



# Local governance dynamics in the Rana Tharu community of Kanchanpur district

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## Article Info

Received: 8 March. 2025

Reviewed: 14 May. 2025

Revised Received: 24 May 2025

Accepted: 28 May 2025

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## Article DOI: In NepJOL

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## Abstract

The Rana Tharu community, a significant indigenous group spanning Kanchanpur and Kailali districts in Far Western Nepal, holds historical roots tracing back to Rajasthan, India. Their migration to this region is attributed to the aftermath of Mughal forces defeating the great Hindu hero Maharana Pratap in the pivotal Haldighati battle of 1576 A.D. This paper aims to shed light on the enduring socio-economic and cultural challenges faced by this community and investigate the roles and responsibilities of relevant governing bodies. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study engaged in Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with a primary focus on Bhalmansas, Bharras, Chakars, and socially active members of the Rana Tharu community. Distinguished by their distinctive cultural facets within the broader tapestry of the Terai regions in Nepal and India, the Rana Tharus find themselves engaged in an ongoing quest for self-recognition and preservation of their identity. The current constitution of Nepal seeks to decentralize political, financial, and administrative powers, entrusting them to local governance bodies. In this endeavor, certain local authorities have taken steps to formalize socio-cultural organizations, perceiving them as conduits through which regulations and development can permeate to the grassroots level. Noteworthy examples include the Krishnapur and Laljhadi municipalities in Kanchanpur district, which have conferred specific responsibilities upon Bhalmansas and Padhanas of the Rana Tharu socio-cultural traditional institutions, thereby upholding law and order within their respective villages. Furthermore, these institutions have been granted developmental prerogatives within the Rana Tharu communities. Such initiatives exemplify the principles of sound governance at the local level and warrant commendation as indications of transparency and accountability. To reinforce this positive trend, it is advisable to equip community leaders such as Bharra, Padhana, and Bhalmansas with essential communication tools, enabling them to promptly alert villagers about potential untoward incidents and liaise with local authorities and the government to facilitate relief efforts.

## Keywords

Local governance, bhalmansa, bharras, Indigenous group, traditional institution

## Introduction

Among various communities of the Tharu society, in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts of western Nepal, Rana Tharu is a prominent indigenous community. The Tharu caste at the first level is regarded as having migrated from Thar Pradesh of India and settled in Nepal, so they are called Tharu (Prabhat, 2064, p. 141). According to historian Atmaram Ojha;

*There are several Tharu communities in Kanchanpur district and among them are: Rana Tharu, Witar, Khasia, Vote, Mahato, Mahania, Growth, Sunaha, Nabunaha, Raji, Kuchila (Kuchvihari), Thangari, Dagwade, Rajaharithaya, Chitaunia, Kanaria, Khas, Lalpuchuwa, Lalpuria, Majhaira, Morangia, Rauthar, Solaria, Jogethuva, Dahit, but there are only 2 main components of the Tharu castes, they are: Rana Tharu and Dagoura Tharu (Ojha, 2065, p.108).*

Researcher Purn Prakash "Yatri" visited during B. S. 2040 in the Far Western Region. He writes on Tharus of Kanchanpur;

*"Dangaura and Rana, both Tharu communities, are very backward in development, and the main cause is a lack of awareness" (Yatri, B.S. 2033, p. 131).*

The Rana Tharu community with their local governance system, including their socio-cultural structures and community behavior, is recognized. This caste has its own customs and culture. Although it is called Tharu, its lifestyle, clothing and food are different from other Tharu castes (Prabhat, B.S. 2064, p. 38). After the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, this region turned into the western part of Nepal as a *new country* (*Naya Muluk*), the areas of Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke and Bardiya, which were parts of the same settlement area. Chandra Shamser had soil tested by an English agricultural engineer in Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchanpur and registered millions of *bigha* land with good yield in the name of his family and relatives (Bhatt, B.S. 2064, p. 9). Rana and other Tharu communities were excluded from the fertile soil and were bound to shift themselves near the jungles. Most of the population of the Rana community in the Sudurpashchim Pradesh of Nepal is concentrated in the districts of Kanchanpur and Kailali. Regarding this, historian Badri Datt Pandey writes on Rana Tharus;

*The Rana Tharu community, a prominent indigenous group spanning Kanchanpur and Kailali districts in Far Western Nepal, has a historical lineage that can be traced back to Rajasthan, India. Their migration to this region is*

*linked to the aftermath of the Mughal forces' victory over the revered Hindu hero Maharana Pratap in the pivotal Haldighati battle of 1576 (Pandey, 1990, p.554).*

Despite their enduring presence, the Rana Tharu community faces persistent socio-economic, governing, and cultural challenges. This study aims to investigate the intricate dynamics of local governance within this community and explore the role and responsibilities of governing bodies that impact their welfare and development.

In the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Khiri, Lakhimpur, Rudrapur, and in Uttarakhand, Nainital, Purnapur, Champawat, and other districts, there is a significant population of the Rana Tharu community. The Rana Tharu community exists in both Nepal and India as an indigenous ethnic group. The community holds a significant presence as an important ethnic group. The history of the Rana Tharu is marked by struggles, and their traditional economy continues to evolve. Their original culture and social practices have persisted, from hospitality to joint family systems (Pandey, 1990, p.548). The Rana Tharu community has its own socio-cultural institutions that have been functioning for centuries. Their functioning shows that they are bridging the community as well as families and agronomy. Their role is multi-dynamic. In the absence of political awareness and political institutions like Village Development Committees/ Village executives, etc., they had been organizing their community. They have been organizing, leading, and guiding their people for centuries. The need is to review their roles in a modern-day context, especially in the context of local governance. People's active participation in public affairs creates changes which is essential in this community.

Though there is a constitution and democracy in Nepal, the government's powers and facilities are even unreachable in the far villages. Especially those villages where the Rana community people are living in large numbers are undeveloped. There is a lack of roads, bridges, good schools, and other required infrastructures. We have local governments, but the effectiveness in governance is absent. Civil society and traditional institutions should have distinct significance in good governance, but there is a genuine issue whether civil societies relate to the local governments or not.

The concept of local governance involves the management and administration of a specific community, municipality, or region at the local level. It encompasses the systems, processes, and mechanisms used for decision-making, resource allocation, and service delivery to residents within a particular geographic area.

Local governance plays a vital role in the well-being and development of society. The text also highlights the importance of discussing whether the Rana Tharu community and their socio-cultural organizations are effectively functioning within this framework. There's a particular emphasis on exploring how constitutional provisions can empower and activate these organizations, which consist of more than twenty institutions, with traditional structures and functions such as *Bharra*, *Bhalmansa*, *Padhana*, and *Chakar*, which have not been extensively discussed.

Till now, the state has not paid much attention to providing constitutional and legal rights to traditional socio-cultural institutions that have already demonstrated their performance in resolving social and property dealing problems, law and order management in the community. The issue to be solved is whether there is a need for empowered institutions or not. The state should comprehensively identify and analyze the enduring socio-economic and cultural challenges faced by the Rana Tharu community in Kanchanpur district, with a focus on understanding the implications of these challenges on their overall development and well-being. There was no appropriate investigation to delineate the roles and responsibilities of relevant governing bodies at the local level that adopt the Rana Tharu community. It was required to understand how the governing bodies interact with the community and contribute to addressing their challenges. Research was needed to understand how socio-cultural institutions operate, bridge social gaps, resolve conflicts, and contribute to the overall cohesion of the community. Regarding these issues, this paper has been constructed.

The study was conducted with the primary aim of investigating the Rana Tharu community within the Far Western Province of Nepal, with a specific focus on Kanchanpur district. This district was chosen due to the concentrated settlement of the Rana Tharu community in this area compared to other regions. The study's main objectives were threefold: first, to identify the socio-economic and cultural institutions of the Rana Tharu community and analyze their functioning and challenges, secondly, to explore the role of governing bodies within the Rana Tharu population and assess local governance initiatives and lastly, to delve into local issues and the influence of traditional institutions on the initiation of good governance. By achieving these objectives, the research sought to illuminate the intricate relationship between the Rana Tharu community and local governance mechanisms. The findings aimed to provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders, enabling them to formulate strategies that could enhance local governance dynamics and, in turn, contribute to the holistic development and cultural preservation of the community.

## Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research approach, primarily through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and interviews were conducted with key community members, including *Bhalmansas*, *Bharras*, *Chakars*, and other socially active individuals. As secondary data, historical and library methods have been applied to discuss the historical facts of the Rana Tharu community. To collect the data for songs, folklore, and the working or functioning of socio-cultural institutions of Rana Tharu, I directly participated and observed the fields. These discussions delve into the distinct cultural facets that set the Rana Tharus apart within the broader tapestry of the *Terai* regions in Nepal and India. The community's continuous struggle for self-recognition and preservation of their identity forms a crucial backdrop against which their engagement with local governance is analyzed. The researcher has been participating in cultural and social activities of the Tharu community on several occasions, and the available facts of the papers presented by him in some seminars in Kailali and Kanchanpur. Such experiences and documents were found very useful. Thus, mostly as primary data, community people and their socio-cultural leaders were interviewed, and in Kanj, Belauri, one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was organised, from where much data regarding issues of culture preservation and social institutions like *Bhalmansas* were collected. As secondary data, the library was used to collect the historical facts regarding the historical aspects of the Rana Tharu community.

## Discussion

The Rana Tharu community likes a government where many constitutional organs function systematically. This community has its own community life, house building art, impact of socio-political movements, socio-cultural institutions, and their liabilities to the society, etc, and these factors have been working in the community.

## Community Life

The entire land section from *Kali Kumaon* to *Karnali River* across *Mahakali* is called *Manas Khand* in the scriptures. *Manas Khand*, located around *Manas Sarovar* lake, is inhabited by people speaking different languages from different sources. There are some *Tharu* tribes living in the South *Terai-Khand (Mal)*, while the minority *Sauka (Vyasi)* tribes are living in the *Byas* region of the northern Himalayan region. Similarly, the *Vanrauts (Rautes)*, who are nomadic tribes, also have their own independent language and culture.

*Nanda Parvatmarabhya Yavat Kakgiri Samou.*

*Tavad Vai Manasakhand Khayate Nripasattama (Skanda Puran, Bhaisab, B.S.2066, p.6)*

Historian Badri Datt Pandey has mentioned Rana Tharus.

*Those people have been living in the Terai of Kumaun and Nepal for a long time. Ranas remain always in a happy , and they claim that they belong to 'Rajputana' The place for storing grains is called 'kuthiya'. A big, airy basket-like thing made of bamboo for keeping grains is called 'Bakhari' (Pandey, 1990, p.549)*

Critic writer Padam Raj Joshi, Prabhat, says that;

*Studying their folk culture, their gods and goddesses are all seen as vegetarians. These people are goddesses' worshippers. If we study their inner rites closely, they are close to the activities of the Kshatriyas of Chittoud Gad or other regions. Their lifestyle is completely literary (Prabhat, B.S. 2064, p. 43).*

They are fond of singing and dancing. The musical instruments used in such programs are like: Kara, Khanjda, Golki, jhumrimadal, mridang, Timki, Thekaara, dwal, basia, Bausi, Sakhiamadai, Mazaira, Mandara, Manar, Mainamurli, Mandra,, Daf, Dugdugi, Ghadabaja, rewani, jharra, naran, tamera, jhaail, pipahi, pinri, pil etc (Bulu, B. S. 2063, p.54).

Revolution of B. S. 2007 and its Impact on Socio-Political Awareness is widely realized in indigenous communities too. Its positive impact is even observed in the Rana Tharu community of Kailali and Kanchanpur districts of Nepal (Kalauni, 2000, p.120).

On this, historian Atma Ram Ojha writes;

*Among the first institutionally organized opposition to the work of liberating the country and the people from the harsh control of the royal regime, among the four people who were made martyrs, three were from Kathmandu Valley, and the only martyr, Dasarath Chand, was from Baitadi, Baskot. In this way, the name of martyr Dashrath Chand, who sacrificed his life at the national altar for the progress of the nation, has become immortal.*

*Even after this, the name of martyr Bhimdatta Pant of Dadeldhura is in the forefront of those who sacrificed for the nation and the people (Ojha, B.S. 2073, p.86).*

According to critic writer Devi Prasad Ojha;

*These two key events - the return of soldiers from the First World War and their subsequent sharing of experiences with their neighbors and villagers - played a significant role in spreading awareness about social and political consciousness. The impact of this awareness was profound and far-reaching (Ojha, B.S. 2057, P.130).*

### **Social Movements and Participation of People**

In social movements, the Ranas have played a significant role. Women have a special role in this community, but they also seek more rights, power, development, and opportunities at both the national and local levels. On this researcher and critic writer Mukund Kalauni says;

*The Rana community has not yet achieved proper administration of resources, including land and property. While caste-based or hierarchical discrimination is prevalent, economic disparities have also left many of them at a lower social status (Premwoti, interview). Women in this community do not have as much awareness and development as women from other communities. In 2007's revolution, revolutionary youth Bhimadatt Pant in the far-west raised a strong voice for the rights of the oppressed, marginalized, and backward Tharu community in Kanchanpur district's Jhalari and Belauri regions, and especially supported the Rana community. However, at that time, the authorities and administrators suppressed his voice. Since then, community members have been actively struggling for social justice and rights (Kalauni, 2000, p.118).*

### **Democratic Exercises in Rana Tharu Community**

In democratic regimes, legitimacy is fundamentally dependent on fair, free, and contested elections, but elections, however, are not sufficient for creating the legitimacy of governmental action. To rule over the people through governmental agencies cannot bring true democracy, for the fruitful implementation of democracy, people's participation is needed. People participate in many ways, and it is more convenient to participate through their institutions. In this context, the following traditional socio-cultural institutions have been practicing political authority in their community.

Rana Tharu community has been applying democratic exercises since its beginning through *Padhana* and his assistant; *Bhalmansa* and *Chakar*. In Rana villages even today, these institutions are more functional in the practical field compared to the constitutionally established institutions. This shows that for practical reasons, representatives should be close to the people and their issues. The Community has been exercising its rules and regulations through the following institutions:

### *Padhana*

*Padhana* is elected by farmers within the category of landowners, and the work done by farmers under this category is protected by *Padhana*. He represents the peace, security, and organization of the village and is seen as a symbol of discussion and coordination. It can also be considered as an institutional representative of the village's political and social leaders. Although engaged in social service, *Padhana* does not receive any recognition or monetary rewards. His position is highly respected and dignified in the village. It is especially honored during important cultural festivals. In some weddings, before the offering of food and other items, he is offered a "*puri*" by the village head. During the month-long Holi festival, the search for the *Padhana* and his involvement in the initiation of the Holi festival are significant. In the current context, the practice of starting the Holi festival from the *Padhana*'s home has been declining in many places (Premwoti).

### *Bhalmansa*

*Bhalmansa* is a prominent local decision-maker, entrusted with the authority to enforce regulations, maintain community cohesion, and protect the Rana community from fragmentation. In this role, *Bhalmansa* is elected by villagers for their leadership qualities, cooperative spirit, competence, social skills, and good health. He is adept at effective communication, maintaining harmony, and organizing the village while undertaking various tasks from the villagers (Basmati Rana).

The term *Bhalmansa* is derived from "*Bhal*" (good) and "*Mansa*" (person), symbolizing a virtuous individual. In the Rana Tharu society, *Bhalmansa* manages public funds, welcomes guests, conveys information to the village servant, and handles similar responsibilities. Despite his one-year term, the tradition of reappointing a capable *Bhalmansa* continues, emphasizing his crucial role as the chief responsible person in the village and his deep respect within the community (Laxmi Rana).

*Bhalmansa* represents the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres of the Tharu society. While the elected people's representatives take allowances and salaries working in the ward and municipalities' offices, *Bhalmansas* do not have



such facilities. Even a constitutionally elected representative remains in their post for five years, but a representative of Rana Tharu village, Bhalmansa, has a term of only one year. If he/she works better, only then will he/she be elected for the next term. Thus, Bhalmansa is the people's representative in a true sense.

*Bhalmansa* Man Bahadur Rana of Shankarpur village says;

*The village is served. I look at cases; problems like quarrels, fights, forced plowing of other people's fields come up. Someone claims someone's farm as their own. I will remind you. If not, I will take the help of the village. Everyone agrees with Bhalmansa. I expect that there is a terror of elephants in the village, and there is a flood disaster in the Dodariver. Due to the flood, the people have lost their lives, crops, and agriculture, and the government should seriously think and solve these problems (Man Bahadur Rana).*

This system ensures the preservation of rights to enforce rules and prevent fragmentation within the Rana community, making Bhalmansa a vital figure in village life.

### *Differences between Padhana and Bhalmansa*

In my observation, the main differences between Padhana and Bhalmansa as mentioned in the following chart.

S.No.	Padhana	Bhalmansa
1.	<i>Padhana</i> is necessary for every cultural event like marriage, Chhath festival, festivals, etc	<i>Bhalmansa</i> is active in the absence of <i>Padhana</i>
2.	<i>Padhana</i> has a structure based on inheritance	<i>Bhalmansa</i> is elected for one year.
3.	Every religious and cultural program begins at his home	<i>Bhalmansa</i> serves as an assistant to Padhana.
4.	<i>Padhana</i> is a landlord. <i>Bhalmansa</i> is an ordinary person.	He is elected and elected criteria is his clarity in speaking and dealing with people. He is an ordinary person
5.	<i>Padhana</i> generally represents 5-7 villages.	<i>Bhalmansa</i> is usually from one village.

## **Bharra**

*Bharra* is a traditional socio-religious structure within the Rana Tharu community. It has a strong influence on their social and direct interactions. It serves as a symbol of their cultural values and also plays a role in the cultural structure of the Rana community. When a Rana Tharu is first recognized as a healer, they are referred to as a "*Bharra*." The belief within the Rana community is that illnesses among them are caused by "*bhut*" (spirits), and *Bharra* is responsible for warding off these spirits and maintaining their well-being (Jagat Bahadur Rana, interview)

Hikmat Damai, an intellectual, on the basis of his field study on RanaTharu; says:

*Bharra keeps the ability to diagnose illnesses, perform mantras recitations for treatment, and exorcise spirits. This strong belief in the power of Bharra is a significant aspect of the Rana community. They hold the Bharra in high regard, considering them as superior and the best compared to others (Hikmat).*

Apart from its spiritual role, *Bharra* also holds an economic role within the community. The villagers provide around 20-30 kilograms of grains to the *Bharra* from each family as compensation for their services. He also possesses knowledge of Ayurvedic plants (medicinal herbs) and remedies, which they use to provide healing to various ailments like snakebites, scorpion stings, bone fractures, and fevers. However, there are challenges and changes being observed in the Rana Tharu community regarding the role of *Bharra*.

The newer generation of educated individuals tends to show less interest in becoming *Bharra*. Educated *Bharra* often develop a broader perspective, which can lead to a diminishing interest in traditional beliefs and practices, resulting in a sense of detachment from their cultural roots. Additionally, some *Bharra* individuals are reluctant to share the names of mantras and medicinal herbs with others. This withholding of knowledge not only limits the practical application of these traditions but also contributes to the gradual disappearance of this valuable cultural heritage. As a result, both disinterest among the youth and secrecy among the practitioners pose significant challenges to the preservation and transmission of traditional *Bharra* knowledge.

For these reasons, it is emphasized that *Bharra* should not be considered merely as an individual but as an institution. Their knowledge should be harnessed for the betterment of society, and a conducive environment should be created to support their contributions (based on focus group discussion, Kanj, Belauri).

In Rana society, *Bharra* holds significant influence and authority. They play roles in various aspects of life, including healing, rituals, and social functions. They hold a special position in the community, not only as healers but also as spiritual guides.

### *Chakar*

*Chakar* is not a neglected post as its name. *Padhana* is regarded as the President, *Bhalmansa* as the Prime Minister, and *Chakar* as the information and broadcasting minister in the Rana community. A "*Chakar*" or *Chaukidar* serves as an assistant to the *Bhalmansa* (landlord) and performs various tasks. The term *Chakar* is commonly used to refer to a watchman or guardian. They are responsible for relaying important decisions from meetings involving influential figures like *Padhna*, *Bhalmansa*, and other notable individuals in the village. The role of a *Chakar* is to act as the primary source of information flow within the village (Bikram Rana, interview). They gather information about current activities, as well as plans of individuals. (Jivan, interview).

In the Tharu community, the *Chakar* is sometimes referred to as *Sevak* or *Hulaki* (postman). They play a role in sending messages to other villages on behalf of *Padhna* or "*Bhalmansa*" during events like marriages or other important occasions. They also help with welcoming guests, organizing weddings, and collecting supplies for weddings. During the Ashadhi festival, they are involved in managing various cultural events. They (*Chakar* and *Chakarniya*) also participate in festivities during *Holi* (observation).

The "*Chakar*" is an essential figure in the community, and his role extends beyond just being a messenger. He participates in various activities that help to maintain the village's social fabric and traditions. His knowledge and involvement in the community's affairs are significant. Regarding his payment, a *Chakar* is usually compensated with around 25 kilograms of rice for villager's son's wedding and 20 kilograms for his daughter's wedding. Additionally, each family in the village contributes around 10 to 15 kilograms of rice annually to support the *Chakar* (Nathuram, interview). In various village events, the *Chakar* is responsible for providing water to the attendees. He also cleans the temple of the deity *Bhuiya* on the first Monday of every month. The *Chakar* is considered as an essential figure in the

Rana Tharu community. *Chakar* is often seen as a representative of the community and serve as the role of the *Bhalmansa's* messenger. Despite their importance, the situation of the *Chakar* is not always ideal. They may face dissatisfaction due to the nature of their work and the lack of personal time. The role is like that of a servant, with obligations that go beyond regular working hours. The *Chakar* often carries out their responsibilities daily, and his private life and problem-solving efforts is often compromised. Their situation serves as an example of a laborious and challenging job (Ram Bahadur, interview).

### **Constitution of Nepal and Rana Tharu Institutions**

Nepal's current constitution emphasizes the decentralization of political, financial, and administrative powers to local governance bodies, intending to facilitate comprehensive development at the grassroots level. Notably, certain local authorities, such as the Krishnapur and Laljhadi municipalities in the Kanchanpur district, have formalized socio-cultural organizations as channels for implementing regulations and driving development. Specifically, the study examines how Bhalmansas and Padhanas of Rana Tharu socio-cultural traditional institutions have been entrusted with responsibilities that contribute to law-and-order maintenance within their villages. Moreover, these institutions have gained developmental prerogatives within the Rana Tharu community, exemplifying principles of transparent and accountable governance.

For good governance in the local governments, traditional institutions should be empowered through making rules from the concerning governments. The present status of the rights of local authorities and traditionally working and duties of *Bhalmansa* are as following;

S.No.	Rights of Local Authority	Functions of Rana Tharu Institution: Bhalmansa
1.	City Police	In matters of conflicts and disputes, particularly those related to the consumption of alcohol and disputes over land distribution and occupation, Bhalmansa plays a role like that of a judge. If any party from the village neglects his advice, Bhalmansa supports the village's recommendation and cooperation.
2.	Cooperative Institutions	Provides unbiased and just decisions regarding marriages from major to minor ones in the village.
3.	FM Broadcasting	-
4.	Local Taxes (Property Tax, House Rent Tax, House and Land Registration Fee, Vehicle Tax, Land Revenue (Land Ownership Transfer Tax), Service Fees, Tourism Tax, Advertisement Tax, Business Tax, Fine Collection, Entertainment Tax, Land Rent Collection)	-
5.	Management of Local Services	Coordination and help to the villagers
6	Collection of Local Statistics and Archives	-
7	Local Level Development Plans and Projects	According to the advice of the village head, performs the tasks
8	Basic and Primary Education	-
9	Basic Health and Sanitation	-
10	Local Market Management, Environmental Conservation	Providing information to the forest laborers about cutting grass and collecting firewood

S.No.	Rights of Local Authority	Functions of Rana Tharu Institution: Bhalmansa
11	Local Roads, Rural Roads, Agricultural Roads, Irrigation	Developing public pathways in the village. Managing the maintenance and construction of public bridges, road repairs, and equipping police stations, along with discussing sudden incidents and collaborating with ward representatives in dealing with unexpected village events
12	Village Council, City Council, District Council, Local Courts, Mediation, and Arbitration Management	Providing impartial and just decisions from minor to major marriage disputes
13	Local Archive Management	Arranges for the observance of worship festivals in the village
14	Distribution of Property Ownership Certificates	Conducting meetings (gatherings)
15	Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Management of Agricultural Production, Animal Health, Cooperatives	-
16	Senior Citizens, Persons with Disabilities, and Management of the Disabled	-
17	Unemployment Data Collection	-
18	Agriculture Extension Management, Operation, and Control	Bhalmansa is responsible for various tasks based on his knowledge, experience, and judgment
19	Drinking Water, Small Water Projects, Alternative Energy	Takes care of the preservation of forests, ponds, and water sources in the village
20	Disaster Management	Handles sudden events such as the maintenance of public bridges and culverts, and consults with ward representatives regarding these matters

S.No.	Rights of Local Authority	Functions of Rana Tharu Institution: Bhalmansa
21	Water Resources, Wildlife, Mining, and Mineral Conservation and Development	Oversees the construction of public roads in the village and protecting the habitats of various animals, especially those near rivers.

(Source: Interviews with Manasingh Rana and Ram Sahay Rana, Shankarpur Village, Belauri, Thakur Ram Chaudhary, Dhangadi and Constitution of Nepal, 2072)

*Bhalmansa* represents the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres of Tharu society. While elected people's representatives receive allowances and salaries for their work in ward and municipal offices, *Bhalmansas* do not have such facilities. Constitutionally elected representatives remain in their posts for five years, but representatives of Rana Tharu village, the Bhalmansa, have a term of only one year. If he or she performs well, only then he or she can be elected for the next term. Thus, the *Bhalmansa* is a true people's representative (observation).

Since the socio-cultural institutions of the Rana community have a great contribution to social integration, social unity and agricultural work, all three levels of government should make them participate in local law-making and decision-making.

### Similarities of local governance and Rana Tharu socio-cultural institutions

The current constitution of Nepal places a strong emphasis on inclusivity for all classes and communities. It is founded on the principles of decentralization of power, granting local autonomous institutions the authority to exercise certain powers. In several municipalities, the rights of some socio-cultural traditional institutions have been transferred. As an illustration, in Kanchanpur district, specific municipalities, such as Krishnpur and Belauri, have enacted legislation to confer civic authorities upon organizations like Rana Tharu socio-cultural organizations.

Here, based on interviews, observation, focus group discussion and reference books, I came to the following comparative conclusions:

## **Responsive to local needs**

Local governance allows decision-making to be tailored to the specific needs, priorities, and challenges of a particular community. Local authorities are more attuned to the local context and can devise policies and programs that are relevant and effective in addressing local issues. Socio-Cultural institutions' chiefs and workers call to the villagers and take a collective decision in favor of the community.

## **Citizen participation**

Local governance encourages active participation and engagement of citizens in decision-making processes. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership, accountability, and empowerment among residents, as they have a direct role in shaping the policies that impact their lives. The Rana Tharu people elect their Bharra, Padhana, and Bhalmansa every year on the eve of Asadi Puja. In large numbers, the presence of people shows the integrity of society.

## **Efficiency and effectiveness**

Decentralizing governance to the local level often leads to more efficient and effective delivery of public services. Local authorities of socio-cultural institutions have a better understanding of local conditions, enabling them to allocate resources and implement programs more efficiently.

## **Innovation and experimentation**

Local governments have the flexibility to experiment with innovative approaches and pilot projects. This fosters creativity and enables the testing of new solutions to local challenges. Bharra and Vaida or Vaidya have sufficient knowledge of medicinal plants. They keep primary knowledge of snake biting, scorpion biting, small wounds, or fever symptoms.

## **Fosters civic education and awareness**

Local governance provides an opportunity for citizens to learn about political processes, administration, and public affairs. This leads to increased civic education and awareness, which in turn contributes to a more informed and engaged citizenry. As mentioned in this paper about the election process of Rana Tharu Socio-Cultural organizations, this community's formation and launching is based on democratic values.

## ***Economic Development***

Effective local governance can play a crucial role in driving economic development. Local authorities can create a conducive environment for investment, job creation, and local business growth, leading to improved living standards and reduced poverty.



In the Rana villages, it is found that Padhana is directly linked with agriculture. Lakhbari and Lakhbariya are two institutions in the Rana Tharu community that are directly related to agricultural work, such as chasing the birds and protecting the crops in the entire village.

### **Social cohesion**

Local governance can foster social cohesion by bringing together diverse groups within a community. Through collaborative decision-making, different social, cultural, and economic groups can find common ground and work towards shared goals. In the Rana community, Bharra is the main person who bridges the people of the village.

### **Environmental sustainability**

Local governments are often responsible for managing natural resources and environmental policies within their jurisdictions. Effective local governance can lead to more sustainable resource management practices and the implementation of environmentally friendly initiatives. For this purpose, Padhana and Bhalmansa work in the Rana villages.

### **Accountability and transparency**

Local governance offers a level of accountability that is easier for citizens to monitor. When decision-makers are within closer reach, they are more likely to be held accountable for their actions and decisions, promoting transparency and ethical behavior. Bhalmansa is a distinct example of accountability in the village; if he does not work properly, in the next year's gathering, he might be removed from the post.

### **Disaster management and resilience**

Local governments play a vital role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Their proximity to communities enables them to mobilize resources quickly and coordinate emergency efforts effectively. In the Rana Tharu community, the whole community system is united in the leadership of Bhalmansa in any crisis.

### **Conclusion**

The Rana Tharu community exhibits a complex social structure and unique democratic practices that play significant roles in their daily lives. Bhalmansa, Bharra, Padhana, and Chakar are central figures within their traditional institutions, contributing to decision-making, cultural preservation, economic activities, and social cohesion. Despite their contributions, the community faces challenges such as modernization, economic disparities, lack of education, and limited political representation. To address these challenges, there is a need for preserving cultural heritage,

promoting education in the mother tongue, fostering economic development, and empowering traditional institutions within the framework of Nepal's decentralized governance system. The effective governance of local governments hinges on the empowerment of traditional institutions. The enumerated functions of Bhalmansa, as outlined in the Constitution of Nepal, Schedule 8, exemplify the crucial role these empowered institutions play. From mediating conflicts and disputes, providing essential services, and making impartial decisions on matters ranging from marriages to property ownership, Bhalmansa acts as a linchpin in the community's well-being. Their responsibilities span various domains, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and disaster management. By drawing upon their knowledge, experience, and judgment, Bhalmansa ensures the preservation of cultural heritage, the sustainable use of natural resources, and the harmonious functioning of the community. As key contributors to local governance, these empowered traditional institutions promote inclusivity, fairness, and collaboration, fostering a robust foundation for the development and progress of the society they serve. Therefore, recognizing and enhancing the authority and capabilities of such institutions is not just a matter of tradition, but a cornerstone of effective governance at the grassroots level.

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to all the interviewees and advisors who contributed to the completion of this research paper. In particular, I would like to thank the leaders of Rana Tharu socio-cultural institutions—such as the Bharra, Padhana, and Bhalmansa for their invaluable insights. I also extend my sincere appreciation to all the Rana Tharu community activists from Belauri, Kanchanpur, who actively participated in the focus group discussions related to this study.

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