

Mass-Media Tradition and Change* (An Overview of Change in Nepal)

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Introduction

A Mass Media is defined as "any means or agency or instrument which communicates ideas, attitudes, impressions or images to a large number of people." There are various forms of media: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, films, books etc. Drama, comics, music, puppetry and graffiti are also included in mass-media. Television is by far the most powerful medium because it dramatizes the news and make it possible to visually transmit events as and when they happen.

Nepal is not only a land-locked country but also virtually a closed one without outside linkages for a long period. In fact, the development of communication linkages at both national and international levels was initiated from the very base after the political change of 1951. The developments that were achieved during the last three decades are not still adequate to meet the national requirements. However, the infrastructure of communication linkages now available in the country should be considered a matter of satisfaction, when viewed in terms of time duration of their development. Although no newspaper other than government publication was available prior to 1951, it was the first medium of mass communication developed in the country. The first newspaper known as "Gorkhapatra" was published in 1901. During its infancy it was basically a medium of dissemination of government notices and informations. Its circulation was extremely limited, and it was usually found in government offices. The political change of 1951 was immediately followed by the publication of a number of both Nepali and English dailies. Besides, Gorkhapatra and Rising Nepal, some of the important dailies are, Motherland, Commoner, Samaj and Naya Samaj etc. There are papers which are published outside Kathmandu, but they are basically local in character in terms of both circulation and news coverage. There are some weeklies like Samikshya, Rastriya Pukar, Naya Sandesh and Matri Bhumi etc. They are, however, mainly important for views, opinions, and comments.

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An obvious constraint to the development of newspapers as mass media was the lack of news agency in the country. It was only in 1961 that the national news agency named as "Rastriya Sambad Samiti" was created. In 1971, it was renamed as "Rastriya Samachar Samiti". The RSS has either exchange arrangement or some kind of link with major wire services of the world - AFP, Tass, Xinhua, Tanjung, A.P. and Kyodo. It has to pay about Rs. 80,000.00 royalty each to AFP and AP. News are obtained on exchange basis as well. RSS publishes news bulletin five times a day in both Nepali and English. Nepal is a member of the non-aligned news pool and has participated in its several meetings. There is also a genuine support for the New International Information Order which seeks to restructure the world media so that information from developing Third World Countries could be reported objectively.

Because of difficult terrains and inaccessibility and due to the lack of communication facilities, newspaper cannot be considered as the quick media. In remote places, it takes several days to make newspaper available. Moreover due to extremely limited number of literate people who can read newspaper, newspapers cannot be still claimed as effective mass media. There are two constraints to the development of newspapers in the country as mass media. One is inaccessibility, the other's illiteracy. Therefore, radio has great advantage over newspapers as it is very quick and effective medium to reach any part of the country. "The radio-the-transistor" is as much part of the milieu as the shamanistic rites of a tribal society. For a country like Nepal with a difficult mountain terrain and an almost absence of the other means of communications, radio is the principle communicator between the government and the people" (Bhatt 1982: 10).

Radio Nepal came into existence with the political revolution of 1951. In the beginning it began its operation from Kathmandu with a 300 watt military type shortwave transmitter. Improvement were made in 1954, 1956 and 1968. Few years back with the installation of a powerful transmitter at Khumaltar Radio Nepal has become effective to cover the all parts of the country and some parts of neighbouring countries. It provides simultaneous transmissions of three frequencies, one medium wave and two short waves. Two transmitters are kept stand by, ready to be on air in the event of the failure of the main transmitters.

Radio Nepal now broadcasts three times a day with the total 13½ broadcasting hours. The programme contents show that the commercial programme has the maximum duration with about 25 percent of the total hours. It is followed by musical programme with about 19 percent. The music content takes in fact the longest duration as the major portion of the commercial service contains music. News and commentary content constitutes about 12 percent of the total services hours of a day. Other important service contents include religions, rural and women programmes. Educational service occupies only 2.4 percent. Most of the programmes except news are pre-recorded on reel to reel tape or broadcast cartedges in the studios (Bajracharya and Shrestha 1981: 164).

A study which has been made recently on the radio service in the country has revealed that the news content is the most popular service. The second popular content is the agricultural service which is operated as a part of the rural programme (Bajracharya and Shrestha 1981: 165). The popularity of these programmes is quite obvious. Radio Nepal has become quite popular for news the broadcast of which is made seven times a day, two times in English and five times in Nepali. In addition, the broadcast of district news is made two times a day. Agriculture service broadcasts mainly informations on techniques of cultivation of various crops as well as control of diseases. By virtue of being a very useful programme to the farmers, the popularity of this service is not unnatural in an agricultural country like Nepal.

In developed countries, extension has been purely an educational programme but in a developing country like Nepal it is an educational as well as a service rendering agency (Pyakurel 1976: 49).

The various extension teaching methods used in Nepal are as follows:

- (a) Mass Contact - Radio, booklets, pamphlets, and posters.
- (b) Group Contact - Group meetings, agricultural fairs and exhibits, results and method demonstration.
- (c) Personal Contact - Farm and home visiting office call.

Film and Music

Until very recently, there was no film industry in Nepal. The Information Department produced on an ad hoc basis news reels, documentaries and occasionally feature films all of which had strong political overtones. The National Communication Plan 1971 envisaged the establishment of a film industry - initially through governmental assistance. The Royal Nepal Film Corporation, a public sector body has thus far produced about half a dozen of feature films. Considering the craze which people have for films, the development of film industry in Nepal is pretty bright. The Royal Nepal Film Corporation has thus far received about Rs. 23 millions from His Majesty's Government and it has a monopoly in regard to production of news reels and documentaries for Ministry of Communication. The Corporation has participated in international film festivals where some of its creations have been well appreciated.

The Ratna Recording Corporation was established in early sixties by Her Majesty Queen Mother Ratna in order to encourage, foster and popularise the varied and rich Nepalese folk culture which finds expression in songs, music and dances. Since its inception, the corporation has produced nearly 100 records which include folk songs and modern music. The corporation has plans to produce cassettes and set up a sophisticated recording system in its recently completed new building in the Panchayat Plaza.

The National Communication Plan 1971

The Communication Plan was initiated in 1971 was formulated under the gracious guidance of His Majesty King Birendra. It came into force on July 17, 1971 with the sublime motto "Communication for Development." The Plan essentially sought to:-

- i. Strengthen the traditional unity of the country for its planned development;
- ii. Strengthen the continuous and unbreakable bonds and belief towards the establishment;
- iii. Enhance national prestige and dignity in the world;
- iv. Create greater respect among non-aligned nations and neighbours towards the kingdom;
- v. Create respect and confidence among countrymen for world peace.

The Plan provided the following policy guidelines for the fulfillment of these objectives:

- i. The communication system should be, as far as possible, comprehensive;
- ii. Activities which are related to mass communication should be "people oriented;"
- iii. As majority of the people live in rural areas, there should be awareness of the need to reorient people's thought towards development through a "judicious mixture of new and old ideas;"
- iv. The language which is to be used by the various communication media should as far as possible be simple and easily understandable;
- v. The message which is sought to be transmitted to the people through communication medium should have a local element;
- vi. Through adoption of realistic and objective attitudes, confidence and respect should be created towards the communication service;
- vii. The material to be used in communications should be topical.

The National Communication Plan aimed at the rapid development of existing Mass-Media as well as at the proper and maximum utilization of the media to create a congenial climate for speedy development. The communication plan covered a wide range of subjects dealing with public relations and information and organisation of various agencies working

in the field of Mass Communication. In the process the plan laid down the basic aims of a development oriented communication strategy and prepared ground for the maximum coordination among various mass communication media and agencies. The plan streamlined various mass-media agencies and laid a basis for their new organisational set up and mutual coordination. It provided for a separate Ministry of Communication headed by a fulltime secretary for the first time. Under the Ministry of Communications are four departments viz. (1) the Department of Information, (2) His Majesty's Government Press, (3) the Department of Postal Services, (4) the Department of Broadcasting (Radio Nepal), as well as six corporation namely: (1) the Gorkhapatra Corporation, (2) the Royal Film Corporation, (3) Ratna Recording Corporation, (4) Sanskritik Sansthan (Cultural Undertaking), (5) Rastriya Samachar Samiti (National News Agency) and (6) Nepal Tele-communication Corporation.

The Communication Plan has become an integral part of the National Development Plan. The Government policy for mass-communication media is well spelt out in the Sixth Plan 1980-85. The specific programmes to be carried out are mentioned in this plan.

The policy measures of His Majesty's Government in the sector of the development of mass communication media include:

- a. Arrangement will be made and effective mechanism will be developed for quick transmission and receipt of news both at national and international level.
- b. Arrangement will be made to make development news of the country available as early as possible throughout the country as well as in the South-Asia countries.
- c. To make mass communication more effective, the functioning of communication lines and concerned units will be well channelised.
- d. The Corporations concerned with mass-communications are so far run with government financial assistance. These corporations will now be developed along commercial lines by developing share capital.
- e. To make these corporations organised on commercial basis, self-sufficient provisions for raising reasonable charges will be made in the various services provided by them.

The major programme to be undertaken in the development of mass communication are as follows:

- a. Teliprinter services will be established between Kathmandu and Nepalgunj.

- b. The central office of RSS office building will be expanded and branch offices will be constructed in Nepalgunj, Janakpur, Rajbiraj and Birgunj or Hetauda. There are provisions for the establishment of monitoring unit, mechanical workshop, documentation and training units, all of which will be attached to RSS.
- c. New equipments will be added in Gorkhapatra Corporation with a view to timely publish newspapers. Delivery system will be made effective, and delivery man will be appointed, to make quick and timely delivery of 'Gorkhapatra' and 'The Rising Nepal', the two widely circulated semi-government dailies.
- d. Radio services will be improved. The standard of radio-broadcast will be upgraded so as to make it well-comprehensive all over the kingdom. Besides expansion and refinement of existing services, two new transmitters will be established, each being of 100 KW capacity. Of these one will be installed in Pokhara and the other in Kathmandu. One Ultra Modern Studio will be developed in Kathmandu.²
- e. To undertake feasibility study for the establishment of television service in the country and to begin transmission service at selected places if found feasible from technical and economic standpoint.

The Radio Education Teacher's Training Project

The Ministry of Education and Culture has recognised the potential of radio as a means of furthering education in Nepal. A variety of educational programmes were initiated in the 1960's over Radio Nepal including a series of broadcasts designed to assist classroom instruction in the primary and lower secondary grades. It was also decided that one of the greatest needs in Nepal where radio might be useful was in (the preparation of training the untrained) primary school teachers. The main objective of the Radio Education Teacher's Training Project is to develop and test a training programme for untrained, rural primary school teachers through the medium of radio reinforced by written, self-instruction materials and periodic workshops. This project has attempted to create a cost effective process for assisting untrained teachers to meet basic certification standards while continuing to live and teach in their villages. The long range goal is to provide the facilities (100,000 watt short-wave transmitter, antenna, recording studio, and radio receivers) and a staff (scriptwriters, supervisors, radio technicians, and evaluators) to provide for and maintain an ongoing programme of radio education in a wide variety of subject areas for many different audiences of varying ages and interests.

The project has been a joint venture of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Communication through Radio Nepal, and the Institute of Education. It has recently been made a formal entity within

the curriculum, text book, supervision development centre of the Ministry of Education and Culture with full cooperation of Radio Nepal for actual broadcasting.

The curriculum designed for the teachers enrolled in this programme stressed the process of learning and teaching and the relevant skills and attitudes important in assisting their pupils complete the prescribed curriculum for grades one, two or three. In addition, it had to include topics which would enable to rural teachers to function more effectively as an "educated person", innovator and change agent. Individual radio-scripts and the accompanying self-instruction materials were prepared to reflect this curriculum with units in education, Nepali language, arts, social studies, mathematics, rural development, health art and physical education. The basic pattern of each one hour broadcast consisted of twenty minute sections covering a given content area separated by one twenty-five minutes session of a more informal nature including music, questions and answers based on letters received, dramas, general information, and non-formal sessions for adult listeners in health, agriculture and current events. In addition to listening to the hour programme, each enrolled was expected to read a related lesson from the self-instruction book. Thus the programme required about two-hours of work a day, five days a week for approximately ten months. During the developmental year of 1979-80 sufficient materials were prepared to start broadcasting in August of 1980. At first there was only one broadcast a week. This was increased to two, then gradually to five a week.

In the years ahead it will be possible to expand the educational programmes to include both credit and non-credit courses in such areas as adult literacy, health, agriculture, child care and nutrition, population education, rural development and topics as requested by various groups within Nepal. Teachers have expressed opinion that they are teaching better as a result of the programme and independent observers have noted that they are actually using new methods of teaching that they have learned through the programme.

Concluding Remarks and Some Recommendations

Communication media are the product of modern industrial society which is essentially urbanised and enjoys a high degree of literate culture. Europe has a well developed 'mass communication system' the proportion of which is still unmatched in this part of the world. "A modern communication system involves two stages or levels. The first is that of the highly organized, explicitly structured mass-media, the second is that of the informal opinion leaders who communicate on a face-to-face basis, much as communicators did in traditional systems" ... its critical feature is "that orderly relationship exist between the two levels so that the total process of communications has been aptly characterized as involving a "two step flow" and "above all, the interactions between the two levels take the form of establishing "feed back" mechanisms which produce adjustment in the content and the flow of different forms of messages." In the arena of models of communication system

Nepal can be termed as in a transitional phase; Lucian W. Pye's (1972: 24-29) observations aptly apply in Nepal's Case too. In a transitional system among many other problems the "more serious problem is the lack of specialized opinion leaders capable of sifting the messages of the mass media system and drawing attention to matters of special interest to particular audiences. Instead those in key positions in the face-to-face systems usually are more like the activists in the traditional system, and hence their special skills lie in expanding upon limited information rather than in selecting from a voluminous flow of communication.

The concept of a dominant media network is conspicuous by its absence in societies where spoken words predominate as the main source of communication. The all pervasive media environment of the west contrasts very well with the extensive nature of the urban centred media catering to the tiny segment of the entire population. In the developing countries, the pockets of urbanised, literate, aspiring and achieving population which constitute the audience of communication media seem like islands in a sea of apathy, ignorance and poverty. Hence the scope of communication media is confined to a few urban centres hardly constituting about 10 percent of total population of the country, with the result that the media environment is felt by thin and tiny population.

The Nepalese communication media suffers from stiffly concentrations within the confines of Kathmandu Valley. Inaccessible surrounding mountains and stupendous illiteracy of about 75 percent in the villages effectively separate the media environment of Kathmandu Valley from the rest of the country. 21 (twenty-one) dailies and over 30 (thirty) weeklies are published from the capital (Royal Press Commission 1981: 129-130). (Now the numbers have increased),³ but their size and coverage apart from government owned dailies is as meagre as the corresponding reading public. They do not reach out in the people for they are competition shy. "The media as a class has been more concerned to secure benefits, government handouts and subsidies rather than help develop the reading public and sell itself through improved coverage and reporting (Royal Press Commission 1981: 63).

Very little differences can be observed in the case of broadcasting media of the South Asian Region. In view of direct reach of broadcasting to the masses transcending literacy and natural barrier of distance and topography broadcasting has remained a solid instrument of the government in power. The broadcasting media carry the news *Mutatis Mutandis* from the national news agencies and overseas channels as in the case with the printed media. The following observation has been aptly made.

"The emphasis on preserving the heritage of the past particularly affects the government owned media. Hence the content analysis of any broadcasting channel gives the unmistakable impression that retaining the status quo is an overwhelming bias of such network. Features like talks, discussion, dramas and even songs carry very little that is stimulating to rouse the people to thought and action. The government owned broadcasting media not only emphasise personalities over the news values

but also deemphasise the representation of alternative ideas (Upadhyay 1981: 36-37).

For the developing countries the problem of reconstruction is the overriding concern. Successive development plans have well emphasised the lack of wider and comprehensive commitment towards the plan objective. It calls for increased socio-political and economic activities on the part of rural masses. The significance of communication media to enlist increased participation in the socio-economic transformation has been increasingly realised. The media are involved to generate social awareness amongst the far flung rural people. In the developing countries, the media have to cater to the taste of urbanites who form the dominant audience as well as reorient their coverage to reach the villages and creat sustained readership there.

Some Recommendations

- a. Mass media should be geared to arouse development consciousness. In the process of national development, it is the responsibility of planners and media men to chalk out a course of action and form strategy in order to make the best use of existing media as well as to develop the infrastructure of communications for creating development consciousness among the masses.
- b. The feed-back process is very essential particularly in broadcasting services. The survey can be utilized for the betterment of programmes by correcting the current defects and flows. The feedback information of the entire communication operation can be collected by various methods viz. sample Readership and Audience surveys, complaint boxes suggestion boxes etc.
- c. Keeping in view the potentiality of the various folk forms, the folk media should be integrated with all mass communication services in order to achieve optimum impact. An integrated use of traditional media can achieve greater success in developments, campaigns as well as in the cultural development of masses. Dr. Everett M. Rogers, Professor of Journalism at the University of Michigan, U.S.A. has aptly pointed out, "The Traditional media have a great potential in achieving development goals because they have a wide audience and high credibility in the eyes of villagers."
- d. The establishment of a permanent "Training Unit" to impart training courses for specific groups of journalists, reporter, broadcasters, information officers etc under the information department should be considered.
- e. The status of the profession of journalism should be raised through a more systematic, regular training, better facilities and greater assistance to the journalists in the performance of their work.

In a traditional society, the urge to change for better is very much essential in the unfolding of development process. Mass media is very much helpful in eradicating worn-out biases, pre-conceived notions and superstitions that impede the pace of progress. In fact mass media helps create the desire to change for good and brings about new conditions in the society by "planting the seed of change" in the minds of men.

In a developing society, an essential service like the communications must be fully utilized for the prime purpose of development activities. And in developing countries, what is termed as, "development journalism" is also taking shape. A Filipino Journalist, Eduardo Lachica thus defined "development journalism."

"Development journalism at its best is a rational, independent thorough enquiry into the problems and conditions of a developing country written in a way that makes them readily understandable to the citizens of that country."

NOTES

1. The Gorkhapatra (1901) and Rising Nepal an English daily (1964) both are government controlled dailies. They have wide coverages of both national and international news. The coverage of the latter being relatively extensive in Rising Nepal. The daily publication of the former is approximately 30,000 (Thirty Thousand) copies, whereas the latter amounts to 10,000 (Ten Thousand) copies.
2. On 25th November 1981 agreement on Medium Wave was signed between His Majesty's Government of Nepal and Government of Japan. According to this agreement medium wave transmitter of 100 KW capacity each will be set up in Lalitpur and Pokhara. By medium wave broadcasting service can be extended to 55 percent of the total population of Nepal.
3. The Rising Nepal, March 23rd 1983 in Column Newsroom chatter sarcastically remarks - At the moment of going to the press there are about 314 registered journals in the kingdom. Of these there are over a hundred dailies in the Capital alone. This flash flood of news-pulp has inundated just about every body. ... At the side walk newsstands, the front pages of hundred tabloids reveal a spectrum of assorted hues.

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