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Nepotism and Governance: Analyzing the Trend of Continuity of Administrative Malpractices in Nepal from the Shah to the Republican Era

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Abstract

This paper investigates the (mis)management of public administration in Nepal from the Shah regime through the republican era, highlighting the persistent influence of nepotism, favouritism, and the chakari system. It reviews the historical context of administrative practices and the impact of political leaders and their families on bureaucratic appointments. Despite the establishment of numerous administrative reform commissions, the recommendations aimed at enhancing efficiency and accountability have largely gone unimplemented. This study underscores the need for a merit-based system to foster effective governance and development in Nepal.

Keywords

Nepotism, Chakari, Panjani, Malpractices, Public Administration, Nepal.

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1. Introduction

The evolution of public administration in Nepal has been marked by a series of political regimes, each leaving its imprint on bureaucratic practices. Beginning with the Shah regime, the central government was characterized by a hierarchical structure that included various levels of officials, such as Chautaria and Mulkaji. The Rana regime further entrenched nepotism within the bureaucracy, with the influence of political families dominating administrative appointments. Even after the establishment of democracy, efforts to reform public administration, such as the Buch Commission, have struggled against entrenched practices. This paper aims to explore the historical trajectory of public administration in Nepal, focusing on the systemic challenges that have hindered the implementation of reforms and the perpetuation of a bureaucratic culture rooted in favouritism.

2. Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methodology, utilizing content analysis of historical documents, reports from various administrative reform commissions, and academic literature. The analysis encompasses a review of the recommendations made by these commissions from 1952 to 2014, assessing their implementation status and the ongoing challenges within the Nepalese public administration system. Interviews with key stakeholders and experts in the field provide additional insights into the persistent issues of nepotism and favouritism in bureaucratic appointments.

3. (Mis)management of Public Administration in Nepal

During the Shah regime, apart from the King, the central government consisted of Chautaria, Mulkaji, Kaji, Rajguru, Purohit, Sardar, Kharidar, Kapardar, Khajanji, Taksari, Dharmadhikari, Dithha, Bichari and so on. Third level employees included addai, pradhan, baithake, nausinda, bhansari, sipahi and tahaluwa

(Regmi, 2074 : 207). There was influence of the Rana family and their relatives during the Rana regime. The situation did not improve even after the establishment of democracy. Buch Commission was established after the establishment of democracy for independence of administration. Some improvements were made by the initiative of that commission. However, not well managed and institutionalized attempts have been made for revolutionary change in administrative system (Nepal, 2075).

During the Panchayat regime too, rulers treated the administration as the institution to fulfill their will and desires. The first elected government established the Administrative Reform Commission in 1990. The commission was provided with the responsibility of identifying the weaknesses of the public administration and providing suggestions for adopting efficient and low-cost administration. The commission submitted a report on April 5, 1992, to the Prime Minister. According to the report, there is lack of motivation, unrolled and extravagant expenses, lack of accountability in the administration of Nepal. However, the government did not implement the recommendations of the report. Rather, the politicizing of the administration went on increasing (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065). The situation is similar during the republican regime as well. The administrative reform commissions are formed during the tenure of every government in Nepal (Table-1) but the implementation of the recommendations is not done.

Table-1 : The Improvement of Administration Commissions, their recommendations and Implementation Status

Year	Report	Major Recommendations	Implementation Status
1952	Administrative Reform Committee (Report of Buch Commission)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting the number of ministries to 11. • Appointing new employees only by consultation with the Public Service Commission. • The facilities of the employees should be revisited by the Public Service Commission. • The solution for the investigation of corruption should be found • The system of cabinet secretary should be removed, and the arrangement of chief secretary should be made. • Decentralization should be adopted. • The law should be made for public administration and financial administration. 	Among the recommendations of the commission, except for the chief secretary and a few other recommendation, no others have been implemented.

1956	Report of the District Administration Reorganization of Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing necessary administrative laws. • Establishment of Administrative Training Center. • Establishment of Planning Development Ministry. • Establishment of National Planning Commission. • Starting the five-year periodic plan. • Reforming the financial administration. • Dividing development and general expenditure. • Giving emphasis to rural development. • Reorganizing public employees and reducing the number of employees. • Reorganizing the ministries. • Reorganization of district administration. • Establishment of district, village, and blocks for administrative decentralization. 	Only a few recommendations in the report were implemented. However, recommendations such as reorganization of ministry and district administration were not implemented.
1968	Report on administration reform commission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of ministries should be limited to 12 from 18 • Separating the District Panchayat and District Administration. • The Chief District Officer should be freed from District Panchayat. • There should be a chance for the employees to hear before giving departmental punishment. • Performing audit by the Auditor General. 	The recommendations such as decreasing the number of ministries were not included.
1976	Report on administration reform commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization of decision-making process. • Giving more priority to the local levels. • Decreasing the number of the ministries. • Establishing a permanent administration reform committee. • Unification of government corporations. • No political appointments were made except for the post of Anchaladesh. • Increasing the salary of the government employees based on the increase in market prices. 	Most of the recommendations such as decreasing the number of ministries have not been implemented.
1992	Report of administration reform commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting the number of ministries from 21 to 18. • Enabling the non-government organizations in economic activities. • Limiting the tenure of the gazette is special class officers. • Preparing job description for the employees and implementation. • Making regular monitoring mechanism of administration reform. 	The majority of the recommendations of this report were not implemented.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cutting off 25 percent of government employees. • Limiting the relationship between the ministers and bureaucrats. • Reform in management of public corporations and limiting government interference. • Making laws for making corruption controlling institutions capable. 	
2009	Report on Administration Reorganization Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ending the impunity. • Ending the political interference on bureaucracy. • Ending the system of forming a lot of commissions. • Promoting E-Governance. 	Many recommendations with long-term importance were not implemented.
2014	The report of administration reform recommendation committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting the number of ministries to a maximum of 18 and to 12 when the federal system would be implemented. • Not developing unnecessary structures without study and justification. • Punishing the corrupt people and institutions to develop immaculate administration. • Nepal Civil Service Employees Union formed with the political faith should be dissolved. • Adopting the concept of E-Governance. • Discouraging the trend of expenditure towards the end of fiscal year. • Adopting a one-door public distribution mechanism. 	The major recommendations with long-term importance have not been implemented.

Source : content analysis, 2024

Altogether 7 commissions were formed from 1952 to 2014 with the motive of reforming the administrative system in Nepal. However, the implementation status of the recommendations made by the commission has been very weak. One common recommendation of all 8 commissions was to reduce the number of ministries. Also, the number of ministries was to limit to 12 after the implementation of federalism. But the recommendation has not been implemented. The cabinet has the right to decrease or increase the number of ministries and government offices. While the executive body can increase the ministries in its desire, the contemporary Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had increased the number of ministries to 27 from 22 in 1996 to sustain his government. While there were limited buildings for the ministries, two to three ministries were adjusted in only a building (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065 : 19). After the implementation of federalism, the number of ministries was 21 while the recommendation was to limit it to 12.

Fukuyama (2004) argues that able and effective governance is only possible with compact. In contrast, there is practice of establishing institutions and offices excessively and which act as political intake system which has become a characteristic of democratic and republican regime.

During the democracy today, the public administration is like the administration of United Kingdom before 1853. At that time, there was practice of appointing the family and relatives in public administration. The practice of appointing public officials through competition on a merit basis was started in 1853 (Kingston, 2011). The administration reform commissions formed in Nepal in various times have provided recommendations for administrative reform. The reports have kept an ambition of inert administration for development of a country. The merit-based administration with competition is one of the recommendations. Further, decentralized administration is another expectation of the commissions. However, from the Shah regime to republican regime, the recommendations of these commissions have not been implemented. As a result, the public administration of Nepal is not efficient until today.

Furthermore, professional and efficient public administration and bureaucracy are the prerequisites of development. However, with the change in political regime, the professionalization of public administration and bureaucracy could not be initiated in any regime.

4. Promote to Relatives Rather than Merit

In Nepal, the bureaucracy is heavily influenced by the party in state power. There is no importance of merit basis in bureaucracy. Because they had contributed to unification campaign of Nepal, Thapa, Basnet, Kunwar and Bhandari had greater domination in Nepalese administration (Whelpton, 2005). There was hegemony of the first Prime Minister of Nepal, Bhimsen Thapa's family and relatives in bureaucracy and politics during his tenure. His nephew, Mathawar Singh Thapa had been in power during that time. There were Bhimsen Thapa's family and relatives in majority of important posts (Subedi, 2061).

This kind of practice continued during the Rana regime as well. There had been hegemony for their family and relatives in the administrative system. Further, business and contracts were also captured by them. With the condition of offering a big part of profit to the Prime Minister, the monopoly was certified to the relatives. Only

the Prime Minister's relatives and their confidant were permitted to establish big shops in the border area between Nepal and India (Shah, 1982).

The Rana administration was not based on a merit system. Employees were selected for administrative duties based on family and personal preferences. The public administration was characterized by favouritism, nepotism, and bribery at all levels (Amatya, 2004 : 28). By birth, Ranas were provided with the colonel post in Nepal Army. They were provided with money to spend from national treasury for the occasions in their homes like, Chhaiti, Nwaran, Pasni, Brata Banda, marriage and death. Their children got allowances from an early age. They were also provided with guards at their gates (Regmi, 2074 : 336).

After the movement in 1951, the first alliance government of NC and Rana prepared a few policies for introducing merit-based appointment in bureaucracy. During this, the practice of providing allowance to Rana and families, money as gifts and land to the public employees was ended. The practice of taking exams to appoint the public employees started. After this as well, the relatives and families were favoured. There has not been drastic change in bureaucratic structure and characteristics. Nepotism continued in the public administration rather than promoting the capable candidate (Mahat, 2006 : 52).

Neither did this practice changed in the republican regime. For example, from April 1, 2007, to September 30, 2007, Rajendra Mahato had been Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies. During his tenure, he had provided 14 different political appointments in various public enterprises and corporations in the post of chairman and managing director most of whom were his relatives and party leaders. Among them, he had appointed his own brother, Yogendra Mahato as the chairman of Nepal Transit and Warehousing Company Limited (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065). Another example is of contemporary Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport, Hisila Yami, a leader of UCPN (Maoists) had excessively appointed her relatives and cadres during her tenure. On June 3, 2007, she had appointed her party cadre Laxmi Prashad Devkota in the executive committee of Nepal Water Supply Corporation. Similarly, her sister Chiri Shova Tamrakar had been appointed as a member in the corporation. Later, Tamrakar was provided with the responsibility of chairperson of the recruitment committee in the corporation. During her tenure,

Tamrakar had appointed 130 family members, relatives, and party cadres in the corporation (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065).

The contemporary Minister Yami appointed her sister Timila Yami as the chairman of Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanipani Limited (KUKL) in September 2007. Also, she appointed her brother Bidhan Ratna Yami as a member of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board. She appointed her relative B K Man Singh Pradhan who had been accused of involving in corruption in Nepal Industrial Development Corporation and Nepal Airlines Corporation, as the chairman of Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Management Board. On June 3, 2007, she appointed her party cadre Krishna KC as the chairman of (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065 : 107).

The concept of nepotism rather than capable had been flourished since Shah and Rana regime which has been continuing in the Panchayat, democratic and republican regime as well. Public institutions act as offices to provide employment to the family, relatives and party cadres of high-level officials, politicians, and elite leaders. The chairman, executive committee, managing directors and CEOs are changed with the change of government (Koirala and Gautam, 1998). Effective governance and capable bureaucracies are the key factors of development (Chakravarti, 2005). In contrast, the rulers have not given priority to strengthening the capacity of employees and appointing capable people for an effective administrative system.

One of the common characteristics of bureaucracy from Shah regime to the republican regime is that there is no priority to merit. There was dominance of families or relatives in bureaucracy during the Shah and Rana regimes. During the Panchayat system, there was dominance of the royal palace and Panchayat rulers. After this, the dominance of political leaders' families and relatives and the party's cadres are seen. The exercise of promoting the closed ones rather than giving priority to the merit system could not bring professionalism into bureaucracy and public administration. As a result, the governance system became very weak. The ultimate effect was seen in economic growth and development of the country.

5. Nepotism, Favouritism, and Chakari in Public Administration

Nepotism, favouritism and Chakari are the main characteristics of Nepali public administration. During Rana regime, only those who

were familiar to Bhardars and Ranas were provided with jobs (IIDS, 2061). The military and civil employees had to do chakari to get a job (Pande, 2039). They had to be present at the palace in the morning and evening. The chakari was a main means to administrative control (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065). The Ranas had institutionalized the chakari system to control political dissatisfaction in people. To sustain the good relationship with the Ranas, the elites had to be present formally certain hours every day in the palace (Bista, 1991 : 94).

The favouritism, nepotism and chakari system continued after the Rana regime in different forms. The mainstay of rules of law could not be established in the country. For instance, the government was formed under the leadership of Matrika Prasad Koirala on November 16, 1951. After that Koirala nominated 80 of his relatives and party cadres in civil service (Dhakal, 2060 : 76). Similarly, the first elected government started reorganizing public administration on July 25, 1959. In the name of reorganization of the administration, the nepotism and favouritism flourished (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065 : 4).

Many people got good posts during the Panchayat regime through chakari. The chakari tradition passed to the Rana from the Prime Minister after the establishment of democracy in 1950. During the tenure of King Mahendra, people had to go to Paschim Dhoka (West Gate) for chakari. Through Hukum Pramangi, those who went to chakari could get job as well as promotions directly (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065). It was impossible during Panchayat system to carry out business without chakari of royal palace and to get appointed in the high-level posts (Manandhar and Sharma, 2053 : 46). The autocratic regime of the Rana regime has been continued after abolished it. It was not possible to get jobs and contract without recognizing the people in power (Shakya, 2018 : 51).

The nepotism got increased in the latest republican regime too. The former secretary who spent years in Nepalese administration says:

The nepotism and favouritism that started during the Rana regime exist today in different forms. Today also, the leaders in power and ministers appoint the people in good posts. The employees who can carry out chakari are provided with the responsibility they wish. The responsibilities are not provided in terms of capability. As a result, the public administration is not able to provide a relative delivery service with changing time.

The incompetence, favouritism and anarchy has been flourishing in Nepal (Based on interview on November 10, 2021).

Political nominees-relatives, friends, clients are regularly appointed to the positions in the administration, especially the more attractive ones, i.e., those with the greatest opportunities for graft which has a direct effect on the overall development of a country (Theobald, 1990 : 98). Holmes (2015; 26) argues that nepotism and favouritism always discourage honest, well-qualified people, who become frustrated at not securing good positions or being promoted.

The nepotism, favouritism, chakari and chaplusi that flourished in the Rana regime continued until the republican regime. This trend got more institutionalized in the republican regime. Appointing the cadres and relatives in the important administrative posts and giving political appointments has been continuing. The trend has not only proven to be a hindrance to the capable person but also the public resources have been exploited. This has directly affected the development process of the country.

6. Continuation of Pajani Tradition

Pajani was a tool for the employees in administration to make them sincere. Pajani is a traditional system of annual screening of the administrative personnel. During the Shan and Rana regime, Pajani was implemented strictly in which the relatives and others the rulers favoured were continued with their job. The rest of the employees were discontinued. In fear of Pajani, employees obeyed the rulers rather than the law.

Before Rana regime, King performed Pajani of all the employees including the Prime Minister (Thapa and Bhandari 2065 : 2). As the continuation of this practice, there used to be Pajani annually after Dashain festival during Rana regime. The reporting was done by all the employees before Pajani. The evaluation was, however, based on not the good work but chakari and loyalty towards hakim (senior). The right to financial security was at the center and thus those employees who were not favoured by the rulers had to lose their job (Regmi, 2074). The personnel were appointed for one year to be reappointed or dismissed after each pajani, a system which, far from improving the administration, bedeviled it by accentuating insecurity among civil servants about their incumbency (Amatya, 2004).

Pajani tradition ended formally with the abolition of the Rana regime. After this, various laws and acts were formed for managing

the bureaucracy. However, the pajani continued in some different forms. The government formed on June 15, 1953, did pajani of high-level officials. The officials who were not favoured by the rulers were transferred to appoint new officials. Similarly, King Mahendra had done pajani of secretaries on October 14, 1955. At that time, some employees were kept as additional groups and new intakes were taken. The new form of pajani continued in Nepal with the establishment of autocratic Panchayat system by dissolving the democratic government in 1960 (Devkota, 2058). The public administration which was just being nurtured was dispersed during Panchayat system and the highly trained and capable employees were rejected (Mihaly, 2002; 139).

Within 13 days of establishment of Panchayat system in Nepal, many Badahakim (District Head Officials) were discontinued with their job. On February 8, 1961, there had been extensive pajani. 13 secretaries were transferred, and 28 new appointments were made. Similarly, a new post, anchaladish (Chief of Zone) was formed for political control in district and village levels and vigilance over the employees. Panchayat regime which claimed for modern state with rule of law, appointed incapable persons as anchaladhish and discontinued them if rulers did not like (Dixit, 1994). During the Panchayat regime, there had been a provision for the employees who completed 20 years of their job to discontinue them if not needed. This provision made the public administration unstable and weak. The employees were compelled for adulation (Thapa & Bhandari, 2065; 7).

Girija Prashad Koirala became first elected Prime Minister after restoration of democracy in Nepal on May 26, 1991. The government had made a policy level decision on November 6, 1992, for employee's cutbacks which was a modern form of pajani. Continuing the 20 years provision of Panchayat regime act, the government discontinued 2 hundred and 94 employees and 3 thousand employees using 30 years provision. Later, the Prime Minister accepted that it was a pajani blunder. He said, "I transferred 7 secretaries to show myself powerful. Due to some loyal and high-level administrators also borne had to face it. It was my fault" (Nepal, 2067 : 145).

Prime Minister Koirala dissolved the parliament due to the internal conflict within the NC. After this, the CPN (UML) formed a minority government on November 30, 1994, as the biggest party. This government also continued the pajani tradition. A number of secretaries were transferred to the Atirikta Samuha (additional

group), and joint secretaries were appointed as an acting secretary on March 2, 1995 (Thapa & Bhandari, 2065). After the contemporary King Gyanendra dissolved the parliament and the coup occurred, 8 secretaries were put on an additional group on March 2, 2005. The secretaries continued their work this way for 14 months (Bhatta, 2071 : 215).

During the republican regime, pajani has been flourished more in a new form. Shan and Rana rulers did pajani once a year. But in the republican regime, pajani occurs like once in a month. After the people's movement of 2006 when Pushpakamal Dahal became Prime Minister of Nepal on August 15, 2008, the employees transfer occurred for 13 times until the first week of November (Thapa and Bhandari, 2065 : 17). This trend has been continuing till today. Former secretary Gopi Nath Mainali whose job was terminated in 2021 was transferred 10 times during his 5-year tenure. He was transferred after working for only 4 months in one office. A former secretary takes this act as a form of Pajani tradition. He says:

According to the civil service act, an employee should be transferred every two years. But during my tenure as the secretary, I was transferred 10 times I could not spend a full year in any office. I was transferred even after 4 months in an office. It seemed that we could spend more time in a ministry only if we work as desired by the ministers. I take this kind of practice as a modern form of pajani (Based on the interview on November 10, 2021).

The Pajani system was developed during the Shah and Rana regimes for keeping control over the employees. After the establishment of democracy in the country, the modern administrative mechanism was developed. However, the regimes changed but the pajani tradition continued in the public administration of Nepal. The Pajani system was not eradicated, rather, continued in different forms. Earlier, the employees who were not liked by the rulers were sacked off the job through Pajani. This system has two major consequences. *First*, the employees who do not do chaplusi and chakari are either shifted shortly or kept in additional places. They are not able to work according to their skill, knowledge, and experience. *Second*, the employees are compelled to work according to the will of rulers to save their positions. As a result, the bureaucracy cannot contribute to the development process of the country.

7. Centralized Mode of Governance

Since the start of unification of Nepal, the public administration of Nepal did not run with policy, rules, or system. Rather, the rulers always mobilized the public administration in accordance with their desires. Order was above the law during Shah and Rana regimes. This kind of order system persists in public administration. The civil servants also seem to obey the order of the rulers rather than policies, rules and laws. The Hukum (order) of the Rana Prime Minister was more than a law (Pande, 2076). The Rana politics had controlled the lives of general people. The Shah and Rana ruler were against sharing even the minimum administrative power (Mahat, 2006 : 45).

There was a centralized administrative system during the Shah and Rana regime. The Rana administration was the hierarchical of a political organization in which authorities passed from the top to the successive lower levels. The administration was thoroughly totalitarian in its sweep, which dominated the people. They also controlled judicial, legislative, and executive functions of government. There was no rule of law (Amatya, 2004 : 336).

The order system persisted in the other regimes as well. During the Panchayat and democratic regimes, the trend of appointment of the civil servants continued with the order of the King (Nepal, 2075). This trend has been continuing even during the republican regime. The major reason for the third world countries that act as a hindrance for sustainable development is excessively centralized governance (Hagen, 2017; 5). The centralized government prevents people from participating and bearing responsibilities.

Through the centralized governance system, rulers mobilized the public administration according to their desire and wish. The bureaucracy could not make plans and strategy to address the development expectations of the people. The budget allocation could not synchronize with the expectations of people. This created hindrance to development in Nepal.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the public administration in Nepal continues to suffer from deep-rooted issues of nepotism, favouritism, and a lack of accountability. Despite the establishment of multiple reform commissions, the failure to implement their

recommendations has perpetuated a bureaucratic culture that prioritizes political loyalty over merit. This has resulted in inefficiencies that hinder the overall development of the country. To achieve effective governance, it is imperative for the Nepalese government to prioritize merit-based appointments, reduce political interference in the bureaucracy, and commit to implementing the recommendations of past commissions. Only through such reforms can Nepal hope to build a professional and efficient public administration that serves the interests of its citizens.

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