang Shu-ming and the Christian educationist Yen Yang-ch’u (also known as Jimmy Yen) advocated the idea of rural reconstruction not only as an alternative to the revolutionary Maoist ideology but also to the nationalist movement of Chiang Kai-shek. For rural reconstructionists, the foremost concern was not to reform the country’s institutions and structures but to develop the human potential. But Chinese rural reconstruction had a rather populist and patronising outlook and never achieved the status of a popular mass movement. It also lacked government support and was eventually wiped out by the Japanese invasion.244

The idea of people-centred rural reconstruction was also to be found in India, where the essentialist colonial discourse of “village India” as the “real India” merged with the idea of development planning.245 In the late colonial period, “the village” as a presumably backward and rudimentarily organised entity at-


245 About the political significance of the nineteenth century colonial discourse of “village India” as an unchanging, simple entity and as the “real India” see: Bernard S. Cohn, “African Models and Indian Histories,” in An Anthropologist among the Historians ant Other Essays, ed. Bernard S. Cohn (Delhi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 212-25.
tracted special interest of very different actors. The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) played a pioneering role through the introduction of rural development schemes in the 1910s. Based on the idea of model villages, the YMCA created so-called “light-house projects” where innovations were demonstrated, which, in theory, could be copied by the local population in surrounding villages.  

More widely known is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s vision of a village-centred social, political, and economic order. Against the background of his ideas of svadēśī (self-sufficiency) and svarāj (self-rule), as well as his idealised image of the Indian village as the soul of the nation, Gandhi promoted a bottom-up concept of development. The small-scale village economy was for him the fundament of a self-reliant Indian nation. Because Gandhi considered peasants to be too poor and ignorant to revive the villages on their own, he introduced “village workers.” Village workers were to act as agents of development and stimulate the people’s self-help capacities in his experimental village projects. These multi-purpose village leaders were expected to deal with many different problems of the villages, ranging from caste oppression to health, hygiene, and education. The Gandhian village experiments are often presented as a genuine Indian development model and as an alternative to Western development. But Gandhi never concealed his engagement with non-Indian intellectual traditions and that he also gained inspiration from development efforts outside South Asia.

Another prominent attempt of rural reconstruction through stimulation of the self-help potential of peasants was made by the colonial administrator Frank Lugard Brayne. In his function as late deputy commissioner of the Gurgaon District in Punjab, he created several model villages in the late 1920s. In his Gurgaon experiment, Brayne, like Gandhi, counted on local leadership and community cooperatives and wanted only minimal state intervention. But unlike Gandhi, he did not follow a bottom-up approach. He rather believed in what would later be called the “trickle-down” effect, meaning that over time the poorest classes will benefit from the growing prosperity and development of the richer classes. Brayne’s approach to peasants was highly patronising. According to him, peasants were not only ignorant but also dull, filthy, given to irrational outlooks, and without any ambition to improve their own lives. In view of the apparent incapacity of the peasants, he counted on the leadership and role-model of well-established local leaders, like local government officials, landlords, and school masters. In addition to these well-established local leaders, Brayne also embraced the support of the Red Cross for health projects and the Indian Boy Scouts for general village improvement work. Boy Scouts seemed to be the best allies to mobilise and motivate the villagers and to fight “backward” traditions by performing simple construction works and social duties. According to Brayne, with their youthful enthusiasm, they would not hesitate to dirty their hands for village work as “a good troop of Boy Scouts is afraid of no one, and will go straight through any custom or prejudice with a laugh and a shout.”

It was not unusual for rural reconstruction initiatives in late colonial India to maintain intensive relations with non-governmental organisations. The Gurgaon experiment was no exception in this regard. Boy Scouts, for example, were also appointed a significant role in Rabindranath Tagore’s Institute of Rural

---


Reconstruction in Shantiniketan. But other civil society groups also engaged in rural development projects like the YMCA, or the Poona Seva Sadan and the Servants of India Society, which also participated in Gandhian village projects.

Yet, despite the attempts to promote the ideas of rural reconstruction and self-help with the support of civil society organisations, all these projects failed to effectively mobilise the rural population and to achieve the desired results. But as Sinha points out, even though the targeted goals were rarely achieved, the projects still had an impact on the evolving post-colonial development regime in several respects: firstly, they raised the awareness for rural problems and planning and contributed to the establishment of rural development planning as a means of rule and control. Secondly, they produced “the village” as a universal category. The village seemed to be a very simple entity, which was more or less identically organised and structured all around the globe and could therefore be tackled with universal strategies by development planners. Last but not least, the late colonial rural reconstruction movement linked Samuel Smiles’s liberal principles of “self-help” with the idea of planned development and thus prefigured the post-colonial slogan of help for self-help.

### 3.2.2 Community Development

One of the most prominent post-colonial rural development projects, which directly built upon the experiences gained with Brayne’s Gurgaon project and Gandhian village workers, was the Etawah Pilot Project in the North Indian dis-

---

251 Prem Chand Lal, *Reconstruction and Education in Rural India: In the Light of the Programme Carried on at Sriniketan the Institute of Rural Reconstruction by Rabindranath Tagore* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), 84-92.
district of Etawah (Uttar Pradesh).\textsuperscript{256} The Etawah Pilot Project was launched as an experimental project in village development in 1948 by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and was designed and coordinated by the American town planner Albert Mayer. Mayer was stationed in India as an engineer of the United States army in the course of the Second World War. During that time, he became very interested in rural development and had the chance to meet and discuss his vision for village development with Jawaharlal Nehru. Soon after independence, Prime Minister Nehru invited Mayer to work out a village development scheme for India. After studying existing village development schemes in India, he realised that all the initiatives started in Uttar Pradesh in the inter-war period were not sustainable and had almost completely disappeared because they were not locally rooted and supported by the villagers. One such initiative, which he found particularly interesting to study, was Brayne’s Gurgaon project. He considered it to be a lesson on an incorrect approach. In his opinion, Brayne was striving for “too quick results at the expense of achieving built-in results.”\textsuperscript{257} Mayer criticised Brayne’s top-down approach and failure to establish trustworthy relations between village workers and villagers. In contrast, Mayer was very much impressed by Gandhi and his dedicated village workers. Gandhian village workers made enormous efforts to identify with the villagers by living among them and sharing the hardship of village life. Mayer had met Gandhi and “some of his saintly followers”\textsuperscript{258} and highly revered Gandhi’s teachings. Yet, he considered Gandhian village work not to be suitable for efficient large-scale development work since the “approach assumed the existence of more saintly people than the world contains.”\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{259} Mayer, \textit{Pilot Project, India: The Story of Rural Development at Etawah, Uttar Pradesh}. 102
As a consequence, for the Etawah Pilot Project, Mayer worked out a plan that combined Gandhian ideals of embedded, bottom-up village work with more systematic methods and modern but simple technologies. The core idea of the plan, which he not only discussed with Nehru but also with Gandhi, was to create a model project that offered “help to self-help” through trained village development workers. Mayer emphasised the need to “work with the people, not tell them,” or in other words, to use “dirty hands methods not arm-chair methods.”

After a few experimental years, the experiences gained with the Etawah Project became the basis of the large-scale community development programme that was launched all over India in 1952. Yet, the Etawah Project not only influenced Indian rural development policies, but had a general impact on the global concept of community development that evolved after World War II from its American and colonial antecedents. From the 1950s onward, community development (hereafter called CD) became a common concept for local development in both the so-called Third World as well as in Western countries. Thereby, the Indian programme was a popular object of study for working out community development programmes for other countries. Although its global variations were manifold, the core idea was the same everywhere. Trained community or village workers (mostly coming from outside) should work together with the local community on the grass-roots level. Thereby the self-help capacities of the locals should be activated, which would eventually lead to economic and social progress.

The Etawah Pilot Project however is not only worth mentioning because it proved to be a very popular, well-studied project, but also because it directly inspired village development in Nepal. Although the sources do not allow drawing a precise or direct line from Indian Community Development to the TVDP, it is known that Paul Rose, the director of USOM Nepal, had studied the Etawah Project before drawing his plans for village development in Nepal.262 Also the Nepalese community development expert, Tara Deva Bhattarai, studied cottage industries and development schemes in India from 1944–46. Thereafter, he joined the Department of Cottage Industries and later on the Department for Community Development, where he was responsible for the planning of the Nepalese village development scheme.263 Further, as will be shown here, the examination of the TVDP reveals many conceptual similarities to the Etawah Pilot Project and its late colonial precursors.

3.3 The Tribhuvan Village Development Programme

3.3.1 Village Nepal

The Tribhuvan Village Development Programme was conceptualised as a comprehensive multi-purpose programme based on the idea of community development. The planners of USOM Nepal emphasised that in accordance with the principles of community development, it was important to design the TVDP according to the villagers’ needs and interests since even the most reasonable measures would fail if villagers did not want them.264 Yet, the crux was that neither USOM nor the Nepalese Village Development Department carried out a survey in Nepalese villages to actually identify the Nepalese villagers’ wants and needs. In the 1950s, there was hardly any other data available about the situa-

263 Tara Deva Bhattarai, A Review of the Community Development Programme in Nepal (Lalitpur: Central Panchayat Training Institute, 1976), I.
tion in the rural areas of Nepal, which could have been used for the planning process. After all, the Nepalese government, together with the Ford Foundation, carried out a survey on small and village industries to sketch projects for the promotion of cottage industries in 1954. But this survey covered only the Kathmandu valley and few villages at its fringe. It certainly did not describe the conditions of all villages in the geographically highly diverse country of Nepal. However, the lack of data and knowledge about rural Nepal did not seem to bother the planners much. Because similar to the insights of the then common peasant studies, it was assumed that villages in all “underdeveloped” countries were organised according to the same, simple structure and that basically all villagers faced the same problems and needs, no matter whether they lived in Egypt, India, or Nepal. It therefore seemed appropriate to use apparently universal solutions to tackle apparently universal problems.

The village programme for Nepal was thus patterned according to existing models and surveys carried out in other countries. As vaguely formulated by USOM, “[i]nquiries into the needs felt by rural communities in various economically underdeveloped countries have indicated” that they want more and better land; employment; water for drinking and irrigation; roads; health services; and educational facilities. Consequently, the TVDP attempted to meet all these needs by a broad range of projects including:

- construction of dirt roads, primary school buildings, provisions of drinking water and latrines;

---

• agricultural extension services, demonstration farms, animal husbandry, provisions of improved seeds and tools, veterinaries;

• establishment and construction of health posts and dispensaries, preventive health services like vaccinations, malaria eradication, sanitation projects; and

• establishment of public schools and libraries; organisation of literacy classes and social education.

The obvious goal of these infrastructural, educational, and health projects was to raise the economic standard of living of the rural population. But the goals of community development were more far-reaching. In order to avoid only short-lived, superficial results, the TVDP also aimed at causing profound political and social changes through the manifold project activities. However, the TVDP did not address questions of land ownership and land reform, although these were obviously important issues for the economic situation of villagers. Instead, the programme planners emphasised that it is most crucial to carry out the works in a way that they raise the “awareness” of the villagers for development issues. Similar to the late colonial development projects in India, the projects of the TVDP should therefore not only bring material improvements but also promote the “spirit of self-help” and create an “energetic” and “enthusiastic” local leadership. Material improvements in village life were regarded as important. But USOM planners thought that “the completion of the first simple projects is often only the beginning of a process of development that gradually extends to all aspects of community life and effects significant changes in the attitude of the people, increasing their self-reliance and strengthening their ability to help themselves.”

One measure to achieve these rather abstract goals was the creation of community organisations. These organisations should activate the people’s in-

---

269 USOM, Nepal’s Program for Development through Village Development Service, 4. On the importance of raising “awareness” for development issues see also: Pindali, “Grāmīṇ Vikās.”
terest and participation in local affairs and thus, in the long run, promote a democratic and development-oriented system of local governance. Especially women and youth, who were so far little involved in public affairs, should be enabled to become actively involved in local politics and public works through community organisations.\textsuperscript{270} Similar to the YMCA and the Scouts in Indian village development, the TVDP foresaw the setup of a nationwide youth organisation called the “Four-Leaf-Club” (Chāra Pattī Club). The name “Four-Leaf-Club” was an allusion to the American “Four-H-Club” with its emblem of a four-leaf clover.\textsuperscript{271} The American Four-H-Club was founded in the early twentieth century as a youth volunteer organisation for agricultural extension work in the US. The four “H,” – standing for head, heart, hands, and health – were a reference to the educational principles of Patrick Geddes and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who had both promoted the “Three-H” (head, heart, hands) instead of the classic “Three-R” (reading, writing, arithmetic) in nineteenth century Europe.\textsuperscript{272} In community development in general, as well as in the TVDP in particular, youth were regarded as most receptive to change and therefore as the ideal, locally rooted drivers of change. Statistics on the TVDP show 350 Four-Leaf-Clubs with a total of almost 9000 members all over Nepal by 1961.\textsuperscript{273} But unlike the still existing Nepal Scout Organisation, which was founded irrespective of the requirements of TVDP and only subsequently became active in village development, the Four-Leaf-Club gained no ground in Nepal and does not exist anymore.\textsuperscript{274}


\textsuperscript{271} Dusenberry, Six Years of Village Development in Nepal, 16-17; USOM, Nepal’s Program for Development through Village Development Service, 14-15.


\textsuperscript{274} But even though the Nepal Scout Organisation still exists, Scouting in Nepal always remained a marginal and totally understudied phenomenon. On Scouting in Nepal see: Kharel, P., “Scouting
The idea of youth organisations for rural development well illustrates the development planners’ conviction for the need of a profound change of the villagers’ mentality – despite the fact that they actually knew little about the lifeworld of Nepalese villagers. Of how little use the generalised concept of ‘village Nepal’ was, became obvious when the TVDP failed to gain ground in the villages. Nonetheless, similar to the colonial discourse of “village India,” the discourse of “village Nepal” as the embodiment of backwardness, lethargy, and fatalism became a persistent commonplace. The idea of “village Nepal” as the “real Nepal” and the representation of Nepal as a nation of villagers was an intrinsic feature of the Nepalese development discourse of the 1950s and was reproduced frequently during the subsequent decades.275 The following statement of Minister Gyawali made in 1972 during a seminar for panchayat development instructors illustrates the persistence of the village discourse, which had been outlined in the course of the TVDP in the 1950s:

As we all know that our's is a country of village and majority of the populace live in villages. The habits and behaviour of our village people are conditioned by the traditional values, thinking and beliefs and do not change according to changing times; since traditionality is not in consonance with our goals and aspiration as developing country. The training centres, therefore, have an important role to play in bringing about change in their traditional thinking, beliefs and apathetic attitude towards life.276

Even though the rhetoric was much less harsh and less racist than in Brayne’s publications, the underlying discourse on villagers in Nepal was basically the same as in colonial India. The villagers were portrayed as apathetic, fatalistic, ignorant, and without any sense for improving their own situation and were perceived as objects to be awakened, educated, disciplined, and developed by district officers and village development workers, who were in turn regarded as the extension of the central bureaucracy.

3.3.2 The Multitalented Village Development Worker

The analysis of the village development plans shows many similarities to community development programmes elsewhere. Yet, beyond the ambitious goals and flowery rhetoric, the practice looked rather different than the plans. One of the first major obstacles was the sheer lack of adequately trained professionals who could conduct the projected development works in the districts and villages. This was a serious problem as community development was largely dependent on the performance of village development workers (VDWs). Therefore the programme had to start with the training of VDWs before it could reach out to the villages.

The first training centre for village development workers was established in Kathmandu in July 1952. This was the very first institution in Nepal with an explicitly stated function of training development professionals. The aim was to train about 4000 VDWs within five years. Fifty students enrolled in the first of the four-month training course. For the second course, the duration was extended to six months and the intake of students was increased to a hundred in order to accelerate the setup of the village programme.277 The number of trainees slightly increased in the following years and two additional training centres were opened in towns bordering India, at Birgunj in 1955 and Nepalgunj in 1956. Because male VDWs were not able to perform all kinds of village works, especially healthcare

for women, a women workers school was opened in Kathmandu in November 1956, with the assistance of the Ford Foundation. As is the case with most data on the TVDP, the number of female trainees varies from report to report. But for the first year of operation they all report about 30 women workers. According to data provided by USAID, 860 male VDWs, 120 women workers, and few other development professionals such as Block Youth Officers and Block Development Officers had been trained by 1962.

Even though the figures are not very precise, it is clear that the projected number of 4000 VDWs could not be reached since it turned out to be difficult to recruit enough trainees. The criteria for admission to the training centres were the “Three-Rs,” meaning basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills, as well as the willingness “to work with their hands,” and to work wherever assigned after training. Women workers only needed to fulfil the last two requirements but did not have to be literate. Hence, the admission requirements were not very high. In comparison, to become a VDW in the Etawah Project, one needed to have at least a diploma in agriculture. However, the situation in Nepal was different. With an estimated overall literacy rate of only two per cent in the early 1950s, it was difficult even to recruit enough candidates with the basic “Three-Rs” skills. Nonetheless, the trainees, who had hardly any previous formal education, faced a very demanding curriculum. They had to go through a six-month crash course in the following subjects:

- Agronomy

---

• Entomology
• Horticulture
• Agricultural engineering
• Irrigation
• Animal and poultry husbandry
• Health and sanitation
• Adult literacy instructions
• Youth organisation

As though this curriculum was not challenging enough, the VDWs were also expected to be familiar with “basic principles of rural sociology and psychology.”

This idea implied the existence of a specific, universal psyche of peasants that could and should be studied before working in the field. In addition to the broad knowledge that the VDWs had to acquire within a very short span of time, the programme also required impeccable character traits: “the workers must be leaders, teachers, and thoroughly inspired with the program and able to inspire others. The worker must be honest, trustworthy, sympathetic, ambitious, and willing to perform the most menial tasks with their own hands.” In other words, a VDW had to have no reservations in mingling with the villagers and was expected not to appear as a government official but as a “friend and well-wisher” of the village people. This image of the ideal village worker reminds one of the Etawah Pilot Project, which emphasised “dirty hands methods” and

284 Dusenberry, Six Years of Village Development in Nepal, 5.
285 It also reminds of the idea of the French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon of the existence of a “collective mind” of the “crowds” that was taken up in Henry Ayrout’s famous study on Egyptian peasants. See: Mitchell, Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity, 129-31.
286 USOM, Nepal’s Program for Development through Village Development Service, 2.
wanted the worker to be a “capable, reliable friend of the village and the villager.”

The job requirements were very demanding. Moreover, the qualifications of the VDWs were crucial for the success of the village programme. Since it was the VDW’s task to actually transmit the whole programme from the planning administration to the villagers, the result of the TVDP very much depended upon their performance. The planners further wanted to offer a two-way channel so that not only instructions from the planning ministry could be transmitted to the villages but also the needs of the villagers could be communicated through the VDWs to the central administration. In the 1970s, the World Bank and many other development agencies popularised this idea under the buzzword of “participation” and promoted it as an innovative approach in development aid. But the villagers’ participation as partners in the TVDP remained rhetorical.

Tara Deva Bhattarai, the director of the Village Development Department summarised the complex and difficult role of VDWs as follows:

- He has to serve as the stimulator, the catalyst and spark plug [of development].
- He is the surveyor, the analyst, the planner, organizer and coordinator.
- He is expected to eradicate evil, educate people, change their behavior to bring light and prosperity in the rural masses.
- He has to create the conditions to make himself successful in his mission.
- He has to be sociologist, psychologist, educator and economist.

---

293 Bhattarai, A Review of the Community Development Programme in Nepal, 38.
Despite the detailed account of the desired qualities of the ideal village worker, the actual workers remain widely anonymous in all the reports. VDWs appear as numbers in the programme’s statistics but there are no lists of names, which could, for example, give hints on their family backgrounds. The reports revealed only little information about who the trained village workers actually were, how they were recruited, or how they experienced the programme. For example, the evaluation report of the Himalayan Studies Centre claims that 92 per cent of the VDWs joined the programme because they wanted to serve the nation and the villages, and 54 per cent were motivated by the employment opportunity offered by the TVDP. 294 But the data is based on a sample of only 19 VDWs and does not give much additional information on the village workers. Thus, like the “universal villager,” the VDW remained part of an anonymous collective.

Apart from the general negligence of record keeping and the consequent low number of documents on the TVDP and on VDWs, there might be two more specific reasons for the absence of information about VDWs. Firstly, village workers were on the lowest level of the hierarchy of development professionals in Nepal. Unlike planners in the central bureaucracy and foreign advisors, the VDWs were the ones who had to reach out to the villages and “dirty their hands.” Although the importance of their work was acknowledged, they were rather regarded as tools to perform the predefined plans than as individuals with their own interests and own ideas about development. 295 Secondly, the Tribhuvan Village Development Programme never was never really fully realised and hardly met its targeted goals. Strikingly, the descriptions in the reports are not only very vague about the VDWs, but also about the actual experiences on the ground. Keeping the reports very general and focusing on the concepts and tar-

295 On the “disappearance” of aid professionals in development reports see Fechter, and Hindman, “Introduction,” 4-6.
gets rather than on the experiences on the ground might have been one strategy to gloss over the disparity between the plans and the actual achievements.

3.4 Diverging Reviews of Village Development

The goals and scope of the village programme were very ambitious and challenging. They required unrealistically high professional skills and strong personalities from the little trained VDWs. Most of the official reports on the TVDP drew a rather glossy picture of the programme and praised its achievements.296

Twenty years after the termination of the programme, the Kathmandu based research group ‘Himalayan Studies Centre’ formally evaluated the programme on behalf of The United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The evaluation report presents a conspicuously positive account and illustrates the discursive moves to conceal the problems and difficulties of the TVDP.297 It highlights the concepts and aims of the TVDP and hides behind statistical data, while it omits details on concrete accomplishments and experiences of villagers and village workers. However, a careful reading of the evaluation report brings the positive impression in a relative view. The statistics were based on only a small sample of interviewed villagers and village workers and many interviewees did not answer all the questions of the survey. The positive conclusions on the success of the programme were expressed in vague formulations and gave only a superficial idea of the concrete achievements and impacts of the TVDP. It for example concludes that the village development programme “aroused a great deal of consciousness among the villagers. They were almost jerked out of their stupor. The importance of education was thrust upon them.

296 Especially official accounts from the Nepalese administration were euphemistic and propagandistic. See for example the article in the official journal of the Nepalese Ministry of Planning: Pindali, “Grāmīṇ Vikās.” Professor J. E. Blackwell, who acted as Community Development advisor to the Nepalese Ministry for Home Panchayat in 1966, uncritically reproduced the government’s propaganda in a scientific paper of the University of Missouri: Blackwell, “A Report on Village and Panchayat Development in Nepal.”

Their aspirations increased." But the report gives no concrete examples to show how the evaluators came up with this conclusion. Moreover, if one makes the effort to read the full report, it becomes noticeable that on pages 84 to 91 – in between the presentation of the achievements and the conclusion – the evaluation team puts its positive findings into perspective. On these few pages, the evaluators point out many shortcomings and constraints of the programme, such as the poor qualification of VDWs and the lack of mobilisation and participation among the villagers. They, for instance, state that the programme “could not receive spontaneous response of the people in desired measure which was considered fundamental in the conduct of the project." Consequently, “development continued to be the concern of the administration instead of the populace.” These critics leave a rather negative impression about the success of the whole village development scheme. But regarding how covertly the Himalayan Studies Centre presented its critique in the otherwise positive evaluation report, the report also evokes the impression that it rather served to sanctify American development initiatives in Nepal than to present an honest, in-depth analysis of village development.

No formal evaluation was carried out from the time when the TVDP was still in operation. But between 1960 and 62 three studies were carried out on development issues in Nepal, all of which included an analysis of the TVDP and on the role of VDWs. They all assessed the TVDP and the village worker’s performance from different angles. The following comparison of the three studies will shed light on the function of reports in general and of the figure of the VDW in particular for the formation of a specific development discourse that evolved in Nepal from the 1950s onward.


The authors of the three studies had all very different backgrounds and motivations: John C. Cool was USAID Community Development Advisor to Nepal; Eugene Bramer Mihaly was a PhD student of the London School of Economics; and Tara Deva Bhattarai was director of the Community Development Department of Nepal and a postgraduate student of Michigan University (US). All three studies recognised the central role of VDWs in the village development programme, though they all came to very different conclusions on the performance of VDWs and the success of the programme.

3.4.1 Cool: An Effective Stimulus
The most positive account was given by the USAID Community Development Advisor John C. Cool. Cool was an anthropologist by training and had worked in other developing countries prior to his arrival in Nepal in December 1961. He was appointed as the USAID’s Chief of Village Development. Soon after his arrival he learned about the Nepal government’s plans to end the collaboration with USAID in the field of village development and to continue the previous programme under the new slogan of “Panchayat Development.” Only three months after his arrival in Nepal, Cool presented a report to the government of Nepal on the “Panchayat System and Self-Help Development.” In this report he analysed the general scope and aims of village development and the efforts made in Nepal to date. He drew a positive picture of the village development programme and reported that the “impact of the Village Development Worker upon the rural people has been much greater than is usually recognized.” Without supporting his findings with examples, Cool concluded that due to the efforts of the VDWs, the villagers had for the first time in history experienced

“that their government ‘cared’; that it was concerned about their future.” Similar to Frank Lugard Brayne in his 1920s village development programmes in Northern India, Cool portrayed villagers as the quintessential embodiment of “backwardness,” as immature objects who could neither speak for themselves nor develop themselves without help from outside. In his view, Nepalese villagers were ignorant, irrational and had “passive and fatalistic attitudes towards their lives.” But Cool was confident that the village development programme offered the proper means to overcome these conditions.

Cool’s analysis was based on the assumption that before the launch of the TVDP, literally no development had taken place in Nepalese villages and that villagers had no ambition to improve their own lives. According to Cool, the great achievement of the VDWs work was the successful introduction of the concepts of self-help and community cooperation, and even more importantly, the stimulation of a sense for development because through the TVDP “a large number of rural people have become receptive to the idea of change.” However, John C. Cool’s report only vaguely describes the claimed positive achievements of VDWs. He did not give concrete examples or figures to illustrate the VDWs’ performance and did not explain how he came up with his conclusions. The report also does not reveal much about the actual practice and implementation of the village development programme. But what Cool’s euphemistic assessment of the American aided programme clearly did was to legitimate past USOM interventions and, in keeping with his job related expectations, to pave the way for future USAID activities in Nepal.

3.4.2 Mihaly: A Complete Failure

A much more negative picture of the VDWs’ achievements was drawn by Eugene Bramer Mihaly. Mihaly was a PhD student in political sciences at the London School of Economics when he came to Nepal in 1962 for a one-year field research on the efficacy of foreign aid in Nepal. He was not employed by any aid agency and did not have to legitimise the policy of a certain agency or to please the Nepalese government as Cool had to. Mihaly did not believe in community development as a useful tool to develop Nepal because the “programme’s assumptions did not fit the facts of Nepalese life.” He thought that “Nepal was even more primitive than most of the other countries aided at that time” and, hence, was not surprised that the trained VDWs failed to meet the programme’s goals. He recognised the VDW’s crucial role because they were not only responsible for the implementation of the programme but were also the “primary element in the channel of communication” between the planners and the villagers. According to Mihaly, the VDWs failed to fulfil their difficult tasks because of several reasons. One reason was that most of the village workers originated from Kathmandu. They had little knowledge of agriculture and equally little understanding of the peasants’ lives and problems. He argued that their idealism usually faded after their arrival in the villages where they were confronted with an incomprehensible and hostile environment. VDWs were not able to mingle with the villagers and a lot of them quit their job after merely working a short period of time in the programme. Mihaly regarded not the lack of skills and knowledge of the VDWs as the greatest impediment of the programme but the Nepalese traditions. Even trainees with adequate educational and social background would lack the necessary enthusiasm because proactive behaviour was suppressed in the Nepalese society where “the young lived under a strict paternal-
ism at home and initiative was discouraged by tradition.”\footnote{Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study, 36.} The “problem” of tradition seemed even more compelling on the side of the “recipients” of aid as Mihaly detected a strong “resistance to aid”\footnote{Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study.} among villagers. He clearly disagreed with Paul W. Rose’s assumption that Nepalese villagers were “aching for change” and was instead convinced that village people “throughout the underdeveloped world,” including Nepal, “were not receptive to change.”\footnote{Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study.} One of the main reasons for the alleged conservatism of Nepalese villagers seemed to be the “widespread fatalism often found in Hindu society” where “attempts to interfere with the unchanging cycle of life were sacrilegious.”\footnote{Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study.} A second, and according to Mihaly even more important reason was the power structure in the rural areas, which were dominated by “landlords who held their tenants in near slavery.”\footnote{Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study.} The powerful landowners rejected any kind of innovation in the agrarian society, as they feared that changes could be a threat to their position.

Hence, Mihaly reproduced the same stereotypes of the fatalistic rural society as John Cool. But unlike Cool, he also blamed the central government. Even if a VDW was able to cope with the power structure in the villages and were able to find out the needs of villagers, it was of no use to transmit them to the central administration. Because, as Mihaly argued, it was very unlikely that this would lead to any useful project in the villages since the central government was not truly or sincerely concerned about what was going on in the countryside. Thus, according to Mihaly, even the most dedicated village development worker was condemned to fail.

\footnote{Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study, 36.  
Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study.  
Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study.  
Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study, 37.}
3.4.3 Bhattarai: A Source of Frustration

The Nepalese expert on community development, Tara Deva Bhattarai, also detected a problem of distance between VDWs and village people. However, he explored the problem in greater depth than Mihaly and did not merely explain it by rural conservatism in “underdeveloped” countries. Bhattarai himself made a model career as a civil servant and development expert. After graduating from Banaras Hindu University in 1944, he was assigned by the Rana government to visit different places in India in order to study cottage industries and to explore the possibilities for promoting such institutions in Nepal. After his approximately two-year study-trip, he joined the civil service as Superintendent to Cottage Industries in 1946. In the course of the launch of the TVDP, Bhattarai was transferred to the newly created Community Development Department, first as its assistant director, and later, after some further studies in the USA, as its director. In 1960, Bhattarai submitted a research paper on the experiences of community development in Nepal for his masters degree in sociology at the Michigan State University. In this paper he did not locate the reasons for failures of the TVDP in the rural society but in problems inherent to the system of village development planning in Nepal. Like the other two analysts, he also regarded the VDW as the key figure in the whole village development scheme. He was well aware of the high demands on the multi-purpose workers and identified several sources of frustration, which obstructed the work of VDWs.

One problem was that the VDW had to stimulate self-help motivation from grassroots, according to the needs of the villagers. But they were sent to

---

316 Bhattarai, *A Review of the Community Development Programme in Nepal*. This report had already been written in 1960 and submitted as ’B’-plan paper to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Michigan State University (USA) for the degree of Master of Science. It was only published in 1976 by the Central Panchayat Training Institute of Nepal. Bhattarai’s research paper serves as the main source of this sub-chapter.

317 The Benares Hindu University (BHU) was a hotbed for nationalists during the Indian independence movement. Yet, there are no indications whether Bhattarai was involved in the Indian independence movement or other political activities during his studies at BHU.

the villages with an externally determined, rigid schedule of targets he had to achieve and were not left with much opportunity to address the needs of villagers. Another source of frustration was that the VDWs were strangers in the villages and were regarded with suspicion by the locals. Even if they managed to make contacts with local leaders, they usually failed to motivate them for community work. VDWs rather ended up rendering service in the interest of the powerful local leaders. Bhattarai stated that it was too risky for VDWs not to obey the local leaders, as according to the programme’s regulation, it was the local leader’s task to regularly report about the VDWs performance to the higher authorities. In addition to these problems, VDWs had also insufficient training and were not qualified for most of the tasks they were expected to perform. VDWs were mostly left alone with their challenging tasks and hardly received enough support from the villagers or the government institutions. In addition to the excessive demands and lack of support, the work was unsatisfying because VDWs were paid a meagre salary. And last but not least, the goals of the village programme itself were often unclear to the VDWs and many of them did not really know what they had to do.

All these frustrating factors compelled VDWs to leave their jobs, Bhattarai concluded. Yet, he also noticed that different levels of expectations also put pressure on the VDWs to stick to their job. First of all, the family wanted a VDW to keep his assignment because government jobs were associated with prestige and elevated social status. The prestige gained with this government job seemed to be more important than a good salary. Secondly, the community expected a VDW to stay in his job as they experienced certain benefits through the community development programme. And thirdly, also the Community Development Department expected VDWs to stay in their jobs, as they were the ones whom they could delegate concrete tasks and the ones to connect the Department with the villages. Bhattarai argued that most VDWs could not risk losing their jobs in order to maintain their social and professional status and oblige these manifold
expectations. Therefore, a VDW “generally manipulates the reports which he sends just to keep up his job”\footnote{Bhattarai, A Review of the Community Development Programme in Nepal, 39.} to the Community Development Department. This meant that VDWs presented the results of the village development programme in a much glossier colour than they actually were. Obviously this did not serve to improve the quality and real outputs of the village development scheme. Hence, Bhattarai called for more support of the VDWs in order to make their jobs more attractive and to increase the success of village development in Nepal.\footnote{Bhattarai, A Review of the Community Development Programme in Nepal, 38-44.}

3.4.4 The Common Denominator

The three analysts, Cool, Mihaly, and Bhattarai had all different backgrounds and motivations and thus, they drew very different pictures of the village development programme and the performance of VDWs. The most positive, yet also the most superficial account was given by John C. Cool. It is noticeable from his vague descriptions and formulations that he was not well acquainted with the situation in Nepal. His report rather suggests that he attempted to gloss over the impact of the United States development aid in Nepal and to facilitate future cooperation of USAID with the Nepalese government. A much more critical account was given by Eugene B. Mihaly who refused to assume that villagers were receptive to change. Yet, although he assessed the achievements of Village Development and VDWs very differently than Cool, both Americans argued within the same discourse of development. According to the mainstream modernisation theory, they based their assumptions on an endogenetic concept of development and located the obstacles for economic and social progress within the local culture and society. For both the “fatalistic” society with its many “backward” traditions seemed to be the main challenge to development in Nepal. This was no revolutionary conclusion, as the rhetoric of “backward” traditions as obsta-
cles of development had become a commonplace in the post-war development discourse.321

Bhattarai also recognised certain social and cultural constraints, namely local power structures and allegiance to ones kin and superiors. Yet, he drew a different picture of the VDWs’ situation and stressed on the problems of the system than of culture. He blamed neither the villagers nor the VDWs for failures but pointed out the excessive demands put on them. Bhattarai’s interpretation of the village development programme, however, did not fundamentally differ from the two American’s approach. All of them reduced the villagers to passive recipients of aid who were not willing or able to improve their own lives. They agreed on the need of change through stimulation from outside, which was best done by trained VDWs. Further, by making “the underdeveloped village” their object of study, they all contributed to the construction of “village Nepal” as the foremost synonym of backwardness. They produced a binary image of rural and urban Nepal, which will be reinforced over and over again throughout the Panchayat Period.

Another similarity of the three analyses is the omission of the political context of the TVDP. The connection of development interventions and geo-strategic interests was no secret in the 1950s and was most obvious in Chinese and Indian aided road construction projects in Nepal.322 Nonetheless, even Mihaly did not consider the TVDP to be a political programme, although the main argument of his PhD thesis was that foreign aid serves foremost as an instrument in Cold War politics. Yet, as I will discuss in the following section, even the seemingly a-political village programme was marked by the political struggle of gaining influence in the Himalayas.

3.5 Termination of the Village Programme

As I have pointed out, the TVDP was designed on the grounds of experiences gained outside Nepal. Hence, it is no surprise that its plans did not match the situation in Nepal and consequently, the implementation of the programme turned out to be far more difficult than presumed. However, misconception of the situation in Nepal was not the only reason why the programme never fully deployed. Another problem was the lack of continuity and consistency among the involved institutions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the TVDP was initially planned as a programme of the Nepalese government. The USOM was only assigned an advisory role but the Americans took over a more active role even before the actual launch of the programme. The TVDP was then conceptualised as a US-Nepalese joint programme with both an American and a Nepalese co-director sharing the lead. This “counterpart system” became a common model to manage foreign aided development projects during the upcoming decades, not only in Nepal but also in other developing countries. The basic idea of the counterpart system was to share the same position between a foreign and a Nepalese expert and thus to create a partnership on equal basis. The sources are not clear about the reason why the USOM decided to engage in the operational level of the TVDP. But as indicated by USOM director Paul Rose, the Americans considered the Nepalese administration as not yet ready to carry out its own large-scale development programme.\textsuperscript{323} This reorganisation of the programme, which happened even before it began operations, was only the first one in a series of reorganisations. The programme’s lead was very inconsistent throughout the whole project period and the governmental responsibility as well as the foreign partners changed several times until the programme was eventually phased out in 1962. One reason was the political and bureaucratic instability on the Nepalese side.\textsuperscript{324} A series of new institutions for rural development emerged during the 1950s and the responsibility for the TVDP switched from one to the other.

\textsuperscript{323} Rose, A little Country with Big Problems: Report on the Nepal TCA Program, 3-5.
\textsuperscript{324} The struggles of the political parties and the monarchy are discussed in chapter four.
Another reason for the inconsistency of the programme’s lead was the rivalry between foreign donors. The USOM was Nepal’s first foreign partner in village development, but Nepal was not reluctant to accept other partners. In 1954, the American Ford Foundation became a minor partner in Nepalese village development. It focused on the promotion of village industries such as fish farming, tourism, or textile printing, in and around the Kathmandu valley. The USOM accepted the new partner because the two American organisations widely agreed on concepts and methods and the Ford Foundation’s involvement did not affect the existing plans and works.

The USOM, however, saw constraints to the village programme when India and its newly created Indian Aid Mission (IAM) became involved in Nepalese village development. India joined in the programme as an official partner only in 1958 but its influence was already apparent, as many Nepalese administrators and instructors of training centres had been sent to India for studying village development. The Himalayan Studies Centre stated that since the IAM joined in, the programme had converted “into a triangular club pulling at times in different directions,” because the “USOM and the Indian Aid Mission did not prescribe the same nostrum for the uplift of the village life in Nepal.” The first two big foreign donors in Nepal, the USA and India, competed for spheres of influence. But the USOM had to accept the IAM as a project partner as the then powerful Nepali Congress Party favoured strong ties with India. The IAM had not only convinced Nepal to join the programme due to its own experiences in village development, which seemed to be much more relevant to Nepal than experiences gained in the North-American countryside. Moreover, India had offered a

---

substantial grant of USD 5.9 millions and a range of well-trained community development advisors to support the TVDP.\textsuperscript{328} In line with its general development policy towards Nepal, the IAM strongly focused on infrastructural projects and administrative reforms. The Himalayan Studies Centre lamented in their evaluation that the TVDP gained a clear Indian outlook through the involvement of the IAM. The former “Village Development Centres” were renamed as “Village Development Blocks” and headed by a “Block Development Officer” like the Indian model. Many of these Development Blocks were backed by Indian advisors or even directly managed by Indian experts in the fields of agriculture, health, cooperatives, animal husbandry, and social education.\textsuperscript{329} It is uncertain whether this renaming really took place only after India joined the programme because the name “Development Blocks” already appears in the draft of the first National Five-Year Plan of 1956.\textsuperscript{330} However, the USOM disliked the new dominant role of the IAM as not only Nepalese officers but also previously influential experts of the USOM were receded to the background. The official history of the USAID in Nepal portrays the competition between the two big donors as human-oriented American versus “bricks and mortar”-oriented Indian aid and claims that the Nepalese officers were unhappy with “India’s patronizing attitudes.”\textsuperscript{331} The Himalayan Studies Centre drew a similar picture of India’s dominant role and concluded that the “single most important factor, which could be held responsible for the premature demise of the project was the crisscross of USOM and the Indian Aid Mission”\textsuperscript{332}

\textsuperscript{330} Nepal, \textit{Draft Five-Year Plan: A Synopsis}.
However, this analysis leaves out the Nepalese government’s own interest and does not fully explain how and why the TVDP was eventually terminated and replaced by a new village development scheme in 1962. The available sources reveal only sparse and ambiguous information about the end of TVDP. Whereas the Himalayan Studies Centre further stated that “India withdrew from the project first and the USOM involvement in the project was also terminated at the end of 1962,” the USAID chronologists claim that “[i]n the late 1950s, USOM decided to phase out village development assistance [...] and in 1962 [the Government of Nepal] asked India to withdraw from the Village Development Project.” One can therefore only speculate whether the Indians and Americans voluntarily withdrew from the village development programme, whether they pushed each other aside, or whether the Nepalese government wanted them to quit the programme. But considering the development policy of King Mahendra, it seems that it was no coincidence that the TVDP eventually came to an abrupt stop after he had taken over full power in a coup d’état in December 1960.

As described in chapter two, the monarchy under King Mahendra gained increasing power throughout the 1950s while the quarrelling political parties weakened each other. In view of the political crisis, Mahendra not only demonstrated his political ambitions in internal affairs but also by presenting himself as a self-conscious statesman on the international stage. One of his first official acts after ascending the throne was to participate in the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung. Later in the same year, Nepal became a member of the United Nations. Both acts underlined Nepal’s status as a fully sovereign state. Under King Mahendra, Nepal also appeared more self-conscious in foreign aid relations. It accepted assistance of various donor countries not only to finance its state-building process but also to counterbalance the influence of the two most domi-
nant aid donors, the United States and India. In 1955, Nepal and China entered diplomatic relations and one year later signed an aid agreement. The agreement assured that China would provide a generous free grant of 60 million Indian Rupees “without whatever conditions attached thereto,” and that “Nepal shall have entire freedom in utilizing the [...] monies and goods and the Government of the People’s Republic of China shall not interfere.” Thus, China, unlike the USA and India, showed at that time no intention to place its own experts and workers in Nepal. In the same year as the Nepal-China aid agreement, Nepal also established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the USA’s biggest rival. The two nations exchanged ambassadors and signed an aid agreement in 1959, one year after King Mahendra’s first visit to Moscow. The Soviet aided projects did not directly interfere with existing Indian and American programmes but both the USOM and the IAM, clearly objected to the Soviet aided East-West Highway project. They argued on the grounds that the road project seemed not to be cost-effective but their critical stance was most probably also motivated by the USA’s general interest of reducing the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence and India’s fear of losing control over Nepal’s road network.

335 Rose, and Dial, “Can a Ministate find true Happiness in a World Dominated by Protagonist Powers? The Nepal Case.”
338 To this date, Nepal’s only trunk road was the Indian aided Tribhuvan Rajpath connecting Kathmandu with the Indian plains. But Nepal had a strong interest in building a road network and welcomed the idea of a transversal road, which made it possible to connect different cities in the Terai without the need to cross the Indian boarder. The Nepalese Government favoured the project even more when it turned out to be of high strategic significance during the early 1960s Nepali Congress Party insurgency. Cf. Whelpton, A History of Nepal, 137-38.
It is remarkable how the Nepalese government, and especially King Mahendra positioned itself amidst the four rivalling powers USA, India, China, and Soviet Union after having zealously avoided foreign interferences for more than a century. The political parties were well aware of the risk involved in this foreign aid power game. But the advantages seemed to clearly outweigh the risks. In view of the reconfiguration of the world order in the postcolonial period and the increasing significance of global governance through international organisations, it was no option to reinstall a Rana-style isolation policy and to abstain from foreign aid. However, due to its instable domestic policy, the Nepalese government did not follow a thoroughly consistent balancing policy. But its foreign policy of the 1950s and early 60s was still effective in regard to the increasing inflow of foreign aid without allowing a single donor to gain a monopolistic position.

King Mahendra’s ambitions became also visible in the field of village development. He reorganised the whole village programme in the course of the establishment of the “Partyless Panchayat Democracy.”\(^{340}\) With its American and Indian outlook, the TVDP did not bring much advantage to the new panchayat government and its nation building policy. However, under the new system, “the village” as a focal point for governmental intervention and as the embodiment of “backwardness” did not disappear from the national development agenda. The TVDP was therefore soon after reborn as the clearly nationalistic “Panchayat Development Programme.” As Dhungel (1975) in his historical analysis of rural development argues, “the Village Development Scheme was reorganised on the basis of political consideration without assessing the success and failures of the programme.”\(^{341}\) Similar to the previous renaming that had underlined the Indian dominance in the programme, renaming was once again a political act to demonstrate the Royal Government’s stake in rural development. The Village

\(^{339}\) Mihaly, Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal: A Case Study, 117.

\(^{340}\) See chapter 2.5.1.

Development Blocks were thus renamed as Panchayat Development Centres, the Ministry of Development became the Panchayat Ministry, the Village Development Department ended up as the Panchayat Development Department, and the Village Development Worker was now called the Panchayat Development Worker.\textsuperscript{342}

The task of the new Panchayat Development Workers was twofold. On one hand, they had to perform development works similar to the village workers of the old programme like providing basic health care, or introducing new farming techniques. As the new programme was still based on the principles of community development, they were also made responsible for stimulating “self-help activities” and changing villagers’ attitudes. On the other hand, Panchayat Development Workers were assigned the task of helping in building up of the local government administration all over Nepal and to promote the royalist panchayat ideology. The curriculum of the new training schools for village workers therefore granted high priority to lessons and instructions on the panchayat system. This means, apart from technical skills, the Panchayat Development Workers had to learn about the role of monarchy, the functioning of the state system and about what was considered to be the national Nepalese culture. Hence, the Panchayat Development Workers were assigned the double role of agents of development as well as of agents of nation and state building.\textsuperscript{343} The apparently genuine Nepalese character of the panchayat concept of village development is questionable though. As already indicated, apart from the more nationalistic rhetoric and new state-building activities, the programme did not change significantly. The plans still reflected the then common globalised discourse of development and modernisation with key-concepts such as self-help, take-off, or self-reliance. It was the Panchayat Workers’ task to transmit a globalised concept of village

\textsuperscript{342} Dhungel, “Rural Development Programmes in Nepal: A Historical Perspective.”

\textsuperscript{343} Panchayat Training Institute, \textit{Abstracts of the First Annual All Nepal Panchayat Instructors’ Seminar (February 15 - March 1 1968)} (Rampur, Nepal: Panchayat Training Institute, 1968).
organisation and development with a nationalistic appearance from the central planning institutions to the rural areas. Hence, they were assigned a challenging role both as agents of globalisation and agents of nationalisation.

3.6 Impacts

The Tribhuvan Village Development Programme, Nepal’s first national rural development scheme, was based on the principles of community development. Community development had its ideological roots in the late colonial period but was in a sense ahead of the times with its approach of human-centred, grass-roots development and its principles of self-reliance, local ownership, and decentralisation. These principles are commonly associated with the 1970s when the “small is beautiful” debate inspired more people-oriented, small-scale development projects. But community development was also based on problematic assumptions of a specific, common mentality of villagers throughout the “underdeveloped world” and ignored local power structures and the diversity of rural societies. The contradictory approach of an externally determined programme claiming to enable self-reliant, bottom-up development made village development an abortive endeavour. Thus, the village development worker, who was conceptualised as the key figure of the programme, was doomed to failure in his role as an agent of development and a broker between the central government and village people. Yet, although the TVDP failed to meet most of its targeted goals, the village scheme still had its unplanned impacts, which were considerable nevertheless.

Firstly, the TVDP shaped the discourse on “village Nepal.” Very similar to the discourse of “village India” projected as the “real India,” it became a commonplace in the 1950s to define Nepal as a nation of villages and villagers.

---


345 About the discourse of “village India” as part of the British theory of rule see: Cohn, “African Models and Indian Histories,” 212-25.
This went hand in hand with the labelling of “the village” as the embodiment of backwardness and the identification of Nepal as a quintessential underdeveloped country. From now on, “the village” became an arena of national interests and a battlefield for donor rivalries without much real attention given to the complex realities of village life. It is striking that in spite of the focus on them, villages and villagers were neither subjects nor even real objects of the discourse but merely the site on which the Nepalese government and foreign donors presented themselves. Though it was probably not a fully deliberate strategy, it can be argued that the focus on “the village” was a welcoming means for Nepalese elites in the central bureaucracy to pass on the label of “backwardness” to the villagers because it enabled them to identify themselves as more “developed” in comparison to the “common” Nepalese people.346

Secondly, the TVDP paved the way for the nationalistic Panchayat Development Programme of the 1960s. The TVDP promoted a globalised concept of modernisation in the form of community development and started to expand the national administration to the rural areas. The subsequent Panchayat Development Programme continued these processes and added a nationalistic dimension to the village scheme. In the wake of the “Nepalisation” of the Western-dictated discourse of modernisation, the village workers became agents of nationalisation as well as agents of globalisation as they had to convey the hybrid ideology of Panchayat Development to rural Nepal. Hence, village workers became low-level assistances in the set-up of the nationalistic developmental state of the Panchayat Era.

Thirdly, the TVDP introduced development work as a new professional field in Nepal. The training centres for village development workers were the first institutions to educate development professionals in Nepal and set certain standards and expectations for the new profession. Although the village workers

346 On the self-fashioning of Nepalese elites as “developed” by distinguishing themselves from “underdeveloped” villagers see: Pigg, “Inventing Social Categories Through Place: Social Representations and Development in Nepal.”
of the TVDP widely failed to fulfil their function as local development brokers, the development planners in the Nepalese ministries and in foreign agencies recognised the crucial role of “low-level” development workers for the implementation of projects and for conveying ideas and ideals from the bureaucracy to the people. Thus, since then, development “field work” offered new job opportunities for the Nepalese middle class with basic schooling. At the planning level, the professionalisation of development took shape through the establishment of new ministries and departments dealing with development issues as well as through selective trainings of development officers in India and in the United States. With the creation of this new professional field, “development” not only became a career opportunity but also a new scale of social differentiation in Nepal. Whereas village development workers were regarded as superior to the “underdeveloped” villager, village workers were clearly placed lower in the hierarchy of development professionals than the planners of the central bureaucracy and the foreign advisors. Due to their rather low status, VDWs appear more as instruments than as capable agents of development in the documents on Nepalese village development. But even though the village workers remained merely anonymous figures in the plans and reports, they boosted the recurrent image of the ideal development worker as a “friend and well-wisher” of the people and as someone standing above and apart from the poor “rural masses.”

---

347 These “higher-level” development professionals will be in the focus of the following two chapters.  
4) The Bureaucrat

Though colonialism has its dark side, in many cases colonial administrations left behind certain positive legacies that were advantageous to modernization. Colonial administrations developed transportation systems, established a basic educational system and introduced a modern system of administration. Nepal has no colonial background, and by comparison to those that have, the country has suffered from the absence of a developmental infrastructure of any kind whether institutional or in terms of physical facilities. (Dor Bahadur Bista, 1991)\(^{350}\)

These are not the words of a colonial master. These are the words of the renowned Nepalese anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista. He expressed his ambivalent feelings about Nepal’s non-colonial past in his famous book *Fatalism and Development*, which was published about forty years after the end of the colonial rule in South Asia.\(^{351}\) Although Bista was not actually wishing that Nepal had been colonised, he dared to ask whether Nepal would not be better off if it had been more exposed to the “modernising” influences of the West. It was not so much the low influence of European culture and values that seemed problematic to him; he rather bewailed the lack of a modern, rationalised state bureaucracy. He therefore described Nepal as having had a disadvantaged starting position when “the country emerged from a very medieval form of feudal dominance”\(^{352}\) in 1951, specifically because the Rana regime did not introduce a formalised public administration that was comparable to the one of formerly colonised India.

---


\(^{351}\) Bista, *Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization*. Bista wrote the book shortly before the people’s movement (jana ândolan) led to the end of the Panchayat system in 1990 and was published first in 1991.

Bista’s view about Nepal’s lack of a rationalised bureaucracy was not uncommon. It was shared in the 1950s by Nepalese policy makers and foreign advisors who were concerned about the transition process from the Rana regime to a multiparty democracy. They considered the thorough reform of the Nepalese administration to be of high priority to make Nepal fit enough to become a modern nation-state. This chapter analyses the reform of public administration in Nepal and shows how it went hand in hand with the set-up of an extensive “development bureaucracy.” The introduction of a rationalised bureaucracy was not only seen as a political imperative but was also considered as a central part of the national development efforts. On one hand, it was part of a foreign assistance programme of India. On the other hand, a rationalised bureaucracy was also regarded as an expression of a modern nation-state and as an essential prerequisite for the implementation of all the new development plans.

As will be shown in this chapter, the steadily growing development bureaucracy took on a life of its own over the years. In order to find out more about the “life” of the public development sector, this chapter will track the history of public administration in Nepal. But it does not suffice simply to recognise the institutional growth of the development bureaucracy during the 1950s and 60s. Apart from the institutions, one also needs to look at the bureaucrats themselves, because they were not an anonymous mass or mere elements of a larger system but crucial agents who shaped the emerging development apparatus in Nepal.

To address these issues, I will outline some aspects of the institutional history of the Nepalese bureaucracy and the induced modernisation efforts of the 1950s, in which Indian advisors took the lead. Then I will show how the 1950s reforms of the public administration led to a certain degree of professionalisation of the civil service sector as well as to a strong entanglement of the

---

Nepalese bureaucracy with foreign aid on one hand and with the Royal Palace on the other. This will be followed by an examination of the social background of the bureaucrats. While doing this, I will look at how contemporary researchers sketched the profile of the typical Nepalese bureaucrat and how the image of the privileged high-caste bureaucrat became a common projection screen for blaming the Nepalese state for not achieving its developmental aims.

4.1 Bureaucrats and Bureaucracy as Objects of Research

The central role of the state bureaucracy in development planning is reflected in the numerous studies on the administrative system of Nepal published by Nepalese and foreign authors. Most of these studies, which serve as the main sources for this chapter, were published during the Panchayat Period. This was a time of intense state building and national development efforts. While some of the works merely discuss the reform plans on a theoretical level, others take a critical stance regarding the contemporary condition and blame the bureaucracy for its inefficiency or corruption. However, even the most critical of the works

acknowledge the state and its bureaucracy as the single-most important actor in development planning. The studies from the Panchayat Period generally lack a global perspective, with their focus generally confined to the national Nepalese context when discussing the role of the state bureaucracy in development planning. Nonetheless, to underline their scientific approach to the topic, many of them refer, at some point, to the Western sociological theories of bureaucratic administration, specifically to Max Weber’s famous study on rational-legal bureaucracy.

Weber developed his study against the background of the rise of the modern nation-states in Europe and was convinced about the superiority of the legal-rational bureaucracy over other forms of state organisations. He accordingly opined that the state authority (Herrschaft) should ideally be based on a rational, impersonal bureaucracy with a clear hierarchical organisation and rules regulating the competencies of bureaucrats. Bureaucrats further need expert training and their promotion depends on their qualification.\(^{355}\) Weber’s ideal type of the bureaucracy and bureaucrats has been quoted and criticised by many, including Nepalese academics. One of the major points of critique is that Weber portrays the bureaucrat merely as an impersonal state functionary and not as an individual whose actions are influenced by social and cultural contexts.\(^{356}\) Weber developed his theory against the background of the rise of the modern nation-state in the late nineteenth century Europe. He considered the rationalisation of the bureaucracy to be part of a general process of modernisation and rationalisation of European societies and thus regarded them as preconditions and manifestations of progress and development.


Recent works on the history of development planning have looked at the role of the state and its bureaucrats from a different angle. James Scott’s *Seeing like a State* and James Ferguson’s *Anti-Politics Machine*, for instance, discuss how the international development endeavours created extensive bureaucracies and enhanced the power of the state. Both these works provide some conceptual inspiration for this chapter. Scott’s work is primarily of interest for the question of how authoritarian power was exercised in the name of development in different places all over the world during the heights of planning optimism. On the surface, characteristics of the bureaucracy in the Panchayat Period seems to correspond to the examples Scott presents in his book to show why “some of the great utopian social engineering schemes of the twentieth century” have failed dramatically. He mentions about a “pernicious combination of four elements” that make development planning a deadly endeavour. The first element is the administrative ordering of nature and society in a simplified manner by procedures of rationalisation and standardisation, with the aim to render the state “legible” and “governable.” The second is a high modernist ideology, suggesting a strong belief in progress through technical and scientific innovation. For Scott, these two elements are not necessarily problematic, and are basic elements of all modern nation states. Yet, they become deadly when combined with the third and fourth elements – namely, an authoritarian state, and a weak civil society. Each of these four elements can be traced in Nepal during the Panchayat Period, although there were no such large-scale planning schemes in Nepal as the ones described by Scott. But the problem in applying Scott’s model to understand the case in Nepal lies not in the absence of extensive town planning projects or massive forced resettlement schemes. The problem is rather that Scott tends to totalise the power of the state and widely neglects the importance of individuals,

---


informal structures, and patronage networks within the seemingly rationalised state bureaucracies. Frederick Cooper even criticises Scott’s book itself for being an example of high modernism since Scott oversimplifies his case studies in order to render them “legible” and to make his argument work. He further criticises Scott for his one-dimensional view of scientific rationality and for misusing the notion of “modernism” by neglecting the dissent, the subjectivity, and wild creativity that were fundamental to modernism.\(^{359}\) Scott’s simplifying the workings of modernism and state power is indeed not very helpful for understanding the unwritten laws and informal mechanism of power that underlined the Nepalese bureaucracy and development planning.

In his *Anti-Politics Machine*, James Ferguson analyses the World Bank aid-
ed Thaba-Tseka rural development project in Lesotho, deconstructing the development discourse and demonstrating how the idea of development aid fuelled the emergence of an extensive and powerful bureaucracy. To describe the national and international development institutions operating in Lesotho, Ferguson aptly applies the Foucaultian notion of an “apparatus” or “machine,” which differs distinctly from Weber’s metaphor of the rationalised bureaucracy as a machine.\(^{360}\) Ferguson argues that the “development apparatus” works as an “anti-politics machine,” meaning that it ostensibly depoliticises highly political issues by producing a technocratic development discourse. It is not Ferguson’s aim to demonstrate how the Thaba-Tseka project failed to meet its targeted goals. He rather wants to show that projects actually end up having many impacts on the local society, although many of these are unplanned and unintended. One of the


\(^{360}\) Foucault’s notion of the French “dispositive” is translated in English either as “apparatus”, “mechanism”, “machine”, or “deployment”. It designates a system or web that connects a heterogeneous ensemble of institutions, administrative measurements, discourses, practices etc. in order to enhance or maintain power. About the concept of the “dispositive” see for instance: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1976). About Weber’s metaphor of the machine for the bureaucracy see: Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie*. 
most noteworthy effects of development projects, Ferguson concludes, is the emergence of a powerful development apparatus that took on a life of its own in countries like Lesotho. Ferguson shows much interest in the development discourse produced by development bureaucrats of large foreign aid agencies, particularly the World Bank. The local population is either looked at as the “target population” of the project or as politicians with their own interest in development. But he does not question the local bureaucrat in his role as a development expert who feeds on the development discourse and who is a crucial agent in the development apparatus as well.

Like Ferguson, most other studies on development bureaucrats predominantly look at “donors” and widely neglect the agency of local actors working in development bureaucracies. One of the few historical studies on local bureaucrats and their role in the postcolonial developmental state is published by Andreas Eckert. In a historically well-grounded study of Tanzania’s transition from a colonial to postcolonial state, he shows how the postcolonial bureaucratic elite established itself as the national elite under the colonial government. Through their previous function as mediators between the colonial government and the local population they had acquired knowledge and power that enabled them to gain influential positions in the postcolonial developmental state.

In the present chapter I share Scott’s and Ferguson’s interest in the emergence of a strong state with an extensive development bureaucracy as well as Eckert’s interest in the historical consolidation of bureaucratic elite. Yet, in a significant departure from Scott’s and Ferguson’s stance, I put stronger focus on the role of local actors and less on the development discourse or on large-scale development schemes. The Nepalese bureaucracy needs to be looked at differ-

---

ently from the Tanzanian one. Because there was no colonial government to constitute a local elite, the legacy of the Rana regime as well as the impact of its dominant neighbour India and other foreign donors require special attention.

4.2 Bhārādārs, Jāgīradārs and Cākariwalās: The Pre-1951 Administration

The first Rana prime minister, Jang Bahadur Rana, inherited a small and weak state bureaucracy from the Shah monarchy when he came to power in 1846. The Shah kings had fought many wars until King Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the Kathmandu valley and founded the kingdom of Nepal in 1769. But the Shah kings failed to consolidate their rule and their administration remained rudimentary. However, although many of the successors of King Prithvi Narayan were forced to share power with the queens, with relatives or even some courtiers, the Shah kings were formally acknowledged to be the source of all power by divine right. Accordingly, they were allowed to appoint or dismiss civil and military officers at their will. Apart from their own family members, the Shah kings distributed the most important positions only among certain selected families known as the tharghars (households of different castes). The tharghars belonged to the two highest caste groups, the Bahun (Hindu priests, also known as Brahmīn) and the Chhetri (warrior and ruler caste). They were rewarded with influential positions in recognition for their crucial assistance in Dravya Shah’s conquest of the kingdom of Gorkha in the sixteenth century. Together with the royal family, they for instance, held the positions of the bhārādārs (literally “bearers of burden”). The bhārādārs were the highest officers of the king and were responsible for crucial roles like treasurers, state secretaries, officers in army, or super-

---

363 Yet, not only remained the control over remote areas weak but some regions also retained far-reaching autonomy as vassal states. These vassal states were only fully integrated into the Nepalese nation state in 1961. Cf. Agrawal, The Administrative System of Nepal: from Tradition to Modernity, 3.
visors of the royal household. Later on, bhārādār became synonymous with high-level government officials.364

Due to their positions of responsibility, the bhārādār officers and their families could exert decisive influence at the royal court. They became so influential that eventually members of the bhārādār class managed to disempower the Shah kings. One of the most powerful bhārādār was the military general and prime minister Bhimsen Thapa, who dominated Nepal’s political life from 1806 – 1837. Yet it was not Bhimsen Thapa but his nephew Jang Bahadur Kunwar who finally ended the absolute rule of the Shah monarchy in a bloody coup d’état in 1846. As discussed in chapter two, Jang Bahadur Kunwar, who changed his family name to Rana, installed a quasi-monarchical system in which the all-powerful position of the prime minister was passed on within his family. During the Rana rule, the Shah dynasty kept the crown but the Shah kings were deprived of real political power for about one century.365

During the Rana rule (1846–1951), as Jang Bahadur Rana expanded and strengthened the civil and military administration, the administrative system continued to be based on a network of cliental families. He created, for example an office for preparing and codifying laws, a central revenue office, and an office for keeping records of all civil and military employees. But despite the introduction of new laws and regulations, the administration continued to be characterised by a relatively low level of formalisation and blurred boundaries between the public and the private sphere of the ruling family. The tharghar families remained influential but as now the Rana prime minister was the source of all authority, almost all the high-ranking positions in the administration were filled up with members of the Rana clan.366 Moreover, there was no formal budgeting and

no separation between the public treasury and the private income of the ruler. The surplus government revenue was simply regarded as the personal earnings of the ruling prime minister. As a consequence, the Rana prime ministers had little interest in spending the taxpayers’ money on cost-intensive social services or infrastructures. The administration was thus primarily concerned with revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. Public services such as educational or infrastructural facilities were, consequently, hardly provided.\(^{367}\)

One measure for increasing government revenue was the introduction of a new land and taxation system. In Nepal, all land was basically owned by the state and most state revenue came from its taxation. During the Shah rule, high-level civil and military officers were not paid in cash but were often assigned tax-free land known as \(jāgīr\) for their services and loyalty to the king. A high-ranking officer could thus become a \(jāgīradār\) (a form of vassal) and was free to lease the land, to raise taxes, and also to dispense justice.\(^{368}\) Significantly, the notion of \(jāgīr\) became synonymous with government employment and is used today as a general term for a salaried job. For the Shah kings, the \(jāgīr\) system was a means to control the country without the need of a well-organised and decentralised administration. Yet, due to their extensive rights, \(jāgīradārs\) could become very powerful and act like local lords. Jang Bahadur Rana therefore confined the \(jāgīr\) system out of concern about the \(jāgīradārs’\) independence as well as in order to increase the government revenues. The \(jāgīr\) system was abolished completely only in 1951, though beginning from 1861, Jang Bahadur gradually replaced the \(jāgīr\) payments by cash salaries and invented the post of salaried district revenue

\(^{367}\) For a detailed description of the administrative system under Jang Bahadur Rana see: Adhikari, \textit{Nepal under Jang Bahadur 1846-1877}.

\(^{368}\) The word \(Jāgīr\) comes from Persian, \(jā\) meaning “place”, \(gīr\) meaning “keeping”. The \(Jāgīr\) system was also known in India during the Moghul and the colonial period. But there were regional differences so that the \(Jāgīr\) system in Nepal slightly differed from the systems to be found in India. In Nepal, \(Jāgīr\) land grants were tied to rendering services to the government and were thus not fix and inheritable. During the Rana rule, \(Jāgīrs\) were mostly distributed to members of the Rana clan. About the \(Jāgīr\) system see: Mahesh Chandra Regmi, \textit{Landownership in Nepal} (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), 16-19, 61-86.
officers to replace the jāgīradārs. The district revenue officers were directly responsible to the prime minister and in order to avoid a conflict of interest, they were not allowed to own land or conduct trade in the district under their supervision. The revenue officers did not collect the taxes from the cultivators themselves, as this was the task of appointed tax collectors.\textsuperscript{369} In the Tarai region, the tax collectors were called \textit{jimidārs}. A \textit{jimidār} was not a government officer but remained a private entrepreneur. He was obliged to deliver a fixed sum of taxes to the revenue officer, regardless of whether he could collect it from the cultivators. In return, he was rewarded with a certain percentage of the collected taxes and with land to use for himself.\textsuperscript{370} The change of the system did not much affect the farmers who cultivated the land, as they were exploited under both systems. The jāgīradār tried to squeeze out as much as possible from his jāgīr since he could be deprived of it any time. The jimidār, on the other hand, raised high taxes since he could keep the surplus as his private earning. Yet, the change of the system had a clear impact on the central government. It increased the government revenue collected from land taxation 200-fold within 1846 to 1951.\textsuperscript{371} It also strengthened the central government’s control over the districts. Moreover, due to the growing importance of the tax authorities, the civil administration offered the young elites a lucrative career opportunity that became as prestigious as military service.\textsuperscript{372}

Even though the British based their rule in India, to a certain extent, on collaboration with local landlords, the organisation of the Rana administration fundamentally differed from the rigidly organised Imperial Civil Service (ICS). As described in chapter two, the British colonial rule had in many respects a strong

\textsuperscript{369} Stiller, \textit{Nepal: Growth of a Nation}, 107-08.
\textsuperscript{370} In the hill regions, the tax collectors were called tālukdār. The tālukdār had a similar function as the jimidār but he was not given land for his own cultivation and had less rights on making a private fortune out of the land under control. About the jimidār system see: Regmi, \textit{Landownership in Nepal}, 104-22.
\textsuperscript{371} Regmi, \textit{Landownership in Nepal}, 83.
\textsuperscript{372} Stiller, \textit{Nepal: Growth of a Nation}, 110.
impact on the Rana regime. Yet, even though the British Raj decisively influenced Nepal’s foreign and trade policy, its influence in Nepalese internal affairs was only marginal. One of Nepal’s most significant differences with India was that the British were not involved in Nepal’s public administration. The only British functionary in Nepal was the British resident in Kathmandu, whose presence the Nepalese government was obliged to accept since their defeat in the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–16). But apart from his diplomatic functions, the resident’s room for manoeuvre was very limited. He was widely excluded from local politics and was only allowed to move freely within the Kathmandu valley. For instance F. M. Bailey, British resident during the interwar period, opened his annual reports by admitting not knowing what was going on in Nepal. Apparently, local elites excluded the resident and his family from their circles on the grounds of caste restrictions so it was nearly impossible for them to gain insightful knowledge on what was happening in the Nepalese administration. Furthermore, government meetings were all held in camera and reports on government activities and decisions were not published.\footnote{See Bailey, F. M, Nepal. Annual Report, 1935 and 1936, 15 January 1937. IOR/L/PS/12/3063A, Coll 21/51, British Library; F. M. Bailey, Report of the British Legation on Nepal for the Year 1937, 12 February 1938. IOR/L/PS/12/3063A, Coll 21/51, British Library. See also Mrs Bailey, Letter to the India Office, Whitehall, 26 August 1937. IOR/Mss Eur F157/295, Bailey Collection, British Library. Life in Kathmandu was very boring for Bailey and his family since they had not only been isolated from politics but also from social life. Local elites had excluded them from their circles on the grounds of caste restrictions. There lived also only a handful of other foreigners in Kathmandu with whom the resident’s family could socialise.}

It was only after the change of regime in 1951, when the governmental acts were made public in the newly introduced \textit{Nepal Gazette}, that they became more transparent.\footnote{Bhuwan Lal Joshi, and Leo E. Rose, \textit{Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study of Political Acculturation} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 156.}

In short, the British did not interfere in the administrative system of Nepal. This was a crucial difference with British India where the ICS had been one of the major instruments of colonial rule. While Indian citizens occupied the middle and lower ranks of public administration, the prestigious positions in the...
ICS were almost exclusively staffed with British citizens. Even though Indians were legally admitted to the ICS from 1853 onward, still it was practically impossible for them to pass the rigid entry exam due to structural discriminations. The recruitment process of civil servants was thus a highly politicised issue in colonial India. In Nepal, the civil service was not a political issue even though there were also many social barriers that hindered the bulk of the population from working in public administration. But these barriers were not legally defined, not least because the legal framework of the Rana administration was very loose and regulations about the recruitment process were almost non-existent. Hence, unlike in India, there was no standardised entry exam and professional training for civil servants in Nepal. Apart from belonging to the right family, the basic qualification required to become a civil servant in Nepal was to master the so-called “Three Rs” – reading, writing, and arithmetic. Although these were only basic skills, the Rana administration faced difficulties in recruiting a sufficient number of candidates due to the generally low level of formal education and existence of only few schools.

Under the Rana regime, just as the legal framework for the recruitment of government employees was very loose, similarly there was an absence of valid legal basis for the promotion or dismissal of civil servants. The career of civil servants depended almost entirely upon the strength of their personal network and the ability to gain the favour of superiors. This informal structure eventually

---

triggered the practice of the so-called cākari\textsuperscript{378} system in the Nepalese bureaucracy. The concept of cākari derives from a religious context and literally means “to wait upon, to serve, to appease, or to seek favour from a god.”\textsuperscript{379} But during the Rana period, performing cākari became also a common secular practice in the sphere of public administration. Analogous to the religious practice, cākari as a secular practice manifests in the effort to be as close as possible to a person whose favour is desired.\textsuperscript{380} Initially, cākari was introduced as a form of control of potential rivals of the ruling Rana prime ministers who were required to spend a certain amount of time in the Rana palaces. They had to show up in a formal manner during specific hours of the day known as the cākari hours. Over time, cākari became a very distinctive, formalised practice in the Rana administration. It thereby became recognised as a central criterion in promoting or dismissing civil servants and basically implied that government employees had to spend as much time as possible in the presence of their superiors and flatter them in order to demonstrate their loyalty. Hence, attendance was given priority over performance when it came to the matter of evaluating civil servants. Accordingly, one of the most feared government offices among the civil servants was the bureau in charge of controlling and recording the hours of attendance of all civil servants.\textsuperscript{381} A central kind of service offered by the cākariwālā (person performing cākari) was transfer of information. Dependency could thus be mutual if a cākariwalā managed to become the carrier of important information.\textsuperscript{382} The cākari system was on one hand an outcome of the informal structure of the Rana administration with its tendency to nepotism and favouritism. On the other hand,

\textsuperscript{378} The Nepalese cākari is not to equate with the Bengali “chakri”. While the first has a strong connotation of “sycophancy”, the latter became in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century a rather neutral term for a clerical job. About the Bengali chakri see: Sumit Sarkar, “‘Kaliyuga’, ‘Chakri’ and ‘Bhakti’: Rama-krishna and His Times,” Economic and Political Weekly 27 (1992).

\textsuperscript{379} Bista, Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization, 89.

\textsuperscript{380} Bista, Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization, 5.


\textsuperscript{382} Bista, Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization, 89-96.
it also fostered the prevalence of informal, person-based structures in the government administration.\textsuperscript{383} As already mentioned, the personal network was decisive among not only the lower ranks of government employees who were expected to perform cākari, but also among the senior positions that were staffed with people related to the governing family. The sons, nephews, and other relatives of the Rana prime ministers were entitled to military ranks and positions in the military and civil administration regardless of their talent or qualifications.\textsuperscript{384}

Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher Rana held key-positions in public administration before he became the prime minister in 1901. Consequently, he was well aware of the inefficiency of the public administration system caused by incompetent administrators.\textsuperscript{385} During his twenty-nine years tenure as prime minister, he thus cautiously tried to professionalise the bureaucracy. He, for example, introduced a pay scale in cash to limit the former system of remunerating senior officers with granting land and other goods. He also reorganised many offices and enhanced the mechanisms of control over the government offices as well as over the districts. Further, as a reaction to the lack of sufficiently educated candidates for civil service, Chandra Shamsher also established the \textit{Srēṣṭha Pāṭhaśāla} (Shrestha school) in 1911 which became the first institution to provide training for civil servants.\textsuperscript{386} \textit{Shrestha} is both the name of a Newar caste whose members were typically working as traders or courtiers as well as the title of ad-

\textsuperscript{383} Not only Bista but also Borgström, Goodall, and Pradhan wrote about cākari as formalised bureaucratic behaviour: Borgström, “The Best of Two Worlds: Rhetoric of Autocracy and Democracy in Nepal.”; Goodall, “Administrative Change in Nepal.”; Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal.”
\textsuperscript{384} Stiller, \textit{Nepal: Growth of a Nation}, 110.
ministrators serving at the royal court.³⁸⁷ The curriculum of the Shrestha school comprised four courses – namely, accounting, rapid handwriting (for copying documents), arithmetic, and learning to memorise and recite statutes and laws accurately.³⁸⁸ The curriculum reflected the function of the bureaucrats as bookkeepers and obedient servants. Creativity and pro-active behaviour were neither required nor encouraged.

Another innovation of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher and his successors was the introduction of the first offices to promote economic development. In the course of increased efforts to modernise the Nepalese economy during the interwar period, the Ranas opened the first offices for the promotion of agricultural and industrial development. Nonetheless, the Rana bureaucracy was far from a modern welfare state and remained primarily an instrument to serve the interests of the ruling family. As has been shown in chapter two, the few reforms therefore helped little to appease the opposition. After all, the sheer lack of an administration providing public services was one of the major reasons for the downfall of the Rana regime.³⁸⁹

4.3 Reforming the Public Administration with Indian Aid

After the end of the Rana regime in February 1951, King Tribhuvan announced the beginning of a new era in which the government and people should work together for the progress of the nation and he also promised the introduction of a parliamentary democratic system.³⁹⁰ However, as has been shown in chapter two, factionalism and rivalries made the fulfilment of this promise impossible. So the project of a parliamentary democracy was eventually given up with the introduction of the Partyless Panchayat Democracy. However, introducing a new government and constitution was only a very small part of the humongous task

³⁹⁰ *Sri Pānca Tribhuvan Śmyṭigrantha*, 651-53.
that needed to be done. The even greater challenge of the post-Rana period was the introduction of a modern administrative system with the ability to implement all political reforms and develop new tasks for national development.

The reform of the public administration system appeared to be the most urgent task of the post-Rana governments, since the state was regarded as the main driving force for development. Accordingly, the 1951 Interim Constitution drew a picture of a democratic welfare state with “modern” elements such as fundamental rights, gender equality, and provisions for the elderly and the unemployed.³⁹¹ There seemed to be recognition of the fact that these rights and services should ideally be provided by a well-functioning public sector. Yet, while the negotiating parties were relatively quick in putting the draft of the interim constitution on paper during the king’s flight to Delhi, the materialisation of its promises was quite another story. As the existing Nepalese cadres had so far only worked in the Rana administration, there were no local experts at hand to reform the system from within. Hence, the reform of the bureaucracy was not only a precondition for the implementation of all the new development plans, but also the target of one of the first foreign aided development projects in Nepal.

The Nehru regime in newly independent India played a crucial role not only in the overthrow of the Rana regime, the installation of a new political system, and the preparation of an interim constitution, but in the reform of the public administration system as well. From April 1951 to February 1952, two Indian advisors helped the India-friendly, post-Rana government to set up the new central office at Singha Durbar, the former residence of the Rana prime ministers. Three other Indian advisors were added for shorter periods for the reform of the administration and the police force. The Indian advisors suggested reforming the Nepalese public administration on the lines of the Indian Administrative Service.

(IAS). Yet, although they wanted to adapt the IAS-model according to local needs, their recommendations never materialised. One problem was that their fragmentary recommendations were formulated only in English disregarding the fact that at that time only a small number of Nepalese bureaucrats were proficient in English language.\textsuperscript{392} Despite such obstacles, the idea of thoroughly reforming the public administration of Nepal with Indian assistance was not given up.

Prime Minister Matrika Prasad Koirala, who cultivated close relationships with the leaders of the Indian National Congress party, agreed with the Indian government regarding inviting another expert team of Indian civil servants to work out a thorough reform plan for the Nepalese administration.\textsuperscript{393} The team of experts arrived in mid-May of 1952 to carry out a one-month survey on the existing administrative system in Nepal. It was commonly called the “Buch Commission,” since it was under the leadership of the joint secretary of the Indian Home Ministry, N.M. Buch.\textsuperscript{394} The secretary of the Ministry of Law and Justice, Colonel Tilak Shamsher Rana, and the Secretary of the Finance Ministry, Lt.-Col. Himalaya Shamsher Rana assisted the team as local counterparts. The Buch Commission’s mission was to work out a reform plan for the Nepalese bureaucracy whose pattern should not merely be “a reproduction of the Indian system but should be designed to meet the special needs of Nepal and to suit the genius of the people. It had to be simple and not too expensive.”\textsuperscript{395} As has been shown in the previous chapters about the slogan of panchayat development and community development, the aims and exigencies formulated by the Buch Commission were usual features of the then common development rhetoric. Yet, as has also been discussed, there was often a wide gap between the rhetoric and the

\textsuperscript{394} Neither his full name nor any biographical information of N.M. Buch are given in the commission’s report. The report also does not contain any biographical information of the other team members.
practical results of development initiatives. In the case of the Buch Commission as well, it turned out to be a much more challenging task than previously anticipated, to implement locally rooted, simple, and low-cost solutions to quite complex problems.

Only about one week after its short visit to Nepal, the Buch Commission submitted a substantial report about how to accomplish a lean and efficient bureaucracy. But despite claiming to provide a basic, simple, locally adapted reform plan, the report contained a long list of 143 recommendations aiming at radically restructuring the Nepalese bureaucracy on the grounds of the Indian, in effectiveness the British-Indian model. The plan recommended that the seventeen traditionally held Rana ministries with their countless, often tiny departments should be replaced by eleven strong ministries reflecting the core responsibilities of the new parliamentary government: general administration; foreign affairs; defence; finance; home affairs; revenue and forests; commerce, industries and civil supply; works and communication; education, health and local self-government; planning and development; law and parliamentary affairs.\(^{396}\) Hence, several ministries were dedicated to social services and development work, which reflects the intention to build up a strong new development administration.

In order to make the reforms work, the Buch Commission gave top priority to training of government employees of all ranks. It suggested that Nepalese bureaucrats, including technical personnel like vaccinators, telegraphs, veterinaries, overseers, and others, should obtain training in neighbouring Indian states and that new training centres for various fields of public services should be set up in Nepal in close collaboration with Indian institutions.\(^{397}\) In addition, the Buch Commission recommended deputing Indian civil servants to work di-


rectly in crucial positions in the Nepalese administration in order to guarantee a smooth transition from the old to the new system. The general secretary of each ministry, for instance, was to work in collaboration with an Indian official from one of the Indian states or the Indian central government for a period of one year. The task of the Indian officers was defined as helping in organising the work routine and training the Nepalese bureaucrats. The Buch Commission underlined its attempt to keep the number of suggested Indian officers to a minimum and to employ as many local staff as possible, instead. The list of Indians to be deputed to Nepal nevertheless ended up comprising about 200 staff, ranging from simple stenographers and skilled technicians to senior officers. The Commission even suggested that a senior serving or retired district judge from India should become a temporary judge of the Nepalese high court.

The Nepalese government accepted the Buch Commission’s report with its suggestions for close collaboration with India to reform the public sector. Henceforth, many Nepalese bureaucrats were sent to India for training and Indian civil servants were assigned to work in Nepal. Indian officials advised Nepalese administrators in key positions and a senior Indian civil servant even worked as personal secretary of King Tribhuvan. In view of the several development experts and internships additionally provided by India under the Colombo plan from 1952 onward, the Indian government’s interest to increase its influence in Nepal through foreign aid becomes apparent. Not surprisingly, strategically important sectors gained special attention. The Buch Commission highlighted for instance the importance of developing communication facilities and roads. Besides this, the Commission also suggested a substantial reform of the Nepalese police force. Similar to the reform plans for the bureaucracy, it thereby empha-

sised the need for formalisation, standardisation, and training of the police force. It was suggested that there should be a clear separation of the police force from the army, standardisation of ranks and uniforms, institutionalisation of recruitment process, and provision of formal training for police officers. The Buch Commission therefore saw an urgent need for establishing a police training school. Similar to the Commission’s other recommendations, it was suggested that the functioning of the police training school should also be assisted by Indian experts. The Buch Commission suggested that the school should be staffed with a total of 204 skilled personnel, of which 45 should be recruited from India. In addition, higher-ranking Nepalese police officers should all go to India for training.  

The reform of the army, on the other hand, was not within the scope of the Buch Commission’s mission. Nonetheless, the Indian government assisted Nepal definitively in the reorganisation of the army in a separate mission. After the poor performance of the national army against the guerrilla fighters of the Nepali Congress Mukti Sena, the need for reforming the Nepalese army in order to maintain law and order in the country became apparent to the post-Rana government. King Tribhuvan therefore also called upon India to assist in the reorganisation of the Nepalese army. Mihaly argues that the Indian government accepted the costly mission in its own interest since it allowed better observance of Chinese activities in Tibet. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the Indian military assistance was not simply limited to the reorganisation of the army, but even included direct deployment of Indian soldiers on Nepalese territory. For example in 1954, Indian troops backed Nepalese frontier-guards in eighteen check-posts along the Tibetan border. The Indian soldiers controlled even the check-posts’ communication equipment and communicated directly with the

Indian embassy about border security issues, not with the Nepalese authorities.\textsuperscript{403}

The reform of the bureaucracy in combination with the military assistance and the bilateral aid under the Colombo plan allowed India to massively interfere in Nepalese affairs at a time when foreign aid just started to gain grounds in Nepal. Not surprisingly, the large-scale Indian assistance provoked ambivalent reactions. While the Nepalese government called for Indian experts, civil servants, and military staff, the rise of India as a powerful player in the setup of a new political order also provoked resentment among Nepalese politicians. The Nepali Congress, for instance, emphasised its friendly attitude towards India and welcomed Indian assistance. But when the Congress party was no more a part of the government, it also heavily criticised Indian advisors and the Indian military mission for their “selfishness” and disinterest in Nepal’s development “on proper lines.”\textsuperscript{404} It blamed India for unsatisfactory results of the administrative reforms and accused Indian experts for following a paternalistic approach. It further criticised India for procuring its own soldiers, its own civil servants, and its own engineers in order to get the jobs done instead of only providing advisors and financial support. The resentments climaxed in March 1953 when the Nepali Congress Working Committee openly asked India to withdraw its administrative and military assistance.\textsuperscript{405} Yet, this demand was rather rhetorical since the Nepali Congress was at this time not a part of the government but had split into several opposition parties without significant power. But the polemic of the Nepali Congress illustrates well how proponents of development aid could also fiercely criticise certain actors or methods. It further shows that foreign aid, since its very early days, evoked the paradoxical response of thankfulness as well as suspicion among the “target population.”

\textsuperscript{404} Nepali Congress, \textit{Whither Nepal} (Patna: Publicity Department of Nepali Congress, 1953), 12, 15.
\textsuperscript{405} Congress, \textit{Whither Nepal}, 12-16.
4.4 Impacts of the Bureaucratic Reforms

Although the Nepalese government accepted the Buch Commission’s recommendations, the latter could not be implemented effectively. Political instability, in combination with the ambitious plans that were only superficially adapted to local conditions, made the implementation of the reform plans very difficult.\footnote{406} Yet, this failure to meet the targeted goals does not mean that the reform of the bureaucracy on the lines of the Buch Commission’s recommendations had no effects at all. Stiller and Yadav\footnote{407} argued that the attempts of the Indian advisors to modernise and rationalise the Nepalese bureaucracy even had counterproductive effects. To them, the major problem was that, “[t]he Indian administrators who worked with the Nepalese administration gave what they could, and that was limited to what they had personally experienced. They were products of the British colonial administrative system.”\footnote{408} This means principles of the British colonial administration were blended with existing practices from the Rana administration which, according to Stiller and Yadav, resulted in an ineffective bureaucratic apparatus. To them, the high value of filing, characteristic of the British Indian administration system, seemed particularly inappropriate to Nepal because “[t]o this, the Nepalis added their own understanding of modern filing – save everything that is written, regardless of its importance, and treat the file like a sanad nikasa report. The new filing system thus reached the limits of inefficiency. The file was sacred.”\footnote{409}

Hence, Stiller and Yadav argued that the Indian advisors aggravated an already existing trend of passing on decisions and actions to higher-ranking officials and thus created an inefficient Nepalese bureaucracy.

\footnote{406} Bhatta, Development Administration in Nepal, 33.
\footnote{407} Stiller, and Yadav, Planning for People, 91-94.
\footnote{408} Stiller, and Yadav, Planning for People, 91.
\footnote{409} Stiller, and Yadav, Planning for People, 92. During the Rana period, sanad nikasa were reports of higher importance, which had to be delivered to a higher-ranking official for decision.
Stiller and Yadav’s analysis is shaped by polemical anti-Indian resentments. But despite the prominent role of Indian assistance, they were the only authors to point out a connection between the British-Indian system of public administration and the Nepalese reforms. Other publications on the history of the public administration in Nepal mention the Indian assistance. But they do not construct a direct lineage of the British colonial bureaucracy in the Nepalese administration.\footnote{Cf. Agrawal, The Administrative System of Nepal: from Tradition to Modernity; Bhatta, Development Administration in Nepal; Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal.”; Shrestha, Administration.} Even Merrill R. Goodall, professor of Government and Asian Studies at Claremont University, made no reference to the British colonial administration in his article on administrative changes in Nepal, which he published in an edited volume titled Asian bureaucratic systems emergent from the British imperial tradition.\footnote{Goodall, “Administrative Change in Nepal.”} Goodall had worked in various positions in Nepal as expert on administration and was also well familiar with the Indian system. But he did not construct any parallels between the two even though the title of the edited volume suggested an interrelation between British Indian bureaucracy and contemporary Asian bureaucracies.

### 4.4.1 Physical Expansion and Professionalisation

Apart from the alleged “Indianisation”\footnote{Stiller, and Yadav, Planning for People, 91.} of the Nepalese bureaucracy, the efforts in the 1950s to reform the public administration with the assistance of foreign advisors also had other effects than the ones described by Stiller and Yadav. Even though they did not result in a rationalised, efficient and service-oriented bureaucracy as foreseen in the plans, they still substantially changed the outlook of the public sector and the function of the bureaucrats.

First of all, the administration became formally separated from the private affairs of the government members. Its primary function was no more to secure the wealth of the ruling family but – at least officially – to serve the nation.
and the people. Secondly, the public administration also started to expand beyond the borders of the Kathmandu valley. During the Rana period, public administration and services were mainly concentrated on the cities within the Kathmandu valley and a few towns in the southern plains. The rural districts, on the other hand, were important sources for government revenue but were only under loose control of the central administration. The Rana government therefore indirectly controlled the rural areas through Bada Hakims (district governors), who were usually members of the large Rana family. Decorated with a high military rank and entitled with judicial and executive power, the Bada Hakims were responsible for tax collection and maintenance of law and order.\footnote{Tulsi Narayan Shrestha, “Evolution of District Administration in Nepal,” in \textit{District Administration in Nepal: Issues and Ideas}, ed. Tulsi Narayan Shrestha (Lalitpur: Nepal Administrative Staff College, 1985); Mangal Krishna Shrestha, \textit{Public Administration in Nepal} (Kathmandu: Educational Enterprise, 1975), 8-9.}

After 1951, the title of the Bada Hakim as district governor did not disappear but his tasks were gradually redefined in the course of the general extension of governmental tasks. Especially the plans for national development changed the function of the Bada Hakim and his subordinates so that the district administration became increasingly commissioned with village development and other rural development programmes. Throughout the 1950s the district administration was not only enlarged but also formalised with a new legal framework and a fixed pay scale.\footnote{Agrawal, \textit{The Administrative System of Nepal: from Tradition to Modernity}, 244-47; Shrestha, \textit{Public Administration in Nepal}, 75-94.}

Such steps for formalisations were initiated throughout the entire public administration system. This led to a third significant change – the professionalisation of the civil service. In the 1950s, access to the civil service was formally available to all citizens and a Public Service Commission was set up for guaranteeing unbiased recruitment of capable personnel. Such a recruiting agency had already been announced in the Government of Nepal Act of 1948 and was eventually established after it was again stipulated in the Interim Constitution of
In 1956, the government also enacted a civil service act as the first legal framework for recruitment, dismissal, and promotion of civil servants. However, these provisions for rationalisation and impartial recruitment were not followed up properly. According to the Interim Constitution, the monarch was not obliged to consult the Public Service Commission and was still free to appoint civil servants at his own will. Moreover, a professionalised, impartial recruitment system under the guidance of the Public Service Commission never materialised due to political instability. Since each change in government potentially also led to a screening of the civil service, therefore job insecurity, nepotism, and patronage networks strongly prevailed after 1950. The instability and insecurity was further aggravated due to the frequent reorganisations of the public administration system. This trend culminated in December 1960 with the coup d'état of King Mahendra and the proclamation of the “Partyless Panchayat Democracy.” As discussed in chapter two, Mahendra suspended all constitutional bodies including the Public Service Commission and established new government offices in the name of Panchayat Democracy. The reorganisation of the public sector also involved the dismissal as well as the promotion of many civil servants at the king's will. Yet, similar to the Tanzanian bureaucratic elites analysed by Eckert, the Nepalese elites proved to be resilient against regime changes. Despite the radical screening of the civil service, many of the dismissed bureaucrats were soon re-recruited as civil servants. Many of the old cadres had already served in the Rana administration and had endured several administrative reforms. These bureaucrats had been able to stay in office not only because of their valuable personal networks but also because they had accumulated crucial skills and inside knowledge about internal matters of the bureaucracy. This made their services

indispensable, in view of the critical shortage of well-educated and experienced personnel.  

However, even though the numerous reforms of the public sector did not result in a rationalised state bureaucracy but rather in an unstable situation, there was still a trend towards professionalisation and specialisation of civil servants, thanks to the training and scholarship programmes. As a consequence, the old cadres had to increasingly face better-educated young professionals entering the civil service from the 1960s onward. Many young bureaucrats obtained specific training for working in the public administration, either within Nepal or from abroad. In Nepal, various on-the-job training courses were organised and the new Institute of Public Administration founded in 1957 replaced the old, and not very significant, Shrestha school as the main centre for civil service training. During the first years of operation, the Institute of Public Administration was the main institution to offer lectures and short in-service training courses for all levels of government employees. But like other government offices, this new Institute for civil service training suffered from the consequences of political instability also, and underwent many changes. In 1958, it was renamed as Administrative Training Centre; in 1961 it was attached to the Administrative Board; in 1962 it was turned into a separate Public Administration Department; in 1966 it was converted into the Central Training Department and was then renamed as Administrative Management Department in 1968. In an evaluation report on executive development training programmes, public administration expert Bhim Dev Bhatta sarcastically commented on the constant reorganisation of the

---

419 Goodall, “Administrative Change in Nepal,” 624, 630.
421 Bhatta obtained a Master in Commerce from Tribhuvan University Kathmandu in 1967 and a Master in Public Administration with Major in Development Administration from Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse (USA) in 1974. In 1970 he joined the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) first as administrative officer and from 1975 as
public administration, saying that “change even for the sake of change is a typical style of Nepalese bureaucracy.”\(^{422}\) In other words, the constant reforms and rapid growth of the public administration system created the impression of a bureaucratic apparatus that took on a life of its own and was rather busy with reforming itself in an uncontrolled manner than with fulfilling its official duties.

Despite the rather random changes and expansion of the Nepalese bureaucracy, the civil servants were still clearly better educated and trained than their counterparts during the Rana period. The data on their training are scarce and scattered. But for the first year after the establishment of the separate Public Administration Department in 1962, its reports mention the organising of lectures and training courses for about 400 clerks.\(^{423}\) The Fourth National Five-Year Plan further reports that about 900 gazetted, and almost 3500 non-gazetted civil servants participated in administrative training courses during the period of the Third Plan (1965–70).\(^{424}\)

The Public Administration Department and its successor organisations were the main institutions for pre-service training to make university graduates acquainted with working procedures of the government bureaucracy and with general skills required in administration and management. Typewriting and shorthand writing as well as general office organisation were typical courses offered for the mid and low-level civil servants. The Public Administration Department was however, only able to offer courses for non-specialised employees. For training on special subjects like taxation, statistics, law, forestry, land survey, etc.,

\(^{422}\) Bhatta, An Evaluation of the Executive Development Training Program in Nepal, 22.
\(^{423}\) Goodall, “Administrative Change in Nepal,” 630.
\(^{424}\) National Planning Commission, ed. Fourth Plan (1970-1975) (Kathmandu: His Majesty’s Government of Nepal, 1970). The Nepalese ranking of civil servants was patterned after the hierarchical structure of the civil service in India. The gazetted officers are the senior civil servants whose appointment was made public in the government gazette.
civil servants needed to go abroad.\textsuperscript{425} Parallel to the Public Administration Department as the main institution for providing training to government employees, there were also decentralised training centres for employees of the panchayat institutions. The panchayat training centres grew out of the 1950s village development training institutes.\textsuperscript{426} They aimed at training government employees working in the districts for the expansion of public administration and for local development works. In addition to the training centres for the grassroots-level development workers, the \textit{pañcāyat agrāṇī praśikṣaṇa kēndra vikās samiti} (lit. panchayat leader training centre and development committee) was established in 1965 for the training of other employees of the panchayat institutions.\textsuperscript{427}

An important addition to the training centres for the mid and lower ranking government employees was the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA). CEDA was founded in 1969 to meet the need for an institute specialised in research and higher training for civil servants. CEDA was set up as an autonomous institution with financial aid of the American Ford Foundation and operated by (and subsequently integrated into) Nepal’s national university, the Tribhuvan University, in 1975. It rapidly established itself as the leading Nepalese research and training institute on development issues. In the first years of operation, CEDA attracted some of Nepal’s most innovative intellectuals and published many original research papers.\textsuperscript{428} Yet, after its integration into the bureaucratic structure of the Tribhuvan University it slowly but definitively lost its drive. Like many other government institutions, CEDA’s significance further de-

\textsuperscript{426} Cf. chapter three.
\textsuperscript{427} Bhatta, \textit{An Evaluation of the Executive Development Training Program in Nepal}, 18, 25; Institute, \textit{Abstracts of the First Annual All Nepal Panchayat Instructors’ Seminar (February 15 - March 1 1968)}.
clined with the end of the panchayat system and has survived until today only as a mere shadow of its former self.\textsuperscript{429}

Throughout the 1970s, however, CEDA organised numerous research colloquiums, conferences, and courses. Its core programme was a three-month executive diploma course for second-class gazetted civil servants. This course focused on three fields of study – development planning, project analysis and planning, and development administration. These three fields of study were taught for one month each and included classes on planning, budgeting, and evaluating projects, as well as on ways of adapting foreign concepts and theories to the Nepalese context. The idea was not simply to teach the subjects, as the students were already well educated, but to “learn from each other” and to “share ideas in a group.” The diploma course was directed at both specialised civil servants like doctors or engineers as well as at general administrators. According to an in-house evaluation report, the participants were satisfied with the diploma course, mostly. But they apparently also needed financial incentives since the targeted number of participants could only be achieved after the course was advertised with the promise of rewards credited by the government for participation. Apart from this, the evaluation report hardly mentioned any other constraints of the executive training programme.\textsuperscript{430}

The outline of the diploma course and the research conducted at CEDA show well how closely interlinked the set up of the public administration and the call for national development planning were. To Nepalese development planners, it was beyond question that Nepal needed not just an administration but something that was conceived as a “development administration.”

\textsuperscript{429} Panday, Devendra Raj. Interview by Sara Elmer. Kathmandu, March 26, 2012.
\textsuperscript{430} Bhatta,\textit{ An Evaluation of the Executive Development Training Program in Nepal}, 34-45.
4.4.2 Entanglement with Foreign Aid

In view of the close relation between the quest for development and the reform of public administration, there was a fourth significant change in the outlook of the national bureaucracy: its close entanglement with foreign aid. As illustrated with the example of the Buch Commission, Indian assistance played a central role in the modernisation efforts of the public sector. But the Nepalese government also called for assistance of other foreign donors, above all in the form of multilateral aid from the United Nations (UN). Especially during the government coalition of the anti-Indian Prime Minister Tanka Prasad Acharya (1956–57) and in the following years, UN experts had been invited to work directly within the Nepalese administration as advisors for professionalising the bureaucratic system.431

Similarly, the Nepalese government sent its employees not only to India for higher training but also to the USA and other foreign countries. Training abroad was particularly common before the foundation of CEDA but also remained significant afterwards. According to a UNESCO-report, a total of 2163 Nepalese students obtained education abroad during the first ten years following the overthrow of the Rana regime (1951–61) with a yearly-increasing number of study grants. The scholarships were distributed by the Nepalese government but most of them were sponsored by twenty different foreign donor agencies. The trainees either went to study directly in the donor country or in a third country. India clearly sponsored most grants and also received the greatest number of trainees (1401).432

431 See the report of one of the UN-advisors: Goodall, “Administrative Change in Nepal,” 618-20. See also the discussion in chapter 3.5 about the political motivation of diversifying Nepal’s donor relations in general and on the rivalries between India and other big donor countries in particular.
432 Bruno Knall, and Hugh B. Wood, “Educational Planning in Nepal and its Economic Implications: Draft Report of the UNESCO Mission to Nepal,” (1962), 56-58. The report does not further specify how many of these trainees were studying directly in a donor country or in a third country. Thus, it is for example not clear whether the 100 students in Malaya were granted a scholarship by the
Offering overseas scholarships was thought to be a relatively uncomplicated, low-cost measure, which served both ends – to help the “recipient country” with its economic development and to help the “donor country” to advertise a positive image internationally. In Nepal, the competition between the various donor agencies for setting foot in the formerly isolated country boosted the number of grants for studying in the various donor countries. Not surprisingly, apart from India, most scholarships for Nepalese students were funded by the Soviet Union and the USA. Yet, despite the strategic value of scholarship programmes, in practice the implementation was often a matter of random coincidence. Many Nepalese students visited, for example, the University of Oregon (USA) following the foundation of the American Nepal Education Foundation in 1955. The University of Oregon was, however, not chosen for any strategic reasons, but simply because it was the home institute of the first American educational advisor to Nepal, Hugh B. Wood.433

In regard to the subjects studied abroad, the UNESCO statistic reveals for 1951–61 that out of the 2163 students, a relatively small number of only 53 students were explicitly commissioned to study public administration and some other 85 students were sent abroad to study closely related subjects (e.g., survey and statistics, police, law, custom and taxation).434 However, a central feature of the post-Rana period was that “development” was defined as a public task and therefore “all out effort [was] needed along with strengthening the working efficiency of the administrators as they [were] considered the agents of change.”435 Thus, government employees were not only trained in public management and

administration but also in other subjects in order to qualify them as the required “bureaucrats–cum–development experts.” Among other disciplines, the UNESCO report lists students in engineering (603), health (418), general education (415), agriculture (277), communication (67), forestry (55), and village development (41). The Nepalese government expected the students to work for at least three to five years for the government upon their return from studying abroad. But whether this policy was strictly adhered to is unknown, since the UNESCO team could only trace the track of employment of only about one-fourth of the students. The team was unable to track the other three-fourth of foreign-educated students. Nonetheless, even though the data on the professional career of the people trained within and outside the country in the name of development is incomplete, it was observed that the great majority of the foreign-educated Nepalese were working for the government throughout the 1960s and 70s. But this concentration came not from pressures of the government but rather from the fact that employment opportunities outside the public administration were limited, since the private sector was very weak during these decades.

Foreign aid penetrated the Nepalese bureaucracy much deeper than merely by training staff and commissioning foreign advisors with reform plans. The exigencies of foreign aid agencies also boosted the rapid and fairly uncontrolled growth of the bureaucracy. Since all development projects had to be channelled through the Nepalese government, donor agencies needed official counterparts for the implementation of their projects. In response to the foreign institution’s demand for contacts with official institutions working in the fields of the diverse foreign aid projects, the Nepalese government created several new

---

departments and bureaus.\textsuperscript{438} As a consequence, Nepal eventually witnessed the growth of two co-existing systems of public administration: first, the general administration for the day-to-day routine financed by the regular national budget, and second, the foreign aid sponsored “development administration.”

Head of the training section at CEDA, Bhim Dev Bhatta, who had studied development administration in the USA, published a book named \textit{Development Administration in Nepal} in 1979.\textsuperscript{439} In the introduction, he defined development administration as a branch of public administration that “is service plus development oriented” and “is practiced in the third world countries.” It also “calls for flexible rules and regulations” and “is run by the experts and trained personnel.” In contrast, “bureaucracy is the modus operandi” of the general public administration, which “is run by the administrators and bureaucrats.” According to Bhatta, another crucial feature of the development administration was that it “requires a huge amount of development funds.”\textsuperscript{440} Between the lines of his scholarly-looking but shallow definition, Bhatta basically says that the concept of development administration allows delegating government tasks to donor agencies, which in turn would build up a local development bureaucracy as part of the general public administration, at their own needs and expenses.

There is not much data available to compare the number of civil servants of the “general” and the “developmental” administration. For the first time in 1963, the Public Administration Department compiled statistics on employment. For general administration a total of 1275 gazetted civil servants, 11,214 non-gazetted civil servants and 15,100 peons (gofers) were revealed. For devel-


167
opment administration, the number came to 834 gazetted, and 9061 non-gazetted civil servants. The number of peons was not given.\textsuperscript{441}

The relatively higher number of unskilled and low ranking employees, in comparison with the number of skilled and gazetted officers, is striking.\textsuperscript{442} It is also striking that the number of foreign aid financed civil servants almost outweighed the number of government employees paid by the regular budget. In view of the steadily increasing foreign grants and loans and the increasing number of foreign aid agencies operating in Nepal, the size of development administration became even more significant in the years to follow.\textsuperscript{443} Yet, not only the size of the development administration, but also its crucial function as the inevitable point of contact for foreign aid agencies was considerable. The development bureaucrats, who were in many cases not just mere administrators but trained as development professionals, were working for both the civil service and the foreign agencies. Thus, they were in a potentially powerful position due to their access to resources and contacts of both sides, the foreign agencies as well as the national decision makers. But despite significant resources, the development bureaucrats also faced serious challenges as a result of their in-between position. On one hand, they needed to act according to the formal and informal rules and regulations of public administration. On the other hand, they needed to cope with the many different foreign agencies, all of whom had their own pro-


\textsuperscript{442} Pradhan explains this primarily by the attitude of officers to enhance their prestige by employing as many peons as possible. Peons did not only take care of all kind of odd jobs in the office but also served in the officers’ domestic sphere, for example as doorkeepers or for serving tea. Cf. Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal,” 48-49.

jects, needs, policies, and forms of organisation. The challenges and constraints of the in-between position of “bureaucrats–cum development experts” are discussed in more detail in chapter five.

4.5 A Look inside the Bureaucracy

The rapid growth of both general and development administration did not result in a rationalised bureaucratic apparatus as envisaged in the reform plans. It rather led to a non-transparent network of old and young cadres, peons, and foreign advisors of various provenances with structures that were constantly reformed and reorganised. Despite the many reports and analysis about the so-called development administration, the sources remain obscure about both the structure and mechanisms of the bureaucracy as well as the identity of its protagonist, the development bureaucrat. Whereas the reports pay much attention to the desired structures and institutions, they mention little about the actual functioning of the public administration or about the personalities of the bureaucrats. However, with the presentation of a little-known but nonetheless powerful institution called the Jāṅic Būjha Kēndra and the analysis of few Nepalese scholars’ reflections on the bureaucrats and the bureaucracy, I attempt to adumbrate an inside-picture of the Nepalese development bureaucracy during the Panchayat Period.

4.5.1 The Royal Think Tank

By the 1970s, countless government institutions targeting development issues had emerged, and sometimes disappeared, in a rapid and rather uncontrolled manner. Most prominently, the Ministry of Planning and Development was founded in 1952. In 1957, this ministry was supplemented by the National Plan-

---

444 Cf. Wildavsky, “Why Planning fails in Nepal,” 528. Wildavsky argues that Nepalese development planners adjust their work rather to the needs and requirements of foreign aid agencies than to the real needs of the country. He, for instance, argues that they work out Five-Year National Development Plans merely as a response to requirements and needs of donor agencies and not because it is believed that the plans are of any use. The role of bureaucrats as brokers between the Nepalese Government and foreign donor agencies is discussed in more detail in chapter five.
ning Commission (NPC). The NPC was set up as an advisory board without decision-making power, directly under the prime minister. Apart from the planning minister, it comprised representatives of political parties, intellectuals, and businessmen. Yet, soon after the constitution of the NPC, the “Council for the Five-Year Plan” was set up with the prime minister as its president, the planning minister as its vice-president, and secretaries of other ministries as well as representatives of foreign aid missions as its members. In the following year, a small *Yōjanā Mandal* (planning board) was also created under the chairmanship of the second prince. After the royal take-over, the king also founded a National Development Council (NDC) under his own chairmanship. The NDC was meant to be the highest forum for discussing and formulating development policies and included the cabinet members, all members of the NPC, the chairmen of the state-sponsored class organisations, the chairman of the national panchayat, the chairmen of the district panchayats, and other high-level politicians or personalities nominated by the king.  

However, not only the various institutions that explicitly targeted national planning but also numerous other public institutions operated in the name of development. The Education Planning Commission, the many departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Work, and of course the powerful Ministry of Finance, which was in charge of negotiating aid grants with foreign donors and channelling the money to the various projects, are just a few of them.

The physical centre of the development administration was the Singha Durbar (lit. lion palace). Prior to 1951, the neo-classical Singha Durbar complex with its more than one thousand rooms was the seat of the Rana government as well as the private residence of the prime minister. But after the Ranas moved out in 1951, the palace became seat of the parliament, the ministries, and many

---


446 Bhatta, *Development Administration in Nepal*, 71-76.
government offices. In literature, the “Singha Durbar” therefore became a synonym for the formally constituted public administration. Yet, as several authors have stated, in addition to the Singha Durbar, there was also a level of parallel administration constituted by the secretaries of the Royal Palace. There is, however, less literature on the institutions of the Royal Palace administration, due to their less official character.

In January 1971, King Mahendra invented a notable, yet understudied institution of the Royal Palace, the Jānic Būjh Kēndra (Investigation and Research Center). Initially, the Jānic Būjh Kēndra (JBK) was conceived as an ombudsman to investigate complaints against senior officials and was thus placed outside the regular bureaucracy under the direct supervision of crown prince Birendra. But when Birendra ascended the throne one year later, it soon expanded its scope and increased its influence. It was entrusted with the right to enquire all kinds of malpractices and corruption in the administration and even more importantly, was assigned the responsibility of conducting research on national development. The JBK thus became a high-powered think tank at the direct service of young King Birendra. The JBK was an explicitly Nepalese board with no foreign members or foreign advisors and consequently, had no formal English name. King Birendra selected the members of the JBK from among foreign educated civil servants as well as from a pool of accomplished journalists, businessmen, doctors, engineers and other professionals. During their relatively short tenure of three to six months as members of the JBK, these well-educated and mostly very young men were encouraged to criticise current policies and structures as well as to formulate new ideas for national development. They were well-trusted and given

---

protection by the king and were allowed to work in an atmosphere that permitted them to openly express their thoughts and opinions.\textsuperscript{449}

One significant result of the JBK’s investigations was the publication of \textit{Mēcī Dēkhi Mahākālī} (\textit{From the Mechi to the Mahakali}), a four-volume study presenting in 4380 pages all the seventy-five districts of Nepal.\textsuperscript{450} King Birendra had commissioned this study in view of the common lack of knowledge about districts outside the Kathmandu valley. The aim was to compile a useful handbook for Nepal’s development administrators and also to provide information on Nepal for researchers, foreign planners, students, and tourists. Each district was presented under exactly the same headings, which covered physical features, historical background, population and people’s lifestyle, economic conditions, transport and communication, education, health, water, administration and panchayat. Interestingly, Prayag Raj Sharma, then dean of the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies (Tribhuvan University), compared \textit{Mēcī Dēkhi Mahākālī} in a book review with the Imperial Gazetteer of India. Similar to the British colonial administrators, the members of the JBK wanted to thoroughly map out Nepal and its people in order to have a manual at hand for its administration and development.\textsuperscript{451} Without questioning the role of colonial knowledge production that was originally meant for the consolidation of colonial rule, Sharma very much welcomed the effort of compiling a Nepal Gazetteer even though he criticised the many shortcomings in terms of coherence and systematic presentation of data. He, for example, appreciated the anthropological study of twenty-four socio-ethnic groups but criticised the fact that the hill-based Chhetri-Bahun group was missing in the analysis despite being “among the most active and leading social

\textsuperscript{449} N. N. “Jaṅc Būjḥ Kēndra.”; Schild, Andreas. Interview by Sara Elmer. Patan, April 1, 2010.
\textsuperscript{450} Jaṅc Būjḥ Kēndra, ed. \textit{Mēcī Dēkhi Mahākālī} (Kathmandu: His Majesty’s Government of Nepal, 1975). \textit{Mēcī} and \textit{Mahākālī} are both names of districts.
groups of Nepal." Sharma explained the omission of this group by drawing upon a popular belief that “they are only a part of India’s Aryan cultural group.” Yet he did not consider the possibility that the hill Chhetri-Bahuns were left out in the study because many of the members of the JBK actually also belonged to this social group and did not see themselves as the object of research. Moreover, the primary audience of the book, for the development administrators, also widely belonged to the hill Chhetri-Bahun group. Hence, the authors may have considered it unnecessary to explain to the readers a social group that was more or less familiar to most of them.

Many members of the JBK were recruited when they were just at the beginning of their career but subsequently these members made successful careers in civil service and in private sectors. For example, the three JBK members Prachanda Pradhan, Devendra Raj Pandey, or Bihari Krishna Shrestha had all been working in the JBK after completing a PhD from English or American universities. Later, they continued their career as eminent development experts, first in government service and later on as private consultants for international aid agencies. The American educated social anthropologist Bihari Krishna Shrestha, for instance, confessed in an interview that his appointment in the JBK significantly facilitated his subsequent work in civil service. Through his work in the JBK in the early 1970s, he became close to King Birendra who subsequently provided protection to him when he fought various disputes with colleagues and superiors. Since he often criticised the functioning of public administration, he was several times removed from his positions and moved to another department or ministry,

---

Shrestha explained in an interview in 2012. But he never lost his job as a senior civil servant, thanks to his connection to the king. He was removed from the government system only in 1991, after the end of the panchayat system. The new Nepali Congress government dismissed him on the grounds of having supported the panchayat system. But Shrestha claimed that this excuse was just a pretext. The real reason, he explained, was a dispute with the Indian-friendly Nepali Congress after having released a resolution against the 1989 Indian trade embargo. However, Shrestha feels no regrets about his dismissal from civil service because soon after, he became a full-time consultant for foreign aid agencies and “made all the money in the world.”

The JBK is a good example to illustrate the obscure structure of the Nepalese bureaucracy with its division into the regular Singha Durbar administration and the parallel Royal Palace administration. Whether institutions or personalities were powerful or not depended, in many cases, less on its formal set up than on the preferences of the king as well as on the ability to cope with the requirements of foreign aid agencies. However, the Singha Durbar and the Royal Palace were not separate but interrelated entities and the bureaucrats could move from one to the other. Many members of the JBK for example, including Devendra Raj Panday and Bihari Krishna Shrestha, worked primarily as a part of the Singha Durbar administration and only temporarily for the Royal Palace.

In reference to James Ferguson’s idea of development apparatus, it can thus be stated that both the Singha Durbar and the Royal Palace were evidently a part of the Nepalese development apparatus. Another central entity of the development apparatus was the Tribhuvan University with its various institutions for producing and disseminating knowledge on Nepal, which was used both by Nepalese and foreign development planners. The significance of the public research centres has been adumbrated earlier in this chapter with a brief descrip-

---

tion of CEDA. The CEDA was Tribhuvan University’s most distinguished institute of development studies. But certain other institutions also, like the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development (CERID) with its journal *Education and Development*, or the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) with its journal *INAS*, contributed to the development knowledge production and to the establishment of a scientifically legitimated development discourse. These were not fully independent research institutions, as the national university was also interrelated with the Royal Palace and the Singha Durbar on an organisational and personal level. Another central entity of the development apparatus was the foreign aid agencies. The role of foreign aid agencies in Nepal and their interaction with government institutions and Nepalese development experts is discussed in chapter five.

The JBK is also a good example to illustrate the shift in generation among the Nepalese development bureaucrats that has taken place in the 1970s. As stated earlier in this chapter, many civil servants proved to be resilient to political changes so that many of the old cadres of the Rana regime continued to maintain their influence in the post-Rana government. However, in the 1970s young graduates of foreign universities who had benefitted from scholarship programmes sponsored by the Nepalese government or foreign aid agencies increasingly gained influence within the sphere of Nepalese public administration. Some representatives of this new generation are mentioned in this thesis.\(^{456}\) These young professionals mostly originated from the same elite families as the older cadres. But they were not just a bunch of privileged young men but were well educated and “acculturated to world culture.”\(^{457}\) Since they were all born around 1940, they had been socialised in the “age of planning”\(^{458}\) and were spe-

---

\(^{456}\) E.g. the above-mentioned members of the JBK. Others are Pashupati Shamsher Rana, Bhim Dev Bhatta, and Tara Deva Bhattarai.

\(^{457}\) Mohsin, “Social Background and Administrative Behaviour.”

\(^{458}\) Publicity, *A Brief Description of the Progress in the Work of Different Departments in the Year 1955-56*, 22. See also chapter three about the idea of Nepal in the “age of planning”.
cifically trained to cope with international development aid and ideas of national planning. Foreign donors appreciated working with them because due to their education abroad these young men were not only familiar with the English language and with Western lifestyles but also with the common development jargon.\footnote{For a deconstructive analysis of the development jargon see Sachs, The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power.} King Birendra was also in favour of this young generation, probably not least because he was himself only twenty-seven years old when he ascended the throne in 1972 and shared their experience of a foreign education.\footnote{King Birendra studied at Eton College, University of Tokyo and Harvard University. See Aryal-Lohani, Rimal, and Regmi, et al., Who is Who - Nepal 1972-74: A Biographical Dictionary of the Distinguished Nepali Personalities; Högger, Die Schweiz in Nepal: Erfahrungen und Fragen aus der schweizerischen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit mit Nepal, 51-52.} Thus, the young cadres of the development administration, of whom many worked at the JBK, were on one hand products of the state-led development efforts, since many of them had benefitted from scholarship programmes; on the other hand, they were also direct agents of development who actively shaped the Nepalese development apparatus through their activities and publications.

Hence, despite the uncontrolled growth of the bureaucracy, there was a decisive concentration of knowledge and power within the development administration. Goodall, for example, identified by 1975 a well-educated elite working in top positions in the Nepalese civil service. He knew many of them since his first visits to Nepal in the early 1950s and had the chance to follow their careers from low-level civil servants and students abroad to senior civil servants who mastered the skills of coping with the Nepalese political elites as well as with the foreign experts.\footnote{Goodall, “Bureaucracy and Bureacrats: Some Themes Drawn from the Nepal Experience.”}

4.5.2 The Typical Bureaucrat

Despite the uncontrolled growth of the bureaucracy there was a decisive concentration of knowledge and power within certain institutions of the development administration like the JBK. But who were the bureaucrats who shaped the
Nepalese development policies? This question is only scantily addressed in documents on administrative reforms. Bureaucrats were merely conceived as neutral functionaries and not as personalities whose work is influenced by their social backgrounds and experiences. However, with the foundation of CEDA in 1969, Nepalese researchers began to look not only at the structures of the administration but also at social factors, which might influence the performance of the development administration.

Under the simple title “Aspects of Development Administration,” the second volume of the CEDA Studies Series investigated the socio-psychological aspects of the administration.\(^{462}\) The editor underlined the importance of this research because “[t]echniques for planning can be imported, resources can be borrowed, and technical experts can be invited” but the goals of the plans can only be achieved with the “corresponding change in the attitude and behaving pattern of the people.”\(^{463}\) Similar to the Tribhuvan Village Development Programme, the authors of the CEDA diagnosed a need for change of attitude among the development bureaucrats as they were regarded as the major agents of development in Nepal.

The quality and profoundness of the contributions in the innovative CEDA publication varies from author to author. K. B. Deuja, secretary of the “Back to Village National Campaign” emphasised the role of the “administrator as an agent of change.”\(^{464}\) For Deuja, “the first and foremost requirement for change is the attitude of the administrator and his unquestionable or unchallenged reputation and personality.”\(^{465}\) He described the ideal bureaucrat as a dynamic, enlightened, and undisputed leader who is ready to take the risk of change and

\(^{462}\) Pradhan, Aspects of Development Administration.
\(^{463}\) See Pradhan’s preface in Pradhan, Aspects of Development Administration, I.
keeps “his management on the alert throughout all stages of the process of change to keep anxiety [of his subordinates] under control.” Deuja did not mention any concrete examples in his short essay and his discussion remained superficial, vague, and repetitive. But considering Deuja’s position as the secretary of a campaign that promotes the authoritarian panchayat system, the suspicion that emerges is whether he was concerned more with legitimising the strong leadership of the king than with real-life experiences of bureaucrats. However, other authors in the same edited volume did not share Deuja’s idealised and simplistic image of the bureaucrat and tried to analyse the situation of the bureaucrats in greater depths.

Mohammed Mohsin, the secretary of the National Education Committee, questioned the interrelation of Social Background and Administrative Behaviour in his article titled so. Mohsin’s training in sociology from Bombay University is apparent in his scholarly essay, in which he criticised mainstream social science theories for portraying bureaucrats as apolitical, neutral, and value-free agents. For Mohsin, it was clear that bureaucrats were not mere instruments of the political leaders but were themselves political agents. His critique would have also been applicable for Deuja’s superficial portrayal of the ideal bureaucrat but Mohsin did not mention Nepalese authors in his article. Mohsin argued that a bureaucrat, like any other individual in a workplace, “lives in a community and a society,” therefore “his likes and dislikes, tastes and distastes, are generally determined and influenced by the cultural heritage, social experience and every day events of his gregarious existence.” He particularly underlined the administrator’s “high inter-changeability of roles that characterises non-Western society,” meaning that his role as an administrator is inseparable “from his other roles as a member of joint-family, a kinships group, a caste, an ethnic community or

467 Mohsin, “Social Background and Administrative Behaviour.”
neighbourhood association.” 

In reference to a leading American scholar in development studies Lucian Pye, Mohsin pointed out that bureaucrats in developing countries would be recruited among the English educated elites who are acculturated to “world culture.” He did not further define the concept of a world culture but pointed out that it would enhance the gap between the administrators and “the common people.” Nonetheless, bureaucrats would still be bound to their traditional affiliations and are expected to provide his relatives and friends certain advantages through his position. Yet, even though Mohsin made efforts to shed light on the socio-psychological aspects of the development administration, his analysis also remained strikingly abstract. Although the context of the publications makes it obvious that Mohsin was actually addressing the Nepalese situation, he mentioned “Nepal” not even once in his article. The reason behind not explicitly referring to the situation in Nepal is not clear. He might have attempted to create the impression of scientific neutrality with his wording or may have wanted to be cautious so as not to affront colleagues and superiors.

More flesh to the bone is provided by the social scientist Pashupati Shumshere Rana with his appeal in “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration.” Born in 1941, Rana started his career at a very young age as Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home and Panchayat (1964–68), after obtaining his bachelor degree from the Haileybury and Imperial Service College (England). Notably, the Haileybury College had been one of the main training institutions of the Imperial Civil Service. Rana was one of the founders of CEDA in 1969 and acted as its executive director until he became a member of the National Development Council and a businessman in 1973. As a businessman, he acted as chairman of the Moran Hydro Electric Company, and as director of the Nepal

470 Mohsin, “Social Background and Administrative Behaviour,” 27.
Bank Limited and became the proprietor of the Nepal Gas Industries Private Limited, both lucrative jobs.\textsuperscript{472}

Like Mohsin, Rana was of the opinion that the mostly elitist social background of the bureaucrats has a decisive impact on the work of the public administration. But he went a step further and situated his analysis of the social background of bureaucrats in the actual context of the nation building process in Nepal. Rana thought that although Nepal has a much longer history of political unification than many other countries, “much remains to be done to knit the country together culturally and economically.”\textsuperscript{473} The low sense of national unity seemed problematic to Rana, but “[w]hat is worse, in the context of our developing economy,” he further argued, is that “a small and dominant minority has a virtual monopoly over the positions of power and profit.”\textsuperscript{474}

According to Rana, the best represented example of this dominant minority was the civil service. He therefore examined the composition of the civil service in terms of caste, geographical provenience, and class, and came up with a distinct social profile of the typical bureaucrat. He concluded that the typical bureaucrat is a high-caste Hindu born in the Kathmandu valley and a member of the class of “client families,” which had become powerful through their connections with the formerly ruling Rana family. In the Rana administration, the more influential officials tended to come from a narrow group of about two or three hundred families. Many of these families belonged to the bhārādār class [courtiers, nobility, or high government officials, mentioned before in this chapter]. In addition to the privileges they had received during the Rana rule, they had further consolidated a dominant economic position through trade and marital affiliations with landlords. Since these families gained wealth and power under the


\textsuperscript{473} Rana, “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration,” 41.

\textsuperscript{474} Rana, “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration,” 41.
patronage of the Rana prime ministers, Pashupati Rana labelled them as “client families.”\textsuperscript{475} He demonstrated that despite the overthrow of the Rana rule, these client families remained powerful so that at the time when his article was published, still eighty to ninety per cent of the high-ranking civil servants belonged to the class of these client families. Rana did not quote his sources but stated that his findings were based on the analysis of the family names of the more senior bureaucrats. However, he did not mention any of the respective names because he did “not wish to hurt the feelings of a group of people amongst whom are many who I [Pashupati Rana] regard as friends.”\textsuperscript{476}

Having said this, Rana addressed a common dilemma of Nepalese intellectuals who wanted to criticise their society. Since many intellectuals belonged to elite families that benefited from a hierarchical social system, they were often hesitant in articulating their critique in order to avoid offending their kin. Pashupati Shamsher Rana himself belonged to an influential family. He was the grandson of the last Rana prime minister, Mohan Shamsher Rana, and son of Bijaya Shamsher J.B. Rana, who had been in charge of Nepal’s first national development plan drafted in the late 1940s. The Shamsher Ranas also had strong relations with the Shah kings, since the Rana family used to intermarry with the royal family. In the entire article, Pashupati Rana refers neither to his own family background nor to any royal connection. But the security of the monarchical support might have allowed him to be more explicit in his social critique than other intellectuals. Although he does not mention any names, readers were probably able to identify the members of client families that Rana referred to.

In terms of provenience, Rana estimated that more than half of the civil servants originated from the Kathmandu valley. This ratio was clearly dispropr-

\textsuperscript{475} Rana, “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration,” 41-42. Pashupati Rana does not mention that many of the “client families” had already been in powerful positions in pre-Rana times (for example the Bhārādārī families).
\textsuperscript{476} Rana, “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration,” 42.
tional to the geographical population distribution, since at that time only about three per cent of all Nepalese people were living in the Kathmandu valley. Rana’s findings regarding caste were equally clear. He stated that eighty to ninety per cent of all civil servants belonged to the highest Hindu castes and were either Bahun (Brahmin), Chhetri, or Newar. Rana did not explain how he came up with his data and neither did he quote his sources. It seems that he may have based his statements on personal observations and estimations and not on empirical research.

However, a crosscheck with the *Who is Who – Nepal*\(^{477}\) published in 1974 confirms Rana’s findings on caste distribution among the country’s elite. The *Who is Who – Nepal* comprises short biographies of the members of the royal family and of 379 other “personalities who have earned their name or fame in social, political, economic, administrative, scientific and other important fields.”\(^ {478}\) The idea of the editors was to compile “authoritative information” about these personalities who were “badly needed for the planned and balanced development of the country” and to present them “in the international arena in true perspective.”\(^ {479}\) Hence, the book was written for foreign readership and intended to present a generally valid list of the leading “agents of development” in the country.

The *Who is Who* is clearly dominated by representatives of the state. Almost all of the 379 personalities were either government employees or elected members of some government bodies. The list of state secretaries, diplomats, judges, members of the National Planning Commission, of the National Education Committee, and of the National Development Council, functionaries of the


National University, king’s nominees of the National Panchayat, and other officials show that certain family names are shared by many among these individuals. Though the *Who is Who – Nepal* does not mention caste membership, it can in many cases be definitively deduced from the family names. Out of the 379 personalities, 330 appear to be Bahun, Chhetri, or Newar (about 87.5 percent), 20 appear to belong to other castes and 29 have names that are not clearly related to specific castes. Particularly common among the prominent government functionaries are names like Shrestha (24, Newar), Singh (20, Chhetri), Upadhyaya (20, Bahun), Thapa (19, Chhetri), Sharma (18, Bahun), Pandey (14, Bahun), Pradhan (14, Newar), and Rana (14, Chhetri).

From today’s perspective, diagnosing a concentration of power among members of the highest Hindu castes might not be surprising since criticising the Bahun–Chhetri–Newar dominance has become a commonplace in Nepal. Especially in the course of the recent civil war (1996–2006), criticising the high-caste elite has become virulent. Not only the Maoist rebels but many other political groups also has blamed the nation building policies of the Panchayat Era for excluding many ethnic and lower caste groups and thus enhancing the gulf in the standard of living between the different sections of the population. But in the early 1970s, open debates about social discrimination were still rare. Pashupati Shamsher Rana warned that the domination of a small Kathmandu-based elite over the majority of the Nepalese population would lead to the disintegration of the nation. He did not, however, advocate a scheduled castes policy like in India, as he considered it not an appropriate strategy to fight social injustices in Nepal.

---

480 The same name cluster can also be found among lower ranks of development bureaucrats as, for example, the comparison of the *Who is Who – Nepal* with lists of teaching staff and trainees of the various District Panchayat Development Training Institutes shows: Bikas Samiti, ed. *Institutional Training Progress Report 2024-2025* (Kathmandu: Bikas Samiti, 1967), appendix, Home Panchayat Ministry, 1972, #41986.

481 The causes and consequences of the civil war have been discussed by many scholars, particularly by political scientists and anthropologists. See for instance the contributions in: Michael Hutt, *Himalayan People’s War: Nepal’s Maoist Rebellion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).
On the contrary, he believed that such policies would perpetuate the separate identities and caste dichotomies and particularly, that most likely only the “elite” members of scheduled castes would benefit from a quota system. Rana rather favoured a more inclusive school system and scholarship policy, which would allow members of disadvantaged groups to acquire the qualifications for government jobs.\footnote{Rana, “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration,” 43-44.}

The common discourse of focusing on an overall Bahun–Chhetri–Newar dominance was also a matter of simplifying the case, as access to the centres of power, like Rana pointed out, was mainly reserved for certain “client families” and not to all high-caste people. Moreover, despite the legal codification of the Nepalese caste system in the Muluki Ain of 1854, “caste” was not a fixed social category as sometimes used in the political debate. There was also always room for social mobility within the caste system. Just as individuals could lose their caste status due to violation of certain caste rules, they could also move up in the caste hierarchy as well, through processes of “sanskritisation,”\footnote{Sanskritisation designates the emulation of rituals and practices of Brahmns. Cf. Louis Dumont, \textit{Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System} (London: Paladin, 1972), 67.} through inter-caste marriages, or simply by changing one’s family name.\footnote{Family names could, however, also be a misleading indicator for one’s caste status as the same family name could have various meanings in different places. About the complex hierarchical structures among Hindu elites in Nepal see: Richard Burghart, “Hierarchical Models of the Hindu Social System,” \textit{Man, New Series} 13 (1978). About social mobility within the caste system see: Christoph Fürer-Haimendorf von, “The Inter-Relations of Castes and Ethnic Groups in Nepal,” \textit{Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London} 20 (1957). For a thorough discussion of the history of the concept of caste on the Indian sub-continent see: Susan Bayly, \textit{Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).} The ethnic group of Newar is a good example for demonstrating the complex nature of caste as a social category and to show why blaming high caste dominance is problematic.

Talking of the Newar as a privileged group is an instance of blatant simplification, since it overshadows the fact that the Newar constitute a large ethnic
group with a proper, highly stratified caste system. Only members of the highest caste, and of the most sanskritised Newar families belonged to the country’s traditional elite. Particularly the so-called Shrestha-Newars were strongly represented in the civil service. “Shrestha” is not only a common family name but also the name of the highest caste group within the Newar. The Shrestha are divided into various sub-castes. Members of the highest sub-caste of Shrestha Newar, the so-called “Chathare Shrestha” (six-grade Shrestha), trace their ancestry back to the Malla kings and courtiers who ruled the Kathmandu valley before it was conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769. The Malla kings belonged to the Chathare Shrestha and also granted the title “Shrestha” to those serving as administrators at the royal court. Constituting the Newar aristocracy, the Chathare Shrestha not only occupied influential positions in the Malla courts but also in the subsequent Shah and Rana courts. Due to their long-standing occupation of high-level positions in the bureaucracy, they were able to hold on to many crucial government positions even after the end of the Rana rule. Thus, the members of the Chathare Shrestha Newar became, over the centuries, a caste of courtiers, bureaucrats, and eventually, of development experts.

Thus, describing the typical senior civil servant as a high-caste Hindu may not be entirely accurate. But Pashupati Shamsher Rana’s specification of the typical bureaucrat originating from a Kathmandu based “client family” offers a more accurate picture. However, by stressing on the three features of caste,

---

485 The exact origin of the name Shrestha is unknown. Scholars are not fully sure whether the Newar high caste named “Shyasya” adopted the Sanskrit word Shrestha [śrēṣṭha], which means “best” or “excellent”, or whether “Shrestha” is a derivation of the Newari word Shyasya. When exactly the name Shrestha had been popularised among Newars is also not known. The two words became, however, synonymous names for the highest Newar caste. About the Newar caste system see: Führer-Haimendorf von, “The Inter-Relations of Castes and Ethnic Groups in Nepal.”; Shrestha, “Castes among the Newars. The Debate between Colin Rosser and Declan Quigley on the Status of Shrestha.”

486 Shrestha, “Castes among the Newars. The Debate between Colin Rosser and Declan Quigley on the Status of Shrestha,” 16. Typical names of Chathare Shrestha Newar include Malla, Shrestha, Pradhan, Maskey, Joshi, Amatya, and few others.
class, and place of origin, he overlooked another intrinsic characteristic of the
typical bureaucrat, – being male.

Apart from the female members of the royal family, the Who is Who – Nepal mentions only twelve women among the almost four hundred personalities. None of them were bureaucrats in the narrower sense but almost all worked for public institutions or were elected members of the Rastriya Panchayat. Three of them had not received formal education but the rest had university degrees, mostly from Indian and US universities and were well-qualified and experienced in their field of expertise.

It is of little surprise that almost all of these women worked in positions that specifically catered to the female population. Out of the twelve women, only two held positions that did not explicitly target women’s issues. One worked as a librarian in Tribhuvan University, the other as a technical expert in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Two of the other women were medical doctors specialising in gynaecology and family planning at the National Hospital. Another one worked as a lecturer in domestic sciences at Tribhuvan University after having received a PhD in this subject from an American university. She was also the founder of the “Nepal Association of University Women.” Others again, had been active as leaders of various women’s organisations. Political scientist Kamal Rana (born 1928), for example, was a founding member of the Women’s Volunteer Service in 1952 and the Nepali Family Planning Association in 1958. She had participated in several international women conferences (e.g. in Sri Lanka 1952, Moscow 1958, Addis Ababa 1969) and was appointed as a member of the UN Commission on Status of Women (1963–65). Since 1966, she acted as

---

central president of the Nepal Women’s Organisation and since 1971 as an elected member of the Rastriya Panchayat.

From early on, “women” featured as a regular topic in development planning in Nepal. The Tribhuvan Village Development Programme had already targeted women when it set up the first Women’s Training Centre in 1954 to train women as village development workers. The female village workers were instructed to educate and train village women in “women’s affairs” such as domestic sciences and maternity health.\(^{490}\) Thus, women were either the targets who needed to be developed according to certain ideas of modernisation,\(^ {491}\) or, they were trained as low-level development workers, so that they could intervene in the private sphere of rural families where men often had no access. But even though development planning opened up a new field of activity for women and enabled them to obtain government jobs, their options were limited to specifically “female” occupations. Desk jobs and higher positions in the civil service remained almost exclusively reserved for men. However, as the examples of the Who is Who show, a few women still achieved quite strong and influential positions among the male dominated national elite. But these are exceptions proving the rule. Moreover, the typical social profile of civil servants as mentioned by Pashupati Shamsher Rana also applied to these few successful women as most of them had been born into a Kathmandu based high-caste client family.


Taking the composition of the JBK, of Pashupati Shamsher Rana’s analysis, and the *Who is Who – Nepal* into account, the typical “bureaucrat–cum–development expert” of the Panchayat Period can be characterised as a male, foreign educated, high-caste member of a Kathmandu based “client family.” While the maleness, the foreign education, and the urban origin of bureaucrats did not stir a debate, the predominantly high-caste, elite background of the bureaucrats formed fodder for the increasingly severe critiques.

### 4.5.3 The Bureaucrat as Agent or Obstructionist of Development?

The CEDA publication on socio-psychological aspects of the Nepalese administration was spurred by its editor, the deputy director of CEDA Prachanda Pradhan. Pradhan was one of the leading experts in Nepal on public administration in the 1970s. He made an impressive career as an academic and a development professional. After obtaining a master’s degree in political sciences from Lucknow University at the age of twenty-two in 1961, Pradhan held several teaching positions before he continued his education in the United States, thanks to a scholarship granted by the USAID. In 1969 he received a PhD under the supervision of Professor Merrill Goodall at the Claremont Graduate School for his thesis on *Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal.*

After returning to Nepal, he became a lecturer and founding member of the Public Administration Programme at the Tribhuvan University. In 1970, he was appointed as deputy director of the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) and a year later as dean of the Institute of Business Administration, Commerce and Public Administration at Tribhuvan University. At the same time, he continued working for CEDA as a consultant and took over the directorship of CEDA in 1976. Later on, Pradhan continued his career on an international level, working for the United Nation’s

---

492 Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal.”
In his 1969 PhD thesis, Pradhan investigated the role of the Nepalese bureaucracy in national development. He looked at the institutional history and functions of the bureaucracy and was also the first to question social and psychological factors that might influence the work of the bureaucracy. In the introduction of his thesis, Pradhan presented Max Weber’s model of a legal-rational bureaucracy only to show that it is not applicable for developing countries. He argued that the Weberian model “tends to ignore human factors” and the “psychological consequence of individual interaction within the bureaucracy.” While it is based on the assumption of a strongly neutral and instrumental bureaucratic apparatus, the bureaucracy in developing countries “is a potent agency of the government.” According to Pradhan, the bureaucracy in developing countries possesses “the information required to manipulate the situation” and as the case of Nepal proves, it “becomes dominating and dictating” so that the “people of such countries become attuned to feeling helpless and need the help of the government in many aspects of life.” Similar to James Scott’s analysis of the authoritarian “high-modernist” state, Pradhan argued that the power of the bureaucracy is particularly problematic in view of the weakness of the political parties and the lack of a vibrant civil society in Nepal. The higher Nepalese bureaucrats were assigned the role of the major agents of change and development and they became influential political players.

498 Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.
However, Pradhan further stated in his thesis that the Nepalese bureaucracy was not satisfactorily fulfilling its role as the nation’s development agency. Interrogating the reasons, he did not question the issue of whether reforming the Nepalese bureaucracy along foreign patterns made sense or not. He rather explained the underperformance of the bureaucracy by cultural and social traits that were rooted in the pre-1951 period. For instance, he pointed out that government jobs were not attractive because of the salary but because working for the government and the king was supposed to be very honourable and prestigious. Having a jāgīr (government job), he argued, enhanced the social status of the person employed. Like in the pre-1951 period, the whole family benefitted from the prestige and benefits attached to a government position. The civil servants’ families profited from the easier access to government institutions, thanks to their kinsman working in the government and from the material benefits granted to higher-ranking civil servants (like a private telephone line or domestic servants). Pradhan argued that since the idea that a person’s job was the concern of the whole family was deep-seated, civil servants often faced high expectations from their family. It was, for example, a moral obligation of civil servants to help their relatives also to get a jāgīr. One of Pradhan’s main theses was that the family expectations, and thus the underlying social values, very negatively influenced the daily work of bureaucrats as the bureaucrats’ priority was rarely pinned on achieving their actual tasks but on serving friends and relatives.\footnote{Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal,” 82-86.} He further blamed the Nepalese society for its caste and class stratification, which he regarded as a major reason for the failure of the bureaucracy to implement the planned development schemes. He shared Pashupati Shamsher Rana’s view of the high-caste dominated civil service. He criticised the fact that despite the abolition of the codified caste system, people of high caste status still enjoyed much more authority in the society. Consequently, the prevalent caste hierarchies further deepened the gulf between the bureaucratic elite and the common
people whom they were expected to serve. Pradhan’s critique was shared and further developed by his colleague Dor Bahadur Bista who formulated the most far-reaching critique of the Nepalese society and bureaucracy in his 1991 publication *Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization.* For Bista, Nepalese bureaucrats were not just ineffective in fulfilling their role as agents of change, but actually constituted a major obstacle for Nepal’s development.

Dor Bahadur Bista earned the reputation for being the “father of Nepalese anthropology” for introducing and promoting anthropology as an academic discipline in Nepal, first in his capacity as executive director of the Centre for Nepalese and Asian Studies (CNAS) from 1978 to 1982 and later as director of the newly founded department of anthropology and sociology in Tribhuvan University. Despite his professorship, Bista’s only formal degree was an undergraduate certificate in Indian Ethnography from the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). He obtained his certificate from SOAS in the early 1960s while working as an assistant of the eminent specialist on Himalayan anthropology Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. After being at odds with his mentor whom he blamed for pursuing a colonial style of anthropology and for having a “native-versus-Western university-professor kind of attitude,” Bista developed his own style of what he called “Nepalese anthropology.” Bista’s ideas and visions about how the discipline of “Nepalese anthropology” should look like were influenced by his further research activities in American universities and for USAID (1964–68), as well as by his professional engagement as a civil servant and

---

501 Bista, *Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization.*
503 Fisher, “An Interview with Dor Bahadur Bista (22 May 1991),” 27. According to Bista, Haimendorf did not want him to become an anthropologist and obstructed his pursuit of a Master’s degree. He further also said that Haimendorf agreed that he publishes in Nepali language but tried to ban him from publishing in English because he thought the information Bista had collected on their common travels were under his copyright.
secretary of the Remote Area Development Committee (1968–1972). He asserted that Nepalese anthropology should not be theory ridden but must be applied anthropology, which delivers useful findings for development work.  

Bista also contributed to the CEDA publication “Aspects of Development Administration.” With his essay about the frustration in Nepalese bureaucracy as “the worst enemy of efficiency,” he started to develop a cultural critique of the Nepalese elites. According to Bista, bureaucrats were frustrated because their talent was either overestimated or totally underestimated, because the disparity between the development ideals they were exposed to during their studies abroad and their daily experiences in Nepal was too big, or because of persistent social pressure to maintain a nepotistic behaviour. While Bista’s 1971 essay was rather sketchy, he further developed his cultural critique over the following two decades and eventually published his well-known but controversially received book Fatalism and Development. This book was clearly a result of Bista’s professional experiences as an anthropologist, development expert, and civil servant. He wrote it in 1989 while the panchayat system was still in function, and published it in 1991 after the system had been ended upon pressure from a people’s movement. In Fatalism and Development, Bista pushed Max Weber’s sociology of religions to the extremes. He considered the Nepalese society corrupted by a high-caste Hindu worldview, which he called “Bahunism.” “Bahunism,” according to Bista, fostered the privileges of high-caste Hindus and cultivated a “culture of fatalism” that impedes innovative, development-friendly behaviour. The criticism of “Bahunism” and fatalism runs like a thread through the

---

505 Bista, “Frustration in Nepali Bureaucracy,” 34.
506 A few years later, in January 1996, Dor Bahadur Bista disappeared on his way back from the remote Jumla district where he had been conducting academic and development work for several years. He has never been seen again since then: K. C. Gaurab, and Pratyoush Onta, Draft Bibliography of Social Scientific Writings by Dor Bahadur Bista (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, unpublished, 2013).
whole book as Bista basically identified them to be the cause of all “evils” of Nepalese society. Since the public administration was dominated by members of high-caste groups, he considered “Bahunism” and fatalism to be particularly severe problems in the state bureaucracy. He thereby emphasised that although formally abolished, the cākari system with its negative impacts continued to pervade the bureaucracy as, in his eyes, the administrative culture has not changed since the Rana autocracy.\footnote{Not only Bista but also Borgström, Goodall and Pradhan argued that cākari as a formalised bureaucratic behaviour was still in practice after the end of the Rana regime: Borgström, “The Best of Two Worlds: Rhetoric of Autocracy and Democracy in Nepal.”; Goodall, “Administrative Change in Nepal.”; Pradhan, “Bureaucracy and Development in Nepal.”}

Neither Pradhan nor Bista questioned the state-centred concept of development of the Panchayat Period and both expected the bureaucrats to act as agents of development. But while Pradhan merely criticised the unsatisfactory performance of bureaucrats as development experts, Bista even blamed them to be true obstructionists of development processes. As demonstrated with the quote at the beginning of the chapter, Bista went even as far as to consider a colonial administration to be more development friendly than the Nepalese administration. However, Bista did not put forward the argument that the Nepalese society must become more “Westernised” in order to develop. He rather advocated a modern Nepalese nation that adapts foreign elements of an efficient state bureaucracy to the supposedly “real” native traditions and not to “Bahunism” and fatalism, which he considered to be “imported” values of a corrupted Hindu elite.

Yet, even though Bista blamed his mentor Haimendorf for having a colonial attitude, his own work is clearly not free from oriental stereotypes. With an allegedly “neutral” look of an anthropologist, he created an idealised and essentialist image of an “uncorrupted,” native Nepalese culture that is lived among the different ethnic groups. Moreover, in his cultural critique of the Nepalese
development bureaucracy he bluntly ignored the global context of development policies and neglected the donor’s interests in Nepal.

Despite assailing the performance of the Nepalese development bureaucracy, neither Pradhan nor Bista fundamentally questioned the state-driven, foreign-aided development efforts. They rather blamed supposedly indigenous (Pradhan) or supposedly foreign imported (Bista) cultural features for obstructing Nepal’s development. Thus, they remained in the common development discourse cultivated by the public administration and by foreign agencies, as they were reproducing central arguments of the economic modernisation theory. Whereas in the case of the village development programme, “the rural poor” and “the incapable village workers” were deplored as stumbling blocks to Nepal’s development, Bista and Pradhan projected the same image of the tradition-ridden, non-innovative, and backward Nepalese people on the national bureaucratic elite.

4.6 Summary and Preview
Since the beginnings of foreign aid in Nepal, the state bureaucracy as the main actor of development underwent many reforms and changes. The case of Nepal thereby distinctly differs from postcolonial states like Tanzania or India because of the lack of a former colonial administration upon which the reforms could have been built. Nonetheless, soon after the change of regime in 1951, the Nepalese government and its foreign advisors started to reform the Nepalese bureaucracy along the lines of the British-Indian system with the aim to “catch-up,” if not with the Western nations then at least with the postcolonial societies. The vision of a strong, rationalised bureaucracy that can lead the nation to a prosperous future was pursued by Nepalese policy makers as well as foreign advisors but it was clearly not realised. Yet, even though the ideal of an efficient development bureaucracy was not achieved, the many reforms significantly
changed the outlook of not only the administration but also that of the Nepalese society.

The public administration system expanded hand in hand with the rise of foreign aid. Both grew rather uncontrolled but became intrinsic pillars of the panchayat government. The expectation that the state, embodied by its bureaucrats, is responsible for the economic and social development of Nepal became very common. It is even reflected in critiques blaming the bureaucracy to be the problem, instead of being the solution for development. The growing public administration further led to the emergence of a new social class of bureaucrats. Similar to the resilient bureaucratic elite in colonised societies, the old elite of the Rana administration survived the political ruptures of 1951 and 1960. But even though much power remained in the old client families, the growing public administration with its claim to become a technocratic development agency also enabled the emergence of a new class of Nepalese “bureaucrats–cum–development experts.” This new class of development bureaucrats largely originated from the previously established elite. Yet they became successful not simply because of their family connections but mainly because of their education. Since the mid-1960s, a new generation of young, Western-educated bureaucrats began pervading the public administration and forming the national elite. Some of the talented and well-connected development bureaucrats, especially those serving the king in the JBK, made impressive careers not only in the civil service but subsequently as private consultants on development issues and as civil society activists. Through their work in the civil service, they became experts on the Nepalese governmental system and through their foreign education they were also experts on the West and on the West- influenced development discourse. This expertise enabled them to carve out their own room for manoeuvre within the Nepalese development apparatus and to become influential “brokers” between the Nepalese government and the foreign aid community. The next chapter will be dedicated to those Nepalese development professionals who man-
aged to become successful development brokers through their ability to cope with both foreigners and Nepalese decision makers and who sometimes even outgrew their role as local development brokers and became members of the international aid community.
5 The Broker

Like mosquitoes, Nepal experts are usually of two types; a) the local experts and b) overseas experts. The local expert, also known as ‘counterpart’, is someone who is expert in the intricacies of the government bureaucracy and is usually seen zooming from one department to another on a Honda trail with a sheet of papers in a shoulder bag. He is also expert in getting stuff through customs and is renowned for such feats of accomplishment as rescuing the foreign expert’s automatic dishwasher and video equipment from the airport godown. The local expert can also renew an errant visa in no time and is an indispensable handyman. Years of working as a part of his counter usually qualifies the local expert for a Ph.D. in a subject such as, for instance, ‘Socio-Economic Aspects of the Nepali House Fly’. The local expert will return to be promptly co-opted into the planning institute. His foreign counterpart, meanwhile, is busy becoming an expert on Nepal. A feat that will take him exactly two and a half days. The best place to get to know experts is at one of those expert bashes, where well-groomed consultants in safari suits usually congregate in the evenings to discuss over gin-and-tonic such matters of mutual interest as the quality of bekti (fish) at the fresh house, or how many more years before enough hardship-allowance can be saved so that the family can live happily ever after. 508

As jocular as Kunda Dixit’s 1984 contribution to the “Funny Side Up” section of the government newspaper may sound, it actually nails a delicate topic. In a nut-

shell, Dixit summarises the dominance of foreign aid in Nepal and presents a vivid picture of expatriates’ lives. He thereby stresses on the close but unequal relationship between local and foreign development professionals. In this aid “partnership,” the foreign expert appears to be clearly superior, not because of his advanced ideas regarding development in Nepal, but simply because he is a foreigner (of Western origin). But the foreign expert is also inevitably dependent on his local counterpart as life and work in Nepal would not be possible without the help of a local “broker.”

In this chapter, I look at these Nepalese development professionals who worked directly with foreign development advisors and thereby helped connecting the community of international aid workers with the local government and society. These “development brokers” overlap, to a certain extent, with the development bureaucrats described in the previous chapter. But while chapter four discusses the set-up of a developmental state and the creation of development bureaucrats, the present chapter focuses on the cosmopolitan sphere of international development aid and the role of Nepalese working within this sphere. These Nepalese development professionals could be employed by the government, working as official counterparts of foreign advisors. But they could also be directly employed by foreign aid agencies, or could even work as free-lance development consultants.

After introducing the theoretical concept of “development brokers” and the rhetorical device of “Aidland,” I would present a brief history of the emergence of foreign aid and the international aid community in Nepal. I then investigate the Nepalese people who work and live within this sphere of international aid. In the process, I distinguish between three different groups of Nepalese development brokers. First, I look at the “petty brokers” who assisted foreign advisors in their daily life as workers in the vast sub-economy of foreign aid. Second, I discuss the “classic brokers” who worked as official government counterparts or
as skilled staff in foreign aid agencies. Their work was essential for the set-up of development programmes but, as will be shown, not free of tensions and enviousness. The third group I look at, comprises what I suggest calling the “subversive brokers.” These are prominent development experts with successful careers in civil service, who were also well respected among foreign development advisors. By virtue of their inside-knowledge, however, they became the fiercest critics of the foreign-aided Nepalese development sector. Finally, I wrap up this chapter by providing a brief outlook on the “career” of the Nepalese development sector after the end of the Panchayat Era.

5.1 Brokers in Aidland

Brokerage, as an activity to bridge the two different social worlds that are otherwise not directly linked with each other, has attracted some attention in historical research on colonial rule. Colonial authorities were highly dependent on people able to mediate between the foreign rulers and the colonised population as well as on “native informants” who provided the colonisers with the necessary knowledge to rule over the colonies. After the end of colonial rule, local brokers remained important in the process of establishing or maintaining relations between local and foreign actors, not least in the emerging foreign aid relations. Nonetheless, brokerage, as a concept for scrutinising the role of local mediators in aid relations, has met with little response by historians.

Since the late 1990s, anthropologists with an interest in the “ethnography of aid”\textsuperscript{510} have already begun taking up brokerage as an analytical concept to scrutinise the role of local development workers. The notion of “development brokers,” particularly, has been promoted by Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan in an anthropological study on local project staff in West Africa carried out around the year 2000.\textsuperscript{511} Broadly speaking, development brokers are local development professionals who mediate between foreign “donors” and local “recipients” of development aid. More specifically, Bierschenk et al. conceptualise development brokers within an economic logic.\textsuperscript{512} Accordingly, a development broker is an “entrepreneur” at the interface between the “donor community” and the “recipient society.” He does not control “first-degree resources” (like jobs, land, credits, specialised knowledge) but has strategic contacts with members who are in control of the required resources among both the entities (donor and recipient). Thus, a broker’s “capital” is his personal network and his profit comes from the “commission” he gains for his work as a mediator between the two separate social entities. The commission is not necessarily monetary but can take the form of various personal profits including getting access to “first-degree resources.”\textsuperscript{513}

Despite the stress on personal benefits gained from brokerage, the research group goes beyond a normative representation of local development staff as “parasites” of aid work, particularly since they are more interested in under-

\textsuperscript{510} Crewe, and Harrison, Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid; David Mosse, Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice (London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005).
\textsuperscript{511} Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan, “Local Development Brokers in Africa: The Rise of a New Social Category.” The concept of development brokers is further used in: Lewis, and Mosse, Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies.
\textsuperscript{512} Bierschenk et. al draw their concept of development brokers upon the economically conceived notion of brokers as elaborated in Jeremy Boissevain’s study on social networks in the Mediterranean area. See Jeremy Boissevain, Friends of Friends; Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).
\textsuperscript{513} Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan, “Local Development Brokers in Africa: The Rise of a New Social Category,” 11-16.
standing the agency of development brokers. To them, development brokers do not simply execute norms given by others. They have both the agency to carve out enough room for manoeuvre for themselves in the interstices and margins of the development system as well as the agency to acquire an aid project for his “clients” (local people or aid agencies). As a result of their field research in West African rural development projects, they conclude that, “far from being passive operators of logic(s) of dependence, development brokers are the key actors in the irresistible hunt for projects carried out in and around African villages.”

Bierschenk et al. distinguish between what they call “bare-foot brokers” (as an allusion to the Chinese “bare-foot doctors”) working as local staff in the “field,” and so-called “big-time brokers” working in senior positions in the planning administration or main offices of aid agencies. In their study they focus on “bare-foot brokers” and identify a set of qualifications and essential soft-skills that enable local project staff to become successful brokers. These included experiences acquired elsewhere than in the respective village (in the city, abroad, or at the university), proficiency in linguistic and cultural codes of the “donors” and “recipients,” scenographic competence to effectively present a project, as well as skills in social networking. Furthermore, professional brokers need the ability to set up a project and to gain direct access to donors. These qualities would put local development workers in the potentially powerful position of representing the local population and communicating the supposed needs of locals to the external financiers of aid projects. Yet, even though Bierschenk et al. scrutinise the skills, competencies, and functions of development brokers, they do not pay much attention to the brokers’ social and educational backgrounds or to their status within the local society.

516 Boissevain, Friends of Friends; Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions, 20-23.
David Lewis and David Mosse adopt Bierschenk et al.’s concept of development brokers in their analysis of development brokers and translators.517 But they challenge the sociological certainty implied in Bierschenk et al.’s approach and push the concept of brokerage further by stressing on the development broker’s crucial function as a “translator.” In reference to Bruno Latour and the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), they reject Bierschenk et al.’s concept of the “interface,” because it entails the pre-existence of certain social and institutional realms. Rather than being interested in how actors operate within existing arrangements of development, they aim at finding out how actors create, shape, and maintain certain structures of the development network. They therefore look at “development” as a network of actors and actants without a fixed hierarchical structure and seek to find out how development projects “become real though the work of generating and translating interests, creating context by tying in supporters and so sustaining interpretations.”518 Hence, for Lewis and Mosse, brokers are crucial actors within the development network who use their skills as cultural translators to tie heterogeneous (human and non-human) entities together and to create the appearance of congruence between development problems and interventions. In view of the “co-existence of different rationalities, interests, and meanings” in development aid, brokerage and translation is thus required to “produce order, legitimacy, and ‘success’ [of projects] and to maintain fund flows.”519 In other words, paying attention to development brokers is crucial for the understanding of international aid, because brokers add to a stable development discourse and keep the “development apparatus”520 running.

These notions of brokerage and translation offer some conceptual guidelines for exploring the role of Nepalese development professionals working

517 Lewis, and Mosse, Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies.
519 Lewis, and Mosse, “Theoretical Approaches to Brokerage and Translation in Development,” 16.
directly with foreign development experts, either as their government counterparts, or as their colleagues in the same foreign aid agency, or as consultants. The present chapter, however, does not analyse the actor network of development as a whole but only some aspects of it. It focuses primarily on what Bierschenk et al. call “big time brokers” and not on “bare-foot brokers.” Apart from the fact that “bare-foot brokers” are already discussed to a certain extent in chapter two in the form of village development workers, one reason for the focus on “big-time brokers” is that the aim of this chapter is to explore the international aid community in Nepal, to which “bare-foot brokers” hardly had any access. Another reason for focusing on the elites among the Nepalese development professionals is of a more practical nature. Unlike anthropological studies on the present situation, a historical study on the development “network” or “apparatus” cannot be based on field-research but must rely on written sources and testimonies of first-hand witnesses. The sources on development work in Nepal are quite disproportionate though. There are plenty of sources on plans and on supposed problems and needs of the “target population” but only little on the actors working for development. Again, there are more documents composed by foreign experts than by Nepalese ones and not surprisingly, there is almost nothing by low-level Nepalese development workers. The situation is similar with witnesses as well. While the prominent Nepalese development experts who acted as “big-time brokers” can be identified because of their public exposure and their own publications, “bare-foot brokers” remain widely anonymous in the archives. It is therefore also difficult to find interview participants who have worked as low-level staff in development projects several decades ago.

Hence, this chapter presents not a complete picture of development brokers in Nepal but focuses on Nepalese inhabitants of so-called “Aidland.” The notion of “Aidland” appears in several recent anthropological studies on professionals in the world of international development. It was Raymond Apthorpe who coined the term “Aidland” in his contribution to two books published in
2011. The editors of both volumes adopted Apthorpe’s notion of Aidland to describe the volumes’ overall topic so it came to be prominently featured in the title of two 2011 publications on the “ethnography of aid”: David Mosse’s volume on “Adventures in Aidland” as well as Anne-Meike Fechter’s and Heather Hindman’s volume on the “Everyday Lives of Development Workers [and] the Challenges and Futures of Aidland.” The contributions in these two volumes complement previous anthropological research on development aid with an explicit focus on aid workers and on “Aidland.” Aidland designates the globalised sphere in which development professionals work and live and appears to be a “non-geographical” place that “may look like another planet, but its reality is not virtual.” As various contributions aptly show, Aidland manifests in offices of international aid agencies, international clubs, high-end hotels, SUVs, American Schools, and other places that are not only strikingly similar regardless of their geographical location but all of which nonetheless offer a refuge from the surrounding world. The anthropological gaze of these studies is not directed at the “recipients” of aid but at development professionals who are looked at as the inhabitants or citizens of Aidland. Yet, even though the authors neither claim the existence of a uniform sphere of Aidland nor suggest a clearly defined type of aid worker, the presented inhabitants of Aidland are almost exclusively expatriates. In most contributions, local development professionals appear merely as background actors but not as proper citizens of Aidland. Only one essay in the two edited volumes focuses on local development professionals with a case

521 Mosse, Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development.
study on Ghana. But it merely discusses the function of personal relations and informal networks among Ghanaians and not the position of Ghanaian development professionals within the wider context of Aidland.\(^{525}\) In his essay “Who is International Aid?” Apthorpe considers local development experts as inhabitants of aidland. As an analogy to the expatriates, he calls them “impatriates.” But he only superficially touches upon the issue of local aid professionals and draws a fairly one-dimensional portrayal of them as profiteers of aid work.\(^{526}\) Hence, although the rhetorical device of “Aidland” offers a fruitful tool to scrutinise the “development network” as a social and historical reality, the existing studies tend to neglect local “inhabitants of Aidland” and their share in stabilising – and challenging – the development discourse. Studies on Aidland thus do not adequately take the agency of local development brokers into account and instead create the impression of “development” as a business of foreigners, in which locals only serve as the foreigner’s helping hand.

The present chapter aims at presenting a more nuanced picture of local development professionals as brokers and as full-fledged inhabitants of Aidland. In the process, it looks at their role as brokers between foreign experts and the Nepalese administration and as spokesmen of the Nepalese people. Unlike Bierschenk et al., I do not stress on the “commissions” brokers gain from their in-between position and do not come up with a clear-cut typology of the Nepalese development broker. Neither do I apply the notion of broker in a strict economic sense but rather use it in a broader sense to designate those cosmopolitan Nepa-

---


lese development professionals who move and act visibly within the international space of Aidland. This chapter is thus also not about hidden communication channels of almost invisible “native informants” but about very prominent but still understudied local agents of development.

### 5.2 The Coming into Being of Aidland Nepal

#### 5.2.1 The “Discovery” of Nepal and the Growth of Foreign Aid

As has been shown in chapter two, the post-World War II period of changes in, and renegotiation of international order also entailed significant political changes in Nepal. After the end of the colonial period in South Asia, during which the Nepalese government followed an isolationist policy, the strategy to maintain its sovereignty had to change, particularly with Britain’s withdrawal from India. Not least in view of the increasing regional influence of China and India, the Nepalese government now actively sought for diplomatic recognition as an independent nation state. For a relatively small country at the periphery of global economy and politics, foreign aid offered a welcoming means to diversify Nepal’s diplomatic relations and to enter the international stage. Until the independence of India, Nepal maintained diplomatic relations only with Britain and Tibet. But with the end of colonial rule in South Asia, Nepal quickly started to reach out for more diverse relations with Western countries. Apart from newly independent India, the Nepalese government established diplomatic relations with the United States of America (USA) in 1947 and two years later with France. In 1947, it also sent the counsellor of the Nepalese Embassy in London on a tour through Scandinavia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. He was assigned with the task of studying the development patterns of these countries and of identifying feasible development co-operations. One concrete result of the tour was the

---

527 Dirks, “Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive.”
invitation of a group of Swiss technical experts to study the Nepalese economy and to elaborate on suggestions for future development assistance.528

Back then, Nepal’s new foreign relations were primarily shaped by two interests, foreign aid and mountaineering. These two interests had ostensibly nothing in common. But even though mountaineers and early foreign development professionals came with different aims and had different organisations in the background, many of them were attracted by the same image of Nepal: as one of the last white spots on the world map. Nepal’s image in the West was largely shaped by the few books written by Western authors, which invariably produced an orientalised image of an exotic and unworldly place that was still unspoiled by Western civilisation.529 Thus, the discovery, surveying, mapping, and development of Nepal and the Himalayas seemed to be one of the last great adventures in a world that had been widely penetrated by European colonial powers. Significantly, the end of Nepal’s isolation policy, which coincided with the end of the Second World War in Europe and the dawn of international development policies, unleashed a race for the still-unconquered eight-thousanders in the Himalayas. Men had already reached the North and the South Poles whereas the “Third Pole,” the highest mountains on earth, still offered a great and very prestigious challenge. It was only in the late 1940s that the Rana government allowed the first Indian, American, and British expeditions to explore the plains and the Himalayas on Nepalese territory. In June 1950, a French mountaineering expedition under the lead of Maurice Herzog succeeded in

528 Bhim Bahadur Pande, Nepal is Bound to be a Switzerland of Asia in Course of Time (Kathmandu: Unpublished Letter, Private Archive, 1977).
529 For example the travelogues of the British Laurence Oliphant or the American Alexander Powell: Oliphant, A Journey to Katmandu (the Capital of Nepaul) with the Camp of Jung Bahadur; Powell, The Last Home of Mystery., or the historical account of the British journalist Percival Landon: Perceval Landon, Nepal (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2007), 156. About how Nepal’s non-colonial past shaped a particularly orientalised image of Nepal see also: Des Chene, “Is Nepal in South Asia? The Condition of Non-Postcoloniality.”
reaching the summit of a more than eight thousand meter high mountain, the Annapurna, for the first time in human history. Two years later, British and Swiss expeditions competed over conquest of Mt Everest, the highest mountain on earth, a competition in which the British team, under the leadership of New Zealander Edmund Hillary, was victorious.\textsuperscript{531} Like the zeal of these mountaineers, the foreign development experts also showed great enthusiasm in the discovery of uncolonised Nepal. For example, the above mentioned Swiss technical expert team, which arrived shortly before the overturn of the Rana regime, was excited about the prospect to work in Nepal because it offered a seemingly “untouched” field of research and a great experimental ground for development initiatives. Moreover, as Switzerland was only a minor player in international politics and never had formal colonies, Nepal also seemed to offer it the chance to be “the first” and to do real “pioneering work” for once. Accordingly, the Swiss experts requested the Swiss government to act fast in view of the quick advancement of American Point-Four men.\textsuperscript{532}

Even though the first foreign aid relations had been established during the last years of Rana rule, concrete projects and the set up of foreign aid missions only started after the change of regime. In terms of foreign population, Nepal was back then indeed still an unoccupied spot. In the early 1950s, the expatriate community was very small. A handful of Swiss experts worked in Nepal either as employees of the Nepalese government or under the flag of United


Nation’s aid agencies. 533 Apart from the few “expats” working for various international organisations, only the United States Operations Mission (USOM) and the Indian Aid Mission had their foreign advisors in Nepal. However, although high in number, the Indian advisors lived and worked rather separately from the small community of “Western” expats.534

It would not be of much significance to speak of “Aidland Nepal” as it existed in the first half of the 1950s. The first foreign aided development projects at that time were in an infant stage and the foreign aid community only consisted of a dozen experts of USOM, the United Nations and, from 1954 onward, the Ford Foundation. However, the situation changed rapidly in the second half of the 1950s. The first years of the reign of King Mahendra saw the beginnings of “the international scramble to aid in Nepal.”535 Now, Switzerland, China, and the Soviet Union also joined the aid community, which was further broadened in the early 1960s by Israel, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, West Germany, and France.536 Like the state bureaucracy, the foreign aid community steadily expanded over time. By the early 1970s, the aid scramble even led to an informal division of the country among the major donors. The Rapti zone in midwestern Nepal was the American domain, the northeastern Dolakha district was regarded as the Swiss district, the FAO dominated the Trisuli area, the Israeli were mainly active in the central and western Tarai, and the West Germans in the Gandaki Zone. Some of the bilateral donors also “occupied” certain fields of

534 Hagen, Building Bridges to the Third World: Memories of Nepal 1950-92, 66.
activities in which they were considered to be particularly competent. The Swiss, for example, focused on dairy production, vocational education, and mountain roads and the Israeli on agriculture and resettlement programmes.\footnote{Mahabir Ale, et al., Planned Resettlement in Nepal’s Terai: A Social Analysis of the Khajurao/Bardia Punarvas Projects (Kathmandu: Tribhuvan University Press, 1976); Commission, Partnership in Nepal’s Economic Development: A Review.}

The division of Nepal among various foreign donors might evoke criticisms of foreign aid as a form of neo-colonialism. However, the concentration of donors in certain regions and certain fields might also be the result of donor co-ordination from the side of the Nepalese government. Several Nepalese and foreign development experts who have witnessed the changes of the development sector in Nepal since about the 1960s, have unanimously confirmed that foreign aid and national development programmes were significantly better co-ordinated in the 1970s than in later times. The main reasons, they argued, were that the bureaucracy was relatively well functioning in comparison to the decades before and after, and that Nepalese authorities did not submissively accept all wishes and suggestions of foreign donors.\footnote{Högger, Rudolf. Interview by Sara Elmer. Zurich, November 19, 2010; Jang Rana, Dev. Interview by Sara Elmer. Patan, March 22, 2012; Panday, Devendra Raj. Interview by Sara Elmer. Kathmandu, April 11, 2010; Pandey, Krishna Kumar. Interview by Sara Elmer. Godawari, March 26, 2012; Schild, Andreas. Interview by Sara Elmer. Patan, April 1, 2010.} The main point of contact between foreign aid agencies and the Nepalese government was the Foreign Aid Division of the Ministry of Finance, which was in charge of negotiating all foreign aid agreements and of allocating development budget to various projects. In an interview, a Swiss development expert described the then head of the Foreign Aid Division and later secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Devendra Raj Panday, as a tough and skilful negotiator who was very critical with the proposals submitted by foreign agencies. The Swiss expert, however, appreciated that Panday did not blindly accept all foreign proposals. Despite the occasional resistance of Nepalese partners, he found it much more enjoyable to co-operate with the Nepalese government in the 1970s than in later periods when the Nepalese gov-
ernment, in his opinion, became much more submissive vis-à-vis foreign donors. However, in view of the steady expansion of Aidland Nepal, the idea of foreign aid as a form of “neo-colonialism” is not completely absurd or out of place. While foreign aid had initially been used as an instrument to become visible as an independent nation in an international arena, complaints about losing national sovereignty because of high dependence on foreign aid money became louder and louder with the steady growth of the Nepalese development sector. Before looking at the debate of Nepal’s aid dependency at the end of this chapter, I will first explore different groups of Nepalese inhabitants of aidland.

5.2.2 Expatriate Lives and Locations of Aidland

With the steadily emerging aid community, by the mid-1 the first public meeting place for expats and local elites sprang up in Kathmandu: the Royal Hotel with its famous Yak & Yeti Bar. The Royal Hotel was managed by Boris Lissanevitch, a dazzling personality who ended up in Nepal after an exciting journey as a refugee from Odessa, a dancer of the Ballets Russes, and as the founder of “Club 300” in Calcutta. Club 300 was Calcutta’s first high-society club, which allowed membership to both Englishmen and Indians. As the club’s host, Boris, as everyone called him, became friends with General Mahabir Shamsher, a prominent exiled member of the Nepali Congress and member of Club 300, and also got acquainted with King Tribhuvan, who was occasionally a guest at the club. As a result of his connections with the Nepali Congress and the Nepalese royals, he was granted permission to settle in Nepal after 1951 and was entrusted to provide consultancy to the government in tourism. Boris soon gained fame as the “inventor” of tourism in Nepal and as the very sociable host of the Yak & Yeti Bar. In the 1950s to 70s, foreign ambassadors, Nepalese princes and policy-makers, development

experts, members of Himalayan expeditions, artists, and local celebrities gathered in the Yak & Yeti to drink foreign liquors, to network with others who had, to exchange gossip, and to discuss the economic and political developments of Nepal. Unlike other foreigners who only stayed in Nepal for a few years on behalf of a foreign organisation, Boris was extremely well connected and familiar with almost all of Kathmandu’s influential elites. Hence, although not working in the development sector, he informally acted as a helpful “broker” to many of the newly arrived expats who needed to get in touch with government officials.540

With increasing number of foreign development professionals and rise of tourism, more and more globalised islands like the Yak & Yeti Bar began popping up in and around Kathmandu. The 1950s saw for example, the foundation of an American club and an American school to which Nepalese children were initially not admitted. Hugh B. Wood, one of the first American development experts in Nepal, described in his memoirs that in spite of the shortage of food supply, electricity, and foreign goods, social life in the 1950s was abundant. He estimated that he and his wife attended about eight to ten parties each week, along with as many teas, dinners, bridge games, receptions at embassies, or functions at the Singha Durbar.541

The American USOM-staff and their families lived and worked in a vacant Rana palace in Rabi Bhawan, conveniently located near the Royal Hotel. Rabi Bhavan was an impressive palace with one hundred bedrooms, high ceilings, and huge chandeliers. But when the first USOM-expert, Paul Rose, arrived in

Kathmandu in 1952, there was only one bathroom, no heating, and almost no electricity. With the arrival of more and more USOM-experts, the Americans step by step carved relatively comfortable flats out of the palace.\textsuperscript{542} Wood recollected his memories of the early days of foreign aid with a great sense of nostalgia. His memoirs begin with the moment of his arrival in Nepal – “November 9, 1953. Shangri-La, at last! A dream come true!”\textsuperscript{543} – and continue with the description of Wood’s “simple” but “rewarding” life and work in the formerly forbidden kingdom. Interestingly, Toni Hagen’s recollections of Kathmandu in the early 1950s are strikingly similar to Wood’s. Hagen was a Swiss geologist, who first arrived with the Swiss technical expert team in the autumn of 1950, and then returned to Nepal in 1952 to work for about ten years for the Nepalese government, the United Nations, and the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). In his memoirs, Hagen headlined his first arrival in Nepal with “The First View of Shangri-La”\textsuperscript{544} and revealed that since his youth, it had been his ardent wish to see the Himalayas. He further described the “primitive” life in Nepal and the shortage of “modern” consumer goods and how intriguing it was for him to discover this utterly exotic kingdom. Like the Americans, Hagen and the Swiss experts who soon followed, began using a vacant Rana palace for residence. The palace was located outside Kathmandu and was named after the place where it was located, Ekanta Kuna. The Ekanta Kuna palace was much smaller than Rabi Bhavan but still a representative residency, despite the renovation it required.\textsuperscript{545} The initial rivalry that was perceived by the Swiss when they wanted to be the first developers in Nepal eventually dissolved into cooperative attitude toward the Americans, and increased socialising with them. However, certain enviousness could nevertheless be detected when the Americans are described in Hagen’s memoirs as those “who enjoyed all sorts of comfort.” Unlike Wood’s de-

\textsuperscript{542} Cf. Hindman, “The Everyday Life of American Development in Nepal.”
\textsuperscript{543} Wood, Nepal Diary (1953-1962), 1.
\textsuperscript{544} Hagen, Building Bridges to the Third World: Memories of Nepal 1950-92, 25.
\textsuperscript{545} Hagen, Building Bridges to the Third World: Memories of Nepal 1950-92.
criptions of the frugal lifestyle of Americans, Hagen’s wife described Rabi Bhavan as a comfortable palace with over-heated rooms and proper bathing facilities, and reported how well stocked the Americans were with modern equipment, imported food, and medicines.⁵⁴⁶

5.2.3 Petty Brokers

Rabi Bhavan and Ekanta Kuna both became meeting places for foreigners who resided in or travelled to Nepal. Their Nepalese colleagues also frequented the American and Swiss residencies as guests. It goes without saying that the growth of foreign aid created new job opportunities not only in the emerging development sector but also in its adjoined sub-economy that catered for the needs of foreigners.⁵⁴⁷ The new entertainment facilities and homes of expat families provided jobs for cooks, waiters, janitors, gardeners, watchmen, cleaners, nannies, real-estate agents, and many more. Apart from their core tasks, household staff sometimes also acted as “petty brokers,” especially when they managed to master some English. I suggest calling them “petty brokers” because they were not hired as development project staff like the above-mentioned “bare-foot brokers” but still facilitated the foreigners’ everyday lives in Nepal as brokers in daily businesses. They were, for example, translating for their employers, showing them where to procure certain goods they needed, assisting in hiring other staff, explaining local customs, and much more. Petty brokers worked closely with foreign development advisors without formal education or training as development professionals. They had no background in the government service and thus not necessarily from the same social milieu as the typical bureaucrats. As they entered the development sector through direct employment by expats, their most important qualification was to be able to communicate (in English) with foreigners regardless of their ethnicity or caste. They further needed other soft skills like

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. Stiller, and Yadav, Planning for People, 51-54.
organisational competencies and networking abilities as described by Bierschenk et al., but not necessarily any formal schooling.\textsuperscript{548}

Early Swiss expats favoured hiring people of the ethnic group of Sherpa as their personal staff, especially those who had already been involved in mountaineering expeditions. They were high in demand because they were experienced in working with foreigners, knew some English, and were ready to accompany the Swiss in remote, mountainous areas. Moreover, Sherpas supposedly had less reservation than other members of higher Hindu castes regarding mingling with foreigners and in doing jobs of various natures.\textsuperscript{549}

In his memoirs, Toni Hagen frequently mentioned how much he appreciated the help of his personal assistant, Sherpa Aila. Aila and his wife managed Hagen’s household at Ekanta Kuna, hired additional domestic help, did the shopping and cooking. Aila was also an indispensible translator and, most importantly, functioned as sirdar (chief mountain guide and head of trekking crew) on the numerous geological expeditions in the Himalayas. As sirdar, he not only guided Hagen through the Himalayas but also organised porters and other Sherpas as assistants, managed food supply, supervised the entire expedition party, and assisted Hagen in his scientific data collection. Aila had already been an experienced mountain guide before working for Hagen, as he had been a member of the famous French Annapurna expedition in 1950.\textsuperscript{550}

Since Aila was not hired as project staff but still essentially facilitated Hagen’s work for the Nepalese government and the United Nations, he can thus

\textsuperscript{549} Some early Swiss development experts regarded Sherpa people also as an ethnic group that was particularly innovative and adaptive to development programmes. See the evaluation report of a Swiss rural development project: Walser, Peter, Robert Schmid, and Heinz Buchmann, “Das Jiri-Projekt: Eine interdisziplinäre Studie, durchgeführt im Auftrag des Dienstes für technische Zusammenarbeit”, 1969. Helvetas Collection, J2.261, 2002/215, Bd. 510, Swiss Federal Archives.
\textsuperscript{550} Hagen, Building Bridges to the Third World: Memories of Nepal 1950-92, 70-71, 87-95, 106-112.
be called a petty development broker. As described by Hagen, he was apparently a very talented, loyal, and smart man. Yet, even though Hagen wrote very positively about Aila and highlighted his impeccable character traits and indispensable services, his approach vis-à-vis “his” Sherpa also remained clearly paternalistic throughout his memoires. The relation between the two men seemed close, but they were neither described as friends nor as colleagues who are at par with each other. There always remained a clear boundary between the superior, very knowledgeable and potent European and the loyal, hard-working, but clearly inferior Nepalese.

Hagen’s orientalised view of Nepal and the Nepalese becomes even clearer in his nostalgic judgement of manifestations of modernisation in Nepal. Again, Hagen and Wood, in a similar vein, bemoaned the loss of “unspoiled Shangri-La” in their retrospective view on changes in Nepal. In his memoirs, Wood described his deep affection for the Nepalese people and revealed that “one of [his] greatest concerns is: can the villagers retain their simple, happy life in the midst of ‘progress’; can the urban dwellers retain their equanimity in the midst of western ‘civilisation’ now being thrust on them? Or will all their fine attributes be lost to humanity, smothered in ‘economic growth’?” After his assignment in the 1950s, Wood returned several times to Nepal on short-term missions and each times realised more changes and signs of modernisation like modern hotels, paved roads, and tall buildings. He recognised the “presumed need for these symbols of growth” but also “yearn[ed] to turn the clock back” as “each change hurts a little bit.”

Similarly, Hagen lamented that the present young generation is “overly ‘developed’” because young Nepalese would scarcely be familiar with the “ancient customs” that he recalled being prevalent in the early days of foreign aid. A well-established Nepalese development expert with more than forty years of experience in development work mentioned in an

interview this ambivalent attitude evident among many foreign experts whose explicit task was, ironically, to facilitate “change,” “modernisation,” and “development” but who at the same time felt pity and even disappointment when the changes became manifest, transforming the original face of Nepal. The Nepalese expert, who had been a childhood friend of Hagen’s son, called this often-observed attitude of foreigners the “Hagen syndrome.”

5.3 The Classic Broker

During the Panchayat Period, Aidland Nepal was inhabited by expatriate development experts, their families, and their personal staff who acted as petty brokers. The international sphere of Aidland was also inhabited by development bureaucrats working as counterparts of foreign experts as well as by skilled Nepalese employees of foreign aid agencies. In this sub-chapter, I will shed light on these two groups who were functioning as the most explicit development brokers in the sense of Bierschenk et al., and whom I thus call “the classic broker.”

Having focused on the early days of foreign aid in Nepal in the previous section, I will now focus on the period when foreign aid was already a well-established institution in Nepal. But while the previous chapter highlights the development bureaucrat’s role as a civil servant and bearer of national development programmes, I discuss here his position as counterpart of foreign experts. But first I will shed light on the practice of employment of Nepalese staff in foreign aid agencies with the example of the Swiss Agency of Technical Assistance.

554 The Swiss Agency of Technical Assistance (SATA) was initially a NGO that set foot in Nepal in 1955. In 1961 its Kathmandu branch merged with the newly created official Swiss aid agency (SDC). While SATA (renamed in 1965 as Helvetas) and SDC operated as separate organisations in other countries, it remained a joined organisation in Nepal until 1989 and also kept its original name SATA until then. The Nepal headquarter of SATA was located in Ekanta Kuna, which today houses SDC and the Swiss Embassy. See: (SDC), 50 Years Nepal-Swiss Development Partnership 1959 to 2009.
5.3.1 Foreign Aid as an Employer

In its 2013–2017 strategy for Nepal, the Swiss government’s development agency highlights its efforts towards inclusion of local staff of diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, caste, ethnicity, age, culture, religion, etc.\(^{555}\) Yet, back in the 1970s, the Swiss Agency of Technical Assistance (SATA) applied no specific rules or principles in regard to employment policy. If an open position was publicly advertised, the suitable candidate was randomly chosen on grounds of skills and experience and not on grounds of the applicant’s social background. Yet, because of the low level of formal education of average Nepalese, attempting to get candidates with the required skills such as literacy, basic English, and accountancy automatically led to the preference of members of more privileged social groups. The concentration on certain social groups was further strengthened as many positions were not staffed through an open recruitment process but through recommendations of existing staff.\(^{556}\) But unlike senior positions in the civil service, which were for long time reserved for members of what Pashupati Shamsher Rana called “client families,”\(^{557}\) foreign agencies like SATA opened up new job opportunities for skilled professionals of other social groups.

As mentioned in reference to the case of Sherpa Aila, SATA favoured members of the Sherpa group experienced as field staff with foreign mountain expedition teams. The boundaries between petty brokers and classic brokers were thereby fluid as the former could also become a skilled development worker through experience and talent. One example of a petty broker who was promoted to responsible position as a classic broker was Phutarki Sherpa. Phutarki was a friend of Aila and had participated in Maurice Herzog’s Annapurna expedition along with him. When Aila became the assistant of Hagen, Phutarkay was


\(^{557}\) Rana, “Towards an Integrated Policy of National Integration.”
hired by another Swiss as field assistant for a dairy project in the Langtang valley. After working with the Swiss dairy specialist for about six years, Phutarkay was passed on to another, newly arrived Swiss cattle breeding expert. Since the dairy specialist was very satisfied with Phutarkay’s assistance, he thought he might be of great value in the set-up of SATA’s new cattle breeding and agricultural project in the Dolakha district. The Swiss cattle breeding expert was indeed very grateful for Phutarkay’s help in setting up the project and establishing contacts with the locals in the remote project area. In the 1960s, with the expansion of the project to a multipurpose rural development programme, Phutarkay managed to acquire crucial positions in the programme. He, for instance became a member of the managing committee of the programme’s co-operative bank where he was in charge of deciding over credit applications. In order to improve his skills as a rural development “expert” Phutarkay was also sent to Switzerland for technical training. As a member of a mountain-based ethnic group with no higher education, Sherpa Phutarkay would normally have had no opportunity of pursuing a career in the public sector. But as he was smart, hard working, and sociable, he was still able to pursue a professional career and earn a salary, which would not have been possible outside the development sector.

Unlike the field staff, the local employees at the SATA headquarters in Kathmandu were mainly composed of members of high-caste groups who did not find or seek employment in the civil service. Until the 1970s, the technical experts as well as the director’s secretary were all Swiss citizens. But the common office personnel including accountants, procurement officers, or peons were recruited from among the locals. Since the local staff was not on a rota-

---

558 Werner Schulthess, *Wie der Käse nach Nepal kam* (s.l.: unpublished manuscript (in the author’s possession), s.d.).
tional system like the foreign experts who usually spent only about two to four years in a particular country, they had a significant role in providing some consistency and continuity in the work organisation. A particularly crucial function of the local office staff was the one as “liaison officer.” This position was for many years executed by the same person, by Dev Jang Rana, who joined SATA as a young man in 1965 and worked with them for thirty-three years until his retirement.  

Dev Jang Rana was born in the Tarai and did all his schooling in the northern Indian city of Dehradun. His grandfather had moved to northern India in the late nineteenth century after he lost his land in Kathmandu in the course of the Shamsher Rana family branch taking power from the Jang Rana branch, with which his grandfather was associated. After finishing school, Dev Jang Rana found employment in the Indian Navy where he worked for ten years before setting off for Kathmandu to seek work in Nepal. He first worked half a year as procurement staff at the USAID office. But since he was a young bachelor, ready for some more adventurous position, he applied for a job as project assistant in a resettlement project of Tibetan refugees in Dhorpatan. He simply saw the job advertisement in the newspaper and got recruited not because of any personal connections but because he could offer the much sought-after skills: his English was good, he was skilled in shorthand writing, and knew how to use a typewriter. Dev Jang Rana had no complains in travelling frequently to the remote village of Dhorpatan in western Nepal. When asked about his salary, he asserted to have been satisfied with the remuneration of NPR 500 (Nepalese Rupee) per month. It was a good income for Nepalese standards. Those days, he would have earned less than NPR 200 working in a similar position in the civil service. Yet, he also expressed some mixed feeling by emphasising that his salary was equal to that of

young Swiss volunteers who on top of the NPR 500, received lodging and travel allowance. In the Dhorpatan project, he was responsible for all kinds of work to keep the project running. His most important but also most challenging tasks were negotiations with the local panchayat authorities. At that time, foreign aid projects had to be carried out mutually by the foreign project leader and a Nepalese government counterpart. But the counterpart system was undermined in Dhorpatan by appointing Rana as the government counterpart, even though he was employed and paid by SATA. Hence, it was his responsibility to mediate between the Swiss project staff and the local people even though he had previously been unfamiliar with the region of Dhorpatan. However, his employer was apparently satisfied with his performance as a development broker because after five years in the Dhorpatan project, he was promoted as liaison officer in SATA’s Kathmandu office.

The position as a liaison officer was at that time the most senior one for a Nepalese citizen working with SATA. As liaison officer he had to take care of the contacts with the Nepalese government and negotiate project agreements with all the governmental departments involved in a project. In his position as liaison officer, Dev Jang Rana gained the nickname “SATA-Rana” among his Swiss colleagues, which hinted at his name but also at his position as the broker between SATA and the “Ranas,” which was a synonym for the government elites in the Singha Durbar and the royal palace. This delicate task required good intuition and full commitment. He was astute in identifying who the important people in the Nepalese administration were and occasionally invited them for dinner at his house in order to cultivate the contacts. Over the more than thirty years of working for SATA, Rana saw countless Swiss directors, colleagues, and ambassadors coming and going. While most of them stayed only for a few years in Nepal, he became a permanent fixture of SATA and even lived in one part of the Ekanta Kuna building.
Dev Jang Rana meets the criteria that Bierschenk et al. defined as necessary for becoming a successful development broker. Before joining SATA, he had gained experience outside Nepal; he could cope with the linguistic and apparently also the cultural codes of the Nepalese bureaucracy, as well as of his Swiss employer, and he was a good networker. Whether he also had good scenographic competencies to effectively present a project can retrospectively not be judged, however. Nevertheless, Rana also fits in Bierschenk et al.’s definition of a successful development broker as someone who gains personal benefits from his in-between position. He earned a higher-than-average salary and a decent pension. Also, as someone working for development and not being the target of development, he gained social credits as he could escape the stigma of being “underdeveloped,” which was attributed to the majority of the Nepalese population.

Hence, the story of SATA-Rana as a classic broker seems to be a win-win situation for both, for SATA as well as for Rana. The work of the liaison officer facilitated SATA’s access to the Nepalese government and SATA enabled the latter to have an interesting, stable job with a good salary.\(^{562}\) When recalling his memories, Dev Jang Rana expressed his satisfaction about having worked many years in such an influential key-position. However, despite his diplomatic formulations, he also hinted at some tensions resulting from his in-between position, which are not discussed in Bierschenk et al.’s study.\(^{563}\) As the broker between the Nepalese administration and the Swiss aid agency, he was not a fully recognised member of either. Rana knew that the SATA staff depended upon his mediating work but was also well aware that no matter how important his work was, he will never achieve the same salary and status in the organisation as the Swiss experts. His last salary before his retirement in the mid-1990s was NPR 27,000

\(^{562}\) Similarly, Stiller and Yadav argue that foreign aid is good for both the foreign experts and the Nepalese who profit from the economy generated by foreign aid. But they doubt that foreign aid is also beneficiary for Nepal and its common people: Stiller, and Yadav, Planning for People, 52-53.

\(^{563}\) Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan, “Local Development Brokers in Africa: The Rise of a New Social Category.”
per month. This was a good salary for Nepalese standards but clearly below Swiss standards, especially in view of the broad tasks and responsibility he had to bear. Like the Nepalese expert described by Dixit at the beginning of this chapter, Rana had to be a jack-of-all-trades and act as a broker in all kinds of situation. Besides his core task of cultivating the contacts with the government officials, he also had to procure goods in the local market, organise vehicles and porters, co-ordinate the transportation of goods to the projects sites and in general do whatever was asked of him. Apart from the difference in the salary, his promotion prospects were clearly limited as well. At his times, SATA was reluctant to hire locals and all the upper echelons were filled with Swiss citizens. Moreover, Rana also did not possess a status that was at par with a senior civil servant. Despite the clearly lower salary in public administration, he thought it was still more prestigious to be a civil servant than a development professional employed by a foreign agency. Likewise, his family had also expected him to apply for a government job instead of joining SATA.564

5.3.2 Unequal Counterparts
The delicate issue of unequal salaries of foreign and local development professionals was not an openly discussed one. An anthropologist and senior civil servant Bihari K. Shrestha, who was also a fierce critic of foreign aid, was probably the first to publicly address the issue. He raised the question of salary discrepancy in a joint seminar of local and foreign experts in 1983, which will later in this chapter be looked at more closely.565 When Shrestha wanted to find out the costs of some donor-employed expatriates working directly under him, he failed in figuring out their salaries because of the latter’s reluctance to confide in him. Finally, he received some information from an expatriate advisor employed by SATA who revealed that the yearly costs of a Swiss or a United Nation’s expert

565 Shrestha, “Technical Assistance and the Growth of Administrative Capability in Nepal.” B.K. Shrestha is mentioned in the previous chapter as a member of the Jānc Būjh Kēndra.
added up to about one million Nepalese Rupees, excluding the office overhead. In 1983, NPR one million was equivalent to about USD 75,000. In comparison, the yearly costs of an average gazetted civil servant amounted at that time to NPR 20,000 to 30,000 in a year. In the same seminar, Shrestha also presented the estimated number of more than 300 expatriates working in Nepal in project covering almost all the development sectors in the country. This number of expats, he pointed out, did not include “those free-lance expatriates who [...] stick around until they find a job.” He further argued in his presentation that the work of a large number of foreign development advisors is not useful for Nepal since they lack the sufficient knowledge of the country and also often lack adequate commitment to their work. Because expats are directly employed by the donor agency, they are beholden to their employers in their home country and not to the people of Nepal, observed Shrestha. Given this situation, he claimed that most of the issues raised by foreign advisors are only peripheral, and therefore distractions for the Nepalese officials trying to address the central issues of the problems. Similar to Dixit’s portrayal of the overseas expert, Shrestha blamed the foreign advisors to be only pseudo-experts on Nepal. He openly expressed his frustration by concluding that “such a situation, coupled with their knowledge of the fact the expatriates are the people enjoying the highest standard of living in Nepal, only contributes to more incensed feeling against the expatriate community altogether.”

The frustration of local counterparts did not escape the foreigner’s notice. A Swiss development expert, who was the director of the SATA office in the first half of the 1970s and who later returned to Nepal for several short-term missions, reported in an interview that the counterpart system was a farce.

---

During the Panchayat Period, the counterpart system was the common model to manage foreign aided development projects, not only in Nepal but also in other developing countries. Its basic idea was to share the leadership in foreign aided project on an equal basis between a foreign advisor and a representative of the local partner organisation, which was in most cases some government institution. This was presumed to be the ideal system for learning from each other as well as for sharing the “ownership” and responsibility of the project. Both project leaders should be “brokers” for each other. The foreign advisor was seen as a broker to gain access to the donor organisation and to the “Western” development knowledge. The local counterpart was seen as a broker to gain access to the Nepalese administration and society and to get relevant local knowledge. In practice, however, the system hardly ever worked out. According to the Swiss expert, different social backgrounds, ways of living, perceptions, and expectations made a true partnership impossible. Moreover, most SATA projects were concentrated in rural areas. For most Swiss expatriates, life and work in rural Nepal offered exactly the kind of exciting challenge they were looking for when applying for a job in development work. But unlike Dev Jang Rana, most Nepalese counterparts experienced posting in a remote area as a kind of punishment. They had to leave behind their families in Kathmandu, to work on a rural project site that was often located several days away from home. Moreover, they were far away from the central administration and thus not able to cultivate the professional network that was crucial for their future career. Needless to say, in the remote project areas, the possibilities of earning some “auxiliary income” were limited as well. Given the low salary of civil servants, small-scale corruption, often in the form of some sort of “commission,” was widespread as a means to gain enough money to pay one’s living costs and school fees for the children.\footnote{Högger, Rudolf. Interview by Sara Elmer. Zurich, November 19, 2010. This perspective was shared by the former secretary of the SATA-Kathmandu office who lived in Nepal for about thirty years (Spahr, Annemarie. Interview by Sara Elmer. Turbenthal, November 18, 2011).}
Because of this unequal situation, the counterpart system was often shaped by deep-seated tensions and mutual distrust. Contrary to the observations of Bihari K. Shrestha, the former SATA Nepal director experienced that Swiss development experts often perceived their Nepalese counterpart as insufficiently committed to the project, especially when the latter would be longing for relocation back to the central administration, or when preoccupied with plans of pocketing some project money. Nepalese counterparts, on their part, were confronted with mostly younger foreigners who were not sharing the same responsibility but who were earning much more money. When the former director was back in Nepal on a short-term mission in 1981, he observed a forceful outburst of a Nepalese counterpart’s frustrated view of the unequal situation between these pretended partners. The incident happened in an integrated hill development project in eastern Nepal, which was then the largest Swiss-aided project in Nepal. The Nepalese project manager was a middle-aged man, well educated, author of several books, and with a long career in civil service. According to the Swiss project staff, the Nepalese counterpart was obviously unhappy with his posting in the far-away hill project. Moreover, the Swiss suspected him of illegally demanding a commission from poor villagers who were seeking work in the project. The Nepalese project manager was thus already morally discredited when one day, several houses of Swiss project staff and their families were burglarised. Soon after, one of the Swiss discovered his bed linen hanging at the window of the Nepalese counterpart’s house. When the local police investigated the burglary, the Nepalese counterpart’s servant publicly admitted to have stolen goods from the Swiss on behalf of his master. The Swiss staff were shocked about the Nepalese manager who enriched himself by forcing his powerless servant to break into other people’s houses. Yet, the former SATA Nepal director, who happened to visit the project shortly after the incident, judged the case differently after conversations with Swiss and Nepalese project staff. To him, the public display of the stolen bed linen, which was not an expensive item even by
Nepalese standard, suggested that the burglary was rather a sign of forceful release of pent-up frustration and a provocative act of revenge of the Nepalese counterpart who could no longer stand the discrimination he experienced in his daily work.\(^{571}\)

Since the Nepalese counterpart did not raise his voice about the incident, his ulterior motives are left in the dark. Nonetheless, the anecdote illustrates the tensions that might erupt from the in-between positions of Nepalese development professionals working with foreigners. The Nepalese counterparts were expected to act as a broker, but in the case of the Swiss aided hill project, the officer did not feel at ease with either of the worlds he had to link the other with. He was a stranger in the rural project area and was also not able to cope with the Swiss. Unlike the successful brokers described by Bierschenk et al., the Nepalese project manager was in this case not able to carve out his own room for manoeuvre and did not gain satisfying rewards from his work.\(^{572}\) Thus, in the strict sense of Bierschenk et al.’s typology of the development broker, the Nepalese counterpart failed to be a real broker in this case.

Salary discrepancy is the easiest-to-quantify, but certainly not the only difference that Nepalese development professionals experience in their “co-operation” with foreign advisors. SATA and other organisations have long realised the salary problem but the issue remains an unsolved dilemma in the sphere of foreign aid. Foreign government agencies need to pay the expatriate staff a salary that is compatible to their salary in the home country. On the other hand, they do not want to pay their local staff a salary that is exorbitant for local standards, a pattern that would potentially completely distort the job market. Nonetheless, as Shrestha pointed out, the visibly different standard of life of ex-


\(^{572}\) Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan, “Local Development Brokers in Africa: The Rise of a New Social Category.”
patriate aid workers and Nepalese people fuelled the growing dissatisfaction with foreign aid.

5.4 The Subversive Broker

As shown in this chapter, the international sphere of Aidland Nepal had no clearly defined borders. It could manifest in a bar, in the household of an expatriate family, on a rural project site, or even in an international “seminar.” When the idea of development as a process that can be planned and managed became increasingly popular in Nepal, actors of development quickly spread out in Kathmandu. As Mosse and Lewis mentioned and I agree, through constant interactions of the various local and foreign actors, the development network became an entrenched social reality in Nepal.573 From about the mid-1960s onward, the seminar as a place to debate development issues and strategies became a popular platform to cultivate and foster the development network. The purpose of an international seminar was to establish a common development discourse by bringing Nepalese and foreign actors together. Through discussion of concepts of development and local realities, global ideas of development should be translated into the local context. The development seminars held in Nepal during the Panchayat Period can thus be understood as machines whose purpose was to tie only loosely connected entities together and create one coherent system of development.

One type of seminar was, for example, the panchayat instructors’ seminar. The government organised various such seminars where Nepalese functionaries, instructors of panchayat training institutes as well as foreign advisors discussed rural development programmes. However, instead of stimulating a proper debate, these seminars served, in the first place, as a platform to promote the concept of panchayat development as well as a platform for foreign advisors to

573 Lewis, and Mosse, “Theoretical Approaches to Brokerage and Translation in Development.”
present their development concepts.\footnote{Cf. Ministry, \textit{Report of the Fifth Panchayat Instructors’ Seminar: Proceeding of the Seminar “Development through Panchayats”}; Ministry of Panchayat, Publicity Section, \textit{Panchayat Development Program in Nepal}; Institute, \textit{Abstracts of the First Annual All Nepal Panchayat Instructors’ Seminar (February 15 - March 1 1968)}; Panchayat Training Institute, \textit{Research in Panchayat Training: Report of the Second Annual Panchayat Instructors’ Seminar (February 3-12 1969)} (Rampur, Nepal: Panchayat Training Institute, 1969).} Another type of seminar was the academic seminar. Especially, the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) and the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development (CERID) as the two leading Nepalese institution for development studies organised various international seminars throughout the 1970s to present current research on development issues.\footnote{Cf. Centre for Economic Development and Administration, ed. \textit{Seminar - cum - Workshop on Development Planning} (Kirtipur: Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, 1971); National Education Committee, ed. \textit{Financing of Education in Nepal: A Report of National Seminar} (Kathmandu: Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development (CERID), Tribhuvan University, 1978); Tika P. Pokharel, ed. \textit{Strategic Elements of Rural Development in Nepal} (Kirtipur, Kathmandu: Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, 1980); Pradhan, \textit{Aspects of Development Administration}.} Academic seminars could, like the panchayat seminars, have a rather ritualistic character where the insiders of Aidland need to flatter each other in order to legitimise their actions. But as will be shown in the following section with the example of a research seminar held in 1983, they could also offer a platform for committed debates and an instrument to address foreign development advisors to harsh criticism.

\subsection*{5.4.1 The 1983 IDS Seminar: Setting and Participants}

In October 1983, the non-governmental research centre “Integrated Development Systems (IDS)” organised a two-day seminar on the role of foreign in the development of Nepal.\footnote{Devendra Raj Panday, ed. \textit{Foreign Aid and Development in Nepal: Proceedings of a Seminar} (Kathmandu: Integrated Development Systems, 1983).} The list of participants read like a list of who-is-who among the elites of Nepalese intellectuals and development experts: Prachanda Pradhan, Bihari K. Shrestha, Harka Gurung, Prayag Raj Sharma, Kunda Dixit, to name a few.\footnote{Harka Gurung was one of the most prominent and renowned scholars, statesmen and development experts of Nepal. As the son of a Gurkha soldier serving in the British Indian Army, he received an English education in a military school in India and later pursued an academic career.} Most participants had obtained higher education abroad and
were therefore familiar with the academic culture of Western universities. They not only made successful careers in the government service but were also known among the foreign aid community where they functioned as “big-time brokers.” The main organiser was the director of IDS and former secretary of the Ministry of Finance, Devendra Raj Panday.

Like other Nepalese experts, Panday started his professional career in public administration and completed higher education abroad. Born in 1939, Panday joined the civil service in 1961 as a fresh graduate from the University of Allahabad in India. He originated from a Kathmandu-based Brahmin middle-class family that was, according to his own statements, not particularly rich but neither had to face any financial hardship. Recalling the beginnings of his professional career, he acknowledges that he had not much knowledge about Nepal outside the Kathmandu valley. But after starting his job as a low-level administrator in the National Planning Council, he gradually learned more about Nepal, its government and its development policies. A decisive moment in his career was when he was granted a scholarship from the Nepalese government to pursue a master’s degree in Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. The government’s scholarship programme was funded by various donors like USAID and as mentioned in the previous chapter, enabled many young civil servants to study abroad. Since he proved to be a good student, the University of

---


Pittsburgh also granted him a scholarship to do his PhD. After obtaining his PhD, Panday’s career gained momentum. He served for some time in the Jāņc Būjh Kēndra and became secretary of the Ministry of Finance. His profile, up to this point, fits well with the profile of other senior bureaucrats–cum–development experts. What was unusual in his career though, was that he quit government service in 1981. He resigned from his influential position as permanent secretary of the Ministry of Finance after the national referendum on the continuation of the panchayat system.\footnote{As a result of increasing public protests against the Panchayat system, King Mahendra announced in May 1979 a national referendum over the political system. The referendum, which took place one year later, resulted in about 55 per cent voting for the Panchayat system and 45 per cent voting for a multiparty democracy. Cf. Brown, The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History; Whelpton, A History of Nepal.} Panday explains his resignation from the civil service citing his disappointment with the king when the use of public resources for partisan political purposes became acute. Since he put himself in an uneasy situation with his protest against the king and the panchayat system, his former colleagues expected him to leave the country. But instead, he continued to stay in Nepal working as a private consultant for development agencies and becoming a well-known civil society activist.\footnote{Cf. Panday, Devendra Raj. Interview by Sara Elmer. Kathmandu, March 26, 2012. As private consultant, he mainly worked for foreign aid agencies in Nepal but also did a few consultancy jobs in other countries. Soon after the end of the Panchayat system, Panday was elected as Finance Minister but stayed not long in office as the post-1990 governments’ were only short-lived due to the political instability.}

While working in key-positions in the ministry of finance, Panday gained valuable insights into the government system as well as into the foreign aid community. He was thus already a well-informed insider of Aidland Nepal when he began his private consultancy with IDS. Panday, however, did not remain a “classic broker” but became what I suggest calling a “subversive broker.” As “subversive broker,” I designate those Nepalese development professionals who became development experts after benefitting from foreign aided scholarship programmes but with time outgrew their role as “classic brokers.” They were
quasi products of foreign aid but after becoming well-informed insiders of Aidland, they boldly started criticising foreign aid in Nepal even though they substantially made their own living out of it.

Devendra Raj Panday’s best known publication is his book “Nepal’s Failed Development” published in 1999 in which he openly blames the Nepalese policy makers as well as the foreign aid community for being responsible for Nepal’s weak economic performance and for making Nepal over-dependent on foreign aid. Yet, this was not Panday’s first sceptical assessment of foreign aid in Nepal. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in his function at the Ministry of Finance, he had already displayed tendency of not being inclined to accept all foreign donors’ suggestions. After his resignation from civil service, he became a more pronounced critic and also started to publish his reflections on the Nepalese development sector. A significant step to stimulate a critical debate on foreign aid in Nepal was the organisation of the IDS seminar in 1983.

The seminar proceedings report a total of 102 participants of all the important government institutions dealing with development issues and representatives of foreign donors including USAID, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank, SATA, as well as of the Indian and Japanese embassy. The seminar was well organised with six clearly structured sessions, each with a paper presentation, a presentation by one or two commentators, an open-floor discussion, and wrap up of the session’s chairperson. All presentations and discussions were carefully recorded in the 340-page long seminar proceedings. All presenters and commentators were Nepalese but contributions of foreign participants were included in the summary of the floor discussion. The paper presenters were all like-minded “subversive brokers” working either for government agencies in positions where


\[582\] Cf. the collection of Panday’s essays published in: Tamang, Looking Back at Development and Donors: Essays from Nepal.
they had to co-operate with foreign advisors or they were working for IDS. Despite similar views of the eight presenters, the open atmosphere of the seminar led to vivid discussions between critics and advocates of foreign aid about the proper approach to development in Nepal.

Panday opened the seminar by stating that “[o]ne of the problems of foreign aid is that we use the word ‘foreign.’”583 By this, he outlined the general tenor of the seminar, which was shaped by the idea that there are serious problems with foreign aid in Nepal and that “the foreign” in aid is a particularly problematic aspect. The seminar took place against the background of the experience of thirty years of foreign aid in Nepal when the optimism and faith in development planning had given way to disillusionment among many Nepalese and foreign development professionals. Panday responded to the general disillusionment by stating that “foreign” aid leads to “the illusion that it does not have to be accepted ‘metabolically’ by [the recipient countries’] socio-economic systems” and that “even the symptoms of rejection [...] can go unnoticed” among the aid community because of the non-identification of locals with aid projects.584 To address these issues, Panday and his co-organisers of IDS therefore brought the aid community together for debating wanted and unwanted impacts of foreign aid and for discussing means to improve development policies.

In his opening speech, Panday also set the tenor of the seminar in terms of language and style. In a condensed review of current trends in development, he discussed the donors’ efforts to commission “Jacksons, Petersons, Pearsons and Brandts” to study aid effectiveness, he raised the question “if the ‘free lunches’ really go to the hungry” and if the lunches are free at all and pointed out that even though the large aid agencies claim focus on the poor, little notice

584 Panday, “Introduction to the Seminar,” v.
is given to the people’s perspective in the “battle for new international economic order.” He also threw in Gunnar Myrdal’s scepticism in view of “scandalous” politics in developing countries, and explained the “Catch-22-like situation” of the poor who have to pay the price for misbehaviour of the political elites. Panday thereby addressed the international community in perfect English, using the common development jargon and impressively demonstrated his knowledge of global politics and development discourse. Like Panday, other Nepalese presenters and commentators also applied the language of Aidland to engage in a debate at par with their foreign counterparts. To give an idea of the discussions, I outline two of the topics that were covered during the two-day seminar and also ask for some of the blind spots of the development debates in Nepal.

5.4.2 Critique I: Foreign Aid and Social Structures
Several papers criticised foreign aid for not reaching out to “the poor” but instead strengthening the “traditional elites.” Misra and Sharma, for instance, argued that instead of raising the standard of living of the poorest people in Nepal, foreign aid has contributed to widening the gap between the traditionally privileged elites and the underclass of petty traders, wage labourers, and landless rural population. They, for instance, pointed out that foreign aided rural development projects helped the elites to extend their influence and control in the rural areas while the “massive increase in the scale of state-sponsored and state-controlled national programmes [allowed] little opportunity for the little voice to be heard.” Banskota agreed with them and explained the plight of the poor by referring to their lack of means to access projects, meaning primarily lack of economic power and organisation. To benefit from projects, he argued, one needs economic power to buy support and gain access to information as well as organi-

585 Panday, “Introduction to the Seminar.”
sation to lobby for one’s needs among the representatives of the public administration and aid organisations. He did not solely blame foreign aid agencies for this situation but also the Nepalese administration, since the government representatives with their elite background have an interest in consolidating their influence. But as most national development programmes were partly funded by foreign aid money, he made clear that foreign aid cannot evade the responsibility of neglecting the poor.

The demand that foreign aid needs to focus more on the poor is not surprising in view of the general claim in international development for “poverty orientation” in the course of the 1970s World Bank’s poverty reduction policy initiated under McNamara. More notable therefore is how Banskota debunked the government and aid agencies’ claim to help the poor as a pretext to keep the development apparatus running. He described the cycle of foreign aid-ed national development programmes as a six-part sequence. In the “pilot phase,” money, manpower, and material would pour into a new project to demonstrate some initial “success” and to confirm the Nepalese government and its foreign partner to continue the project. In this phase, “costs of these initial efforts are deliberately kept out of the public eye and only the achievements are highlighted.” Then follows a phase of “inordinate expansion” when “verbal commitments [...] come in floods” from all sides, a large institution is set up and many seminars and trainings are organised. In brackets, Banskota raised the perky question whether the trainings are “a case of supporting the dominant elite’s positions”

---

discouraging. After a while follows the third phase of “conflicts and crises.” In this phase, (elite) groups who are not benefitting from the programme in an expected way begin complaining and rumours about malpractices of programme staff start spreading. Because of frequent changes in the administration no one can be blamed for the mismanagement. The foreign aid partner slows down the disbursements and asks for an evaluation, Banskota explained. This leads to the next phase of “benign neglect and stagnation” of the programme. The bureaucracy allows the programme to decline and “the opposite elite understand the signals and reduce their outcry, knowing something else is in the pipe line – this time for those who made all the noise.” In the fifth phase begins the “quiet withdrawal.” The government loses interest in the programme because foreign funds are declining and the government does not want or is not able to bear the burden of financing all alone. The involved bureaucrats are now more interested in finding new schemes and projects. The sixth phase, therefore inevitably entails the “search for new models.” The government attempts to pacify some of the local elites by promising a new programme and some government institutions “see this as their opportunity for expansion and empire building. Once more the machinery is mobilized to find a new thrust.” The cycle then starts again from the beginning with substantial inputs from foreign aid. Banskota argued that in this cycle of foreign aided programmes, “the needs and the problems of the poor are of value only for justification to get more aid.” According to him, the cycle tends to repeat itself because the local elites in the programme area and the national elites in the bureaucracy benefit from the development machinery. He provocatively concluded that

\begin{quote}
\textit{using foreign aid and the labour of the poor, the elite have been having a joy-ride because they are an integral part of the decision-making system}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{591} Banskota, “Foreign Aid and the Poor: Some Observations on Nepal’s Experience,” 64.
\textsuperscript{592} Banskota, “Foreign Aid and the Poor: Some Observations on Nepal’s Experience,” 64.
\textsuperscript{593} Banskota, “Foreign Aid and the Poor: Some Observations on Nepal’s Experience,” 65.
\textsuperscript{594} Banskota, “Foreign Aid and the Poor: Some Observations on Nepal’s Experience,” 65.
\end{flushleft}
and have the resources to ensure its continuance. Willingly or unwillingly foreign aid has danced to their tunes, and probably rightly because even they would not really know what else to do.\textsuperscript{595}

Banskota thus vividly presented how both Nepalese elites and foreign donors keep development funds flowing in order to uphold one’s own job and also showed how evaluations and criticism were just part of this game.

In the commentaries and floor discussions, criticism of local and national elites for being selfish profiteers of foreign aid met with wide approval. But there was also criticism that Banskota’s presentation was only grounded in his observations of rural development programmes and was lacking thorough empirical data. Another point raised during the discussions was that presenters like Misra and Sharma have unrealistic expectations and are therefore overcritical with foreign aid. Foreign aid, goes the counterargument, has nowhere brought total social transformation but has at least played a positive role in redressing hardships in Third World countries.\textsuperscript{596} The problem with this kind of debate is not only that the precise impact of foreign aid cannot be empirically measured since the outcome of a project depends on various intertwined factors of which foreign aid is only one. The problem is also that the impact of foreign aid on “recipient societies” is often only looked at in relation to the planned benefits of a programme. The IDS seminar debates at least went beyond the common discussions and also included unplanned social changes that emerged as by-products of foreign aided development programmes. Most relevant in view of this chapter’s topic is the emphasis that foreign aided development programmes have effectively changed the Nepalese society by unintentionally creating a new urban middle-class. This new middle-class was composed of the administrative and

\textsuperscript{595} Banskota, “Foreign Aid and the Poor: Some Observations on Nepal’s Experience,” 65.
\textsuperscript{596} See minutes of the floor discussions in: Panday, Foreign Aid and Development in Nepal: Proceedings of a Seminar, 25.
technical professionals who were trained and employed specifically for the requirements of development programmes.  

But this new social group of development professionals was discussed with a remarkable detachment. In spite of belonging to this social group, there was no self-reflection on parts of the seminar participants about their own role as development brokers in the emergence and maintenance of the development sector. In addition, while the seminar participants were blaming the “evil” elites – whose identity they did not clearly define – for domineering over “the poor,” they did also not reflect on their own paternalistic approach towards “the poor.” Like “the elites,” “the poor” were also treated as a more or less homogeneous entity with which the participants did not associate themselves. “The most needy” with the “little voice” were portrayed as a helpless mass, unable to speak for themselves and therefore dependent on being represented by Nepalese development professionals like the ones present at the seminar. By “othering” the poor and speaking for them, the seminar participants not only underlined their position as being agents, and not targets, of development. They also reproduced the same paternalistic approach towards their less fortunate countrymen, for which they were criticising foreign advisors. Hence, even though critical thoughts on foreign aid and national development programmes were openly articulated at the seminar, the participants did not fully think through the impact of foreign on the social structures of Nepal as they only marginally touched upon the fast-growing social group of Nepalese development professionals that was represented at the seminar.

---

5.4.3 Critique II: Dominance of Foreign Aid

Another big topic debated at the seminar was the dominance of foreign aid in Nepal, which led to a strong dependency on foreign donors. The depiction of “the story of foreign aid in Nepal” as “the story of a trickle turning into a torrent” was undisputed among the participants. Panday underpinned the prevalent feeling of a strong dependency on foreign aid with statistical data. According to the presented figures, the first National Five-Year Plan (1956–61) was fully financed with foreign aid money. Thereafter, the national development expenditures as well as the foreign aid inflow were constantly rising in absolute terms even though the share of foreign aid in the overall development budget declined from the initial 100 per cent to 45 per cent in the Fourth Plan (1970–75). It then started to rise again and reached 61 per cent in the Sixth Plan (1980–86). As for 1981, the share of foreign aid in the total government expenditure amounted to almost 40 per cent and was about 5.7 per cent of the total gross domestic product (GDP). In comparison to other South Asian countries, Nepal was not completely out of the ordinary. In India, foreign aid amounted to only about 0.9 per cent of the GDP and in Pakistan 3.2 per cent. But in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the share of foreign aid in the GDP was higher than in Nepal, amounting to about 8.5 per cent. However, the Nepal government’s dependence on foreign aid money was still remarkably high. Due to the high share of foreign aid in development programmes “development” and “foreign aid” were almost synonymous in Nepal, as pointed out by two other seminar participants. Panday, however,

---

603 Panday has no complete data for the year 1981 for the share of foreign aid in the total of the government expenditures in South Asia, but gives the following data from the IMF International Financial Statistics and from the Bangladesh Economic Survey of 1982-83: Nepal 38.2% (in 1981), Bangladesh 45.6% (in 1981/82), Burma 13% (in 1979), India 7.0% (in 1981), Pakistan 17.4% (in 1980), Sri Lanka 25.7% (in 1981). See Panday, “Foreign Aid in Nepal’s Development: An Overview,” 278-79.
acknowledged that due to foreign aid some visible progress had undeniably been achieved, especially in the construction of a proper road network, telecommunication, education, and health services. But he considered the strong dependence on foreign aid money to be too high a price and not a sustainable solution for the future.\(^{605}\) He agreed with Banskota that despite being aware of the shortcomings and the planning gaffes of projects, foreign and Nepalese project managers were not much motivated to improve the situation since both profited from the steady flow of development funds. The evaluation reports would further sustain their “attitude of plodding along”\(^{606}\) as “[m]ost are forthright about their criticism of the various programmes [...] and yet when it comes to recommendations, all suggest the programmes to be continued, albeit with some minor changes.”\(^{607}\)

The seminar participants discussed not only Nepal’s financial dependence on foreign aid but also the dominance of foreign ideas and values attached to development programmes. Pradhan and Shrestha emphasised that foreign aid should not only be looked at from the volume of foreign funds but “as a total package that comes with the cash flow: the Western concepts, assumptions, values, beliefs, advisory services, technical expertise, manpower training and so on.” They went even as far as to state that the Nepalese government with its unselective acceptance of this package “helps to reinforce the foreign dominance to a stage of neo-colonialism where the country becomes dependent, even to the extent of being organized in cleaning its own streets and door steps.”\(^{608}\) Not all participants went as far as to equalise foreign aid with “neo-colonialism,” but all agreed that the government’s dependency upon foreign assistance for even providing basic services was alarming.

\(^{605}\) Panday, “Foreign Aid in Nepal’s Development: An Overview,” 281, 297.
\(^{608}\) Pradhan, and Shrestha, “Foreign Aid and Women,” 99. Bina Pradhan and Indira Shrestha both worked as researchers at IDS.
Pradhan and Shrestha exemplified the problems with foreign development concepts by looking at the situation of women in development projects. They argued that most projects, including the ones specifically targeting women, actually worsened the situation of women instead of improving their economic and social position. The reason, they thought, was the “Western economic parlance” categorising women either as “housewives,” “money earners,” or as a mix of both. But these categories would only fit a very small segment of elite Nepalese women and would leave out the majority of women working productively in family farms without being paid. They argued that most rural development projects neglect women despite their crucial contribution to the survival of farm families and bypass them as workers and decision makers in the rural economy. Development projects thus not just failed to make use of the skills and expertise of women in agricultural production but often even weakened their authority and status in the society. Pradhan and Shrestha further argued that even projects that were particularly targeted women, failed to improve their economic and social situation because they only promoted “housewifely” activities like knitting, sewing, childcare, kitchen gardening etc. The question whether the categorisation of women as either “housewives” or “money earners” did really reflect the realities in Western countries or not had no relevance at the seminar. The point was rather to show how dominant foreign development concepts were not paying enough respect to local conditions and could consequently result in contrary outcomes than planned.

By expounding the problems of the dominance of foreign development trends and concepts, the seminar participants adumbrated what Panday later called the “psychological dependency” on foreign aid. Due to the high share of foreign aid and the dominant role of foreign advisors in development projects,

---

609 Pradhan, and Shrestha, “Foreign Aid and Women,” 103.
610 Pradhan, and Shrestha, “Foreign Aid and Women,” 105-09.
Nepalese people would feel helpless and lack the initiative to improve their lives on their own. Aidland Nepal was almost everywhere and its actors – the development professionals, as well as its actants that donated vehicles, food grain fertiliser, machines, etc – penetrated national life down to remote villages. To illustrate the deep-seated connotation of “development” with “foreign,” Panday pointed out the “fact that, in the villages, a native playing his own development advisory role is greeted, especially by children, with ‘bye-bye’s.”612 However, as mentioned above, the “native’s” role as a development expert and as a broker between the local society and the foreign donors was not further explored at the seminar.

Despite manifold criticism, most seminar participants could not imagine putting a halt on foreign aid. Since foreign aid substantially financed the public sector, they feared that the state would collapse without it and would not be able to even provide basic services to its people. Panday concluded though, that if foreign aid merely remains an instrument of plodding along with plans and projects, it might better be stopped altogether since it only serves to maintain the status quo instead of improving people’s lives.613 Panday was not the first to state that foreign aid failed to fulfil its promises. Other participants like Bihari K. Shrestha, or previously Mihaly and Stiller/Yadav came to similar disillusioned conclusions about foreign aid in Nepal.614 Yet, an aid moratorium, or even the end of foreign aid, had so far not been the topic of public debate in Nepal. Since the late 1960s, criticising foreign aid and development planning had become common both within and outside the circles of development professionals all over the globe. But the more radical call for stopping foreign aid was only popu-

larised in the late 1980s, mainly among authors of the post-colonial approach. A few participants approved Panday’s provocative suggestion of an aid moratorium, 615 while others rejected it on the ground that “it is actually foreign aid that is holding the fort.” 616 Stopping aid was, however, not Panday’s favoured path. He saw it rather as a kind of shock treatment to force the government to take development work into its own hands but preferred foreign aid to continue under different terms. He especially asked foreign donors to consider the socio-economic realities in Nepal more carefully, and as they were anyway interfering into internal matters, he asked them to use their power to “nudge” the Nepalese government to work more efficiently instead of letting the latter “plod[ding] along” with them in a silent agreement. 618 On the other hand, he asked the Nepalese government not to blindly adapt all trends of international development, especially as “new” development strategies often turned out to be just old ideas in new disguise. These less radical suggestions received wide approval at the seminar and most participants’ suggestions for future development co-operation pointed to a similar direction. Hence, albeit harsh criticism of the aid community, the seminar also leaves the impression of not going much further in its suggestions for changing the development policy than the evaluation reports, which the participants dismissed for being “forthright about their criticism of the various programmes” but still recommending “the programmes to be continued.” 619

615 Ziai, “Post-Development.”
5.4.4 Blind Spots

By discussing topics like the dominance of Western development ideals, the impact of development programmes on social structures, foreign aid as a form of neo-colonialism, or the possibility of an aid moratorium, the seminar tapped the pulse of the age or was even ahead of its times. Some aspects of common development debates were, however, strikingly absent. For example, none of the participants brought up arguments of the neo-Marxist dependency theory, which gained worldwide attention in the 1970s. The dependency theory was neither discussed at the seminar nor was it the focus of other public debates in Nepal. This might be surprising in view of late King Mahendra’s emphasis on Nepal’s non-aligned policy. But probably because Nepal was hardly exporting any primary commodities and because it seemed to be much more cut off from the world economy than postcolonial nations, the dependency theory never gained ground in Nepal. The upcoming neo-liberal trend in international development politics was also not a topic at the seminar. The reason was simply that neoliberal development economy directly affected Nepal only after the late 1980s, when Nepal had to negotiate a structural adjustment loan with the World Bank and

620 On the dependency theory see for example: Menzel, Geschichte der Entwicklungstheorie: Einführung und systematische Bibliographie, 21-42, 211-224., or one of the main publications of dependency theorists like Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil.
622 In a later publication, Panday, for instance, wrote (in reference to the World Trade Organization negotiations) that Nepal has no power to influence negotiations on the world economic order. Its needs are not only very different from the “developed” countries but also different from most “developing” countries, which are economically still better off than Nepal. See Panday, Nepal’s Failed Development: Reflections on the Mission and the Maladies, 10th Anniversary Edition, 370-71. Baburam Bhattarai (vice chairperson of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal/Maoist and Prime Minister from August 2011 – March 2013) analysed “underdevelopment” in Nepal in his 1986 PhD thesis from a Marxist point of view with a strong influence of the dependency theory. But his analysis did not enter the mainstream development debate in Nepal. Bhattarai completed his PhD in 1986 at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, but only published his work in 2003. See: Baburam Bhattarai, The Nature of Underdevelopment and Regional Structure of Nepal: A Marxist Analysis (Delhi: Adroit Publications, 2003).
became more significant after the end of the panchayat system in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{623} Yet, the absence of a debate on Nepal’s position in the world economic order is still remarkable.

Another aspect conspicuous by its absence at the seminar was a critique of the political system and its leader, the king. Although the seminar participants harshly criticised the Nepalese government, the critique was never directly addressed to the king who had promoted himself as the figurehead of national development. Moreover, the panchayat system was not questioned and no one asked for a more democratic system. The seminar participants regarded “development” as a state affair and debunked selfish motivations of government officials and foreign advisors for keeping the development sector alive. But they did not look at development planning and foreign aid as a political instrument of the national government or of foreign donors. Only Panday pointed cryptically into this direction by mentioning that the Nepalese government always admitted its responsibility for development planning and “will no doubt have to bear the weight of that burden one day.”\textsuperscript{624} Consciously or unconsciously, he thereby predicted the collapse of the panchayat system in 1990 and the loss of power of the king who had grounded his legitimacy to rule to a great part on the promise of development. As known today, the post-1990 governments were not able carry the burden of the promise of development, which was one reason for the unstable political situation and the outbreak of the Maoist insurgency in 1996.\textsuperscript{625}

Last but not least, the role of Nepalese development brokers was only very marginally discussed at the IDS seminar. The organisers and participants of the seminar used their position as insiders of Aidland to bring high-profile Nepalese officials and foreign advisors together and to present them their view of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{624} Panday, “Foreign Aid in Nepal’s Development: An Overview,” 301.
\textsuperscript{625} Cf. Hutt, Himalayan People’s War: Nepal’s Maoist Rebellion.
\end{flushright}
development in Nepal. By applying the up-to-date development jargon and expressing their familiarity with the current development discourse, the seminar participants demonstrated their legitimacy to act as brokers between Nepalese decision makers and foreign donors. Moreover, their Nepalese nationality also gave them the ostensible right to represent the Nepalese people and speak for them to an international audience. They thereby used their knowledge and position to subversively formulate harsh criticism of foreign aid and development planning in Nepal. Yet, as mentioned several times, the seminar participants did not debate their own role and responsibility as well-educated, well-connected development professionals who owe their careers in a large part to foreign aid. In the closing speech of the seminar, Harka Gurung covertly reminded the participants of their somewhat ambivalent position by first of all thanking “foreign aid for making this seminar possible.”626 However, the assembled group of “subversive brokers” did not take this issue any further.

5.5 The Career of Development and Development as a Career

Looking back at the IDS seminar after about thirty years, it seems that although a broad audience of development policy makers had been reached, it did not have any significant impact on the development policy in Nepal. The share of foreign aid in Nepalese development programmes remained high and the Nepalese government and foreign donors continued to “plod along” without fundamentally changing the concepts of development.627 Nonetheless, when looked at from a broader perspective, the seminar still exemplifies some significant changes in the history of the Nepalese development sector. By the early 1980s, the optimism and faith in development planning had given way to disillusionment, frustration, and ever increasing criticism. Foreign aid was no more taken for granted as a quick-fix for economic and social development. The organiser of the IDS seminar

therefore suggested to properly diagnose Nepal’s “disease” instead of continuously feeding the “patient” with foreign aid like with antibiotics that produces “additional unhealthy symptoms” instead of the anticipated positive effects. However, the seminar reflects not only this change of attitude but also how Aidland Nepal and its inhabitants have developed since the 1950s. Since the days of Wood and Hagen, more and more foreign aid agencies have set foot in Nepal and the expatriate aid community in Kathmandu became bigger and bigger. Hand in hand with the growth of foreign aid, an extensive public development administration emerged. The history of the Nepalese development sector is, however, not simply a story of growth and expansion. It is also a story of change and diversification, not only in view of development trends but also in view of the agents of development. Both the growing state bureaucracy and the donor agencies offered plenty of new jobs and opened up “development” as a new career opportunity for the better-educated Nepalese. The Nepalese government and foreign donors were dependent on local development professionals who could be put in charge of development projects and could mediate between the foreign aid agencies and the Nepalese administration. Thus, by the early 1970s, a new and influential social group of well-educated Nepalese who worked as “development brokers” had emerged. Many development brokers were able to start a career in the development sector, thanks to a privileged family background and to foreign-aid-sponsored training or higher education. The smart and ambitious ones could use their English education and their connections to influential Nepalese families to be taken seriously as spokesmen of the Nepalese people by the foreign aid community and to obtain influential positions in public development administration or in foreign aid agencies. These development brokers conspicuously appropriated the jargon of international development and did not apply

---

the religiously flavoured modernisation discourse of King Mahendra’s Panchayat Development rhetoric. 629

As the example of the 1983 IDS seminar shows, profession as a “classic” development broker was not necessarily the final destination of a career in Aidland Nepal. While the development sector was mainly composed of the public administration and foreign aid agencies until the 1970s, it became more diverse – and even more diffused – in the 1980s with the increasing number of Nepalese development professionals acting outside the public administration. During the Panchayat Period, very few non-governmental organisations (NGOs) existed. The state tightly controlled NGOs and obliged them to register with the 1977 founded Social Services National Co-ordination Council (SSNCC). 630 But the elites of the Nepalese development brokers found ways to work as private “development entrepreneurs” without necessarily setting up an officially registered NGO. More and more development bureaucrats used their knowledge, skills, and network to work as private consultants in addition or instead of their government jobs. Yet, as the IDS seminar also shows, quite a few of these well-informed insiders of Aidland Nepal became “subversive brokers” who undermined Aidland from within. Despite selectively appropriating the development discourse and owing their personal career to some extent to foreign aid, they did not further perpetuate the development discourse but challenged it by questioning the benefits and legitimacy of foreign aid.

With the end of the Panchayat Period in 1990 and the arrival of neoliberal trend in international development, the composition of Aidland Nepal became even more diverse and intransparent. The big-time development brokers presented in this chapter remained prominent inhabitants of Aidland Nepal.

629 See chapter two about the rhetoric of Panchayat development.
630 Brown, The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History, 68. The SSNCC was chaired by the Queen and controlled all foreign funds destined for Nepalese NGOs. The number of NGOs in Nepal slowly grew from 10 in 1960 to 37 in 1987.
Many of them quit civil service and continued their careers in international NGOs, as private consultants, as civil society activists, or even as politicians.

With the liberalisation of laws concerning NGOs, foreign aid funds need no more to be channelled through the government but could now directly flow to NGOs. This led to a significant shift from the governmental to the non-governmental development sector. The number of officially registered NGOs increased from about forty in the late 1980s up to more than 30,000 in 2010.\textsuperscript{631} But not only non-profit, but also for-profit institutions slowly but steadily set foot in post-1990 Aidland Nepal as subcontracting enterprises in development projects. Especially since the turn of the millennium, the Nepalese government and foreign aid agencies have increasingly began to outsource the implementation of projects, or parts of projects, to subcontractors, which are NGOs or private enterprises. The trend of subcontracting development work thus not only led to blurring of boundaries between the private for-profit sector and the non-profit development sector but also produced new types of brokers mediating between the various stakeholders.\textsuperscript{632} The scrutiny of the development sector of post-1990 Nepal goes beyond the scope of the present thesis, however.

\textsuperscript{631} See the list of NGOs registered with the Social Welfare Council (successor organisation of the SSNCC) from 2034-2067 VS on: <http://www.swc.org.np/allngo_list.php> accessed December 2, 2013. Not all, but most of the registered NGOs work in the development, the health, or the educational sector.

6. Conclusion: The Making of a Development Caste?
To conclude, I summarise the history of the visions and agents of development in Nepal from a bird’s-eye view and discuss the making of a “development caste” as one of the unintended effects of development planning and foreign aid in Nepal.

There is little that is known about the visions of development among the Nepalese living in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is known, however, is that the political and historical discourse after 1951 represented the Rana rule as the embodiment of backwardness. The Rana rule seemed to typify everything that the post-1951 governments promised to overcome: illiteracy, lack of road network, a discrimination-based caste system, no political participation, isolation policy, low formalisation of public administration, no development planning, and similar problems. The retrospective representation of the Rana rule thus reveals much more about the ideas of modernity and visions of development of the post-Rana period policymakers than of the people living during the Rana rule. However, the post-1951 image of backward Nepal did not emerge out of the blue but was based on an earlier colonial image of an uncivilised Nepal. This image could be identified in the European press coverage of Jang Bahadur Rana’s voyage to Europe as well as in Chandra Shamsher Rana’s attempts to present himself as a modern and civilised ruler. Yet, Chandra Shamsher’s public appeal for the abolition of slavery also shows that he was not only familiar with debates on civilisation and modernisation in Europe but that he was also aware of their political power. His, and subsequently his successors’, (unfruitful) interest in Japan’s version of modernity can accordingly be interpreted as a statement against “European” modernity that seemed intimately connected with imperialism. However, during the Rana Period, there was no public debate on modernisation and development. The debate eventually entered Nepal through expatriate Nepalese political activists living in India who propagated unnati (development) and demanded a change of regime in Nepal. Unnati, in this context, re-
ferred not to economic development or the setting up of infrastructures but primarily to the development of a Nepalese national consciousness and a strong nation. Yet, in the late 1940s, the political debate significantly shifted from unnati to vikās (development). Vikās also means development, but came to be associated specifically with planned European-oriented economic and infrastructural development as well as with foreign aid. After the defeat of the Japanese empire and the end of British colonial rule in India, the last Rana rulers opted neither for a Japan-oriented modernity nor for unnati but for the promise of vikās to safeguard their rule. However, this was not really a matter of free choice as the call for vikās, or development, became at that time an inescapable postulation all around the world.

The last Rana ruler’s announcement of national development planning only materialised after the change of regime in 1951, however. In the 1950s, the vision of development was clearly influenced by mainstream economic modernisation theory as development was regarded as synonymous to economic growth and new technologies. Yet, what Nepalese development planners and their foreign advisors regarded as the most urgent need, was a “change of attitude” of Nepalese people. The idea that Nepalese people were poor because they were driven by a fatalistic acceptance of their situation is well visible in Nepal’s first village development programme and still haunts today’s debates on development in Nepal. The idea, back than, was that trained village development workers should stimulate the villagers’ self-help capacity and promote development at grass-roots level. This idea of bottom-up development by facilitating self-help was strongly influenced by Indian community development. But it would be misleading to think of it as an “Indian” concept as community development was a globally circulating concept.

Although the first foreign aided development programme did not bring the anticipated results, it heralded profound changes in the Nepalese society:
“development” crystallised as a new social difference marker. It was not so much a novelty that on a global scale Nepal was now ranked among the “underdeveloped” countries, since the label of underdevelopment was preceded by Nepal’s earlier reputation as an uncivilised, oriental place. The novelty was rather that “development” became a social difference marker within the Nepalese society itself. In the new development hierarchy, rural villagers were placed at the low-end of the scale as they were seen as those who needed to be developed by others. Those working for development were accordingly placed in a higher position. This is, of course, not a new insight identified by this thesis, as other authors point it out as well.\textsuperscript{633} However, this study does argue out that it would be wrong to think about a simple development hierarchy structuring the Nepalese society. Existing social difference markers were not just replaced but rather complemented by the new “development” markers. Village development workers, for instance, still faced difficulties in commanding respect because other social difference markers such as age, gender, or caste, remained intact and overlapped with the status marker “development.” There was, however, also an implicit hierarchy even among the ones working for development, as this was by no means a homogenous composition. The village development workers were created as those lowest-level development professionals who had to “dirty their hands”. At the other end of the strata were the planners in the government offices and their foreign counterparts. Since development was conceived as the government’s responsibility, the bureaucracy – and the bureaucrats – assumed a central role in development. Accordingly, education and training of government employees for becoming experts on development issues was a central part of the thorough reform of the public administration.

In short, the 1950s witnessed the birth of development as a new occupational field. But it was not a smooth beginning. The demands on development

professionals were high, both in terms of professional qualifications as well as in terms of expected character traits. Not surprisingly, neither village development workers nor the “bureaucrats–cum–development experts” were able to meet the expected standards. Rather injudiciously, development professionals had been conceived as mere instruments to perform development work, dismissive of the fact that they were at the same time individuals with certain weaknesses, interests, and social obligations. Moreover, the new functions of development workers and development bureaucrats did not build upon existing expertise but were created as completely new kinds of jobs. There was, however, an unplanned continuity within the public administration system. Although the post-Rana governments announced a thorough reform of public administration, senior positions in the development bureaucracy remained occupied by the same elite that had already dominated political and economic life during the Rana Period.

While during the 1950s standards of a universal modernity increasingly penetrated Nepal in the form of development projects and foreign advisors, the Nepalese government under the lead of King Mahendra, around 1960, started to propagate a Nepalese version of modernity and development. Under the label of “panchayat development,” King Mahendra and his government created an ostensibly indigenous concept of development, which promised to secure Nepalese traditions while at the same time stimulating economic development. According to the vision of panchayat development, this was to be achieved through the formation of a strong state, based on the principles of a traditional Hindu kingdom, and through locally adapted development programmes. Yet, despite massive propaganda, the definition of Nepalese traditions and locally adapted means of development remained fairly unclear. However, the power of the panchayat development ideology resided not in its details but in its political function. With the nationalistic panchayat development policy, King Mahendra killed two birds with one stone. He legitimised his authoritarian rule as a Hindu king and created
a mental shield against foreign domination. The panchayat ideology especially served to sharpen Nepal’s profile as an independent nation that was distinct from its two powerful neighbours. To paraphrase Partha Chatterjee, the Nepalese government’s efforts to produce a distinctly national modernity through a Nepalese vision of development was an essential part of its cultural project of nationalism and a form of resistance against foreign domination. Whether the “Nepalese” vision of development was really an “indigenous” one or not was however not questioned by any of the actors of development in Nepal. Anyhow, despite a lot of renaming, panchayat development did not mean a discontinuation of the development policies started in the 1950s. Accordingly, foreign aid continued to grow, and the training of Nepalese development professionals remained a high priority.

By 1970, development planning and foreign aid were well established and the optimistic belief in progress through planning was still intact. Moreover, public life in Nepal was no more imaginable without foreign aid. It not only helped the state in providing basic services like education and infrastructures but also generated many jobs in development projects as well as in the vast sub-economy of Aidland Nepal. Thus, development had become an important workspace and source of income for many Nepalese people. The most significant employer of Nepalese development professionals was the public administration, which had not only immensely expanded since the 1950s, but was also characterised by some relatively strong and well-functioning institutions. The efforts of educating and training government employees to enable them to work in all levels of development planning soon bore fruit, as by this time, the bureaucracy became reasonably well-staffed with trained development professionals. This also led to a generational change among the civil servants. The newly trained

---

development professionals, while rapidly filling up the lower ranks of the civil service, began occupying the senior ones as well. Although the old cadres did not disappear, they increasingly had to face young, well-educated civil servants entering senior positions, especially in those government institutions that coordinated directly with foreign aid agencies. By the early 1970s, these numerous young cadres crystallised as a new national elite, which I suggest calling a “development caste.” The notion of “caste,” however, serves only as a metaphor and is not to be misunderstood as an equation with the notion of caste as used in the (formerly legally codified) Nepalese caste system. Like Gunnar Myrdal\textsuperscript{635}, I suggest using “caste” also not as a scientific analytical category but rather as a rhetorical device to describe the character and role of the new elite of development professionals.

The metaphor of caste to describe the new Nepalese elite of development professionals seems appropriate for several reasons. First of all, this group of high-level development professionals can be referred to as a “development caste” simply because of their common occupation. Although the legally codified caste system had been abrogated with the end of the Rana rule, social stratification along different castes, which were often associated with certain occupations, has remained intact in Nepal. In this regard, the new occupational group of development experts can be seen as a new kind of occupational caste. Secondly, it might be countered that using the caste metaphor is inappropriate because caste membership is generally acquired by birth and not by pursuing a specific career. However, although access to positions in civil service and in foreign aid agencies were in principle open to all, becoming a high-level development professional required a certain educational background as well as the right personal network. Hence, as shown in this thesis, people with a more privileged, higher-

\textsuperscript{635} Myrdal used the notion of “caste” as a metaphor to describe race discrimination and segregation in the Southern United States: Gunnar Myrdal, \textit{An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy} (New York: Harper, 1944).
caste background were more likely to obtain an influential position in the development sector. Not surprisingly, many Nepalese development professionals originated from typical bureaucratic castes like the high-caste Shrestha group.

Thirdly, the development sector offered an attractive workplace with enticing opportunities for earning money and social status. Describing the emerging group of influential development professionals simply as a new kind of upper-middle class would therefore not pay enough respect to the social prestige associated with development work. Other than “class,” which is primarily defined through material wealth, “caste” is a strong indicator of the social dimension of development work as well as the spiritual superstructure given to it in the course of the panchayat propaganda. The high social status of development professionals was, however, not based on having a jāgīr (government job) or being close to the Nepalese authorities only. It was also based on being an insider of Aidland Nepal and thus in effect, for being connected with the world of “Euro-American modernity.” This leads to the fourth reason why the rhetoric device of the term “development caste” seems appropriate to designate Nepal’s development elite. The caste metaphor implies a feeling of cohesion among the members of the “development caste” and differentiation from other social groups. The members of the “development caste” indeed differed from other social groups not only because of their occupation but also by virtue of their educational background. The development professionals in senior positions had all obtained higher education abroad and many of them had even obtained PhDs from American universities. Education abroad, especially in the United States, distinguished them from the older generation of government elites, and was like a rite of passage to become a member of the “development caste.” The cohesion of the members of the “development caste” was further strengthened through their age and common language. They were all born around 1940, and were well familiar not only with the English language but also with the specific development jargon used by expatriate development advisors all around the world.
A fifth reason is that the caste metaphor also acknowledges the importance of informal networks in development work. Despite a theoretically rationalised bureaucracy, personal networks shaped the everyday practices of the public administration as well as the co-operation with foreign aid agencies. The personal networks were strengthened through members of a similar social background, common educational level, and common work experience in institutions like CEDA, or the Jāñc Būjh Kēndra. Some may dismiss the metaphor of the “development caste” as superfluous because the existing notions of a “development apparatus” or a “development network” do also explain the structure of the development industry by considering the interactions of various development actors beyond formal rules and regulations. However, they describe the system of international development aid as a whole and primarily stress on foreign aid and the global development discourse. Moreover, the notion of the “apparatus” evokes associations of a depersonalised machine and the notion of the “network” diffuses hierarchical structures and stresses on the importance of non-human actors. The “development caste,” on the other hand, specifically denominates the influential group of elite Nepalese development professionals, as a sub-group of the international development system. Last but not least, the metaphor of the “development caste” also alludes to the ostensible tension between “modernity” and “tradition,” which was played up in the panchayat development rhetoric. For all these reasons, the relatively coherent new Nepalese elite, which had evolved by the 1970s as a result of foreign aid and development planning, can be called a “development caste.” The “development caste” was an influential social group not only because its members occupied key positions in the Nepalese administration but also because its members had the power to represent Nepal and the Nepalese people through their planning activities, through their direct contacts with foreign advisors, as well as through their publishing activities.

It must however be noted that the formation of a development caste by the 1970s is not the end of the story. Since the members of the “development
caste” were still very young when they acquired key positions, they remained influential in the subsequent decades. But by the 1980s, the structure of the “development caste” began falling apart again. The development sector, which until the 1970s mainly constituted of government institutions and foreign development agencies, became more complex and diverse from the 1980s onward. More and more Nepalese development professionals started private consultancy businesses either in addition to or instead of their government jobs. Some also became employed by donor agencies, which increasingly hired locals for higher positions as well. The “development caste” became further supplemented by new members, as more and more young Nepalese men and women acquired higher education and found employment in the ever growing development industry. The public development administration, on the other hand, slowly but surely degraded because of its cumbersome structures and the exodus of experts. It also became more and more obvious that the existing public administration was not able to fulfil the government’s promise for development. This provoked frustration and anger among Nepalese development professionals as well as among the general public. Some members of the “development caste” used their influential positions to resolutely articulate their criticism of foreign aid and national development planning. They claimed that these would in effect serve the interest of groups that are already privileged and the high dependency on foreign aid would impede Nepal’s proper development. Most critics, however, conspicuously excluded their own role as privileged members of the society who made their living out of development work. Moreover, they did not suggest any alternative vision of development but basically retained the idea of levelling inequalities through concerted development interventions. Fundamental criticism of the idea of development planning was sparse and sporadic and it appeared that few people actually favoured changes as radical as putting a hold on foreign aid. The development industry pervaded the Nepalese state and society so deeply that even the most severe critics could not imagine how Nepal should sustain
Without its existing system of foreign aid and government-led development programmes.

After 1990, with the collapse of the panchayat system and the neoliberal trend in international development, the Nepalese development sector definitively took on a life of its own and stepped out of the government’s control. The actors working in the development sector became extremely diverse, given the prolific growth of NGOs and the trend of subcontracting development work. The king lost his position as the figurehead of development, but many of the development professionals, who had become powerful during the Panchayat Era, remained active and influential. Higher education and travels abroad, however, were no more a privilege of a small segment of government supported development experts, so the pool of young foreign educated Nepalese development professionals steadily grew. Also, criticism of development work and policies has become a common feature of public debates and is today aggressively articulated by actors of various levels. However, as the history of development shows, criticising development was always part of the game, since criticism often merely involves blaming others and legitimising one’s own suggestions for development. The ostensible self-criticism of actors working in the development sector thus contributes significantly to the pervasiveness of the idea of development and its appendant industry. Furthermore, although debates over pros and cons of development strategies and foreign aid have been, and still are, common features of the development sector, the role of development professionals is widely ignored in the debates, as there is little true self-reflection. Hence, it can well be said that development work and foreign aid has not at all lost their significance in Nepal, considering the increasing frustration and criticism that has spread over the topic for the last thirty and more years. On the contrary, a look at the statistics as well as at life in the Kathmandu valley shows how conspicuous and omnipresent Aidland Nepal still is. Regardless of whether one regards the idea of “de-
development” as a boon or bane, it has certainly shaped the history of Nepal in the twentieth century.
Bibliography

Interviews

- Schild, Andreas. Patan, April 1, 2010.
- Spahr, Annemarie. Turbenthal, November 18, 2011.

Archives

- British Library, India Office Private Papers, Bailey Collection.
- League of Nations Documents Collection, League of Nations Archives.
- Swiss Federal Archives, Archives of the Federal State since 1848.
- Swiss Federal Archives, Helvetas Collection.
- Swiss Federal Archives, Private Papers of Walter Custer.

Printed Sources and Literature


Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London ; New York: Routledge, 1994.


Boardman, Philip. The Worlds of Patrick Geddes: Biologist, Town planner, Re-
Borgström, Bengt-Erik. “The Best of Two Worlds: Rhetoric of Autocracy and Dem-
Brar, Gurpreet Singh. Gram Panchayats in India: With Special Reference to Pun-
Brown, T. Louise. The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History. Lon-
don: Routledge, 1996.
Caplan, Lionel. Warrior Gentlemen: “Gurkhas” in the Western Imagination. Provi-
Carlyle, Thomas. On Heroes, Hero-worship, the Heroic in History. London: J. Fra-
sier, 1841.
Centre for Economic Development and Administration, ed. Seminar - cum -
Workshop on Development Planning Kirtipur: Centre for Economic Develop-
ment and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, 1971.
Chatterjee, Partha. The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial His-


Department of Publicity and Broadcasting, ed. *The Panchayat Way to Prosperity: Collection of the five speeches delivered by His Majesty King Mahendra, February 5 to 18, 1963* Kathmandu: Department of Publicity and Broadcasting, 1963.


Goodall, Merrill R. “Administrative Change in Nepal,” In Asian Bureaucratic Sys-


Kaphley, Indra Prasad. Fundamental Bases of Panchayat Democratic System.
Koirala, Jevan Chandra, ed. Tulsimeher Shrestha Smśtigrantha Kathmandu: 2061.
Lal, Prem Chand. Reconstruction and Education in Rural India: In the Light of the Programme Carried on at Sriniketan the Institute of Rural Reconstruction by Rabindranath Tagore. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932.
Ludden, David. “India’s Development Regime,” In Colonialism and Culture, edited


N. N. “60’000 Slaves Set Free, Story of the Nepal Emancipation, A Great Reform.” The Observer, 1926.


Oliphant, Laurence. *A Journey to Katmandu (the Capital of Nepaul) with the Camp of Jung Bahadoor*. London: John Murray, 1852.


Pigg, Stacey Leigh. “‘Found in Most Traditional Societies’: Traditional Medical


and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University, 1971.
392–401.


Truman, Harry S. “Inaugural Address (19 January 1949),” In *The point four program: reaching out to help the less developed countries,* edited by Dennis Merrill, University Publications of America, 1999.


U. N. Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to the Economic and Social Council. “Community Organization and Development: Definitions of Terms,


Yasas, Frances Maria. *An Evaluation of the Women’s Affairs Training Centre: Re


**Curriculum Vitae**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sara Sangita Elmer Udry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of Birth</td>
<td>30 September 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Origin</td>
<td>Glarus Sued and St. Antoni (CH)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Institution and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/2008 – 02/2014</td>
<td>ETH Zurich, Doctoral studies at the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 – 12/2012</td>
<td>University of Cambridge (Corpus Christi College), Visiting research student at the Faculty of History, funded by a scholarship of the Swiss National Science Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2009 – 02/2012</td>
<td>University of Zurich, Research associate at the “University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe” in the frame of the doctoral studies at ETH Zurich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/2000</td>
<td>Kantonsschule Glarus, Matura</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Institution and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since 02/2014</td>
<td>International Relations Office, University of Zurich, Coordinator North-South and International Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 – 11/2013</td>
<td>Bern Historical Museum, Educational Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2008 – 02/2012</td>
<td>Chair of History of the Modern World, ETH Zurich, Research Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 – 12/2008</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), assignment for an oral history project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 – 12/2007</td>
<td>Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/2004 – 06/2005</td>
<td>Institute of Religions Law, University of Fribourg, Assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>