

# NEPALI BLOGGING AND DEMOCRACY

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## Introduction

This article is an attempt to assess the nature of Nepali news weblogs (blogs) within broader debates around the democratising potential of the Internet.<sup>1</sup> I am particularly interested in the role of Nepali news blogs during the period of royal rule after February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005. My main argument will be that while Nepali news blogs are far from democratic it is clear that they did play a role in restoring democracy. Nepalis adapted blogging technology for their own ends in promoting democracy as a political concept, rather than using blogs as working definitions of deliberative democracy. Blogging as a medium has many faults in and outside of Nepal but during royal rule Nepali bloggers largely successfully used the blog format for their purpose of telling the world about Nepal.

My essay will be focused on assessing the 'pro-democracy' credentials of Nepali news blogs. I will first introduce blogs as a topic and then I will explore how blogs fit into wider debates around the Internet, democracy and the public sphere. I will then explain the blogging context in Nepal and how Nepali bloggers adapted the blog format in Nepal. Following this I will also consider the impact of censorship and self-censorship in different forms. My essay will then include assessments around the quality and culture of online deliberations. After focusing on examples during February 2006 I will then go on to briefly highlight changes and potentially democratising developments within the Nepali blogosphere during and after the People's Movement in April 2006. I will also include appropriate comparisons with other blogospheres (the term for a collection of blogs) as well as online Nepali journalism.

Blogs perform a wide range of different roles and, as I hope to illustrate, have adapted to different political and social contexts, sometimes with unexpected results. Blogging (the practice of writing a

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1 Thanks are due to Stefanie Lotter and Michael Hutt for first encouraging me to study this topic. Thanks also for advice, information and inspiration to Ujjwal Acharya, Aditya Adhikari, Deepak Adhikari, Rhoderick Chalmers, Pratyoush Onta, *Saynasomething*, Umesh Shrestha, Dinesh Wagle, *Zaded* and members of Martin Chautari. I am also grateful for the very useful and thought-provoking comments of two anonymous reviewers.

blog) remains an elitist medium and conversations on Nepali news blogs, as elsewhere, have often fallen short of even basic offline standards of civility and democracy. However, in a time of political tension and print media censorship, my argument is that Nepali news blogs were effective in communicating information about Nepal to the outside world. Part of this essay also involves scrutinising the often widely optimistic definitions made on behalf of blogging itself (though usually not made by those who blog - bloggers - themselves). My argument is also that Nepali news blogs add an extra facet to the debate on blogging. Nepali news blogs, during royal rule, found a different way of promoting democracy particularly via the interest of the online Nepali Diaspora.

I begin by taking a simple starting definition that a blog is a website which is “diary-like in appearance but run in reverse chronological order” and “posts are made on a regular basis and accompanied by the date.... Editorial control ... is at the discretion of the blogger” (Ferguson and Howell 2004: 7). Blogs also usually have comment boxes to allow debate and feedback on each post. My main focus is on Nepali news blogs, which share some aspects of online journalism but are also similar to online social communities. By combining several different aspects blogs fall into a unique category, albeit one with historical antecedents.<sup>2</sup> Blogging first developed in the early 1990s as an underground, counter-culture interest in the USA (Ferguson and Howell 2004:7). The number of blogs increased greatly in 1999 when the first free build-your-own blogging software was launched (Ferguson and Howell 2004:7). Historically, as one writer suggests blogs “connect back to the days of personal fanzines, flyers, billboards and eighteenth-century pamphleteering” (Crompton 2003: 95). From the beginning Nepali blogging has been associated with journalists who blog on political topics.<sup>3</sup>

This essay will focus only on a limited selection of Nepali-authored news and politics-related blogs during one particular moment. Full references will be made throughout but it should be noted that the Internet and the blogosphere are, by their very nature, provisional with blogs and websites closing, becoming inactive or changing web address. Bloggers who are anonymous will be quoted by their online name only.

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2 I thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

3 However not every Nepali blogger wishes to write on political topics or become an online citizen’s journalist. For more on Nepali Citizen’s Journalism see <http://www.cjnepal.org/>

Most of my examples from blogs will come from February 2006. This has the value of including posts (an item posted on a blog) relating to the first anniversary of King Gyanendra's royal takeover as well as posts covering the municipal elections. This period highlights the particular use of blogging by Nepalis during a time of political upheaval. As one academic suggests, "it is in semi-authoritarian states that the Internet has precipitated tangible political change to date" (Reilly 2006:121). Information from online content has also been supplemented by e-mail and interview contact with Nepali bloggers. My study is far from comprehensive or scientific and much more detailed research into Nepali blogging is needed, possibly from within the Nepali blogosphere itself.

Many current debates on political blogging only operate in and draw from examples in Europe or the USA. This is partly due to the online dominance of the West, though works do exist on, for example, the Iranian blogosphere (Alavi 2005). In the Nepali case there are, at present, only a small number of academic analyses of any part of the Nepali online world.<sup>4</sup> This essay hopes to encourage further studies of online activity in Nepal. Detailed studies of the behaviour of Nepali Internet users (in Nepal or amongst the Diaspora) and an in-depth comparison and examination of the links between online and offline Nepali journalism are just two potential future topics for research.

My essay will include examples from a range of news and political comment blogs, particularly United We Blog! (UWB)<sup>5</sup> but also including Mero Sansar<sup>6</sup>, Blogdai<sup>7</sup> and others. I have chosen to focus on UWB and Mero Sansar in particular, as both blogs were among the earliest and also most popular Nepali news blogs.<sup>8</sup> UWB is mostly in English, with occasional comments in Nepali. Mero Sansar is the first blog to be written

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4 These include Adhikari 2061 v.s., Luintel 2005, Montgomery [no date], Onta and Parajuli 1998, Upadhyaya 2003a, 2003b, 2005. Several Nepali journalists have also written newspaper and online articles about Nepali blogging e.g. Adhikari 2007.

5 Henceforth UWB, <http://www.blog.com.np>

6 Mero Sansar claims to be the first Nepali-language blog. <http://www.mysansar.com>

7 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/>

8 Both UWB and Mero Sansar are probably still the most popular and well-known blogs writing on Nepali news and political matters. UWB began in October 2004. Mero Sansar first began blogging in April 2005 at <http://merosansar.blogspot.com/> then switched to <http://www.mysansar.com/> in February 2006. Blogdai began in January 2005.

in Nepali unicode but attracts comments in English and Nepali. Both blogs usually post at least once a day. Although UWB and Mero Sansar are located in Nepal the nature of the Internet means they are open to comments and posts from Nepalis and others across the world.

A major issue for studies of the online world has been the trust, sincerity and reliability of the bloggers and commentators. For the purposes of establishing a supportive Bloggers Association of Nepal (BLOGAN), blogger and journalist Ujjwal Acharya has proposed members be “bloggers identified as regular and Nepali by origin”.<sup>9</sup> However, the nature of the Internet makes it almost impossible to be sure of the identity and background of both bloggers and commentators. Also under certain political situations or out of personal choice bloggers may prefer to stay anonymous. The somewhat ‘pro-Royalist’ blogger *Blogdai*, was subject to much comment box speculation concerning his nationality. Also it can be very hard to tell where a blogger is located. Indeed, as argued later, Nepalis outside the physical borders of Nepal dominate the Nepali blogosphere. For these reasons it is impossible to define with certainty every blog and comment mentioned in my study as Nepali-authored.

This study will occasionally make some comparisons with online Nepali news sites and online journalism but my main focus is on Nepali news blogs.<sup>10</sup> It is important to begin by stressing the difference between blogs and other websites, though admittedly the distinction is not always clear-cut.<sup>11</sup> There were (and still are) multiple online message boards, blogs and discussion forums used by Nepalis and others wanting to discuss Nepal.<sup>12</sup> There are Nepali blogs covering a range of topics such as Nepali cricket, law, Nepali media and many more.<sup>13</sup> This essay is not privileging one topic or format over any other. Instead I am focusing on

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9 ‘regular’ means posting on their blogs regularly. [www.NepaliVoices.com](http://www.NepaliVoices.com) is the online home of BLOGAN.

<http://www.nepalivoices.com/2006/11/09/proposing-bloggers-association-of-nepal/#comments> accessed 15 December 2006.

10 For an excellent overview of Nepali online journalism see Adhikari 2061 v.s.

11 I thank an anonymous reviewer for stressing these points.

12 The Yahoo Group NepalWatch is one such popular e-mail group as is the Nepalnews.com chat room.

13 The fullest list of Nepali blogs is at Nepali Bloggers  
<http://www.bloggers.com.np/>

globally popular news blogs that were said to have had a political impact and illustrated something new.<sup>14</sup>

### **Debates on the Internet and Democracy**

Important questions have been raised about the political role of the Internet since the growth of e-mail and the "dotcom" financial booms of the 1990s (Franklin 2005: 106). Behind my main argument is the simple idea that blogs are linked to and reflect society through their users and bloggers. This may seem fairly obvious. However, new computing technology can be quickly reified, de-linked from human society and seen as being automatically beneficial for democracy and the economy (Wise with Steemers 2000:185). Many existing reflections on blogging by journalists seem to follow this 'ideology of cyberspace' and appear wildly optimistic about blogs and the global potential impact of blogging on all our lives. For example, Arianna Huffington, editor of the well-known USA-based Huffington Post blog, said that "blogging has empowered the little guy" and "it really does become a conversation" which has "gone global" (Huffington 2006).

As with previous communication mediums the Internet and blogs are also globally contested sites that are subject to a debate and battle between private and public interests (Dahlberg 2002). Online users face information which "is increasingly commodified", patented and copyrighted (Dahlberg 2002). Underlying many debates around blogging is an idea that they can regain control of this losing battle. This idea suggests that blogs can help re-establish Enlightenment-style public discussion spaces, empower the individual as a citizen and thus contribute to building more democratic societies.

On the other hand blog sceptics have challenged these views with wholly negative assessments about the impact of blogging. One critic said that the idea that "blogs will one day rule the media world is a triumph of optimism over parasitism" (Butterworth 2006). Blogs have been attacked as wholly undemocratic, parasitic on old media and elitist. One commentator has said blogging is "a democratic medium, allowing anyone to participate in political debate without an intermediary. But it is a direct and not deliberative form of democracy. You need no competence to join in" (Kamm 2007a). Questions have been asked about whether more publishing space and more online speech is necessarily a good thing for democracy (see Kamm 2007a, 2007b).

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14 As detailed in <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4093>, for example.

Much of the current, more realistic, thinking about the democratic implications of new digital technologies has usefully adapted Habermas's pre-blogging concept of a 'Public Sphere' and, in particular, his account of citizens developing into media consumers (Habermas 1996; Wise with Steemers 2000:191). Habermas "saw the ideal Public Sphere as being a space distinct from both the state and the market where citizens could exchange views ... so that public opinion could be formed" (Wise with Steemers 2000:191). But, for Habermas, the rise of commercial mass media in the nineteenth century means modern media is a "sphere for the exercise of power rather than a forum for rational discussion among free and informed citizens" (Wise with Steemers 2000:192). Many commentators, in updating Habermas, view blogs and other new communications technologies in a balanced manner (Friedland 1996). On the one hand, blogs are clearly embedded in a networked marketplace but, also and at the same time, blogs are a potential forum to extend democratic communication practices, depending on their purpose. In the Nepali case this online private versus public battle over the Internet exists more in the financial and structural difficulties of online journalism and Diaspora sites (though it may go on to affect blogs, as highlighted later).

Whilst discussing the democratic development of the Internet one unavoidable fact to bear in mind is the huge global 'digital divide'. Cheryl Parsons, on a trip in 1998 to investigate the then small world of online journalism in Nepal, made the following observations: "In some very important ways, the Web is quite provincial. You might even say that it suffers from the same problems as the English colonialists in India: it's rich, it's white, it doesn't speak the local language and it thinks it knows best" (Parsons 1998). The hyperbole around new communication technologies has been challenged starkly by the fact that the vast majority of the world's population do not even have telephone access let alone access to a computer. It is clear that the globally vast inequality between Internet 'haves' and 'have-nots' still reflects offline inequalities.

US-centric debates around blogging and democracy are often polarised into stating that blogs are either pro-democratic, deliberative forums or anti-democratic and individualist. In reality, blogging, like other new communication technologies, contains some potential and real drawbacks. Nepali news blogs are part of these global debates on blogging but also represent separate and new trends outside of the Western online world. Global arguments around blogging tend to view political blogging solely as a form of journalism and focus on questions around the democratic value blogging can add to or take from western

liberal democracies (Geras 2007a, 2007b, 2007c and 2007d; Kamm 2007a, 2007b). Examples of blogospheres operating outside of western liberal democracies, such as the Nepali blogosphere during royal rule, suggest that we should also consider the local adaptation of blogs and their indirect effects on democracy alongside the undeniable pro- and anti-democratic features of blogs.

### **The Nepali Blogging Context**

To help understand how local adaptation has taken place I will now consider the context of blogging in Nepal. Online users in Nepal cannot ignore the North American and English linguistic and cultural domination of online life. Blog users are inescapably interlinked within global networks and trends but can also adapt to local concerns and debates. In this regard Nepali news blogs could also, arguably, be part of an effort to re-establish civic forums in Nepal. Dharma N. Adhikari claims that in Nepal “traditional community participation forums such as the *guthi*, *ḍabali*, *chautāri*, *panchāyat* - various names for the old-town-squares-from New England type of civic forums - are fast vanishing” (Adhikari 2005). Adhikari recommends ‘public-orientated journalism’ to counter these trends, aid democratic participation and help build a Nepali sense of citizenship and a strong civic culture (Adhikari 2005). Blogging, though only one form of such participation, could easily be part of this. The Nepali blogosphere, as I will show, contains examples of how a relatively small blogging community can ‘localise’ online content and the blogging medium itself towards specifically Nepali concerns and interests.

Placing Nepali news blogs in this tradition of older Nepali civic forums (despite all the inequalities of both blogs and civic forums in practice) helps avoid judging blogs solely from western frameworks.<sup>15</sup> Nepali blogs, in this vain, were the latest vehicle for spreading news in times of political strife as well as developing a Nepali identity, only now the medium operates worldwide and out to the Diaspora. Similarly, the actions of the rulers of Nepal once again played some part in determining the form and medium of Nepali opposition. For example, Nepali news bloggers arguably operated in a similar fashion to Father Moran and his ham radio activities in 1950s Nepal. In that case too technological advances inside Nepal were used to connect personally with the outside world (Messerschmidt 1997). Fruitful comparisons could also be made between blogging and the development of a Nepali literary culture outside

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15 I thank an anonymous reader for stressing this.

Nepal (Chalmers 2003) as well as the anti-Rana pamphleteering and agitation in the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite numerous innovations introduced by blogging it is clear that, in terms of access and users, the Nepali blogosphere is highly unequal. Although the costs of hardware and online access are falling they remain high enough to keep computer penetration very low. Estimates of the numbers of Nepalis who use the Internet range from 80,000 (Jones 2005) to 400,000 (Reporters Without Borders 2003). Clearly, at whatever numbers, this group is an unrepresentative section of an estimated 27 million population.

Nepali-based bloggers are generally well aware of their small number, unrepresentative nature and limited impact within Nepal. Very few bloggers make exaggerated claims about the impact of blogs in Nepal. An anonymous female Nepali blogger, *Zaded*, has said 'In a country with so limited population with Internet access, I don't think blogging has a notable impact in the society at large too.'<sup>16</sup> Though it is worth pointing that during the period of royal rule and after UWB was read by some Nepal-based politicians, diplomats and members of the Royal Nepal Army.<sup>17</sup> However the direct political impact of blogs inside Nepal is clearly very low.

In terms of technical knowledge potential bloggers require some computing knowledge, spare time and the ability to pay charges, be it from a home computer or from Internet cafés. Internet use in Nepal also seems to mainly involve using chat and e-mail functions, though more research is needed on this.<sup>18</sup> Blogging, as elsewhere, is not yet widely known and practiced even amongst those who have Internet access. The industry and IT infrastructure itself is also hardly well developed for providing access. In 2005 there were only apparently 16 Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the whole of Nepal (Reporters Without Borders, 2005). Private ISPs have also faced obstructions from the former

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16 *Zaded* blogs at Zade X-PreSS: <http://zade.wordpress.com/http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/10/01/i-blog-do-you-btw-happy-birthday-uwb/>, accessed 15 November 2006.

17 Personal communication, Dinesh Wagle. Wagle has also interviewed British Ambassadors Keith Bloomfield and, Andrew Hall for UWB. <http://web.archive.org/web/20060115135647/www.blog.com.np/?p=941> accessed on 20 December 2006. <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/07/29/a-doctor-from-thulo-syabru-andrew-hall-is-british-ambassador-to-nepal/>, accessed on 30 July 2006.

18 Luintel 2005 and Adhikari 2061 v.s.



monopoly telecommunication provider (up to 1994), Nepal Telecommunications Corporation, who also manage their own ISP (Upadhyaya 2005).

Despite this, technological changes inside Nepal have made it easier for bloggers to get online. Nepal Telecommunications' Internet connection costs have fallen, particularly for high-speed users.<sup>19</sup> Many of the journalists behind Nepali news blogs have benefited from the introduction of high-speed connections in their places of work. There were an estimated 4,000 Internet cafés in the Kathmandu valley alone, a figure sure to have increased (Luintel 2005). The declining costs of computers and faster Internet connection speeds have helped here, as has the expansion of IT education. This situation is a far cry from the early 1990s when Internet access basically meant only e-mail and was largely limited to embassies and development organisations. Users in Nepal also had to pay by the kilobyte to send and receive e-mails.<sup>20</sup>

However, assuming users get online then knowledge of English is required as 'US and Western domination of online cultures adds a linguistic and "content divide" to the "connectivity divide"' (Dahlberg 2002). Attempts to alter and 'localise' the Nepali online world can, initially, prove difficult and time-consuming. A certain level of technical skill and knowledge is necessary to read and write online in Nepali. Although the Madan Puraskar Pustakalya's Nepali Font Standardization Project, using Nepali Unicode, has greatly helped, users still need to learn a typing scheme and need a Windows 2000 operating system.<sup>21</sup> Complete standardisation has not yet occurred, search facilities for Nepali fonts are underdeveloped and several websites can still only be read by downloading different Nepali language fonts. Obvious access and IT problems means the Nepali blogosphere appears hugely underdeveloped compared to countries such as Iran where there is widespread Internet access and a very conservative estimate of 64,000 bloggers in Farsi (Alavi 2005:1). As in Nepal, but in far greater numbers, technologically aware

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19 <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?nid=93747>, accessed on 10 December 2006. Wireless laptop access is also possible, though currently expensive. <http://www.wagle.com.np/dinwag/dinesh-wagle-blog/2007/01/11/hurray-laptops-go-wireless-in-nepal/#comments>, accessed 11 January 2007.

20 As remembered by an anonymous reader.

21 For more see Chalmers and Gurung 2004 and <http://www.mpp.org.np/> Further information is also at <http://www.wavemag.com.np/issue/article419.html>, accessed on 15 December 2006.

young people have taken the lead in blogging, partly as a tool to challenge state censorship.

The democratic development of blogs has also been hindered by financial and structural weaknesses, echoing wider battles for control of the Internet. For comparison, even the most popular Nepali news websites have faced lengthy financial and structural difficulties. Sanjiv Raj Bhandari, CEO of Mercantile Communications, claimed it will take at least 10 years for his company's popular *Nepalnews.com* website to make a profit (Upadhyaya 2003a:122). Any income comes purely from advertising and *Nepalnews.com* also has to pay to host the copyrights of different online publications (Upadhyaya 2003a:122). Any future advertising on blogs may also mean limitations on content. Adverts can bring politically motivated problems and pressure in sourcing advertising revenue, as Nepali newspapers discovered after February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005.

Umesh Shrestha, as a full-time blogger in Kathmandu, has faced severe financial difficulties. For income Shrestha relies on donations to his site from readers, using advertisements, selling telephone cards to USA-based Nepalis from *www.chirbir.org* and earning money from writing articles on Nepal for Korean-based OhMyNews International.<sup>22</sup> Most bloggers do not blog to make money, though it is possible to make some money from advertising on blogs. UWB made around \$100 every six to eight weeks from the search engine Google's AdSense (advertisement placement) scheme. Several posts and comments on Acharya's NepaliVoices blog detail useful advice on how to make money from the scheme.<sup>23</sup> Popular news blogs, with daily or even more frequent updates require immense time on maintenance and editing of user's comments. All of this activity, and Internet charges, costs individual bloggers, particularly non-journalists without facilities. At the moment the only Nepal-based blog supported by the blogger's employer is, as far as I am aware, *Phalano.com*.<sup>24</sup> The financial weakness of the initial Nepali news bloggers appears to be linked to the general financial

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22 The Chirbir phone card scheme also supports the growing Citizen Journalism Nepal <http://www.cjnepal.org/> which is not yet profitable.

23 <http://www.nepalivoices.com/2006/12/08/why-nepalese-blog-or-why-people-blog/#comments>, accessed 9 December 2006. Some bloggers have been caught trying to manipulate the AdSense scheme for extra income.

24 <http://www.rajeshkc.com/phalano/>

weakness and precarious job tenure of journalists in Nepal (particularly those working outside the Kantipur Group).<sup>25</sup>

In terms of setting a context, the Nepali blogosphere is also better understood by looking outside the physical borders of Nepal. One major factor propelling Nepali news blogs during royal rule was the huge interest of the Nepali Diaspora. In some ways, the Nepali blogosphere provides a space more for the Nepalis outside Nepal than those in Nepal itself.<sup>26</sup> News and political blogs during royal rule seemed to be dominated by the Diaspora including Nepalis across the world. UWB and Mero Sansar receive most of their page 'hits' from the USA, Hong Kong, and the UK.<sup>27</sup> Comments left by bloggers, if stated, usually indicate a non-Nepal home location. Several blogs invite guest posts, which often come from Nepalis outside Nepal.<sup>28</sup> Several well-known Nepali news and political blogs, or websites with a blog or comment box element, are located outside Nepal.<sup>29</sup>

The Diaspora's aims on the Nepali blogosphere seem to differ in purpose from the original aims of Nepali-based bloggers. For Nepal-based bloggers the medium was originally used as a way to send out news about Nepal around the world. However Nepalis writing and posting comments outside Nepal often use blogs to reconnect with Nepali politics and their home country. Jemima Sherpa has written of her experience in New Zealand:

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25 Umesh Shrestha's own story appears to be a typical example. See <http://merosansar.blogspot.com/2005/10/19/channel-nepal-fired-me/>, accessed 13 April 2006.

26 I thank Rhoderick Chalmers for suggesting this point and others related to the Diaspora impact on blogging.

27 Communication from UWB's Wagle and Acharya and Mero Sansar's Shrestha. Nepali bloggers do have accurate figures for the respective location of 'hits' and 'page views' to their blogs and further research could be done on this. 'Hits' are logged by blog site meters and measure the number of times a blog page and associated files (such as graphics) are retrieved from a Web server. Since many items are usually retrieved per visit and one web page is often visited and refreshed by the same user many times 'hits' can artificially inflate the number of users. Many blogs now use 'page views' instead which measure the number of individual users visiting one web page.

28 For example a regular contributor on UWB is Prakash Bom from New York. This forum for guests is similar to the Guest Column on Nepalnews.com.

29 Such as Samudaya <http://samudaya.org/> and Paramendra Bhagat's Democracy For Nepal <http://demrepubnepal.blogspot.com/> both based in New York.

Like many young educated Nepalis abroad, I find myself escaping regularly into cyberspace to ease bouts of homesickness and reassure myself of Nepal's existence. Most days I ritually check the local news sites and then scour BBC and CNN for mentions, before logging on to the various forums and chat programs where others like me seek common refuge from all over the world. Here I keep old friends and sometimes make new ones, most of us united only by our alienation.<sup>30</sup>

For Jemima and others reconnection to the homeland is increasingly done online and through blogs.

The Diaspora appetite for news and comment on Nepal appear to be better fulfilled by Nepali news blogs rather than ordinary Nepal news websites, particularly during times of political change inside Nepal. Bloggers' efforts to present news quickly and in a personal way are one appeal. However, both blogs and Nepali news websites share, as stated earlier, an interactive and community aspect. The online chaos of the blogosphere is, perhaps, part of their appeal. As will be clear, online blog conversations in comment boxes are often very poor in quality. Further research is needed, but it may be precisely this loosely regulated and unpredictable online anarchy that appeals to Diaspora blog readers. The more formal approach of Nepal news websites and their comment boxes or chat forums is to usually regulate commentator posts much more strictly than blogs, in part, perhaps, reflecting their commercial and advertising concerns.

There are several Nepali news websites which could be defined as blogs but do not call themselves blogs (such as arguably the first Nepali online news journal, *newslookmag.com*) as well as websites which incorporate a blog, comment box or chat forum element (such as *insn.org*, *samudaya.org* or *sajha.com*). These websites generally share the interactivity and community aspect of blogs whilst also operating as clearing houses of Nepal-related news or community information. The blogs I am interested in arrived after online Nepali news websites and cover a wider range of topics through a blog format only, whilst typically generating their own blog posts from within Nepal. There are clearly grey areas though and further research is needed on the closely allied Nepali news websites and online Diaspora communities.

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30 <http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/279/NepaliPan/10063>, accessed 15 December 2006.

*The Development of Blogging*

Before investigating the adaptive early Nepali blogging world, it is first worth going back to the early Nepali Internet and assessing a similar example. In April 1992 the first electronic magazine on Nepal, The Nepal Digest (TND), began in the USA under Rajpal J Singh. Its beginning in the USA reflected the large and continuing impact of USA-based Nepalis on the Nepali online world. For Nepalis living and studying abroad it was a vital news source up until 1995 (when, in September of that year, the Kathmandu Post went online). As with Nepali blog conversations in the next decade, Onta and Parajuli recognised the strengths and potential of TND including the many ‘high quality debates’ covering topics such as development, education, and gender issues (Onta and Parajuli 1998).

However “occasionally the quality of discussions in TND has left a lot to be desired” (Onta and Parajuli 1998). As with blogs comment-based discussions Onta and Parajuli found ‘uniformed opinions’ rather than “readings-based analytic judgement” based on knowledge of Nepali arguments, research and complexities (Onta and Parajuli 1998). Onta and Parajuli also noted several barriers to participation, some of which are yet to be dealt with by the Nepali blogosphere. These included the lack of Internet access for many Nepalis, the dominance of English in TND and the lack of female participants (Onta and Parajuli 1998). Despite the stated aim of founder Singh to make TND “accessible in all the 14 zones and 75 districts in Nepal” the voluntary aspect of funding TND (which was entirely reliant on, as the Digest stated, ‘subscribers and viewers like you’) hindered development and any expansion inside of Nepal (Onta and Parajuli 1998).

The beginnings of Nepali blogging also illustrate a locally adaptive process. Having been, from the start, an important site for the Diaspora the Nepali blogosphere also had origins in Nepal’s political crises and changes within Nepali media.<sup>31</sup> A Nepali blogosphere did exist before February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005. UWB was actually founded in October 2004 by Kantipur journalist and blogger Dinesh Wagle, with technical help from fellow Kathmandu Post journalist Ujjwal Acharya, primarily for personal use as an online diary. Nepali bloggers certainly did not begin with the

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31 For more on the history of the Internet and relevant telecommunications regulation in Nepal see Montgomery [no date], Adhikari 2061 v.s., Upadhyaya 2003a, 2005.

aim of creating online discussion forums similar to Martin Chautari.<sup>32</sup> Early Nepali bloggers were also influenced and inspired by trends from the USA. Wagle, like Acharya, originally learnt about blogs through reading newspapers online such as the New York Times.<sup>33</sup> Following suggestions from American friends, UWB was transformed after February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 into a news outlet with an explicit ‘pro-democracy’ stance. The headline banner of the site became ‘United We Blog! for a Democratic Nepal’. The particular function of many Nepali news bloggers, to tell the world about Nepal, stems from this decision to concentrate on politics and promote a ‘pro-democracy’ outlook.

Idealistic models of an empowered Nepali citizenry alongside greater professionalism in the media also helped indirectly inspire Nepali news blogs. Nepali bloggers such as the ex-Channel Nepal journalist Umesh Shrestha of Mero Sansar, were also influenced by ideas around citizen’s journalism. For Umesh and others in Nepal the South Korean-based global citizen’s journalism site *ohmynews.com* seemed to offer one particularly good example of citizen’s journalism in practice. Many of the ‘pro-democratic’ values around Nepali blogging also stem from the vibrant independent media world and civil society changes of post-1990 Nepal. Political and economic changes in Nepal saw the development and huge growth of independent print and radio media. As Onta says this growth “contributed to new ways of looking at ‘old’ issues’ and ‘enlarged the space of what can be called civil society in Nepal and facilitated the search for democratic foundations for the state and entire society” (Onta 2001:334). A generation of future news bloggers benefited from these developments. News blogs clearly developed in Nepal from this background civil society and journalistic influence.

### *Nepali Blogging Innovations*

Despite facing similar problems to TND, the emergence of Nepali news blogs represented something innovative and different. Looking at the online content it is clear that Nepali bloggers have developed new and somewhat ‘democratic’ news processes using blogging technology and technological innovations inside Nepal. In similar ways to citizen journalists in the USA, the actual production and form of writing have

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32 Lal 2001 unfavourably contrasts the ‘virtual world of Cyberia’ with Chautari, pointing out the effectiveness of face-to-face communication and discussion in a country with very poor Internet access.

33 Personal communication.

been open to greater scrutiny and debate. The posts produced on blogs have also, arguably, represented more of a conversation with readers than the lecture-style format usually handed down by traditional media (Gilmour 2004). Umesh Shrestha of Mero Sansar consistently used photos, audio downloads and videos to cover protests, speeches and anything else he could record.<sup>34</sup> On February 7th 2006 the popular 'pro-democracy' songs of Rubin Gandharva appeared online in Shrestha's video blog section.<sup>35</sup>

In this manner Shrestha and other bloggers reported back on the day's activities and protests, offering a news service to the Diaspora. Shrestha also received recognition for his efforts from the America Nepal Society.<sup>36</sup> News bloggers such as Shrestha were able to react to reader feedback on the comment section and effectively create their own fast news feed. The nature of the medium also allowed individual bloggers to consistently post news at a much faster speed than *Nepalnews.com* or *Kantipuronline*.<sup>37</sup> A report of the King's speech on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 was posted almost straight away on Mero Sansar. 'Byas Bhata' was one of many commentators who noted this saying 'i read the update news of nepal by this site, unbelievable, how fast we can read the news. thanks for merosansar team.'<sup>38</sup>

The generally partisan 'pro-democratic' purpose of Nepali news blogs and the medium itself also encourages a very different set of news compared to traditional media. Many Nepali-based bloggers are part of a post-1990 younger generation in print media "with little mentoring" who "are interrogating their society in ways that have never been done before" (Onta 2001:334). In this vein Nepali news blogs have carried out their own investigative reports, have helped bring attention to unreported events and have kept older stories alive. Also, unlike other blogospheres, Nepali news blogs cannot be accused of being 'purely parasitic' on traditional offline media (Kamm 2007a). The number of early bloggers who were also newspaper journalists makes any divide irrelevant as does the originality of stories on Nepali news blogs, particularly during royal rule. UWB, in particular benefited from the fact that, as Dinesh Wagle

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34 <http://www.mysansar.com/?p=138>, accessed 4 April 2006.

35 <http://www.mysansar.com/?p=133>, accessed 4 April 2006.

36 <http://www.mysansar.com/?p=801>, accessed 15 December 2006.

37 <http://www.nepalnews.com> <http://www.ekantipur.com>

38 <http://www.mysansar.com/?p=117#more-117>, accessed on 15 December 2006.

said, “political reporters ... share info with me that they can’t write in Kantipur” (Jones 2005).

Through this type of investigative-style reporting UWB also covered an alleged Army beating of a woman CPN-UML party activist in Dang.<sup>39</sup> The killing of another CPN-UML member in Dang (Umesh Thapa) and subsequent protests, had been claiming all the headlines in the Nepali print media. UWB wrote “in addition to that, security men had come heavily against unarmed activists who were protesting the election. The woman on the photos is Shusman Sharma, leader of CPN-UML, who was mercilessly beaten up by securitymen.”<sup>40</sup> Like many other posts the content was backed up by graphic photos, which in this post, showed Sharma lying in bed, presumed injured, attached to a drip.

Blogs also seemed to show more news from outside Kathmandu, often in a way that directly undermined Army or Maoist claims in the conflict. UWB received one such ‘Breaking Blog’ from Sunauli in the Terai. The detailed report and accompanying photos show a Maoist victory against the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) who had attempted to challenge Maoist control of this section of the Mahendra highway, which contradicted official government reports.<sup>41</sup> One grateful commentator, ‘*waterman*’, said in praise of the post, ‘This is excellent reporting. Being on the spot at the right time and getting an independent account to the world.’ ‘*waterman*’ goes on to speculate that, in the conflict:

The international media is basing itself only on RNA handouts. Only a select of these so-called professional houses have bothered to at least compare the contrast between RNA and CPN (Maoist) versions of the same incident. Reportedly many RNA personnel are missing.<sup>42</sup>

Blogging allowed bloggers to respond quickly and in different formats. Nepali bloggers used this flexibility to present different viewpoints. Both UWB and Mero Sansar undercut the government presentation of the municipal elections on February 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 in online diaries and reports noting the low turnout. In one post the views of a Ministry of Foreign

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39 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/12/police-barbarism-in-dang-nepal/>, accessed 2 April 2006.

40 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/12/police-barbarism-in-dang-nepal/>, accessed 2 April 2006.

41 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/10/rebels-rule-nepali-highway/#comments>, accessed 5 April 2006.

42 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/10/rebels-rule-nepali-highway/#comments>, accessed 5 April 2006.



Affairs spokesman were deliberately contrasted with a mocking editorial from an Indian newspaper.<sup>43</sup> Bloggers also provided an alternative, often comic, view of the current news. On Mero Sansar a photo of Maoist leader Prachanda, from his February interview appearances, was doctored in numerous different hairstyles. The blog played on the length of time Prachanda had been out of sight and reduced the Supreme Commander to a figure of fun.<sup>44</sup>

UWB, Mero Sansar and other blogs have also become trusted news sites. Unusually for a blog UWB is a news source for Nepal on the popular search engine Google.<sup>45</sup> The fact that they are written and run by trained journalists arguably helped initially gain and maintain readers. UWB's policy of admitting and correcting errors of fact also helped create an element of trust lacking elsewhere in the blogosphere. Their longevity as regularly updated news blogs also helped such blogs develop a regular readership who trust them as a valid news source.

### **The Impact of Censorship and Self-censorship**

Nepali bloggers also developed a blogosphere by innovation and adapting blogging technology in the face of censorship. King Gyanendra's February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 proclamation indirectly provided the impetus for the establishment of Nepali news blogs. In the first week there was an information blackout as telephone lines were cut, mobile phones networks were down and Internet access was blocked. Only a few journalists and academics were able to access the Internet during this period via satellite links at embassies and diplomatic missions. On February 8<sup>th</sup> Internet access was restored.

During royal rule the government concentrated on censoring popular forms of media in Nepal (particular FM radio and daily newspapers). However the online world was also censored. The Ministry of Information and Communication and the RNA blocked several news and community sites that incorporated a blog. The government also attempted to block access to thirty websites, several of them news and Maoist websites.<sup>46</sup> These websites were often popular with the Nepali Diaspora

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43 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/11/himalayan-sham-nepal-election-drama/>, accessed 21 April 2006.

44 <http://www.mysansar.com/?p=151>, accessed 3 April 2006.

45 Dinesh Wagle, personal communication.

46 <http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?NewsID=1020187>, accessed on 27 March 2006.

and included the website of the International Nepal Solidarity Network (hosted in India) and the more blog-like Samudaya (hosted in USA).<sup>47</sup> State control was quite easily thwarted by constantly changing proxy servers that allowed the banned sites to be viewed in Nepal using so-called mirror sites.<sup>48</sup> It is also possible that, unlike other governments, the Nepali government did not have the technical expertise to ban news blogs.

Following the February 1<sup>st</sup> actions UWB and other bloggers transformed their sites and began posting news and political items for very practical motives of telling the world about Nepal and also avoiding print censorship. Other blogs, such as Radio Free Nepal,<sup>49</sup> began from this point too. With newspapers under severe pressure blogging also had the advantage of carrying few restrictions, no editors and could be done anonymously. Radio Free Nepal, an anonymous blogger, later wrote that, during the first week of the royal takeover, 'I thought at that time it would be appropriate to note down the daily events and people's thought as a diary. I did that on my computer.' After February 8<sup>th</sup> Radio Free Nepal

was asked by many to explain what had happened in Nepal through e-mails. Some friends at United States of America suggested me to blog the diary in back dates. . . . It was decided that I would remain anonymous and ask other friends to write on blogs anonymously, which would save us from possible harassment and prison.<sup>50</sup>

Radio Free Nepal's site then grew in popularity after "my friends in USA did their best to popularize the site", presumably mainly to the USA-based Diaspora.<sup>51</sup> Many newspapers facing censorship during this period resorted to using elaborate metaphors or printing editorials about subjects such as ballet.<sup>52</sup> Blogs, in contrast, had a little more freedom and could directly speak, as Radio Free Nepal said, 'the truth as I see and as I think' (Friel 2005). Radio Free Nepal also later stated that their 'primary aim' in blogging was "to get the information to the world about Nepal and

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47 <http://samudaya.org/> <http://www.insn.org/>

48 INSN mirror site was at <http://66.116.151.85/>

49 Radio Free Nepal is no longer updated: <http://freenepal.blogspot.com/>

50 [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=15011](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15011), accessed on 15 December 2006.

51 [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=15011](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15011), accessed on 15 December 2006.

52 Dinesh Wagle blogged about his experience of writing editorials. See <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2005/02/11/new-kind-of-journalism-nepal-ii/>, accessed on 15 December 2006.

to tell them that we are not happy with what's going on and we want democracy back” (Glaser 2006). From this point on the Nepali blogosphere in general became associated with news and political reporting, particularly to the Diaspora and other Nepal watchers around the globe.

Ironically, the rather feeble forms of online censorship in Nepal only ended up boosting a form of blogging co-operation and greater unity in the Nepali blogosphere, something already aided by the shared ‘pro-democracy’ purpose of most news blogs. Blogs with huge political differences came to support each other over blogging censorship. After Samudaya was blocked in Nepal *Blogdai* said, on his own blog:

It is a pity that G cannot see the implications of this type of censorship. Samudaya has it's position, sure, and it is a bit anti-monarch, sure, but if you are G and trying to convince the world that you are going to re-establish democracy then why attack one of democracies greatest attributes: freedom to dissent?<sup>53</sup>

Though *Blogdai* stated that he did not “really support Samudaya's practices and pro-party leanings” he did “support giving everyone, pro and con a fair voice; it doesn't help G's cause if he stifles any side of the debate. Anyway, in that spirit I've invited Samudaya to use our blog as an unedited posting cite for their views, since we here at *blogdai* are not currently banned in Nepal.”<sup>54</sup>

It should also be noted that bloggers themselves also engaged in effective censorship and arguably anti-democratic practices. Nepali bloggers have not been completely autonomous from state control and a pressure to self-censor, a concern for any open forum.<sup>55</sup> Like print journalists, news bloggers in Nepal censored themselves. Most bloggers are also editors of their own blog and usually retain editorial control over the comments they receive. UWB filtered comments posted by readers against a checklist of banned words and derogatory terms such as the disrespectful ‘Gyane’ for the King. This stage of editing occurs before comments are posted to all readers on the blog. Particularly suspect comments were and still are personally edited on UWB by Wagle.

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53 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2005/06/diplo-speak-revisited.html>, accessed 14 July 2006. See the comments section.

54 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2005/06/diplo-speak-revisited.html>, accessed 14 July 2006. In a global example of blog solidarity Nepali bloggers protested about arrested Iranian bloggers in late February 2005.

55 Also one of Dahlberg's conditions in Dahlberg 2001.

Despite being ‘pro-democratic’ in political outlook UWB also sought to remain civilised in terms of address. Wagle also maintained certain comment board standards, as he feared de-registration of the site by the authorities if comments went too far.<sup>56</sup>

Other Nepali news blogs faced similar dilemmas. It is worth quoting *Blogdai*’s experience in full. On March 30<sup>th</sup> 2006 he said on his blog:

We here at blogdai have recently had our own little microcosm of a 7-party tantrum. Some of our anonymous posters can tolerate neither editing nor criticism. Rather than play the democratic game and look for a rational means of expressing their views, these posters have resulted to bullying, forgery, harassment, gross repetition, blackmail and stubborn insistence on their views in the face of clear facts to the contrary. Like a democracy, our blog has rules. We want a higher level of discourse, not a shout-fest, so we edit those posts that seek to hijack discussion space and relevance. Unfortunately, this practice has now risen to the level that blogdai now has to monitor all postings prior to their publication here. Pity again. In order to preserve the democratic pillars of our blog, we’ve had to resort to an undemocratic practice.<sup>57</sup>

Bloggers themselves were well aware of the irony of supporting calls for greater democracy and free speech on the one hand whilst also filtering out their own online protesters and defining their own standards of comment board bad behaviour. The most popular blogs like UWB and Blogdai subsequently faced opposition from websites set up to complain about their comments being filtered.<sup>58</sup> The editing and removal of comments caused annoyance amongst commentators who protested online and continually questioned the reality of UWB’s banner headline (‘For a Democratic Nepal’).

### **The Nature of Online Blogging Content**

Having looked at the context of Nepali blogging, its local adaptations by users and questions around censorship I will now consider the actual online content of Nepali blogs. Following on from Habermas’ analysis of the public sphere, Lincoln Dahlberg has developed a useful set of conditions by which to assess modern communications and their relation

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56 Personal communication, Wagle. Websites ending in the address .np require registration in Nepal.

57 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2006/03/rules-of-game.html#>, comments accessed 20 April 2006.

58 Such as, <http://boycotofblogdai.blogspot.com/>

to strengthening democracy in society (Dahlberg 2001). Dahlberg's framework can be used, in outline and alongside the Nepali context, to help critique Nepali news blogging. Dahlberg's broad themes include analysing the level of autonomy from state control, the nature of online conversations and the ability to engage with the arguments of others. It is also worth analysing how blogs have or have not 'democratised' the role of journalist/blogger and reader. These issues placed alongside Nepali concerns provide a helpful guide to assess the 'pro-democratic' nature of Nepali news blogs' content during February 2006 and at other times.

Having considered the level of autonomy from state control in my earlier censorship example my next consideration is the state of deliberative online practices and the ability to engage with the arguments of others in Nepali blogs. A deliberative approach attempts "to develop online public spheres through which ... individuals ... come together to critically debate issues and form rational public opinion" (Dahlberg 2000). Deliberative online models also aim to strengthen citizen participation and 'take representative democracy as a starting point and ask how it might be strengthened' (Friedland 1996). Deliberation is often contrasted with an individualist online 'plebiscitary framework', which favours direct voting and views "electronic communication as a democratic end in itself."<sup>59</sup> In the Nepali online world this difference perhaps equates to the gap between single-issue online polls on news portals (such as the regular *Nepalnews.com* Nepali Times poll) and the more sustained conversations that sometimes can take place in blogs or message board forums. Conversations took place on these forums but their facilitation was a low priority compared to the aims of Nepali news bloggers (to tell the world about Nepal).

One writer has noted that 'cyberspace' can be "about as interactive as a shouting match" (Streck 1998:45). Another has stated that the whole medium of blogging "breeds entrenched positions; there is no editorial requirement for balance" (Bertram and Stangroom). Geras wondered why "modes of address and argument are tolerated in the blogosphere that would not be (tolerated) in a seminar or democratic public meeting" (Geras 2007a). The poor quality of online blog conversations has led many to roundly condemn political blogging as a whole (Butterworth 2006).

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59 The online plebiscite model is particularly associated with the USA. See Friedland (1996) for more.

In some ways political discussions during a war are also bound to be divisive and the blogging medium itself seems, across the globe, to encourage a particular disdain for patient deliberation. Unsurprisingly, Nepali news blog discussions were no different from other online discussions and did not usually fit Dahlberg's model of deliberative online practices. Comment boxes, typically, became repetitive expressions of individual anger, and predictions of future doom against the royal family, the Army, Maoist leaders or political leaders (regardless of the subject of the original topic post). The ease with which comments can be posted and their anonymous nature perhaps also encourages quick comments, many of which are later regretted.<sup>60</sup> Both the medium and the context of a divisive ongoing war hampered Nepali blog discussions.

Many blog-based comment box discussions followed a familiar pattern to TND discussions on the early Nepali Internet. Responding to one UWB posting on Maoist attacks in the Terai<sup>61</sup> a regular anti-Maoist commentator '*sarki ko choro*' says Babarum Bhattarai is "a cunning psychopath and will kill thousands more to satisfy his ego."<sup>62</sup> Another typical comment comes after the Supreme Court scrapped the King's Royal Corruption Commission. '*Kirtipure Maharjan*' said "King's commission died today...king will die tomorrow".<sup>63</sup> The poor quality of conversations partly reflected the polarising nature of the conflict. Also many Diaspora and Nepali-based readers may have been frustrated and had no other forum to vent their thoughts.<sup>64</sup> A popular online discussion forum on *Nepalnews.com* was shut down after February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005, perhaps leaving many to use blogs instead (Reporters Without Borders 2005).<sup>65</sup> The complexity of issues in Nepal consistently takes second place in these conversations. Writing a strong and strident post or comment appears much more important and an actual discussion may have been the very last thing some wanted.

The level of debate over the causes of the conflict only occasionally reached episodes of insight. In this short example things do not begin

60 As suggested by Pratyoush Onta.

61 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/02/page/4/>, accessed 5 April 2006.

62 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/10/rebels-rule-nepali-highway/#>, comments accessed 5 April 2006.

63 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/13/kings-corruption-commission-dies/#>, comments accessed 5 April 2006.

64 As suggested by Ujjwal Acharya.

65 This forum re-opened after April 2006: <http://forum.nepalnews.com.np/>

promisingly: ‘Manan’ said first: “The Royal Nepal Army has killed more innocent people than the Maobadi. So who’s the bigger terrorist?” ‘Satyabadi’ responds a little later saying:

Mr. Manan, Newton’s law states that in every action there is always an equal and opposite reaction. In the case of our bloody war, action was initially started by Maoists. They always provoked the military and killed other party cadres and innocent villagers. Only after that military reacted with its force. In the course of reaction, there might be some unwanted casualties and damages which is difficult to stop. So, now tell me, who is more terrorist? ACTOR( nihu khojne= Maobadi) or REACTOR ( pratirodh garne= RNA)?

A surprisingly developed response came after from ‘m’ (presumably ‘manan’) saying:

Mr Satyabadi, Do you think the Maoists came out of the blue? No, they were also reacting to something—they were reacting to the abject poverty and misery in which the vast majority of the Nepali population live. They were reacting to the inability of the corrupt political system to respond to this. They were reacting against exploitation by landlords, moneylenders, bribe takers and givers, corrupt merchants, etc. Who started this? It cannot be said that one party or group started this. It is a legacy of poverty and destitution going back centuries. The Maoists reacted to this because the King and the political parties failed to react. Poverty is a greater killer than war has ever been.<sup>66</sup>

There are other examples of engaging online conversations and a more balanced approach within the Nepali blogosphere. Blogdai occasionally posted interesting discussions of single-issues topics, albeit amongst a fairly small group of regular visitors. A contributor on Blogdai ‘Shiva Nepali’ posted an informative and investigative article on the state of electric power in Nepal in March 2006. Shiva Nepali highlighted an apparent license scam, which held back Nepal’s hydropower development.<sup>67</sup> The post and most of the comment box responses illustrated an unusually good debate on substantive issues within the Nepali blogosphere. Rather than discussing the usual issues in Nepali politics Shiva said to readers:

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66 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/12/rendezvous-with-prachanda-maoist-leader-nepal/>

67 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2006/03/power-for-brighter-nepal.html>  
accessed 10 March 2006

I would, for a change, like to divert the readers' attention, to a crisis that is genuinely hurting Nepal. Power. Electrical Power. As we all know, Nepal is witnessing severe power shortages since the last few months now, and in the absence of rain to fill our aquifers, it is only going to get worse in the coming days...This is a matter of grave concern. Nepal currently has an installed capacity of a little over 600 MW, but actual generation is far, far less than this. Currently, we are generating less than 150 MW, while peak demand is over 550 MW. That is a deficit of 400 MW!<sup>68</sup>

Unlike many other blog posts Shiva ended, unusually, with a recommendation. He said:

Someone out there has a license to every potential hydropower project identified by the government, and they are demanding 15-30% share from any prospective investor to 'use' their license or asking for huge sums of money to sell them!! This is the main reason we have not seen investments in hydropower in Nepal. THIS IS A REQUEST TO ALL NEPALESE AND SUPPORTERS TO PLEASE BRING THIS TO LIGHT AND PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT TO REVOKE ALL LICENSES THAT HAVE BEEN ISSUED WHERE THE CONCERNED PARTIES HAVE NOT MADE ANY PROGRESS SINCE THEY GOT THE LICENSE.<sup>69</sup>

An ensuing comment box discussion took place on this issue with very little of the usual intemperate attacks, despite even this issue having the potential for fierce online dispute. However, in general, on Nepali news blogs very little in the way of a real debate took place on issues around Nepali politics.

#### *Online Rumour, Conspiracy and Half-truths*

The debate below represents a typical comment box conversation and illustrates the development of a UWB comment box 'line' on political issues followed by predictable insults and hyperbole. One commentator, 'Manan', posted on UWB to strongly remind opponents that: 'UWB is a site for DEMOCRACY, you fools. Its naturally going to be biased in that direction. If you want a site where you want to express your royal...views, go and do it. No one's stopping you.'<sup>70</sup> Replytoall replied:

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68 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2006/03/power-for-brighter-nepal.html>, accessed 10 March 2006.

69 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2006/03/power-for-brighter-nepal.html>, accessed 10 March 2006.

70 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/02/page/4/>, accessed 5 April 2006



“so what democracy are you talking about you fool Manan? Ain't it supposed to mean that you get to talk what you feel.” This was followed by *sarki ko choro* saying with venom: “it is better to be King’s arse-licking fool, rather Murderer-worshipping intellectuals glorifying killing of 13000 Nepali, rapes of countless Nepali women and mutilation of Nepali children.”<sup>71</sup>

Also, as offline, online conspiracy theories become authentic fact. The Internet is a particularly useful tool to rapidly spread rumours. In Nepali news blogs during February 2006 they often involved India, its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and King Gyanendra. This extract posted by *Hareram* in the comments sections is a typical example. *Hareram* claimed that:

RAW have been trying all the dirty tricks in the book to destabilise Nepalese Government. Indian wants to appoint one of their stooge corrupt politician as Prime Minister of Nepal....RAW in now using Indo Asian News Service (IANS) to disseminate propaganda against Nepal. . . . This RAW is funding and training Nepalese Moist terrorist also. They have been protecting leaders of the terrorist in their SAFE HOUSE in New Delhi.<sup>72</sup>

In comment box debates what is contested offline can become accepted fact. Comment boxes were also subject to competing groups of bloggers promoting their particular views. The mostly anti-Seven Party Alliance *Blogdai* and his supporters posted across the Nepali blogosphere and regularly ganged up in opposition sites to promote their ‘correct’ view. This often involved typical claims to speak on behalf of the average, typical Nepali as well as challenges to the identity and legitimacy of opponents. ‘*Dev Prasad*’ said in one comment:

I must apologise to Blogdai for i have been spending much of my Blogging time on [www.bloggersnepal.com](http://www.bloggersnepal.com). I have been drawn to this particular blog because its standards are poor, ideological and self-righteous—everything that i find odious in a publication. Just take a look at a S. Green’s blog and any number of his comments to see what kind of crap they are publishing.<sup>73</sup>

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71 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/02/page/4/>, accessed 5 April 2006.

72 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/12/difficult-lives-in-nepal/#comments>, accessed 5 April 2006.

73 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2006/02/comrade-james.html#c114088240422927561>, accessed 3 April 2006. See comments

As Dahlberg suggests many online communities can simply “reinforce the shared values and interests of the group” (Dahlberg 2000). Nepali news blogs were no different when they operated as online opposition to the King. UWB’s definition of democracy was reinforced by visits to the site. This version of being ‘pro-democratic’, like other ‘pro-democracy’ blogs, relies heavily on loosely defined and non-party political civil society interpretations of current events. Wagle said “I am not blogging against anyone, but for peace, democracy and freedom...” (Friel 2005). Also, normally a small number of regular visitors, sometimes offline friends, colleagues or school alumni, dominate most comment boxes. Gaining entry into this blog elite requires familiarity with the language and previous arguments, and also the holding of ‘correct’ views, leading to what Kunda Dixit called online “ghettoisation” (Dixit 2006).

#### *Blog Choices and the Diaspora*

The Nepali news blogosphere is not completely ‘undemocratic’ for readers. Choosing which blogs to read and follow or not to read at all is, however, not dissimilar to the choices people have made before with ‘old’ media. Online users can “filter in, and also filter out with unprecedented powers of precision.” This can, however, mean avoiding encounters with views with which they disagree or with topics they would never have considered (Sunstein 2001). Nepali news blogs represent something of a special case since the sequence of political events in Nepal during February 2006 was difficult to drastically ‘filter’. Nepali news blogs also, albeit mainly on political topics, did provide space for ‘unanticipated encounters’ with different views as well as ‘common experiences’ that Sunstein claimed had diminished elsewhere in the online world (Sunstein 2001). The Diaspora in particular seems to have benefited from this, though, as stated, more research is needed on their online behaviour.

The largely poor level of online conversations should not be generalised into a condemnation of the blogging medium as a whole. Onta suggests that the 1990 print media boom made “just about every literate Nepali a media critic” (Onta 2001:334). In similar ways just about every computer literate Internet-surfing Nepali has become a critic of online Nepal-related content. Interestingly, blogs have also altered traditional media’s online presence. Kiran Nepal, manager of *himalkhabar.com*, admitted bloggers put pressure on Himal to redesign

their website and try to appeal to a younger audience.<sup>74</sup> Despite their drawbacks, comment boxes on blogs also provide opportunities for feedback not seen in other Nepali media, albeit with much more publishing space compared to newspapers. Wagle said that one editorial from Kantipur may receive three or four letters published in the newspaper but fifty or sixty comments when translated and republished on the UWB website (although, inside Nepal, the numbers reading Kantipur are obviously greater than those reading blogs).<sup>75</sup> Blog readers can also make criticisms and suggestions and have even become co-opted onto a blog as a writer.

The online role of the Nepali Diaspora helped the Nepali blogosphere to develop but has also been widely questioned. In Nepali news blogs users identified as non-resident Nepalis were often subject to particularly harsh personal abuse. Some useful comparisons can be made between the Nepali case and the online activities of Diaspora groups from other countries. Franklin studied online political debates between the Tongan Diaspora and those living in Tonga (Franklin 2005:106-135). As in Nepali discussions, the topics discussed mainly focused on political change, democracy and the role of the monarchy in the Pacific Island Kingdom. Tongans expressing 'pro-royal' attitudes as well as those challenging this with 'pro-democracy' ideas have to defend their diasporic status if they live abroad. One post stated (in capitals), "ARE YOU TONGAN AND WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING?" As in the Nepali blogosphere, "dismissing diasporic opinions ... out of hand is part and parcel of both content and political rhetoric" (Franklin 2005:127).

As in the Tongan study comment posts regularly attack and question the identity of all bloggers, whether based in or outside of Nepal. In February 2006 the identity and 'Nepaliness' of some Nepal-based bloggers was similarly attacked. Some were accused of speaking in favour of the Maoists, India, the USA, one political party or the King. 'Response' had the following to say about a UWB post on a Maoist highway strike:

...and u publish with a great pride!! You Wagle maoists!! U think they are doing good thing by keeping bombs in highway that would kill ordinary people. And our brave RNA went to remove those coz u stupid people

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74 <http://www.ujjwal.com.np/2006/02/01/bloggers-inspire-himalkhabarcom/> accessed 29 March 2006. Website is now non-existent.

75 Personal communication.

would be killed. And when they are ambushed u are happy!! U crazy fellow!!!<sup>76</sup>

The identities of anonymous commentators were also regularly attacked. 'BB' in a comment on Blogdai directly questioned the identity and therefore the knowledge and 'right' of 'M.R.' to pronounce on Nepali matters, particularly in 'M.R.'s pro-King fashion. 'BB' said to 'M.R.' "I have a question for you. Have you ever been to Nepal? Do you understand Nepali history and the atrocities and misrule by the ruling class for the last 250 years? If not, stop blabbering based on your false assumptions." A long attack then followed which ended,

Do you see any diversity in King's closest advisors? These people and their aristocratic families ruled Nepal through their visible or invisible hands around monarchy for much of Nepal's 250 years of history sans 10 years of democracy. If you are an outsider and only read the official history of Nepal, you would not understand these realities and you would not be able to prescribe a solution for Nepal problem.<sup>77</sup>

Clearly the possibility of being an outsider could be just as hazardous, in terms of comment box attacks and reputation, as being an insider blogging from Nepal. As also in Tonga, the views and comments of the Diaspora and others were, in heated political debates, often easily dismissed by the very fact of coming from outside Nepal. Regularly questioning the identity of online users and their right to comment hardly reflects an open, deliberative forum.

#### *April 2006*

Assessing the role of blogs in the April 2006 people's movement provides a slightly different perspective. Nepali news blogs were just about the perfect medium to get news and information quickly out across the globe. Nepali news blogs' strengths were in telling the world about Nepal, not in providing deliberative forums. As with the period immediately following February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 many Nepalis and Nepal-watchers turned to blogs for an authentic and personal perspective of fast-moving events. Nepal and Diaspora-based bloggers became very active. *Zaded* later blogged that:

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76 <http://unitedweblog.wordpress.com/2006/02/10/rebels-rule-nepali-highway/#>, comments accessed 5 April 2006.

77 <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/2006/02/comrade-james.html#c114088240422927561>, accessed 3 April 2006.

... the most rigorous blogging experience was during the 19day April Movement. I used to be hanging in front of my computer all day along. Sometimes from four in the morning till two in the afternoon without a break! I blogged like crazy. Sometimes about my experiences as a Human rights monitor while other times I spoke of being out as a civilian. Blogging was such a huge solace, to a mind going insane in a country crippled due to the every increasing days of strike.<sup>78</sup>

Many Nepali news blogs were updated several times a day, sometimes several times an hour at crucial points during April. The quickest online response and explanation to the King's various speeches to the nation came through in comment boxes of UWB and Mero Sansar. An example below illustrates Nepalis posting as the King restored Parliament on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2006. '*Lahure*' asks in the comment boxes 'Can any of you, how watched the proclamation post a summary of it? It would be a great help for people like me living far away from the homeland.'<sup>79</sup> The comment box commentators fulfilled his request and ended up creating over 180 different comments.

This effective real-time reporting was carried out not only by a team of bloggers but also by their readers in comment boxes. The UWB team consisted of friends and other journalists known to Wagle and Acharya, particularly Deepak Adhikari, who had his own password and access to the blog.<sup>80</sup> Adhikari says he sat "in front of a desktop computer day in day out for nineteen consecutive days during the April Uprising, (and) almost single-handedly provided updates to the Net-savvy world via blog" (Adhikari 2007). Adhikari, like *Zaded*, found the nineteen days an "intensive experience in disseminating information" through UWB and he "realized the power of the medium called blog" (Adhikari 2007). As on many other blogs, everyone who had a password could post their own reports and news and also edit comments. During April 2006, this division of labour proved very useful and allowed multiple and quick updates from across Kathmandu and Nepal. During this period news blogs like UWB and Mero Sansar reduced their number of opinion pieces and increased the number of posts on news and reports. Both blogs

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78 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/10/01/i-blog-do-you-btw-happy-birthday-uwb/>, accessed 15 November 2006.

79 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/04/24/eve-of-final-protests-through-lens/#>, comments accessed on 25 April 2006.

80 Deepak Adhikari is also a journalist working for the weekly magazine *Nepal*, who runs his own blog at Deepak's Diary—<http://deepakadk.blogspot.com/>

focused on describing the nature of the protests and demonstrations, often through photo blogs (UWB) or video blogs (Mero Sansar), which summed up the range of protests in one day.<sup>81</sup> This focus on raw news became the standard practice for Wagle, Adhikari and others during this period, partly as time constraints allowed little editorialising and partly to act as a service for the Diaspora readership and their demands.

### **Democratising Developments and the Blogosphere's Identity Crisis**

The Nepali blogosphere has seen several potentially democratising developments in terms of access and users, some of which I will briefly highlight. Many of the developments are tied in with the changing role of the Nepali blogosphere after the April 2006 people's movement. A relatively freer media inside Nepal and the lack of any rapidly changing political crisis had left Nepali news and political blogs with a possible 'identity crisis'.<sup>82</sup> Their foundation and existence as sites solely for political news and discussion, particularly for the Diaspora during royal rule, was unsustainable after April 2006. However, since then several further encouraging adaptations and developments occurred.

Firstly, there seems to be a growth in the number of Nepali language blogs, many of which have developed after the April Movement.<sup>83</sup> UWB in Nepali successfully re-established another Nepali language site named Blogmandu in November 2006.<sup>84</sup> It is possible to argue that, post-April 2006, there is less emphasis on explaining Nepal to the online English-language world and a corresponding greater need for Nepalis everywhere to communicate and understand each other in Nepali. Improved technology helped, as did a trend of young bloggers attempting Nepali-language blogging. On both Ujjwal Acharya's NepaliVoices and Nepali Bloggers sites Nepali language blogs are in the minority on the 'blogroll'.<sup>85</sup> However, this is little misleading since many bloggers now post in Nepali or English or even a mix of the two. Also, in more personal blogs such as Zade X-PReSS, Nepali and English become mixed in the same post in a creative mix of report and comment. In one example near

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81 Such as <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/04/24/general-strike-day-xix/>, accessed on 24 April 2006.

82 As Ujjwal Acharya of UWB described it.

83 Such as: <http://www.hamroblog.com/> and <http://hamrodesch.blogspot.com/>

84 Blogmandu is at <http://nepali.blog.com.np/> The original site was hacked.

85 A blogroll is a collection of links to other blogs visited by the editor and is usually located on one side of a blog. The blogs are <http://www.bloggers.com.np/> and <http://www.nepalivoices.com>

the end of the April Movement *Zaded* employs direct reportage to describe one protest:

'Janos, janos [Go back] bhai haru, cufew natodnos natra karbahi huncha [don't defy the curfew or else we will have to act against you], a policeman warned the protestors throwing stones from the Koteshwor side.

The protestors defied the warning, kept throwing stones.

'Oye, toli le,' [Hey bring the battalion] the policeman said.

'Janos, dhunga nahannos [Go, don't throw stones], he kept warning.

The protestors didn't obey.

Then the police ordered his junior to fire. The tear gas bomb landed near the Bhaktapur bus park area in Koteshwor. I saw it fly to the army barrage behind it. Later when we reached the place the protestors (there were only 5 to 7 of them) were talking of the bomb. 'Na phute samma kehi hunna [It doesn't matter until it blasts].' The bomb? Must have landed in the grassy area because I saw no evidence of it there.<sup>86</sup>

The appeal for readers lies in the fact that these extracts are obviously unedited and completely different from a normal essay or news report. For many readers there is also a more general interest in reading unmediated reports and thoughts from people directly involved in and experiencing political change.<sup>87</sup>

Many newer blogs barely mention Nepali politics and cover many different topics. The blogger *Saynasomething*, in a blog post overview of Nepali female bloggers, claims that "female bloggers are more expressive compared with male bloggers" and cover a broader range of topics while "men focus on political issues."<sup>88</sup> Global research confirms that men write roughly 80% of blogs with a political focus (Ferguson, R. and Howell 2004:7). Greater diversity in blogging topics, greater use of Nepali and a greater number of non-political blog topics have all moved Nepali blogging away from its political and journalistic origins.

Part of finding a role for news blogs after the April Movement may also involve them becoming more like personal diaries (as UWB was before February 1<sup>st</sup> 2005) and perhaps losing some of their 'politics only'

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86 Zade's translations. <http://zade.wordpress.com/2006/04/23/action/>, accessed on 15 December 2006.

87 As seen in the popularity of Riverbend (2005), a female blogger in Iraq.

88 English translation of Saynasomething's article: <http://www.nepalivoices.com/2006/11/10/female-bloggers-own-world/#more-9> accessed 11 November 2006. The original Nepali version: <http://saynasomething.wordpress.com/2006/11/10/female-blogger/>

readership in the process. The example of younger Nepal and Diaspora-based bloggers may be particularly instructive. *Zaded* writes that she has “... no reservations when it comes to blogging, anything goes from crushes to welcome parties, and first coffee dates to politics just anything under the sun that strikes my mind.”<sup>89</sup> Part of these changes reflects different motives for going online and starting to blog. *Zaded*, for example, writing about her own entry into the Nepali blogosphere, stated that: “I took up just because I love to write, not for others but for my own peace of mind.”<sup>90</sup>

Many Nepali male bloggers and blog readers are, unsurprisingly, interested in what female bloggers have to say. In terms of online conversations this interest can also lead to more online respect and improved online listening. *Saynasomething* also quotes *Zaded* noting that “in woman’s blog, comments are polite.”<sup>91</sup> Even when contentious political topics are being discussed comments are usually more respectful than those on UWB and Mero Sansar. The personal blogs format itself may also discourage the kind of political attacks seen on news blogs, as personal and diary-like thoughts, from either gender, are perhaps harder to initially dismiss and attack in comment boxes.

Also aiding greater internal democratisation of the Nepali blogosphere has been a growth in blogging from outside Kathmandu. This includes the development of blogs with a regional focus such as the blog on Beni Online and Ilam Sutra.<sup>92</sup> This trend appears to be linked to the growth of regional and local online news portals in Nepal and amongst the Diaspora. Rather than being deliberative discussion forums these newer blogs, in sum, represent elements of another form of online democratic participation. They show signs of what Dahlberg called “communitarian online practices that enable people to express and strengthen their values and interests within mutually supportive online groups” (Dahlberg 2000). Heated debates on Nepali news blogs during wartime rarely illustrated this.

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89 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/10/01/i-blog-do-you-btw-happy-birthday-uwb/>, accessed 15 November 2006.

90 <http://www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/10/01/i-blog-do-you-btw-happy-birthday-uwb/>, accessed 15 November 2006.

91 <http://www.nepalivoices.com/2006/11/10/female-bloggers-own-world/#more-9>, accessed 11 November 2006.

92 <http://benionline.blogsome.com/http://ilam.wordpress.com/>



More general positive developments amongst Nepali bloggers have also come from the growth in blog organisation and the activities of Nepali 'blog evangelists'. Support and advice has come from the BLOGAN,<sup>93</sup> Ujjwal Acharya's NepaliVoices,<sup>94</sup> and Acharya's very useful early translation of popular blogging software, Wordpress, into Nepali.<sup>95</sup> Acharya's NepaliVoices has increased the number of Nepali blogs linking to each other (posting each other's web address on their own blogroll) meaning that there are now fewer Nepali blogs operating as autonomous projects. The similar activities of blogging evangelists in Iran contributed hugely to the spread of Iranian blogging (Alavi 2005:325).

Nepali bloggers have clearly benefited from the technical advice and encouragement of Acharya and others. More established bloggers have arguably, in turn, learnt from the more distinctive, personal approach by newer bloggers. This is seen perhaps in Wagle's and Acharya's own efforts to return to personal blogging, particularly after the April movement when UWB required less attention.<sup>96</sup> The example and enthusiasm for blogging of Deepak Adhikari from Deepak's Diary, UWB's Acharya and Wagle, the previously mentioned blogger *Zaded*, and ex-journalist and full-time blogger from Mero Sansar, Umesh Shrestha, has also helped spread blogging in Nepal and provided examples and inspiration for numerous other Nepali blogs. Acharya has tried to spread knowledge of blogging through talks to students of various colleges in Kathmandu, while Wagle and Adhikari have written journalism on blogging.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

Nepali blogging has shifted purpose since April 2006 and will continue to alter and adapt as Nepali society and polity changes. In this small overview of Nepali news and political blogs during one particular period,

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93 <http://www.nepalivoices.com/blogan1/>

94 Prior to NepaliVoices Acharya offered bloggers advice and encouragement at The Radiant Star, a website which is now closed.

95 <http://www.ujjwal.com.np/lots-blog/> and <http://www.ujjwal.com.np/wordpress-in-nepali/>, accessed on 3 March 2006. Website now closed although articles have been transferred to <http://www.nepalivoices.com/trs-favorites/>

96 Wagle's personal blog, Wagle Street Journal, is at <http://www.wagle.com.np/dinwag/>; Ujjwal blogs at <http://www.nepalivoices.com/ujjwal/>

97 Ujjwal Acharya, personal communication.

blogging as a medium has not appeared to be particularly 'democratic'. It remains an elitist forum and clearly suffers from difficulties much of the online world shares in holding comment box conversations. While the medium itself can be 'anti-democratic' the local context also helps explain matters. If the Nepali example illustrates anything it is the adaptability of local users in using blog technology for relevant and global Nepali means, rather than imitating others in building deliberative forums. Nepali blogs during and after February 2006 worked best in providing information during a time of crisis and also as a site to shout views, rather than as deliberative discussion forums. Nepali blogs after April 2006 are still adapting in, as shown, local and imaginative ways.

Though the political impact of blogs inside Nepal has been low the medium was almost ideally suited to tell the world about Nepal during Nepal's political crises. Within a limited space for manoeuvring, Nepali news bloggers created an effective online rebuttal to the royal regime that was noted and heard internationally. Blogs were clearly not in themselves working definitions of democracy that some claim, but they did help promote a return to democratic political rule. The later growth in different Nepali blogs, the growth of female bloggers, the greater use of Nepali, and an increase in regional blogging outside Kathmandu have helped create a different, more internally democratic, Nepali blogosphere. Their rise may help Nepali blogging gain a clearer identity and become more democratic as blog topics seem to shift from the political to the personal. This is not a maturing of the Nepali blogosphere, rather another use of the same medium for different purposes.

Looking at this small sample of Nepali news blogs helps us to rethink current ideas around studying blogs and questions around the purpose of blogging. Clearly the medium itself is not suited to deliberative discussion and remains unheard of by most Nepalis. However Nepali news blogs, when viewed away from questions around direct democratic value, help suggest alternative ways that blogs can enlarge and promote political democracy. In telling the world and the Nepali Diaspora about Nepal, blogs proved to be an almost ideal messenger matched by adaptable, innovative bloggers and an eager Diaspora. The undoubted inequalities and deliberative difficulties of the Nepali blogosphere during February 2006 should be considered alongside their global impact for the particular purpose of telling the world about Nepal.

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## Weblogs

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Beni Online <http://benionline.blogsome.com/>  
Blogdai <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com/>  
Blogmandu <http://nepali.blog.com.np/>  
Bloggers Nepal <http://bloggersnepal.com/>  
Boycott Of Blogdai <http://boycottofblogdai.blogspot.com/>  
Deepak's Diary <http://deepakadk.blogspot.com/>  
Democracy For Nepal <http://demrepubnepal.blogspot.com/>  
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<http://freeexpressionasia.wordpress.com/>  
Hamro Blog <http://www.hamroblog.com/>  
Hamro Desh <http://hamrodesh.blogsome.com/>  
Huffington Post <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/theblog/>  
Ilam Sutra <http://ilam.wordpress.com/>  
NepaliVoices <http://www.nepalivoices.com>  
Normblog <http://normblog.typepad.com/normblog/>  
Oliver Kamm <http://oliverkamm.typepad.com/>  
Phalano.com <http://www.rajeshkc.com/phalano/>  
Radio Free Nepal <http://freenepal.blogspot.com/>  
Samudaya <http://samudaya.org/>  
Say na Something <http://saynasomething.wordpress.com/>  
United We Blog <http://blog.com.np/>  
Wagle Street Journal <http://www.wagle.com.np/dinwag/>  
Zade X-PReSS <http://zade.wordpress.com>

## Websites

Beni Online <http://www.benionline.com.np/>  
Chirbir Nepal [www.chirbir.org](http://www.chirbir.org)  
Citizen Journalism Nepal <http://www.cjnepal.org/>  
Committee to Protect Journalists <http://www.cpj.org>  
eKantipur.com <http://www.ekantipur.com/>  
HimalKhabar <http://www.himalkhabar.com/>  
International Nepal Solidarity Network <http://www.insn.org/>  
International Nepal Solidarity Network mirror site <http://66.116.151.85/>  
Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya <http://www.mpp.org.np/>  
Nepalnews.com <http://www.nepalnews.com>  
Nepali Bloggers <http://www.bloggers.com.np/>  
Nepal Monitor <http://www.nepalmonitor.com>  
Nepal Press Freedom <http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org/>  
Nepali Times <http://www.nepalitimes.com>  
Newslook Online Magazine <http://www.newslookmag.com/>

OhmyNews International <http://english.ohmynews.com/>

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