

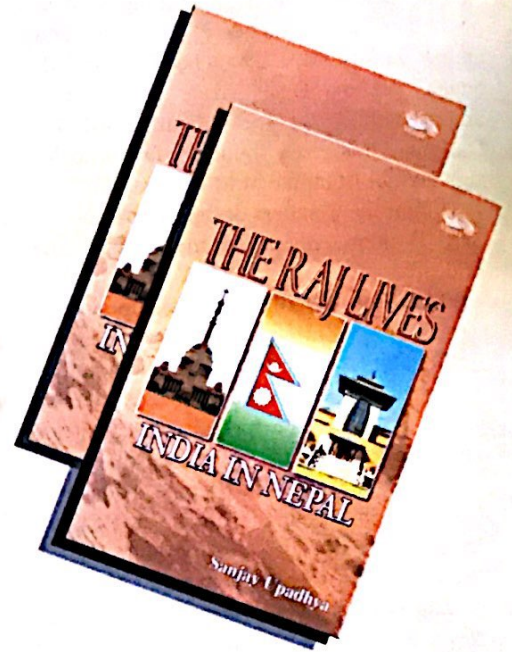
BOOK REVIEW

Embracing Tight



■ By Bipin Adhikari

The basic premise of Sanjay Upadhyaya's new book-- that "sixty years after British colonial rule, Nepal's struggle to shed its Raj-era shackles continues" - is a living account of the historical testament of Indo-Nepal relations



Sanjay Upadhyaya's book "The Raj Lives: India in Nepal" [New Delhi: Vitasta Publishing Pvt, Ltd, 2008] is the latest addition on the current scholarship on Indo-Nepal relations and their vicissitudes.

Written with a noble objective of "cut[ting] through the "rhetoric and recriminations" in Indo-Nepal relations, the author, a matured journalist and scholar, also intends to "clear the way for a rational debate on what will continue to be a highly complex relationship." The author hopes to cultivate "a more dispassionate understanding of why India has acted in the way it has." Especially, on the later issues, the author intends to encourage his compatriots to have "a more dispassionate understanding.

The book comes in a very critical period of Nepal's history. This period is critical not just because Nepal is framing a new Constitution, and restructuring the state in a very troubled scenario. This period is critical also because the political state that maintained historical continuity of the Nepalese nation, its independence and sovereignty, and the institutions that resisted Indian interference in Nepal have also been dismantled.

The 12-point understanding reached between the insurgent Communist party of Nepal (Maoist) and the mainstream political parties protesting against the monarch (exercising executive powers to quell the Maoist insurgency) have finally led to the abrogation of the 1990 Constitution; promulgation of a new (but 'loose') interim document to fill the vacuum, elections to the Constituent Assembly, and abolition of

monarchy. The active Indian initiation and support - both of the politicians and of the Indian security agencies-- to achieve all these changes have not been any secret.

The Indian contribution not to put the monarchy on referendum; help provide Nepalese citizenship to more than two million Indian immigrants in Nepal, and to quell the national army on this issue has been remarkably successful. India has also helped the Maoists to form the government - after creating countervailing power in the plains of Nepal to check their ambitions (should it be needed). As the nation is passing through this transition, the new Prime Minister, Puspa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', has been kind to accept the status of the "special relations" between India and Nepal during his official visit to New Delhi last month.

The basic premise of Upadhyaya - i. e. [even] "sixty years after British colonialist rulers left the sub-continent, Nepal's struggle to shed its Raj-era shackles continues" - is a living account of the historical testament of Indo-Nepal relations. Upadhyaya starts examination of his premise with the analysis of the political, strategic environment of the Himalayas in the second half of the 18th century leading to the institution of the modern Nepal. He links this process with the war with Tibet in 1791-92, the war with East India Company in 1814-15, which resulted in the ceding of all territories west of Mahakali river and east of Mechi river as well as the entire lowland jungles in the South to the Company, starting of the process of Nepal's political and psychological encirclement, and working with the British during both

the World Wars in a bid to keep the country safe.

Upadhyaya deals with the period of instability between 1951-60, during which India acquired a very bad name in Nepal. The next thirty years was a story of open discord and quiet diplomacy, where India played so effectively pitting one force against the other, in a bid to prevail supreme in Nepal. Upadhyaya has analysed the mass movement of 1989-90, the dynamism and deficit of democracy in that period, in a subsequent chapter explaining the background behind evolution of the twin pillars (monarchy in multi-party system) theory. The last four chapters deal with the assassination of King Birendra and his family, the takeover of executive power by King Gyanendra at the height of the Maoist movement, and background for institution of democracy in the shadow of Mao. Finally, the author has reflections on post-Raj realism.

Upadhyaya is super in the analysis of the issues (including actions, attitudes ...etc) beforehand. He relies on authoritative sources. He is nowhere overbearing, nowhere taking sides on the issues that have been accumulated over the years, and certainly not expecting too much. His references about B. P. Koirala and King Birendra's handling of Indian affairs are not adequate for sure. Much of these accounts have been published recently highlighting the Indian role in the movements and counter-movements in Nepal. King Gyanendra certainly abused the democratic process, but that certainly is not the reason why he has been dethroned.

Upadhyaya has given benefit of doubt to India on so many issues that many others wouldn't give so easily - apparently in a bid to establish his impartiality. Additionally, the readers do not find much in this otherwise very thorough and comprehensive book about the agenda of Constituent Assembly and the role of Nepali Congress stalwart, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, during this transition. But that does not minimize the great work that the author has done.

To sum up, it must be stated that any study of Indo-Nepal relations and its recent ramification will not be complete without reading this book thoroughly. Apart from being an objective analysis of the theme, The Raj Prevails also explains how Nepalese think about their core national concerns. This book is also an honest effort for the people who believe that it is possible for Nepal and India to have a just relationship in full recognition of each other's sovereignty, national independence and eagerness to grow as per the aspirations of their people.

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difficulties.

For that to happen, India must stop doing

what Professor Leo E. Rose prophesied in 1973, and what turns out to be true after reading this book: "Some future Indian government may well conclude that the simplest solution to New Delhi's chronic problem with Nepal would be to replace the existing regime in Katmandu with one considered more reliable by the Indian authorities. While this would probably prove counterproductive in the long run, it could be accomplished with relative ease in several ways: direct intervention by Indian troops; slightly disguised intervention through the use of the Gurkha units in the Indian army or ex-servicemen resident in India; indirect intervention through support of a Nepali revolutionary movement; or an all-out economic blockade." Apparently, this is not helping out the troubled relationship. ■

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