

BOOK REVIEW

Nepal-India: Democracy in the Making of Mutual Trust. 1993. Dinesh Bhattarai and Pradip Khatiwada. Nirala Publications Jaipur. Pages 320: IC Rs 295.

The stalemate in relations between Nepal and India that began on March 23, 1989 and lasted for fifteen months started with the termination of the Trade and Transit treaties that existed between the two countries. This crucial period is regarded to be 'the lowest ebb' in relations between Nepal and India – a time when a tiny, India-locked Himalayan Kingdom stood up to its mighty and formidable neighbour to the south. One opinion is that the crisis was brought about by a group of power-hungry ruling Panchayati elites for sustaining and promoting their vital interests at the cost of the suffering of the common people who during the period underwent untold misery brought about by an acute economic crisis. The other opinion is that the fifteen-month stalemate in Nepal-India relations is a glorious chapter in the Nepalese political history when Nepalese nationalism exerted itself and resisted the arm twisting tactics of giant India especially when dealing with its small landlocked neighbour to the north.

Whatever be the interpretation, only history will judge the developments of the crucial fifteen-month period that was catalytic in overthrowing the thirty year old dictatorial panchayat polity and reinstating in its place a multi-party form of government.

The book under review authored by two career diplomats, Dinesh Bhattarai and Pradip Khatiwada, based on the former assumption that "the age old neighbourly relations were disturbed by a swarm of parochial self seekers of Nepal" (Preface) unfolds with an introductory chapter followed by the background of Nepal-India relations. The second chapter highlights the forces and factors that brought in changes since a multi-party form of government was first established in the country in 1951 and the achievements of that eighteen month period (1959 -60) of Nepal's first multi-party government. The third chapter analyses the crisis in Nepal-India relations and the restoration of *Status quo ante* after the overthrow of the Panchayat system in 1990. Chapter four under the heading 'Recapitulation' however, is taken up

Contributions to Nepalese Studies, Vol. 21, No. 1 (January 1994), 127-130.
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by appendices (p. 194-315) carefully gleaned but useful, to support the hypothesis that the book is firmly based on.

Basically, the volume lays emphasis on the traumatic years 1989-91, regarded as a 'blot' in the history of Nepal-India relations and raises fundamental questions regarding democracy and dictatorship and trust, mistrust and betrayal in the present Nepalese political context. The stalemate in relations of otherwise two friendly countries resulting in an economic crisis forms the main highlight of the book. The publication also brings into sharp focus the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy by the exiled Congress and Communist party leaders and fine tunes how it ultimately culminated in the overthrow of the despotic partyless panchayat polity and how a multi-party form of government was established in the Spring of 1990.

It is against this vivid background of happenings and political upheaval that Bhattarai and Khatiwada get down to analysing the events covered mostly by some Nepali and Indian government publications, journals, newspapers, radio broadcasts and television reports. This is precisely where the book stands exposed, raising serious doubts as to whether an "attempt has been made to make it a factual study" as the authors profess. On the one hand they state that the "book is a *record* of happenings in Nepal India relations during 1988-91 (Preface) while on the other they also categorically state "that the views opinions or arguments and *inferences* advanced in this book is strictly and entirely our own and have nothing to do with our official positions", (Preface). This, however, is bound to raise the moot question as to whether to career diplomats who joined the civil service during the bad old panchayat days and who are currently serving at the Embassy of Nepal in New Delhi and at the Embassy of Nepal in Washington should, during active diplomatic postings abroad, venture to air personal views in book form on issues that can be heavily debated, seriously questioned and outrightly challenged.

To begin with, the Nepal-India stalemate in relations assumed international proportions and was amply covered by the local, regional as well as the international media. If certain sections painted Nepal to be the villain of the piece; as a thankless country taking undue advantage of India's 'goodwill' and 'magnanimity' (which has been abundantly cited) the other opinion presented was of India being the regional bully, ruthlessly pushing forward its national interest and forcing a small, helpless, dependant and landlocked neighbour to its knees and, in the process, throwing to the winds the basic norms of inter-state behaviour and gross violation of human rights. The latter view which the book has conveniently ignored is indeed revealing to say the least. The heavy list of references and quotes cautiously gleaned, as mentioned earlier, from the Indian media, presents a disturbing, distorted and

lopsided view of the whole crisis. It leaves the reader wondering as to why saner and more objective articles on the stalemate like 'Imperial India' (*The Economist*, April 15, 1989) 'Coming of Age in India' (*Independent*, April 11, 1989), 'Teaching Nepal a Lesson' (*Economic and Political Monthly*, April 8, 1989), 'A Matter of Time' (Salamat Ali, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 4, 1989) 'India-Nepal Discord' (Anirudha Gupta, *Economic and political weekly*, April 22, 1989), 'The Imperialist Tendency is not new to India' (*The Times of India*, Aug. 15, 1989) etc. to name just a few, were not even mentioned in the 'factual study'.

While several Indian scholars have been copiously cited from their write-ups on the crisis, not a single reference is made to the several seminars held in Kathmandu at the time. If not all, at least two seminars, one held by Forum Nepal, June 5, 1990 and the other held by Nepal University Teachers' Association (NUTA) could have been cited to give a balanced and objective view to the unfortunate crisis. Articles by Nepali scholars like 'Restructuring Nepal-India Relations: Search for Subcontinental Security', 'The Midget, The Mammoth and the Myth of the Missing Link', and 'Nepal-India Relations: Heading for a Showdown' authored by Anand Aditya and Dev Raj Dahal, and S. B. Thakur respectively, graphically presented the Nepalese side of the story. Had these also been quoted, a clearer and an unbiased picture could have surfaced from the the pages of the volume. The publication, as it stands, is not only blatantly pro-Nepali Congress but unabashedly pro-Indian as well. It is an insult to the intelligence of any Nepali who carefully followed the fifteen month 'war of nerves' till the final overthrow of the Panchayat polity.

There can be no doubt that B. P. Koirala was a worthy son of Nepal. But let us not forget that so was King Mahendra. If B. P. Koirala's achievement in the foreign policy front was noteworthy, establishing diplomatic ties with seventeen countries in eighteen months (p. 30) surely King Mahendra's contribution to furthering diplomatic relations with some fifty plus countries during his reign deserves mention. This serious lapse, that too by two career diplomats, certainly smacks of mischief and outright partiality. The crucial **role** played by the United Left Front in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in Nepal cannot be undermined, either. Just to cursorily mention their role in the movement is to do them gross injustice and undermine their role in the movement. It is a fact that without their support, the success of the movement could never have come about. Just to magnify tenfold the role of the Nepali Congress and allow them to hog the limelight is a cruel, wicked distortion of the truth. It is also interesting to note why, in Appendix xvi, the hijacking of the RNAC plane with IC Rs three lakhs on board from Biratnagar by militant Nepali Congress workers is brushed under the rug of secrecy. Surely it couldn't be a bout of diplomatic amnesia in an otherwise

detailed chronology of major events in the history of Nepal from 1974 onwards.

In short, the book is through and through a Nepali Congress mouthpiece—pretentious and superfluous with flattering references to the Indian connection. Moreover, the typographical and grammatical errors that are too numerous to enlist, give the impression of the publication being unceremoniously hurried through the press for whatever reasons political, personal or professional. No doubt, the book raises vital questions of crucial political significance to the goodwill and trust of Nepal- India relations, but the serious lack of objectivity on the part of the writers in shaping the final outcome is also bound to raise eyebrows in the 'pin-stripe' community and maybe even trigger off a few high blood pressures in political circles.

- Ananda P. Shrestha

BOOK REVIEW

Mutual Regards: America and Nepal. Seen Through Each Other's Eyes. (नेपाली र अमेरिकीको दोहोरी नमस्ते). Surya Man Tamang, Bhim Bahadur Tamang, David H. Holmberg and Kathryn S. March. 87 Pages.

In this short book two Tamangs of the Rasuwa-Nuwakot region of Nepal and two Americans of upstate New York relate their first impressions of life in United States and Nepal respectively. The Americans are David H. Holmberg and Kathryn S. March, who first undertook anthropological research in Rasuwa District nearly twenty years ago; the Tamangs are Surya Man Tamang and Bhim Bahadur Tamang, the former of whom has provided fieldwork assistance to Holmberg and March since an initial encounter on the public bus in 1975. On a month-long visit to the U.S. in 1992, the Tamangs kept a journal of their itinerary and observations; likewise, the American anthropologists offer excerpts from their fieldnotes on Tamang social life recorded during two years of dissertation research from 1975-77. The Tamang and American commentary divide the book into sections, creating a mutual regard, or *dohori-namaste*, for the social universe of the other. Photographs at the center enhance the cultural exchange created by the two sets of fieldnotes. By sharing their tales of grappling with life in foreign lands, providing translations of each account in Nepali and English, and ultimately commenting on the iterative process of collaborative authorship, the four authors create what they call a "travel dialogue"— a unique experiment in cross-cultural representation, which should be of interest to a great diversity of readers in both Nepal and the U.S., from the newly literate to the advanced scholar.

This diversity of readership is the book's greatest asset. To its great credit, the book has been very popular among young readers in rural Nepal, if my own observations in Sankhu of Kathmandu District and Surya Man Tamang's in villages of Rasuwa District are any indication. The book provides, in language both simple and colloquial with a humorous sprinkling of Nepalese proverbs, a vision of America some what different from the myths advanced by the media and lodged in the popular imagination. The Tamangs' account includes descriptions of such traditional icons as the statue of Liberty, the White House and the Golden Gate Bridge. While they indeed

Contributions to Nepalese Studies, Vol. 21, No. 1 (January 1994), 131-135.
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marvel at artifacts of development, like tall buildings, good roads and supermarket check-out machines, they appreciate some of the challenges of life in an advanced capitalist society — the very high cost of living, for instance. Moreover, the Tamangs give greatest attention to aspects of American life that will resonate most for Nepalese readers: family customs, farm technology, places of worship and relationships among friends.

For Nepalese students of the English language at all levels of competence, *Mutual Regards* offers a context to learn and improve their language skills that is far more engaging than the typical English language textbook found in Nepal. The English translation of the Nepali is provided in simple, grammatically simple language. Holmberg and March, with the assistance of Nepalese colleagues, have moreover gone to considerable lengths to translate the numerous Nepalese proverbs used by the Tamang into their closest English equivalents (rarely, of course, a direct translation), thus offering Nepalese readers an opportunity to study English in its colloquial form. Because the Tamang and American accounts of each others' cultures are real and applicable to everyday life in Nepalese society, this book can be used not only to teach a reading skill, but also to encourage reading habits. In Sankhu, I have seen siblings arguing over whose turn it is to read the book, and shirking household responsibilities lest they forfeit their chance— not a common relationship with literature in rural Nepal, as far as I have seen. Likewise, the Tamangs' travelogue and the Nepalese translation of the intermediate and advanced students of Nepali. By sharing some of their early fieldwork misadventures, Holmberg and March also, if self-consciously, offer a rare glimpse into the mystified realm of ethnographic fieldnotes. This gesture is significant because anthropology education so inadequately addresses methods for recording data, even though fieldnotes later become the foundation for entire dissertations, books and ultimately careers.

Finally, *Dohari Namaste* should appeal to anthropologists and other social scientists in both Nepal and the West for its experimentation with a new form of cultural representation. The cross-cultural collaboration in authorship alone offers something of an antidote to the legacy of one-sided, voyeuristic authorship reporting. The collaboration here entails not simply a compilation of journal entries by each author, but, more importantly, a process of negotiation through which each was forced to reckon with the priorities and values of the other. Each author originally offered a selection of his or her notes quite different from that actually included in the book. The production of the book itself entailed multiple encounters, during which the authors substantiated and criticized one another's choices. For the authors, this dialogue itself delineated points of difference and similarity in Tamang and American world views more clearly than their own individual writings could.

By including an "Afterword" describing "the iterative conversation produced along with this book," Holmberg and March also enable their readers to appreciate the dialogue that renders this book a genuinely cross-cultural collaboration.

One point of negotiation, for instance, concerned the extent to which places, times, people and prices ought to be specified in the text. While the Tamangs rigorously record precise times, place and people names, distance traveled and prices paid, the Americans have a tendency to refer to people and places with abstractions like, "a little further down the trail," or "a woman from a nearby village." The Americans found the Tamang penchant for recording such details dull reading and an unnecessary compilation of facts and figures, while the Tamangs were frustrated by their co-authors' obscurity concerning a matter of importance to them. The authors' negotiations concerning this issue of naming resulted in the Tamangs' fleshing out name lists with some of their more intimate impressions, which they had omitted, and the Americans included those selections from their notes which offered more specificity concerning such details.

Perhaps more interesting than the compromise itself were the insights both Tamang and American authors gained about the social universe of the other. For Tamangs, since every journey inevitably leads back to one's own locality, and every encounter is traceable to one's own kin, the world itself becomes a network of places and people linked by trails and carefully monitored relationships. Tamangs thus remember and record places, dates, names and prices, skills which are invaluable for subsistence farming, long-distance trading and making religious pilgrimages. By recording their travels in *Dohori Namaste* with American units of accounting, such as miles, dollars, acres and Eastern Standard Time, the Tamangs not only extend their trails further out from their own locality, but also situate themselves in a larger, more cosmopolitan universe. Their fluency with this new mode of accounting is a self-representation that they insist on including in this writing.

Americans, on the other hand, can inhabit worlds "populated by general types," and in which family, professional and social affiliations may comprise more or less separated spheres of interaction. For Americans, places are not linearly linked, but are rather discrete locations in space. In unfamiliar environments, their own anonymity and privacy, as well as that of others, is something to be valued and respected. The Tamangs' reaction to wandering into a nightclub in Washington, D.C., where they had seen naked women dancing illustrates the cultural specificity of American expectations of anonymity and privacy:

A little while later, we went outside, where we saw lots and lots of people. What did those people who saw us coming out of there think? Even if you go into a bar and drink only milk, when you come out they will say you had been drinking liquor. If I say, "I'm an honest man, a faithful man," touch a sacred ammonite (*shaaligraam*), and even if I swear a sacred oath, who will believe me? (15).

The Tamangs cannot conceive the possibility of anonymity, even in such a distant and unlikely place as a nightclub in Washington D.C. For them, any encounter, even with a stranger, can be traced to mutual acquaintances or kin. Americans, on the other hand, can regulate the censorship of others by moving among places known and unknown.

Through *Dohori Namaste*, then, American readers can learn about Tamang society not only from the notes of the American anthropologists, but, perhaps more significantly, from what the Tamang authors say about American culture. The same is true, of course, about Tamang readers learning about American society, as the American authors also write from particular subjective positions, which are reflected in the language, idiom and content of their representations. The paired sets of filled notes thus remind us that cultural representation can never be likened to objective reporting, as Western anthropologists have been wont to claim. Just as the Tamang account of America is informed and shaped by Tamang priorities and value, the Americans describe Tamang social life from a singularly American point of view.

The Tamangs' short ethnography of the West similarly raises questions about the plausibility of development in Nepal as it has been conceived by Western planners. The glimpse we get of the Tamang world view, through their account of an advanced capitalist society, poses a challenge to assumptions about linear development trajectories rendered by Western economic models. Consider Surya Man's musings on flying in an airplane:

The plane took off at 7:05, Bangkok time. As we got up high, myself, as I got above the clouds and looked out, I thought: in the beginning, the most important lama-teachers, sitting in divine 'planes', went back and forth above clouds just like these in the realm of the gods. I remembered the words of the lamas as they preached to us, showing us on their sacred paintings, and saying that the gods feasted upon all conceivable kinds of celestial fruits up there. Therefore, too, myself, inside the plane it seemed I ate and drank all

conceivable kinds of things and listened to all sorts of music and watched all kinds of images with dancing and song.(2).

Just as Surya Man Tamang searches for referents in his Buddhist schooling to relate the experience of air travel , so too must ideas about development be rendered in terms meaningful to the intended beneficiaries in Nepal. Concepts like 'free markets' and 'democracy' must be translated— and in such translation, transformed— into processes which make sense in the particular context of Nepal. Accounts of the West such as those of the Tamangs' here remind us that even such things as the economy, science and technology, which Westerners may consider to be entirely disembedded from social life, are in fact cultural constructs: they were created and have meaning in one particular social context, and cannot be unilaterally transferred to another.

Genuinely collaborative efforts, such as the production of *Dohori Namaste* can serve to rectify the colonialist legacy of both anthropology and development. Through the back-and-forth process that became the book, the authors began to build a realm of *common* experience that enhanced their understanding and appreciation of their individual and cultural differences. In this spirit, the authors' intend to devote any profits from the sale of the book published, incidentally, in Kathmandu by Jeevan Support Printing Press, which is owned by Bhim Tamang — to funding educational opportunities for disadvantaged children from Nuwakot District. It is indeed a testament to the potential arising from cross-cultural collaboration that the book was originally conceived by Surya Man Tamang with this objective in mind.

- Katharine N. Rankin