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Research Article

The Antecedents of Media Capture in Experiential Texts in Nepal: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Based on literature review and analysis of a corpus of documents with references to the evolution of journalism in Nepal, the paper has eclectically and purposively selected publications that referred to the study period, roughly 1950-2000, and had insights on periodicals/ newspapers and the operational environment of the period that was marked by little or no readership and advertising. The paper argues that the unprofessionalism and partisanship evident in media in Nepal reflect its failure to fully transition to independent, impartial content production, the normative expectation of citizens from journalism in democracies. Nepal's newspapers began exercising formal freedoms in the 1950s but have never been fully independent in practice. The country had low literacy, low readership, and a largely traditional economy when newspaper journalism began, and the early publications sought support from partisan interests and/or government to remain viable.

Keywords: Media capture, ideological indoctrination, partisanship, professionalism, media history

Introduction

The printed press arrived in Nepal in 1908 B.S.ⁱ (1851 A.D.) and was largely used to print official stationery, announcements and notices, and stamps (Devkota 18; Dixit 19-20), and later books and periodicals/ newspapers. Printing, however, was strictly controlled under the dictatorship established by Jung Bahadur Kunwar (1846), the first Rana prime minister. The Rana rule in Nepal ended in January 1951 (Savada xvi). The Ranas had ensured that publishing was either a government undertaking or done by private businesses that had approval of the rulers, reminiscent of the controls on printing in Europe in the sixteenth century or before Reformation (Poe 116). Literacy in nineteenth century Nepal was a luxury and available only to those approved by the Ranas, and therefore there was no readership or a market to support

periodicals/newspapers to assist them to grow into publications independent of state and political interests, which had been the case in the United States in the late nineteenth century (Petrova 805).

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to understand the historical development of newspapers in Nepal to isolate tendencies symptomatic of what we understand today as “media capture” – a situation where the media is neither fully controlled nor fully independent of various interests resulting from non-transparent exchanges of both monetary and non-monetary favors between various interests in politics and business and media and journalists. Capture here is discussed as something that applies to both media and journalists, or media/journalists as used in all references hereon.

Given the fairly recent emergence of the media capture paradigm – the theory was first articulated in a 2006 paper by the economists like Timothy Besley and Andrea Pratt in 2005 (Schiffrin 4) – it is important to understand whether capture is a product of the twenty-first century, or if its symptoms have always existed but has taken until now to recognize them. This understanding can help explain why Nepal’s media have deviated from the established norms of independent, professional journalism and have instead continued to serve various interests particularly, political. The underlying assumption is that isolating symptoms of capture by analyzing historical texts and first-person accounts of journalists can provide a basis for explaining why twenty-first century Nepali journalism remains in an intermediate state between independence and political “clientelism” (Papathanassopoulos and Hallin 184-85), which is essentially a state of capture.

Political clientelism in media of Southern Europe and Latin America is rooted in the history of the press where there “has been an advocacy press, created more for the purpose of making politics than making money” (Papathanassopoulos and Hallin 184-88), which may have parallels in Nepal where such media have also existed for over 70 years, taking 1951 as the starting point for privately produced journalism. Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Danniell C. Hallin argue that the clientelism – also evident in Nepal – can be one explanation for capture tendencies as it “forces the logic of journalism to merge with other social logics – of party politics and family privilege, for instance – and it breaks down the horizontal solidarity of journalists...” (189).

The media capture framework provides one explanation to why media has not functioned independently in democracies, even when there are only a few or no direct control on their operations. It exists in markets where there is journalistic professionalism, or “the idea that journalists serve a public interest that transcends the interests of particular political parties, owners and social groups” (Papathanassopoulos and Hallin 189), but, as in the case in Nepal, it also exhibits partisanship, bias and other unprofessional practices. The latter are typical for captured media environments, where the capturers influence news and current affairs content for manipulating public (audience) perceptions and decisions, most importantly voting decisions (Besley and Prat 721). Even though both money and power can be used to secure influence over media, one can argue that money, perhaps has a greater role because while embodying economic power in capitalistic societies, the exchanges can also be hidden allowing the media to continue exhibiting a semblance of independence even while disseminating influenced content. This money could come from governments, politicians, powerful interest groups and businesses and could include as subsidies, bribes, advertising, and other favors, etc. that result in financial benefits to media/journalists, etc. (Besley and Prat 721; Schiffrin, “Introduction to Special Issue on Media Capture” 1-10; Dragomir, *Media Capture in Europe* 1-25; Mungiu-Pippidi 91-92). There are three basic rationales for owning and operating media, which are power, public service and profit (Nielsen 34). The first

motive is self-explanatory: the case of private media. The second implies facilitating public service through private media with autonomy from government. What needs to be understood here is that publicly funded media that are not independent are but tools for exercising state power. The third motive is profit. Media capture is a construct where “media (are) being operated not for profit or for public service, but as an instrument for the pursuit of other interests, either purely political or tangled up between politics and commerce” (Nielsen 38).

In Nepal, the successive governments have used money from the state coffers to “support” media, which, this paper assumes has *prima facie* been used to extract the favorable coverage. Government support to media was part of public policy after the Press Commission Report 2015 B.S. (1959 A.D.) had recommended that the government should support media with advertising and also as a customer of newspapers, to ensure a sound relationship between media and the government, as that would also “assist towards stopping unfounded criticism” (Press Council Nepal, *Prakashanko Digdarshan (Publication Guide 308)*). This statement indicates an underlying interest, or the “string” attached to government advertising. To ensure fair distribution, the report suggested that advertising should be decided on the basis of regularity (at least a year of continued publication), to people who had been running newspapers for two years (even if irregular) and on the basis of circulation, among others. The report had categorically said that the government should not provide journalists and media with direct financial support (Press Council Nepal, *Prakashanko Digdarshan (Publication Guide 310)*).

In 2006, the economists Besley and Prat proposed a model of democratic politics where media capture has an internal cause or origin because of how media organizations are structured. “Each media outlet faces two possible sources of profit – commercial profit and profit from collusion with government” (Besley and Prat 21) and this collusion could include direct financial flows and bribes and indirect means such as support to media through state advertising. The governments can also manipulate policies and laws to favor companies run by the media owners in exchange for desired coverage. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi has provided a succinct explanation on what a captured media looks like, which when unpacked can provide a basis for understanding the historical, traditional, and institutional roots of media capture in Nepal. According to her, media capture is

a situation in which the media has *not succeeded in becoming autonomous* (emphasis added) to manifest a will of its own and to exercise its main function, notably of informing people, *but has persisted in an intermediate state* (emphasis added), whereas various groups, not just the government, use it for other purposes. (91)

This captured media landscape is characterized by concentrated, non-transparent ownership of media, political control of media, strong links between media and political elites, and “infiltration of the media by secret services” (Mungiu-Pippidi 91). Capture is operationalized by “financing media and journalists willing to toe the government line and by not funding independent, critical media, authorities manage to suppress large parts of the media sector” (Dragomir, “Control the Money” 2). The governments use various tools capture including public funding for state-run and administered media, official or public advertising, subsidies, and market disruption measures.

Two relevant symptoms for examining the antecedents of media capture in Nepal are: (a) media serving some interest (political, business, etc.) other than the public interest, and (b) political control of media. Financing would have been the other way to track down capture but has not been attempted owing to the difficulties in studying the typically secretive exchanges, a situation also experienced by Dragomir in Africa. What

was used instead as indicators of capture was the biased editorial coverage and lack of transparency in funding of media outlets.

Media capture operates through favor exchanges between those seeking to influence media, its owners, and journalists, particularly in countries where journalism and politics are intertwined. The governments seeking to influence media owners can frame policies and enact laws to favor owners and can provide journalists with paid junkets and appointments to state agencies in exchange for favorable content. In Nepal, such favors have often been linked to partisan choices journalists make early in their careers. Ideological conditioning of journalists and political alignments of media owners in anticipation of financial and other favors, causes them to be answerable to partisan forces which is when they stop exercising their judgement. Instead, they then begin to function as cogs and springs of the party propaganda machines remaining in a perpetual state of influence and capture.

Methodology

This paper is based on literature review and analysis of documents with references to the evolution of journalism in Nepal, selected eclectically and purposively to include publications relevant to the period of the study, roughly from 1950-2000 that had insights on periodicals/ newspapers of the day and the operational environment, and were readily available. The texts in the following 11 publications were closely read, isolating references that indicated some give-and take, which were then analyzed for making the inferences. The texts reviewed include Devkota's *Nepalko Chapakhana ra Patrapatrikako Itihas [A History of Nepal's Press and Mass Media]*, Savada's *Nepal and Bhutan: Country Studies*, Dhakal's *Teen Sambatsar [Three Years]*, *Nepali Patrakaritako Bikaskram [Development of Nepali Mass Media]*, Dixit's *Jeevan: Mahaviyan [Life: A Great Journey]*, Nepal's *Mero Samaya [My Time]*, Aryal's *Media Reader*, Birahi's *Aago Niveko Chaina [Fire Not Extinguished]*, Sharma's *Patrakaritaka Satisal: Maniraj Upadhyaya Smriti Grantha [The Pillars of Mass Media: A Collection of Memoirs of Maniraj Upadhyaya]*, Silwal's *Kalam [A Pen]*, and Adhikari's *A Compassionate Journalist: The Life and Times of Bharat Dutta Koirala*.

The Concept of Media Capture

The printing press arrived in Nepal almost 300 years after the invention of moveable type in Europe but publishing was strictly controlled: all presses were either owned by members of the ruling Ranas, their *gurus* (priests) and sidekicks (Devkota 24, 33). The expansion of literacy after mechanized printing had helped newspapers to spread across Europe within 100 years (Poe 111-12). In Nepal, the country had neither the literacy nor an industrial economy required to create demand for reading, and advertising to support newspapers in the 100 years after printing was started, but there was a similarity: Like European publishing (and resulting literacy) that had helped bring about an end to feudal rule starting with the American and French revolutions, Nepal also had its first and successful political uprising against authoritarian rule in 1951.

According to Andrea Matles Savada, a political opposition to the Rana rule had begun after World War I, with Nepali language newspapers published in India already discussing dissent in publications such as *Tarun Gorkha* and *Gorkha Sansar* in Kumaon, and *Gorkhali* in Benaras (Varanasi) (36). In Bihar, Nepal's first political party, Praja Parishad, had begun publishing *Janata* weekly that advocated democracy and the overthrow of Rana rule. The first national plan (1956) did not have an estimate of literacy, which was two (Adhikari 5) to five percent when the Ranas fell (Savada 94), which also explains the low circulation and readership of the early newspapers).

Available records on the press during the Rana Period (1846-1950) and after democracy was established in February 1951, during the transition to democracy 1951-1960, royal takeover and introduction of Panchayat Rule (1960-1990) and the restoration of democracy in 1990 provide insights on both direct and indirect controls that were exercised to influence media content. It is evident that both partisan efforts to influence the press as well as the exercise of state power (and money) to control content have persisted throughout Nepal's modern history beginning in 1951.

Much literature on media capture focuses on how governments and businesses influence media (also in collusion) by trading favors, while not as much can be found on political capture, particularly that resulting from partisanship. Anya Schiffrin made references to political elites and media capture, saying that political parties and corporations work "in tandem" to pressure media to produce favorable coverage, but did not elaborate (Schiffrin). Arguably, one reason why partisanship is not discussed as a cause of capture is the origin of most literature which has been mainly in the West, where political partisanship of media has been a thing of the past except – perhaps – until the arrival of MSNBC that began to carry liberal voices and Fox News, the conservative side in the United States (McIntyre 69).

Partisanship and media capture have been discussed in the newly democratizing countries of Europe (Ryabinska 46-60) and in Afghanistan (Relly and Zanger 1-23) where it has remained a strong factor determining the independence of media content. This provides a basis to suspect that its endemicity in other developing countries, including Nepal. Jeannine E. Relly and Margaret Zanger also discussed the susceptibility of media work to capture by external forces in situations where "imported journalism values are layered upon previous and continued institutional arrangements" (1) and concluded on the need to study capture under six typologies, economic, political, cultural, legal, bureaucratic, and societal, that could be useful to understand capture in contexts where media operate under distinct traditions and institutional arrangements.

Partisanship was a feature of American journalism in the late nineteenth century before advertising 'liberated' newspapers from political influence. The early newspapers there were extensions of political parties tasked with ensuring information flows as desired by the party members (Petrova 791). In return, they received "direct and indirect subsidies from political parties and better access to political information. The costs included restrictions on the content of the newspaper, i.e., a lack of control, and the inability to address a broad audience with diverse political preferences" (Petrova 793).

The Antecedents of Media Capture in Nepal

A review of documents related to the evolution of journalism in Nepal suggests the existence of strong tendencies of capture by political parties, which began with the use of journalism as a political tool in 1935 by the Praja Parishad (Savada 36). Narayan Dhakal has provided a fairly detailed account of how political influence worked in party-run papers during the three years he had worked at newspapers run by the Marxist-Leninist party. The account explains the party's *modus operandi* for controlling information flows by placing ideologically indoctrinated cadres in newspapers they owned/funded and using them as part of the propaganda machines as evidenced by the instructions given at the "fraction" meetings at newspapers he worked.. Even though Kundan Aryal has argued that partisanship was replaced by commercialism after 1990, when democracy was reestablished in Nepal after 30 years of direct rule by the king, there is evidence suggesting that political influence on journalism is anything but gone. One example was the oath-taking ceremony of elected officials to the journalists' association affiliated with the then Nepal Communist Party, (Onlinekhabar, "NCP

Classifies Journalists") and appointment of journalists to party publicity units, and election campaigning teams that have been widely reported by media. These show a definite increase in party influence on journalism, even though the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) had retained only one newspaper, *Budhabar*, as its mouthpiece after 1995 (K. Aryal 73).

Many newspapers of the 1960-1990 period opposed to the regime were controlled by, or were sympathetic to the banned political parties, while the government also maintained a firm grip over them through various means including criminal sanctions, and financing. The pro-communist papers functioned as direct extensions of the party, while the pro-democratic press operated under directions of party leaders even if they had individuals as editors/ publishers.

In the case of the communist party press, Dhakal said a "party fraction" (unit) headed by a senior party member made all major decisions, including assigning and reassigning cadre-journalists (14-15, 68). He has described how Raghuji Pant, a columnist, was assigned to another party wing following the party's displeasure over an opinion piece on Chinese student protests (Dhakal 41-43). It was also not unusual for Nepali Congress party leaders to anoint cadres as editors, as it had been in the case of Harihar Birahi, who was assigned to become editor of *Tarun* – a Nepali Congress party weekly – by B.P. Koirala while in exile in India (233). Birahi worked as editor of *Bimarsha* weekly, a strong Nepali Congress voice during the final years of the Panchayat system.

Partisan control of media, however, did not end with the establishment of democracy in 1990. Kishore Nepal has discussed how he used to receive direct orders from party leaders on what should be broadcast on Nepal Television after he had been appointed as a board member (408-9). Individual bias of the journalists also mattered, as one can infer from Nepal's account on how he had blocked broadcast of a statement by the Prime Minister's opponents within the Nepali Congress party, which he believed that would have affected the government negatively; and in another case the stopping of an interview of a communist party minister in the Interim Government of 1990. The following section discusses capture resulting from partisanship of journalists, and its mechanics where possible, largely based on published accounts, before attempting to draw inferences on capture symptoms evident in Nepal's media.

Media Capture during the Rana Rule

One early indication of media capture in Nepal can be traced back to the 1930s, during the reign of the fifteenth Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher Rana who had used money to influence newspapers. According to Kamal Mani Dixit, Rana understood the growing influence of printed papers and had devised a "good tool to control media" where he allowed two publications *Sharada* (monthly) and *Uddhyog* (fortnightly) to publish and had given them (currency) 900 each. Similar support had been obtained by *Sahitya Srot* and *Aankha* (Dixit, "Press Ra Akhbar" 27.). These publications shut down after 1950. "This was the only incentive and support provided by the government to publications before the dawn of democracy," (Dixit 27). The Rana-era publications were largely apolitical (K.C 169-170), and even though *Jagaran* is said to be the first politically-oriented publication that had appeared in Nepal three days before the end of Rana rule (Dahal 30), *Yugbani* and *Nepal Pukar* were two other weeklies with political content and both were published from Benaras and Kolkata (India), respectively (Dixit 28).

Media Capture: 1950-1960

The daily *Awaj* began publishing on 19 February 1951 – a day after King Tribhuvan proclaimed the establishment of democracy, and freedom of expression and other civil rights. The paper was a private initiative but had received government support and was supportive of both the government and the Nepali Congress party. It shut down after about two years (Devkota 34). The government was formed in accordance with the *Antarim Sasanbidhan 2007* (Interim Statute, March 1951), which under Part 2, Article 16, *Ka* provided freedoms of expression and publication (Devkota 211). It was also the first recorded instance of a post-1950 government, one of the Nepali Congress and Rana representatives, providing financial support to a newspaper though it is not clear how much or on what terms. The early government support existed alongside efforts to control media. For example, B.P. Koirala a member of the post-revolution Rana-Nepali Congress government had said government was not against curtailing press freedom but would not “remain silent” against those publishing news that was untrue and harmful to the government (Mainali 7).

B.P. Koirala was later elected as prime minister following the 1959/60 election, and sometime in March 1960 an editor had approached him for support to start a newspaper, after his effort to make a similar request to the king had been deflected by a royal palace secretary. Madan Mani Dixit had asked the Koirala Rs. 600 each month and had in exchange offered his conditions – support him as elected leader of the country, for being a pillar of democracy, and for his efforts to overthrow the Rana rulers (Dixit.ⁱⁱ He had also requested the Prime Minister to help with the registration of his paper, *Samikchya*. Dixit has mentioned receiving such support for about four months, after which he had also published some critical stories about the government but not of Koirala as such. This can be considered as another early example of political financing and its influence on media, even though it is not clear if the money had come from the state coffers or from the Prime Minister himself. When Dixit had made the request with self-imposed conditions, Koirala is said to have asked, “*Afno yo bachan lai palanata garnuhuncha?*” (“Will you abide by this commitment of yours?”ⁱⁱⁱ) (Dixit 251), which indicates an agreement to the tradeoff. Dixit said that he received at total of Rs.2150 from Koirala (265) at a meeting he had with King Mahendra – who had also given him travel expenses for a visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The support from Koirala stopped after three issues (261).

Media Capture: 1960-1990s

The period between 1960 to 1990 was one where King Mahendra had dismissed the elected government, which under a new constitutional arrangement, Panchayat System, had him at the top of the power pyramid. In the years that followed, Nepal had a party-less parliament which Namboodiri described as the “third way” of democracy, “distinct from the one party and multiparty democracy” prevalent at the time (Namboodiri 94). It was a period of swift and effective sanctions against media critical of the regime, under the Press and Publication Act 1963 that allowed government to close newspapers and jail editors and publishers without appeal (Baral 174, Dahal 34). The obvious targets were newspapers supportive of the banned political parties and those published by the parties. Even a newspaper that was considered independent, *Samaj* daily, which according to its editor had no political line, no government “investment” and was not driven by any interest – was not spared for its reporting (Dahal 34; Devkota 35).

Government controls of the press during the Panchayat period were similar to those imposed by the British colonialists in India. Tendencies of power worship and

extortion of sources were also not uncommon. It was also a period where “(journalists) openly threatened businesses and politicians with character assassination and exposes; they extracted bribes and special favors...(through) ‘envelope journalism,’” (Adhikari 173). Since journalism had yet to become a viable business, money either came from government or from advertisers, political parties and even foreign embassies (Dahal 33; Nepal 147).

Alongside strict sanctions, the government had also found ways to support newspapers and had classified newspapers to provide them advertising: a form of financial assistance (Devkota 161-165) and supported almost every type of newspaper. Even those identified as pro-Nepali Congress or pro-Communist received government support. The government financing had come to light in 1970 when a minister had disclosed the assistance provided to newspapers between 1969-1970 in the Rashtriya Panchayat, the king’s parliament. The supporters had received “handsome subsidies” and even others received a certain share (Baral 175, 178); this inequality in financial support, the author has argued, encouraged the press to polarize politically and ideologically. However, based on analysis of memoirs of journalists of the day such as Harihar Birahi, Narayan Dhakal, Kishore Nepal and Madan Mani Dixit, one can argue that financial support was but one reason for the polarization because there was also strong ideological foundation among journalists, similar to “cognitive capture” (Stiglitz 9), which explained their partisan positions.

There was still another way the government supported the media. It was to purchase copies of supportive newspapers. During King Mahendra’s Back to the Village National Campaign in 1975-1979, for example, the campaign office had purchased 100-500 copies of such newspapers (Dahal 35). Further amidst the political financing, there was still another player at large. Kishore Nepal had papers that supported India and those that were against; the supporters received advertising from the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, which also purchased copies of such newspapers. However, none of the newspapers were financially viable because they had little or no income from subscriptions and almost no commercial advertising. They relied on monthly support that came from the government but served one political interest or another (147-148).

Press related laws were relaxed briefly after King Birendra announced a referendum on the political system: the Panchayat system vs. or multiparty democracy, in May 1979 following widespread student protests. This announcement was followed by relaxation of controls on media and a spurt in newspaper publication (Aryal et al 37)

Media Capture: 1990-2008

Nepal had formal democracy after 1990, which was disrupted by different political events such as the violent Maoist “People’s War” (1996-2006), massacre of the royal family (2001), the takeover of executive power by King Gyanendra (2005) and protests leading to reestablishment of democracy in 2006. One can argue that political partisanship that was a distinct feature of private sector Nepali journalism before 1990 remained a major influence in the years leading to the twenty-first century causing media to remain in a perpetual state of capture in terms of their inability to exercise their own wills. The following section discusses partisan controls that existed before 1990 and the influence that has had on journalism.

Partisanship and Media Capture

Documentation on journalism in Nepal before 1990 suggests that there were some journalists like Maniraj Upadhyaya of *Samaj*, Chandralal Jha of *Nepal Times*, and Gopal Das Shrestha of *The Commoner* in his later years (Mainali 3-39; Nepal 147-55),

who practiced independent journalism, while most others had picked sides. They either supported the government or specific politicians therein or were supportive of one ideological persuasion or another. After democracy was restored in 1990 many partisan journalists were rewarded by politicians with appointments to state positions and other perks, which conveyed a strong message which I argue was a wrong message – to others joining journalism as their profession: that it is okay to pick sides. The communist party-run papers also continued to function as mouthpieces or willing surrogates, and those supporting the Nepali Congress and other political forces also continued operations in accordance with the wishes of their political masters.

Many pre-1990 editors and journalists were political activists before they began journalism. Harihar Birahi, for example, had gone to India to join the Nepali Congress' revolution when he had been asked by the party leader to work at *Tarun*. He has made a rare admission of the conflict that results from having dual roles as party activist and journalist: "Even after having given more importance to journalism than the party and being involved in it full-time, I feel that I have not been able to be 'professional'," (Birahi 246). He has argued that rather than make journalism a profession, he saw it as a "weapon for change", a platform for expressing the truth as he observed it, and his opinions. He did not have issues about doing journalism in support of the party and against the Panchayat, and the politicians of the day also considered such journalists as being party cadre rather than independent professionals. He has recounted one instance when he had arranged an interview with a senior Nepali Congress. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, who later went on to become the Interim Prime Minister, had said, "Oh! *Babu* (a reverent form of address someone younger) you're not only a journalist but also a party worker. Please do not get angry ... the interview will not take place today" (Birahi 254). Bhattarai had added, "I will give you a small (sic) interview (a day before the weekly *Bimarsha* published). But it has to be printed on the front page. In bigger font than others, in a manner in which all can see" (255).

Another account by Narayan Dhakal, a member of the Marxist-Leninist party and also a journalist assigned to party publications, provides information on how the control operated on the left side of the political spectrum. His account covers three years in party journalism, including dismissal from *Prakash* weekly to accommodate another party worker and reappointment to work as editor at another paper, *Dristi*, and the eventual discharge. After dismissal from *Prakash* (14-15), Dhakal had demanded that he also be made secretary of the party unit overseeing the paper if he were to take on the position as editor of *Dristi* (36). This unit was headed by senior party leaders, first by one known by his pseudonym Comrade Bibek (Madhav Kumar Nepal) (34) and later by another Comrade Pankaj (Jhala Nath Khanal) (68). This unit was in charge of all major decisions – hiring, reassigning, and even sanctioning journalists. The party also sent regular write-ups, under pseudonyms, for publication. Three papers run by the party at the time were *Dristi*, *Chhalphal* and *Prakash*.

Comrade Pankaj – head of the party's unit at *Dristi* when Dhakal was the editor – went on to become minister in the Interim Government formed in 1990 but had continued to instruct Dhakal. On one instance the minister's assistant had asked him to carry a certain story in the paper, which Dhakal had passed on to another paper – *Chhalphal* – for publication, leading to an altercation with the minister. At the time, there had been a change in the leadership of the party unit at the paper, and Dhakal said he told the minister to get a party decision if he wanted him to abide by his instructions. At that the minister is said to have said, "You have to publish what I tell you to because the party has sent me to oversee the government" (Dhakal 72). Dhakal eventually left the

newspaper, when the party decided to appoint someone else as editor and a mediation effort by the then party general secretary between him and Comrade Pankaj had failed.

Another document has discussed the benefits journalists derive from partisan journalism how parties and politicians, and the journalists' own partisan positions, influence journalistic output. Nepal has recounted receiving instructions from party leaders while he was at Nepal Television and also advising the then Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. The party chairperson and Prime Minister had, for example, asked him to interview Sher Bahadur Deuba (who later went on to become prime minister for five times) on television as he wanted to promote Deuba. Nepal had complied to the request (405).

Nepal had been given "responsibility of controlling and managing the news department of Nepal Television," (Nepal 408) and had on one instance stopped broadcast of one interview of a communist minister in the Interim Government. It was edited and broadcast only after the Prime Minister intervened and the "apatijanak ansa" (section of concern) was edited out. On another instance, the Nepali Congress General Secretary had instructed him to broadcast a critical statement against the then Home Minister "as it was". Nepal said he did not comply, as doing that would have embarrassed the government led by Bhattarai. One can even argue that the journalism that Nepal has described him as doing during those years is something beyond just influence. According to Nepal, he had accompanied the Prime Minister on various trips to cover campaign speeches, and at times, "After his speech he (Prime Minister) would take my note book and make notes of issues that should be covered with importance" (Nepal 413). At the time was advising the Prime Minister while also serving as editor of *Deshantar* weekly.

Nepal has also provided insights into how the government tried to influence content of the private press, after an elected government had been installed. The Prime Minister's press advisor Jaya Prakash Gupta, used to come to the office of *Suruchi* weekly where he worked, each week a day before it was published (Nepal, 420). Even though the press advisor did not directly influence content, his presence there was enough for journalists to get the message. Nepal was eventually sacked from the newspaper after which he began working with the Kantipur Media Group (427).

By Nepal's account, even publishers at *Kantipur*, which was then a new private broadsheet launched in 1991, had made its political choice. He had joined *Kantipur* in January 2003 after which paper took on the policy to support Sher Bahadur Deuba, then the leader of the opposition party (Nepal 432), which Nepal claims to have facilitated, following which, the publishers used to hold "regular consultations" with the opposition leader at his official residence in Maharajgunj. It could be more than a coincidence, perhaps, that the Kantipur Group was issued a terrestrial television broadcasting license, the first among private stations, in April 2001 during Deuba's second stint as prime minister from August 2001 to October 2002 (Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers; Ministry of Information and Communication Technology). This license helped the media group to consolidate across all platforms: print, radio, and television to become the largest company.

After Sher Bahadur Deuba became the Prime Minister of Nepal in 1995, Nepal was appointed as chairperson of Nepal Television. Based on his experience at the state broadcaster, Nepal has argued why state media cannot be independent (or remain captured by design):

Because there is political pressure on broadcasting, and the hiring of even ordinary staff, the leadership of the agency does not get opportunity for quality work for the (good of the) corporation. The bureaucracy cannot withstand

political pressure, and those hired have to make some compromises for doing quality work. (435)

The Nepali Congress party won the election in 1999 and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai became the Prime Minister, who then offered Nepal the job as his press advisor which had lasted till December 2000. Bhattarai was succeeded by Girija Prasad Koirala, and by Sher Bahadur Deuba again in August 2001. Deuba then appointed him as General Manager of the Gorkhapatra Corporation, and editor of *Gorkhapatra*.

As discussed above, an analysis of the symptoms of media capture in Nepal based on texts related to the evolution of journalism provide many examples of unprofessional practices. These stemmed from the socioeconomic and political context and traditions, and the absence of a sound economy to support independent newspapers through advertising. Newspaper journalism in Nepal that was rooted in oppositional politics first against the Ranas, and later against the king and the Panchayat rulers remains largely unchanged for a majority of media, as evidenced by partisan associations of journalists whose memberships have grown after the 1990s, and also by the efforts of political parties to consolidate their hold over journalists and media. The fairly recent "oath-taking" event of elected office holders of the journalists' association close to the Nepal Communist Party in the presence of the then Prime Minister and co-chair of the party is one example. Besides, there have also been instances where journalists have willingly signed up to support party-political campaigns (Onlinekhabar, "Congress Ko Chunab"; Onlinekhabar, "NCP Classifies Journalists"). Based on the analysis of information in documents related to the evolution of journalism in Nepal on the symptoms of media capture, one can argue that partisanship among journalists and media and unprofessional practices are strong predictors of capture, as they provide a basis for other exchanges monetary or otherwise.

Conclusion

I had set out to examine the traces of media capture in Nepal in published records on journalism done at different times in Nepal's fairly short history of independent journalism. Even though based on a purposive selection of the review sample, publications that referred to the journalism practiced during the specified period, there are clear indications symptomatic of capture in different periods of history. The analysis has revealed the following practices that have also been observed by scholars in captured media environments: paid or "envelope" journalism, selective cash payouts, advertising and copy purchases, unprofessional practices of journalists particularly compromised impartiality and independence, policy and licensing favors to media owners, and political appointments of supportive journalists to official media institutions and as advisors. These findings lead to my inference that media capture has been a pervasive feature of Nepali journalism throughout history but has not been recognized and discussed as it continues to serve the interests of both the capturers (mainly politics, in this case) and those captured (media and journalists).

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ⁱ The Nepali Calendar is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar. The conversions made to the Gregorian calendar are approximations, particularly in situations where actual dates are not available. All Bikram Sambat dates have been identified with the acronym B.S.

ⁱⁱ Dixit had told Dahal (2070 B.S.) that the money was provided on the basis of three conditions, which in his book he clarifies had not come from B.P. Koirala but from the journalist.

ⁱⁱⁱ All Nepali language statements have been translated into English by author.

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