

## Book Reviews

1. Amatya, Saphalya, *Rana Rule in Nepal*, Delhi: Nirala Publications, 2004, pp.382, bibliography, appendices, Price: Rs. 695 IC (cloth).

Dr. Saphalya Amatya is a noted cultural historian of Nepal. His numerous academic papers on different cultural aspects of Nepal have enriched the academic world to a large extent. But this time, Dr. Amatya stands before us as a political historian with his new book entitled *Rana Rule in Nepal*. Originated as a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi some three decades before, the book analyses the last phase of the Rana regime starting with the premiership of Juddha Shumsher. Millions of words have already been written on the Rana regime, but a thorough study on its last phase was still lacking, and Dr. Amatya has certainly filled this vacuum.

With the background of Rana administrative system and initial anti-Rana activities, the author has started his analytical study with the ouster of C class Ranas on domestic side, and formation of *Praja Parishad* on the political side, the two political events that made the beginning of the end of 104 years Rana regime. The author argues that Nepal's struggle for the overthrow of the Rana regime can be viewed as part of the Asian national freedom movements, which gained momentum after the Second World War and eventually a deathblow to colonialism and imperialism (p.13). A critical study has been made to analyse the achievements and failures of last three Rana Prime Ministers - Juddha Shumsher, Padma Shumsher and Mohan Shumsher who shared the responsibility for the collapse of the Rana regime in one way or the other. The author considers Juddha Shumsher as a realist, who had a sense of timing and knew when to go and when to stop (p. 129). About Padma Shumsher, he writes that he was weak as a man and indecisive as a ruler. As a ruler, he had the dreams and visions of a romanticist, but not the determination and courage of a man of action (p.160). However, the author considers Mohan Shumsher to be largely responsible for the destruction of his own dynastic rule and claims him to be a wrong person at a wrong time (p. 191).

Why did King Tribhuvan take political asylum at the Indian Embassy? The author has presented several versions about it, but failed to give his own opinion. He simply writes 'perhaps partly in opposition to this (restrictions on King's movements), partly with a sincere desire to liberate the country and the people from the painful bondage and serfdom of the Ranas, he ultimately decided to take asylum at the Indian Embassy (pp. 224-225). So far as the source materials of the book are concerned, in addition to books and articles, unpublished theses, contemporary

documents and newspapers and magazines, the author has taken pains to interview concerned leaders and officials to assess the themes in a more comprehensive way. But he should have given a list of the interviewees with their full identification in the bibliography.

Another notable feature of the book is the excellent language and brilliant presentation of facts and issues, for which not only the author but also his supervisor Prof. L.S. Baral deserves special thanks.

To mention few weaknesses of the book, the title of the book itself is quite confusing. It demands the survey of the 104-year rule of the Ranas in total, but the work is limited only to the final phase of the regime. The reviewer believes that the original title of the dissertation - *The Rana Rule in Nepal: The Last Phase (1939-51)* should have been retained. Secondly, the title of chapters on persons such as Juddha Shumsher, Padma Shumsher and Mohan Shumsher seems to be odd. They should rather represent the main theme surveyed in the concerned chapters. Similarly, the title - *Causes of the Downfall of the Rana Rule* gives us the smell of a textbook rather than that of a research work. The third point is that, while analysing the role of political organizations against the Rana autocracy, the author has narrated at length the circumstances leading to the formation of Nepali Congress but did not mention a word about Nepal Communist Party, which was formed in 1949. Truly, the party did not play a role in the movement, but it could pose a pressure on the Rana rulers in view of the establishment of communist regime in China. Lastly, it seems that the book is the reprint of the dissertation submitted three decades earlier. No attempt is made to consult and use the plethora of materials published after 1975, the inclusion of which would have made the work more comprehensive and authoritative.

These minor shortcomings do not decrease the quality and standard of the book in anyway. It may be cited as a significant contribution to Nepali historiography, and the author rightly deserves words of appreciation for bringing such a valuable work to light.

The quality of paper and printing is excellent, and the Nirala Publication deserves special thanks for that. But the price of the book seems to be beyond the reach of the general reader; so the reviewer strongly suggests that the Nirala Publication should come with a paperback edition in the near future.

**Prof. Dr. Tri Ratna Manandhar**

Central Department of History

Tribhuvan University,

Kathmandu, Nepal.