

Highlighting issues such as these – to the British government, for example, who are providing support to the army in the current situation – is part of an intellectual's task of speaking truth to power. This surely does not make those who do so necessarily supporters of terrorism, as seems to be the accusation made against anyone in Nepal who currently dares to speak out. It is a terrible indictment that doctors and health workers in Nepal at present are neither able to freely treat, or to freely record and make public the excesses of current politics in Nepal. That more are not doing so, testifies to their vulnerability and the climate of state terror they find themselves in. Those who speak out, and they are all too few, take great personal risks at present, and I for one offer them all the support I can. Looking then at the current Emergency through the awful privilege of witness afforded by medical practice, does bring issues of the current situation in Nepal into sharp relief, as indeed it did in 1990, and as Adams highlights for us.

This too is metaphysically related to issues of the ambiguous relationship between truth (who does not believe we have that on our side), science (including our rationally developed arguments) and politics. That Adams' book challenges us to acknowledge this and think more widely on the subject, and within a theoretical frame that is both provocative and contestable, is the gift of a well-undertaken intellectual exercise. We need now, more than ever, more nuanced ways of talking about, and discussing, the complex political realities that face Nepal in its current crisis, rather than those of good against evil or good government against terrorist. Reflecting on the role of medicine in the current conflict, following on from Adams' work, may be one such window onto a labyrinth of complex political realities facing Nepal. It may not provide any easy answers, but it should make all of us who take positions uncomfortable. Re-reading Adams' book in the current situation in Nepal reminds me of this, and of the need for challenging and innovative interpretive perspectives on a complex, shifting situation full of violence.

***State of Nepal* edited by K. M. Dixit and S. Ramachandaran. Lalitpur: Himal Books, 2002. ISBN 99933-1322-x, vi, 312 p.**

Reviewed by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

Sixteen essays by scholars from the Indian sub-continent, mainly Nepal, have been brought together in *State of Nepal*. Its ambitious aim is "to try and explain contemporary Nepal to the world, particularly its evolution over the last dozen years of democracy" (p. v). This task is very nearly fulfilled by the book, which provides a description of a great many aspects of present day Nepal, and does so in an unprecedented way. Clear and easy to read, the views expressed by the authors have

the benefit of being both synthetic and likely to generate discussion. For all these qualities, *State of Nepal* is accessible to every one and can be highly recommended.

As is almost inevitable with any collective book, the level of scholarship in *State of Nepal* is somewhat uneven: it contains both very subtle papers, among which Saubhagya Shah, C.K. Lal and T.B. Subba's contributions must be mentioned, as well as articles which could gain by greater originality or a more balanced analysis. As space is limited, I will confine myself to just two remarks.

The major weakness of the whole is certainly its lack of historical perspective, even if the goal is to describe the last twelve years. Most of the essays take into consideration the Panchayat era at best, simply ignoring or caricaturing what happened before it: such is the case with R. Pradhan who writes: "it was the Gorkhali kings who spread the [Hindu] faith in its diverse forms across the mid-hills of Nepal". And, "janajati ethnic groups [were] outside the pale of the caste hierarchy till then [the promulgation of the Muluki Ain in 1854]". It is regrettable that the editors included no historian among the "best analytical minds on Nepal".

My second remark concerns the coloration of the book and I will therefore devote a little more space to it. Besides its stated aim of providing an explanation "to the world", the *mleccha* reader is left with the feeling that the goal of the book is primarily to show what is going wrong in Nepal and provide solutions, and as such is addressed to the different tenants of power. This strong practical inflection of the book evokes a kind of modern Hitopadesha which is not without problems.

Some of the contributions, such as K. M. Dixit's, directly address the King, who "must descend from the royal pedestal ...[and] also realise that much of the country's problems of today had to do with the thirty years of the unrepresentative Panchayat system put in place by his father". R. Pradhan preaches the recognition of cultural difference and the abolition of hierarchy (though his remark on the "land-hungry Parbatiya populace" is hardly in itself absent from such prejudice). S. Sharma apparently wants the *rāj guru* to reform Hinduism to give it an equal chance with other "proselytising religions" – a rather odd definition of Hinduism, it must be said, in the Nepalese context where Hindu proselytism has been pretty strong, not only among the "tribal groups" but also the unorthodox Hindus of the Western region. S. Upadhyaya advises "a more assertive political role for the monarchy to guard against the recklessness and impunity of political parties". Is this not the role of the judiciary? D. Thapa's wishful thinking encourages the political parties to unite, and the Maoist leaders "to convince their young followers countrywide of the compromises they would have to make with the political establishment, and secondly reconcile their demands with the present constitution". C.K. Lal advocates reinforcing "inclusive cultural identities such as Maithili, Bhojpuri or Awadhi" on both sides of the Indo-Nepalese border in order to weaken parochial identities and give strength to citizenship. This solution is also advocated by T. B. Subba, but in a more general way: "rather than creating ever more rigid political boundaries which

constrict the cultures that traverse them, it is important to build bridges". The next contribution (S. Shah) recommends "the political parties, the intelligentsia and the market [...] to contemplate creative ways of 'bringing the state back in'" in order to control the NGOs and to guide their activities in a framework which would be more appropriate in the present context. Seira Tamang's solution to the various forms of patriarchies prevalent in Nepal is more internal, since it is anchored in the analysis of these forms - above all, qualitative research on the subject. S. Shakya's article on the economy - a kind of liberal credo - contains a long list of "prescriptions", which are apparently addressed to the government. The same liberal tone is to be found in S. Dixit's article on education which recommends "the communities to pay at least a portion of the costs incurred in running a school", rather than controlling and limiting the fees in the private sector. Similarly, D. Gyawali's interesting analysis of the choices made throughout the history of Nepal in the field of technology deplores the fact that "the main technology choices in Nepal continue to be bureaucracy-dominated instead of being community or market-led". B. Subba criticizes the focus on hydropower and claims that reservoirs should be built instead of big dams, to regulate the water in the Gangetic plain and furnish Nepal with electricity. Even in the field of modern Nepali literature, the conclusion of M. Thapa is full of good counsel: publishers are asked "to stop acting like book-sellers", writers to "push themselves even after they have earned praise", critics "to speak honestly", *et cetera*... In the final article, S. Ramachandaran explains that "the relationship between Nepal and India has to achieve a level of maturity: "Nepali interlocutors dealing with New Delhi require to demonstrate more maturity and seriousness of purpose, instead of being prisoners of empty anti-Indian rhetoric". The only paper in which Weber's demarcation between the scholar and the politician appears, is the one by P. Onta which concerns the recent "media boom".

From the king down to the intelligentsia, all are called upon to make efforts in their field to build up a new, ideal and utopian kingdom of a strange kind, mixing up what may appear as opposite features. This very liberal kingdom to be, without boundaries and hierarchies, without any norms or model (nor even its school curriculum), led by a dynamic private enterprise in the fields of education and economy, should *also* be headed by a strong State *and* by an active king, seen as the ultimate guardian of the general order. There is no indication if this general advisory orientation of the book was a prerequisite from the editors. If it was the case, it would have been good to state this, and if it is a mere coincidence, then we can conclude that M. Thapa's penultimate sentence does indeed summarize the common concern of the authors well: "In short, the world must be changed". This final programme, even more ambitious than what was announced at first, obviously needs to be discussed outside the circle of scholars - and/or with scholars with different orientations, since the prescribed remedies: liberalism, capitalism and pluralism are indeed more revealing of political views rather than things that emerge naturally from scientific analysis. Besides, post-1990 Nepal has seen the emergence of liberalism and pluralism together with political violence, a parallel calling for prudence.