

Sanjay Upadhyaya. 2008. *The Raj Lives: India in Nepal*. New Delhi: Vitasta Publishing.

The unity and diversity of the sub-continent have guided India's relations with its South Asian neighbors.

One needs going no further than to read the Declarations issued by successive SAARC summits to see the guiding influence of the unity factor. They refer regularly to the common values of the member states, the profound common civilizational continuum of great antiquity which constitutes the historical basis for sustaining harmonious relations in the region. Like unity, diversity has always been important defining and determining feature of the region. This feature of diversity has been more important particularly since 1947, for after this, these differences widened as political systems diverged, economies that had hitherto been part of one unit went their separate ways, and even in terms of culture each nation emphasized their uniqueness in the effort to build a distinct national identity.

Independent India's neighborhood policy had choices, or what looked like choices. One possibility for India was to emphasize and therefore make the required effort to accept the diversity in unity argument, so as to cultivate good relations. There were many arguments in support of this too. For instance, quite apart from the general benefits of a cordial external environment, to which the compulsions of being a SAARC

member state were added in 1985, there was the later argument that for India's rise to stature in the world good neighborly relations were a prerequisite. This meant going an extra mile, or that India giving more than it would get. The other possibility was benign neglect, a seriously considered option within official circles. This meant that if the neighbors were anxious to go their own way, and emphasize diversity at the cost of unity, India would also be happy to go its own way.

In fact, of course, these choices were largely for policy planning papers or for theorizing. In the real world there was never a situation in which you could say, well now, I think I'll exercise choice B instead of A.

For Nepal, similarly, there were choices. On the one hand, the Nepali leaders could use arguments about dependence on India, the latter's bullying tactics or interference in internal affairs to bolster their own political position or to promote national solidarity or both. The closeness of relations as they developed after 1947 was enough to generate an inexhaustible supply of incidents that could be used for this purpose. And on the other hand, they could put economics first and emphasize the developmental dimensions of bilateral relations which could lead to cooperation in fields like industry, agriculture, and the promising hydro-power. This could also lead to a more constructive and cooperative evolution of relations among the two countries.

But again, there was never really a choice. Remained in Kathmandu, one could never decide to stay away from India's stifling embrace, or as an alternative, go in for a cooperative relationship. These choices exist only if the two parties can declare that their past is over, and for them everything starts anew so that in the future they can make the correct choices.

Sanjay Upadhyia in *The Raj Lives* rightly reminds us, and this is the starting point of his book, that you can't do this for that, that the relationship has a long history which has influenced issues, ideas and individuals and that consistent patterns and underlying attitudes have defined the Nepali mindset. So his book does not intend to break new grounds but to portray India's role in Nepal on the basis of his personal experience and information available in the public domain. He presents a dispassionate description of the history of the relationship, and in doing so, when he refers to India's preponderance and adds that Nepali politics provides the best arena for inquiry because here India's influence has been conspicuous, detrimental and untenable, we need to take it seriously.

The author starts with the rise of modern Nepal in the second half of the 18th century, its subsequent expansion eastward and westward until,

inevitably, it ran up against an already expanding power of the South, the East India Company. Nepal came off second best in the encounter, lost much of the territory gained recently and, with battered national psyche, was left looking inwards to ensure its survival as a nation. But the British kept out of the internal turmoil of the mid-19th century which brought Jang Bahadur Kunwar and the Ranas to power, reducing the Monarch to a rubber stamp.

A century later, when the King saw an opportunity to get back to power, India did not do the same. Given the background – the active participation of Nepali leaders in the Indian independence movement, their close ties to Jawaharlal Nehru and other Indian leaders and the support India extended for democratic change in Nepal – this was not surprising. In any case King Tribhuvan regained the Monarch's power under the Delhi Compromise, and worked out with help and guidance from Nehru. This stage was set for Nepali leaders of all hues to believe that, whenever anything happened in Nepal's domestic politics, India must have had a hand in it. And when Nehru arrived in Kathmandu in June 1951 he promptly gave his hosts an extended lesson on how to conduct their domestic affairs, further entrenching this idea as a grievance.

Other grievances also built up alongside. The Nepalis thought that after the British retreated from the sub-continent, areas which they had taken from Nepal in the encounter with the East India Company should now revert. When an Indian military mission arrived in the 1950s to train the Nepali army, considering the proven fighting qualities of the latter, their pride was hurt. When Tenzing Norgay climbed Mount Everest India claimed he was Indian. This hurt their pride too. The 1954 treaty on harnessing the waters of the Koshi, one of Nepal's biggest rivers, led to accusations, for it seemed primarily to benefit India. Then India's role as Nepal's principal development partner also came under fire. All this aid, it was said, was only to keep Nepal from diversifying its foreign relations.

One of the major grievances, seen as the symbol of the perpetuation of the Raj and of India's domination, was the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, especially the exchange of letters with that Treaty which brought Nepal into India's defence perimeter.

The next stage began in December 1960 when King Mahendra announced that he had used his emergency powers to take over the administration. Nehru seemed upset, saying that it was a setback to democracy, and a complete reversal of the democratic process. But such is the nature of the bilateral relationship, says the author, that the Monarch

could have taken this step with the knowledge if not actual connivance of New Delhi. However Mahendra took Nepal's relations with China up another notch soon thereafter; he was in China to celebrate the 12th anniversary of the Revolution; Nepal and China signed a border agreement as well as an agreement that China would help construct a road from Kathmandu to the Tibet border. As if in a response, India began giving help to Nepali rebels. To make things worse (though the author does not mention this item) there was the October 1962 pronouncement by Marshal Chen Yi of China that in case any foreign army makes a foolhardy attempt to attack Nepal, China would side with the latter. This was much openly welcomed in Kathmandu. The chain of controversy became more complicated when Indian Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh chose a 1969 visit to Nepal to talk about the 'special relations' between the two countries; a few years down the road and King Birendra called for recognition of Nepal as a Zone of Peace, meaning the end of any kind of security relationship with India. By 1988 Nepal was in open violation of the 1950 Treaty when it signed an agreement with China for the purchase of weapons. This situation was further aggravated as the purchased weapons included anti-aircraft guns, suggesting that they were for defence against any air attack by India.

By now most things that happened in political Nepal had acquired an Indian angle. When Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao arrived in Kathmandu in October 1992 he not only faced black-flag demonstrations but seemed to attach more importance to his meeting with the King than with the now democratically-elected government, although India's hand was clearly to be seen in the movement to restore democracy at the end of which elections had been held. If political leaders were killed India's hand was seen; when there was a vote in Parliament the Indian Ambassador's hand was seen in the outcome.

The second half of the book largely elaborates the central themes already developed about the pervasive nature of India's hand in Nepal's economic, political and developmental concerns. To mention just a few examples, when there was domestic instability in the mid-1990s India was accused of fomenting it in preparation for a military invasion; the expansionist nature of India's policy was easily seen in the publication of a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh map showing Nepal included in a 'Greater India,' not to mention Bharatiya Janata Party Vice-President K.R. Malkani's reference to the mistake India had made in not accepting King Tribhuvan's offer to merge Nepal with India; then Indian actor Hrithik Roshan made, or was alleged to have made critical remarks about

Nepal, leading to extensive violence against theaters showing Indian films.

The focus of these chapters is on taking Nepal's history from 1999 to 2006 rather than on dealing intensively with how India interfered with the events that moved that history forward. For by the end of the period others too – in the main, the British, of course, the Americans, the UN, and China – had entered the scene.

The last chapter is a summing up. Firstly, India had generally been more comfortable with the monarchy, because although authoritarianism has thrived on anti-Indianism it is democracy that has done more to fan the flames. Raising fears of the southern neighbor has been a proven political tool in Nepal. On the other hand, speculates the author right at the end, maybe India has concluded secret agreements with the Monarch, the political leaders and with the Maoists. Secondly, so far as bilateral issues are concerned each one of them becomes a problem, whether it is border management, trade and transit facilities, cooperation in the critical water sector or the more critical security questions. And behind it always is the 1950 Treaty, seen by the average Nepali as a serious infringement of national sovereignty. This litany must lead many readers to conclude that maybe benign neglect was best.

But here, at the very end, the author gets it right again. While most would have concluded on an optimistic note, saying that if such and such steps were taken the relationship could be put on a new track, and then give a list of steps, his parting line is that history and geography have conspired to perpetuate the Raj in Nepal, meaning things will always be about the same in the future.

Some things in the book are not quite accurate. It is mentioned that the East India Company got permission to recruit Nepali soldiers; actually Nepal was always against this and on occasion even put to death those Nepali soldiers who returned from British employment. There is a reference to the 1950 Treaty requiring 'effective measures' if either country faced a security threat. Actually this phrase was in the exchange of letters, which was kept secret for some years after the signing of the Treaty. There are a few others. But these are rather minor points in a book, which does deserve to be taken seriously by readers on both sides of the border for its balanced and comprehensive account of the relationship.

Well-organized and clearly printed, the book is well-produced: subheadings divide up each of the ten chapters into convenient sections. There is not only a reference section, and notes arising from the text, but also a Who's Who, a glossary, a bibliography and an index, all of which are very useful.

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