

## REVIEW ARTICLE

*Three Decades and Two Kings (1960 - 1990): Eclipse of Nepal's Partyless Monarchic Rule.* 1990. Rishikesh Shaha. Sterling Publishers, New Delhi. Pages v + 128. Price IRs. 150.

*Politics in Nepal 1980 - 1991: Referendum, Stalemate and Triumph of People Power.* Third revised edition, 1993. Rishikesh Shaha. Manohar Publishers, Delhi. Pages xiv + 344. Price IRs. 320.

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### Panchayat's Three Decades

The first book under review here is a collection of Shaha's various essays organized in four chapters. In the first chapter, which runs for 46 pages (thus constituting half of the main text excluding the appendix), he provides a broad historical overview of the three decades (1960 - 1990) of Panchayat rule in Nepal. Those readers who are familiar with the pathology of Panchayat's thirty years will find very little that is new here. Prefaced by a brief discussion of the various political experiments of the 1950s, Shaha says that after the Royal takeover of 1960 (when Nepal's first experiment with democracy met an unceremonious end), King Mahendra devised the panchayat system "in an attempt to create a simulation of democratic administration" (p. 5). But what was often described as a 'tiered democracy' was actually a system in which the "actual number of votes that could theoretically send a candidate up through the system to a seat in the Rastriya Panchayat was ludicrously small by the standards of representative democracy as understood elsewhere" (p. 5). Political parties were not allowed to function because they were thought to be inherently divisive, faction-oriented and incapable of playing "an integrative role in the Nepali context" (p. 6). Various measures adopted by King Mahendra to promote national unity and integration and to expand Nepal's foreign relations are mentioned briefly.

In 1972, King Birendra succeeded his father who died of a heart attack and the first four years of his rule were "characterised by a perceptible rise in acts of both governmental and popular violence accompanied by waves of unrest among students and peasants" (p. 10). These incidents are mentioned but

briefly. Nevertheless he writes that they provided the "immediate background to the 1975 second amendment to the constitution of Nepal" (p. 10), which in its main body, incorporated the role and functions of the Back-to-the-Village National Campaign (BVNC). Shaha writes that the machinery and operational procedures of BVNC "resembled those of a political party" (p. 17), in this case, the King's Party. The BVNC contained a "scheme for evaluation of the worth of social workers as a means of making the people realise that the criterion of acting as popular representatives in future would be their actual contribution to the success of development programmes for their region of locality" (p. 16-17). As another official organ aimed at promoting popular participation, Shaha writes that the BVNC was "foredoomed to failure" because that task "could be secured only with the help of non-official and purely people-oriented agencies" (p. 17). The second amendment to the constitution also made provision for a Commission for the Prevention of the Abuse of Power (CPAP) which although "it looked like the institution of the ombudsman in some democratic states" was in reality a watchdog committee for the King "to check whether the people in various elective and appointive positions were acting in a manner prejudicial to the accepted practice and tradition of the monarch's rule by peremptory command" (p. 18).

The BVNC became one of the first victims of the 1979 popular agitation led by the students. As the situation worsened, King Birendra announced (on 24 May 1979) a referendum in which he said "all eligible citizens will be asked to vote on one of two choices: whether we should retain the present panchayat system with suitable reforms or whether we should set up a multiparty system of government" (quoted in p. 19). But Shaha states that the elaboration contained in King Birendra's message of 16 December 1979 substantially modified the choice offered originally. Irrespective of the results, the King specified that the members to the legislature would be elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage, the legislature would recommend the appointment of the Prime Minister, and the cabinet would be responsible to the legislature.

As is well known, the results of the referendum which was held on 2 May 1980 were in favour of the "reformed" panchayat system (with about 55% of valid votes for it as opposed to 45% for the multiparty system). The small "victory" margin looks even less impressive when you consider, as Shaha does, the fact that the voting age was not reduced to 18 from 21 as was popularly demanded. Thus many of this age group (18-20) who had played a role in the student movement that brought about the referendum "were debarred by the electoral law from being enrolled as voters" (p. 22). In its effort to ensure that victory, the Panchayat government of Surya Bahadur

Thapa forgot about the "serious economic crisis facing the nation" (p. 23). Shaha identifies the following as the consequences of this neglect: the undeclared planned holiday for the fiscal year 1980-81, unbridled inflation, the worsening unfavourable balance of trade, and loss of self-sufficiency in food production. On the other hand, corruption was placed "on the high pedestal of a 'new value' of national life and culture" (p. 23).

The third amendment to the constitution of Nepal which was announced later that year maintained the King's "authority to rule by peremptory command," made room for a parliamentary form as mere "window-dressing," continued the ban on political parties, and denied, as before, the people of Nepal "the right to freedom of association" (p. 26-30). Even the independence of organisations with a non-political agenda was severely circumscribed by the requirement that they operate under the wings of the Social Services National Coordination Council (SSNCC) headed by Queen Aishwarya. While ostensibly the SSNCC aimed to coordinate the welfare activities of various social organizations, its "rigid control mechanisms" squashed the "promotion of broad-based, effective assistance programmes for the needy" (p. 32).<sup>1</sup>

Shaha then makes brief comments on the 1981 and 1986 elections (readers will find separate chapter-length discussions on these elections in Shaha's other book under review here) and looks at the "reformed panchayat legislature at work" (p. 34 - 38). In a brief section on economic development, he writes that "[a] basic needs strategy is inherently revolutionary" and argues that "freedom of association or organisation is a *sine qua non* of development" where "[g]enuine involvement by the people in decision-making through organisations of their own choice" can happen. He concludes this chapter with a short description of the 1985 bombings in Nepal and a note on the establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which, despite its shortcomings at present, is "but a necessary means to the ultimate realisation of the ideal of regional cooperation in the real sense" (p. 45).

The second chapter is a brief evaluation of Nepal's economy over the three decades of Panchayat rule. It begins by stating what is generally known: "the partyless panchayat system has failed to use efficiently the human and material resources available for Nepal's economic development" (p. 47). Shah then goes on to retell, based on various published reports, the many dismal records of the regime with respect to the economy Nepal is the only South Asian country with an average negative growth between 1960 and 1982. It has a per capita income of mere U.S. \$150 in 1986, a highly skewed pattern of income distribution in favour of the rich, a Kathmandu-centric growth of public utilities and services, decline in foodgrain production per

capita, and more generally, the negative results of investment in agricultural development. The failure of land-reform measures, burgeoning trade and budget deficits and foreign debt, and "unproductive expenditure on the overblown army and police force" all contribute to a future scenario that is truly dismal even in the South Asian context. The 34-page appendix found in this book – the "White Paper on the State of the Economy in Nepal" – brought out on 25 May 1990 by the Finance Minister of the Interim Government, Mr. Devendra Raj Pandey provides further details.

The third chapter contains reprints of five of Shaha's short essays published previously in various Indian newspapers during the 1980s on different aspects of Nepal-India relations. The first two were written during the trade imbroglio of 1989-1990 when in the absence of any valid trade and transit treaties between India and Nepal, the former closed most of the transit routes into the latter, thereby causing inordinate hardships to the common people of Nepal. In the first piece reprinted here from *The Statesman* of 30 August 1989, Shaha berates Panchayati rulers for putting all the blame for the trade impasse, including for their own failures, on India, and for using it "as a shield against the internal pressure which has been slowly and steadily building up for greater democracy and human rights in Nepal" (p. 61). In the second essay (reprinted from *The Indian Express* of 24 June 1989), he states that as a landlocked country Nepal is "quite justified in asking for two separate treaties of trade and transit" (p. 62). He writes that the delay in signing the concerned treaties shows that "there is a lack of basic political understanding and credibility between the two Governments" (p. 63) and blames the Nepali authorities for trying to bring international pressure on India when quiet diplomacy was the need of the hour.

The third essay is reprinted from *The Times of India* of 3 September 1986. Shaha writes that concrete terms of understanding between the two countries can only be worked out in bilateral treaties. However, King Birendra's proposal that Nepal be declared a zone of peace had received enough international support for it to become such a prestige issue for Nepal that it was in the interest of India to make "some sort of brief declaration supporting Nepal's peace zone proposal in principal without prejudice to the existing understanding and treaty on cooperation in respect of mutual security and development" (p. 67). He also argues that "in view of nascent Nepali nationalism and the pattern of international economic cooperation brought about by the worldwide technological revolution" and much else that has happened since its signing, the two governments should review the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship and do what is required "to ensure everlasting peace and friendship" (p. 67-70). In the remaining two essays, written in 1984 and 1981 respectively, Shaha argues, among other things, for the

lessening of mutual fear and suspicion, a frank appraisal of "the entire gamut of bilateral relations" (p. 77), and greater cooperation between the two countries in the economic sphere.

The fourth and last chapter is about monarchy in Nepal. Brief sections devoted to "King Mahendra's political innovations" and "kingship in vedic and sanskrit literature" are followed by a discussion of the movement that put an end to the "tradition of rule by peremptory command" and restored "democracy and human rights" in Nepal (readers should again note that this subject is covered in more detail in the second book). Talking about the future of the monarchy in Nepal, Shaha writes that it is in its permanent interest to recognize that in democracy sovereignty resides in the people. Shaha adds that if King Birendra "endorses his grandfather's solemn commitment to the people in some form or the other and endeavours sincerely to fulfill it, Nepal may have stable and ordered progress as a nation" (p. 92).

Overall, it must be noted that what Shaha has to say in chapters one and four are repeated at greater length in his second book under review here. Therefore, the only reason one might want to read this book is to learn Shaha's views on Panchayat's economic performance (an analysis which is derivative) and on matters related to Nepal-India relations (a chapter of reprints). While those new to Nepal studies might benefit from this book, old hands will find it difficult to justify buying it.

### **The Transition to Multiparty Democracy**

The first edition of the second book under review here was published as *Essays in the Practice of Government in Nepal* in 1982. The then Panchayat government headed by Surya Bahadur Thapa arbitrarily confiscated about 200 copies of it after some copies had been sold in the book market of Kathmandu. In that incarnation, this book contained a total of nine essays. Two of these essays that dealt with pre-Rana politics and Jung Bahadur were omitted in the second revised edition published in 1990 as *Politics in Nepal 1980-1990* with the same subtitle as the third edition under review here. In addition, the opening essay, entitled "Elitism in Nepali Politics" was shortened, deleting Shaha's discussion of elitism in modern political and social theory, and appeared as "Monarchy in Nepal" in the second edition. This and the following essay "Patrimonial Elites of Nepal" provided a historical background to the subsequent nine essays, four of which were new, of the second edition. In the main, these essays charted the decade of Panchayat politics between the Referendum of 1980 and its demise in 1990.

The third revised edition contains all of the eleven essays of the second and three new ones. It also contains a brief epilogue, and as appendices, the texts

of the three separate Treaty of Transit, Treaty of Trade, and Agreement of Co-operation between HMG of Nepal and the Government of India to control unauthorized trade signed between the two countries on December 6, 1991.

I will not review the essays reprinted from the second edition for two reasons. First because they are well-known. Second, because their main thrust has already been covered in chapter one – which I have summarized above at some length – of the first book. They recount, in somewhat greater detail, the events leading up to the 1980 referendum and its aftermath, the third amendment to the Panchayat Constitution, the 1981 and the 1986 elections to the Rastriya Panchayat, and Panchayati politics during the second half of the 1980s. They also describe King Birendra's efforts to declare Nepal as a Zone of Peace, the human rights situation in Nepal during the old regime and the movement that led to the restoration of multi-party democracy in the country. I will return to this last essay in the concluding section of this review.

The first of the three new essays of the third edition charts out the political life of the Interim Coalition Government (April 1990-May 1991) consisting of representatives of the Nepali Congress and United Left Front and headed by Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Shaha credits this government for having successfully carried out the three fundamental tasks assigned to it: "(1) the restoration of the status quo ante to 1 April 1987 with regard to trade and transit facilities through negotiations with India, (2) the promulgation of a constitution guaranteeing fundamental rights of freedom and the rule of law, parliamentary form of government, constitutional monarchy and independence of the judiciary, and (3) the holding of elections by the end of mid-May 1991 at the latest" (p. 228).

As far as the first task is concerned, Shaha credits Mr. Bhattarai's visit to India at the invitation of the then Indian Prime Minister Mr. V. P. Singh in June 1990 for having immediately set the relationship that had gone sour over trade and transit issues back on the proper track he says that the joint communique issued at the end of this visit was "more than a routine formality for several reasons" (p. 229). For one thing, in terms of trade and transit facilities, it became the basis to restore the status quo ante to 1 April 1987. The subsequent visit of Mr. Chandra Shekhar to Nepal in February 1991 in his capacity as the Prime Minister of India and the high-level task force set up to explore "comprehensive economic relationship on a mutually advantageous basis" (p. 231) have, according to Shaha, set up the relationship in terms more favourable to Nepal than before.

Shaha then narrates the various *tamashas* leading up to the promulgation of the new constitution on 9 November 1990 and then proceeds to analyse the document. Using as his examples the ambiguity involved in issues such

as the King's power to revoke the constitution and declare a state of emergency, Shaha declares that the document is "a good constitution that could be better." Further examples given include what appear as restrictions to rights to equality, freedom and press, religion and right against preventive detention. As the position of the Hindu King is safeguarded elsewhere in the constitution, Shaha says that there was no reason for calling Nepal a Hindu state in part one. This, he says, not only has "the effect of rubbing religious minorities the wrong way," but also "militates against the principle and practice of separation of Religion and the State" (p. 242).

Shaha also has a short section on what he calls "discrimination against sex." Here he only raises the citizenship issue whereby children of male citizens of Nepal are Nepali citizens by descent whereas children of female citizens can only claim this status after 15 years of residence in Nepal. Shaha makes no comment on the fact that the Constitution Recommendations Commission consisting of nine members did not include a single woman. Nor does he mention how even as the Constitution states that "the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of sex" (p. 240), it paid *no* attention to concerns regarding equal inheritance to family property for men and women, raised from various quarters while the document was being prepared. Moreover, Shaha does not mention the fact that during public deliberations prior to the writing of this important document, certain sections of the Nepali political spectrum has questioned the process itself and called for the election of a constitution assembly that would be responsible for framing the constitution.

In the final section of this essay, Shaha gives a brief account of the parliamentary election of 12 May 1991 and tabulates the performance of the various parties. In talking about the deficiencies in the conduct of the elections, he praises the work of the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal (with which he is associated) for having properly raised issues regarding voters lists and code of conduct of political parties. Commenting on the elections, Shaha says they were fought on "vague notions attributed to the two mainstream parties by their adversaries." While the Congress represented the Communists as "the party of atheists and godless persons drawing their inspiration from foreign countries," the Communists reciprocated by projecting the Congress "as the party favoured by the Indians and the Americans and likely to surrender the country's independence and sovereignty to them" (p. 248). Shaha does not say a word about how *both* parties made unreal development promises to their voters, and certainly there is no reason to excuse such practice as "natural" – as some other analysts tend to do – to the rhetorical exigencies of electoral politics in a democracy. Finally, he says that the trend towards the evolution of the two party system as evidenced in

the 1991 elections "must be regarded as healthy and satisfactory...from the point of view of the growth and stability of the democratic system" (p.248). Why this is necessarily the case is not spelt out.

In the second new essay entitled "Formation of the Post-election Government" the author tells his readers that it is too early "to assess objectively the performance of the post-election government and parliament" and thus he has just reproduced some "skeletal information about them and their activities, as furnished by Mr. Mahesh Chandra Regmi's Weekly Nepal Digest" (p. 249). True to his word, the whole chapter is a boring list of names of cabinet ministers and national assembly members, a long quote from King Birendra's July 1 1991 address to the joint session of the House of Representatives and the National Assembly, and extracts from editorial comments on the speech by various Nepali newspapers. The issue of the language problem raised when some members of the Assembly and the House chose to speak in Hindi is mentioned without much analysis or commentary from Shaha. Some of the highlights of the budget presented to the Parliament on July 11, 1991, are given with a comment that the budget for 1991-92 shows a "remarkable increase in expenditure on the army and the police" (p. 260) as compared with the budget of the previous fiscal year presented by the Bhattarai-led government.

In the last chapter Shaha briefly describes the outcome of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's trip to India in early December, 1991. Signing of the memorandum of understanding between the governments of Nepal and India for setting up the B. P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation is taken by Shaha to be a "fitting recognition of the valuable services rendered by him [B. P.] to the cause of democracy in both the countries" (p. 261). In terms of other achievements of the visit, it is mentioned that separate treaties for trade (for five years) and transit (for seven years) were signed. Assurances given by Koirala to those interested in private investment and joint ventures in Nepal, and his willingness to engage in "major multipurpose water-resource development projects on the basis of bilateral cooperation" (p. 263) are mentioned. Reference is also made to the criticism by Koirala's adversaries regarding the statement that "there would be no arms purchase from China in the future" (p. 263). The texts of the joint press statement, the memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of agriculture, and the memorandum regarding the B. P. Foundation are given.<sup>2</sup> A brief note on the 1991 SAARC Summit held in Colombo and another one on major cabinet reshuffles in Nepal are also included.

Open differences between Koirala and the Congress Supreme Leader Ganesh Man Singh regarding ambassadorial and other appointments and the subsequent peacemaking role played by Nepali Congress President Bhattarai

are also mentioned. Shaha does not tell us his own opinion on this issue. He could have asked for instance, if Mr. Singh was justified in raising the "favouritism and nepotism" (p. 276) issue with respect to the appointments. Or more generally, what are the criteria by which such appointments are supposed to be made? To this reviewer's knowledge, Mr. Singh never openly discussed such criteria himself and engaged in Koirala-bashing from a platform which simply proclaimed "my men were not selected by Girija"! In the absence of publicly declared criteria, the process of appointments under multi-party democracy did not look one bit different than those of the much maligned Panchayat era.

As these three new essays were written before the Congress session in Jhapa in early 1992 and before Tanakpur became a hot issue, I cannot blame Shaha for not analysing these as significant political events in Nepal during 1992 (see p. 277-8 for some of his speculation regarding the Jhapa congress). Written immediately after the major events of 1990-91, his new essays seem to meet the publisher's desire to have an updated "blow by blow" account of the transition to democracy in Nepal, rather than present us with a sustained analysis of the process. While some important questions are raised in the first new essay regarding the constitution, the other two leave a lot to be desired. As they stand now, these essays are generally disappointing, and those who own the second edition of the book will not find much reason to buy this third edition.

Now some comments on Shaha's earlier essay on the "Movement for the Restoration of Democracy" reprinted from the second edition. Shaha writes that on 6 April 1990 – "the climatic day of the protest movement" – "The Kathmandu valley people were on the move, the inhabitants of Kirtipur amongst the most militant, *seeking to avenge the amputation of noses 225 years ago by the King's forefather* (p. 207-8; emphasis added). It is unclear to me on what basis Shaha imputes such intentionality to the protesters from Kirtipur. Interviews with these protesters might provide us with clues to make such a claim but such a method of inquiry is not Shaha's forte. It is worth asking if and how Prithvinarayan Shaha's atrocities are preserved in the public memory of the inhabitants of Kirtipur, and if it had any influence on the positive agenda of protest participants from Kirtipur on that day of April 1990.

The second point is related to the time when Patan was under siege (the last days of March 1990). Shaha writes, "men of Patan sent to men of Kathmandu a quantity of women's bangles and of tassels for the ends of women's braided hair with the insulting implication that Kathmandu men had lost their manhood" (p. 203). No further comments on this act are forthcoming from the author. To this reviewer it seems that even in the

climatic moments of political protest, gender oppression remained *outside* the agenda of protest. The above act, supposedly perpetrated to insult the inactivity of Kathmandu's men protesters, is insulting to *all* women of Nepal. If some three years after the end of the old regime we wonder why the culture of elite politics has not made much difference to many forms of oppression in our country, it might be worth our while to ponder further on how supposed revolutions leave old forms of skewed power relationships intact or remold them in new patterns.

The third point is related to the violence reported from various parts of the country during the last days of April, 1990, immediately after the installation of Bhattarai's interim government. Shaha writes how in Kathmandu "some vigilante groups rounded up and held captive people whom they considered to be acting suspiciously, and next morning 'excited mobs' attacked these 'people's prisoners'" (p.220). At least five persons were beaten to death and some of their bodies were taken around the city on a push cart in what this reviewer can only interpret as a macabre celebration of "people's power." In addition, Shaha mentions (relying on RSS reports) that six bodies of "policemen" were found in Teku, apparently victims of a mob that thought that they were "thugs disguised as police" (p. 221). Other incidences of public lynching are also mentioned by Shaha, but he does not suggest how we might interpret such crowd behaviour.

The fact of the matter is that several individuals suspected of being "thugs" were taken around the city of Kathmandu for many hours and lynched in daylight. While many watched, nobody intervened to save their lives. To me it is significant that no analyst thus far has examined these lynchings for their significance both for the political culture of democracy in Nepal, and more generally, for a social theory of violence in Nepal. What is it that allows people to be murdered in such a way? Why is it that such violence was tolerated by the same people who had only recently brought an end to a supposedly ruthless system? How is it that no one has been held accountable for these killings, just as no one has been punished for the murders perpetrated under the old regime? What is the relationship between such violence and the "criminalization of politics" that one hears a lot about for the case of South Asia? Do these killings constitute an aberration or are they evidence of deeply embedded violent tendencies in our society? Three years after these lynchings, when more than half a dozen separate incidences of security forces firing on public protest gatherings (resulting in the death of several dozen people) have been recorded, it might not be out of place to ask if the memory of these lynchings informs how our police forces react to mob situations today. Could it be that they consider being encircled by a mob as the end of their lives and therefore resort to firing? I think these questions

deserve more attention than they have thus far received.<sup>3</sup>

Also we might want to ask if democracy has "come" to the families of those lynched in the streets of the capital of the country? In a related context, Amrit Srinivasan has written: "It was in the production of a new kind of evidence, whose documentation would compensate for the unexplained 'residues' of rational history-writing, that the survivor proved crucial. As an ordinary member of society speaking from private memory and experience, the survivor furthermore provided a corrective to the understanding of history as an exclusively specialist activity." (1990: 307) Thus, talking to the families – the survivors of public lynching – might teach us a thing or two about our intellectual unwillingness and inability to understand violence. Moreover, as Srinivasan has written, it "is from the epistemological space that the survivor occupies that we can perhaps interrogate the exact nature of the relation between society and state" (1990:320).<sup>4</sup>

Finally I want to raise an issue regarding the field of analysis that political science writings in Nepal encompass using Shaha's above books as examples. It would be fair to say that Shaha, while writing within the traditional turf of political science or history (see Shaha 1990), has always chosen to write about elite politics as the only legitimate subject of his inquiry. For him, political and historical writing means talking about the politics of those in power or those knocking in the doors of power (either legitimate or banned oppositions depending on which era of Nepali history he is talking about) at Kathmandu. In all of his works, Shaha equates the politics of this elite level unproblematically to the *politics of Nepal*. It is this perspective that, is the weakest aspect of *all* of Shaha's works. Politics not centered in Kathmandu and the linkages between politics at the centre and "local" levels remain uncomfortably outside his purview and therefore outside his *Politics of Nepal*.<sup>5</sup>

Lest I be accused of having raised this issue only from the position of an armchair academic, I give the following extract from an interview I conducted over the course of two days in Galyang (Shangja district) in July, 1992. At the end of an interview whose main focus was a different topic somewhat, I asked my interviewee (name withheld), a man in his fifties, what he thought about the transition from Panchayat to a multiparty democracy in Nepal. He told me (my translation from Nepali):

I have not been able to see this [transition thing] very clearly. It seems like the [new] leaders are searching for their shares of the spoils. They know their problems, and we know ours....Money comes for certain projects. They put up a show and the rest... [gestures to indicate that they "eat" the rest]. National/local elections – we do not have to get excited. Those who occupy seats eat. For us

at the bottom life is like this.

The remoteness of Kathmandu and all the talk about multiparty democracy in that town that I had heard since returning from abroad in January, 1992, struck me in a way that my writing cannot adequately represent here (cf. Pandey 1991). The tasks for political analysts like Shaha is to be able to write about politics in such a way so that sentiments such as those expressed above are included in the "Politics of Nepal" centrally. This means that analysts abandon their obsession with politics at the centre and re-create their field of analysis (for political science as well as historical writings) in new, inclusive, and imaginative ways. Then perhaps scholars like Shaha can legitimately call their intellectual exercises "Politics of Nepal." Otherwise, equating politics centered in Kathmandu with the politics of Nepal would have dangerous long-term implications and scholars like Shaha will have made themselves complicit in a discourse of exclusion.<sup>6</sup>

### Notes

1. This reviewer has some experience of dealing with the Youth Activities Coordination Committee (YACC), one of the six committees formed under SSNCC. As a member of the executive committee of a social organization based in Kathmandu between 1981 and 1984, I was required to meet with officials of the YACC on numerous occasions. On one such occasion in early 1984, immediately after my organization had published a year-book of its activities for the previous calendar year, I was chastised by the then President of YACC for thanking YACC in the year-book only in small print. Moreover, he asked me why, in my capacity as the editor, I had not requested a "message" from him for the same, and he proceeded to remind me that a previous editor had done so. So much for coordination! Volumes are waiting to be written on the saga of these six committees and more generally on "social work" in the Panchayat years.
2. For another view on India-Nepal relations after the Koirala government came to power, see Baral (1992).
3. A conversation with Kanak Mani Dixit convinced me that these questions were important.
4. For attempts to redress the shortcomings of what Srinivasan has called "rational history-writing" or what is more generally called social theory with respect to violence in South Asia, see Das (1990), Baxi (1991) and Pandey (1991) among others.
5. This weakness also pervades the "classics" of political science writing on Nepal. See, for example, Gupta (1964) and Joshi and Rose (1966). For a review of Shaha (1990) that does not question his focus on elite history

as the history of Nepal, see Thapa (1992/93). Khatri et al. (1992) have begun an effort to redress this situation, however partially, regarding political science writings on the "transition phase."

6. I wish to emphasize that my effort here has not been to denigrate Shaha (or other scholars), but to initiate a discussion in which specialists and others writing on Nepal can reconceptualize the field of knowledge that we have come to know as "political science."

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Development through Non-Governmental organizations in Nepal*. 1991. Diwaker Chand. Institute for National Development Research and Social Services, Kathmandu. Pages 128. Price: US \$ 20/-.

In December of 1992, the Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) issued a report entitled *The Potentials of Nepal NGOs*<sup>1</sup>. This study sought to examine the present state of the nongovernment (NGO) sector in Nepal and assessed prospects for its future evolution as a major player in Nepal's socioeconomic development. It identified several important issues facing NGOs and pinpointed existing and potential problems. The growing responsibilities of Nepal's NGOs clearly call for prompt attention to these matters.

CECI's study found Nepal's NGO sector in a complex state. Since democracy, literally thousands of new NGOs have been established, and the governmental mechanism for regulating NGOs has been redefined. The overall credibility of the sector was found to be in jeopardy, since many of the new NGOs which are emerging are "opportunistic", with "self-interested motives"<sup>2</sup>. Such organizations threaten to absorb development funds without delivering genuine efforts. Furthermore, the study identified weaknesses within the sector which need immediate attention if NGOs in Nepal are to capably assume the vast responsibilities expected of them in Nepal's future.

The NGO sector in Nepal is at a crucial point in its history. A Nepal's people, new democratic government, and the international aid community look to it as the key to sustainable and successful development, the sector itself is in the midst of drastic growth and changes. NGOs are challenged to assert a self-definition, to improve their ability to rise to heightened expectations, and, provided their new-found freedoms are sustained, to carve a productive niche in the development efforts of Nepal's democratic future.

Diwaker Chand's recent book, *Development Through Non-Governmental Organizations in Nepal* is a timely contribution to the present dialogue which examines the changing identity and role of NGOs in Nepal. Chand offers an overview of the growth and transformation of the NGO sector by combining a historical survey of social service organizations in Nepal with

his personal theoretical assertions. A former member of HMG's Social Service National Coordination Council (SSNCC), and the author of several books on Nepal's socioeconomic development<sup>3</sup>, Chand writes with both an insider's insight and an insider's bias.

The study is divided into six parts, covering a wealth of information in only 98 pages of text. Consequently, the work is more useful as a factual reference than as a source of conclusions or synthetic observations. This is not so much a comprehensive analysis as it is a plethora of facts. For those reading Chand's work in its English version, there is the significant obstacle of poor editing; at times, the reader is left to ponder rather unintelligible sentences.

*Development Through Non-Governmental Organizations in Nepal* begins with an effort to define the term "NGO", which, although it may seem a basic step, is a significant and controversial issue within Nepal's NGO community today. As a clear and accepted single definition does not yet exist, just about any organization can assume the title "NGO" and faces little challenge. Chand sees true development as a collective endeavour in which people's organizations-NGOs play an integral part. Unfortunately, however, he does not offer a very innovative approach to identifying them; he uses broad, trite phrases like "non-profit", "non-Governmental", and "committed to solidarity and justice". The inauthentic NGOs invading the sector can easily make their way around such terms.

Chand creates four possible categories in order to organize and classify a sector whose members perform many, very different, tasks. For the author an NGO in Nepal can be considered under one of these headings: "social service" NGO; professional research-oriented NGO; government-affiliated NGO; NGO directly attached to a government agency. A precious little elaboration and commentary are offered regarding the latter two categories, but Chand asserts that the "social service" NGO is far more useful for Nepal's needs than the professional, research groups. He argues that professional groups fail to establish crucial grassroots links and are ultimately not sustainable.<sup>4</sup>

A historical overview of social service organizations is offered in Parts Three and Four of the book. Perhaps the most interesting portion of this section is Chand's portrayal of SSNCC.

Most post-democracy writings on SSNCC are sharply critical of this former NGO and social service group regulating committee. Accusations ranging from improper appropriation of funds to politicized management of development funding abound. Many claim that the Council's main function was to protect the interests of the Panchayat Government and to monitor political threats. SSNCC is also said to have cultivated a serious dependency

upon development planning from the central authority and to have discouraged unity among different social service groups.<sup>5</sup>

Such observations are notably missing from Chand's assessment of history. His picture of the Council is rather favourable, and at times defensive. The Queen, as the head of the organization, is often accused of having grossly mismanaged it. Chand, however, praises her leadership and suggests that if there were problems with the Council, they were caused by its association with other bureaucratic offices within HMG. Since SSNCC was not an autonomous body, it had obligations to consult several other ministries before finally making decisions.

Chand views SSNCC as the primary instrument of institutionalization of the NGO sector, a step which he sees as crucial to the full evolution of nongovernmental assistance. In the democratic era, he writes, a council similar to the former SSNCC would be crucial to a smooth future. The only real reform he suggests is autonomous decision-making power.<sup>6</sup>

The author goes on to look at the People's Movement, and concludes by suggesting improvements upon current development practices. He calls for the maintenance of political neutrality among NGOs, but asserts that they must also be constantly politically aware. In general, he supports more freedom for the NGOs which populate the sector, but, as discussed, continues to support a governmental regulating body similar to SSNCC. While Chand's ideal picture requires reform, it nevertheless, retains some potentially damaging characteristics.

Like much of the contemporary literature on the subject, *Development Though Non-Governmental Organizations in Nepal* stresses the evolving importance of the NGO community as a catalyst for change—both socioeconomic and political. Chand's book emerges at a crucial time; hence his observations are well worth discussion and debate.

## Notes

1. CECI. *The Potentials of Nepali NGOs*. Vol 1. Kathmandu: Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation, Dec. 1999.
2. CECI. 3.6.3.
3. Other works by Diwaker Chand include: *New Dimensions of Economic Development in Nepal* (1975); *Critical Appraisal of the Rural Economy of Nepal* (1976); *The Foreign Trade of Nepal* (1977); *Recent Trends of Economic Development in Nepal* (1978).
4. See also Chand, p. 83 for comments on SEARCH, a professional NGO in Kathmandu.

- 5 For two elaborations, see Maskey, Bishwa Keshar "Nongovernmental Organizations for Development: Search for a New Vision" 27-29 NGO Seminar, Kathmandu, p10. OR CECI report, endnote 1.
6. The newly-established NGO regulatory council, the Social Welfare Council, was established after the publication of Chand's recent book. The new council resembles SSNCC in function and composition.

- Anne M. Rademacher

## BOOK REVIEW

*People Power*. 1992. Gopal Chitrakar. Kathmandu: Sita Chitrakar. Pages 197. Price Rupees 2000/US \$ 100.

Two hundred and twenty two years after Nepal came into existence as a nation state, there have been two bitter struggles for democracy and the restoration of human rights. The first popularly known as the Revolution of 1950-overthrew successfully the yoke of the 194 year-old autocratic Rana regime and the second, greatly inspired by people's movements in Eastern Europe helped bring down in April 1990, the much despised thirty year-old partyless Panchayat rule like the proverbial house of cards. For the first time in the nation's political history, hardline Communist parties of Nepal and the liberals of the Nepali Congress joined hands. For a common cause they came together for the first time. Democracy was restored after three decades.

The fight for democracy the second time round- better known as the Mass Movement - was a fierce, bloody and determined one. In just fifty days, the movement rocked the edifice of the Panchayat system right down to its very foundations. The people emerged victorious. Freedom dawned. Democracy arrived. The nation and its people, however, paid a heavy price in terms of the loss of human lives and destruction of property. The streets of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur turned into bloody battlefields; tear gas, gun smoke, bullets, shouts and screams of agony and pain rent the air. Pungent smell of burning tyres, streets and pavements littered with bricks and stones along with the bodies of the dead and dying were a common sight. A sight not easily forgotten. But liable to be forgotten all the same.

Gopal Chitrakar, the trained photo journalist, in his book *People Power* makes sure that the historic struggle is not forgotten. The photographs compiled in the publication record how tenacious the movement was and give a wide coverage of the most significant and dramatic moments of the mass uprising. By just flipping through the volume with its two hundred photographs on varied themes-and enlarged for effect-the mass movement suddenly comes alive. The sequentially arranged photographs read like a photo essay and is far more effective than what could be expressed in words. The photo documentation amply covers the historic movement, the struggle,

transfer of power during the interim period and the subsequent challenge to the elected government posed by the civil servants agitation. The photographs are also backed by a first person account of the movement by the author himself and gives a vivid insight into the risk a photo journalist encounters when actually in the field. The incident in Patan, especially, has a chilling, blood curdling effect.

It is evident that the photographs in the volume have been carefully and meticulously edited. Though they do not photographically document the event in its entirety, as to what happened in other parts of the country, it still provides a fairly comprehensive account of Nepal's fight for democracy and freedom. Though the volume in its preface gives the impression of being carefully edited, and proof read, glaring grammatical, typographical factual and structural errors both in the text and in the photo captions state otherwise. If the publication intends to go into second edition, the numerous errors will have to be seriously looked into.

**Some sampling is given below:**

may for my (p. iv) chates for chats (p.5) continous for continuous (p.12) sefety for safety (p.12) pusurge for upsurge (p.36) countrary for contrary (p.38) thier for their (p.77) clebrate for celebrate (p.70) Sing for Singh (p.71) yothful for youthful (p.93) overly for overtly (p.143) disbandes for disbanded (p.148) urgs for urges (p.149) consituation for constitution (p.155) democrati for democratic (p.170) left for right (p.176) Koriala for Koirala (p.178) use for us (p. 187) Suprime for Supreme (p. 187), 1942 for 1985 (p. 188) world for word (p. 190) choose for chose (p.192) befor for before (p.195) burn for burnt (p.63) vctims for victims (p.65) commmission for commission (p.162) counducted for conducted, television for television, earthquak for earthquake (In the back flap of the publication.)

Errors of punctuation are too numerous to list.

It is common knowledge that the fight for freedom and its ultimate success was due to the coming together of the Nepali Congress and the hardline Communist parties of Nepal. But the photographs clearly show the Congress trio hogging the limelight, not to speak of the photos of the controversial and much talked about presence of the Indian leader Chandra Shekhar addressing the historic Nepali Congress Conference of January 18-20, 1990, occupying the strategic front pages of the volume. Even the three UML leaders' views, with photographs alongside that of the Congress trio at the end, fail to erase the impression that they only played second fiddle to their Congress counterparts in providing leadership to the movement. The success of the struggle, the way it was planned, executed and finally accomplished

was the result of the timing, coordination and orchestration of plans of action on both sides. Both deserve equal credit. Neither did the Nepali Congress occupy centre stage, nor did the UML and other parties simply cheer from the sidelines.

Above all, the power of the people to make or break governments also vividly comes to the fore. The publication is a gruesome reminder of how the Nepali people, when taken for granted, can with the strength of a thousand storms uproot with astonishing ease even a thirty-year regime in just a matter of fifty days: The publication at the same time very subtly warns the present democratic government and political leaders to fulfil, at least to some extent, the pledges and promises they made to the people in the name of democracy and freedom. The bloody struggle is certainly not over yet. The fight was after all, basically against tyranny, oppression, corruption, nepotism and the abuse of human rights, and the people will continue to crush such forces of evil whether it be under the outocratic partyless Panchayat rule or under the present democratic Multi Party system.

The photographs as mentioned earlier, no doubt, speak volumes, but the poor, washed out print quality certainly does not compliment the coffee table publication. Whether in colour or black and white, most of the photos quality wise, are a total disappointment coming as they do from a self trained photographer of twenty years and Photo/Art Editor of Gorkhapatra Cooperation. Despite the shortcomings, however, the final product is still fairly remarkable, and good enough to set the heart racing, the blood boiling and the head spinning. But it is only the price tag of the volume that takes the breath away. A whopping two thousand rupees/ a hundred US dollars! A real heavy weight!

– Ananda P. Shrestha