BOOK REVIEW


The present book under review is "the description of Nepal's growth and change during the last four decades in resource development, land use, deforestation, agriculture, population, cultural pattern, urbanization, industrial growth, transport systems, tourism and associated environmental management issues" (p.284). This is a book on "basic facts" of Nepal where the authors have integrated a massive amount of materials from different sources and presented a synthesis on Nepal's efforts to develop and change in the last four decades.

There are 11 chapters in the book, including 26 tables, 32 illustrations and 55 photographs. Chapters Five, Six and Seven are relatively longer, covering almost 36 per cent of the total text (pp. 101-204). A book of this size demands more careful evaluation than can be summarized and justified in a short review. First, let me briefly outline the contents of the book.

Chapter I introduces Nepal as a least developed country of the world. The second chapter, on "Environment and Natural Resource Base" gives a brief account of the geocological zones, climatic configurations, water resources, mineral resources, forest and scenic resources and natural resource management systems in Nepal. Chapter Three on "Land Use, Forest cover and Environmental Problems", has a short section on land use pattern (less than one page) but goes on to some details on topics such as forest cover, forest typology, deforestation and degradation, and principal factors leading to deforestation, forest management, forestry institutions and strategies for forest development in Nepal. One of the most important strategies of HMG to develop the forestry sector is the formation of "Forestry User Groups" throughout the kingdom beginning 1992 (Eighth Five Year Plan), is given minimal attention in the chapter. Chapter Four addresses the patterns and problems of agriculture, discussing the various aspects of agriculture such as cropping pattern, productivity and policies for reducing the incidence of landlessness in Nepal. The main problem of this chapter is the lack of analysis as to why agriculture still remains traditional and why conditions

of farmers have not improved over the years. Chapter Five, on "Human Resources", deals with mainly the demography of Nepal, covering topics such as the growth of population, distribution and density, and migration patterns (internal migration and circular migration). Then this chapter provides a case study of population mobility in a village (Taranagar) in the Middle Mountain Region in Gorkha district, followed by a section on fertility, mortality and demographic transition, population policies and family planning. Finally, there is a short section on health care, literacy and human development. The health care system and education are vital topics in relation to human resource development, which should have demanded a separate chapter. I don't know why the authors want to call this chapter as "Human Resources". Chapter VI, on "Cultural Patterns", deals with the various language groups of Nepal, the society, culture and economy of the various ethnic groups, environmental attitudes of cultural groups and historical context of ethnic interaction and change in Nepal. One of the nicely integrated sections in this chapter is the case study of a Newar village "Satungal" in the Kathmandu valley. Though the chapter as a whole provides an overview of culture in relation to environment, there is little here in the way of cultural accounts of people who have successfully adapted to the area over the years. Nowhere, have the authors attempted to isolate specific cultural factors (such as religion, village endogamy, kinship or the status of women) which are inimical to conventional developmental norms. Nor does the chapter provide information on the 60 different ethnic/caste groups enumerated in the 1991 census. The actual number of Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus and other groups are, in fact, much higher than quoted in chapter on the basis of mother-tongue classification.

Chapter Seven, on "Settlement Patterns and Urbanization", briefly describes typical settlements and patterns of urbanization in Nepal. However, the focus is mostly on the three cities of the Kathmandu valley. The chapter describes environmental degradation in the Kathmandu valley caused by factories and large number of smoke spewing vehicles. The authors conclude that while urbanization, population pressure and poverty may be the proximate causes of environmental degradation, policy failures to formulate and implement appropriate environmental regulations are frequently the underlying cause (p. 203). Chapter Eight, on "Industrial Development", highlights the patterns of industrial growth in Nepal before and after 1950, geographical distribution of industries, potential for industrial development, recent industrial policy and has a small section on cottage industry and handicrafts. Despite the information used, the authors are not willing to conclude that the picture of small-scale industrial development in Nepal was better before 1950 than after. Likewise, why
foreign donors and investors are more interested in infrastructures than in industries, is not given due attention in the chapter.

Chapter Nine, on, "Transport, Trade and Communication Patterns", is interesting as it provides a brief historical overview of trails and the role of porters, motorable roads, railways, air transport, trade and location of markets, foreign trade and transit routes, transport strategy for landlocked Nepal and communication patterns and much more briefly on postal communication, telecommunication, telex and telegraph, radio, television and press. Chapter Ten, on, "Devleopment of Tourism", gives a glance of tourism in Nepal in general. It highlights touristic resources, natural and scenic landscapes, types of tourism, touristic frontiers and issues such as economic development potential of tourism and environmental impacts of tourism in Nepal. The last chapter "Development Challeges" emphasizes the population-resource balance equation, which according to the authors, is not given serious attention in planning the developmental efforts in Nepal.

No doubt, we need a systematic, historical and evaluative discourse on the issues of change and development in Nepal. My dissatisfaction about the book, however, rests on so many shortcomings encountered in the book. First, let me begin with the numerous unsupported statements made in almost all the chapter. These statements, I feel misinform the general readers and thus demands a careful scrutiny.

In the first chapter itself the authors have shown soft corners towards India in substantiating their arguments. According to the authors, Nepal's introduction of the work permit system for Indians in Nepal violates the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty between Nepal and India(p.9). The authors obviously are not sensitive as to how this poorest country of the world would survive economically and politically if uncontrolled flow of Indians remains unregulated in Nepal? This argument is reemphasized in chapter V (p. 122). It is surprising to note that nowhere have the authors made an effort to comprehend the fact that the uncontrolled flow of Indians is creating unemployment for a large number of Nepali people. Furthermore, if Nepal does not strictly enforce the birth registration system, there is no way of identifying a local from a recently arrived Indian national. This has already created a chaos of the "citizenship issue" in the Nepal Tarai. On page 10, they note that "...... communist leaders were elected in 1994 on the basis of anti-India rhetoric". In fact, the anti-India sentiment in Nepal can be observed throughout history but became more pronounced when Nepal introduced the Panchayat system of Government in 1962. Many Nepalese painfully remember the extreme Indian high handedness of 1989 when India blockaded Nepal for 15 months, destabilizing the country's economy and politics. So what makes authors blame the Communist
government is not clear given the fact that non-communist voting Nepalese are forced to make nationalist standings vis-a-vis the Indian government. The other statement, on p. 14 "Nepal's trade and transit impasse with India in 1989 contributed to a period of high inflation and slow economic growth". This statement could be true in certain contexts but, again, this was the first time in Nepal's history when Nepal attempted to come out from the Indian grip to prove itself as a sovereign nation state. While Nepal has already forgotten this kind of lessons by now by withdrawing the work permit system for Indians and it is also the case that Nepal must pursue an independent economic policy to survive and prosper.

In Chapter Two, p. 24 it is noted that "A 1993 field survey of several Nepali Pravasi Sanghs—organizations of Nepalese which provide assistance to new immigrants in north Indian cities—revealed that nearly 1.5 million Nepalese have left the middle Himalayan area for jobs in India". Similar statement reappears on p.117 of Chapter V as well. No authentic source is given in the text for this information. In fact, the Pravasi Nepali Sanghs are poorly organized institutions in India which hardly could count the flow of Nepali emigrants in India with little resources at their disposal.

On p. 106 of Chapter Five, it is written: "In an agricultural country like Nepal, a more meaningful measure of population pressure on the land is the ratio of people to the cultivated land. At the district level, the density per cultivated area ranges from almost 3,000 persons per square kilometer in Mugu to 191 in Mustang". This kind of statement is misleading as to how people are making their living in the Mountain region of Nepal. A Mountain inhabitant knows very well that his livelihood does not depend on agriculture alone and must simultaneously engage in at least three types of economic activities, e.g. agriculture, animal husbandry and trade to make a living. In recent years, a lot of Mountain people also seasonally engage in trekking and mountaineering activities. Elsewhere, I have written (1993) that the Byanshi people, who live in the High Mountain area of Darchula district (above 9,000 ft.), are the more prosperous group compared to other groups living in the lower elevations of the district. The statement such as "The Magars, Gurungs, Thakalis, Rais and Limbus have been Hinduised..." (p. 143) is not fully true. In fact, except the Magars and, to some extent the Thakalis, other groups are least Hinduized in Nepal. In Eastern Nepal, the Limbus are the least Hinduized group though they have remained in close interaction with the Parvate Hindu groups over the last three centuries. Again the statement like "The Hindu of north Indian origin in the Tarai show a low degree of animal husbandry, as do the Newars (p. 151)" is not at all true so far as the Yadavs of the Hindu Tarai are concerned. Numerically, they are not only the largest single Hindu group of the Tarai
but also raise a large number of cattle and buffaloes. They are popularly known as Gwala or Ahir meaning "milkmen" in the Tarai.

The statement in Chapter Seven, "A little more than 99 per cent of these localities had populations less than 2,000. ..... Eighty-nine per cent of the total population lived in localities that had a population less than 2,000 (p. 177) ..... confuses more to the readers. Similarly, in Chapter Eight also a statement reads "A field study in the Tarai revealed that workers who are moving to areas where industrial jobs are available are uneducated and untrained" (p. 217). Surprisingly, there is no authentic source for this statement as well.

Second, the authors rely too much on secondary sources in their treatment of the complex issues such as the change and development in Nepal. In fact, the whole analysis is based on census and survey data. Census data, particularly the demographic data of many developing countries of the world, are full of holes and often quite unreliable. So, any effort to understand Nepal better must not only include the macro-level data but also information from village studies (which are indeed available) to understand the concrete patterns of change and development over time.

Third, in every argument made by the authors, the population-resource balance model or the Malthusian theory is implicit (such as over population, deforestation, shrinking land base, declining agricultural yields and increasing poverty). There is clearly, a perceptual problem here. Nepal can as well be seen as being rich in terms of its natural and human resources. Some of the greatest resources of Nepal are its altitude, climate and topography where a variety of staple and cash crops can be grown throughout the year. Likewise, the multi-racial, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural characteristics of the nation could prove itself to be the best human resources if the leaders learn how to harness them properly. Moreover, the successful adaptive strategy of various groups of people in Nepal is little highlighted in the whole text.

Finally, while poverty and underdevelopment in Nepal are interpreted overwhelmingly in terms of what is physical, technical and observable in the statistical sense, I feel that the authors deliberately avoided to explore the root causes of the problems of underdevelopment in Nepal. Some such are as follows:

A. Nepal is not only landlocked but also India-locked. Nepal should learn from the achievements made by India in a number of sectors. But India's interests continue to dominate Nepal in major aspects of social, economic and political life. No doubt, thousands of Nepalese go to India for short term employment and likewise thousands of Indians also come to Nepal for work and business as well. Considering the size of the respective country, if
this kind of uncontrolled flow of Indians into Nepal continue, it will
definitely destabilize Nepalese economy and politics. Furthermore, Nepal's
policy of population control becomes meaningless until and unless this
uncontrolled flow from Indian is regulated. So, Nepal must regulate its
border if it has to develop and fulfil the interests of the people as a whole.

B. The other fundamental root of Nepal's underdevelopment is its
inappropriate politics and its less than committed leadership throughout
history. Whether it was the Rana regime or the partyless Panchayat regime
or the multi-party democratic form, the governments are not really serving
the common people: The increasing poverty of people over the years clearly
proves that the governments have not been effective.. After the onset of
multiparty democracy, corruption has become more public and ministers and
members of parliament have become more concerned for their personal
gain rather than acting committedly for the Nepalese who are struggling for
their basic needs. Overpoliticization has become the main pastime and hobby
for the majority of Nepalese. Until and unless the government is sincere
and committed for development, Nepal will remain underdeveloped in the
next century as well even if we design the best plans to improve the
socioeconomic conditions of people.

C. Finally, though billions of dollars have already flown into this poor
country as grants and loans in the name of development, implementation of
concrete development programs to improve the economy of people seems
far away. In fact, if one compares Nepal's performances with those of the
South Asian countries over the last four decades, Nepal has become poorer
and more underdeveloped than before. It seems that aid and development
programs are initiated in Nepal primarily for political reasons and in order
to fulfil the interests mainly of the donor themselves rather than on
humanistic and nationalistic grounds.

    Nevertheless, a patient student of interdisciplinary studies can extract a
    good deal of valuable source materials from the book for further research and
    analysis. It reads easily not only because of its detailed names, places, dates
    and events but also because of its systematic and coherent picture of the
    Nepalese society over the last four decades. The book can prove a good text
    not only for foreign students, particularly undergraduates, but also for the
    B.A. level Nepali students as well. In addition, the book should be of great
    service to those interested in contemporary Nepal. Numerous statistical
    tables and extended bibliography (230 titles of published materials) on
    Nepal also increase its value. The only fear I have about the book is that its
    price could go high which would not be affordable for the average Nepali
    student.

    – Dilli R. Dahal
CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEPALESE STUDIES  
CUMULATIVE INDEX: 1986-1996

Purna P. Amatya

Contributions to Nepalese Studies is a research oriented semi-annual journal of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). Started in 1973, the Journal has been able to establish record for its continued and uninterrupted publication for last 23 years—an unusual phenomenon for a professional journal in Nepal. With regular publication of Scholarly articles and book-reviews the Journal has been playing significant role in the enrichment of socio-anthropological literature of Nepal.

The Journal has succeeded in publishing 341 articles and 80 book-reviews in its 23 volumes of 47 issues. A systematic cumulative index to Vol. 1-12 (1973-1985) of the Journal was compiled and published in the Issue No.3 of Vol.12 of the Journal. The Cumulative Index has been brought up to date in the following pages by indexing Vol.13 to 23 (1986-1996) of the Journal, which contain 162 articles and 41 book-reviews. With a view to helping a user of the Journal quickly find information of his interest in the pages of the Journal, the Cumulative Index lists all the 162 articles in classified order, and the classified list is appended with alphabetical Author-Title and Subject indexes at the end. The Subject distribution of 167 articles is found to be as shown in the following chart:

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