

Book Reviews

Ram Sharan Mahat. 2005. *In Defence of Democracy: Dynamics and Fault Lines of Nepal's Political Economy*. New Delhi: Adroit.

Few people, it initially seems, are more ideally placed than Ram Sharan Mahat to write an account of Nepal's political economy in the decade of the first sustained period of multi-party democracy. Appointed to the National Planning Commission during the first Nepali Congress government, and subsequently made Finance and Foreign Ministers, he was heavily involved in policy formation for much of the nineties. He thus occupied a vantage point ideal to observe the capabilities of Nepali state and society, as well as weaknesses that impeded policy implementation and the achievement of policy goals. Written during the period following King Gyanendra's dissolution of parliament in 2002 and subsequent seizure of power, Mahat's account is first and foremost a defence of multi-party rule. Set in the context of high levels of disillusionment with parliamentary democracy, *In Defence of Democracy* seeks to counter what Mahat perceives as elite negativism – that tendency of the Kathmandu elite to perceive nothing but factionalism, corruption and bad governance masquerading as popular rule. Mahat attempts to defend the decade of parliamentary rule by demonstrating that government was made more accountable to the people than in any other period of Nepali history. However, though aspects such as the development of democratic institutions and social development receive some treatment in the book, the emphasis is mostly on the economic gains made during this period. Mahat provides a thorough description of the policies and goals set during the nineties and demonstrates that it was through them that significant economic gains were made. Although policies were often perverted in their implementation, and the gains made rarely lived up to expectations, Mahat's defence rests on the demonstration that in no other comparable period of Nepali history did the material circumstances of the people improve as much as during the decade of parliamentary democracy.

Second, in addition to being a defence of democracy as a mode of governance, Mahat's book is also a defence of the liberal economic and social policies that prevailed during the nineties. As an adherent of the neo-liberal orthodoxy, Mahat believes that it was the dramatic

liberalization of the economy in the early nineties that made whatever economic growth occurred in Nepal possible. He states repeatedly that the role of the state is simply to provide social goods such as infrastructure and education, and to regulate the market in such a way that the entrepreneurial capacities of the people are allowed to flourish.

Third, this account is also a defence of the ideal of democracy. Mahat has no truck with those political economists who believe that high-levels of economic growth are possible in developing countries only when authoritarian governments prevail over populist pressures and direct the flow of resources in a neutral and efficient manner. Instead of engaging with the arguments of these political economists to provide an adequate rejoinder, Mahat, however, chooses to counteract the theory of authoritarian advantage in a rather perfunctory manner, asserting only that this theory has been conclusively demolished by a number of scholars whom he cites.

The first of the three parts of *In Defense of Democracy* sets out the historical background of Nepal's economy from the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification to the end of panchayat rule. Occupying over a hundred pages, this background is at times drawn out and tedious. Using sources familiar to anyone with a knowledge of Nepali history – like the seminal writings of Mahesh Chandra Regmi on Nepal's economic history, for instance – Mahat shows how for the majority of the period since Prithvi Narayan Shah, Nepal was a pre-modern, exploitative state.

Although the later Rana rulers made a few efforts at modernization, it was not until the advent of the Panchayat system under King Mahendra that any sustained attempts to change the structure of Nepal's economy were made. Mahat recognizes that this system has a few advantages that could assist it in forming and implementing policies that could help achieve high levels of economic growth. The absence of factionalism that has been a characteristic of multi-party politics in Nepal made it possible for the government to not succumb to economically untenable populist demands, and instead focus on long term projects such as infrastructure building.

However, Mahat rightly points out, the Panchayat period cannot but be seen as a failure. It was still above all a system for the preservation of elite interests. Successful land reform could not be carried out due to the presence of vested interests. The economic emphasis was on supply side intervention, with very little emphasis on the income side demand creation of the majority of the population. Even other policies, that were presented as suitable to the genius of the country, were in fact merely a

camouflage for the interests of the elite. The theory of class co-ordination, for instance, emphasizing the harmony and inter-dependence of all of Nepal's classes, was probably a pre-emptive response by the state to the possibility of uprisings based on Marxist ideology that were prevalent in many of Asia's nations at that time.

Having thus established that Nepal's economic stagnation under Panchayat rule was a direct result of its policies that chiefly benefited only the elite classes, in the second part of the book Mahat moves onto the changes brought about by the Nepali Congress government in the nineties. The new National Planning Commission constituted in 1991 soon prepared the Eighth Plan that explicitly stated that though economic growth was desirable, efforts had to be made to ensure that the poorer segments of society benefited from it. This was a rejection of the "trickle-down" approach to economic planning. However, due to Nepal's dependent position in the world economy and the changes in economic thinking since the mid-twentieth century, the Nepali Congress government had to move away from its traditional ideology of democratic socialism as promoted by B.P. Koirala towards a more market-based approach. How adherence to a market-based regime can be regarded as a rejection of the "trickle-down" theory remains unclear.

In any case, sweeping liberalization measures were implemented in the early nineties. Attempts were made to strengthen regulatory, monitoring and evaluation systems to prevent leakage and strengthen policy implementation. The government decided to focus on infrastructure and other areas of social sector development, leaving the development of industry to the private sector. While Mahat goes through all these measures in great detail, one aspect of these reforms, the Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) deserves special mention here. The primary goal of the APP was to bring about a technology-based revolution in agricultural production through investments in irrigation, roads, fertilizers, electrification and other inputs. It aimed to raise annual per-capita agricultural growth from an existing level of 0.5% to 3%. As Nepal's economy is still predominantly agrarian, the transition from a subsistence-based to a commercial system of production is of utmost importance for economic prosperity. Further, the only way to sustain high levels of growth and provide employment to an increasing population in the long term is to channel agricultural surplus to industry.

As Mahat goes on to show after his review of the new plans and reforms, there were significant, though not dramatic, improvements in Nepal's economy between 1991 and 2002. As reported by the World

Bank in 1999, poverty declined between 1991/92 and 1995/96. A later study by the World Bank found that poverty declined from 42% of the population in 1995/96 to 31% in 2003/04. While poverty in urban areas declined from 26% to 10% during this period, the decline in rural areas was from 43% to 35%. Significant gains were also seen in the development of roads, in electrification and rates of literacy.

However, economic growth during the 1990s was characterized by a widening discrepancy between classes and regions. The urban, non-agricultural economy vastly outperformed the rural, agricultural one. While the success of the non-agricultural sector was primarily due to the liberalization measures, Mahat attributes the failure of the APP to achieve its goals to a failure to increase the productivity of principal crops, adverse weather conditions, and weaknesses in the implementation of the APP. As he states, the APP lacked an adequate monitoring and evaluation program and the supply of agricultural inputs fell short of their target. After the late nineties the disruptions caused by the Maoist insurgency can also be regarded as a cause for the lacklustre performance of the agricultural sector.

Mahat focuses chiefly on macroeconomic indicators and technocratic solutions in the second part of his book. A primary weakness of his account of Nepal's political economy is his lack of emphasis on state-society relations. His statement that the Nepali government became more responsive to the needs of the rural areas after 1990 due to the fact that many political leaders themselves came from rural areas, though partially true, is misleading. He fails to recognize that disparity in Nepal is not merely regional, and fails to identify the class interests of the state elite. While it is true that the state became more responsive to a wider group of people under multi-party rule than during the Panchayat period, the political leaders still came from dominant classes and represented certain class interests. The failure of the democratic state to implement significant land reform measures can be attributed to the influence of vested interests whose support was important to the state elite. The failure of the APP in implementation can similarly be attributed to a relative disregard of agriculture as compared to the non-agricultural sector. Mahat himself comes close to this understanding when he states that the robust performance of the non-agricultural sectors was due to the fact that most of the reforms were targeted specifically towards them. The corollary of this insight – that the agricultural sector was relatively disregarded – is not followed up in any detail, and Mahat's account suffers as a result.

The exclusion of certain social segments from the political process is the subject of a chapter in the third part of the book, but Mahat fails to mention the connection between this exclusion and the disregard of the agricultural sector. Nonetheless, he does recognize that a representative democracy isn't sufficient in a country as inegalitarian as Nepal, and that institutional measures have to be taken in order to ensure greater representation of the population. The realizations of this chapter, however, are insufficiently integrated with the rest of the book. This suggests that, although Mahat has noticed the increasing demands made by Nepal's various minorities within the free political space provided during the nineties, he has not given sufficient consideration as to how greater inclusion can be made possible.

Including the chapter on social exclusion, the third and longest part of the book is an assortment of miscellaneous chapters of varying quality that range from various critical issues the various governments faced during the nineties, such as the Bhutanese refugee crisis, the issue of corruption, the importance of roads and the controversy surrounding the project of the Arun III hydroelectricity project. This is followed by a summary of Nepal's recent political history and an appraisal of the crucial faults of the state and society in Nepal. Mahat concludes by restating his position that, contrary to the beliefs of the elite, the decade of parliamentary rule was marked by significant gains. He goes on to make the argument that the best solution for the restoration of peace in the country is through the restoration of parliament and negotiations with the Maoist rebels.

The most interesting sections of this last part of the book are those where Mahat discusses plans or projects he was directly involved in. The discussion of the controversy surrounding the Arun III project is particularly noteworthy in this respect. As Mahat states, he was heavily involved in the protracted appraisals and negotiations that went before the project. It is evident that the cancellation of the project by the World Bank, under pressure from an international NGO network and parliamentary opposition, is felt by Mahat as a personal blow, and much of his chapter is an impassioned defence of the project. He argues against those critics who state that Arun III was unviable because its tremendous cost could not be borne by the state, that it crowded out smaller hydroelectric projects that were much better suited to Nepal's needs and that it would cause severe environmental damage. Mahat staunchly disagrees with the first two charges and states, regarding the third one, that the benefits that Arun III would provide far outweighed the

environmental damage it would have caused. Mahat's arguments are, however, unlikely to convince the critics of Arun III who maintain that the many small hydroelectric projects that have emerged since then provide more energy than Arun III would have, and that too at a lower cost. Still, the chapter on Arun III is of interest because of its description of the historical dynamics behind the project and why the government was so keen on its implementation.

The brunt of Mahat's ire is borne, not by the NGO activists, but by the parliamentary opposition under the UML. He is bitter about the UML's opposition to the project, and maintains that it was hasty and ill-considered. Complaints against the UML recur throughout the book. Although Mahat recognizes that all political parties need to take responsibility for the misgovernance and factionalism that was characteristic of Nepal's democracy during the nineties, he believes that a primary reason why policies could not be implemented adequately was due to the intransigence of the opposition. Further, he believes that the UML's vision reveals a lack of knowledge about the needs of the nation. For instance, he states that the first UML government under Man Mohan Adhikary, in its opposition to the prior liberalization policies of the Nepali Congress, sought to implement what were in essence misguided policies that "stressed the promotion of 'national capital' and brought about a host of populist budgetary proposals."

For Mahat, then, the only viable ideology in Nepal is neoliberalism and all alternatives to it are misguided and "populist." He justifies his position on the basis that liberalization and privatization is the only "pragmatic" mode of governance. It is true that in a nation as poor and dependent as Nepal, it is exceedingly difficult to resist the onslaught of the Washington Consensus orthodoxy. It is also true that the ideal of democratic socialism as held by the Nepali Congress for much of its history before it came to power was difficult to sustain when even India, through which that very ideal arrived in Nepal in the first place, had given up all pretensions of socialism. It is, however, disingenuous of Mahat to gloss over the role of the liberalization regime in fostering the widening gap between rich and poor. For him all failures are merely a failure of implementation; failures that can be corrected if only the opposition remains mute and the civil service works with discipline and efficiency.

That free market policies intensified feelings of neglect among large segments of the population and helped the Maoists attract support cannot be denied. Apologists for the status quo may maintain that the upsurge in Maoist violence in both Nepal and India is due solely to age-old

inequalities. In India, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to hide the fact that globalization and corporatization is aiding mostly the middle-class at the expense of the marginalized. That globalization has led many of the alienated poor directly to the arms of the Maoists is a fact that is gaining more widespread currency in India today. Judging by Mahat's account it seems that the Nepali elite, which has always depended upon its big southern neighbour for intellectual sustenance, has yet to awaken to this truth.

In any case, it is unlikely that any future government of Nepal will so unabashedly pledge allegiance to the Washington Consensus. Although Nepal is not in a position to withdraw from integration with the world economy, the Maoists remain ideologically committed to a staunch opposition to what they perceive as "imperialism," and will ensure that the unbridled liberalization of the nineties does not occur again. How these two demands will be reconciled remains to be seen. More recently it seems that an awareness of the contemporary geopolitical situation has led the Maoists to soften their stance. Perhaps during the course of future negotiations, people like Mahat will learn to temper their ideological beliefs to the demands of the moment as well.

Thus Mahat's book – which is competently edited and handsomely bound according to South Asian standards – fails to accomplish all that it sets out to. The book is successful as far as demonstrating that the decade of multi-party rule, despite its failures, managed to accomplish more in such a short period of time than any prior regime. It is also successful as a description of the policies implemented during the nineties and as a readable synthesis of macroeconomic indicators and other statistics relevant to the period. It is in its justification of neo-liberal economic policies that it fails to convince.

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Clint Rogers. 2004. *Secrets of Manang: The Story behind the Phenomenal Rise of Nepal's Famed Business Community*. Kathmandu: Mandala Publications.

Rogers' book is an endeavour to explain the astonishing transformation of a marginal Himalayan people, the Nyeshangte of Upper Manang valley, into a wealthy business community with their main base in Kathmandu.

In so doing, he progressively reveals various aspects of Nyeshang society; thus the book can best be labelled a thematically focussed monograph.

In line with many other writers of Tibetan speaking peoples of Nepal, Rogers assumes a historical 'push' towards trade in order to overcome inadequate subsistence possibilities in the high altitude valley of Manang. The entrepreneurial history of Manang starts in the 18th century by trade privileges granted by King Rana Bahadur Shah. But due to the geographical location of the valley, the Nyeshang inhabitants could not take part in the Tibetan trade as did the neighbouring Thakali to the west. Instead, Nyeshang traded local goods like scented glands of musk deer, medicinal plants, and woollen products to India. Progressively trade was extended to Indo-china and became independent of goods produced locally in Manang. Nyeshang traders learned to exploit price differences between South – and Southeast Asian countries, buying gemstones in Kashmir and selling them at a profit in Bangkok, from where Thai silk was brought to markets in India, and so on. Later, when the tourism boom took off in Kathmandu in the 1960s, Nyeshang traders had accumulated substantial fortunes that could be invested in hotels, restaurants, and curio shops there. Since the opening of Manang for tourists in 1977, Kathmandu-based Nyeshang businessmen have increasingly invested in their natal valley. Thus, Nyeshang business has travelled from the Manang valley to India, to Southeast Asia, to Kathmandu, and has recently returned home to Manang.

In the description of early trade, Rogers relies heavily on other writers, especially on Wim van Spengen (1987). But he succeeds in locating Nyeshang business activity in a regional-historical context which makes it highly interesting to read. Thus having narrated the story of Nyeshang business, he goes on to grapple with the main question of the book: how was this adventurous story possible?

The author starts his quest for a credible explanation by referring to two previous writers who have pondered over the same question. The first, von Fürer-Haimendorf (1975) ascribed certain cultural traits to enterprising people in the Himalayas. Entrepreneurial activity occurs, he contends, in cultures that reward risk-taking behaviour and individual choice, and lack the strict family obligations and social hierarchy so prominent in the Middle Hills. Andrew Manzardo (1977), on the other hand, looked for an ecological explanation to the trade success of some Himalayan communities. He observed that enterprising traders tended to originate in Trans-Himalayan valleys with access to pastures that were sufficiently plentiful to breed a high number of pack animals.

Like von Fürer-Haimendorf, Rogers finds the answer to Nyeshang business success in socio-cultural circumstances. At the base of the success lies a balanced attention given to private and communal interests. In contrast to caste society where social rank is ascribed by birth, a Nyeshang person achieves higher rank through individual enterprise. Private enterprise has become part of Nyeshang collective identity, according to Rogers. But this emphasis on the legitimate interests of the individual is balanced by a strong feeling of communality, which is in the last instance derived from a collective dependence on local irrigation systems. The balance between the individual and the collective has proved to be a particularly favourable quality in capital formation. In Kathmandu, Manang businessmen picked up a communal fund system, the *ki-du*, from the Tibetan exile population and later they adopted the tender *dhukuṭī* system, which is a way of raising capital quickly whenever a promising business turns up. Both systems are ways of raising capital for individual use that presuppose mutual and collective trust in order to work in a sustainable manner. Manang businessmen have been “fortunate opportunists” who were able to raise capital immediately whenever a chance of profit-making came into sight.

In sum, the Manang recipe for successful business is to establish “a middle ground between individual competition and communal cooperation,” which reminds this reviewer of the Scandinavian model of social democracy. Presently, however, competition between hotel owners in Manang valley has come to dominate over cooperation, thus putting the Manang success story in jeopardy there.

Rogers’ book is a very readable account of the history of a remarkable people. Of particular interest is the way he manages to relate micro-level qualities of a remote Himalayan people to macro-level events and processes at national and international arenas. The outcome of the analyses is a highly credible explanation of a success story from which other communities as well as politicians and development workers have much to learn.

Other parts of the book are less well documented. The description of the agro-pastoral system and the environment (chapter 1) contains assertions that might better have been formulated as questions. For example, the contentions that irrigation water is a bottleneck in farming rather than labour, and that forest regeneration has not been able to keep up with local use, are rather dubious. Also, the intriguing fact that Manang people’s attitude towards outsiders changed from being unfriendly and even hostile, to becoming amicable hosts to passing

trekkers in a matter of ten years or so, is not given a credible explanation. Rogers has managed to reveal the secret of entrepreneurship in an outstanding manner, but all secrets of Manang have not yet been told.

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Pratyoush Onta, Shekhar Parajulee, Devraj Humagain, Komal Bhatta, and Krishna Adhikari, eds. 2005. *Radio Patrakāritā: FMmā Samācāra Sambād*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

The frequent news bulletins and lively talk shows that we hear in FM radios in Nepal today did not start overnight. There is a history of struggle to broadcast news in FM. In the erstwhile controlled media environment of Nepal, FM stations toiled a lot to give the listeners what they wanted to hear. There were legal, socio-economic as well as organisational hurdles on the way. We get to know about these hurdles and the struggles to overcome them in this book which is a compilation of various studies on news and talk programs in FM Radios in Kathmandu and Pokhara. The chapters have been researched and written by a set of Martin Chautari researchers and radio journalists.

From interesting and unusual experiences of radio broadcasters to the inside story of news and current affairs production, this book gives a detailed account of radio journalism in FM stations. The study has tried to follow three approaches to news production as reviewed by media scholar Michael Schudson (2000): a) political economic; b) social organisational and c) cultural. These three categories are dealt with in an appropriate manner by the researchers. The history and growth of the FM radio sector and its legal and policy aspects are accurately and substantially analysed in chapters one and three respectively from the political economic approach. An overview of the existing literature on FM radios in Nepal, a

brief discussion of the three approaches to news production and a summary of the research findings are presented in chapter two.

As pointed by Devraj Humagain, the legal and political aspects of FM Radios are important in order to understand the environment in which they function. Journalism in radio has been shaped by the National Broadcasting Act passed 12 years ago. Humagain's detailed analysis and critical study of the Act is not only informative but equally interesting to read. His first chapter on the history of FM radio gives a very detailed account of the growth of the sector. It describes the dilatory tactics of the government in issuing licences. According to Humagain, FM stations now exist in 22 districts of Nepal and are owned by companies, NGOs, cooperatives and locally elected bodies. He also discusses the important organisations and individuals who have promoted FM radios. Given the level of detail deployed in this chapter, it can be a little wearisome to read at places but its rich information sets the background for the rest of the book.

Chapter three gives an overview of the policy and the hostile regulatory environment in which the FM sector has had to operate in Nepal. Humagain discusses the license fee that FM stations have to pay to the government based on the power of their transmitters. FM Radios are categorised by its owners as commercial and community/non-commercial but that classification is not recognised in the Broadcast Act and the stations do not pay their license fee accordingly. This shows either ignorance or the irrationality of the concerned authorities. Another valid point raised by Humagain is the provision in the Act that requires independent radio stations to devote one fourth of their time to relay the national broadcast of Radio Nepal. Although this has not happened in practice, the intention seems to be to curb independent broadcasting in a significant way.

In chapter four, Binod Dhungel describes what King Gyanendra's regime tried to do to control or shut down the operation of FM radios after February 2005. He argues that the actions of the royal regime impeded the free flow of information in the form of news and current affairs programs. This had an adverse impact on the income of radio stations leading them to lay off journalists in large numbers. He also argues that the withdrawal of public service advertisements by the government had a negative impact on the economics of FM stations. He further points out that the government tried to close FM radio stations by accusing them of supporting Maoist activities through radio programs. The arguments in this chapter are well supported with documentary

evidence, interviews with those involved in the running of various radio stations and Dhungel's personal observations as a radio producer.

Dhungel's largely political economic approach can be read in conjunction with the experiences described by Ghamaraj Luintel and Sriram Poudel in chapters six and seven. Luintel's writing comes as a fresh and delightful read bursting with his experiences in the making of *Hālcāl*. *Hālcāl* is another term for news or happenings and is the title of the NGO-owned Radio Sagarmatha's news bulletin in Kathmandu. Weaving interesting facts with humorous anecdotes, Luintel provides a very informative and interesting account of what *Hālcāl* contains and how it is produced. He also discusses the experiences of learning through mistakes and describes how Radio Sagarmatha coped during the 2001 royal massacre and after the royal takeover. His chapter gives a clear picture of what working in a radio newsroom means even to those who have never seen such a newsroom. The conversational style of his writing is pleasant to read when compared with the academic style adopted by Chautari researchers.

The experiences of starting and producing news in Kantipur FM is detailed by Sriram Poudel in chapter seven. From the very first line- 'Notice about a lost buffalo!' it clearly ascertains the effectiveness and accessibility of FM in the Kathmandu valley. There are several instances where Poudel successfully highlights the compromises that news had to undergo because of various factors controlling their broadcast. Poudel's experience of not being able to broadcast news on the royal massacre highlights the then reality of media control. He also tells us about the funding situation for news and talk programmes in his station (which can be related to other radio stations as well). News is regarded as expensive to produce whereas entertainment shows that only include playing songs and phone-ins are relatively cheap to produce. And on top of that, listeners are attracted to the entertainment shows which generate more advertisement revenue for the station than the news oriented shows or news bulletins themselves.

In chapters five and eight, Krishna Adhikari discusses the practice of news in FM stations in Kathmandu and Pokhara respectively. He describes how news is manufactured, namely, the process it undergoes before being broadcast. He says, even if the radio stations were started with a different motive, they have ended up broadcasting political news. For example, those who started Kathmandu Metropolitan City's *Metro FM* had thought that they would broadcast news and information on the efforts being made on daily revenue collection, sewage, water, road,

electricity, footpath, temple conservation etc., in Kathmandu but in practice it too ended up broadcasting political news. This has been the case with other radio stations as well.

It has become a general practice to read news straight from the newspapers in the FM radios. Some stations give the names of newspapers from which they read out the news while others do not. Adhikari has raised questions about whether FM stations should be allowed to do this. Though it is considered ideal to at least give credit to the paper once, he found that it is not the case all the time. Adhikari's chapters give us a lot of details even as one wishes that he had done more analyses based on them.

Though talk shows and discussion programs are as old as news bulletins in FM stations, the studies in this book argue that they are still in their infancy when it comes to journalistic performance. According to researcher Shekhar Parajulee (chapter ten), the lack of research in talk shows in FM stations in Pokhara is indicative of two facets of FM broadcasting culture: (1) lack of time given to presenters and (2) lack of seriousness of the presenters. Much the same could be said about the same category of programs in Kathmandu's FM radios which have been examined by Komal Bhatta in chapter nine. Bhatta analyses talk shows in several stations critically and points out that there is a lack of teamwork in the production of such programs. He also argues that stations have not invested adequately to produce such programs.

Chapter 11 makes us aware of the situation of Tamang language programs, in particular talk shows. Pratik N. Tamang, a radio presenter himself, uses his experiences and those of his fellow Tamang language broadcasters to describe the state of affairs. He argues that programs in Tamang have influenced a young generation of Tamangs to be proud of their language and have bolstered Tamang music and other cultural production. However, he says much of this production has relied on the voluntary labour of enthusiastic Tamang broadcasters who the FM stations have been reluctant to hire as employees. He also stresses that there should be much better coordination between Tamang ethnic organisations and broadcasters.

Overall, the book is successful in highlighting the important issues related to news and talk programs in FM radios in Nepal. It serves as a full guide to FM news broadcasting (from its inception to this date) and also highlights the issues that so often get overlooked by those in FM radio broadcasting such as the importance of volunteers and crediting sources. Empirical research has been carried out comprehensively and

chapter narratives read well for the most part. Media researchers and students can benefit hugely from this book, not only because of its data-heavy contents but also because the book is written in Nepali. In addition there is an extensive bibliography which is very useful for other researchers.

However, having worked for Radio Sagarmatha for over four years, I found that the book does not provide adequate analysis of some relevant issues. First, it does not tell us if there are differences between the news broadcast by community and commercial radios and if so, what accounts for that difference. Second, the book is not sensitive to the fact of gender disparity prevalent in FM radio stations, especially in the departments that produce news and discussion programs. Such departments are generally male dominated, although some female journalists are starting to show up as serious producers. They should have been interviewed. Their perspectives on news production and the FM radios as a whole would have added value to the analysis presented in this book. Third, though management issues in FM radio stations are only briefly mentioned, I feel that they play an overwhelming role in the health of radio stations. Hence they deserved a more thorough analysis than given here.

Finally it can be concluded that although the FM radio sector has overcome many barriers in order to reach its present stage, the field is still immature. There is a lot more that can be done to improve the state of radio journalism in Nepal, research-based analysis such as that contained in this book being one of them.

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Vijay Kumar Manandhar. 2004. *A Comprehensive History of Nepal-China Relations up to 1955 A.D.* 2 vols. New Delhi: Adroit.

Though there have been relatively few publications whose titles specifically mention Nepal-China relations, the long-standing connections between Nepal and Tibet and the dynamics of the India-Nepal-China

triangle mean that any analysis of Nepal's past or present foreign policy gives China plenty of attention. With so much already said, both in Leo Rose's classic *Strategy for Survival* (1971) and many less well-known but still valuable studies, it has become difficult to come up with anything radically new.¹ One can, however, dig additional detail out of the archives, reinterpret some of the evidence for particular episodes or simply provide a handy synthesis of what has already been published in many scattered places or remains unpublished in other researchers' theses. Manandhar has done some of all three in this lengthy study, which incorporates much from his earlier publications, *Cultural and Political Aspects of Nepal-China Relations* (1999) and *A Documentary History of Nepalese Quinquennial Missions to China 1792-1906* (2001), as well as extensive new material. The first volume, written mostly from secondary sources, starts with the earliest recorded contacts, including travels by Buddhist scholars in both directions and the early diplomatic contacts between the Licchavis and the Tang dynasty. It ends with Nepal's role in the 1904 Younghusband Expedition and the negotiations for the withdrawal of Chinese forces from Tibet after the 1911 revolution. Volume two, offers a detailed history of the quinquennial missions and a survey of Nepal-China relations from 1906 to 1951 (largely omitting for 1906-1912 the Tibetan issues already discussed in volume 1). Both these chapters are based on the author's own archival research. Finally, there is an account (necessarily from secondary sources as the relevant archives are not open) of the establishment of full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic in 1955 and a discussion of Nepal's status until 1906 as a 'tributary' of China.

Manandhar's main analysis confirms the general picture presented elsewhere. China's concern has normally been with maintaining her position on her side of the Himalayas and she has intervened on the other side only when she perceives a threat to her security north of the mountains. The assault on Megadha in the 7th century, carried out by a Chinese official leading Tibetan and Nepalese troops, was a one-off response to an earlier attack on the official whilst he was leading an embassy, not an attempt to secure a permanent presence. The Chinese invasion of Nepal in 1792 was provoked by Nepal's aggressive policy towards Tibet just as the invasion of India in 1962 was triggered by India

1 The most important include monographs by Ramakant (1968, 1976), Hussain (1970), Mojumdar (1973a, 1973b), Muni (1973) and J. Sharma (1986).

appearing to threaten Chinese communication with Tibet across the Aksai Chin plateau.

The result for Nepal is that China has had some usefulness as a counter to India but this is limited and intermittent. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, China always rebuffed Nepal's requests for military or financial support against the British, but the latter's apprehension of what China *might* do was a significant factor. Manandhar cites with approval Ludwig Stiller's suggestion (Stiller 1976: 104-5) that a wish to appear non-aggressive in Chinese eyes was probably one reason for Lord Hastings returning most of the Tarai to Nepal in 1816. From mid-19th to mid-20th century, China's weakness left little scope for playing one giant neighbour off against the other and the Ranas opted instead for alliance with British India. Then the establishment of the People's Republic of China and its re-assertion of control over Tibet enabled King Mahendra to revive the old policy. In 1962, seven years after the end of Manandhar's period, the outbreak of the Sino-Indian border war allowed the king to avoid having to come to terms with his Indian-supported Nepali Congress opponents. However, China was of no assistance to King Birendra during the 1989-90 'blockade' and King Gyanendra's recent hopes that India will back direct royal rule for fear of China's gaining influence in Kathmandu are unlikely to be fulfilled. If India swallowed its dislike of Gyanendra's neo-Panchayat approach it would be because of worries about Nepali and Indian Maoists, not about China.²

Manandhar has done a thorough job of filling in the background to a well-known story. His bibliographical coverage is good and he has made a particular effort to find material on the Chinese side, something that has always been a problem as few who write on Nepali history are also experts on China. He has made use of a contribution by American Sinologist John Kiligrew (1979) on the 1792 war, which should have been cited in at least two of this reviewer's publications.

When discussing the 1792 events, Manandhar follows Kunjar Sharma (1973: 138-139) in arguing that there was no formal peace treaty between Nepal and China, despite the fact that the supposed text was one of the

2 Brahma Chellaney (2005) argues that India's opposition to Burmese military autocracy allowed China to increase her influence there and that, therefore, she should not risk putting too much pressure on King Gyanendra. One American commentator (Weinstein 2005) has also recently suggested that the king's China gambit might succeed. However, this does not seem a widely shared view among analysts and, in any case, Burma is not dependent economically on a single neighbour to the extent that Nepal is on India.

documents forwarded to the United Nations in 1949 in support of Nepal's application for membership. The document given in Naraharinath's *Sandhi-Patra Saṅgraha* (2022 v.s.) appears to be based on the spurious text presented in Pudma Jang Bahadur Rana's biography (1909) of his father, Jang Bahadur Rana. All this may well be so, which leaves it unclear what the understanding actually included. Manandhar, like Sharma, lists *de facto* terms (vol. I: 134), not citing specific documents but claiming they can be reconstructed 'from various primary and secondary sources.' His own list differs from Sharma's and, crucially, it does not include any undertaking from China to come to Nepal's defence if attacked by a third party. However, Nepal itself did later claim that it had received a pledge of Chinese protection. In 1842, according to a Chinese source Manandhar later cites (vol II: 307), King Rajendra told the emperor that an imperial decree of 1793 had promised Nepal assistance 'in men, money or horses' against a foreign attack.

Manandhar does cite specific evidence of the *amban* (Chinese representative in Lhasa) and other imperial officials urging the emperor to accept Nepal's offer to attack the British during the Opium War of 1840-42 (vol.I: 226-7). He juxtaposes this with Rose's version (1971: 100) according to which the *amban*, Mang-pao, himself told the Nepalis not to make such suggestions and refused to forward their letter to the emperor. Although Manandhar does not explicitly endorse either version, Rose is almost certainly more reliable here as the source is Meng-Pao's own *Si-Tsang Tsou-Shu* ('Tibetan Memorials'), a collection of his letters sent to and received from the emperor. Writing in the 1850s, John Francis Davis, one of the other authors Manandhar cites, gives a purported extract from a letter in which Meng-pao does appear to endorse the Gurkha request but no source reference is given and garbled translation or willful distortion is probably the reason for the discrepancy.

There certainly was a group of scholar-officials who believed that China could resist British encroachments by encouraging South and South-East Asian rulers to attack them. At the head of this group was Lin Tse-hsu ('Commissioner Lin'), whose actions to suppress the opium trade in Canton precipitated the Sino-British conflict but also earned him a reputation as an honest and patriotic official. In summer 1842, just before the war ended, a member of the group, Yao Ying, who was governor of Taiwan during the war and had learned something about conditions in South Asia by interrogating British prisoners, wrote to the emperor urging

acceptance of the offer of Gorkha help (Polachek 1992: 201-2).³ However his letter apparently never reached the court whilst the recommendations of Wei Yuan, who is cited by Manandhar, were made in a book completed just after the war ended and published in 1844. Lin Tse-hsu himself had fallen out of favour with the court as a result of the initial reverses in Canton. The views of Lin and his circle were important in the post-war debate over how China should respond to future foreign threats but they were not part of the crucial circle of advisors to the emperor during the conflict.

Despite China's growing enfeeblement, Nepal's 'tribute' missions were not formally ended until the 1911 revolution ended the imperial system. Though some in Nepal still saw them as a counterweight to British influence, they were now more valued for the opportunities they afforded to take duty-free goods into China than for any strategic significance. Manandhar explains that this was also an important motive for similar missions from Korea, a state certainly regarded by the Chinese as much less peripheral than Nepal. He also discusses at length the question of whether the system implied that Nepal was a Chinese dependency. Drawing particularly on the work of the celebrated American Sinologist, John Fairbanks, he argues that for the Chinese, their emperor acted as a representative of all mankind in offering sacrifice to the gods. In consequence, from the Chinese point of view, all other centres of power were in some sense subordinate to the Chinese ruler. It is not really possible to 'translate' a concept of this type into the dichotomy of political independence/dependency central to modern concepts of international law.

In the first half of the 19th century, however, when Nepal was still trying hard to use China as a counterweight to the British in India, the Nepalese themselves were not unhappy for the British to believe that they were indeed the emperor's dependents. Hence the elaborate ceremony in which the king and his court traveled out of Kathmandu to greet the returning envoys and to ceremonially receive the imperial letter.

Manandhar gives a detailed account of each mission to Beijing and, as an exercise in cultural history, the most interesting is perhaps the last,

3 Polachek's 1992 book – the only one which I can add to Manandhar's impressive list – is a revisionist study of Lin and his circle, arguing that they acted out of factional ambition and clung to the hope of raising an Asian coalition as a way of avoiding the painful internal reform which China really needed.

which took place in 1906. Its leader, Kaji Bhairab Bahadur had fluent English, which he used both to read every English work on China he could find and also to correspond with Chandra Shamsher Rana. On the return journey he appears to have had some kind of temporary nervous breakdown. He first threw himself on the protection of a British citizen, claiming that both the Chinese and his own Nepali colleagues had been trying to kill him, and subsequently he was seen walking along the road with a Buddhist-style prayer wheel – strange behaviour for a high-caste Hindu. The kaji's behaviour soon returned to normal and Manandhar suggests, perhaps correctly, that the Briton may have exaggerated in his account, but there is corroborating evidence from another member of the mission and the story in the British records does thus have some basis. The inconveniences of the journey, tension within the mission, failure to sell the opium he had brought from Nepal and perhaps just the strain of coping with too many cultural variables had evidently unhinged him.

Overall, Manandhar's book is a valuable addition to the literature, and one that I am certainly glad to have on my shelves. There are, however, a number of shortcomings. First, a work as detailed as this will inevitably have a largely specialist readership yet its usefulness as a research tool is reduced by the failure to include a fuller index. Anyone seeking information about a particular individual who might have been on one of the missions to Beijing will therefore have to trawl through the narrative for the relevant years instead of homing in at once on the relevant name. There is a similar, though less serious problem with the bibliography, which omits some of the titles cited.

Second, a comprehensive history of Nepal-China relations should have included more discussion of just how important economically the Kathmandu Valley's entrepôt trade across the Himalayas actually was. Nepal's most celebrated economic historian endorsed John Pemble's characterisation of this commerce as "a peddling business in luxury goods, carried on mainly at the behest of the wealthy and the curious" (Pemble 1971: 58) and also asserted that this trade had "attracted attention as a field of historical research beyond any proportion to its contribution to Nepal's economy" (Regmi 1988: 186). Against this, we have Kunjar Sharma's (1973: 60) conclusion that "trans-Himalayan trade was one of the important links in the chain of continental trade of Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, supplying in the process the markets not only of Nepal, Tibet and India, but also of Central Asia, Mongolia and parts of China." Regmi is probably right that trade across the mountains was not a large proportion of what would now be called Nepal's GDP.

However, Sharma points out that, on Kirkpatrick's (1811: 211) figures, imports from Tibet, together with the profits from the minting of gold and silver coinage for the Tibetans, made up about 25% of the state's income in the 1790s. Its importance for Nepal's political economy was therefore considerable.

Manandhar also fails to discuss fully the process of decline in the entrepôt trade. It is still not clear whether the effective ending of this was more the result of the British opening of the route through the Chumbi Valley in Sikkim or of the liberalisation of Tibet's import policy forced upon the country by Younghusband's 1904 invasion. This question in turn affects our assessment of Chandra Shamsher's policy of co-operation with Britain on the Tibetan question. The Maharaja appears to have believed that the growth of Russian influence in Tibet, which Younghusband's expedition was intended to forestall, would lead to Britain seeking greater control over Nepal. Just how great an economic price Nepal paid for the supposed geo-strategic gains is difficult to say.

The author could also have given more space to cultural relations as opposed to high diplomacy. He does look briefly at food crops which may have been introduced into Nepal from China, but he decided not to discuss early migrations from what is now Chinese territory. As shown by George van Driem's work (van Driem 2002), this field of study is a fascinating one, even though conclusions must inevitably remain highly speculative.⁴

Finally, one small point of detail – the only such error which I detected. The author consistently refers to the disputed border claimed by the British in the north-eastern Himalayas as the 'MacMohan' line. This Indo-Scottish hybrid has a delightful ring to it, but 'MacMahon Line' is the correct spelling.

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Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat became the new Finance Minister of Nepal in February 2014, his sixth stint in this job intermittently since 1994. Prior to this, he was Deputy Chairman of the National Planning Commission for three years. In Nepal's turbulent political transition following the decade long Maoist insurgency in Nepal, Dr. Mahat also served as member of the Special Committee for the Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Army Combatants, which saw the successful resolution in 2013 on the future of some 17,000 former combatants. He has also served in the Board of Trustees of the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok (1993/4). He has several publications to his credit including a widely acclaimed book *In Defence of Democracy* (2005) by Ram Sharan Mahat. Edition unavailable in Russia. This edition of this title cannot be bought in your region. Click to see if another is available for you to purchase. See Other Editions. The Peoples Movement brought about a polity based on political plurality and broad freedom. The state-imposed conformity and authoritarianism under the Panchayat gave way to diversity and innovations. The period was accompanied by new paradigms and ideas in many aspects of national life. A variety of concepts, idioms, and cliches of the contemporary world found their expressions in various forms. Corresponding address: Notes 1. Kantipur (Kathmandu Nepali language daily newspaper), November 13, Ram Sharan Mahat, *In Defence of Democracy: Dynamics and Fault Lines of Nepal's Political Economy* (New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2005). 3. World Bank, 1994, Staff Appraisal Report: Arun-3 Hydroelectric Project, Washington DC: The World Bank.