

9-29-2010

# Media Contribution in Transfer of Power in Nepal

Binod C. Agrawal

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nsc\\_research](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nsc_research)

---

## Recommended Citation

Agrawal, Binod C.. "Media Contribution in Transfer of Power in Nepal." (2010). [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nsc\\_research/43](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nsc_research/43)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Nepal Study Center at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Himalayan Research Papers Archive by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

# **Media Contribution in Transfer of Power in Nepal**

**By**  
**Binod C. Agrawal**  
**Professor of Eminence**  
**Director General**  
**TALEEM Research Foundation**  
**City Plaza, Sterling City, Bopal**  
**Ahmedabad 380058, India**  
**Email: [taleemad1@sancharnet.in](mailto:taleemad1@sancharnet.in)**  
**[binodcagrwal@gmail.com](mailto:binodcagrwal@gmail.com)**

## **Media Contribution in Transfer of Power to People in Nepal**

***Abstract:** Land locked Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal was known for relative isolation and state controlled media access and exposure until late twentieth century. The limited print and electronic media produced and distributed within the kingdom was fairly restrictive though news papers and magazines, radio and television signals were received without much restrictions from the neighboring countries particularly from India. Other countries like China also broadcast Nepal focused information and news. On the turn of the twenty first century, Nepal's cultural and political scene have taken revolutionary path in which kingship has been replaced by democratic order. The aim of the paper is to discuss and analyzed the contribution of media in achieving transfer of power to people. The paper is based on the first hand interaction with Nepal media persons and available secondary data on the growth and development of media in Nepal and political events. Radio broadcast in Nepal started in April 1951. At that time, radio coverage was small and limited to Kathmandu-the capital and surrounding valley. Radio Nepal since then has grown both in terms of infrastructure and broadcasting time. Added to it has been expansion of "community radio" often used for political campaigns. Television arrived in mid eighties in Kathmandu and rapidly expended its coverage. In spite of several political upheavals and turmoil gradually private entrepreneurs took over media within Nepal. Youth within Nepal and emigrants to other parts of Asia provided continuous information that contributed to influence the struggle for democratic power to people.*

## **Media Contribution in Transfer of Power in Nepal**

By Binod C. Agrawal<sup>1</sup>

“The achievement of Nepal’s citizen’s radio in establishing community broadcasting and then depending, it from a dictatorial regime in 2005 has become a model for public radio in other parts of the region.” (Dixit 2009:12)

### **Political Communication in Nepal: A Theoretical Perspective**

Norris (1999) identified three main schools of thought on political communication developed over a period of several decades in twentieth century mostly in Euro-American democratic context. These included “mass propaganda”, “partisan reinforcement” and “recent theories of cognitive, agenda setting and persuasion effects...” (Norris et al. 1999:2). Habermas (2006) reported impressive increase in the volume of political communication in Euro-American democratic countries a phenomenon quite visible in the South Asian countries including Nepal to-day. The political communication is dominated by mediated communication “that lacks the defining features of deliberation” (Habermas 2006:414). At the same time, power of political communication shapes presentation of messages... in multiple ways tempered by political and social power of the ruling elite. The political communication contributes in agenda setting and also legitimating of democratic process (Habermas 2006:415). Such political communication helps in the formation of a plurality of public opinion that would “...yield non arbitrary standards for the identification of the courses of communication pathologies”. (Habermas 2006:416).

Media especially radio in the context of Nepal, manifested “...itself in the choice of information and format, in the shape and style of programs...and framing of issues”

(Challaghan and Schnell 2005 as reported by Habermas 2006:419). Nepal's political communication was reinforced by Maoist insurgents' spread over large part of the country at a time when King had largely lost his legitimacy to rule and kingdom was inflicted with corruption and indifferent administration. Concurrent media development saw withering of State monopoly of radio and television especially on the periphery of Nepal's boundaries.

The contribution of FM radio in achieving democracy must be examined in this frame of political communication for "partisan reinforcement" between King and Maoist insurgents. A similar role of media can be found in case of Iran where cassette recorders were used for conveying the message to overthrow the Shah of Iran (Tehrani 1984).

### **Data**

In last three years, the author has had direct interaction and exchange of views with several prominent Nepali journalists, researchers and radio broadcasters like Radio Sangramatha, Nepal's first non-government independent radio station. In addition, the author could interview several Nepali men working in India. The views expressed are base on limited observations on day-to-day reporting of Nepal television and Indian English news papers.

## **Aim**

The aim of the paper is to find out the contribution made by FM radio in achieving transfer of power to people in Nepal from monarchy.

## **Geopolitical Position of Nepal**

Land locked Hindu Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal was known for relative isolation and State controlled Media Nepal a SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) member country is predominantly mountainous having physical and cultural diversity. In spite of linguistic and dialect diversity, Nepali language is widely spoken and remains a major means of communication. Often Nepal is considered as “a yam between two boundaries” and sandwiched between two Asian giants – India and China” (Kasajoo 2008a and 2008b).

Nepal is divided into three regions, Himalayan, Hill and Terai. Snow covered mountains are cold and largely barren. Himalayan region covers little over one third of the land mass. Mount Everest is situated in this region along with other world’s highest peaks. Important valleys are situated in the Hill region of Nepal covering over 40 percent of the landmass. Kathmandu, the capital city, is situated in Hill region. It is densely populated and continues to dominate the political scene of Nepal. The productive Terai region or plain area of Nepal covers little over 20 percent of the country land mass and runs along the northern border of India. Almost half of the country’s over 25 million humans live in Terai region. These geo-physical differences in three regions have played significant historical role in the past leading to the present political changes in Nepal.

## **Monarchy, Maoists and Media**

In South Asia, the non-colonized countries include Nepal and Bhutan which have had age old monarchy. They both are going through the process of democratization. (<http://news.rediff.com/column/2010/may/24/nepalise-woes-require-indian-support.html>).

In this process, China and India have been playing an invisible role. Tiwari (2001) believed that Maoist movement in Nepal must be viewed in the background of Naxalite movement in India and Maoism in China. Over a period of time, Communists of Nepal, like in other parts of South Asia, divided and formed as much 19 Communist parties while political movement for democracy continued. The main enemy remained King and or Nepali Congress for most of the Maoists. In case of Nepali Congress, Maoists believed that they were supported by “...expansionist India and imperialists America...” (Tiwari 2001:3). Many others believed that China supported Maoists in Nepal. Nepal journalists give no credence to the view that China gave covert or overt support to the struggle.

No Evidence of direct or indirect media support from India or China is available in the struggle for democracy. The same is asserted by many Nepali journalists and communication researchers who do not even mention name of any country which supported Maoists during armed conflict. Tiwari (2001:4) believed that Maoists did not have “.... advantage of geographical continuity from India” and “...ideological support from Radio Beijing” (Tiwari 2001:4). However, Singh (2009) asserted that “The Maoist have close links with China have received material and moral support from it during their 10 years of armed struggle”.

(<http://www.clawa.in/index.php?action=deetails&inid=236&uid=71>)

Aditya Man Shrestha (2009:5), a senior journalist of Nepal observed “The experience of media during armed conflict in Nepal have testified that the media was sandwiched between conflicting parties... The partisan role they played unfairly dominated the whole media world”.

“People who have been suppressed, exploited and marginalized for political, social, cultural and economic rights continue to strive for its transformation into a modern democratic country” (Kasajoo 2008a:83). During political struggle period, constitutional monarchy was questioned and challenged by Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) by way of sporadic but regular insurgency across country. “People’s War” was supported by men and women together (it was estimated that about 30 percent guerrillas were women).

### **Radio and Roots of Democracy**

Among all electronic media, radio broadcasting has had several ups and down but steady growth and development in Nepal over half a century dating back to 1951. Even in its infancy, radio was utilized “...to broadcast revolutionary messages...” (Kasajoo 2008a:341). “Similarly, the revolutionaries started Prajatantra Radio Nepal from Biratnagar, the eastern city in Terai in early 1951” (Kasajoo 2008a:341). According to Kasajoo (2008a) an eminent Nepali journalist, the seed of democracy was sowed in Nepal more than half a century ago in which media especially radio played an important role in challenging and attempting to throw monarchy.

Several attempts since then have been made to have a democratic Nepal by introducing multiparty democratic system to start with, which survived for a short period of 10 years

till 1960. Two years later in 1962, King Mahendra introduced the *Panchayat* system which was viewed by Nepali people and other observers as direct and autocratic rule. Almost thirty years later, due to popular people's demand for democracy in 1990, King Birendra introduced constitutional monarchy and a multiparty democratic rule. The short lived multiparty democratic system could not fulfill the aspirations of Nepali people.

After 1996, radio in Nepal grew and spread through out the country in "Short Wave", "Medium Wave" and FM from 10 watts to 10,000 watts radio stations both in public and private sectors. Radio expansion was with or without the label of community radio since no distinction was made between commercial and community radio in Nepal (Kasajoo 2008a). FM radio was last to arrive on scene but with a bang having over 290 licensed FM radio stations in August 2009.

(See current status [http://www.nepalradio.org/p2\\_information.htm](http://www.nepalradio.org/p2_information.htm)).

State owned Radio Nepal was used as a mouthpiece of the Government and Public Service Broadcasting. On the other hand, the Community Radio reached to the remotest part with the messages of change in social and political order. Technical skill training and financial support for the expansion of radio in Nepal was received from various parts of the world having explicit and implicit ideological and political agenda.

Bhattarai (2007:137) reported "In March 2006, the Royal Nepalese Army said it had been licensed to run six FM stations. At the same time the Maoists who have been engaged in a violent insurgency since February 1996 claims to be operating five clandestine FM stations".

FM Radio has been most preferred source of information though Indian radio is also listened too especially by shopkeepers and housewives in a low literacy and mountainous country. FM Community Radio dotted across Nepal influenced listeners in far flung and remote areas starved of information and news. The public opinion stated getting influence directly by enabling radio listeners to hear what was happening in Kathmandu the capital and in the rest of the country while experiencing bullets of Maoists', disappearance of near and dear or killing of informers or loyalists of King.

“People’s war” or arm struggle against King by Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) who were called: “Maoist insurgents” by royal regime and radio broadcast started around the same time. The wild fire of insurgency engulfed almost all parts of the country except some part of Kathmandu valley. The arm struggle was carried out by men and women together (it was estimated that about 30 percent guerrillas were women). The toll of violent conflict was estimated to be 12000 to 13000 lives which included police, insurgents (Maoist guerrillas) and alleged informers of police and innocent civilians.

The demand for democracy was accentuated after King Gyanendra declared a State of Emergency on February 1, 2005 and assumed direct power. The political struggle took a dramatic turn within a short span of time. The end result was declaration of Nepal as Federal Democratic Republic by the Parliament rectified after national election 2008 and removal of King without clear majority in the parliament by any political party. Even after five rounds of parliamentary election for Prime Minister of Nepal no one has been elected (Chandrasekharan 2010). An experience of parliamentary democracy of Nepal is

no different than experiences of many multiparty democratic countries. The struggle for bringing multi party parliamentary democratic system of governance in Nepal continues. Interviews of Nepali men working in India, who visit Nepal at least once a year for an extended period, indicated that radio listening gained popularity over a period of time. These men also listened radio broadcast carrying Maoist messages and CDs were distributed and sold in the market place. Some of these CDs were sold in the boarder cities and towns of India and were available in New Delhi having large Nepali working population.

Bhattarai(2007) described in detail alternate media's contribution in early days of political transition from monarchy to democracy. Apart from community radio according to Bhattaria (2007:150-158), other media included community towers, community telephone centers, audio-cassettes, regional/district news papers, wall newspapers, alternate theater and video. Bhattarai (2007:172) reported that "the alternative media forms in Nepal has been successful largely due to the open environment. ...But long term success even these efforts would [be] possible in a democratic polity".

Radio especially FM Radio in last ten years it seems helped achieved democracy. Its role must be seen in the long drawn political struggle from the grass root in the frame of "agenda setting" and "partisan reinforcement". The cumulative radio effects of political communication have brought about major changes in opinion of an average Nepali men and women who began to despise the King Gyanendra. So much so that King lost his "God like image" that was taken for granted not long time ago.

The transition from monarchy rule of the King to total democracy has been some what a novel and exalting experience to the citizens of Nepal. In this context, Rashmi (2009:1) observed “As Nepal continues in its transition of defining its political destiny a new born republic, what remains certain is the fact that the Radio assumes and indispensable role in shaping the opinion of the people; and hence the fate of its future.... Indeed, the Radio has been a central path way of connecting and empowering the diverse people of Nepal as a dynamic political entity”. Based on brief analysis, it is concluded that FM Community radio in Nepal played a significant role in achieving transfer of power to people from monarchy.

## Reference Cited

- Anonymus 2010 Current Status. Broadcasting and wireless operation Frequencies Issued by Frequency Division, Ministry of Information & Communication, government of Nepal. [http://www.nepalradio.org./p2\\_information.htm](http://www.nepalradio.org./p2_information.htm)
- Bhattarai, Binod 2007 Nepal:Picking up Steam, but Political Bottlenecks Ahead. In Media Pluralism in Asia. The Role & Impact of Alternate Medi.
- Kalinga Seneviratne,ed., pp.132-175 (AMIC Asian Communication Series). Singapore:AMIC and Kim Wee School of Communication and Information NTU.
- Chandrasekharan, S. 2010 NEPAL:Wrestting for Prime Minister's Crown: update No. 228, July 27, 2010 Note NO. 592. <http://www.southasiananalysis.org./papers>
- Dixit, Kunda 2010 View point: Media is the Message: The Media must Help Restore and Protect Democracy to Ensure Development. Media Asia Vol 37 No 1, pp. 10-12.
- Habermas, Jurgen 2006 Political Communication in Media Society does Democracy still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research. Communication Theory 16(2006) pp 411-426 International Communication Association (original Article) doi:10.1111/j.1468=2885.2006.002804.x
- Kasajoo, Vinaya 2008a Nepal *in* Asian Communication Handbook 2008. eds. Indrajit Banerjee and Stephen Longan;pp 335-368. Singapore:AMIC and WKWSCI-NTU.
- 2008b Nepal: Proliferation of Community Radio set to Change Communication Patterns *In* Community and Mainstream Media: Partnering to Promote Millennium Development Goals, ed, Kalinga Senevirantne; pp. 81-107 Singapore:AMIC.(CD).

- Noorris, Pippa, et al. 1999 On Message. *In* Chapter 1 Theories of Political Communication. London: Sage Publications. Downloaded from Internet
- Rashmi 2009 State of Radio in Nepal(Term Paper). Saturday, June 27, 2009. Posted in Rashmi Blog.
- Shrestha, Aditya Man 2009 Role of Media in Conflict Revolution in Nepal. Paper submitted to seminar on “Building Bridges for Peace in Nepal” organized by Centre for Economic and Technical Studies (CETS) in Cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), October 17, 2009. <http://telegraphnepal.com/test/new-det.php?new>
- Singh, Harbhajan 2009 Maoist Government in Nepal: Ramifications for India. Article No 1234 dated January 13, 2009 <http://www.claws.in/index/php?action=detils&mid=236&u id=71>
- Tiwari, Clintra K. 2001 Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Internal Dimensions. <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/paper2/paper187.htm>
- Tehranian, Majid 1984 Dependency and Communication Dualism in the Third World with Special Reference to the case of Iran. In Continuity and Change in Communication Systems: An Asian Perspective. G. Wang and W. Disanayake, eds. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Press.

---

<sup>i</sup> TALEEM Research Foundation, City Plaza, Sterling City, Bopal, Ahmedabad 380058 India, e-mail: [binodcagrawal@gmail.com](mailto:binodcagrawal@gmail.com)