

## **THE PRINT MEDIA IN NEPAL SINCE 1990: IMPRESSIVE GROWTH AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES**

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### **The Print Boom**

Until early 1990, when the king-led Panchayat System gasped for its final breath, the most powerful media in Nepal were all state-owned. The two most important daily newspapers, *Gorkhapatra* (in Nepali) and *The Rising Nepal* (in English), were published by Gorkhapatra Sansthan, a 'corporation' under government control. Similarly, Radio Nepal and Nepal Television (NTV), both also owned by the state, had complete monopoly over the electronic media. The non-state media was confined to weekly newspapers owned by private individuals, most of whom were affiliated to one or another banned political party.<sup>1</sup> Then came the People's Movement in the spring of 1990, which put an end to absolute monarchy and the Panchayat system. Due to a confluence of several factors, the demise of the Panchayat, of course, being the most significant, media was the one sector which recorded massive growth during the decade of the 1990s – growth seen not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. By the end of 2001, the media scenario was unrecognisable to those who only knew Nepal from the earlier era. And the most dramatic changes came in print and radio. This article deals with the growth in print media, especially the commercial press.<sup>2</sup>

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1 For various aspects of media during the Panchayat years see Baral (1975), Khatri (1976), Royal Press Commission (2038 v.s.), Verma (1988), Wolf et al. (1991), Nepal (2057 v.s.) and Rai (2001).

2 Although the state-owned Radio Nepal continues to be the most powerful media in Nepal with a communication infrastructure unmatched by any other institution, there has been a phenomenal growth in independent FM radio. By late 2001, licences had been issued to 25 independent radio operators, out of which some 20 were on air, more than half of them outside of the Kathmandu Valley. For more details on the growth of the non-state sector radio see Pringle (1999), Bhattarai (2000), Onta (2001), articles in Ghimire and Luintel (2058 v.s.) and Onta and Mainali (2059 v.s.). For a bibliography of recent writings related to FM radio in Nepal, see Onta and Parajuli (2059 v.s.). For much of the decade after 1990, comparatively little happened in the television sector apart from the

While *Gorkhapatra* and *The Rising Nepal* continue to be published, their influence has vastly diminished in the face of stiff competition from eight other broadsheet dailies—five in Nepali and three in English—all in the private sector. In 1993, a new era in print journalism began with the launch of two private-sector broadsheet dailies, *Kantipur* (in Nepali) and *The Kathmandu Post* (in English).<sup>3</sup> As of late 2001, the success of these newspapers, in particular the financial success of *Kantipur* (estimated circulation 70,000), has not yet been replicated by others who came in their wake. These include those currently being published such as the Nepali language dailies *Himalaya Times*, *Nepal Samacharpatra*, *Spacetime Dainik*, and *Rajdhani* and the English dailies *Spacetime Today* and *The Himalayan Times* (estimated circulation varying from 7,000 to 50,000) as well as three others that have ceased publication. Nevertheless these Nepali and English language papers have made the daily news market fairly competitive.<sup>4</sup> There has also been a phenomenal growth in the genre of evening daily newspapers, especially those published in Kathmandu, even though they are deemed to be weak content-wise (Bhatta 2001).

The weekly Nepali-language tabloids (known as *sāptāhiks*) continue to exert substantive influence in political circles and hence they have to be considered part of the mainstream media in Nepal. They are mostly run by publishers and editors close to political parties and their factions, and the general prediction of their demise, with the advent of corporate print media in the mid-1990s, has proved to be clearly off the mark. For, these tabloids continue to provide grist for the political mill, with even occasional investigative pieces that the larger dailies tend to shy away from, and demonstrate a daring that the larger dailies do not. The

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government-owned Nepal Television (NTV) selling slots to commercial and NGO operators. See K.C. (2000), Sharma (2058 v.s.) and Subedi (2059 v.s.) for more on television in Nepal.

- 3 Aditya (1996) is based on research done in 1993. Hence it is unable to capture changes discussed in this article. For a critical review of that work, see Tiwari (1997).
- 4 *Nepal Samacharpatra* was initially launched as *Ajako Samacharpatra* in January 1996 and its name was changed on 18 September 1999. The three papers that have exited the scene include the Nepali language dailies *Lokpatra* and *Shree Sagarmatha*, and the English daily, *The Everest Herald*. The latter two were promoted, in the main, by the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML). In the absence of an independent Audit Bureau of Circulation, the circulation numbers given here are based on estimates provided by industry insiders.

investment required for weeklies is relatively modest, as are the printing costs, produced as they are in black-and-white on subsidized newsprint. Since reader taste for this format of print media is still robust, it is expected that weekly newspapers will still be around for the next few years even when they will not be able to recover their full operating costs from the market.

The most popular weeklies found in the market today include the following: *Deshantar*, *Punarjagaran*, *Ghatana ra Bichar*, *Saptahik Bimarsha* (all considered close to factions within the Nepali Congress Party), *Chalphal*, *Dristi*, *Jan Astha*, *Budhabar* (all considered close to the Communist Party of Nepal—Unified Marxist-Leninist, CPN-UML), *Jana Ekata* (close to the Communist Party of Nepal-Ekata Kendra), and *Hank* (close to the Communist Party of Nepal- Masal). Another popular weekly, *Janadesh*, which used to function virtually as a mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maobadi), has been closed by the government after the imposition of emergency in late November 2001. These weeklies have an estimated circulation of 10,000 to 25,000 each.<sup>5</sup>

In the last few years, within the various print media forms, it is magazines that have seen the most spectacular growth. Influential magazines include both those published by commercial publishers and those that are close to political parties. The investment in this genre has come from both big investors who have spent a lot of money in creating a market for their general newsmagazines (e.g., *Himal Khabarpatrika* and *Nepal*, both Nepali fortnightlies) and others with specific profiles. In the latter category, for instance, *Mulyankan* and *Nawa Yuba* are Nepali monthlies read extensively by left activists, workers and youth. *Sadhana* is a monthly family digest and *Bimochan* can be described as a monthly youth magazine. *Ekaisaun Satabdi* and *Nawayug* are two of the more prominent magazines aligned with CPN-UML and the other political parties also publish similar magazines. The circulation of the more successful magazines varies from 10,000 to about 50,000.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also publish quite a few periodicals. The best known among them include *Asmita* (published by the Asmita Publishing House and Resource Centre), *Haka Haki* (jointly published by Development Communication Centre and Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists) and *Bikas* (published by Sustainable Development Forum). While none of these NGO publications match the

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5 For more on the weeklies see Gaunle (2056 v.s.), Onta (2000) and Ghimire (2000).

national visibility of a *Himal* or *Mulyankan*, they have created for themselves a niche each amongst the reading public. *Asmita* is the feminist trailblazer in the Nepali press whereas both *Haka Haki* and *Bikas* deal with issues related to Nepal's development and social change, with the latter being far more critical of the development mainstream than the former.<sup>6</sup> Other specialist category magazines—on entertainment, literature, dalits, janajatis and other themes—also exist although they are not covered in this article.<sup>7</sup>

Along with a growth in magazines and broadsheet dailies, news photography too is showing signs of maturing into a potent genre by itself. Offset printing had been available for the state print media in the pre-1990 period but it was only when that technology began to become more accessible to private commercial media in the following years that newsphotography took off. Private print media houses started hiring full-time photojournalists in 1993 and that practice has now been followed by almost all the leading newspapers and magazines. Photo-stories have now become a common feature in print publications.

Cumulatively, the growth in print media has contributed to opening up Nepali society to new ideas and newer ways of looking at 'old' issues. It has enlarged the space of what can be called civil society in Nepal and facilitated the search for democratic foundations for the state and the entire society at large. Learning through everyday practice with very little mentoring, a younger generation of Nepali journalists are interrogating their society in ways that have never been done before: from democratic rights to food supplies, from greed to generosity, from political factions to civil organisations, from Maoist terrorism to state brutality, from hunger strikes to fashion shows, the Nepali press is learning to report about all these subjects and more. More importantly, it has made just about every literate Nepali a media critic who can readily present a list of complaints against the media's current level of performance.

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6 Development Communication Centre used to also publish the English language magazine *Face to Face* until the end of 1999 when the magazine folded. Himal Association, an NGO established in the late 1980s, was the publisher of the English language Himalayan magazine *Himal* until 1996 and the Nepali language bimonthly journal *Himal* until 1998. See Des Chene (2056 v.s.) for an assessment of the magazine *Bikas*.

7 See Onta (1997a and 1997c) for a preliminary look at the growth of Nepali magazines in the 1990s. Des Chene (1996) provides a detailed analysis of a single *janajāti* magazine.

In the next section, I discuss the factors responsible for the growth of print media in the 1990s. This will be followed by an analysis of some of the institutional characteristics and constraints of Nepali print media. In the third and final section, I focus on the print media's ability to do investigative reporting.

### **Factors Responsible for the Growth**

Five factors together seem to have played an important role in the growth of the print media in Nepal in the 1990s.

*Legal regime:* The 1990 Constitution of Nepal is a landmark document for the guarantees it provides as fundamental rights of the citizens of Nepal. These include the right to freedom of expression, right to assemble without weapons, right to establish organisations, right to information, and the right to protection from censorship. These are fundamental legal guarantees without which the growth in Nepali media after the 1990s would not have been achieved. Following the promulgation of the Constitution, several acts relating to the media in Nepal were passed. The most significant one from the point of view of the commercial press was the Printing Press and Publications Act, 2048 v.s.. This guarantees that the property of any properly registered press in Nepal will not be confiscated by the government because of what it has printed (as was possible in the Panchayat era). The same Act guarantees that except for conditions specified by a law, no *a priori* censorship will be exercised in the case of any printed matter. It also guarantees that the registration of a newspaper or magazine will not be cancelled because of its content.<sup>8</sup> Government action, while it can still be high handed, is now regulated under this new legal set-up. While earlier 'erring' journalists could be handled by the administration, now they have necessarily to be brought before the courts except under a state of emergency as the one declared in late 2001.

*New participants:* The second factor that is responsible for the growth of print media is the increasing involvement of private institutions, NGOs and elected local government bodies in media production and education. Since their investment in media hardware, such as printing presses, are guaranteed against confiscation, the private sector has now

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8 For the case of electronic media, the National Broadcasting Act, 2049 v.s. was crucial in making it possible for the private sector, non-governmental organizations and local governments to operate independent radio stations.

already invested heavily in print equipment. NGOs have become significant players in media output in Nepal, partly due to the development focus of donor agencies. The involvement of NGOs in the field of media education dates from the 1980s, and in the years since 1990, this involvement has increased, both in volume and depth. Moreover, several media-related and other NGOs now produce feature services focused on specific themes such as women, biodiversity, tourism and nutrition (Adhikari 2001).

*Growth in advertisement market:* The third factor responsible for the growth of print media is the cumulative increase in the market of advertisements. Industry insiders suggest that the print (and radio) advertisement market grew at an annual rate of about 30 per cent during the late 1990s. The growth in state agency advertisements and public service announcements, the arrival of Indian multinational consumer items in the Nepali economy, the modest growth in the Nepali private sector, and the increase in the number and activities of both international donor agencies and Nepali NGOs account for most of this increase. In addition, individual patronage of print media in the form of condolences and congratulations is also contributing significantly to this growth.

*Growth in media consumers:* The fourth factor to consider is the increase in the number of Nepalis who, for various reasons, use media products on a level that is unprecedented in the history of Nepal. This consumption can be tied to the increase in the absolute number of literate Nepali citizens. It now seems that for more and more Nepalis—possibly an estimated 30 per cent of the population of 23 million—some form of media is becoming an integral part of their lives. Pressures emanating from professional compulsions, increased reliance on the media for development or politics-related information, changes in popular culture and fashion, and other reasons have contributed to this greater use and consumption of media. This growth is also tied to the relative ease with which print media can be accessed by subsets of the population who were earlier not served by these media forms, thanks in part to the growth in distribution networks. Nepal saw a spurt in highway building in the 1990s that led to many new routes for bus services. Similarly the growth of private airlines made it easier to distribute daily newspapers.

*Imperative of the Nepali language:* The cultural politics of the Panchayat regime had relied to a large extent on the promotion of the Nepali language as a fundamental marker of the Nepali identity. Its educational and other programmes had promoted Nepali at the cost of other languages spoken inside Nepal. While this did historical violence to

the local cultures and languages and dialects of Nepal, the Panchayat's language policy resulted in a Nepali population that overwhelmingly speaks with each other in the Nepali language. When the environment for media growth became congenial, media promoters and producers cashed in on this fact although it is also true that the more democratic environment has made it possible for the production of media in other languages, however small their volume might be at the moment.

Thus it was the ushering in of media freedom by the 1990 Constitution of Nepal which made it possible for new investment to enter the sector. The oppositional weeklies of the Panchayat era were gradually eclipsed after 1993 by broadsheet dailies with relatively less ideologically inspired content. A gradual build-up of competition across the various genres of print media has enhanced professional opportunities and quality. And all of this activity in print was supported by a growing advertisement market. Thus, the freedom of expression after 1990 coincided with the expansion of the market (and the concomitant greater need to advertise) as well as expansion of the reach of the distribution networks (in the case of print media) via highways and airways. Thus the opening up of the legal and economic spaces to forces of democratisation and the market have contributed to the growth of the media in Nepal in the 1990s.

### **Institutional Characteristics and Constraints**

Despite the growth described above, there are several institutional weaknesses remaining in the Nepali print media that limit its potential as a vibrant force for the democratisation of Nepali society. Some of the more important weaknesses and how they influence its working ability are discussed below.

*Kathmandu-centric:* Almost all nationally influential print media in Nepal is edited, printed and produced in Kathmandu. The total print run of all the daily and weekly newspapers produced from Kathmandu on any day of the week has now surpassed the 350,000 mark. The most influential daily, *Kantipur*, sells 70,000 copies whereas fortnightly and monthly magazines sell anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 copies per issue. Due to an increasingly better road network and the advent of private airlines, the Kathmandu-produced print media reaches different parts of the country more easily today than even five years ago. Regionally important print media is produced in places such as Dharan, Narayanghat, Butwal, Pokhara, and Nepalgunj but newspapers or magazines produced from these centers have not been able to create a national presence. The best regional newspapers have a circulation of about 7000 copies. The private

enterprises producing these regional newspapers are weak in terms of investment, as well as editorial and management skills.<sup>9</sup>

This kind of spatial concentration of all nationally significant print media production in Kathmandu means that the Nepali media represents the Kathmandu establishment point of view on almost all issues. The corporate media houses being based in Kathmandu, and close to the 'power centres' in society, tend to play it safe between the various political, financial and intellectual elite camps. This should be cause for alarm to anyone interested in generating the conditions in which a diversity of orientations and points of view (both intellectual and spatial) can be served by a truly pluralistic and democratic media in Nepal.<sup>10</sup>

*Ownership pattern and form:* State ownership of media is most obvious in the case of the Gorkhapatra Sansthan (publisher of several print media products including two broadsheet dailies), and slightly less so in the case of the national news agency, the Rastriya Samachar Samiti, which is Nepal's only news agency. While every post-1990 government has talked about privatising Gorkhapatra Sansthan (the incongruity of print media being government-owned in this day and age being the reason) successive governments have found it difficult to take the definitive decision. These two media institutions, along with Radio Nepal and Nepal Television, have seen continuous government interference during the 1990s. The ruling dispensation's ability to effectively use its print media for propaganda has decreased due to the growth of the private sector which dominates the print media market.<sup>11</sup> While this is an improvement over the situation that prevailed in 1990, there is the danger—as is discussed later in this article—that commercial interests will get the better of

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9 Details regarding the past and the present situation of the print media outside of the Kathmandu Valley are discussed in the contributions in Onta (2058 v.s.).

10 We would have to qualify this statement by looking at the work of the political weeklies. I have left that analysis for another occasion.

11 Nevertheless the misuse of Radio Nepal and Nepal Television for the same purpose continues. The state's monopoly over Radio Nepal means that the most powerful media in Nepal continues to be an appendage to the party in power. In actual terms this has meant that the Nepali Congress Party has misused Radio Nepal for most of the 1990s, given that it has formed majority governments or led coalitions for most of that decade. State ownership of Radio Nepal and Nepal Television has meant that these institutions have been deprived of creative dynamism and they suffer from the inability to take forward the possibilities offered by new communication technologies.



editorial imperatives in print journalism. This danger is especially real for publications where the editor is either weak or his office is yet to be institutionalised as an entity independent of proprietorial, political and commercial interests and influences.

*Gender, ethnic and caste composition:* Journalists in Nepal tend to be overwhelmingly male and from the Bahun, Chhetri and Newar (BCN) caste groups. While the number of women columnists has increased in the last decade (Onta 1997b) and there is a visible presence of women in the independent radio stations (at least in Kathmandu), the percentage of women reporters and editors, both in print and electronic media, continues to be small. In the autumn of 2000, a team of researchers from the Kathmandu-based Centre for Social Research and Development (CSRD) conducted a survey of 114 print publications and the organisations that produce them. The survey, which covered the Kathmandu Valley and 22 other cities of Nepal, found out that women constitute less than six per cent of the workforce in the editorial department, which for the purpose of the survey consisted of all editors, reporters, desk and layout staff (Parajulee and Gautam 2058 v.s.). Similarly, women constitute less than five per cent of the regular columnists. Amongst top management positions—chairman, managing director, director, circulation chief and marketing chief—a few women head marketing and circulation departments but they account for a tiny percentage of their overall workforce (cf. Maskey 2049 v.s., 2055 v.s.). Hence, despite much talk about ‘gender and development’ for the last twenty years, the owners of most media organisations have done very little to increase the number of women in their editorial and management staff. Some feminist organisations (such as Sancharika Samuha) have succeeded, to a certain extent, to put examples of pro-women analysis in the mainstream media through print feature services (Adhikari 2001). But even their best effort has not been enough to effectively address the disproportionate absence of women in media organisations.

Similarly, one rarely finds members of non-BCN caste or ethnic groups in the editorial or management departments of mainstream media. The CSRD survey has produced results that invite much reflection. In the 104 ‘mainstream’ publications surveyed<sup>12</sup>, dalits constituted less than two per cent each of the staff of editorial and managerial departments, and less than one per cent among regular columnists. Members of the ethnic

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12 10 of the 114 publications surveyed were specialist ethnic or dalit ones and hence were not counted as ‘mainstream’ publications.

groups, *janajātis*, constituted about 14 per cent of the editorial staff, 22 per cent of the managerial staff and 12 per cent of the columnists. If one excludes upper caste Newars (all Newars were included in the *janajati* group in the CSRD survey) from these calculations, all the three statistics regarding the participation of *janajātis* in mainstream print media would be around 10 per cent or less. Similarly the number of *madheśīs*—Nepalis from the Tarai—is very small (Chandrakishor 2001). What is clear is that there is very little participation of women (half of the estimated 23 million population), dalits (about 20 percent) and ethnic minorities (about 35 percent) in Nepal's print media (Parajulee and Gautam 2058 v.s.).<sup>13</sup>

The overwhelming presence of Bahun, Chhetri and Newar males in the world of Nepali media means that minority concerns and voices of women, dalits and *janajātis* are not adequately represented, both textually and numerically, in all the media products and institutions. Similarly the concerns of Nepali *madheśīs* are under-emphasised by the nationally dominant media. These mutually non-exclusive categories of the population constitute a substantial majority of the 23 million Nepalis. In other words, the ethnic and caste composition in Nepali media organisations do not correspond with the demographic pattern of Nepali society. What is even worse is that most mainstream media institutions and elected functionaries of professional bodies of journalists, as documented by Parajulee and Gautam (2058 v.s.), do not even consider this mismatch to be a problem. Nor have any of the major media houses instituted a progressive recruitment policy. The biases of the group from which the editors come—BCN, and even among them an overwhelming presence of Bahuns mean that critical issues do not get coverage, particularly in relation to issues raised by the social movements of women, *janajātis*, dalits and madhesis.

*Educational qualifications of journalists:* No comprehensive data is available about the education levels of journalists working in Nepal, but indicators are that they are rising. During the Panchayat years journalism was not a respectable profession, and therefore, qualified, 'respectable' and career-oriented people were not attracted to it. Gradually, with the rising profile of journalists in the society, this is changing and people with higher educational qualifications, certainly, but also greater goals in life,

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13 Although similar surveys have not been done for radio and television, suggestive data generated for dalits and *janajātis* in radio show that the scenario cannot be very different in the electronic media. See Biswakarma 2058 v.s. for the case of dalits and Yatra 2058 v.s. for the case of *janajātis* in radio. Also see Lawoti and Yatra 2057 v.s.

are being attracted to the profession. Many of the most competent staff of the private broadsheet dailies, the influential magazines and independent radio stations have at least a bachelor's degree, if not a master's. Many of the major media houses no longer hire reporters without a bachelor's degree although there are exceptions. Some of the more educated young journalists could have opted for other professions but are now choosing journalism, giving the profession a new credibility as a career option. Despite this positive trend, which is expected to continue, it is also the case that an overwhelming number of journalists in Nepal have never completed a bachelor's degree, let alone a higher specialised degree. Moreover, the number of journalists trained in the research methods of the social sciences is still very small in Nepal. Lack of exposure to such methods can be attributed in part to the poor state of social science teaching in Nepali colleges.

In addition, most journalists whose working language is Nepali have a very poor command over English, despite their having BA or MA degrees. This inability restricts their effectiveness as communicators. Lacking access to resource materials and texts that are available only in English, these journalists are unable to keep themselves up-to-date with critical developments in the fields they cover. As a result, even some of the best print journalists are unable to bring the same level of expertise to their work as the leading professionals in other disciplines. This becomes clear when media persons are unable to elicit relevant information of public interest from experts in other fields while doing specialist reporting. To make matters worse, non-media professionals from various other disciplines have not yet developed a culture of working with media institutions.<sup>14</sup>

Since even the toughest structural constraints allow some flexibility for individual action, I do not mean to suggest that the institutional characteristics of the Nepali print media discussed above determine its ability in the last instance. I acknowledge that even within the world of print media as discussed above, there is room for exceptional investigative reporting. However my submission is that the structural features identified above cumulatively make Nepali print media only a partial watchdog institution at its best.

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14 *The Kathmandu Post Review of Books*, initiated in 1996 by Ashutosh Tiwari and now managed by Martin Chautari is an exception. Similarly some of the feature services discussed by Adhikari (2001) are also exceptions to this trend.

### **Investigative Reporting**

What then is the capacity of the Nepali print media with respect to investigative reporting? Given the widespread corruption in Nepal, the importance of good investigative reporting is self-evident.

When *Kantipur* and *The Kathmandu Post* emerged in early 1993, and were subsequently followed by other broadsheet dailies, some media-watchers said that this type of competition would foster an environment for quality investigative journalism. It has now become clear that the increased number of broadsheet dailies does not necessarily foster investigative journalism. The reason for this is related to their huge investment needs and the small size of the political-financial elite set in Nepal. Those who have invested in broadsheet dailies are people who come from this small elite and, more often than not, are politically well connected. Members of this same set are often the big patrons of advertisements published in these newspapers. Editorial decisions in the big dailies are taken with consideration to advertisement revenue, and business reporters regularly exercise 'deliberate restraint' on behalf of the management. Hence, despite an occasional in-depth report done at the initiative of an individual journalist, the big newspapers have been unable to undertake ground-breaking investigative journalism on the nexus between business, politics and crime in Nepal on a regular basis.<sup>15</sup>

What about the weeklies and magazines? Since the financial requirements for a weekly or a magazine are relatively small compared to that required to run a broadsheet daily, theoretically speaking, they should have become the chief forums for investigative journalism by now. That they have not become so requires some explanation. The popular weeklies have not been able to shed their Panchayat-era avatars as purveyors of 'mission journalism'. Their popularity depends on a section of the Nepali readers' taste for a form of crude and exaggerated 'political journalism' fostered during the Panchayat era. Various factionalised political parties have used these publications as their publicity fronts in the post-1990 period, and their coverage of broad social issues is minimal. This situation is guaranteed to continue as the best people working for the weeklies have already left them for greener pastures elsewhere in the media.

The newsmagazines that have emerged during the past decade are free of this Panchayat-era taste baggage. Yet they have not achieved anything

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15 See Adhikary (2000), Josse (2001) and Onta, Parajuli and Parajuli (2009 v.s.) for other assessments of the capacity of print media in Nepal.

beyond modest success on this count mainly because institutional capacity to focus, direct and compile the work of individual reporters, a vital component of magazine journalism internationally, has not been developed in any significant way. This may be one reason why the number of newsmagazines remains small while lifestyle and *bicār-pradhān* (opinion-based) magazines are witnessing relatively more growth. Lack of research and analytical skills have limited even magazines relatively free of the financial-political constraints discussed above from substantially improving the quality of investigative journalism in Nepal.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, we must say that the impressive growth of print media in Nepal in the 1990s does not necessarily mean that it has served the cause of democracy in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. Print media in Nepal at the turn of the century looks impressive when compared to its status in 1990 but it also suffers from several institutional weaknesses discussed earlier. As a result, Nepali print media can not do ground-breaking investigative reporting that would rock the power equations of Nepali society. In other words, Nepali print media is a partial democratizing force in Nepal but at the same time, it shares the privileges of power associated with the three wings of the state and the Nepali financial-business world. Thus we can conclude that while Nepali print media has contributed toward the reduction of the ruthlessness of our political and financial bosses, it has a long way to go before it can truly speak for the set of multiply disenfranchised Nepalis. Hence, painstaking advocacy at all levels—further research on the structural and institutional constraints discussed above and policies and programs to overcome them—will be necessary for years to come if we want to bring about some significant changes. All those who have a stake in improving media's effectiveness as a force for democracy in Nepal must take this task seriously.

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contained in this article. Some parts of this paper are being published as Onta (2002).

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