

D.R. Regmi. 2007. *Ancient Nepal, Medieval Nepal* (2 vols.), *Modern Nepal*. New Delhi: Rupa and Co. in association with Dilli Raman Regmi Memorial Library.

Dr. Dilli Raman Regmi is perhaps the lone historian of Nepal to write extensively in English and disseminate it inside and outside the country. In spite of being an economist by training and a politician by profession, Regmi chose history to be his main area of research and study, and produced seventeen volumes on the history of Nepal in the period of thirty-five years (1948-83). His writings covered the total history of Nepal from ancient period to modern times and did not even leave the technical areas such as painting, sculpture and coins. Recently, one researcher told me that he has discovered four more books by Regmi in Hindi on Nepali history, contemporary politics and language and literature. But I think these are the pamphlet-like thin books which cannot be compared with his thoroughly researched works in English. Regmi also has written a number of papers on Nepali history (the first article being published in 1942), but most of them are beyond the reach of readers till date.

None of the books written by the Regmi are now available in the market and one has to visit some specific libraries to consult them. Under such a situation, the reprint of some of his big volumes is “good tidings of great joy” to the academicians of the country and abroad.

Rupa and Co. has taken great interest in the history and culture of Nepal. Some months back, it has published four classic volumes on Nepal by William Kirkpatrick (first published in 1811), Francis Himilton (1819), Daniel Wright (1877) and Perceval Landon (1928), and now it, in association with Dilli Raman Regmi Memorial Library, has come with a gift of four big volumes by Dr. Regmi containing nearly 3500 pages for the students, teachers, academicians, and general readers.

### **Ancient Nepal**

Regmi's first book on ancient Nepal appeared in 1952 under the title *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*. After eight years (1960) he produced a separate volume on Ancient Nepal, which was once again thoroughly revised and enlarged in 1969. In 1983, Regmi came with three volumes under the title *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal*. The book under review is the reprint of the 1969 edition. Why Rupa and Co. did not choose the recent edition (1983) for publication is understandable, because the *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal* is meant primarily for professional historians and researchers, whereas the 1969 edition is useful for all sections of readers. But the publisher has mentioned 1965 as the first publication year of the book, which is not correct. No book on ancient Nepal by Regmi was published in 1965.

Regmi admits the lack of sufficient epigraphic evidence to analyze different issues of ancient Nepal, and that is why he offers several working hypotheses to the scholars for further study and research. He divided the history of ancient Nepal into three parts—legendary (Gopalas and Mahisapalas), Kirats and Licchavis. Even in the Licchavi period, he considers its history from the middle of fifth century as historical. He considers Nepal's pre-history "a matter of convenient guess" (p. 37). The political boundary of Nepal during the ancient period is a subject of controversy till date. Some historians consider the boundary of ancient Nepal as big as the present boundary. But Regmi rejects this view and writes "In ancient times, the word 'Nepal' meant only the valley of Kathmandu and the state which came into existence under the same name could just include areas measuring hardly a hundred miles on both sides" (p. 34). But he has words of praise for the civilization of ancient Nepal. He aptly writes "The Nepal Valley measured the most advanced civilization in the whole of the Himalayan region.... It is because of this civilization that Nepal has a name in history" (p. 13).

Without citing any evidence, Regmi considers Patan to be the capital of ancient Nepal. He writes, "Bhatgaon as a city was probably founded in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century...Kathmandu appears to have enjoyed the status of the second city of the realm from the very beginning" (p. 11).

Some scholars have tried to bring the political status of ancient Nepal under controversy by considering it as under the suzerainty of India. Regmi refutes this idea and says that the discovery of some Kushan coins cannot "establish the fact of Kushan hegemony over Nepal" (p. 70) and the mere fact of "three pillars in the western Nepal of the modern period

does not indicate that the country was under the suzerainty of Ashoka” (p. 60). He argues how Manadev secured his country’s independence by striking his own coins (p. 72). But at the same time, Regmi accepts the impact of Indian culture on art, literature, language, sculpture, philosophy and even “political ideas” of ancient Nepal. He has cited several sources to prove his statement.

Regmi considers inscriptions, chronicles, coins and foreigners’ accounts as main source of ancient history of Nepal (pp. 4-47), but he has critically analyzed their utility and drawbacks as sources of history. He considers inscriptions to be the most important source, but not to forget, the inscriptions do not speak anything negative about the rulers.

Of the two eras mentioned in the Licchavi inscriptions, Regmi considers the first one as Saka Sambat which is still the opinion of the majority of historians. On the second, he makes a review of three propositions viz. Harsha era, Tibetan era and Amsuvarma era. This part of history is still a subject of debate among scholars.

Coming to the political history of the Nepal during the Licchavi period, Regmi describes Amsurvarma as “most prominent ruler of early Nepal and [sic] greatest personality in the Licchavi period” (p. 164) and he identifies him as either the nephew or son-in-law of Shivadev I, solely on the basis of chronicles (p.161). He quotes one Chinese source to say that “Udayadeva was killed by his brother (Dhruvadeva) and Narendradeva (his son) then had escaped to Tibet” (p. 18). He says that Narendradeva showed prowess and was courageous, adventurous, and fearless. His reign was free from internal disturbances (p. 196). Regmi calls Jayadeva II a man of courage with wide fame, but does not accept his sovereignty over Kamarupa, Kanchi and Saurashtra, only on the basis of the court poet’s description (p. 200). About Aramudi, Regmi calls him a local ruler of Gandak region belonging to Magar race and asks for further research on the topic (p. 214). About Bhrikuti, he calls her a daughter of some local chieftain either of eastern Nepal or that of present day Palpa (pp. 216-17) and concludes that the “Bhrikuti story is not a part of Nepal’s history” (pp. 351-52). Similarly, Regmi has convincingly argued that Nepal was never under the suzerainty of Tibet.

In the last chapter of the book, running more than 120 pages (pp. 223-345), Regmi describes the administrative system, society, economy and art and architecture of ancient Nepal based on inscriptions, chronicles and some external sources. Some of his conclusions in this connection are:-

- (a) Nepal maintained her monopoly over transit trade between India and Tibet and also the trade passing between Nepal and Tibet (p. 261).

- (b) Castes in Nepal are as ancient as its history. Its inscriptions and foreign source materials have testified to the existence of castes in Nepal as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and even earlier (p. 271).
- (c) Pagoda style originated in Nepal and from here it travelled to China and other countries (p. 300). It was during the seventh century that the entry was made by this style into Tibet mainly through Nepali efforts.

On the whole Regmi's *Ancient Nepal* (the 1969 edition) is a rare piece of research work. On the basis of available original and secondary sources, the author has presented a definite picture of ancient Nepal with suggestions for further study and research, and with working hypotheses for the same.

### Medieval Nepal

Dr. Regmi first wrote on medieval Nepal in 1952, as a part of his book, *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*, but his account of medieval period is very short covering only fifty pages. However, in 1965-66, he came out with four big volumes on medieval Nepal, containing more than 2500 pages. The first volume gives the history of early medieval period from the introduction of Nepal Sambat to the division of the Kathmandu Valley kingdoms. The second volume traces the separate history of Kantipur, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur for nearly three centuries and in the last two volumes, the author has produced source materials such as inscriptions, chronicles and *thiyasaphus*, specially for professional scholars.

Rupa and Co. has reprinted the first two volumes in the original form, but has added the source materials of the third volume as appendices in a divided form in both the volumes and the fourth volume is not reprinted at all. This has placed readers in great confusion. There is no publisher's note to clarify the contents and Bishu Hari's two-page introduction is merely an eulogy to the author, as it does not mention a single word about the book. Hence, it has become extremely necessary for Rupa and Co. to reprint the fourth volume immediately with a publisher's note of clarification. It will complete the medieval Nepal series by Regmi and also clarify the confusion among the readers on the original contents.

As the sub-title of the book suggests, the first volume of *Medieval Nepal* covers the period from 750 to 1530 A.D. This is slightly confusing. Regmi himself considers the start of early medieval history of Nepal from 879 i.e. the introduction of new era, Nepal Sambat and he has started his discussions with the same event. As to the year 1530, Yaksya Malla died in 1482 and his kingdom disintegrated in due course of time. But Regmi

has his own argument to end his first volume in 1530. He writes, "It seems that actually the kingdoms divided formally about 48 years after the death of Yaksya Malla in the time of his grandsons. This was so because as long as Yaksya Malla's sons lived they held the throne under joint sovereignty" (p. 452).

Regmi makes a bitter criticism of some Indian and Italian historians for their versions about the Tibetan hegemony in Nepal (pp. 65-68) and writes, "We have not the slightest doubt about Nepal maintaining its independence all through the centuries while Tibet had become an imperial power" (p. 64). The author has mentioned in detail Samsuddin's invasion of Nepal (1349 A.D.), including the routes he took to reach the Kathmandu Valley and pointed out the mistakes committed by Petech and Jayasawal on the event (pp. 312-20). He argues that Jayasawal made a mistake and Petech followed him without verifying the original inscription (p. 319).

Regmi's analysis of events prior to the rise of Jayasthiti Malla is confusing and there are some errors too. But he has presented an analytical picture of the time with whatever materials he had in his possession. About Jayasthiti Malla, he writes that the king "rightly deserves a place among the few greatest kings of Nepal" (p. 370), but he doubts the historicity of his reorganising the social system (p. 369). Writing on the conquests of Yaksya Malla, Regmi argues that the contemporary source of Yaksya Malla's conquest "are more in the nature of an eulogy than presenting a statement of facts" (p. 446), but he accepts that Yaksya Malla "had curbed unruly feudatories and defiant tribes in his eastern and western sectors of the kingdom outside the Valley" (p. 446).

A separate chapter on socio-economic conditions of the Kathmandu Valley during the early medieval period, covering 228 pages, may be considered as a significant contribution by Regmi. Emphases have been given on the administrative system, economy, religion and architecture. A separate section is given to the caste system with special reference to Jayasthiti Malla, but information about the *guthis*, an important aspect of medieval social system in Nepal, is very short, covering less than three pages.

The last chapter of the book is devoted to the Khasa kingdom of Karnali region, based mainly on the source materials collected by Tucci and Narahari Nath. Regmi calls it an era of "tremendous prosperity both in cultural and material spheres," and writes, "Although feudal in structure, the Khasa state maintained an expanding economy with extensive commercial contacts both internal and external" (p. 718).

On the whole, Regmi concludes, “This was altogether a glorious age for Nepal. Except for the factor contributing to territorial dismemberment and series of foreign invasions that affected the events of the period, Nepal recorded prideful achievements in many a significant sphere, particularly in those of literature and arts” (p. 629). The message of Nepali culture to the next door neighbors, specially Tibet and China, is worth remembering.

The second volume of *Medieval Nepal* is the biggest volume ever written by Dr. Regmi. It consists of 1076 pages, out of which political history of the three kingdoms – Kantipur, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have been analyzed in about 350 pages, whereas the administrative system, socio-economic life and art and architecture have been discussed in more than 600 pages. Equally important are the appendices which give an account of Nepal by contemporary foreign travellers and also a detailed analysis of the Malla coins.

One serious limitation of Regmi’s work on medieval Nepal is that the author is strictly limited to the three kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley and he has largely neglected the *Bāise* and *Caubise* in Karnali and Gandaki region respectively. He has also neglected the Sena kingdoms in eastern and western Nepal, though some reference may be found in the book on their relations with the Malla kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley. Another point to note is that the author has taken the accounts of Kirkpatrick (1811) and Hamilton (1819) as primary sources to explain socio-economic life of later Malla period, with the assumption that the socio-economic scenario does not change so quickly. This may not be fully true, in view of the rise of the new royal dynasty and its conquest of the small principalities in the eastern and western Nepal.

While analyzing the political history of early medieval period (in Vol. I), Regmi has adopted the style and format of Luciano Petech and that is to present the source materials (mostly inscriptions) in brief first and then to describe the events on the basis of those materials. But in the second volume, the author has slightly modified his style by generalizing the source materials to analysis the facts and events. He might have done so in view of the plethora of materials on later medieval period.

Regmi has used the words Kantipur and Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Bhatgaon, and Lalitpur and Patan simultaneously throughout the book for the Valley kingdoms. It may create confusion at least among the foreign readers. He should have adopted uniformity in naming the Valley states.

In the history of Kantipur, special emphases have been given to Pratap Malla, followed by the age of regents and Chautarias and finally the

emergence of a new dynasty under Jagajjaya Malla. While analysing the history of Lalitpur, the rule of the feudatory chiefs, its conquest by the King of Kantipur, Siddinarshing's declaration of an independent state and political feud after Yoganarendra Malla have been discussed. In the case of Bhaktapur, the achievements of the different kings have been discussed in a chronological order.

Plenty of new materials have been discovered after the publication of Regmi's books and so a reader should also consult the recent materials to get a correct picture of medieval period, specially the political history. For instance, Regmi has presented Bhaskar Malla and Mahendra Singh as two different rulers (p. 167), in fact, they are the same.

Coming to the socio-economic conditions during the later medieval period, the author has given special emphases on the social life, covering more than 300 pages. Included in this section are domestic rites, society and family, caste and inheritance, food and drinks, dress and ornaments, world of superstitions and religious life. Along with that the administrative system, economic life, and art and architecture have also been duly analyzed on the basis of primary sources.

One serious charge leveled against Regmi is that he ignored the contributions of local scholars to a maximum extent, and a number of inscriptions, already published by Samsodhan Mandal, have been referred to as unpublished. In fact, it is a general tendency among the Nepali writers of the 1950s and 60s to neglect the contributions of their counterparts by giving special emphases on the writing of foreign scholars, and in Regmi this tendency was at its height till the publication of volumes on medieval Nepal. But in his books published in 1975 and 1983, Regmi had slightly changed his attitude and began acknowledging the works of native writers too.

### **Modern Nepal**

Dr. Regmi had produced his first book on modern Nepal in 1961 under the title *Modern Nepal: Rise and Growth in the Eighteenth Century*. This 333-page book deals with the history of Nepal during the 18<sup>th</sup> century starting from the 1740s, along with a short background of *Bāise*, *Caubise* and the Sena kingdoms. In 1975 the author came out with an enlarged and revised edition of the book running through 608 pages, but a significant chapter of the previous edition dealing with administration, polity and economic condition has been omitted. Why Regmi did so, is not known. Possibly, he did not get sufficient materials for it and decided to make the new volume purely a political history of Nepal and its foreign relations.

Simultaneously, Regmi produced the second volume of modern Nepal, under the title, *Modern Nepal: Expansion, climax and fall* dealing with the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, starting from Rana Bahadur's flight to Banaras in 1800 and ending with the beginning of Anglo-Nepal war in 1814. Rupa and Co. reprinted both the books in a single volume.

Divided in sixteen chapters, the first volume of *Modern Nepal* gives a detailed account of the military campaigns of Prithvi Narayan Shah, Rajendra Laxmi and Bahadur Shah along with a brief background information on *Bāise*, *Caubise*, Sena kingdoms and the Gorkha state. Nepal's relations with her northern (Tibet) and southern (British India) neighbours during the second half of 18th century have also been analyzed and the book ends with Rana Bahadur's abdication of throne and his flight to Banaras in 1800. Prithvi Narayan's military campaigns have been analysed on the basis of Babu Ram Acharya's book, though his name does not appear in the bibliography, and for the regency period of Rajendra Laxmi and Bahadur Shah, several documents published by *Samsodhan Mandal* have been utilized. Regmi is correct to say that the victories of Prithvi Narayan was "not the success of one man alone" (p. 270). Credit should be given to his sincere brothers, able generals and far-sighted diplomats. The author considers Rajendra Laxmi and Bahadur Shah as of different temperaments. Both were equally ambitious and so their unity did not last long (p. 289). Regmi has discussed in detail the clash between the two, with plots and counterplots by their supporters and opponents, but has slightly neglected to analyze the military campaign of Rajendra Laxmi. Not to forget, the conquest of powerful *Caubise* states viz. Kaski, Lamjung and Tanahu by the regent made it easier for Bahadur Shah to make further territorial expansion. Nepal's expansion in the west, including Kumaun and Garhwal, has been discussed at length and Regmi describes Bahadur Shah as a man who "with all his statesmanship and administrative ability steer clear of difficulties and stresses of circumstances" (p. 565). However, the author considers the dismissal of such an able statesman as a "natural sequel." He writes, "No ruler tolerates a regent in his manhood and least of all one, like Rana Bahadur who was aspiring to enjoy an absolute and autocratic regime" (p. 566).

The objectives, activities and failure of two British missions (Kirkpatrick and Abdul Kadir) have been discussed mainly on the basis of Indian archival documents and Calendar of Persian Correspondence and Nepal's war with Tibet have also been analyzed in a chapter of nearly 100 pages. However, the title of the chapter, "The First Gorkha Tibet War," is



not correct because Nepal had fought two wars with Tibet in 1788 and 1791 respectively, the second war being converted into the Nepal-China war. In this connection, the author has published the original text of Nepal-Tibet Treaty 1775, signed by the Nepali king and the Dalai Lama (pp. 511-12). The treaty is in Newari and different scholars have given their own arguments as to why such an official treaty was prepared and signed in the Newari Language.

The second volume of *Modern Nepal* is more or less a history of Nepal's relations with the British during the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century (1800-1814). Divided in eight chapters, the first four chapters deal with the Knox Mission – from genesis to failure whereas the last four chapters analyse Nepal's expansion of territory and her clash with the Sikhs and the British, which ultimately led to a war with the British in 1814. On the political history, the fifteen-year period witnessed the tragic end of some big personalities such as Kiritiman Singh, Damodar Pande, Rana Bahadur Shah, Prithvipal Sen and Rajrajeswori and the emergence of Bhimsen Thapa as the defacto ruler, who completely dominated the political scene for more than three decades.

The sub-title of the volume – *Expansion: Climax and Fall* – seems not to be justified. Regmi discusses the climax of Nepal's territorial expansion (up to Satlaj) but not its fall. He should have discussed Nepal's defeat in the war and the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) which halted Nepal's militancy campaign forever and through which it ceded a third of its territory to the British.

The chapter scheme in the book does not seem to be satisfactory. In the chapter titled "British Mission Returns," Rana Bahadur's return to Nepal and the killing of Damodar Pande have been discussed in detail, whereas in the next chapter titled "Rana Bahadur Returns to Nepal," the assassination of Rana Bahadur and the emergence of Bhimsen Thapa have been analyzed at length.

Despite these minor drawbacks, the volume gives much new information on Nepal's history during the crucial period on the eve of Anglo-Nepal war. The author has extensively used Indian archival documents and also a few Nepali sources to analyze the different issues. As such, the volume is most useful for further research.

### **Epilogue**

Rupa and Co. and Dilli Raman Regmi Memorial Library must be congratulated for the reprint of the monumental volumes of Dr. D.R. Regmi on the history of Nepal. This 4-volume set almost covers the historical survey (from ancient period to the beginning of Anglo-Nepal

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War 1814) made by Regmi as a historian and a professional scholar. The only exception, perhaps is the *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal* (1983) which reflect the latest viewpoint of Regmi on ancient Nepal. But this 3-volume work has been designed in the form of original inscriptions, their English translation and a commentary on them is more useful for professional scholars than general readers.

Research on any subject is a continuous process. With the discovery of new materials or development in research methodology, certain facts or figures and comments or analyses may have to be revised or modified or even changed. There are certain points in Regmi's works which need to be revised thoroughly or partially (in view of the exploration of new materials). But they do not decrease the quality or standard of the work in any way. In fact, the colours of Regmi's books today are as fresh as when they were painted.

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