

REVIEWS

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Y. P. Pant and S. C. Jain, **Regional Imbalances and the Process of Regional Development in Nepal**, New Delhi: Development Publishers, 1980, pp. 72, Tables and Index.

Pant and Jain are no strangers to the economic literature on Nepal. Both the authors have written profusely on aspects of Nepali economy. Their interest in regional development is surely commendable.

It is ironic, however, that just when regional planning and development in Nepal appears to have been shrouded in confusion and controversy that a new book on the theme should appear which does little to clear the confusion and adds more to the surrounding controversy. The book is quite frankly pretentious. In a span of 72 pages the authors attempt the stupendous task of charting "a detailed framework on overall regional development strategy" which, as the authors suggest, "incorporates basic requirements of regional development, details of sectoral programmes on regional basis, overall integrated development strategy" as well as long term investment strategy and projected sectoral investment requirements for the country as a whole for the next 15 years! The crux of the book, however has very little to do with the clarification of the concept of regional development in the context of Nepal.

Nearly one-third of the book is devoted to highlighting the natural and developmental imbalances among different ecological and developmental regions of Nepal. This is an old theme the first lucid exploration of which was made by Harka Gurung in his monograph **Regional Development Planning**. The present book includes some new tables and the data have been slightly updated. The analysis is sparse but the inescapable conclusion is of course that the benefits of development have not been equitably distributed

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and that existing regional imbalances call for a regional development strategy in tune with Nepali geographic and economic realities. The exploration of regional imbalances assumes that an inventory of regional resources exist. The authors have framed the tables on regional imbalances on the basis of existing secondary information without even indicating that a detailed inventory of regional, natural, economic and human resources does not exist in Nepal. For some reason the CEDA study on the Far Western region has gone unnoticed. One looks in vain for a resource-based analysis of regional imbalances in the book.

The justification for a regional development approach in Nepal constituted the second theme explored by the authors. The theme covers exactly eight pages of the book, and in all honesty Harka Gurung's monograph does more justice to the theme. The authors neither analyse the theoretical and methodological appropriateness of the grand strategy of "Growth Centers" and "Growth Corridors" nor do they provide reasoned economic explanation of the objectives of regional development as enunciated in the appendix to the Forth Plan. Planning for regional development is generally regraded as an exercise in coordinating four cardinal territorial policy objectives that of justice, stability, growth, and balance. The interpretation of these territorial policy objectives in the context of Nepal is sorely lacking in the book. The authors further fail to look at the concept of region as it has been interpreted in the context of Nepal. The process of regional development presupposes an adequate interpretation of the concept of region. Planning minus an adequate consideration of the concept of region may be planning but it surely is not regional planning !

The ultimate, and from the author's perspective the most "original" part of the book covers roughly the last 37 pages. This section is devoted to "outlining and detailing" the author's regional development strategy, its sectoral ramifications, and a "consistent" long term investment strategy. The authors favour the now popular integrated rural development strategy (IRD) but the theoretical and methodological implications of the strategy is conspicuously absent from the author's treatment. The authors follow the approach of the planning documents literally. Statements, not analysis, are made and conclusions are abruptly derived. The fundamental question of how the IRDP strategy can be theoretically, methodologically, and practically made part of the Growth Centre hypothesis is left quite

untouched by the authors. Even the concept of integrated rural development in the context of Nepal's development experience is given scarce attention. The authors list the basic requirements for a IRD strategy as if these are self-evident 'truths', and detail "sectoral programmes" as if an ad hoc listing of sectoral projects is enough answer to the problems of linking local development programmes to the regional framework and linking the regional development programmes to the much wider national context. There is no mention of the vital role of regional specific policies in agriculture, industry, population, settlement, infrastructure etc. in orienting the IRD programmes in different regions. It might be noted that such region-specific policies do not exist in Nepal and the need has been completely ignored by successive plans. What the authors have listed is not the outline of sectoral programmes but a list of priority areas under different sectors. Real programmes can be outlined and detailed only when resource inventory of different regions exist, when region-specific policy guidelines are formulated, and when the 'felt needs' of the people, and the 'perceived needs' of the planners are made to converge. This convergence, it seems to me, at local, regional and national levels is the crux of the IRD programmes. The authors treatment of this aspect is at best shallow and superficial.

A regional development strategy is first and foremost an exercise in the clarification of concepts where the broad objectives of the strategy and its ramifications are objectively analysed. It is only then that a investment strategy consistent with the regional development strategy is formulated and experimented. In spite of the conceptual lapses in outlining and analysing such a strategy the authors take much pains in working out their investment strategy. In doing so the GDP growth rates of different ecological zones for each five year period between 1975/6 and 1994/5 have been projected. It should be remembered that the GDP figures for ecological zones themselves are best guess estimates. Since the goal set by the authors is to treble the GDP by the year 1995 the differential growth rates for different periods have been worked out on the sole basis of what are considered "reasonable" growth rates. The criteria on which this "reasonable" is based is however, not spelled. The investment requirement over the 20 year period between 1974/5 and 1994/5 to achieve the desired level of GDP has then been projected. Simply, the model makes the growth in GDP from different sectors a function of the investment in different sectors of the economy. The model, at least

as it appears in the book, does not seem to be well-specified. This, however, could have been a printing error. The projected investment model is based on the 1967/8 to 1976/7 time series data of GDP estimates and the sectoral distribution of development expenditure in roughly the same period. Investment, the authors concede has, been worked out at 20% less than development outlay. The model has been worked out for three ecological zones as well as for the nation.

The authors assume that the growth coefficients will register increment during the 6th plan period and then decline in the subsequent periods. The assertion that the economy may reach a take-off stage during the 6th plan period is hard to swallow on the basis of existing trends which show a declining productivity in the vital sectors of the economy. Investment coefficients have derived for each 5 year period on the basis of which investment requirement for the next five years have been computed. Accordingly, except for the transport and communication sector (which shows a continuous decline in elasticities throughout) the coefficients in all periods following the 6th plan show a decline. The assumption here is that in the years to come the development that have already occurred in the transport and communication sector will increasingly contribute to the growth in the national economy. This presupposes the formulation of policies at different levels that will be able to reap the advantages from existing transport and communication network. The authors are optimistic about the performances of the economy in years to come but the basis of this optimism is hard to discern. Sectoral investment requirements have also been computed on the basis of sectoral elasticities. The authors postulate the highest investment requirement for the agriculture sector and the lowest for the transport and communication sector. GDP as well as the investment requirements have been projected for all periods for the Terai, the hills and mountains, and the Kathmandu valley. In percentile terms, however, the projected investment requirement for ecological zones in each period is almost constant—around 33% for the Terai, 26% for the Kathmandu Valley and about 41% for the hills and mountains. With that projection the authors presume that the levels of investment “will correct regional imbalances to a great degree and ultimately result in narrowing down of differentials of per capita GDP between the regions.” !

The implicit assumptions behind the projections are many and not

all have been adequately treated in the book. The major question is: how is the projected GDP and investment requirement consistent with the resource potentiality of each ecological zone? what the authors attempt is a purely econometric exercise which poses as many questions as it tries to solve. It must be remembered that in models of this type the spatial connotations are reflected only in the differential growth rates of different economic sectors in different ecological zones. One expects this differential to be based on a sound analysis of the regional resource but for ecological zones, again raises the question: what do the concepts of "region" and "regional development" mean to the authors?

The book shows all the signs of a hasty publication. It contains no maps and no diagrams the spatial differences between ecological zones could have been better elucidated through appropriate maps. The analysis in general is quite sketchy. Themes are introduced and closed abruptly. The projections, perhaps the most "original" part of the book, also lack enough ramifications. The "rush" for the press is nowhere reflected as conspicuously as when one finds out that the book has an index but no bibliography. With a little more analysis, editing, and presentation the book could have been much better produced. Finally, it must be said that one expects more from Pant and Jain.

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REVIEWS

-Chakramehr Bajracharya

Harka Gurung, **VIGNETTES OF NEPAL**, Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan, 1980, pp. 435; maps, plates, bibliography, glossary and index.

Perceptive travel accounts by native scholars is a rarity in Nepali geographic literature. This lacunae is filled to a large extent by the present book. The book is an excellent compendium of travel accounts of then numerous treks across the country undertaken by the author largely between the period 1966-1978. The book intentionally gives wider coverage to lesser known places. Within a span of twenty chapters, organised geographically from the west to the east, the book is not merely a travel account as travel accounts go, but a perceptive exercise in the diverse geographical, social, economic and developmental manifestations of Nepal.

Although not formally so divided, the subject matter contained in it falls into three broad parts—physical, human and developmental.

As a part of physical aspect, the book introduces to the readers a wide range of environmental conditions, representative land-uses and types of vegetation that span between tropical plains and the alpine heights; and explores the exotic scenic grandeur of places like "paradise of Buddha"—Phoksunde, native land of yeti-Everest, and world's "one of the most extraordinary and most beautiful places"—Pokhara. There are also glimpses of northern borderlands such as Humla, Mugu, Dolpa, Mustang and Manang alongwith the exciting description of mountaineering ventures of varying scale—Kagmara and Everest, and about the big game shooting in the once endemic malarial tropical jungle of Chitwan. The author's pertinent observations on local geology; geomorphology of the places like Gandaki Valley and Arun Valley; river system particularly of Marsyangdi and Arun; glaciation of Everest region and glacial features of Talung and Manang Valleys; extents of geographical distribution of certain crops,

cultures and livestock add to our knowledge of that phenomena which were of immense interest in our geographical studies.

Much as the same, the book portrays the personality of various places and people across the country. The book not only highlights the geographical distribution of human activities and circulation pattern associated with the satisfying of man's basic needs but also provides glimpses, in a rather admirable style the co-mingling of diverse native cultures in religious gathering at places of contrasting locale-Devghat and Gosainkund for satisfying his spiritual needs, in his search for the meaning of life. The author has also painstakingly checked the observations of various social scientists against his own in dealing about different ethnic groups and their cultural processes. While the author provides revealing anthropological insights into such people as the Raute, Rajbanshi, the Satar and the Lepcha, such themes as the cultural syncretism among the Bhotia, Gurung and Thakali, the clan history of Thakali, and the history of local feudal principalities as well as the process of Gorkha expansion are very rewardingly treated.

The book also takes into account the changes and processes of development affecting enclosed wide valleys, roads side areas and remote regions of interior Nepal. If the book throws light on the dichotomy of Kathmandu and Mahendranagar, differential rate of development of similar area Jhapa and Kanchanpur, Hat dominated eastern hills against western hills with permanent bazars and Chautaras; it warns against the consequences from the encroachment upon and depletion of natural resources, and suggests new ventures in development like hydro-electricity from Rara, skiing resort in Langtang etc.

Besides the works on records of various scholars, the record of names and appreciation of the works of such persons like Tal Bahadur Pun—a recent Victoria Cross winner, Pasang Kambache—a dedicated man who nurtured and established horticulture farm in the cold desert of Mustang, Phu Dorje—an efficient Sherpa with good climbing records, Dil Das Thapa—a dedicated school teacher further enhance the quality of the book.

The format of the book is attractive with a glossy semi-stiff colour

front cover. The eleven colour plates are well reproduced and out of fourteen black and white plates most of them came out good. The bibliography is selective with only sixty-one of the published sources cited. All native terms used in the text are included in the glossary with particular emphasis on place-name derivatives with diverse linguistic sources. Similarly, places that are relevant to the description are included in the index showing altitude in meters for most places.

The book contains nineteen maps which are fairly detailed and well produced showing important place names mentioned in the text. These maps are drawn from various sources but most of them are based on Survey of India 1:506,880 and 1:223,440 series. The book records the defect in map co-ordinates (p.96) and map inaccuracies (pp.110, 279) in the northern border land.

Many of the errors are noted on an errata sheet included in the book. But in the errata sheet itself there are incorrect numbers at two places (one each in page and line column). The book is not yet free from such misprints. There are at least forty such mistakes in the book. Humla women has been mistakenly put as Jumla women (Pl ix a) and Mustang town (Pl. xvii b) is upside down. Correction of few other minor mistakes such as the dates mentioned in pages 241 and 246; few references to page numbers in black and white plates; and rechecking of altitudes of peaks appearing in the text against the given route maps may be found useful for the second edition of the book.

It seems as if the book has made distinction between "Teesta" and "Tista" as the former (p. 188) appeared as Tista in the errata sheet. In fact, the former is the native pronunciation, and latter the survey name for the same river. The religious harmony subsisting between Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal could have been brought into focus with much clarity by adding a sentence or two in pages 269-70. Shiva is worshipped as Aryavalokitesvara by Buddhist. Snellgrove in Buddhist Himalaya (p. 78) observes "Halahala, Loknath, Nilakanta, were all accepted as forms of Lokesvara". The name of a deity Nigalasaini has appeared as Nikalasaini (p. 21). The popular version in Baitadi is that the said deity, also known locally as Kanhile Bhagvati, appeared in Dehimandu out from the bushes of Nigale. and thus it took its name Nigalasaini. Tulsipur

(p. 29) should have been designated as zonal headquarter, not as district headquarters.

This book is a commendable work by the author who is known widely for his scholarly and meticulous approach to his subject. Besides students, scholars and those interested in Nepalese study, it is the reviewers belief that persons planning future treks and expeditions into the mountains of Nepal will find the book profitable.

The book is perhaps unique in the manner in which it treats the Nepali geographic, social and economic landscape with profound sympathy and understanding. In spite of the few misprints and mistakes noted above the book shows careful planning and, above all, careful and skilful editing.

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