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BOOK REVIEWS

Claude Arpi, ***Tibet: The Last Months of a Free Nation: India Tibet Relations (1947-1962) Part I,*** (New Delhi, 2017, VIJ Books), Pages: 468, Price; Rs.1295 (HB)

It is one of the ironies of history - and of geography as well - that our knowledge of our neighbour, Tibet, is composed of shreds and patches, heavily borrowed from Western sources (Tibet as Shangri-La, a remote, inaccessible and exotic wilderness); or skimpily outlined in our imagination through our Buddhist connections (Tibet as a Buddhist sanctuary and centre of Buddhist archives and traditions); or through the saga of Tibet's so-called Living God, the Dalai Lama who, following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950, sought refuge in India in 1959; or, in more ominous terms, through our realisation that China, which traumatised us with its victory in its 1962 war, simultaneously transformed a quiescent Tibet-India border into a fractious China-India one.

Claude Arpi painstakingly traces this debacle in a book that anyone interested in the omissions and commissions bedevilling the Tibet issue will find revealing, instructive and, not least, depressing. This first volume covers the period 1947 to 1951; three further volumes are to cover respectively 1951-54, 1954-57 and 1957-62. Arpi's research centres in the main around Indian documents which, despite our obsolete rules that tend to prevent access to important government archives even to genuine scholars, he has managed to obtain and study alongside interviews with some of the players involved. In addition, he quotes some relevant Tibetan and Chinese material as well, although these, given the problems associated with accessing such material, are understandably far less in number.

As a prelude, Arpi traces the history of the triangular British India-Tibet-China series of contacts emanating from the overall British strategic posture towards the end of the nineteenth century that called for securing the India-Tibet border as a protective buffer for the Empire. Traditionally, Indian trade relations with Tibet, dating back several hundred years, were reinforced during the British Raj times by small military escorts in Tibetan trading posts like Gyantse, Gartok, and Yatung. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the British authorities felt the need to further systemise

this practice and, through a show-of-strength expedition to Tibet by Francis Younghusband, persuaded the Tibetan authorities to sign an agreement in 1904 that gave the British exclusive trading and mining rights in Tibet. It is notable that China was not involved in these negotiations, although a separate understanding with it ensured police protection for Indian traders in Tibet. This was followed by the Anglo-Tibet Agreement of 1914 - notable once again for China not being a signatory - which further formalised India-Tibet trade relations, at the same time fixing the McMahon line as the boundary between the two countries. Against the backdrop of long-standing trade contacts between India and Tibet, these two agreements confirmed the freedom which Tibet enjoyed in its foreign relations; and to the extent that weak central governments in China left Tibet to its own devices, Tibetan independence was an established fact notwithstanding sporadic Chinese territorial claims over the Himalayan state.

The scene in Arpi's book now shifts to 1948, when the Indian Ambassador to Chang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang China, K. M. Panikkar (the erstwhile historian and advisor to some princely states in pre-independent India) writes to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to say that the newly-victorious Communist Government in Peking headed by Mao Zedong is likely to "take a forward policy" in respect of Tibet; that independent Tibet would actually be India's benefit; and that it would, in this context, be useful to recall that "Chinese sovereignty over Tibet has not been recognized by us" (p. 60). A year later, Nehru confirms what becomes the accepted and customary formulation for India with regard to China's claim to Tibet, namely that, in Nehru's words, "India has always recognized the **suzerainty** of the Chinese Government over Tibet, but Tibet is considered an autonomous unit and India's dealings with Tibet are on that basis" (p. 85).

The word "suzerain" denotes, in historical terms, feudal overlordship and has, in modern terminology, come to mean the control of one state over another alongside the latter's autonomy. This finicky but ultimately unstable distinction between "suzerainty" and "sovereignty" as applied to the Chinese claim over Tibet was, as Arpi recounts, subsequently to prove both a headache and a bitter pill for Delhi.

Meanwhile, India's post-1947 relations with Tibet were temporarily overshadowed by Tibetan procrastination in recognising our Independence - on the grounds that India, inheritor following its independence of British India's rights and responsibilities, needed to respect Tibetan claims to some territories south of the McMahon line around Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Tawang. This contretemps was, however, overshadowed by events, notably

by the Communist victory in China, and by Tibet having to come to terms with the new government in Peking. Around this time, Delhi, conscious of the need to get to know more about the situation in Tibet following developments in China, sent its Political Officer in Sikkim, Harishwar Dayal, to Tibet; and followed it up with another visit by Major Z.C. Bakshi to appraise Tibetan military capabilities. Both emissaries, in their reports to Delhi, noted Tibetan anxieties about their relations with the newly-risen power in Peking.

Nehru's unrivalled domestic and international stature in the 1950s is reflected in the Indian involvement in worldwide peace-keeping operations, especially in relation to the Korean War (1950-53) where India aspired to play a role which was reassuring to all parties. Also, Nehru's India during this period championed China's membership in the United Nations even in the face of Western resistance which preferred to retain Kuomintang China's seat in the world body. A by-product of these political and diplomatic prescriptions was, in Arpi's estimation, the Indian proclivity to be sympathetic about Communist China and not to treat it as a threat. Nehru's assessment was that the perilous Korean conflict, in which Mao's China had taken a leading role, obliged India to play a prophylactic role in the Himalayan region, a role that would, while noting Tibetan aspirations, not end up antagonising China.

Panikkar dutifully reflects this posture until August 1950 when, in an *aide memoire* submitted to the Chinese Government (p. 219), he inexplicably describes Tibet's status as "autonomy within the framework of Chinese **sovereignty**". This unanticipated concession aroused, according to Arpi, a raging debate in India's Ministry of External Affairs, a debate that did not, however, clarify why and how such a fundamental shift in stance came about. Consternation in the Ministry led to its senior-most officials, like Secretary-General Girija Shankar Bajpai, hastening to explain, in November 1950, that Panikkar's use of the word "framework" signified Tibetan autonomy within Chinese suzerainty; and that Chinese "sovereignty" over Tibet was "qualified by complete autonomy" for Tibet. The Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, B. N. Rau, went a step further in this exercise of linguistic legerdemain, and declared that "autonomy plus sovereignty equals suzerainty". In short, India found itself entangled within its own web of words.

A tantalising sidelight to this self-entrapment by India is mentioned on p. 282 by Arpi: namely the reported suggestion - this has been widely written about elsewhere - by the United States that India rather than Communist

China should assume the UN Security Council seat to be vacated by Kuomintang China. Needless to say, the distaste with which the Western world viewed Mao's China, especially in light of its armed resistance against the USA and its allies during the war in Korea - resistance that at one stage enabled Chinese and North Korean Communist forces to threaten the South Korean capital of Seoul - made such an offer understandable. It transpires, in Arpi's recounting, that American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was the one making the suggestion at a meeting with India's Ambassador to the USA, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister. Nehru was quick to reject the offer, pointing out that this would jeopardise India's relations with Peking; and that, in any case, "larger issues" were involved which would make any such deal inadvisable.

In the meantime, alarming reports were floating around China's preparation to take military action against Tibet even as China itself talked of "peaceful negotiations" with the former to resolve the issue. Towards the autumn of 1950, India's Political Representative in Lhasa, Sumal Sinha, alerted Delhi about the movement of Chinese troops within Tibet; by early October of that year, various reports spoke of these troops having advanced 50 miles into the country (which Panikkar incidentally discounts). Meanwhile, in an effort to avoid conflict, Tibetan representatives were prepared to travel to Peking to negotiate but were held up indefinitely owing to the non-issue of Chinese visas. Around this time, India's Political Officer in Sikkim (q.v.) warned Delhi of Chinese expansionist tendencies. But even as late as 26th October 1950, Arpi notes, Delhi had, oddly enough, received no definite information about the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

What made matters worse from our point of view, according to Arpi, is that despite reports of China's military advance into Tibet, India continued to take a soft position on Peking's moves. Although Nehru wrote to Panikkar that "(the) Chinese invasion of Tibet would be deplorable, and, we are convinced, not in the interest of China or of peace…", Panikkar's approach *vis-à-vis* Peking was more conciliatory: he still believed (p. 290) that "[China's] action in Tibet would appear to be related to the Chinese Government foreseeing the possibility of large-scale warfare." Embedded in such interpretations is the argument that Communist China, excoriated by the USA and its allies, was doing what it was doing in order to protect itself.

Also, Panikkar's assessment happens to coincide with Nehru's preoccupation with India's "larger" diplomatic role in world affairs. Arpi is of the view that this preoccupation had the effect of clouding Nehru's vision of the Tibet issue, one illustration of which was the harsh manner in which Nehru admonished Sumal Sinha for persisting with warnings about Chinese

intentions in Tibet - warnings which, in Nehru's view, showed a lack of understanding of the profundity underlying the diplomatic policies of the Indian Government. Among other things, Delhi was keen that broader issues involving world peace as well as ensuring Communist China's admission into the UN take precedence over unsubstantiated suspicions and misgivings about Chinese intentions. Arpi adds the intriguing point that none of Sinha's warning reports are available in our records.

Inside China, the picture is vastly, and inexorably, different. An 8th August 1950 memo from Mao Zedong instructs armed occupation of the Chamdo area in eastern Tibet as a prelude to a Chinese offer to negotiate a "peaceful settlement" with the Tibetans. It couldn't be clearer to observers at this point that the Chinese offer is no less than enticing the Tibetans to Peking and holding them to ransom over their sovereignty. On 7th October, the actual Chinese invasion seals Tibet's unhappy fate; and by November 1950, China has abandoned all pretence of limiting itself to eastern Tibet and starts moving its forces towards Lhasa, occupying it on 9th September 1950, an event which was regularised, as it were, from our point of view - and no doubt to China's satisfaction - by our Political Representation in Tibet being transformed into a Consulate General.

Nehru was to admit later that, in taking Chinese assurances at face value, "we (i.e. India) may have deceived ourselves."(p. 262). Arpi's more censorious conclusion is that "Mao knew that Nehru's India was like a paper tiger" (p. 333).

The scene shifts to the United Nations in New York where the El Salvador delegation, acting on behalf of the Western powers, requests the General Assembly to consider the question of Tibet. Around this time, Sumal Sinha had earlier informed Delhi that Chinese troops were moving into eastern Tibet, and that the Tibetan authorities wished to take the issue to the UN. According to Arpi, Harishwar Dayal had also repeated his misgivings about what the armed Chinese action against Tibet signified. Nehru was, however, loath to agree to UN intervention, arguing (this is in early November 1950) that irrespective of Chinese actions, if they were prepared to accept Tibet's autonomy, the problem would be less intractable; indeed, it would be unwise to risk Chinese resentment at this stage for its negative effects on ensuring precisely such autonomy. In the event, India preferred the UN Security Council to deal with the issue rather than the General Assembly; and the question is inscribed on the agenda of the UN Security Council, where it languishes till today.

In pages 392-4, Arpi mentions India's disquiet about what implications the Chinese invasion of Tibet could have for us. For instance, Tawang (presently in Arunachal Pradesh) was a frontier town endangered by Chinese actions. And though the 1914 Anglo-Tibetan Agreement (referred to earlier) had, in Tibetan eyes, given Tibet some traditional control over Tawang, India took the preventive measure of occupying it as Chinese troops took Chamdo and threatened Lhasa. Interestingly, Sumal Sinha tried to allay Tibetan fears about this action of India, at the same time making the prescient prediction to Delhi that Tawang would turn out to be troublesome for us later - a prediction with which we are now saddled as we reject insistent Chinese claims to the area.

Arpi also mentions the well-known letter of 7th November 1950 of Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to Pandit Nehru - pursuant to a note on 31st October on the same subject by Secretary-General Bajpai - warning that China's forcible occupation of Tibet was only the beginning of India's troubles with China (pp. 297-99). As this note and Sardar Patel's letter have been extensively discussed in various forums, this review does not go into them except to say that the two authors were among some others who foresaw India's territorial disputes with an irredentist China.

Such is the series of events and its attendant happenings that Claude Arpi narrates; and his lacerating account of the Indian sins of commission and omission is particularly accusatory of Nehru and Panikkar. The former emerges from Arpi's account as naïve and self-delusive, and the latter as sentimental and unrealistic. Nearly seventy years after the China's occupation of Tibet, and fifty five years after China's war on India in 1962, available records, especially on our side, form the basis of Arpi's story of Indian credulity, lack of hard-headed political and diplomatic acumen, misplaced trust, gross miscalculation, unpreparedness, and dejection.

This perspective, based on recapitulation buttressed by available records would, in a larger context, incorporate some other factors that went into making the tale, the tragedy that it turned out to be. Among other things, Communist China, victorious in its protracted war against Chiang Kai-Shek, and toughened by its involvement in the Korean War, was determined to annex Tibet (Annexure 3 in Arpi's book reproduces a 2 January 1950 plan by Mao of his Tibet campaign, showing how single-minded and aggressive China was in its calculations). Indian support for Tibet would have made no difference to Chinese goals even if, in terms of international law and diplomatic etiquette, Indian opposition to them, no matter how ineffective, was obligatory. Chinese perfidy in respect of Tibet

was something India had not expected at the time; indeed, such perfidy was repeated in the 1962 conflict that China imposed on India and left it humiliated. In other words, Nehru's naiveté and Panikkar's gullibility do not erase the duplicity of the Chinese, even if Panikkar, as our envoy in Peking, failed in his duty of advising Delhi of the real nature of Chinese intentions. Furthermore, in Nehru's estimation, Tibetan autonomy had three other complicating aspects: first, it had to be balanced with the then surge of Indian friendship for China; second, it had to be cognisant of India's involvement in global issues that made its trustful relations with China important; and third, the presumption that Tibetan autonomy would not be undermined by China's occupation, and that such autonomy could be negotiated between Peking and Lhasa *ex post facto*, could not be dismissed outright.

As it happens, none of these lasted in the face of Chinese deceit. And finally, Mao's China, flush with pugnacity and muscularity following its victory over the Kuomintang, was the antithesis to the then India's post-Gandhian outlook, convinced of the righteousness of its non-violent triumph over the British Empire, and as a result an evangelist for the peaceful resolution of disputes. That such a policy was weak-kneed in Chinese eyes not only led to the Tibet debacle but has haunted our relations with China ever since.

One might shrink from wanting Claude Arpi, in his three further volumes on India-Tibet relations, to dwell on our habitual shortcomings when it comes to our erstwhile policy towards China. However, it is nonetheless salutary - for our understanding of the motivations of our adversaries, for our policy formulation, and not least for our self-esteem - to realise, from sedulous and meticulous exercises like Arpi's, what led to events deeply distasteful for us, to avoid repeating the process, and placing ourselves in a state of self-inflicted, irredeemable, and indefinite victimisation.

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to Ireland, to Senegal and to (the then) GDR
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Darvesh Gopal & Dalbir Ahlawat (Eds.), ***India- Australia Relations: Evolving Polycentric World Order,*** (New Delhi, 2017, Pentagon Press), Pages: 280 (i-xiv, 1-266), Price: Rs. 995 (HB)

The collection of essays edited by D. Gopal and Dalbir Ahlawat sets out to examine and present the multilayered dynamics in the emergent Indo-Pacific region. The well articulated chapters traverse through the evolving theoretical moorings and administrative experiences in the region and in doing so open up a panoramic yet riveting reading of policy postures and policy overtures of major and minor stake-holders in the region. The contributions underscore the historical, the administrative, and the ever changing and swaying nature of policies, as of stand-offs and possibilities in contemporary Indo-Pacific. The chapters weave into each other in parts, temporally and spatially, and feed into a larger understanding of the complexities and the intense vivisections of power relations in the region trying to figure out an apt, all accommodating and globally accepted nomenclature for itself rather than be defined by major powers. "The desire for a stable order in the Indo-Pacific has intensified competition between both global and regional players and has in turn led to political and power imbalance in the region." The first chapter, 'New Strategic Order and Uncertainties' by D. Gopal and Dalbir Ahlawat (pp. 1-11) and the second chapter, 'Shifting Strategic Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Region: Implications for Australia and India' by Dalbir Ahlawat and D. Gopal (pp. 12-32) chart the evolving US and China backed geo-strategic and security landscape in the Indo-Pacific and the advantages and disadvantages of the same as operative in the region. "The chapters outline a nuanced and counterposed reality in the region, one that points out the advantage that the West led by the US and its allies in the region have vis-à-vis the divide that exists between Asian countries themselves. This perceived divide exists most noticeably between India and China, giving rise to theories of 'western conspiracy to divide China and India".

"The two chapters also look at the problems of the US' re-balance strategy, even as they problematise the importance of looking either east or west for any nation"

The third chapter, 'Indo-Pacific Region: A Nebulous Construct or a Fulcrum for India-Australia Partnership?' by Y. Yagama Reddy (pp. 33-49); the fourth chapter, 'Evolving a New Geo-political, Strategic and Regional Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific Region' by G. Jayachandra Reddy (pp.50-66); and the fifth chapter, 'Indo-Pacific Region: Implications for India-

Australia Relations' (pp. 67-84) revisit various ideas concerning the Indo-Pacific from various theoretical positions and evaluate the evolution of 'Indo-Pacific region' (IPR) as the 'New Theatre' of global centrality(52-55), with 'New Foreign Policy Orientations'. These chapters go on to juxtapose the larger economic conveniences, inclinations, and limitations concerning 'Geo-economic Complementarities (69-73) and Geo-strategic Commonalities' (73-76) while exploring possibilities for the same.(42-44, 76-80).

The sixth chapter, 'India-Australia Relations and the Maritime Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific' by Pragya Pandey (85-104); the eight chapter, 'Managing the Challenges of India's Indo-Pacific Policy' by Lindsay Hughes (pp. 118-137); the ninth chapter, 'Why is Australia so Enthusiastic About the Indo-Pacific?' by Alan Bloomfield (pp. 138-156); the tenth chapter 'Australia and the Dispute in the South China Sea' by Munmun Majumdar (pp. 157-171); and the twelfth chapter 'Maritime Security in India-Australia Partnership: Enhancer or Spoiler?' by S. Utham Kumar Jamadhagni (pp.192-206) engage the reader with their subtle details of the significance of the Indian Ocean and the evolving security concerns in maritime Asia primarily centred around Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean through its Maritime Silk Road; the maritime leg of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

The eleventh chapter, 'Forming a Bilateral Pattern: Menzies and Nehru's Foreign Policy Influences Today' by Auriol Weigold (pp. 172-191); the thirteenth chapter, 'The Evolving India-Australia Relationship: From Benign Neglect to Critical Convergence' by Prithivi Ram Mudiam (pp. 207-226); and the fourteenth chapter, 'India-Australia: Confluence of Interests' by A. Subramanyam Raju (pp.227-242) test, evaluate and assess the India-Australia relations over the years from the days of Robert Gordon Menzies (Australia) and Jawaharlal Nehru (India) through the Cold War days through the initiatives during the 1990s of the Australia-India Council (AIC); to the changes in India post 2014 (the Modi led BJP government in power in India), etc. The discussions in these three chapters revisit India-Australia relations silhouetted on the daunting spectre of Australia as a historically 'dependent ally' of the US at one level and the changes in recent times through positional shifts in the United States' policy in the Indo-Pacific - such as questioning the 'value of massive military investment in Asia', and Donald Trump's ubiquitous 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) discarding Obama's 'strategic game plan' as 'complete and total disaster' - at another.

These fourteen chapters by collating diverse sources bring to the fore an in-depth analysis of India-Australia relations in both temporal and spatial contexts with marked signposts in the global transition from bipolarity through

unipolarity to a sway towards polycentric order, coupled with the spectre of the contested 'hegemony' ever present. The discussions in the different chapters of the book befittingly justify the subtitle of the book, 'Evolving Polycentric World Order'.

The title of the book, 'India-Australia Relations' hides more than it reveals about the contents within. The different chapters provide and address issues not just related to 'India-Australia' but go further and contribute to a greater understanding of global events such as the 'changes' (styles of leadership, postures of administration/management, policy overtures, ideological mantras, etc.) in the United States of America from Obama to Trump; the hegemonic postures of China not just across Asia but across the globe or for instance the contest between India and China to be the 'significant power' locally and globally. The collection and the arguments could have been more intense had the angle of the contest between India and China for the coveted title of a 'significant power' been more problematised with an intention to complicate and glean further into the ways in which smaller actors in South Asia such as Nepal, Bhutan or actors from East Asia such as Mongolia play into cementing these contextual notions of replicating discourses of global hegemonic and 'significant power' constructs in Asia.

The voluminous endnotes and the bibliography is undoubtedly a treasure trove for future academic ventures and critical engagements on related topics. This collection should interest students, research scholars, policy makers and implementers, and maybe politicians interested in this subject.

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