
The book under review is a product of a workshop organized by the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Studies and survey research activity that accompanied it. It combines an introduction with five other chapters by separate authors.

The introductory chapter, by the editor Lok Raj Baral, gives a rundown of Nepali political history from the end of the Rana regime up to the period of multiparty democracy. Focusing on the period since 1990 the chapter considers the importance and utility of elections (acknowledging their contributions) before pointing out the problems that have besieged political practice. While the results of the three general elections gave reason to believe their fairness, those of the two local level elections showed the opposite as they overwhelmingly favored the parties in power. The author argues that while elections have changed elites, they have not changed the culture or quality of institutions. Democratic periods in the history of the country have been short-lived.

The author objects to the fact that during the period of multiparty democracy the major parties have flip-flopped in their ideologies and policies, making no secret of their quest for power. The list of criticisms is long, including the inability of the parties in power to hold the majority they received, instability, intra-party feuds, and personal clashes between senior leaders; unreasonable demands, extra- or un-parliamentary methods; and pressure tactics of the opposition. Pursuing democracy as an electoral mechanism, but without internalizing and living out a democratic spirit, has created distortions and decay. Participation is not genuine and centralization has been reinforced. The positive aspect of the democratic exercise is that freedom and openness have given space for free public debates. The author also concedes certain incremental achievements within the context of practical constraints. This connects to the Maoists as they, in contrast, advocate untenable radicalism, but nonetheless have carried a positive message of change.

The author suggests that elections, government, and governance are interwoven like a web. Elections give legitimacy to government, a government should uphold certain requisites to attain governance (which
implies efficient governance), and a government that fails to attain this governance through neglect of these requisites is not legitimate.

Political development is in fact the theme of the first chapter, entitled "Democracy and Elections," written by the editor himself. The title is not a good representation of the chapter because the topic of elections is only one of the chapter's many sub themes. With a brief survey of political development theories, the author makes the point that contextualized country-specific frameworks are important, though more generalized theories should also not be lost sight of. Therefore, political development in our context is a hybrid concept between the original formulation in the developed countries and our own ground realities. It is shaped as much by socio-cultural, ideological, geopolitical, and numerous other variables as by universalistic ideas and theories. Pointing out legal and performance legitimacy as the key contemporary political development issues, the author also throws up multiple sets of prerequisites.

Baral includes some public opinion data containing the variables of democracy and elections according to which the position of elections as a component of democracy ranks low in public opinion. But the author takes no account of this. Most of the respondents associated elections with rights of the people. Freedom was rated as the greatest achievement of democracy. Corruption, insecurity and unemployment were regarded as principal problems in democracy. People recommended good governance as a way of consolidating democracy.

Baral describes state, nation, and democracy as historically intertwined strands with democracy joining as the late comer. It has bred domination, exclusion, and subsequent dissatisfaction. The author makes the case for pluralism and inclusion through democracy. He shows a paradox of Nepali history that though the nation in some form predated the state, nationhood is, in a way, non-existent due to exclusion. The author analyses the composition of the parliament. As before, the prevalence of a certain caste group continues in the post-1990 period, with Brahmins now replacing Chhetris. Gender wise, the parliament has far too few women.

Baral also provides a historical account and analysis of elections and parliamentary practice. The Government of Nepal Act of 1948 envisioned a unicameral, non-partisan legislature, but this idea was aborted. However, there were some experiments with elections at the local level. The political uncertainties that followed made general elections possible only in 1959. The Nepali Congress party took only 37.2 percent of the vote but took more than two-thirds of the seats in the winner-takes-all
system. In the three general elections of the post-1990 period too, the winners were able to claim greater power than their actual percentage of votes received would justify. Initially Baral disapproves of this practice but soon it is being cited as normal procedure in established democracies. Although pointing out maladies is the main topic of the chapter, the author does point out patterns (such as how the NC and UML were established as the largest parties, with the RPP following quite far behind) and makes some projections (such as how the entry of the Maoists into the electoral process may erode the UML base while the NC base is projected to be stable due to absence of non-left alternatives, with the RPP facing "psychological and symbolic difficulties"). "Used more as a political ladder rather than an opportunity for correcting systemic aberrations, the election is used for recycling of elites of upper caste and class backgrounds" (p.42). Baral points out some woes of election practices such as ascriptive-based rather than achievement-based norms in election nominations, and the mushrooming of political parties on the eve of elections. Paradoxes in parliamentary practice are shown by instances such as the nomination of ten members of the Upper House, controversies over the dissolution of parliament, controversy surrounding the ratification of the Mahakali treaty, the Citizenship Bill of 2000, the stalling of the parliament by the opposition, demanding the majority-commanding-government's resignation, etc. Innovative trends are lacking and there is a tendency to avoid the parliamentary route. Nevertheless, elections have an integrating effect and create enthusiasm among the voting public.

Baral dwells on a wide range of topics, though they often appear to digress from the focus or theme of the chapter. For example, he also describes the roles of NGOs and the media at length. In describing national political events in Nepal, he sometimes compares them with India, and sometimes measures them against an idea of political development that appears abstract and without benchmarks.

Chapter two, "Election Management" by Ram Kumar Dahal, deals first with the concept of electoral systems, explaining elections in relation to people and democracy, and then goes on to explain election systems, though the discussion is not comprehensive and has some factual errors. It then outlines the electoral system as used in Nepal. The next section tries to explain the phases of election management before, during, and after elections. But it ends up focusing only on the before and during stages (basing its discussion largely on information from the Election Commission) and says almost nothing about the after stage. The chapter
also deals with legal provisions and the functions of the Election Commission and Election Constituency Delimitation Commission. While some steps of election management are explained with details on local provisions, functions, and technical and logistical aspects, others aspects go unmentioned. It would have been better if the author had referred to the election cycle, well known in election process studies, to help keep track of the processes and steps involved.

Among those studied, people who did not vote gave non-registration of their names, physical distance, and not getting voter identity cards as reasons for not being able to vote. Though we cannot generalize from the 66 responses collected here, these are some of the problems of elections that the study brings up. In the 1999 election one-fourth of the people believed the process had been manipulated, mostly by proxy-voting, followed by underage voting, the use of force and violence, etc. The respondents are disaggregated into categories like rural and urban residents, different age groups, occupation groups and though it is actually their perceptions of the practices of manipulation, the author states that those practices were higher among them. This is misleading. As in the previous chapter, terms like sample and universe are confused, though this chapter and the whole book makes the study of samples an important part. The word sample is used in research methodology for a small quantity that represents the whole, which is called universe or population. It is apparent that a part of the population is studied here without knowledge of sampling theory. To cite another example of the wrong use of quantitative data, it is stated here that 86.6 percent of the respondents voted in the 1999 election, while the actual voter turnout according to Election Commission records is 65.69 percent. This shows the study's sample is not representative of the whole (Nepal's voting age population). As such, the author should explain why he is using an unrepresentative sample. The bottom line is that the chapter's use of survey data is questionable.

One useful piece of information from the questionnaire survey is that sizeable amounts of money is spent on distributing money and materials, even trinkets, during elections. The legal and administrative provisions and Dahal's personal impressions are the more readable sections of the chapter.

Dahal also explains that the government has intervened in elections, especially local elections, through CDOs and the police. There are instances of people in government using resources for elections for their own partisan ends. The election code of conduct attempts to control such
practices. There have also been calls sometimes for a more neutral caretaker government for election, as in Bangladesh. The chapter also deals with security management. Challenges and problems of elections include impartiality, adequate legal provisions, identification of votes, booth management, implementation of the code of conduct, security and order, monitoring, and observation of elections.

The third chapter, "Election and Governance" by Krishna P. Khanal, starts by highlighting the problem of governance in the country. 98.8 percent of the respondents to the survey pointed to the necessity of good governance for the consolidation of democracy. Its absence renders elections and democratic provisions futile. The definition of governance used is a broad one, meaning democracy and even political process. Elections have been considered a part of governance. This may not agree with other definitions of governance that are more specific. Believing the definition "to create an order, a ruling among the populace in a given political society" to be confining and conventional, Khanal brings people, market, and development into the ambit of governance. He relates elections with three major principles of a democratic polity – representation, legitimacy, and consent to govern.

In an overview of the structures of governance, Khanal comments on the structures of government and practices – malpractices such as the assertion of power or the obstinance of the king and army toward the prime minister, executive instability and the inability to command, and politicking by parliamentary committees. The opinion survey found approval of the central government and some outcomes of the democratic exercise to be low. Most of the people surveyed think that members of parliament should concentrate on developing their areas rather than their national level legislative functions. The author traces the cause of this attitude to the kinds of election campaigns and commitments made.

Khanal also describes the bureaucracy as still patrimonial and parochial, and now more politicized. It is non responsive and inefficient in functioning despite some attempts to reform it. According to Khanal, "People rate the performance of police and administration at local level very low" (p.132). Centralized party structures and strict polarization of society along party lines have become "impediments to the effective implementation of the schemes related to decentralization and local governance" (p.135). The judiciary protects human rights, conducts judicial review, and administers justice. Justice is delayed, and there are irregularities, corruption, and the judiciary lacks accountability. The
author comments on cases of judicial review, and looks at civil society as it relates to governance.

Problematic issues of governance have been pointed out as election practices, executive instability, leadership, corruption, opposition methods, disrupting normal life, and the insurgency. Khanal's chapter is basically on governance and not on elections and governance. A bias in favor of the executive as opposed to the legislative, or towards a particular government, is sometimes sensed in the chapter.

Chapter four, "Political Parties and Elections" by Krishna Hachhethu, begins with an interesting analogy between elections and marriage ceremonies suggesting that both tie legitimacy with obligation. Elections marry parties with people, or representatives with voters. "Elections provide a channel of communication between the mass of society and political parties" (p.156). Elections bring together political processes of participation, mobilization, aggregation of demands, and socialization as well as having multiple positive impacts that consolidate democracy.

The chapter first gives a primer on political parties and public perceptions toward them. People are generally positive towards the parties—as they have historically been associated with positive changes in society—but not towards their leaders. It also analyzes political parties in terms of ideological topography. Ideological divergence among major parties is constantly thinning. The chapter also classifies parties according to their commitment to multiparty democracy and representation in parliament. Hachhethu observes a gradual precedence of pragmatism over ideology and says this has both positive and negative impacts, but does not say what these are.

Hachhethu inconsistently attributes the reasons for those results of the elections to the exercise of the people's judgment, to the influences of incumbency, and to party divisions. What is also not analyzed, but should have been, are the changes in popular voting patterns from one election to the next. Two-party dominance has been observed as the trend taking the second election result among the three as an exception, and this generalization has been extended to the entire subcontinent, thereby ignoring the emergence of regional parties in India. The multiple splits within, and faces of, the communist parties seem to have confused the author as well. The United People's Front is said to be a front organization for the CPN (Mashal) and the National People's Front of the CPN (Unity Centre). Actually, Mashal was part of the Unity Centre and UPF was its front, while NPF was the front of Masal.
Hachhethu deals extensively with nomination processes in different parties for candidature, internal disputes, and alignments in elections, and has garnered valuable information on these topics. Equally revealing is his analysis of ideological planks, policies and programs, and campaign methods of the political parties, both across parties and across different elections. The data presented shows how voters have prioritized their expectations. People perceive a yawning gap between the promises made during elections and the delivery on those promises later. They feel that once elected, their leaders forget them. Political parties have therefore not been able to foster responsiveness, a key element of democracy, through elections.

The fifth and last chapter, "Social Structure and Voting Behavior" by Dhruba Kumar, explains the hierarchical nature of the Nepalese society—Thalus/Mukhias/Hune Khane and the rest, the caste system, the rulers, and the Raiti/Praja. The author discusses different facets of Nepali society: how political class and education were exclusive till not long ago; how Brahmins, Chhetris, and Newars have traditionally dominated politics (and still do); how social hierarchies were codified by the Manusmriti, the Dibya Upadesh, and the Muluki Ain; and how these systems of hierarchy and patronage have continued through history even into the present system of democracy.

Kumar's chapter largely rambles on, offering scattered observations and election data. Some important observations include how the sharp difference between the two local level elections show that the party in power influences results and that the commitment of the national electorate is unstable. The author points to the growing ethnicization of politics in Nepal and how this trend stands against extant election rules. A recurring theme is that some groups dominate the political scene. This leads to the inference that Nepal is "constitutionally framed to deny the right to represent the nationalities that are numerically in a majority but treated as national minorities" (p.211). Voters, though free to choose, can choose only those options imposed from above.

The author draws several conclusions from the election results. These include: how, through overwhelming turnouts, voters have rejected radical alternatives to democratic practices; how the desire for political stability and functional government is seen in the choice to elect centrists rather than the extremists, and how voters' dissatisfaction was expressed through alternation of representatives; how pluralism was preferred over sectarianism; how the commitment to democratic order continues despite
the fragility of the process; and how communalization is not the course on which we are heading.

Again, public opinion data have been fitted in—sometimes awkwardly. For instance, the participation of women in elected positions has been measured through what people think about it, rather than by what their actual number is. Otherwise, the information is revealing. One instance of incorrect information concerns voter turnout statistics. The author claims that Nepal's voter turnout is low compared to that "in most democracies [where] the percentage is as high as 90 percent and above and as low as 70 percent" (p.205). However, the fact is that many established democracies have much lower turnouts.

On the whole, the book is seminal both because of its comprehensiveness and because it is the only available book on the subject. The information and observed patterns are illuminating. Data on public opinion is also informative but the extent to which this data is representative of the whole population is questionable, and some of the authors do not seem confident with the data or in how to use it.

Substitution in the parliament by newcomers through elections is a celebrated observation in the book, repeated across chapters. However, the appetite of readers of today to learn about election systems, to make an assumption, will not be satiated because the subject matter is different. The book remains up to date on elections given that there have been no elections since it was published. However, when one happens and with a different election system, another book will be urgent.

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It is now well known that members of the Constitution Recommendation Committee (CRC) set up to aid the drafting of the 1990 constitution were shocked when the majority of suggestions they had solicited from the Nepali public related to ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional issues. Demands which in today’s political situation appear reasonable and pertinent – for recognition of languages and cultures other than Nepali, for proportional representation of historically marginalized groups in the
legislature and other state organs – were in 1990 summarily dismissed by the CRC as threats to national unity.

Justice Bishwa Nath Upadhaya’s remark at that time that it was “unfortunate” that most of the issues brought to the attention of the CRC, which he chaired, were about “peripheral issues” is sometimes now related with disbelief as an illustration of high caste state-elite insensitivity towards the aspirations of the majority of Nepal’s people. Ideas of nationalism imparted by the Panchayat regime – of a people united by a single language and culture, under the benevolent protection of a Hindu monarch – had heavily influenced the very people who had fought for the abolition of the Panchayat system and the political class was disconnected from non-Bahun/Chhetri socio-cultural groups.

That the 1990 constitution, while enshrining the basic values of multi-party democracy and formal equality, was in large part discriminatory towards many of Nepal’s varied ethnic/caste groups is now widely accepted. That Nepal’s ethnic heterogeneity demands more than a state that guarantees only formal political equality has become a truism. The open political space that was created due to the adoption of basic civil liberties after 1990 allowed for historically marginalized groups to organize and articulate their grievances against the state and offer prescriptions for state reform. Among Nepal’s varied socio-cultural groups, it was members of the group now known as janajāti that became the most cohesive and articulate. While it was the Maoists who were chiefly responsible for making ideas such as the need for a secular and federal state a major agenda for Nepal’s political class, much of the current legitimacy for these ideas comes from the efforts of janajāti activists and scholars over the past two decades.

Mahendra Lawoti falls directly within this lineage of activists and scholars. His 2005 book Towards a Democratic Nepal: Inclusive Political Institutions for a Multicultural Society attempts to synthesize and bring coherence to a wide variety of scattered arguments and offers prescriptions based on the comparative study of countries that have succeeded in managing diversity through political accommodation. His book, which is comprehensive and well argued, although often tediously repetitive, has become the one of the most important manifestos for reform which places accommodation of marginalized ethnicities and castes as its central goal.

The 1990 constitution, Lawoti argues, despite being nominally democratic, has been responsible for increased exclusion of marginalized socio-cultural groups from the political process. The adoption of a
majoritarian political system – key elements of which are a unitary state and First-Past-the-Post electoral system – which, suited for countries with a homogenous cultural mix, served in Nepal to perpetuate the dominance of what Lawoti refers to as Caste Hill Hindu Elite Males (CHHEM). The unitary nature of the Nepali state led to over-centralization of power and extreme power abuse. Administrators deputed by the government to the regions displayed great callousness towards the people they were supposed to serve as they were only accountable to the centre.

By declaring the state as Hindu, the constitution discriminated against other religions; in recognizing only Nepali as the official language, it relegated other languages to second-tier status; through restricting political mobilization on ethnic/caste/regional lines it violated the fundamental rights to organization and expression. The failure to protect group rights of minorities and provide affirmative action measures for oppressed groups, meant that dominant groups had an unfair advantage to the spoils of the state. Through forcing other socio-cultural groups to adopt the Nepali language and other norms and values of the dominant group, the state not only impeded the access that non-dominant groups had to the state, but also served to damage their indigenous languages and capabilities.

Lawoti’s venom is reserved for the post-1990 dispensation; he has little against the Panchayat regime. His insistence that the political institutions adopted after 1990 were chiefly responsible for institutionalized exclusion is somewhat strange as it was the Panchayat system that consolidated almost all of the aspects of the Nepali state that Lawoti believes harmed non-dominant socio-cultural groups.

Though never explicitly, remnants of a fairly influential trend within Nepali thought that seeks to place all blame for Nepal’s failures on Bahunbad while absolving the monarch and those around him appears in Lawoti’s thinking. Historically, most hill-Nepalis, including janajātis, while holding grievances against the state, have been trained into some aspects of Panchayati nationalism and view the monarchy with fondness as the adhesive that holds the Nepali nation together and as a traditional and benign source of patronage. The rapacious and scheming Bahun, in contrast, has no redeeming qualities in this mythology.

These views have been turned into a theory in Dor Bahadur Bista’s seminal anti-Bahunbad manifesto, Fatalism and Development (1991). Bista claims that development has failed in Nepal because of the values and attitudes propagated by Bahunbad. In contrast to the Bahun, is the loyal, hard-working and collaborative janajāti, who represents the
“authentic” Nepali values. Bista’s ideal Nepal is a place where \textit{janajātis} dominate the government and bureaucracy and their work-ethic and spirit of collaboration is harnessed for the good of the country by a wise and benevolent monarch.

Although recognizing that the Panchayat system was discriminatory and lacking much fondness for the monarchy, vestigial remnants of these feelings remain in \textit{Towards a Democratic Nepal}. For Lawoti, the post-1990 dispensation is equated with Bahunbad. It is therefore more culpable for institutionalized exclusion than the monarch-led Panchayati regime, which, in Lawoti’s estimation, was at least more representative than the post-1990 political order as it at least inducted people into the government and bureaucracy on the basis of their caste and ethnicity.

Lawoti’s grievances against the post-1990 order run so deep that he claims that the guarantee of formal equality in the 1990 constitution has actually actively hurt the interests of marginalized socio-cultural groups, as it presents a democratic and progressive front to a “racist and sexist” constitution. This, according to him, was deliberate on the part of the ruling Bahun dominated elite: In an uncharacteristic lapse into intemperateness, he writes: “This method of parading a positive façade in the front while hiding the dagger to stab in the back is a typical dominant group operating style in Nepal.” (p. 137)

Nevertheless, issues of relative culpability aside, Lawoti is on firm ground throughout his discussions on the various means through which the state has discriminated against most of Nepal’s socio-cultural groups. The continuation of institutionalized exclusion, he argues, will lead to greater political mobilization and violence by Nepal’s marginalized socio-cultural groups and will have a devastating impact upon the Nepali state’s stability and integrity. To prevent such consequences, it is necessary to restructure the state and its institutions to make it congruent with Nepal’s diverse social reality. Ideally, this would be done through the promulgation of a new constitution, to be drafted by a widely representative Constituent Assembly.

\textit{Towards a Democratic Nepal} was published in 2005, a period when the King’s capture of state power had led to increased conflict and deep political uncertainty. Ideas like Lawoti’s, while possessing a certain cachet, were by no means dominant in Nepali public discourse at the time. Though the idea of a Constituent Assembly had been pushed by the Maoists, elections towards this end seemed a pipe-dream. At that time, then, Lawoti’s book helped to push ideas regarding the necessity for a radical restructuring of the Nepali state through an elected Constituent
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Assembly into mainstream political discourse. Now that elections for a Constituent Assembly have become the single most important goal of Nepal’s political class, arguments in its favour are less necessary. Assuming that elections to a CA will in fact be held in the near future, it is Lawoti’s prescriptions for reform that are of more interest.

Following the political scientist Arend Lijphart’s classification of political institutions according to whether they belong to “consensus” or “majoritarian” models of democracy, Lawoti argues that all of Nepal’s current political institutions are majoritarian in the extreme and need to be replaced by consensus ones. Among the various kinds of consensus institutions that Lijphart identifies, Lawoti chooses two as most important for Nepal: federalism (as opposed to a unitary state of the majoritarian model of democracy), and a proportional electoral system (as opposed to First-Past-the-Post). In addition Lawoti prescribes widespread reservations for marginalized groups based on their population share in the legislature and other state organs, declaration of a secular state, and other constitutional protections of minority rights.

These prescriptions are discussed in some detail and arguments provided for why they are suitable for Nepal. Federalism, he argues, should be based on ethnic lines rather than on administrative ones, as the latter would simply serve to perpetuate the dominance of elite groups. It is evident that Lawoti has paid much thought to objections people may have to his prescriptions. While discussing federalism, for instance, he is thorough in countering possible criticism: In response to the criticism that Nepal does not need federal autonomy because it is too small, he shows that there are smaller countries than Nepal that have adopted federal structures. In response to criticism that majorities will rule over minorities in the regions where they are in power, he identifies institutions to protect the rights of minorities within regions. And in response to those who say that federalism will lead to the disintegration of the country, he argues that federalism will make secession less rather than more likely as there will be less incentive for groups to secede if their grievances are addressed.

Despite his optimism regarding the positive effects of his political prescriptions, Lawoti himself inadvertently illustrates the difficulties in finding adequate political structures for a country with multi-layered social stratifications. For instance, Lawoti prescribes “non-territorial” federalism to resolve representational problems for groups like Dalits who do not form a numeric majority in any area but are scattered across the nation. Here, “groups that are spread out and cannot form territorial
regions for themselves elect their representatives to a national council in a nation-wide election. The elected representatives govern the group in cultural and educational matters.” (p. 250)

Non-territorial federalism, and other institutional measures such as sub-autonomy within regions and the right to form new regions, Lawoti argues, will ensure that the rights of minorities will be protected within regions. However, it is clear that the rights accorded to groups in non-territorial federalism (being limited to cultural and educational matters) do not provide them with sufficient autonomy and protection from the majority group. The latter, in Lawoti’s schema, will possess too great a degree of administrative and economic power, with substantial jurisdiction upon minorities.

Despite these quibbles, *Towards a Democratic Nepal* remains a landmark in Nepali political discourse. Nepal’s political structure is currently undergoing one of the most significant changes in its history: through the promulgation of a secular, federal constitution, Nepal’s self-conception will officially change from a nation bound together by traditional elements of nationalism (language, culture, religion, land) to that of a state bound together by a political principle of acknowledgement of group differences and what the Indian constitutional scholar Rajeev Dhavan has called “celebratory neutrality”.

A political principle has less emotive strength than belongingness to a cultural group, and many Nepalis (mostly, but not limited to, the Bahun/Chhetri elite) are confronted with anxiety and insecurity as they wonder whether a small, poor country will remain intact if tied together only by political principle. While Lawoti’s arguments may not directly assuage these anxieties and insecurities, they do unambiguously demonstrate that the only alternative to radical restructuring is an increase in violent conflict, upheaval and fragmentation. In its way, then, *Towards a Democratic Nepal* continues to serve as a political document that legitimizes and attracts support to ideas which, though now part of mainstream political discourse, continues to face resistance from certain sections of Nepali society.

By its very nature *Towards a Democratic Nepal* is a book that is fated to become dated, to become overtaken by political events. In a hypothetical post- Constituent Assembly future, where a constitution broadly based along the lines that Lawoti lays out has been adopted and put into practice, it is likely that this book will be seen as a both prescient and naïve product of its time. Prescient, for recognizing the appalling consequences of continued institutionalized exclusion and offering timely
solutions for reform. It is naïve because the intense political contestation and compromise going on in the country will produce conceptions of federalism, proportional representation, etc., that are very different from Lawoti's simple and elegant prescriptions. The political institutions that will be adopted will have succeeded in some cases, but will have failed in many others (for, no institutions can solve all of Nepal’s problems, as Lawoti sometimes makes it seem in his book). Faced with the divergence between a messy political reality and the elegant and optimistic prescriptions that Lawoti offers, the future reader of Towards a Democratic Nepal may think, mistakenly, that the book was written in a simpler and more innocent time.

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I bought this book reluctantly, thinking that I would quickly skim its more than four hundred pages for bits of information on Karl Heinz Wagner who, in 1954, became the first westerner to be ordained a Buddhist monk in Nepal, taking the name Sugata. Despite my best intentions, however, I quickly found myself engrossed in the book, reading every word and eagerly turning page after page. This is the story of a German anti-Nazi war resister whose struggle to find meaning led eventually to Nepal where he lived and later visited many times. But intriguingly, it is also the story of Sugata's relationship with Rachel Kellett, a Briton half his age who offered to help him transfer his life onto the written page. The result is an elegantly written book that is somewhere between autobiography (told in Sugata's voice) and biography (Kellett's framing and interpretation of Sugata's experience). The autobiography is interspersed within the story of Sugata's relationship with Kellett, their many meetings and travels together, and most pointedly, their clashes over how to present Sugata's story. This beautifully conceived project offers us a well crafted and moving life story, but also a fascinating account of the struggle between two people—autobiographer and biographer—to resurrect and tell a life.

Karl Heinz Wagner was born in Germany in 1911, the illegitimate son of an unknown father and a Swedish German mother who handed him over to a sister and her husband to be raised. The rise of National Socialism (Nazism) in the 1920s and 30s, combined with Wagner's own
insecurity over being a "bastard" in the home of step parents, made his childhood a time of growing alienation. An outsider, he naturally fraternized with other outsiders in his school, notably Jews whom he saw being increasingly humiliated and finally, brutally abused. A Jewish school friend introduced Wagner to the writings of Gandhi which convinced him to become a pacifist, and sparked a life-long interest in South Asia. While a teenager Wagner came to despise Hitler and Nazism, even while his own step parents became party member, an act that finally drove him from their home at a time when the German economy had collapsed and hundreds of thousands of people were without work. Rather than succumb to the humiliation of endless labor queues, or worse, joining the Nazis for food, Wagner became a wadervogel, a wandering bird or, as it is translated by the authors, a "bird of passage." The rest of Wagner's life would be a combination of restless wandering in search of meaning and stability, and a desire to be alone, rooted in a familiar landscape.

Part one begins with an account of Sugata and Kellett's meeting at a Buddhist meditation retreat in Bodhgaya in 1998 when Sugata was already in his late 80s. As the two get to know each other, and as she learns that Sugata has already written a good bit in German about his early life, Kellett (a published writer) suggests a collaboration. Sugata's German notes, written decades before, along with recorded reminiscences, become the material that Kellett translates and beautifully crafts into the English text.

The bulk of part one is a fascinating account of Wagner's attempts to flee from his hated "homeland" while at the same time being inexorably drawn back to it by the forces war and nationalism. After a few happy but poor months wandering aimlessly through Switzerland with friends in the early 1930s, Wagner was arrested for vagrancy, separated from his friends (whom he never saw again), and deported. He next travels to Sweden, his mother's ancestral home, only to again be deported when the Nazis expel foreigners from Germany, and other countries retaliate in kind. In desperation he flees to Turkey, hoping to get a job, but discovers that without training or experience of any kind, employment is impossible. Reluctantly he returns to Berlin where, with the help of an anti-Nazi administrator, he enrolls in school for art and design. Because of his art (and specifically cartography) background, when he was inevitably drafted into the Nazi army, Wagner was able to secure a non-combatant role and when Germany invaded Norway, he was recruited to serve as a translator (having picked up some "Scandinavian" before the war). The
final chapters of part one are an exciting account of Wagner’s covert work with the Norwegian resistance, his assistance in passing Nazi war secrets to the British, and his dangerous mid-winter, cross-country escape to Sweden in 1943. In supposedly neutral Sweden Wagner was arrested and spent the rest of the war in prison.

Part two recounts Wagner’s post-war life, and his journeys to the East. After the war, in spite of his status as a resister, Wagner had to live with the stigma of being a hated German in Sweden, even while refusing to go back to his “native” Germany. Eventually able to more or less “pass” as a Swede, Wagner worked in graphic design in Stockholm, exhibited paintings, and married a Swede, Ingrid. Because of his deeply ingrained counter-cultural instincts, Wagner soon met Swedish Theosophists and became a life-long vegetarian. Describing himself as "150% Theosophist" (p. 269) Wagner reveled in a philosophy and world view that upheld his strong anti-Christian, anti-Western antipathies. Via Theosophy Wagner soon found the works of Lama Angarika Govinda—a.k.a. Ernst Lothar Hoffman—a German Theosophist who in the 1930s had traveled to Tibet and India where, in Darjeeling, he claims to have been ordained a monk in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.\(^1\) Inspired by Theosophy and a growing fixation on Buddhism, in 1953 Karl and Ingrid Wagner traveled overland to India, among the first of hundreds of thousands of westerners who in the coming decades would traverse the same route in search of Eastern wisdom.

In India Karl and Ingrid lived in Sarnath, guests of the Theravadan Mahabodhi Society. There Wagner met a young Nepali monk (who was reading a book by Lenin which sparked their initial conversation!) who invited Karl and Ingrid to come to Kathmandu to study under his master, the Newar abbot and pioneering Theravadan, Amritananda. Intrigued by the prospect of traveling to the remote mountain kingdom and studying under a renowned teacher, Karl and Ingrid accepted Amritananda's invitation and flew (the road had yet to be opened) into Kathmandu in April 1954. There they lived in Amritananda's Theravadan monastery (Ananda Kuti) on the Swayambhu hill. Fascinated by what he found, Wagner spent most of his time wandering around the Kathmandu valley photographing religious sites, festivals, and events, including Tribhuvan’s death rites at Pashupatinath. It was also at Pashupatinath that Wagner met

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the Shivapuri Baba, a Hindu yogi, hermit, and guru, then reputed to be 128 years old. Ironically it was this Hindu guru that Wagner identified as the person for whom "I had been awaiting" (p. 309) and who he visited frequently during his almost three years in Nepal. (The book is dedicated to the Shivapuri Baba.) It was also during this time, from January to March 1955, that Wagner hiked from Kathmandu to Tengboche in Kumbhu (and back) making him again a pioneer in the yet-to-be-named enterprise of "trekking." There are also interesting accounts of Wagner's friendships with Kathmandu Newars including Tirtha Narayan Manandhar and Karkat Man Tuladhar.

In June 1955 Amritananda ordained Ingrid Wagner a Theravada Buddhist nun making her, in fact, the first westerner to be ordained in Nepal. (Shortly thereafter Ingrid, now Amita Nisatta, returned to Stockholm where she amicably divorced Wagner, retained her vows, and spent her life intrepidly teaching and promoting Buddhism until her death in 2001. She deserves her own book.) In November 1955 Karl followed Ingrid's lead, taking ordination from Amritananda and adopting the name Sugata, which he retained for the rest of his life. Sugata remained in Kathmandu studying what he could (often at the Kaisar Library), but because he spoke no South Asian languages (in fact he learned English from Amritananda and fellow monks!), in January 1957 Sugata left Nepal, partly at the suggestion of Amita (Ingrid) who told him that there was a demand for Buddhist teachers back in Europe. Sugata returned to Europe in full monk's habit and began several years working as a lecturer, traveling all over Europe giving illustrated talks (using the thousands of slides he had shot) on India, Nepal, and Buddhism.

Interestingly, in 1960 Sugata again returned to Nepal, but this time at the invitation (and funding) of Shamsher Man Sherchan. Sherchan was the well-educated and cosmopolitan son of a wealthy Thakali family that had for generations controlled the salt trade through the Kali Gandaki valley. With the salt trade finished (due to the Chinese invasion of Tibet), by the late 1950s Shamshere Man Sherchan was looking for new ways of attracting business to his home district and his thoughts turned to (what we would now call) cultural tourism. Aware of the fact that Indian dance was being publicized and spread to the west, Sherchan decided to invite Sugata—a photographer who was also a Buddhist monk and a popular public speaker in Europe—to come to Tukuche in order to document and publicize the so-called "Devil Dances" held annually at the Buddhist Kyupar Gompa. Sugata made the trip to Nepal (again overland) and took hundreds of photos of the Sha Na dances. Whether or not Sugata's trip
had any immediate impact on tourism in Nepal is perhaps less important than the fact that it was Sherchan who instigated the whole project. This is one of the clearest and earliest examples I know of a Nepali very consciously promoting tourism. Foreigners typically take the credit for inventing "trekking" in Nepal but this story shows that the origins of "adventure tourism" are not as clear cut as some have imagined. As Kellett says, Sherchan "had seen a potential new imprint on the old salt route: tourism" (p. 353).

The final chapters recount Sugata's life in Europe from the 1960s to 2001. With the spread of television in the 1960s Sugata found his illustrated lectures less and less in demand. By this time he had moved to Norway where he used his artistic skills to create traditional painted wood objects. These both brought in money and allowed him to indulge in an increasingly reclusive Buddhist life style. Sugata bought a small property overlooking a mountain lake in rural Norway where he built a simple cabin, raised vegetables, and lived year round mainly on his own. Although we don't learn much about it, in the late 1960s Sugata entered a "secret marriage" (p. 368) with a local woman, broke his monk's vows, and gave up his yellow robes. Why he left his Theravadan order seems to have been a difficult topic for Sugata to discuss but it was tied both to his desire for companionship (and sexuality) and the exhausting reality of having to endure the stares and questions that his monk's robes invited. Late in the book Kellett explains, "When he discarded his monk's robes, he said that he no longer needed them: he was a Buddhist as he felt, and that was sufficient" (p. 401). There is also an account of a trek to Muktinath that Sugata and Kellett took together in 2001, during which Sugata celebrated his ninetieth birthday, and reflected on his life as a Buddhist.

Those looking for information on Nepali history, society, or culture will not find a lot in this book, though there are a few gems. What we get instead is a fascinating story of a man whose life wove in and out of Nepal for decades. Students of Buddhism will find an account that is refreshingly free of the kind of karma/dharma narratives ("I was destined to become a Buddhist," etc.) that are common in many Buddhist conversion stories. Best of all, this book is about a Buddhist man, not a Buddhist saint. Through Kellett, Sugata emerges as a passionate person driven by ethical ideals, but also a man with plenty of flaws and failures, tossed about by the tides of history and his own very human desires. There is no trace of hagiography. Bird of Passage should be read for its insights into the interplay between history and human nature, its account
of what "the East" and Nepal meant to westerners in the early- to mid-twentieth century, and for its fine writing.

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Foreign development aid, whether governmental or non-governmental, has always been an attempt at intervention in people’s lives, attempt to shape and transform their material and cultural conditions, without any formal procedures ensuring accountability towards those whose lives are affected by the intervention. Most villagers, children, women, or urban poor, who become the target of a particular development program, have no idea why or through what process they were chosen as the ‘beneficiary’ of that program at that particular point in time. Those thus chosen to be the ‘beneficiary’ in mysterious ways are then asked to actively participate in the programs designed to ‘help them help themselves’. If they don’t participate voluntarily, or complain about the program, they are accused of being lazy, greedy, selfish, stubborn, or plain ignorant. The length of the program is also decided by the donors, not the beneficiaries. After two or five years, the project staff disappear, as suddenly and mysteriously as when they appeared, and usually you never hear from them again – even if you had important grievances or legitimate requests.

This book, Sāmājik abhiyān yā bikās sahāyatā, is a small but important exception to this general pattern. In this book, we are able to read an honest account by a foreign aid worker on what he thought and did while in Nepal, as well as his reflections on the experience afterwards. The author Sadamatsu wrote this first in Japanese, his native language. The book was well reviewed and widely read in Japan by those interested in NGO work. However Sadamatsu did not stop there. He made great efforts to enlist both Nepali and Japanese collaborators to have this book translated and published in Nepali language. In my view, this effort is a reflection of his personal change that is described in this book. In the beginning, he conceived himself just as many other aid workers do. He was going to engage with the aid recipients temporarily, give them the
right amount of stimulus and assistance, then once the recipient community became ‘conscious’ enough, ‘owned’ the project, and began to move forward in their autonomous development-path, he, the helper from outside, would disappear from the scene, almost without a trace, as if he never existed.

Had things happened the way he imagined at the beginning, it would not have been necessary to go through all the trouble to have this book translated and published in Nepal. Of course, it would have been nice to give the recipient community and his Nepali counterparts something more than a final evaluation report. But it would not have been necessary. In fact, towards the end of his tenure as the head of the Nepal office of a Japanese NGO, Shapla-neer, he was planning to write the book as a case study in successful community empowerment. In other words, the book was to be addressed to other Japanese interested in the work of development aid, and was to show them how, despite difficulties, community empowerment – or, in Sadamatsu’s words, a process of development in which the locals themselves were the subjects and the active agents of the process – was possible.

The book that he ended up writing is a very different one. This is not a happy ending story. It is a story of difficulties, struggles, unexpected events, unresolved questions, and ongoing reflections. At the end of the book, we can see Sadamatsu becoming a very different person from who he was when he first arrived in Nepal in 1994, eager to put into practice here the wonderful concepts and techniques of community empowerment he studied at the University of Manchester. At the end of the book, he is no longer simply an outside development expert who can help the landless Nepali farmers one day, and say, the Ethiopian villagers the next – while himself being somehow ‘above’ or ‘outside’ all the process, unchanged by his encounters and engagement with the locals. Due to this change, in my view, he had to have this translated into Nepali. I will have more to say about this later. But first, let us go over some of the key themes of the book.

The book begins with Sadamatsu’s recollection of the time when he first heard the word ‘kamaiya’ in western Nepal. He was told that the word referred to Tharu bonded laborers in that area, who were forced to work under the landlords like slaves. This made a deep impression on him, and he began to explore the possibilities of building up a project that could benefit the kamaiyas. From the beginning, he realized the difficulties of working directly with kamaiyas under the control of the landlords. With the help of his collaborator, Keshav Gautam, he learns of
the existence of a community of former-kamaiyas in Bardiya, who were living on captured land. Sadamatsu then asks the members of the NGO, SPACE to carry out a research on kamaiya system while living among the relocated former kamaiyas. Despite initial difficulties, young SPACE workers succeed in carrying out systematic and detailed study of the kamaiya system. The book, Issues and Experiences: Kamaiya System, Kanara Andolan and Tharus in Bardiya (SPACE 2000), based on this action research, is still one of the most systematic and lucid published accounts on kamaiya labor system.

Having spent unusual amount of time (six months) and energy for a small Japanese NGO on preliminary action research, and having gained a more nuanced understanding of the issue, it was time to design an aid program that would address the kamaiya problem.

After the preliminary action research, the members of SPACE recommended that Shapla-neer support ‘pilot assistance projects’ to be initiated in the settlements. In particular, SPACE fieldworkers proposed, in addition to literacy classes and vegetable gardening, support for the Kanara Mul Samiti. The Kanara Mul Samiti was an umbrella organization for the resettled kamaiyas. Its main purpose was to obtain land rights for all those who had been resettled. However, Sadamatsu and Shapla-neer’s Tokyo officials decided to refuse this particular request. The reason was the ‘political sensitivity of supporting a land-rights struggle of an indigenous people’. Shapla-neer officials felt that involvement in such ‘political issue’ could, in the worst case, result in their expulsion from Nepal. This angered the leader of the Kanara Committee, who, after all, had made a very reasonable request. As a result, the NGO’s staff had to temporarily leave the community. The members of SPACE, for their part, did want to support local efforts at obtaining land-rights, and blamed the breakdown of relationship with community members squarely on Shapla-neer and Sadamatsu.

This debacle shows, in part, one of the classic symptoms of the rhetoric of foreign aid, namely its pretence of political neutrality. As James Ferguson argued, development presents itself as a neutral technical intervention to solve the problems of poverty, despite the deeply political nature of poverty itself. What Shapla-neer and Sadamatsu told the members of SPACE and the residents of Bardiya, in effect, was that they could give ‘development assistance’, but could not intervene in any kind of ‘politics’. As I wrote at the beginning, development aid has always been an attempt to shape the material and cultural conditions within which the recipients of the aid live. In that sense, development aid has
always been political. Put in another way, if development has anything to do with the aim of reducing or eliminating structural poverty and suffering, it necessarily has to intervene and transform the relations of power and inequality. To state otherwise is to lie, in order to preserve the existing structures of exploitation. At both the levels of rhetoric and practice, then, the line between ‘development aid’ and ‘political intervention’ has always been artificially drawn. And the construction of that line itself has always been political – i.e. dominant ways of drawing the line tending to serve the interests of the powerful.

Yet, this is not a book that merely provides an example of the pitfalls of non-political pretence of development that many of us are already familiar with. This book gives much more. It provides an exceptionally honest account of how the asymmetrical relationship between the donor and the recipient hinders communication and produces mistrust and misunderstandings despite good intentions of all parties involved. It also describes vividly, not only how the axioms of development (e.g. that it should be politically neutral) limit what can be done, but also how development agents may be able to learn to question those axioms and their tasks, and begin to do things differently. Before we go on to discuss what this learning involved, we need to look at another axiom that Sadamatsu was caught up with during his first tenure in Nepal.

From the beginning of the book, Sadamatsu states repeatedly that the ideal development project is the one in which the locals are the agent and the subject of the process. The locals should be the ones who define, design and carry out the development project; the outsiders simply provide assistance at the beginning of the process, which really belongs to the locals. In stating thus, Sadamatsu, not fully consciously, participates in the long and diverse traditions of the discourse on ‘self-help’. Discourses on self-help, which we could trace back to many ancient religious traditions, were at the core of Gandhian and Deweyan community development projects. Among the first development programs in Nepal to be launched after the demise of the Rana regime was the Village Development Program (VDP). The program was conceived and supported by American official development aid workers, and a notion of community self-help constituted its core philosophy. As I have shown elsewhere (Fujikura 1996), community development projects in the 1950s were state sponsored and, among the most visible effects of those projects, despite their rhetorical focus on community autonomy, was the expansion of government bureaucracy. As I have also pointed out, community empowerment projects since the late 1980s employ rhetoric
and techniques strikingly similar to those of community development projects in the 1950s. Yet the community empowerment projects since the late 1980s are conducted in the world of neo-liberal ideologies and structural adjustment measures. In the latter case, then, the rhetoric of community empowerment often serves as alibi for the abandonment of the poor and the weak by neo-liberal state policies (Elyachar 2002).

I do not mean to argue that self-help projects are inherently flawed. On the contrary, I believe initiatives that help promote degrees of autonomy, control, and swaraj are welcome. What I do want to point out here is a tendency in the self-help discourses to obscure the nature of the larger structures and relations of power within which we all live. The case in point is the depoliticized and domesticated Freireian pedagogy described in Sāmājik abhiyān yā bikās sahāyatā. The Freireian pedagogy is often reduced, in conventional development programs, to a manipulative tool -- simply exhorting the poor to be more frugal and sanitation-conscious while masking the more structural causes of their immiseration. Conversely, Paulo Freire’s thought is firmly rooted in the tradition of critical ontology that emphasizes that every being (including human being) is constituted through its relation with other beings (see Keshav Gautam 2051 v.s. for a concise and cogent introduction to Freire’s thought). Once you start treating individuals or small communities as if they can exist in isolation from the wider network of beings, you are in the realm of mystification.

What most so-called Freireian approach in conventional development programs lacks is precisely the reflexivity on the relational constitution of human subjects. This is also the case in this book, until the last chapter. There is a double blindness. One is the blindness towards local and regional history, which manifests itself in Shapla-neer’s refusal to engage with the issues of land title. Of course, Shapla-neer asked SPACE staff to conduct historical research on the area, and the latter came up with an analysis of the history of struggle and dispossession. Yet, after receiving this first-rate report, Shapla-neer decides to ignore the main conclusion of the report, maintaining that they should stay clear from any intervention that appears to be political. It is indeed surprising that, after this refusal, Shapla-neer could still imagine that their project had anything to do with Freire. The other blindness has to do with the relationship between Shapla-neer and the community of landless Tharus. There is a total lack of reflexivity on the part of Sadamatsu on the reasons why they became involved in each other’s lives in the first place. The members of Shapla-neer fail to reflect on and imagine how the relationship might appear from
the locals’ side. This blindness is a function of the myopic and apolitical version of community self-help discourse. Sadamatsu discusses about this blindness and a subsequent realization in the last chapter of the book.

What prompted Sadamatsu to deeply reflect on the meaning and value of his enterprise in Nepal was the Kamaiya Freedom Movement of the year 2057 v.s. Sadamatsu, after five-years of trials and tribulations in Nepal, succeeded in helping create savings groups participated by about a hundred households of former agricultural laborers. The Kamaiya Freedom Movement resulted in the freedom of up to 200,000 bonded laborers. Sadamatsu also learned that international NGOs, such as ActionAid and Save the Children US, actively supported the movement – the movement that was plainly ‘political’. As I discussed earlier, in the views of Sadamatsu and Shapla-neer, international NGO could not get involved in any activity that even remotely resembled ‘politics’ in the host country. It became clear that this sense of limit was not shared by other major international NGOs.

The Kamaiya Freedom Movement of 2057 v.s. was a special movement, which emerged at a unique moment in Nepali history. The movement still continues, and many thousands of freed bonded laborers are still forced to struggle to obtain minimum rehabilitation support from the government. Sadamatsu’s book discusses the significance of Kamaiya Movement from the point of view of an international NGO worker. Let me briefly discuss its significance here from some other perspectives. By 2057 v.s., ten years had passed since the Jana Andolan of 2046 v.s. A sense of disillusionment with the parliamentary democracy was strong. Disillusionment had largely to do with how politicians and political parties behaved since the restoration of democracy. Many people were frustrated by the actually existing major political parties, and by extension, the actually existing parliamentary system in Nepal, which seemed incapable of representing the general interest of the people. By the year 2057 v.s., there had been three general elections. Defenders of the parliamentary democracy were claiming that both the people and the politicians were gradually learning how democracy functioned, and after a couple of more elections, things would begin to run more smoothly.

The Kamaiya Movement chose a different track. They were not going to wait for more general elections, for another 10 or 20 years, for the political parties to ‘mature’, and the government to finally implement the human rights provisions of the 2047 v.s. Constitution – all the while allowing government bureaucrats and development professionals to make their living writing reports and conducting workshops in the name of
kamaiyas. Instead, the 19 kamaiyas from Kailali, and their supporters including the mass-membership grassroots organization BASE and network of Nepali and international NGOs and citizens initiated mass mobilization for kamaiya freedom. The movement was unique in that its participants and supporters transcended party divisions. It was participated by common people, women and men, landless and small farmers as well as professionals and intellectuals. It was decidedly non-violent, in the context of an intensifying civil war. Importantly, even though it was a protest against the government and development industry, the movement did not aim to replace the government or refute the project of development as such. Instead, it urged the existing government as well as development organizations to act in the right way.

Unlike many other protests, the movement tailored their demands so that the government could actually accept and act on them. For example, it was clear to many inside and outside the movement that one of the main causes of the Kamaiya problem was the unequal land tenure system. However, even though radical and effective land reform was something to which most would agree as a worthy goal, the movement decided not to make it its main agenda in 2057 v.s. That was because land reform, it was clear to many in the movement, was not something that the government could act on quickly. Even though equitable redistribution of wealth, or the ‘creation of exploitation free society’ (which is the official ‘vision’ of BASE), was a shared hope of many participants, they did not imagine that it could be realized quickly, in one fell swoop. The movement adopted a step-by-step approach, and first of all, demanded freedom. The movement demanded the government to declare null the debts owed by Kamaiyas, and declare them free. These already had firm legal basis in Constitution and other statutes. Government had simply to restate those already existing guarantees – which it did by the authority of a cabinet decision and with the unanimous approval by the parliament on Shrawan 2, 2057 v.s.

After the kamaiyas gained freedom, they began the struggle for land rights and rehabilitation measures. Less than a year after the declaration of freedom, the parliament was dissolved by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, and representative democracy in Nepal ceased to function. Yet the freed kamaiyas could not simply wait for the resumption of the ‘normal’ process of parliamentary elections to voice their urgent demands. In the increasingly polarizing western Nepal, freed kamaiyas negotiated delicate balance and continued to engage with the government administration to demand rehabilitation measures. In 2058 v.s., an interviewer from BBC
radio asked Dilli Bahadur Chaudhari, the president of BASE, why the Nepali government should be concerned with kamaiya rehabilitation when the country was in the state of civil war. Dilli Bahadur Chaudhari answered that major national crises arise from cumulative neglect of small things. In this regard, we could say that freed-kamaiyas, even under the condition of emergency, patiently continued to engage in the effort to teach the embattled government how to govern better. As I have written elsewhere, their politics is a politics of patience, which is not a politics that longs for ‘total revolution’, but work with patience to reform and improve the situation gradually even under the conditions of severe deprivation and difficulties (see Fujikura 2061 v.s., Fujikura 2007).

Having stated some of my own take on the significance of the Kamaiya Movement, let me return to Sadamatsu’s reflection on it. For Sadamatsu, the Kamaiya Movement was an occasion to deeply reflect on his activities in Nepal, and on the boundaries between development aid and politics. This reflection leads him, in this book, to explore the criteria with which to judge the appropriateness of INGO interventions in domestic socio-political issues. Sadamatsu hopes that the notion of universal human rights would allow the international NGOs to engage with important issues that are simultaneously ‘political’. Universal human rights, which by definition transcend national boundaries, he thinks, may provide ethical and legal bases for INGOs to do what they think are right in the host country. As readers can surely see, invocation of ‘human rights’ or ‘rights-based approach’ does not in any way free anyone from the problems of arbitrariness and the politics of definition. The previous problem was the distinction between development and politics. Now the problem is simply displaced on to the distinction between what constitutes human rights and humanitarian concerns, on the one hand, and exclusively domestic issues, on the other. (We have already seen the politicization of human rights and humanitarianism, for example, in the US ‘humanitarian’ bombings in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.)

Earlier, I said that there was not much point in trying to distinguish development from politics, since development is by nature political. Similar things could be said of the effort to distinguish human rights concerns from other concerns. Human rights (especially the ones that development organizations are concerned with, which include wide range of economic, social and cultural rights) cannot be guaranteed without detailed attention and constant struggle to arrange and rearrange social and material relations and modes of governance. In other words, even if we could speak of and define ‘basic human rights’ (or ‘development’) in
general and \textit{a priori} terms, their actualization demands reflection and action on the historical context and linkages cutting across wide ranging domains. This is all too natural since the problem of human rights, like that of development, is about ‘wellbeing’ and the concrete efforts to bring about material, social and spiritual conditions that would foster it.

In this book, Sadamatsu begins with a definition of ideal development project – a project planned and implemented by the locals, for the locals. In the last chapter, Sadamatsu says he realized that that definition lacked any mention of the outsider development worker, who surely was part of the process of initiating and implementing the project. Consequently, he had failed, in thinking about Shapla-neer supported projects in Nepal, to consciously reflect on the \textit{relationship} between the locals and himself. He realizes that the real question that concerned him, after he learned of the Kamaiya Movement, was not whether the program in Bardiya fit his definition of an ideal community empowerment project (which apparently did). It was whether other ways of relating with and collaborating with each other were possible, the collaboration that might even involve apparently ‘political’ actions. The question then becomes, in my view, not so much of formulating new, \textit{a priori}, definition of good development aid (or good assisted social movement). Rather the question becomes construction and reconstruction of relationship between concrete actors, constantly searching and reflecting on what is possible and desirable within given complex situations.

We could restate the way the central question shifts through this book in the following way. First, it was about defining the ideal process of community development, and then trying to implement it on the ground. After the experiences and reflections over the years, the question has changed to a more open-ended exploration, of what kind of collaborations are possible within given concrete socio-political conditions. We can also say that the problem has shifted from one of aid to that of alliance. In the beginning, Sadamatsu defined himself as an invisible, context-free development agent, selecting from above, those most in need of awareness raising and assistance. Now the problem has shifted to one of alliance, the question focuses explicitly on the relationship between concrete actors. It is the question of exploring the limits and possibilities of establishing concrete socio-political relationship between actors (including Sadamatsu himself), who are themselves defined by the historical context within which they are placed. The picture has become more realistic, and also Freireian, in that Freire regarded human relations as one of interaction and mutual learning, and never in terms of the
unidirectional relation commonly imagined between the aid (or knowledge) giver and receiver.2

It is important to note that after leaving Nepal in 1999 and spending some time in Japan and Bangladesh, Sadamatsu has returned to Nepal as a representative of another INGO, and has been playing important role in coordinating INGOs in Nepal during this politically turbulent time. During this time, as I noted earlier, Sadamatsu enlisted a number of Nepali and Japanese collaborators in order to have this book translated and published in Nepali. As I suggested earlier, this effort is a reflection of Sadamatsu’s personal change, which is described in this book. He now sees himself not as a free-floating development professional for whom there is not much difference between Ethiopia and Nepal, but a person deeply committed to establishing relation of collaboration with concrete individuals, groups and movements in Nepal – to entering into relation of mutual pedagogy. This book, in my view, is a reflection of that personal change and ongoing effort.

References

2 One should also remember that Robert Chambers, whom Sadamatsu also cites, increasingly emphasize the need for ‘reversal’ of relation between the development professionals and the poor. Chambers also emphasizes that development is fundamentally about relationship – development calls for conscious reflection on the prevailing relationship between the haves and have-nots, and concrete actions to transform those relationship (see Chambers 2005).


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