

Regional Development in Nepal: An Exercise in Reality.

1978. B.P. Shrestha and S.C. Jain. 160 pages. Development Publishers. New Delhi. Indian Rs. 40/- (U.S. \$8).

The subtitle of the book by Dr. B.P Shrestha and Dr.S.C. Jain (an Exercise in Reality) hints at the ambitious task of this slim volume. Not only do the authors attempt to scan the existing regional disparities in Nepal's agricultural, industrial and social services development but they also spell out a scheme for narrowing down these differences. On the basis of data extracted from various survey studies and other relevant sources, Dr. Shrestha and Dr. Jain confirm the popular view that the more remote the regions from the national centres, the more underdeveloped they are in terms of all economic indicators. The existing regional imbalances are attributed to the past development strategy of concentrating the available resources in relatively accessible areas with better potential for higher pay-offs. But why was such a policy adopted? The authors have ignored this question apart from making a few passing references to cost benefit calculations.

It is perhaps due to a bureaucratic mentality and feudal administrative mechanisms in the centre that some regions continued to grow while others remained stationary. Even in regions where perceptible growth took place, the benefits were skewed in favour of upper class groups. This further accentuated the socio-economic imbalances among various classes and groups of people within a region. Unfortunately, the authors do not deal with this issue.

In fact, the regional economic imbalances would not have emerged to the extent seen today, had national planners realized the urgency of the problem in earlier years, particularly 1970, when the Planning Commission developed full momentum with high ranking economists and geographers as its members. Would it have really mattered if the conditions had not been optimum and the standard or economic benefit/cost had not been so high provided there had been concern for people's needs and aspirations? But there is no gain in lamenting over the past.

The second part of the book is concerned with spelling out a regional development strategy, with a national objective of doubling per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a regional objective of equalising the per capita GDP in the next 20 years. The strategy proposes a differential rate of growth in each one of the four development regions and the three geographical regions over the next 20 year period (1975/76-1994/95). The scheme envisages a constant rate of growth of GDP at 6 percent in the central region and relatively higher rates of growth in other regions during 1980-1995. The proposed course thus aims for relatively higher rates of growth in the hills, mountains and terai compared to the Kathmandu valley. But it is worth questioning whether the regions with unfavourable physio-geographic conditions, terrain and climate, and with a low level of physical infrastructure, would be capable of generating higher growth rates?

These days it is being increasingly realized that growth by itself will not promote rural development. What is in fact required is a reduction in poverty,

unemployment and inequality of income. Hence, development of the economically weaker sections of the population and of specific areas appears to be the prime concern in any efforts toward regional development. Suitable activities need to be identified on a case by case basis rather than making generalizations in terms of the development and geographical regions. Moreover, activities should be designed to undertake an enquiry into the relation between requirements and resources at the local levels.

The authors seem to have worded hard in providing an estimate of the investment requirements for the development regions as well as the geographical regions for achieving the proposed rates of growth over the projected period. But in the absence of an adequate data base, the analysis appears shaky. Moreover, it is difficult to understand whether pumping up the estimated investment would lead to the targetted rates of growth in each region, for the authors have neglected the influence of other crucial factors on the growth of GDP through time, such as cultural, social, psychological and political determinants.

The programmes of industrial, agricultural, infra-structural and social services development outlined by the authors for each of the geographical regions require an appropriate institutional base for their effective implementation. Past experiences suggest that the existing institutions, whether they be Sajha or the local panchayat, are very unlikely to come up to the authors' expectation that these institutions will effectively implement various development programmes in their respective areas and make the villages more self-reliant than

at present. The more increase in growth hierarchy from the present 2 to 5, i.e. growth centres, growth axes, growth points, service centres and central villages - may not be as effective in the implementation of programmes as the authors' expect, without some kind of socio-economic revolution in the villages. We already have growth centres and growth axes from the Fourth Plan onwards, but the generation of activities along the growth corridors and in the centres have been extremely disappointing. Would the authors' five-tier hierarchy solve this problem?

Sriram Poudyal

Agricultural Finance in Nepal: An Analytical Study.
1978. K.K. Jha. 241 pages. Heritage Publishers.
New Delhi. Indian Rs. 50/-

Agricultural Finance in Nepal, originally a Bombay University Ph.D. thesis, attempts to explain the problems of agricultural finance in Nepal from the point of view of both demand and supply. On the demand side, the author concentrates on the demand for credit, indebtedness, investment and disinvestment among various groups of farmers classified by the size of their land holdings. On the supply side, money lenders, debt legislation, co-operatives and compulsory savings are discussed. Much of what has been written in the book is based on a field study of 142 farmers in 6 villages - 3 each from the two different districts of the Eastern Terai in 1969. The time gap of nearly a decade in bringing out the survey analysis has somewhat outdated its importance, since much has happened in the field of agricultural finance in the intervening years. For example, the co-operative system has been substituted by the multipurpose Sajha and the Agricultural Development Bank has been made more effective in lending to farmers through a net work of 169 branches, sub-branches and Small Farmers' Development Schemes in all the 75 districts. As these are the officially claimed attempts towards improving the condition of agricultural finance in the country, one might wish that Dr. Jha will find time and resources to make an evaluation of the situation he studied a decade ago.

The author, after interpreting and analyzing the survey data in various ways, comes to the too familiar conclusion that small farmers and share croppers, exploited by the money lenders in the past and neglected explicitly or implicitly by the credit institutions and reform programmes in the present, constitute the major problem group. He further observes that in a situation where the farmer's income is very low because of factors like small and fragmented holdings, non-availability of irrigation and other facilities, 'primitive' methods of cultivation and growing population pressure on land, the mere provision of credit will have limited impact. Hence, Dr. Jha proposed that credit should form a part of an overall development.

Throughout the book, there is much comment on the reasons for success or failure of various reform programmes and their inadequacies in helping the small farmers to get out of the vicious circle of indebtedness and poverty. In a sense, the book is an historical account of the agricultural reform and modernization programmes initiated in the past. Dr. Jha scans the history of the co-operative movement and compulsory savings scheme and comes to the conclusion that 'the compulsory saving were ironically a net addition to the financial burden of the cultivators which resulted in their new credit needs to be met by further borrowings'. This shows that savings made under pressure would not be genuine savings at all. In all, Dr. Jha's book brings to the focus at least two important but often neglected aspects of the credit programme: 1. that the debt-relief measures alone, if not supported by the provision of credit, would not be effective in strengthening the position of small farmers; 2. that the denial of institutional credit to the farmers for household and social

purposes would drive them towards money lenders with all its adverse consequences. It is a pity that the Agricultural Development Bank has, so far, ignored the suggestions contained in this book.

Despite Prof. Dantwala's comment in the foreword, '.... true there is nothing startlingly new in the thesis' the book will be of interest to the students of agricultural economics and persons involved in agricultural development.

Sriram Poudyal

The Road to Nowhere: A Selection of Writings 1966 -
1977. 1979. Kamal P. Malla. 255 pages. The Sajha
Publications. Nepal. Rs. 26.50/-

All the roads seem lately to lead to Kathmandu. In 1971 a British book came out entitled Road to Kathmandu (Macmillan). A certain French film company made a movie called "Road to Kathmandu". A fleet of buses carrying overland tourists arrives in this capital city from Europe each fall and the company which runs them is christened Kathmandu, Inc., N.Y. A group of young Japanese pop singers and musicians performed recently at the Dashrath Stadium; one of their songs was about coming together with, and belonging to Kathmandu.

But, once in Kathmandu, the road seems to come to a sudden end. Kathmandu is the end of all roads. It is the end specially for those who live here, the locals, the Nepalis. For them there is no Buddha, butterflies and hashish in Kathmandu, nor a levitating Dalai Lama. Kathmandu is most certainly not where the sun rises. For them there is (but) only the frustration and boredom of living in a country where everything fails. An elitist Nepal's psyche is wounded by his share of guilt in this general failure. The Road to Nowhere sums up Malla's guilt, his personal comments about and involvement with the system. The collection of writings represents his impatience with the modern institutions of Nepal. Some of the writings are of interest as specimens of rare confession coming from the inside.

The Road to Nowhere is a collection of 20 articles written over the period of a decade between 1966 and 1977. Written in different genres, they cover a wide range of interests - educational planning, university, teaching, linguistics, personalities, journalism, autobiography, culture, the intelligentsia, literature, and book reviews. The 'marginal commentaries' (author's Prepace) go deeper; they become the voice of disenchantment of a present-day Nepali with the intellectual history of modern Nepal as it evolved through such post-1950 institutions as the Royal Nepal Academy, Tribhuvan University, the Rising Nepal, the National Education System Plan, the intelligentsia and several personalities.

Although written at different times, Malla's critical sense gives the collection a semblance of unity. Malla assumes throughout these articles the role of an 'intellectual', an intellectual of his own fashioning, the assessing-evaluating intellectual. He becomes his own here, the proto-elite, the representative of an 'articulate class of intellectuals who are willing to fill in the critical-evaluative role' (p. 199). The creator is bent on fulfilling his own prophecy, in a society like ours, the excruciating function, the raison d'etre of intellectuals seems to be 'to tell truth to power' (p.234). Malla fulfills that role with courage, insight, and incisiveness.

In "Kathmandu Your Kathmandu" (pp. 211-222) Malla says 'somewhere between the municipal area of Kathmandu and its adjoining outskirts lies the fatal border between the purity of man before the fall and his depravity since he ate the forbidden fruit.' This in a sense defines the

world the critical-evaluator himself inhabits. It is his vantage point - the fatal border that lies between the erstwhile bathrooms and present-day university classrooms, between the "Communications for Development" loudly proclaimed by the Rising Nepal and the realities that cause the sinking breaths of the Thakali woman, between the "Education for Development" and the mock entrance and qualifying examinations of Tribhuvan University, between the sacred societies of men of letters that a usual academy is and the sordid mausoleum where petrified mediocrity reigns as in the Royal Nepal Academy.

Split thus between the sacred and the sordid, Malla is an idealist whose idealism is doomed to failure. His search, 'the nomadic forays' as he calls it in the Preface, leads him nowhere; the pattern of dream and disenchantment thus takes another toll. The search for character is one motif that runs throughout the body of this collection. The search, characterized by passion, bitterness, satire, humour and cynicism, becomes essentially a search for identity of the modern Nepali amidst the vagaries of a nation in transition.

Tribhuvan University, that massive educational institution of present-day Nepal, is the beginning of the end, the beginning of the road to nowhere. Malla started teaching the same year as the university was founded (1959). He joined the Faculty of English soon after and became a Professor and later a Rector. The very first question that occurs to him is : 'what kind of university is it going to be?' (p.10). The articles on the vicissitudes of the university reflect Malla's concern with a moral question, viz., whether Tribhuvan University has or will

develop a 'distinct image of its own' (p.11) in reference to the concept of a university that has a character, or an environment, like the British universities, for example, which 'are not characterless institutions' (p.5), where even the hall of residence has a character (p. 254), and unlike the L.S. College of India, 'a physically hostile environment where there was nothing aesthetically stimulating' (p. 250). Malla is haunted by the idea of character; he would passionately like Tribhuvan University to have a character much in the same way as the Prince in Henry James' The Golden Gowl wished for his wife to have it; 'He expected her, desired her, to have a character, his wife should have it, and he wasn't afraid of her having too much'. But Tribhuvan University turns out to be a characterless institution; the faculty a 'shifting crowd', and marked distinctly by 'amorphous characterlessness' (p. 12). More recently, the University with its 78 campuses presents only a 'substandard educational environment' (p. 95), an 'environment fit only for breeding substandard citizens' (p. 96), where 'teaching is maily a means of livelihood rather than a way of life' (p. 194).

It is not just the university system which has failed. All other institutions of modern Nepal evolved over these three decades have also failed in the same way.

The National Education System Plan that evolved in the seventies, of which Mall was an insider if not one of architects, comes equally under his attack. He calls it 'Krushev's proverbial troika' (p. 69), and 'the most institutionalized of illogic' (p. 69). One notices a certain staleness of imagery when Malla calls education in Nepal 'something like Frankenstein's mechanical monster' (p.68),

but the critique is all pervasive, 'our educational establishment is a malicious form of cancer with which our body-politic is increasingly threatened' (p. 70). Notice also the clinical angle which is habitual to Malla's critical sense.

The Royal Nepal Academy is another milestone in the journey down the road to nowhere. Malla's sketch of the Academy, in spite of its initial hint of a visit to the mausoleum, actually has the tempo of Gulliver's voyage to Laputa. The present-day great Academy of Projectors in Lagado replaces its mathematics of calculations by the confusion over 'wild projects' (p. 61), member-projectors groping 'in the dark labyrinth of its sub-committees, the endless strings of their meetins'(p. 63). The very first encounter with the structure of the Academy building reminds the author of quadrangular bathrooms - the remnant of scatology from Gulliver's accident at the palace in Lilliput..

Equally, the Rising Nepal, the big national daily, lacks not only a character of its own; it also reflects our own lack of character by shamelessly exhibiting that 'we do not know where to break an English word and yet continue to run a daily' (p. 19). There are two apocalyptic moments in this short review of the three years in the life of the Rising Nepal. The first occurs when the author violently juxtaposes the experience of reading the Rising Nepal and of watching the wrinkled breasts of a Thakali woman (p. 18). The second happens when the only big English daily is proclaimed as the institutionalizer of 'Jyapu English' (p. 20).

In Nepal, there is no middle class, and much less a thinking middle class. In this sense, Malla is right when he presents his anatomy of the 'intellectuals' of Nepal as 'a class of white-collared proletariat who work, not for wages, but for salaries of different scales' (p. 199). The bare subsistence-level salary the civil servant receives is not meant for turning him into a thinking animal but for keeping him from starving, busy all his life putting him hand to his mouth. The rise of the middle class in Nepal is only a myth; it is only the rise of individuals who have betrayed the nation, of those who chose to 'make themselves' in the inevitable choice between 'making themselves' and 'remaking society', Malla's assessment of the intelligentsia of Nepal as lacking in 'character and distinction, integrity and effort' (p. 204) is deep and soul-searching.

Finally, Malla comes to ask in "The Cultural Identity of Nepal" (pp. 223-235) the most relevant and the final question: What does being a Nepali mean? However, the author fails to come up with any answer. The attempted answer loses itself in the rhetoric of history and culture.

One also starts to notice that not only the answers but also the questions gradually lose themselves. There seems to be an end to the seeking, to the travelling of the road and the end is pathetic. I think this happens in "Nepal: A Resume" (pp. 236-242) significantly, the last to be written in the collection (1977). In this short resume, the questioning spirit, the 'holy curiosity' seems to have come to an end; the quest dissipates into a meek compromise with the eating of the apple. While Malla could still manage to laugh at 'the beatitude of an

exploitationless state' (p. 204) in "The Intellectuals in Nepalese Society" (1970), he ends this resume with a ritualistic bravado on the theme of the release of 'the mainspring of development'. This essay seems rightly to mark what the author calls 'the end of the nomadic phase in the author's life' (Preface).

One may agree or disagree with Malla's assessment of the post-1950 institutions and people of Nepal. Malla's assessment is devastating, at times unscrupulous, such as in his comment on Verma's personal patience with earning for himself three degrees of Master of Arts. It is rare for our people or intellectuals to speak out, rarer for those within the institutions themselves to do so. However, Malla's detached critical sense has the effect at times of sounding too clinically remote. It feels as if the author enjoys as aesthetics the act of making statements, of piling pronouncement upon pronouncement, all chiselled and hammered to their utmost perfection. It is one thing, indeed aesthetically quite satisfying, to stand outside and condemn the system. It is quite another to justify the ethics of the act. The crucial problem that arises then is: how does one reconcile the ethics and the aesthetics of such an act in the context of Nepal? Does the scholar-aesthete eschew all his moral responsibilities by becoming merely a distant observer, isolating or even alienating himself from the duties for which he may be held accountable? Does an intellectual Nepali's role in Nepal end as soon as the critical perspective is achieved? At the same time, one feels strongly sympathetic towards the criticisms that Malla brings to bear upon the crucial issues in the national development. Malla uses the English language as a tool for incision

into the nation's arteries with remarkable mastery of precision. The medium suits the stance - the language which is neither Newari, the mother tongue, nor Nepali, the national language, but English, the language of the outsider, the profit of which lies in that one knows 'how to curse'.

Ramesh Shrestha

BOOK REVIEW

Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom. 1980. Leo. E. Rose and John T. Scholz. 144 pages. Westview Press. Nations of Contemporary Asia. Boulder, Colorado. Price(?).

This is the latest book on Nepal by Leo E. Rose - a well-known scholar and an authority on contemporary Nepal's politics - jointly written with John T. Scholz, a relatively new scholar, also of political science. It is a thin volume consisting of 144 pages and produced under a series called Nations of Contemporary Asia (ed. Mervyn Adams Seldon). The book offers a generalised reading focussing on the politics of Nepal with its two concomitant subjects, economy and foreign policy, in the post 1951 period mainly. The narrative is smooth and unencumbered by the usual footnotes and reference-citings met in specialised works. The broad accounts are rendered with little ambivalence or uncertainty in writing. Such a style is born of necessity perhaps, as the present series is addressed to a wide range of international audience. The authors think that despite its general treatment of the subject matter, the synthesis of material it represents might enable the specialists as well to formulate many 'working hypotheses from a more comprehensive perspective' in their own studies on Nepal.

The book is divided into five compact chapters devoted to study environment, history, political system, society, economy and international relations of Nepal. The chapter on Environment and History provides a historical setting to the main study concerned essentially

with the present. The book does not derive any new conclusions differing from the authors' own conclusions arrived at earlier in their previous works. For other source material it seems to draw from certain sources more heavily than from others, in which the works of Lionel Caplan, Frederick Gaige and Mahesh Regmi are prominent. However, the final narrative is a lucid account of the slow and entangled political process evolving in Nepal from 1951 onwards.

The historical background records the main political events conditioning some of the characteristic features of the Nepali court politics in the pre-1951 days. The Rana rule has been evaluated afresh. It is said to have brought stability to Nepali politics and achieved greater administrative consolidation through increased centralisation and expansion of administration in the outlying regions. Furthermore, the responses of the Rana rule to pressures from external power (mainly from the British-Indian government) had been guided by nationalistic interest; this becomes validated by the fact that Nepal could retain its national independence and sovereignty until the very end of British colonial history in South Asia.

Occasionally, some generalisations in this chapter as well as in others appear far-fetched. An example of it perhaps is to try to trace the history of some of the minority ethnic groups to the Licchavi period (5th - 8th A.D.). This is historically doubtful. If the migration of the Sherpas to their traditional habitat in the Solukhumbu region of Nepal may be any guide, this Tibetan group living in the north of Nepal obviously arrived there only

four hundred years ago (cf. Michael Oppitz's Geschichte Und Sozialordnung Der Sherpa, Universitätsverlag Wagner, Innsbruck-München, 1968). An early speculative history of certain Tibeto-Burman speaking groups in the Himalayan region cannot give ample ground for assuming a definite historicity for the present-day tribes in their specific settings. The section on the history and culture preceding the Gorkha conquest also gives an impression of being hastily rounded-off making errors even in some historical dates (for example, the dates of the commencement of the Malla rule and Jayasthitimalla are wrong. pp. 12-13).

The second chapter is a study of the political situation after the fall of the Rana rule in 1951. The political changeover of 1951, popularly called 'the revolution of 1951' in Nepal, has been redefined as representing 'the beginning of a long, gradual and continuing search for viable institutions and processes that meet national requirements'. The twists and turns of the events together with the account of the roles played by the main participants in Nepal's political drama are recounted well. The pervasive influence of traditional values in the society is said to be responsible for Nepal's continued adherence to the old political culture and also for spurning by it of the concepts of a popular rule and a representative form of government. All hopes for a gradual political transition were dashed to the ground in the early fifties. The political parties were faction-ridden and the leadership was weak. On the other hand, monarchy was getting assertive and trying to enlarge its role in Nepalese politics. In the ensuing struggle between the two sides monarchy finally succeeded in outmanoeuvring them all. The Panchayat system introduced by

the royal ménage in 1960 has far from freed Nepal from its political problems, however. Its problems have stemmed from its own inner contradictions and constant pressures from the banned political opposition for liberalising the system. The journal of political developments in the book comes right down to the time just before the holding of Nepal's first ever referendum in April 1980. The closing of the chapter is rather abrupt and carries no clear prognostications for the future.

Political culture in the Nepalese society forms the subject of discussion in the third chapter of the book. Although it is a synthesis of previous researches, its interpretation of the material is novel. It approaches the subject by analysing the pattern of relationship existing between various groups and by discussing the politically and socially dominant sections among them. A sense of strong ethnic identity is said to be one of the abiding social characteristics of the people of Nepal. Nepal is a predominantly Hindu Society in a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic setting. Social interaction is based mainly on the notions of caste hierarchy. There is yet another mode of relationship, that is the authority relationship. Under this relationship, an individual enjoys an amount of authority through his landholding. Nepal's social stratification under this relationship alone might make it resemble with other stratified society of the pre-industrial times, but its social hierarchy based on ritual purity makes this social phenomenon of social relationship appear complicated. These two modes of relationships, however, do not oppose each other, as it might appear to be the case on the surface. On the contrary, they invariably coalesce in favour of certain

groups, who, thus, are able to maintain their higher social and political status. The widely prevalent chākari system for entering jobs and winning larger favours in the Nepali social life, even today, is said to reflect the continuing social behaviour first developed in Nepal's agrarian setting. Under it, mutually obligating bonds were laid down between a patron (landowner) and his client (tenant). The whole political pyramid of Nepal is said to be formed of such successive patron-client bonds from the base to the apex. It is said that authority relationship at times may be seen undercutting ritual status of caste, but this happens only at intermediate levels. Hindu social predominance at the national level makes even non-caste societies to emulate the social modes of high castes and thus sanskritise themselves in varying degrees to ascend higher in national hierarchy.

The study of the Nepali society presented is not so much an exposition of its cultural systems as it is to identify the elite groups of Nepal in the centre and periphery. This approach to the subject somewhat reminds me of a remark made by a sociologist about another in a book: '(his) social system is mainly a political system and his political system is largely concerned with elite members'. However, the various members of 'elites' described in the chapter appear to need clearer definitions. No Nepalese equivalents are given to explain the concrete social or political categories these elites might be referring to. In this sense, the social commentary becomes somewhat vague.

As a tiny country sandwiched between Asia's two

giant nations, India and China, the problem of political integration and national independence has always been one of greatest concerns for Nepal. Its response to it in modern times has been through reinforcement of the Hindu political ethos and, culturally, through the vigorous promotion of one-language policy even more. In a multi-ethnic society such a policy can be interpreted to be intolerant of the languages and cultures of the smaller groups. The notion of cultural pluralism is rejected for building up of a more monolithic social milieu. Such a society would probably be similar to Kornhauser's description of a 'mass society', which he describes as being 'vulnerable to political movements, destructive to liberal democratic institutions'. Is it such an attitude which is resisting the growth of democracy in Nepal? One would have wished the authors to discuss this question along with the social psychology of the ruling elites relating to the actual political process.

Studies done on the politics of Nepal create a wide interest among Nepali readers in general, especially when they are written by a team of Berkeley scholars. The broad perspectives which the present book brings to bear on Nepal will enable the readers to grasp the essential political features of this Himalayan Kingdom in a better manner without being forced to take sides on any controversy.

Prayag Raj Sharma