SCHOOLS AS AN ARENA OF STRUGGLE: REEXAMINING THE PANCHAYAT ERA POLITICS OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

Nepal does not have a very long history of "modern" formal education system. The Ranas who ruled the country for over a century (1846–1951) were, barring a few exceptions, against public having access to education.[1] When the Rana rule ended in 1951, the literacy rate of the country was less than two percent (Pandey, K.C. and Wood 1956). In the next decade (1951–1960), after the downfall of the regime, the number of educational institutions and concomitantly the number of students/teachers grew significantly (HMG 2018 v.s.b; see Table 2) in many parts of the country, even though the political situation during that decade remained chaotic.[2]

During this decade, people all across the country became excited to create new avatars of themselves as individuals and as associations. There emerged associations of every hue and shade: from school managing committees to *ṭol sudhār samiti*s (community reform committees), literary clubs, public libraries, theatre groups, Dalits' associations, women's associations, farmers' associations, and traders' associations. And of course new newspapers were started and new political parties were formed. All of these formations attracted activists from various walks of life and augmented the larger concerns of the society (see Malla 1979; Parajuli 2009).

But all this changed dramatically when the "constitutional" Shah King Mahendra staged a coup d'etat in December 1960, and took over the reign of the country. "Development of education" remained one of the main mantras that the post 1960 royal regime also chanted. The regime had two major policy interventions in the education sector—one in 1961 and the other in 1971. This paper critically examines these interventions, explaining along the way the socio-political contexts under which they were introduced and

[1] See Parajuli 2012, 2019 for more details on the Rana era education policy.

[2] See Joshi and Rose 1966 for the blow by blow account of the chaotic politics of the decade (1951–1960).

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the politics behind these policies, and it also outlines what their impacts have been—intended or otherwise.

This paper will show how educational institutions increasingly became an arena where the state and the erstwhile political party actors contested after 1960. The state tried and, to a large extent, became successful in taking control of the school managing committees—an analysis of the educational policies of the first decade of Panchayat shows the gradual concentration of powers in the hands of the state agents. However, because of a few factors, e.g., finance, teachers, and students, the oppositional activities in the education sector continued. And it in fact remained the only sector that posed serious challenge to the regime's functioning or even survival. The regime therefore, I argue, devised and employed two pronged strategy to bring the entire socio-political life under its direct purview. One was employed in the political arena via the "Go-To-Village National Campaign," (see Baral 1976; Baral 2012[1977]; Shaha 1978) and the other was the revamping of the education sector with the introduction of the National Education System Plan (NESP). This article is about the latter strategy.

The royal government introduced the NESP (often called New Education Plan or *nayā̃ śikṣā*), aiming to completely overhaul the entire education system of the country. The rulers saw that the success of the Panchayat system "largely depend[ed] on the ability to create a mass awareness" which was "hardly possible without a close relationship between political and education system." The plan thus was to utilize "the education output…as an essential investment for political and national development" (HMG 2028 v.s.: 14). The main crux of the Plan, it was repeatedly claimed, was to provide adequate "manpower" that the country required (see, HMG 2028 v.s.). While it was true that there was a short supply of human resources in the technical areas, I further argue that it was *not* the reason for which the new plan was devised and introduced. "Manpower" was merely a pretext to extend the regime's grip over public life by taking full control of the educational arena, and weeding the erstwhile political actors out from that arena.

This article is divided into five sections, excluding this section and the conclusion. In the first section, I describe the political context of the post 1960 period under which the education policies were formulated. I then look at the educational policies of the first decade of the Panchayat, leading up to the NESP. After that I will detail what I call the "official transcripts" of the NESP. In the following section, I will critically analyze the NESP moving

beyond the official transcripts. Finally, I will discuss the local consequences of the plan with examples drawn from the Pokhara area.

Post 1960 Political Context

On December 15, 1960, the then reigning King Mahendra took over all the power in his hand through a military-backed coup d'etat. He disbanded the one-and-half-year-old parliament as well as the constitution, imprisoned the first ever elected prime minister, ministers, and then members of the political leadership. He outlawed the political parties and their sister organizations, and scrapped the civil liberties. He blamed the then party in power, Nepali Congress, for being "incapable of maintaining law and order in the country," setting aside "the interests of the country and the people," and "imperilling the national unity" (HMG n.d.: 4–5). He also claimed that there was a "direct threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Nation" (HMG n.d.: 19; see also Baral 2012[1975]).

On December 26, 1960 Mahendra set up a council of ministers—which comprised of Nepali Congress detractors and his trusted lieutenants—under his own leadership, thereby making (and demoting!) himself the de facto prime minister. Soon after taking over the country's administration, he set up a new ministry called the "National Guidance Ministry" that would concoct the ideological basis of the Panchayat system that he intended to introduce. The ministry, he claimed, would "inspire people of every walk and profession…and specially students, in all spheres of activity cultural, social and ideological, to devote themselves to the service of the Nation" (HMG n.d.: 34).

With the promulgation of the Emergency Arrangements Act on January 12, 1961, all the power was vested upon the king himself, and the council of ministers was relegated to a subordinate status—it had no right whatsoever to challenge any action of the king, who was free to do as he liked. In a bid to take complete control, the whole administrative machinery was overhauled; hundreds of gazetted and non-gazetted civil servants were purged, transferred, defying the Civil Service Act. Moreover, the police force was reorganized, and significant changes were made in the ranks of the Army, whose presence was now expanded to every single district (see Joshi and Rose [1966]; Chauhan 1970; Baral 2012[1974]a).

Various decrees were issued and laws were enacted to thwart every possible threat that might emanate from the outlawed parties and their cadres.[3] The "tour commissions" (*dauḍāhā ṭolī*s)—reminiscent of the Rana era—were reinvented again (the practice had stopped after the elected government came to power). They ran "kangaroo courts" in the name of providing speedy or "on-the-spot" justice. The decree issued under the Public Security Act

> made it incumbent upon government servants, civil and military pensioners, heads of government-aided educational institutions, *zamindar*s and *talukdar*s*,* small landowners, *patwari*s*,* and even parents and guardians, on pain of loss of job, pension, land, and privileges as the case might be, or in fear of punishment, to steer clear of politics and to inform the police if anybody, even a member of their own families or ward, engaged in anti-government activities. (Baral 2012[1974]a: 199, italics in original)

It was thus not sufficient for one to not participate in oppositional activities, it was also necessary to keep a watch and report any suspicious activities to the authorities, i.e., to act as a spy. Failure, non-compliance of the "king's order" or the decree was a punishable offence. So much so that even government aided schools and parents were to face the repercussion—punishable offence—should they fail to control and/or report their students/children from participating in oppositional activities.

The totalitarian nature of the regime is also exemplified by the stern measures it took to control and eliminate the nascent print media sector. The regime sought to decrease the number of media to a bare minimum and keep them under strict government control (Baral 2012[1974]a; Devkota 2059 v.s.). The newspapers were required to keep themselves off politics and not criticize the government's actions. A number of papers and editors/publishers who allegedly "violated" such directives were variously punished. Most of the newspapers, however, capitulated and published eulogies of official policies and especially of the king in every conceivable occasion. Some members of the press justified the suspension of fundamental rights

[3] Among such acts were Special Circumstances (Control) Act, Public Security Act (revamped), Destructive Activities Prevention Act (DAPA), etc. (see HMG 2018 v.s.a).

claiming such rights as "luxury" to the Nepalis (Baral 2012[1974]a; Devkota 2059 v.s.).[4]

The 1960 coup became "largely successful" for there were no strong and organized oppositional activities immediately after the disbanding of the multiparty democracy. There were sporadic agitations here and there from the outlawed party workers, which however never posed a serious threat to the regime. One such tepid opposition also came from the school managing committees of public schools in some districts, chiefly, Dolakha, Ramechhap, Sarlahi, Sindhuli, Mahottari, etc. The managing committees of these districts decided not to collect the government grants. But since these grants were one of the major sources of school income, teachers of these schools were not paid their salaries (Sharma 2062 v.s.). The teachers, who were also mostly aligned to the banned political parties, went on a strike from February 12, 1961, i.e., two months after the coup for not being paid their remunerations. After a few weeks, when the problem became worse, the government formed a one man *dauḍāhā ṭolī* and "resolved" the issue (Sharma 2062 v.s.). In so doing the government used coercive as well as legal measures (see Baral 2012[1974]a; HMG 2018 v.s.a) and suppressed the agitation, which could neither rally strong support from the general public nor from the now banned party workers.[5]

At the outset it may seem that the state's might prevailed over the collective action of the "local actors" but at the same time the weakness of the state was exposed for it could not just do away with schools unlike other social formations. For, any negative publicity regarding education would have diminished the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of both the public, and the international community, without whose tacit support the government could hardly sustain. This predicament was in a sense also an indication of what lied ahead for both the state and the opposition groups in the coming years.

[4] The remarks made by the press in reference to the special acts amply illustrates the situation: "[I]f a political party government [sic] had issued the ordinance, we would have fully opposed it, but it has been issued by the government led by King Mahendra, the supreme head of the nation, and therefore we welcome it" (quoted in Baral 2012[1974]a: 200). See Onta 2004 for an account of how the state run radio was employed in disseminating Panchayati state propaganda. Devkota 2059 v.s. also provides a glimpse of the state interventions in the media sector.

[5] See "Local Consequences" section below for more details regarding the implication of the political change.

Legal Efforts to Take Control of the Education Sector (1961–1971)

It is against this political backdrop that I now focus my attention on the state-led activities in the education sector. On January 5, 1961, as the chairman of the newly formed council of ministers, Mahendra broadcast a "Message to the Nation" setting forth the policy and program of his government. Among the sectors that the government sought to reform, education appeared first on the list. The Message read: "To the extent that resources permit, primary, secondary and higher education will be expanded.…The government will eventually provide for a national and scientific education system that will suit our national genius and requirements, and will generate a new spirit of awakening in the country" (HMG n.d.: 20–21).[6]

[6] If we look at the financial provisions made to the sector education, however, does not figure on the top of the priority list. The new budget of the king-led government slashed the budgetary allocation to the education sector to mere seven percent of the total national expenditure—around four percent less than what the Nepali Congress government had allocated in the previous year. In the 1970s, the country was spending around 7–9 percent (see Table 1) in the education sector while neighboring countries were spending a significantly bigger chunk of their national expenditure on education. In 1968 the percentage of the total national expenditure for the education sector was 6.5 in Nepal (Agrawal 1978: 83), whereas in India it was 21 percent and in Sri Lanka 16.1 percent; Iran was spending 19 percent and The Philippines 28 percent (Ragsdale 1989: 16). Though the education sector did not receive adequate attention financially, the sector soon drew greater attention from the state for political reasons, as I elucidate.

Table 1 : National Expenditure in the Education Sector

Year	Total Government Expenditure (in Million Rs)	Expenditure on Education (in Million Rs)	Percentage of Total Government Expenditure
1960/61	134.8	14.3	10.61
1970/71	973	71.5	7.35
1972/73	1137.4	79.2	6.96
1973/74	1267.5	96.7	7.86
1974/75	1547.5	124.4	8.03
1975/76	1740.9	158.8	9.12
1981/82	9187.2	821.4	8.94

Source: Adapted from Agrawal 1978 and RJMKS 2043 v.s.

Subsequently, a high level All-round National Education Committee was formed on May 7, 1961. The formation of such a Committee was in a sense surprising given the fact that it was just around half a decade ago that the country had produced a comprehensive report on education (i.e., Pandey, K.C. and Wood 1956).[7] The Committee, formed under the chairmanship of the Minister for Education Bishwo Bandhu Thapa, a Nepali Congress defector, was "to appraise what can be done to develop the education sector." It was asked to submit the report in less than five weeks (HMG 2018 v.s.b). The committee held "62 hours of rigorous discussion" and submitted its report within seven weeks (HMG 2018 v.s.b).[8]

The report recommended for a uniform education with a single language of instruction, i.e., Nepali, and even provided with syllabi for different grades for the government to adopt. It also recommended a special treatment to Sanskrit, and strongly recommended the removal of English from the curriculum in the primary level, i.e., up to the fifth grade (HMG 2018 v.s.b). The report departed from the previous report (i.e., Pandey, K.C. and Wood 1956) for it was designed to centralize the sector, even though the rhetoric remained decentralization of education. The report recommended that the government should have control over all the educational institutions across the country. It also provided with a proposed draft of the Education Act, and of Education Code.

To open a new educational institution, the proposed draft of the Education Act made it mandatory to obtain *pūrva-svīkṛti* (pre-permission) from the government owned department of education (Makalu Books 2062 v.s.: 181). The Section three of the proposed act read: "It will be illegal to open any type of school without obtaining pre-permission from the department of education." And Section six said: "It is prohibited and is illegal to act against this law; the punishment shall be as set by His Majesty's Government"

[7] The National Education Planning Commission, formed in March 1954, worked hard for more than a year and employed the country's who's who of the time (see Rappleye 2019). The report produced by it in 1955 was published in 1956 (Pandey, K.C. and Wood 1956) and is available at www.martinchautari.org.np/files/SchoolEducationDocuments/ReportOfTheNepalNationalEducationPlanningCommission_1956_Eng.pdf; accessed December 12, 2019.

[8] The complete report is also available online at www.martinchautari.org.np/files/SchoolEducationDocuments/SarwanginRastriyaShikshaSamitikoReport_2018_Nepali.pdf; accessed December 12, 2019.

(Makalu Books 2062 v.s.: 182). This Act was a rehash of the Rana era decree related to education (see Parajuli 2008 for details) which had remained largely defunct after the advent of democracy in 1951. The government accepted the report, and after nearly a year, promulgated the Education Act, 2019 v.s.

If the above outlined provisions were targeted towards newer schools, the following provision was introduced to take control of the institutions already in operation:

> The school managing committee will have 11–13 members including a chair, deputy chair, secretary, principal, etc. One member will be from among the teachers. A member of the municipality or village committee and a representative from the education office will be ex-officio members. District magistrate (*baḍāhākim*) will be the chairperson of the school managing committee.[9]

With this one stroke the government virtually took control of the school managing committees, and thereby schools (see the last section for details). The government continued to make changes in the administrative apparatuses in the following years. Soon the leadership of the managing committees shifted from the hands of the *baḍāhākim* to the zonal commissioner (*añcalādhīś*) to the chairperson of the District Panchayat, and the schools' management and administrative affairs too shifted gradually, thereby increasing the state's control over the schools.

Not only was there increased presence of state bureaucracy in the school managing committee, the chair was also given mostly a free ride in selecting the other members of the committee. Because of such changes, and also due to changes in the local body politics, the local "conservative elites" who were against the opening of schools in the first place and who were against educating Dalits or girl children then went on to become chairs and managers of the schools, in many cases, by virtue of their being leader of the local *Pañcāyat*s (see Parajuli 2009). However, since the government had engaged in public posturing for education, these "conservative elites" were not able to obstruct the expansion of education openly because if they did, the opposition groups would portray them as opponents of the government's policies.

[9] My translation. The act is also available online at www.educationlaw.gov.np/nepali/files/doc/History/Education%20Act_2019.doc; accessed 12 August 2019.

The regime's effort to take control of this realm, which was the only remaining meaningful public domain beyond it's direct purview, however, was met with continued resistance from below. Since the schools were still locally financed—there was yearly grants too, from the state side—it was not that easy for the regime to push all the actors out. Moreover, a significant portion of the erstwhile political activists had joined the teaching sector partly to eke out a living and partly to seek a refuge. The activists wearing the hats of managing committee members or teachers were thus performing roles, and were employing strategies similar to those that they or their predecessors had used in the Rana era—i.e., educating children, but at the same time also resisting the state (see Parajuli 2008, 2009).

Apart from the managing committee members and teachers, student groups and their unions were also engaged in oppositional activities because of the banned political parties' covert involvement in the student groups/bodies. The mid 1960s was marred with protest programs of student unions on every conceivable occasion.[10] The regime too was aware of such "camouflaged operations" of the oppositional groups, and had tried to counter them by employing various measures, legal and otherwise.

The biggest blow to the regime, however, came from the defeat of the "official" candidates in the elections to the member of the national assembly, Rashtriya Panchayat, in the category called "graduate constituency."[11] If there was any meaningful election happening in the Panchayat system, it was only in this category. The college graduates, in the beginning, were privileged for they were allowed to elect four representatives from among themselves for the national assembly. But it so happened that those critical towards the system were elected, and it conveyed a clear message that the educated lot was against the regime (see Baral 2012[1972], 2012[1977]; Shaha 1978). The other major concern for the regime was the increasing victory of the erstwhile party workers in the local/general elections (see Baral 2012[1973]).

In order to counter these growing problems, the regime concentrated itself in both political and educational fronts. On the political front, it amended

[10] All the major political parties including the regime had their student fronts in educational institutions, especially colleges. The government backed front was the weakest in terms of popular student support. See Baral 1975; also Upraity 2030 v.s.; Hayes 1976; Ragsdale 1989.

[11] All the graduates, i.e., having a bachelors degree or above, were allowed to send four representatives to the Rashtriya Panchayat (see, Baral 1977).

the constitution in 1967 and introduced a political program called "Go-To-Village National Campaign" (GTVNC) aimed at cleansing all the opponents from elected governing bodies (see Baral 2012[1977]). The government also later (in 1975) removed the provision of the graduate constituency altogether by amending the constitution. On the educational front, it kept on shuffling and re-shuffling national education councils and other similar outfits aimed, it seems, for public consumption rather than doing something concrete. Educationist Krishna Raj Aryal, who later became education minister, wrote:

> In Asar 2024 [June/July 1967] National Education Advisory Council [NEAC] was formed with 13 members on it. The council became defunct with the lapse of time and was dissolved after twenty two months of existence and no accomplishment....A new NEAC was formed in 2026 Baisakh [April/May 1969] with 51 members on it; it had no chairperson. The council too became defunct and was dissolved after seven months of existence....[A]gain a new council was formed with eight members on it under the chairmanship of education minister....Within two and half years three different councils were formed, providing reasons for the general public not to have confidence in such committees. (1970: 70–71)

More important however were the changes the regime made in the administrative structure of the education that bears testimony to the power vested in the hands of state agents. Following is the relevant portion of the government's decision to take control of the schools:

> The Chief District Officer will constitute managing committees of the primary schools. He will nominate a chairman of the committee with the consent of District Panchayat from among persons, i.e., Charmain of the Gram or Nagar Panchayat, member of Gram or Nagar Panchayat, distinguished persons interested in education. The managing committee will elect secretary and treasurer from among the members of the committee....The CDO can amalgamate and close down those primary schools which are not running in accordance with the regulations....The CDO can constitute district education service of non-governmental primary schools. He also can, according to the

> power entrusted to him, promote and dismiss primary school teachers by formulating necessary rules and regulations.[12] (Aryal 1970: 55–56)

In an effort to craft the citizenry, the royal government also introduced "Panchayat" as a part of the curriculum of the lower secondary level in 2024 v.s. (1967/1968).[13] Along with the GTVNC, the crafting process gained further momentum in the later years.[14] All this however was just a "trailer," metaphorically, and the carefully crafted "cinema" was soon to be released in the form of the National Education System Plan (NESP).

Revamping Education Sector: Official Transcripts of the NESP

In the two decades after the overthrowing of the autocratic Rana regime, the literacy rate of the country had increased from less than 2 percent in 1951 to 8.9 percent in 1961, and to nearly 15 percent in 1971 (RJMKSS 2043 v.s.; Skerry, Moran and Calavan 1991). While the literacy rate seemed to be slightly slackening in the 1960s, the expansion of education across the country in the two decades—in terms of schools, students and teachers—may seem impressive (see Table 2). But on the darker side, a whopping 85 percent of the country's population was not able even to read and write in 1971. And, of the 15 percent literates, only a tiny minority had obtained higher education.

In 1971, the royal government unveiled NESP (*nayā̃ śikṣā*), after years of "secret planning,"[15] aimed at complete overhauling of the whole education system. It was prepared under the command of King Mahendra, whereas the then Crown Prince Birendra took active part in designing and finalizing, and also in implementing it, when he became the king after his father's death in 1972 (Mitchell 1976; Hayes 1981). The title page of the report read: "By Command of His Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram

[12] There are many accounts of former teachers who faced harassment during the Panchayat era (see, e.g., Sangroula 2060 v.s.; Yonjan-Tamang 2011).

[13] For an example of the state intervention in crafting the citizens via textbooks and curricula see Onta 1996.

[14] See GTVNC 1975, Suchana Bibhag 2025 v.s. for the "official" version of the campaign. For a critique of the program see Baral 2012[1977] and Shaha 1978.

[15] Of the more than half a dozen reports/plans on education that the various governments have commissioned and produced, only this one bears no name of the individuals involved in writing it.

Shah Dev in consonance with the requirements of the partyless democratic Panchayat polity and planned national re-construction" (HMG 2028 v.s.). This plan, claimed by the government as an effort to expand the outreach and also touted as the "effort to modernize rural Nepal," was introduced, I argue, to control the expansion of education. It was aimed at weeding out the erstwhile actors, who were now concentrated in this domain, as well as at stopping the new generation of oppositional activists from emerging, and thereby taking complete control of public life. Let me first provide a brief description of the official rhetoric of the plan.

Table 2 : Expansion of Education in Nepal (1951–1980)

Year	**1951**	**1961**	**1971**
Literacy Rate	2	8.9	15
No. of Educational Institutions			
Primary	321	4001	7256
Secondary	11	156	1065
Higher	2	33	49
No. of Students			
Primary	8505	182533	449141
Secondary	1680	21115	102704
Higher	250	5143	17200
No. of Teachers			
Primary	NA	7331	18250
Secondary	NA	1772	5407
Higher	37	417	1070

Source: Adapted from HMG 2028 v.s. and RJMKSS 2043 v.s.

Referring to the educational innovations of the past two decades, the plan began, "HMGN has since a long time realized that rapid, un-purposive and lopsided growth of education was leading to alienation of education from the country's socio-economic realities" (HMG 2028 v.s.: i). Mohammad Mohsin, member secretary of the high level national committee formed by the king to implement the plan, and apparently a member of the secret coterie that designed it, stated further, "The education system prevailing in

the country till recently was anomalous to the requirements envisaged by the country's system for national construction" (Mohsin 1974: 3). That system was, he added, a "slavish imitation of the system introduced in the past by imperialist powers in their colonies to strengthen their colonial empire" (1974: 3). The inherited system of education, according to Mohsin, gave rise to "problems for the development of the polity and the nation" (Mohsin 1974: 4) as it generated huge expectations in the educated youth. Besides, he contended, a wide gap was found between the educational output and the technical manpower requirement for nation-building.

To tackle the "irrelevant and disorganized varieties of education" the government called for "unifying education into one productive system that serve[d] the country's needs and aspirations." The plan claimed to remedy the problem: "The concept of education as an end to white collar jobs is being replaced by a new concept that regards education as an investment in human resources for the development of the country" (HMG 2028 v.s.: i). The national goals of education were set: "[T]o prepare citizens as loyal not only to the nation but also to the monarchy" and to create "a just, dynamic and exploitation-free-society in conformity with the party-less democratic Panchayat system" (Mohsin 1974: 5). And some of the objectives were spelled out thus:

> (i) to establish a composite national education system, integrating all the current educational process in the country, (ii) to make education objective, applied and relevant to the country's needs, (iii) to diversify knowledge and to spell out the rational and objectives of education at different levels, and (iv) to democratize educational opportunities through balanced decentralization of educational facilities. (Mohsin 1974: 5)

To make education "relevant to national need and functional," the regime intervened in every aspect of education: from syllabi, curricula, and textbooks to teachers, the examination system and the students. This had far reaching implications. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all the repercussions of this plan. Nevertheless what I aim here is to put the plan in a political context, give an idea of its intervention areas and also discuss some of its local consequences, intended or otherwise.

Beyond Official Transcripts: NESP as a Means of Control

The official transcripts stated that the education system of the two decades since 1951 "did not reflect the national reality," and was "anomalous to national polity and development" (Mohsin 1974: 3). The term "manpower" was often invoked to justify the new plan, and the education system of the past is blamed for failing to provide with adequate "manpower" that the country required (Gurung 1972, 1973; Manandhar 1974).

If we deconstruct or look beyond the official documents, we can glean the context and rationale behind the new plan. Trailokya Nath Upraity, the then vice chancellor of Tribhuvan University, while lauding the kings' effort—i.e., the NESP—sought to explain and justify the new plan in the following words:

> In the education system that we adopted, national reality and wishes were not reflected….We started to worry when we saw that the produce from our *education industry* failed to become an asset in providing support in national development, and on the contrary started to become a *national burden*. The education activities have been *ruining youth characters* and were showing the *symptoms of social disturbances*. It was in this context that the new education plan was designed. (Upraity 2030 v.s.: 17; italics added)

Commending the farsightedness of the monarch, the American anthropologist Ragsdale wrote, "It [NESP] demonstrated the monarchy's will and determination to reform fundamentally the entire education system. The felt need for the plan was a response to the feeling of crisis that drew out of the students riots in the mid-sixties and to the problem of unemployed liberal arts graduates" (1989: 89).[16] Another researcher Hayes wrote,

> University graduates are being produced at a rate that many countries find difficult to absorb in the labor market….Frustrated in their efforts to obtain employment that they feel is consistent with their training, many students and graduates have turned to *radicalized* political behavior….The NESP that was developed in Nepal *recognized* these

[16] For an account of student politics for the period 1961–1975, see, Baral 1975.

> problems and attempted to deal with them….[I]t was an ambitious effort to deal with problems before they became severe.
>
> The plan mandates that *only 2 percent* of children entering primary school will receive higher secondary education, and these are to be trained in rudimentary vocational skills. *Only a very small number* will continue in higher education and most of these will enter practical studies in technology, science and public administration. (Hayes 1981: 676–677, italics added)

Evidently, the regime foresaw what lied ahead, in terms of political opposition, that too emanating from the education sector, should it not contain the number of the students in higher education. Thus under the NESP the government planned the growth and expansion of education in such a way that it would automatically check the spread at higher levels. The idea—denied however by the then King Birendra when he claimed, "Education Plan [i.e., NESP] is not to control, it definitely is to fulfil the country's needs"[17]—was to produce only a limited number of "manpower" that the system could co-opt by providing them with some sort of employment.

Gopi Nath Sharma, a civil servant who spent most of his service period in the education department and retired from the post of joint secretary, wrote later:

> The plan was prepared *very secretly* (*ati gopya, ati jarurī*) with the participation of a few limited individuals and institutions. The draft of the plan was then presented for discussion and adoption at the National Education Advisory Council [which had no role in its preparation]. The Council found the plan as *untimely* [inappropriate for the time being] and conveyed its opinion to the king, it was understood, through the Education Minister Basudev Dhungana. But the king sent it back for further consideration after which the senior member professor Yadu Nath Khanal resigned from the Council. (Sharma 2062 v.s.: 175, italics added)

Though Sharma does not provide details, and sort of diminishes the credibility of the information by inserting "it was understood" (*bujhinthyo*)

[17] Quoted by Upraity 2030 v.s., which appears as the title of his article.

in the sentence, the quotes above give an idea about the origin and the intentions of the plan. What becomes clear is that the plan was designed by a secret coterie close to the palace, and even the National Education Advisory Council was not consulted but was asked to endorse it when it was ready.[18] Sthaneshwor Sharma, another bureaucrat of the education ministry said,

> I was asked to draft a regulation related to school managing committees. Since there was unnecessary control, my draft proposed more power back to the community. My boss called me and said that it was not what the people up in the ladder (*māthi*) wanted. He said he would ask somebody else to make it. Later only did I know what they wanted; they wanted more control.[19]

The previous legal changes had already brought the schools, and the managing committees under state agents to a large extent but that was not considered enough. With the NESP, the schools were nationalized; they became government property. And the plan also centralized the school managing committees into one district education committee, comprising the chairman of District Panchayat, chief development officer, district education officer, headmaster of a high school, and three private citizens appointed by the *aĉalādhīś,* the zonal commissioner. This new committee took over the control of local schools from the managing committees. In place of such committees a provision of "school management support committee" (*school vyabasthāpan sahayog samiti*) was created, which was stripped of any real power whatsoever, and was simply left to play advisory roles.

Now since the government had a complete say over the schools, it downgraded a large number of high schools to lower secondary schools, and lower secondary to primary schools (Vir 1988). And a number of schools were also merged. Primary school was shortened from five to three years. In many parts of the country there were only primary schools that previously taught up to the fifth grade, but now they could only teach up to the third

[18] While I have not come across Yadu Nath Khanal's—one of the most respected diplomats who served both the kings in different capacities—own writing on this incident, according to Sharma, Khanal was not only unhappy because the Council was kept out of the loop, but was also against what the plan envisaged.

[19] *Māthi* during Panchayat period often referred to the palace. Interview with Sharma, December 2006.

grade. This meant that very young students (aged 8–9 years) now either had to travel a long journey, mostly to some other villages, for further studies, or simply quit school. This decision alone restricted a large number of potential but less resourceful students from graduating to the next level. Similar was the case with the colleges. Ragsdale wrote, "[M]any liberal arts colleges that had been opened throughout Nepal in the sixties are either closed or made into campuses of one or another of the institutes" (Ragsdale 1989: 91; see also Aryal 1970; Bhatta 1982).

The public schools were converted into *sarkārī* (government) schools. The teachers working in those schools were also made government employees. With some screening, the government enlisted the teachers in state payroll, and also increased their pays and perks. This definitely was a welcome respite for many lowly paid teachers (Bhatta 1982). They now were accountable not to the local public whose children they were teaching, but to a distant authority who would hardly visit the school. The plan also removed the provision of student unions/committees in both schools and colleges, thereby clearing yet another obstacle in Panchayat's pursuit of complete control of public life (see No Name 2042 v.s.; Rana 2051 v.s.).

The process of Nepali-ization was insinuated by making Nepali as the language of instruction in the mid 1950s (see Pandey, K.C. and Wood 1956; Rappleye 2019). In the early 1960s greater emphasis was placed on monarchy, which further gained momentum in the mid 1960s with the introduction of Panchayat in the curriculum of social studies (see HMG 2028 v.s.). But it was with the NESP that the process of ideological indoctrination really took off in the name of "national integration," and "national construction." To quote Mohsin, the ideologue:

> Education is the major vehicle for producing responsible *men of faith*; and so, the main objective of the NEP [i.e., NESP] is to make education capable of meeting the requirements of national construction in accordance with the ideals adapted….Unless the syllabi, the curricula, and the textbooks reflect the national realities and requirements, education cannot be productive and development oriented. NEP proposes to make education relevant and functional…. Mostly, a *total change* in the syllabus of *social education* is sought for….While preparing curriculum for every level, *special attention*

> is given so that the stipulated objectives are achieved by every level according to *manpower* requirements. (Mohsin 1980: 3; italics added)

As education produced "men of faith" what else could be more appropriate than the textbooks? The new curriculum was then aimed to promote a "sense of the dignity to labor, to teach loyalty to king and country, and foster better understanding of Panchayat democracy" (HMG 2028 v.s.). The ideological dose to the students started as early as grade three. Anthropologist Ragsdale wrote, "The new primary Nepali language texts start out on a simple enough level for teaching children to read and write, but by grade three this simple approach is lost to an emphasis on citizenship and understanding the Panchayat system at a level beyond the capacity of most children" (1989: 119).[20] This was so because most students were expected not to move to the next level, as per the plan. A UNESCO report also mildly criticized the government's decision to shorten primary period from five to three years: "Many educationists hold that a minimum of four years at the first level of education is required….[A]t some time in the future a lengthening of the primary period from three years must come…" (McCabe and Padhye 1975: 45).

In order to stop a large number of students from obtaining higher education, the plan intervened in the examination system. Apart from the existing central examination for grade ten (or school leaving certificate, [SLC] exam), the plan introduced two other barricades: one at grade three and the other at grade seven so that only a limited number of students could graduate to the next level. As per the plan only 40 percent of the students could now enter lower secondary (grade 4–7) level. And from the lower secondary, only 50 percent could reach higher secondary (grade 8–10) level, which was 20 percent of the original cohort (Makalu Books 2062 v.s.: 254; HMG 2028 v.s.). Moreover, the government made plans to lower the percentage of college level students from the existing 27 percent of the higher secondary level students to 19 percent (HMG 2028 v.s.). Provision of work experience and "entrance examination" or admission tests were introduced to make sure that the "manpower" produced was in compliance

[20] See Onta 1996 for a discussion of Panchayat's intervention in the young minds via textbooks.

with the "national requirements," estimated and projected by the National Planning Commission, following the lead from the government.[21]

Vir summed up the control mechanism of the regime:

> [M]onarchs led to imposing restrictions on higher education for the explicit aim of discouraging expansion at higher level. However, the mechanism evolved was different than that of the Rana rulers. The state did not discourage the entry into colleges, but probably kept the results in accordance with its policy. One generally comes across to a remark by teachers and students that low percentage of results is governmental policy. Not more than one fourth of students were given pass marks. Thus roughly three-fourth of students were pushed out from the colleges each year to appear for the examination as ex students next year. (1988: 44)

Indeed, the plan made various changes so that only a tiny minority could receive higher education. Instead of 33 percent marks required to pass a subject, the government now increased it to 40. As the examinations were centralized at three different levels, and schools were under control, the government regulated and set the percentage of pupils that would move up to the next level no matter how well the students did in the exams (Vir 1988). The other check point introduced in the plan was admission test or entrance examinations, which the students however vehemently protested and the authorities had to slightly relax this provision (see Bhatta 1982). As such entrance exams were less effective in controlling the students' entry into next level, the government further tightened the exit examinations.[22]

The issue of wastage also becomes important here. The failure rate was in fact high in the country even before the takeover. As there was a lack of reading materials (textbooks or otherwise) and scarcity of teachers (not to think of trained ones), it is understandable why higher percentage of students

[21] Following the government lead, the National Planning Commission conducted researches to study the state of educated unemployment in the country, and to estimate the manpower requirements for the country in the future. During the period a number of monographs and articles appeared dealing with "manpower and education." See, e.g., NPC 1968; Gurung 1972, 1973; Manandhar 1974, 1983; Mohsin 1973, 1974, etc.

[22] The pass percentage of college level degrees was worse than that of the SLC—less than 10 percent on average (Sharma 1989).

used to be unsuccessful in these exams. Serious concerns had been raised about this problem of wastage since the early 1960s. The UNESCO report (Wood and Knall 1962), as well other educationists drew Nepal government's attention to rectify this problem because the whole investment made on a student was in vain when s/he failed (Aryal 1970). Interestingly, instead of correcting the problem, the government exacerbated it. After the NESP was introduced, the objective was to fail as many students as possible so that there would be no educated unemployment.

Krishna Raj Aryal seemed to be aware of the control objective of the NESP before it was made public. Writing in 1970, he warned that "if higher education is restricted the benefits of higher education will go only to the children of aristocracy, socio-economic landed or intellectual" (Aryal 1970: 109). He further criticized the idea:

> The prevalent thinking among both the educationists and administrators that the spread of higher education creates the problem of unemployment seems *misleading and unthoughtful*....There are many countries in the world where higher education is not restricted rather opportunities for the same are encouraged. Those countries do not suffer great problems of unemployment. Thus the problem of higher education is in the proper channelization to achieve desired effects, rather than trying to *check* it.[23] (Aryal 1970: 110, italics added)

The procedure to make students unsuccessful had far reaching serious implications. By branding even the deserving and qualified students as "unsuccessful," the regime was hurting their self-esteem, and their psyche (see Mathema and Bista 2005). What in essence the regime was telling the young minds was: "We gave you every opportunity to study, we paid the teachers' salary, subsidized the cost, and even then if you didn't succeed, it's you who is to blame. Problem lies in you, not on us." The parents and the students who did not have knowledge of such a mechanism would think that the government is putting every effort to educate its citizens, and hence they could not complain. However, it was the government who was tricking

[23] Cf. Hayes 1976, 1981; Vir 1988; and Ragsdale 1989 who mostly see the check as a wise decision on the part of the Panchayat government.

the parents, the pupils and the citizens by producing a whole generation of "unsuccessful" students.

The "comprehensive reform" plan of the NESP was thus largely to craft the citizens from early on, and to produce a limited number of "manpower" that could be easily consumed within the Panchayat system. The plan aimed to produce "literates" who would be able to read the state sponsored propaganda materials, but they would not be educated enough to think independently, and ask critical questions (cf. Freire 1970; Kumar 1991). Since the schools—with specifically designed curricula and textbooks—produced conformity and obedience, and also helped stage the modernist façade of the regime, they (mostly primary schools) continued to proliferate to a large extent.[24]

Local Consequences of the Panchayat Era Politics and Policies

In this section I will be looking at what I call local consequences—which may or may not be intended—of the Panchayat era education policies. I will be drawing examples mostly from the Pokhara region (Parajuli 2009). In Pokhara, the National High School (initially called Public Middle School) was the epitome of local actors' first collective enterprise (see Parajuli 2008, 2009). After the political change of 1960, the founders of the school lost control over it. They had earlier relentlessly fought against the district magistrate's (*baḍāhākim*) bid to take control of the school, but they could now do nothing but accept the magistrate's leadership because of the new legal provision. Apart from the chairmanship, there were not many other immediate changes observable in the composition of the committee. But the school lost two most active members in Prem Chaitanya Brahmachari (chairperson of the school managing committee) and Rishi Keshav Parajuli (advisor), when both fled to India subsequent to the coup d'etat. Since Parajuli was also involved in other educational institutions such as Prithvi Narayan College, Navin Primary School, Ratna Rajya Laxmi (RRL) Girls' School, etc. in various capacities, his absence perhaps did impact in their functioning. Similarly, other educational institutions too saw their one or more active workers disengaged. It is however difficult, several decades

[24] Despite being an integral part of the education system, the libraries, on the other hand, had different functions. They contributed in producing independent minds and dissent which the autocratic regime would not tolerate. Hence, the libraries died prematurely (Parajuli 2019).

later, to assess the impact on the functioning of the institutions when they lost their most active and resourceful members.

In some schools, there were more troubles than just the vanishing of some of the founders/promoters. Tal Barahi School was one such example. A few years after the political change, most of the managing committee members, and the school staff—from the peon to headmaster—were rounded up by the authorities. Others were later freed but the erstwhile political workers like Lila Bhakta Acharya, Min Bahadur Gurung, Tarka Bahadur Kunwar, Krishna Bahadur Kunwar, Bhakta Bahadur Karki, and the head teacher Tek Nath Baral were jailed on the charges of stealing telephone wires that were connected to the royal palace at Baidam (Lakeside). Baral, the head teacher, explained the incident that led to their arrest:

> We didn't have a school building at that time and we wanted to build one. Since I was busy we decided to hold the managing committee meeting at night, after dinner, which was not a problem as we all were from the same locality. As we didn't have much resources we decided to cut some old public trees from our area and sell them. But the next day we all were arrested, even teachers and peon who were not present at the meeting were not spared. Though all the [managing committee] members, except me, were previously active workers of the Nepali Congress, the meeting was not for political purpose. I was not a Congress supporter. In fact, I was the district president of the Youth Organization.[25]

The telephone wire may or may not have been stolen in the first place. Perhaps holding a meeting at night and the participants being banned Nepali Congress (NC) activists (Lila Bhakta Acharya was district president of the NC, Min Bahadur Gurung was an elected member of the first Parliament, Tarka Bahadur Kunwar and Krishna Bahadur Kunwar were active district level workers of NC) worked against them. The state agents needed just an excuse to intimidate and arrest the workers. In so doing they cared neither

[25] Youth Organization was one of the six class organizations set up by the Panchayat government (see Baral 2012[2074]b). Hence Tek Nath Baral at that time was effectively a Pancha. Interview with Tek Nath Baral, September 2006.

for the future of the school nor that of the students, and the school remained closed for a while after this incident.[26]

Bhadrakali, another public school of Pokhara, established immediately after the downfall of the Rana regime, later became sort of a playground where both the state agents and the local promoters incessantly fought in a bid to take control of the school. After some initial hiccups, the school had already been upgraded to a secondary school and its performance in the SLC examination had been remarkable. However, there soon emerged a problem, as the principal of the school Tika Ram Koirala was rounded up on the charges of misappropriating funds, and of being an *a-ta* or "anti-national element."[27] Koirala said,

> I was charged of misappropriating funds and of being a *arāṣṭriya tatwa*. Since all the financial transaction records were maintained and no single penny was misused, there was not much they could do.…The other charge was also baseless. It so happened that the framed picture of Mahendra [i.e., king], which was hung above my chair, was slightly tilted towards the left.[28] This, they argued, was deliberately done to disrespect the monarch, and hence I became an *a-ta*. I was called at the *aĉalādhīś*'s office.…He formed a two-member investigation committee headed by the [Prithvi Narayan] Campus Chief [George] John, which found no discrepancy, and gave me a clean chit.[29]

This incident maybe a personal vendetta of someone who did not like the principal or one who vied for that post. This could as well be an act of

[26] A few activists allegedly involved in the said incident who I interviewed rejected the charges of stealing wires and claimed that the state agents cooked up such charges to "break" them. Even if the activists were involved in the incidents or in sabotage," it shouldn't come as a surprise for those are "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985).

[27] *A-ta,* short form of *arāṣṭriya tatwa* or "anti-national element" was a generic term used by the Panchayat state to refer to oppositional NC activists.

[28] It was mandatory to hang the monarch's picture above the chair of the principal as a mark of respect and as a symbol of subservience.

[29] Interview with Tika Ram Koirala, retired university teacher, November 2006. See also Koirala 2057 v.s.

showing disapproval or "resistance" on the part of the teachers or students or someone who was opposed to the regime (see Scott 1985). Whatever the fact maybe, the point to note here is that anyone could allege his/her opponent as an "anti-national element" and thereby put him/her in trouble. Even the slightest tilt of the picture frame of the king could be used as an excuse to suppress the individuals who the state/agents disliked.[30]

This Bhadrakali School, known also as the "*Kāṅgresī*" school,[31] came under repeated attacks from the so-called "*maṇḍale*s."[32] On another occasion the school was turned into a virtual battleground when the group backed by the state machinery captured the school and its documents. The school-founding group, in protest, ran classes at the nearby public grazing land whereas the state-backed group ran the school at its own premises. Despite having control over the school building and all, the establishment group was left with only a small number of students whereas the founding group, being more locally embedded, enjoyed the support of locals and hence had a vast majority of students.

Incidentally, the chairman of the school managing committee Bhoj Raj Subedi, though the Deputy Chairman of Kaski District Panchayat, was on the side of the founding group. Subedi was previously a NC activist who had later joined Panchayat, participated in the election, and held an office. And it was because of his being the Deputy Chairman of the District Panchayat (the regime's bid to take control of school, as I explained above) that he was heading the school managing committee. But the other side had gotten strong support from the state machinery. Because of this there were parallel classes running for quite some time, and there were attempts to resolve the issue. Either the "two schools" were to be merged or one of them was to be de-recognized.

[30] There were incidents when journalists/editors/publishers were jailed simply when names of the royal family members were misspelled in the newspapers or poor quality pictures of them were published. One such example is Bhupanidhi Pant, editor of the weekly *Sapta Gaṇḍakī,* who was imprisoned for misspelling the then queen's name (Parajuli 2009).

[31] School founded by or under the influence of the Nepali Congress members.

[32] The term was initially used to refer to members of the Rastravadi Vidyarthi Mandal or Nationalist Students Group, a student front concocted and financed by the Panchayat regime. *Maṇḍale* later became a pejorative term used generally to refer to henchmen of the regime.

One night when the activists of the anti establishment camp were returning home from a lengthy discussion with the district education authority at the latter's office, they were physically assaulted and some of them had to be hospitalized. As it was dark the attackers could not be identified. The incident created uproar in the city and demonstrations were organized in protest. The opposition groups also used this as a pretext to criticize the regime. Though the activists had to endure injuries, they ultimately were able to take control of the school; they were triumphant even though the school documents were set ablaze (C. Sigdel 2057 v.s.; Koirala 2057 v.s.; T. Sigdel 2057 v.s.).[33]

But soon thereafter, when the NESP was implemented, the school had to pay the price. With the introduction of the NESP, a number of schools were forcibly merged, and others were downgraded.[34] Almost all the "morning" and "night" schools, targeted at job holders and somewhat grown ups (adults), were closed down. In Pokhara alone four or five such schools were closed. The sole "Dalit school" of Pokhara was also shut down. Bhadrakali School was among the high schools downgraded to lower secondary by the state authorities in Pokhara. Likewise, Bindhyabasini and RRL Girls' School were also downgraded to lower secondary level. They could now only teach up to the seventh grade and not up to the tenth grade as was previously the case. This was a serious blow to the schools' economic health and to the "prestige" of the actors involved as well as to the community that they were serving. This decision of the government also amply illustrates the regime's intention of limiting the number of students from attaining higher education, as I explicated above.

With the schools now nationalized, and the new managing committee (district level) put under the control of the state bureaucracy, the locals were stripped of most of the powers that they previously enjoyed regarding the functioning of the schools. The local school management support committee had no authority whatsoever. Despite being rendered powerless, and despite

[33] Interviews with Chitrangad Sigdel, Ramesh Kant Sigdel, Tika Ram Koirala and Kishor Baral, November 2016.

[34] The newly promulgated Education Act 2028 v.s. (Section 15) gave the government unrestricted power to shift a school from one place to other, merge two schools, close the school or change the name of the school. The act is available at www.martinchautari.org.np/files/SchoolEducationDocuments/ShikshaAin_2028.pdf; accessed July 30, 2019.

being downgraded, the promoters of the schools did not give up easily. These actors used their influences or networks, and made the authorities review, and, in some cases, retract the decision. After some efforts the RRL Girls' School could ultimately regain the higher secondary status and so did Bindhyabasini School after some time. According to the then head teacher Lal Kaji Bajimaya of the RRL Girls' School—which was named after the queen mother Ratna—they even had to "cash" the name of the queen mother for the purpose.[35] However, Bhadrakali School, despite similar efforts, was unsuccessful in its bid to regain its higher secondary status.

Furthermore, the nationalization of schools, and the centralization of examination system had deleterious impact on the whole education system. One important impact was on the composition of the graduates produced. The sector had been the preserve of upper caste and upper class, which however was slowly changing after 1950. The NESP reinforced the caste/class dominance again. Let me now explain how.

Since most schools, prior to NESP were locally established and community financed (the government also provided support with grants-in-aid), one major challenge for the managing committees was to collect enough resources so that schools could run smoothly. Tuition fees collected from the students was the chief source of income. More students meant more resources. Hence, it was in the interest of both the committee and the teachers to attract as many students as possible—which they did by visiting every single house in their catchment area. The tuition fee alone, however, was never enough. Therefore, they often relied on the support of the local community itself and collected both cash and kind donations from the local residents. In general, richer members gave more and the poorer ones gave less but everyone in the community contributed their fair share. It was sort of an informal tax heaped on the community which perhaps was a burden to its relatively poorer members. But since they paid their share, they also demanded that their children be taught at the school. When the schools got nationalized, this bond and the interconnectedness between the communities and schools became tenuous. There were no incentive for teachers or managing committee members to visit parents to ask them to send their children to school. Tika Ram Koirala, the then principal of Bhadrakali School shared his experience:

[35] Interview with Lal Kaji Bajimaya, September 2006.

> Before the NESP, when I was teaching at the school, we had students from across the community; we had students from what today we call the Dalits and *Janajāti*s, namely, Damai, Kami, Sarki, Muslim, Gurung, etc. We used to go to every household in the community to collect donations (*candā*). Some would give just half a kilogram (*ek māno*) of millet….After contributing they would often demand that their children should also have the chance to study. And it was also in our interest that many students came to study. But when such practice was stopped after the NESP, people like us stopped visiting the households and there was nobody to encourage those families to send their children to school….This is what I myself saw, experienced…. Afterwards the children from such communities stopped going to school….The number of students from Dalit and *Janajāti* families decreased after 2028 *sāl* [i.e., the year NESP was implemented]. Even today when I meet some Muslims, they say "We sent our children to school when you taught, but later *testai bho* (so happened….[we did not])." The Sarkis, Damais I meet say the same, "When you were teaching, we had to send our children, but later we didn't have to." There was no pressure on them; their participation dwindled.[36]

Implementing the NESP in districts such as Kaski was a difficult challenge since the ratios of enrolled students at various levels were already well above those the government had prescribed.[37] To check the student flow from early on, two new centralized examinations were introduced in the third and seventh grade. It was claimed that these exams were "barriers to keep less academically qualified students from passing out" to the next level. Ragsdale (1989) provides an insightful account of how the new examination system made the teachers of Laxmi Primary School of a Gurung village declare six students unsuccessful out of fourteen in the third grade:

> When examination results day was held at Laxmi PS…the annual score announcement went without a hitch. In grades one and two, low caste artisan children received top honours, standing up for their headmaster's praise. A Gurung boy did best in the Shishu (pre-

[36] Interview with Tika Ram Koirala, November 2006.

[37] As per the new plan, the schools had to decrease the number of students they had hitherto been serving. See McCabe and Padhye (1975) for further discussion.

> primary) class. Of fourteen children in the third grade, six failed. Among them were a Gurung boy and girl, but the rest except for one, were poor Brahmans from a settlement below Lamagaun, astride the Panchayat borders. Failing along with them was the third grade's only low caste artisan. Whatever villagers knew of the method by which these results were obtained they kept to themselves. (Ragsdale 1989: 141)

The last sentence of the above quote provides some clue about the adjustments made in the final result—the examination marks were altered "to fit local expectations." By being able to alter the results for their own benefit, the local community insured their continued effectiveness in the functioning of school vis-à-vis the state. But the more important issue here is that the students that were axed at the expense of few others were the ones who were less resourceful—in this case Brahman boys from afar and the artisan boy. If we think of it as a general scenario, then we get a picture in which the new multi level control system reinforced the existing social hierarchy. The NESP thus set up a mechanism that produced a new educated class which came from the resourceful upper class/caste of Nepali society.

In a nutshell, even though the state's might prevailed in many instances, e.g., nationalization of schools, introduction of barriers, curricula, textbooks, etc., policies from above were continuously challenged and modified. Even with the carefully crafted new education plan, NESP, the regime's expectations remained unfulfilled.

Conclusion

The Panchayat era (1960–1990) largely resembled the late Rana era. At a cursory glance, there may seem stark differences between the two periods but there were more similarities than differences. What was done openly in the Rana regime was done covertly in the Shah regime. During the Shah period, when all other avenues for participation in public life without being part of the system were closed off, the activists who hitherto had been involved in other social formations converged on the education sector as managing committee members and as teachers. They also used it as a platform to challenge the hegemony of the state which also was the case in the late Rana era (see Parajuli 2008).

Initially, the royal regime did not perceive mass education as a problem. On the contrary, it banked on it to legitimize the coup d'etat. It gradually tried to take over the schools by controlling school management committees. However, it soon became obvious to the regime that it could not completely contain the sector. The repeated defeat of the official candidates in the election of the graduate constituency was a clear indication of where the "real" threat to the system might emanate from. Even though the growth of the bureaucracy and the security sector was exponential and they initially could easily accommodate the new graduates entering the labor market, it soon became apparent that the government would not be able to handle them all in the future (Baral 1977). Besides, the education sector which was one of the biggest employers, lied beyond the direct control of the state. And, the teachers as well as students were proving to be the Achilles heel of the system. However, the regime could not just dispense with the education sector unlike other sectors.

Subsequently, the regime introduced a carefully designed NESP to control the entire education system: locally established and managed schools were nationalized, examination system was centralized, and new curricula, text books were introduced in an effort to craft the young minds. The regime became largely successful in controlling the education sector, in partially curbing the growth, but again it could not weed the actors out completely. Policies from above were continuously challenged and the state was forced to make adjustments, leading ultimately to the demise of the NESP itself in the late 1970s (Bhatta 2005). However, in the meantime, irreparable damage had already done. The defective "manpower producing machines" not only kept on reproducing the social inequality but also exacerbated it by creating such situations where the students from relatively poor and disadvantaged communities could either not have access to education or even if they did, they could not graduate to the next level. It is therefore no surprise that the social composition of Nepali public life even today reflects this dynamics; it is the preserve of those who are resourceful—caste and class wise.

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