

# The Press in Nepal (1951-74)

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It is really a difficult task when one tries to present the genesis, growth and the present style of functioning of the Press in Nepal. These aspects get blurred, as does its role in the society as a whole. An inquiry into the plight of the Press would also mean an inquiry into the level of intellectual development, literacy growth, communicational advancement, and above all, the attitudinal change of the people at large. Moreover, the task has been further complicated by the undifferentiated role of Private papers and government-sponsored papers. At one end of the spectrum, there are two largely circulated dailies owned by the government; at the other end, there is a multiplicity of papers belonging to individuals. They are relatively colourless, personalityless and above all, to a large extent, valueless. The former thrive on the public treasury, enhance the values of the system, and do the work of Gazette or notifications, the latter aptly do the same but with a slight difference. The question of their survival is also greatly determined by governmental financial help; so they are dependent on its attitude towards them. However, there are some dailies and weeklies that tend to be independent and survive the financial pressure of the government. In short, some of these papers belonging to the second and third categories are in a way "born in idealism and live in frustration". Sometimes they die and sometimes survive through blood donations.

The present article would, therefore, make an attempt to show this "sad plight" in its entirety. By way of caution, it can be stated that it is not a wholly empirically based-study. Nonetheless, it would show the history of the Press, its linkage with past politics in order to explain its stagnant behaviour over the years. The present paper would also concentrate, however briefly, on the orientation towards the present Panchayat System as well as interaction between the government and the Press.

## Historical Overview

It has been aptly remarked that "each nation that enters the cycle of modernization must at some point break through in three fields: Political and Social reform, language and journalism"<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately Nepal did not possess these. Nor did she undergo the process of colonization. She was lucky in missing it; but she also failed to bring about a social renaissance towards which other colonized countries were striving. In India, for instance, social, religious and literary renaissance was followed by political awakening encompassing many facets of Indian life. But, Nepal, quite surprisingly, remained unaffected by these socio-political abrasions. In addition to it, these colonized countries were

being aroused, ironically enough, by the importation of foreign ideas or influences through which the native-educated intellectuals could detect a common enemy-colonialism-which, in return, had been introducing attendants of modern liberal political institutions. In short, it was a colonial blessing in disguise.

It would be misleading if one sought to find a parallelism between the process of modernization in India or elsewhere where a similar situation existed, and the break-through in Nepal's development. However, it is interesting to note that the first hand-operating Printing Press, (i.e. Giddhe Press) popularly known as Vulture Press of 1851, was also a part of the influence of the western world<sup>2</sup>.

Followed by a spate of developments in the direction of introducing press activities in Nepal, the first electrical press was installed in 1912. In 1893, the Pashupati Press - the first private venture - started operating, and "by the end of 1950 there were less than ten public presses" with minimum Press business<sup>3</sup>. Despite such antecedents of the printing press in Nepal, no independent papers or journals, with the exception of a few literary magazines, could play a crucial role in disseminating political consciousness in the country. This was mainly to be attributed to the uncongenial political climate of those years and whatever presses were operating were instrumental in promoting the value - systems of the Ranas and their lackeys. The political system was also highly stratified along caste and status lines, confining all political activities to the harem of the Ranas. It could be seen that the one hundred years history of the Nepali Press was basically geared to this political process which was characterized by unquestionable loyalties, servitude and identification with the family rule. Upper-caste and class-attitude confined the role of the Press to court-politics. And the agents were generally those who showed their allegiance to the established authority. They were passive, alienated and 'atomized' individuals who were "subjugated" to the rulers, manifesting the sentiment that the government was something that was there by a specially stratified race- the Ranas.

The political culture that developed during the pre-Rana period was further crystallized under the Ranas. And the "subject culture", being basically oriented towards the "powers that be", continued fundamentally unchanged till the 1950 revolution. As the development of healthy journalism was not possible without political consciousness, the Press became a non-entity in Nepali socio-political life. Started in 1858, the first official paper- the Gorkhapatra- also helped promote the Rana culture. However, a few nationals living in India "where politics and social awakening were at their high watermark, concerned themselves with Nepalese affairs: Politics, Social Progress, languages, culture, and above all political change"<sup>4</sup>. They gave factual accounts of the conditions obtaining in the contemporary Nepali society. Although many journals and magazines were coming out every now and then within

the country as well, they did not provide enough input for bringing about political awareness in Nepal. Many publishers of such journals were neither social reformers nor political dissentients, but they were primarily unconcerned persons insofar as the spread of critical views was concerned. From a journalistic point of view, this profession made little or no contribution whatever to the political change of 1950. But many young, enthusiastic elements working outside the country made serious bids for heralding a democratic era in Nepal. At last, the Rana system was overthrown in 1950 thereby giving way to the experimentation of modern liberal democratic values.

The post-1950 revolution period was significant in many respects. It was characterized by various kinds of innovations, euphoria, "extroversion" and above all a sudden transformation from what one Nepali scholar calls "the sleep of the middle ages" and the people found themselves "exposed to neon lights of an electronic age"<sup>5</sup>. In this hour of excitement, the people not only changed their political styles but also made innovations in various fields. In 1951, the first public-owned Nepali language daily, Awaz, was started. Later, many dailies and weeklies followed it but, as they were all one-man affairs, they gradually vanished from the scene.

The post-revolution period equally betrayed the fact that the Rana political system was buried at a single stroke, but not the political culture of the earlier period. The people also forgot that "they were too deeply embedded in a tradition for a smooth transition"<sup>6</sup> to a democratic system. As democracy was a process to be promoted from all agencies of public opinion, the Press on its part failed to build a tradition of its own and its role also became, to a large degree, spurious as well as marginal. This state of affairs was further complicated by the steady rise in the number of papers - dailies and weeklies. In 1951, there were one daily and three weeklies, but as of 1960, the figure of dailies and weeklies registered so far rose to approximately 32 and 65 respectively. But this sudden rise in the registration of papers was more or less offset by their infant-mortality. By 1965, the number of dailies and weeklies published, however intermittently, rose to 65 and 101 respectively<sup>7</sup>.

The first Press Commission was also organized in 1958. The commission was assigned the task of investigating the development of the Press in Nepal following the 1950 revolution. It was also to study the economic and other kinds of difficulties faced by the Press. Later, it could be seen that the idea of the Press commission became a part of the new political style during the Fifties and Sixties. Various governments formed Press Commissions but often no tangible result was forthcoming. The period under study (i.e. 1951-60) was also one of strained relationships between the government and the Press not because the latter was under heavy pressure from the government but because it lacked sobriety or perhaps failed to comprehend the limits of its rhetoric. Thus, on

several occasions, many papers were brought to task, as some of them were allegedly bent on jolting the public figures and institutions including the Monarchy. But this period was characterized by a new style of political life or at least some sort of an "apprenticeship" in liberal democracy; so it was natural on their part to behave thus and such trends could have been amended had there been positive thinking in the direction of professionalization or institutionalization. On the contrary, the men in power did not seem to be interested in enhancing the prospects of the Press in Nepal. The modernizing elites brought to the fore by the 1950 revolution were also partly responsible for ignoring the fact that democracy minus a responsible Press would become redundant.

Established in 1952, the plight of the Nepal Journalist Association was miserable. Hit by internal cleavages and personalistic considerations, the N J A did not make any headway in ameliorating the difficulties of the Press-men. Despite these professional symptoms manifested in Nepali Press circles, some journalists did not fail to inaugurate agencies such as existed in other countries. Some editors created Sagarmatha News Agency with a view to supplying news to the papers at large. Later, yet another news agency, called Nepal Sambad Samiti (Nepal News Agency) was created but owing to internal conflicts among journalists, both of these could not flourish. Nevertheless, these two agencies became pace-setters in the sense that the new regime established after the royal take-over in 1960 organized a single news agency, Rastriya Sambad Samiti (RSS) under official Patronage.

The feuds raging among press circles in the post -- 1950 period were attributable, to a large degree, to the unbroken Political culture on the one hand, and the abrasion of liberal trends on the other. Most of the political actors in this period were not primarily oriented towards the new values. As a result, they could neither abandon the old authoritarian elements which were so overwhelmingly present in their behaviour, nor did they completely identify themselves with the process of political development. They were "marginal ambivalents" having shifting political loyalties. These contradictory political phenomena gave way to the establishment of personalistic parties and splinter-groups with alarming rapidity. These were created with the purpose of opening what Myrdal calls, though in a different context, "Career routes"<sup>8</sup> to the Palace. This was patently observable when they strove to forge alliances from time to time with the motive of maximizing the king's favour. When the first parliamentary election was over in 1959, many of those who had suffered ignominious defeats predictably mobilized their resources to stigmatize the government on each and every count. The Press, as it was divided along group lines, joined the fray in promoting political tension or in disseminating misgivings.

All these were the products of tradition and history. Although the Press with "modern sensibilities" cannot remain indifferent to the country's politics, the Press in Nepal during this period of

"extroversion" did not develop its own professional standard. And this tendency was also more strikingly present in the political system brought about in consequence of the royal take-over in 1960.

#### The Press in the Post-take-over Period

King Mahendra's overthrow of the Parliamentary government, with the Nepali congress in power on 15 December 1960 and the restrictions imposed on freedom put the Press in an awkward situation, as was the case in other aspects of national life. The new situation also demanded conformism to some of the accepted principles of the system: royal leadership, Partylessness, class co-ordination and decentralization. The Panchayat system, as it embodied these principles, was to be promoted by all segments of Nepali society. But one contradictory trend set by the system was that the system allowed "political pluralism" to a certain degree while retaining the idea of a consensual society. It was further abetted by the explanation that the system was on an experimental basis and that with the passage of time Nepal would again revert to liberal democracy, abandoned in 1960.

Home Minister during the early phase of the new regime, Vishwa Bandhu Thapa was no less categorical when he said reassuringly that political parties would be revived, and the king had entrusted him to return to democracy as early as possible. For his part, king Mahendra, too, was on record on 13 April 1961 as saying that after five years or so, the people would have the option to choose the system which they preferred<sup>9</sup>. Although no associations or organizations other than the officially recognized ones were allowed to function, the Press enjoyed, to a limited extent, freedom. Since the very beginning, many papers obviously identified with the pre 1960 political orientations, provided enough room for enlarging conflicts whether the governmental elites liked it or not. Yet some newspapers which had no such orientations and were basically characterized by their freefloating political loyalties, suddenly adjusted their role to the changed political situation.

As it could be seen that most of the newspapers had supported the royal action of 1960 for what they called the "ushering in of democracy" in Nepal, they were also the intemperate critics with regard to the new Guidance Principles as well as other matters. But there was no dearth of papers that praised the government as much not because of satisfaction with its management of affairs as because of the involvement of the king in the political Process<sup>10</sup>. This kind of paradox became a continuous feature in the attitude of the Nepali Press up to date.

#### Controversial Press Act

Although newspapers in general behaved in conformity with the officially prescribed taboos, yet the government seemed to be sensitive to the reaction of the Press. In the beginning, repres-

sion of deviant newspapers was also immediate<sup>11</sup>. In 1962 the government enacted the Rashtriya Sambad Samiti (RSS) Act whereby "no other news agency (save the government controlled RSS) shall be allowed to operate, collect and sell news in Nepal and about Nepal"<sup>12</sup>. Prior to the organization of the RSS, there were two news agencies. This Act also made the RSS an integrated, independent body that would distribute news to papers.

The Press and Publication Act (Press Act) enforced in 1963 became controversial as well as determinant in harbouring misgivings between the Press and the Government. Its section 30 imposed several constraints on the Press. It stated:

His Majesty's Government may issue an order directing the suspension of any news, criticism or publication in case it is deemed reasonable to do so in the public interest. No appeal or complaint shall be entertained against such order<sup>13</sup>.

The Press Act vested absolute power in the government and virtually sounded the death-knell of some of the extrovert newspapers, leading to a long-drawn-out battle between them. Over the years the refractory Press scoffed at alleged undemocratic measures undertaken by the governments concerned and took up cudgels for the relaxation of the Press Act, arguing that it was as much equally necessary for the new system which had promised to be democratic and tolerant.

The strained relationship between the government and the Press continued to be accentuated. Many papers started publishing editorials and comments in aggressive tones, in resentment particularly at the "gradual disappearance of freedom" of the Press due to section 30 and its ramifications. Most of the papers expressed similar views on different occasions. Some of the typical ones may be worth mentioning. In this context, what was said by a local weekly would merit a full length quotation.

- (a) We do not have any new material on the basis of which we may write an editorial different from those which we have been writing every year since a decade ago on the occasion of Democracy Day. But the section 30 of the Press Act, which acts as a screen for all evils, notably the growing list of power, antipopular measures, corruption and so on, prevents us from expressing these views. We can only say that during the past 19 years we have been moving backward every year instead of making progress. A country which is lagging behind in socio-economic field cannot be said to have attained progress and stability in the political field<sup>14</sup>.

Realizing the strained relationship that had been existing between the Press and the government, the latter had tried to bring about a rapport, if belatedly, by forming a Press Advisory

council in October 1967. It was an official body designed to look into the Press affairs. Unfortunately, however, the council was too frequently reorganized by the ministers concerned, apparently guided by subjective considerations. Its membership was ordinarily composed of ex-officio members who were normally governmental nominees. The Nepal Journalist Association (N J A), operating in a moribund state, complained about the unhelpful attitude of the council. The N J A believed that the latter was alleged to have been working against the unity of journalists as a whole, by contriving dissension among them<sup>15</sup>. Not suprisingly, the Press had a much smaller role to play in the council. What mattered significantly was that it relentlessly aired their begrudging opinion against the section 30 of the Press Act and demanded its amendment. Furthermore, the deepening of misunderstanding between the government and the Press was coming to the surface owing to the code of conduct imposed on journalists. As the purpose of the code of conduct had been to bring journalists in line with the Principles of the Panchayat System, it was enforced without allegedly consulting the N J A<sup>16</sup>.

Meanwhile, in 1970, the Press heaved a sigh of relief when the flamboyant Home and Panchayat Minister Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay tried to prove his liberal bonafides by amending the Press Act of 1963. This measure was also a ministerial gesture aimed to mollify the hostile Press which was sympathetic to his proposition that the Panchayat System should be resilient enough to adapt to new situations. For this, Upadhyay was fighting a lone battle with the Pro-Status-quo elites - Tulsi Giri and his admirers.

The amended article of the Press Act incorporated the provision for appeal to guarantee judicial protection of the Press<sup>17</sup>. As a result, many newspapers, harassed under the previous article, were allowed to function. However, this euphoria was short-lived in the face of the increasing pressure of the Hawks within the administration.

The misunderstanding between the Press and the Government became, once again, transparent when it allowed the publication of papers but stopped the financial help to private newspapers. Curiously enough, on 22 July 1970, the Home and Panchayat Minister gave a detailed account in the National Panchayat regarding the financial assistance given to the Press by the government during 1969-70. In so doing, the obvious intention of the Minister was to demonstrate his impartiality towards the Press insofar as the distribution of financial assistance was concerned. For the distribution pattern showed no rational criteria for the dispensation of administrative justice<sup>18</sup>.

#### Multiplicity of Papers

During the early phase of the royal take-over, Home and National Guidance Minister, Vishwa Bandhu Thapa, had proposed to

publish a daily newspaper on a co-operative basis. This proposal was a warning that dissident papers would not get any kind of official help. Later, the Minister also warned that their failure to be useful to the regime would mean a close-down and, in as much as the king was the sole judge of whether the government was functioning well or not, no adverse criticism from any quarter would be tolerated<sup>19</sup>.

Such official statements were not only indications for mending the recalcitrant Press but also created disappointment in Press circles in general. The statements were also suspect as the proposition of the Minister was "absurd" and "fascist" enough to stifle democracy to which he himself had avowed messianic commitment. But by 1965, the government decided to publish yet another daily the Rising Nepal, thereby materializing its earlier commitment with a slight difference. Instead of a few well-regulated papers, the number of weeklies and dailies significantly increased over the years.

The chequered history and style of functioning of the press would be very much evident when a casual visitor would take a stroll in the centrally located area of New Road. The visitor would not only see newspapers in abundance but also would, perhaps, hurriedly draw an inference about national development. However, the visitor would not be misled by such abundance of papers. He would have only reminiscences of the press in Europe more than a century ago.

A decade before, the UNESCO publication mentioned 13 daily newspapers with 0.8 per cent distribution per 1,000 inhabitants<sup>20</sup>. In 1974, the number of dailies and weeklies rose to 67, most of them being published from the capital<sup>21</sup>. A detailed study of the circulation of these papers and periodicals has not been conducted yet; it can be estimated nonetheless that not a single private newspaper can compete with the two government-sponsored dailies The Gorkhapatra (vernacular daily) and Rising Nepal (English daily). The Gorkhapatra as it has varied facets is the most popular paper. Its circulation figure exceeds 10,000 and it reaches a cross-section of society. As it is a singular mixture of governmental notifications and advertisements for employment (official and non-official), and other similar activities of daily life, it is a leading paper in Nepal. Its English counterpart Rising Nepal has a circulation of approximately 5,000 copies. Mostly foreigners and a small section of English-loving Nepali readers read this paper. The other dailies range in circulation from 200 to 1,000, while the corresponding figure for weeklies varies from 500 to 5,000<sup>22</sup>. The three weeklies Naya Sandesh, Matribhumi, and Samiksha top the list of weeklies in respect of circulation. The Naya-Sandesh seems to be popular because of its sensational news items, sex columns and other features of common interest. The Matribhumi Weekly, representing a section of political persuasion, reaches many people outside of Kathmandu valley. The Samiksha weekly too is a political paper but it has some distinction of its own. It



can also be estimated that these papers including a few others such as Rashtra Pukar Weekly, Arati Weekly, Pratidhwani Weekly, are apparently in a better position to survive the frequency of mortality.

One of the striking features of the Nepali Press is its cluster in the urban area of Kathmandu. Kathmandu has grown from a population of 121,019 in 1961 to 153,405 in 1971. And it is the only city with a population of over 100,000 (i.e. internationally recognized criterion for a city). However, no papers would cover the literate section of this population save the Gorkhapatra. The survey conducted by UNESCO has adopted a standard for evaluating the development of the mass media under which a country is classified as deficient in Press coverage if it produces less than ten copies of daily newspapers for every 100 inhabitants<sup>23</sup>. But, if this standard is strictly followed, the number of copies per 100 of population is only four in Asia, one in Africa and eight in Latin America. In Asia, Japan alone reaches the UNESCO standard, having one of the 22 "highest newspaper saturations in the world"<sup>24</sup>. Thus, if one would try to make a comparative study of the condition obtaining in the Press in Nepal, he would muse in amazement over the sad plight of the Press here. Even the high rate of literacy-growth does not enhance the prospect of newspaper-circulation. For it has been aptly substantiated by the dialogue with many of the students reading in higher classes, or those who have attained to different official posts, that many members of the emergent generation do not bother to read Nepali papers including the Gorkhapatra. It was amazing particularly when the author tried to substantiate this point by asking some questions regarding their reading habits. However, a negligible number of students, with their obvious political attitude, seem to be quite at home with some major developments within and without Nepal. The number of students at the higher level is an increasing phenomenon. In 1951, there were 250 higher-level students but the figure rose to 17,200 in 1971. This meant that the educational development was encompassing many other areas of national life. Although the rate of literacy growth alone does not inculcate the habit of reading newspapers or disseminating information in the remote corners of the country, yet it would be a positive factor in creating social consciousness.

As "education is both cause and effect of overall development"<sup>25</sup> it would have a far reaching consequence. But educational development in as much as it implies the growth of Journalism also, must be related to other areas of development. For the lack of communications and transportation would neither decentralize the developmental process nor would it disseminate information. Thus, the diffusion of the Press, or the circulation of news or views would be largely determined by physical factors. Perhaps this is one of the reasons, among many other prominent handicaps, why the Nepali Press barring a few papers, has not been able to cross the boundary of Kathmandu valley.

Polarization of Papers

The polarization of newspapers or periodicals has been greatly promoted either by the multiplicity of papers or by governmental miscalculation. The governmental decision to allow the publication of papers on the one hand and to withdraw, temporarily, financial assistance on the other, triggered off indignation on the part of these papers. It had been a commonplace that papers close to the administration used to get a handsome subsidy, while the deviant papers had a sense of deprivation, even though they too received assistance. But the situation did not stop there. The intervening period 1971-73, and even today, was characterized by a unique triangular conflict between the two sections of the Press and the Bista government. The power elites in those years were apparently bent on nicknaming a certain section of the press as "antina-tionalist", and the supporting section as "nationalist".

The mushrooming of papers registered from the middle of 1970 further heightened this trend. The government was also destined to play a crucial role in forging a coalition among the anti-government papers. It was interesting to note that the differences that stemmed from monetary considerations drove them to an edge of polarization along political or, to a certain degree, ideological lines.

The polarization along respective lines of thinking came to the surface following the announcement of the National Communication Service Plan in 1971. The Plan which incorporated the provision for an 11 - member Press Council consisting of a majority of journalists from Private Papers gave a fillip to the hostile Press<sup>26</sup>. The new plan, which stipulated that the majority of the Press council members would be private journalists, appeared to modify the decision of the government in favour of the interest of the Press. Accordingly, the election to send four representatives to the proposed council was held on 18 January 1972 under the supervision of the NJA. That the government was not happy with the election outcome was betrayed by its cool response to it. A section of the so-called "nationalist" Press boycotted the election, presumably taking its cue from the official line which had nevertheless been deprecated by the "hostile" Press as an "under-hand and disguised" attempt of the government to have the election postponed<sup>27</sup>.

As a corollary to this development, four representatives belonging to the "oppositional camp" were opposed by the pro-government Press interpreting the result as the victory of the "anti-nationalist" or "Pro-Party papers"<sup>28</sup>. On the face of it, the election showed certain trends to be facts of political life, highlighting, in turn, inter-Press cleavages on the one hand and the government's motivation on the other<sup>29</sup>.

Shortly thereafter, the government further deepened the crisis. Many opposition Papers lashed out at the government calling it a

"dark period in the history of Nepali journalism". Meanwhile, some members of the National Panchayat formed a "committee for the Protection of Press Freedom" and issued a statement to strongly "condemn the dictatorial and repressive policy followed by the government towards the Press"<sup>30</sup>. However, the Prime Minister sharply reacted to such allegations by calling them "wild and irresponsible" criticism being made by a section of the local Press. He also stated that the "Nepali Press has lost the confidence of people". As the government was facing widespread opposition within and without the National Panchayat, it adopted administrative measure to restrain it. On 2 September 1972, a "massive" rally was held at which the Prime Minister not only condemned his inveterate critics but also sounded the death-knell of the "oppositional" papers<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, the government amended the Provision of the Press Council as envisaged under the National Communication Service Plan, thereby depriving of membership four representatives elected earlier. Instead, the Journalist Association was also refashioned. In spite of these attempts, the division of the Press continued unabated. However by the beginning of 1974 and with the change of ministers, all papers seemed to have received financial assistance. But the deepening misunderstanding between them is not receding. This can be adduced by the recent conference of editors and publishers held in Kathmandu on 30 November 1974. Prior to the conference, the chairman of the NJA issued a statement criticizing it as yet another device for dividing the Press. The conference notwithstanding the negative attitude of the NJA, passed a resolution for setting up a "Royal Press Commission" to analyze problems bedeviling the Press in Nepal. Other resolutions passed by the conference were, among others, the amendment of the existing Press and Publication Act, the prompt withdrawal of cases against journalists whose actions were incompatible with the spirit of the Press Act, the release of arrested journalists and the impartial distribution of advertisements. Many senior journalists also stressed the need for Press freedom which "is the strongest guarantee of the development of the nation"<sup>32</sup>.

The conspicuous presence of the Minister of Communications was one of the striking features of the conference. It was obvious that the minister was anxious to maintain a neutral posture with regard to the inter-Press cleavages. The loss of faith in the impartiality of the government on the part of "anti-nationalist" papers was offset by the misgivings in the conformist papers<sup>33</sup>. It was understandable that recently many papers, with obvious biased overtones of aggressive pro-establishment tendencies, became critical of the Rijal Government, particularly when the later subsidised papers without political consideration. Until recently, the government gives Rs 1,000 and Rs 7,00 to each daily and weekly respectively. But it is up to the government alone to decide the criterion for giving financial assistance. So, papers in themselves are generally "unenterprising" and "timid". Their aspiration, their attitude, and motivation is, thus, determined by the financial assistance provided to them.

Political Orientation of the Press

It is an uphill task to find a fixed, consistent political orientation in Nepal because of the continuous tradition of personalistic, individualistic behaviour by individual owners of newspapers and periodicals. An individual is the overall in-charge of an individual paper: he is responsible for what the paper writes. These have managed to survive not so much because of their independent sources of maintenance as because of their indiscreet sources. Nor are papers the independent ventures of the affluent industrial elites as is generally the case in other countries. The alleged monetary help from other external quarters also reflects their orientation, notwithstanding the code of conduct imposed on them.

Regarding financial assistance and encouragement, some criteria have been fixed by the government. There are some positive points such as widecoverage of news, independent coverage, timely editorials, articles and commentaries, loyalty to the Crown, the nation and the system, which would be taken into account for getting additional encouragement from the government. If certain papers violate these principles and present an opposite picture, they forfeit the assistance as well as extra monetary help.

There can be little doubt that political orientation of the Press in Nepal, characterized by the more ostentatious shifts in loyalty, is determined by what the government has up its sleeves. Taking all developments so far, we see that some dailies and weeklies, described in the preceding pages, with their overt political orientations in their respective political values, have been pursuing consistent policies towards the current system and the government. Their affiliation or identification with the anti-status quo Panchayat elites becomes pronounced when they strongly advocate the need for change within the Panchayat system. Ever since the fierce debate over status quo vs. change got under way they seemed to have sided with the reformists. Some other papers having been guided by fringe benefits, were seemingly highly confused, while the rest supported the status quoists<sup>34</sup>.

The anti-status quo papers hold the view that the "goal of an exploitationless society cannot be established without political freedom". Among the dailies and weeklies, Nepal Times, Nabin Khabar, The Motherland, The Commoner, Dainik Nepal, Samaj, Swatantra Samachar, Samikshya, Rashtra Pukar, Matribhumi, Naya Sandesh and Nepal Bhasha Patrika and a few other seem to be critical of the present sterile political and economic conditions. Furthermore, some weeklies and dailies which were considered to be conformist papers, have also been airing their views in favour of change, but they want to make a distinction between the reform and the pro-Party orientation<sup>35</sup>. The former (reformists) in their opinion, are in tune with the expression of the king who stated that there was enough scope for change in the Panchayat system but the change would in no case impair the fundamentals of the system.

By 1973, three major lines of thought are seen in editorials on the Panchayat system. Some papers -, Naya Samaj, Gorkhapatra and a host of others highlighted the contributions made by King Mahendra through the Partyless Panchayat system, maintaining that the Party system was incompatible and irrelevant. Some others, on the other hand, pledged full allegiance to the Panchayat system but simultaneously stressed its shortcomings in various fields. Some others also blamed authorities occupying high positions for having indulged in conspiracies and added that the objective of the Panchayat system could not be attained only by praising it, or by condemning as "antinationalists" those who failed to do so. Yet another line of thought was evident when a paper stated that "a system which had proved suitable for the nation at one time or in one situation may not prove suitable in another"<sup>36</sup>.

These lines of approach to the present Panchayat system do not contain much substance after the declaration of the king on 16 December 1974 that he was going to constitute a Constitution Reform Commission, "in order to make the Panchas more active in accordance with the wishes of the people"<sup>37</sup>. Reacting to the decision of the king, many dailies and weeklies expressed happiness, over timely reforms to be introduced in the system. Nevertheless, they seem to have expressed such opinions in conformity with their former line of thinking. One local daily exhorted the people to express independent opinions from their respective stations in life and added that three things - Independence of the nation, the king's supremacy, and the democratic aspirations of the people - should be taken into account while reforming the constitution. In contrast to this line, another daily termed the king's decision as a "bold speech" but criticized others who want a drastic change within the system<sup>38</sup>. Despite these differences in their approach to the proposed move of the king, the Press in general seems to have formed a consensus in this regard. And perhaps, this might also help to bury the political differences so far existing between them.

#### CONCLUSION

The history of the Press in Nepal actually begins with the revolution of 1950, even though some humble start was made before. Nepal had varied experiences of Political Pluralism as a consequence of the ushering-in of democracy, the sort of thing seen in other liberal democratic countries. In short, the ten years period was the period of "rising aspirations" when institutions were created, papers published, and excessive enthusiasm shown by the people belonging to various walks of life. As the people had no previous 'apprenticeship' in this kind of political life, it was not unnatural on their part to innovate institutions without, however, disciplining their newly aroused enthusiasm and behaviour in accordance with new values. This short political experience in liberal values had also an impact on the post - 1960 period, even though the new situation demanded some sort of conformism to the established political order, failing however to limit plural

thoughts, to a certain degree, in Nepal. Therefore, the Press also enjoyed freedom within the boundary drawn by the system.

In the light of our analyses discussed earlier, a few observations can be advanced regarding the condition of the Press in Nepal. First, journalism in Nepal, either in the public or Private sector, has not yet shown positive symptoms of development, much less professionalization and specialization. But, during this short period, a few educated young men have undergone training in this field, although their knowledge seems to be under constraint because of the conditions around them. Moreover, paper producing is a hobby, a part-time job, a source of livelihood for some individuals and not a "full-time vocation to be followed in its own right".

Second, the larger the number of papers, the greater would be the intensity of the problems of the press. Papers are published by individuals who have no adequate resources to run them. Nor do they have professional zeal or a sense of mission. The paper-explosion very much helps to vitiate the climate, in the sense that these papers lack a common minimum professional standard, and hence fall easy prey to subjectivities and sensitivities. The government is equally responsible for creating such a situation of conflict, because it is the government that heightens inter-press differences by aligning itself with either one or the other section of the Press. This role has been facilitated by the resources it commands. In brief, it can be maintained, quite convincingly, that the mushrooming of papers is, in large measure, a governmental product for achieving short-term personal objectives, without much care for the system or the Press.

Third, in no country where political pluralism (in our context to a limited sense) is allowed to function, Papers are not ordinarily published or owned by the government. The publication of the two largest dailies (Gorkhapatra and Rising Nepal) with huge resources and relatively well-trained staff for their maintenance can only lead to the decline of the Press in the private sector. No other papers can match them in form and content; nor can they separate themselves from the hegemony of these government-sponsored papers. Moreover, the only news agency - RSS- has also made their condition miserable, for all papers are dependent upon the RSS, with the concomitant effects of uniformity of news in all papers. As a consequence, people can not find any difference between the news items in the private and in the official dailies.

Finally, there has been a considerable decrease in the intensity and volume of principled dissent. Perhaps this is the main reason why the political role of the Press - in forcing the government to take Press opinion into account while making decisions - is becoming negligible. Sometimes, mostly out of desperation, the opinion of the Press is characterized by what Lerner calls, though in a different context, "aggression" or "regression". Fed by sensationalism, personalism, and make-believe rumours, the Press

also lacks credibility: this can be attributed to many factors-economic, politico-cultural and circumstantial. As a paper is the domain of an individual, its credibility would be considerably determined by individual activities.

It is interesting to know that Kathmandu-based political, bureaucratic, and other elites perhaps spend sleepless nights when they fail to read foreign papers, especially Indian Papers, in the evening, but nobody seems to have given serious consideration to improving the lot of the Press in Nepal. So the Press has not been able to make headway in the right perspective. Judging by the way the "fourth estate of democracy" has been ignored in Nepali society, it would not be out of place to stress the need for royal intervention in order to clean up the mess. This task is simplified by the patent fact that the Press, including the widest section of Nepali society, looks upon the king as the only problem-solver, because monarchy enjoys consensus, and commands respect. A drastic but judicious planning for improving the present malady of the Press is perhaps the demand of the hour.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Herbert Passin, "Writer and Journalism in the Transitional Society" in Lucian W. Pye ed., Communications And Political Development (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 82.
2. Grishma Bahadur Devkota, Nepal Ko Chhapakhana Ra Patra Patrikako Itihas (History of the Printing Press and Papers of Nepal) Kathmandu, 1967).
3. Kamal P. Malla, "The Intellectual in Nepalese Society" in Pashupati Shumsher and Kamal P. Malla eds; Nepal In Perspective (CEDA, Kathmandu, 1973) p. 270.
4. See Yugeshwar Prasad Verma, The English Language Press in Nepal, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Tribhuvan University, 1973, p. 18.
5. Malla, n. 3, p. 277.
6. L.S. Baral "Nepal's Apprenticeship in Democracy 1951-1960", India quarterly (New Delhi), Vol. 27 July-September 1971, p. 185.
7. Devkota, n. 2, p. 42.
8. Gunnar Myrdal, The Challenge of World Poverty (Penguin, London, 1971), p. 469.
9. Proclamations, speeches and Messages (HMG, 1967) p. 19.
10. See Swatantra Samachar and Halkhabar, 7 and 8 March 1961.

11. Within a short span of time, the government banned Kalpana, Dainik Nepal, Philingo, Samaj, Samiksha, Halkhabar, Swatantra Samachar and arrested editors of some of these and other papers. For details see Nepal Press Digest (Kathmandu), 1961-62.
12. Nepal Gazette, 29 Magh 2019 (1963).
13. Nepal Gazette, Vol. 12, 12 January 1963.
14. Samiksha Weekly, 19 February 1970.
15. The Motherland, 7 December 1968.
16. Gorkhapatra, 3 December 1968.
17. Nepal Gazette, Vol 20 (Supplementary no 18 (A), 26 August 1970) See also Nepal Ain Sangraha Purak Khanda 2027 (1970) p. 85-89.

The amendment in the section 30 of the Press Act was as follows: In case it is decided to impose a ban on any news report, criticism or publication, which disturbs the law-and-order situation or makes an attempt or instigates others to do so, or which commits any of the offenses mentioned in subsection of section 5 of the Act with the motive of undermining the Partyless Democratic Panchayat System which has been established according to the constitution of Nepal, His Majesty's Government may issue an order imposing a ban on such news report, criticism or other publication. But before doing so, His Majesty's Government shall consult the Press Council. In case it is not possible to hold such consultations before imposing the ban, His Majesty's Government shall do so within 7 days thereafter. The person aggrieved by the imposition of such a ban may file an appeal to the supreme court within 35 days.

18. According to the records maintained by the Department of Information, the number of daily newspapers published in Nepal before the amendment of the Press Act in 1970 was 21, while that of periodicals was 31. Of these, 16 dailies and 20 periodicals got financial assistance from the government. The breakdown of the assistance was as follows:

Dailies: Naya Samaj (21,000), Samaj (21,000), Swatantra Samachar (21,000) New Herald (18,000), The Motherland (17,000), Hamrodesh (16,000), The Commoner (12,000), Dainik Nepal (11,000), Nepal Samachar (10,000), Nepal Bhasha Patrika (9,000), Naya Nepal (8,000), Samaya (8,000) and Nepal Times (6,000)

Weeklies: Dhanusha (7,200), Samiksha (7,200), Arati (7,800), Jagrit (6,000), Naya Sandesh (5,400), Pratidhwani (4,700), Himal Chuli (1,200) Seema (1,000), Matribhumi (5,400) and Nepal Sandesh (Hindi, Patna) (5,400).



19. Nepal Press Digest, Vol. 5 No. 5 1961, pp 2-3.
20. Ibid., No 4, p.6.
21. Statistics of Illiteracy (World Congress on Illiteracy, Teheran, 1965) quoted in E. Lloyd Sommerlad, The Press in Developing Countries (Atma Ram and Sons, Delhi, 1966), p. 52.
22. Figure supplied by the Department of Publicity, His Majesty's Government, 1974.
23. This is the tentative estimate of Publicity Department.
24. See n. 21, p. 1
25. Ibid.
26. Harka Gurung, Graduates in Nepal (National Planning Commission), Kathmandu, 1972.
27. The 11- member Press Council provided for an ex-judge of the supreme court, the chairman of the Nepal Journalist Association as the exofficio member secretary, Directory of the Publicity Department, one editor either from the Gorkhapatra or Rising Nepal, The General Manager of the RSS as an ex-officio member, four elected representatives of Journalists and two members to be nominated by the nine members mentioned above. See Rashtriya Sanchar Yo-Jana 2028 (1971) p. 51.53.
28. The Motherland, 20 January, Dainik Nepal 17 January, and Nabin Khabar, 20 January 1972.
29. The four elected representatives were Manindra Raj Shrestha (The Motherland), Chandra Lal Jha (Nepal Times), Mukunda Biyogi (Matribhumi) and Vishwa Nath Luitel (Samaj). Gorkhapatra, 19 January 1972.
30. Author's interview with some editors belonging to the "nationalist" camp corroborated the point that the inter-Press conflict was one of political values. The present Chairman of the NJA, Gorkarna Dev Pandey, also told the author that in a partyless system there should be no free play of party-oriented views or activities. For countering that kind of trend, many papers also got financial assistance in that period.
31. Nepal Times 16 and Gorkhapatra, 17 July 1972.
32. Prime Minister, Kirti Nidhi Bista's public speech on 2 September 1972.
33. Rising Nepal, Nepal Times and Samaj, 1 December 1974.

34. The Chairman of the NJA, Gorkarna Dev Pandey was critical of the presence of the Minister of Communication, Rodha Prasad Ghimire, at the conference.
35. See Nepal Press Digest, Vol. 14, No 22, 1970, pp. 257. For specific articles see also Matribhimi, Matribhumi Weekly, 2 June and Nepal Times, 5 June 1970.
36. Author's interview with some editors substantiated this view.
37. See in detail Gorkhapatra, Naya Samaj, Dainik Nepal, Rashtra Pukar (13 December) and Nepal Bhasha Patrika 13-17 December 1973.
38. Nepal Times, Naya Samaj, Dainik Nepal, Samaj, The Motherland and a number of others 17 December 1974.