

Challenges of Nepali Journalists in Conflict Resolution

By

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Nepali press and media played a major and an important role in abolishing the tyrannical Royal regime and establishing the federal democratic republic system. After the country changed into federal democratic republic, Nepali press and media sector thought that there would be a sense of change in the media world as well but things did not go as the media sector had assumed. The contribution of Nepali Journalists towards ending the tyrannical Royal regime and establishing democracy and republic in the country cannot be underestimated. Nepali press and media has always fought and struggled for people's right. It is widely known that Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has embodied this spirit in every period in Nepali history.

Nepali Journalists under the leadership of FNJ played an important role in the April Revolution. The journalists not only protected the political parties but also played a leadership role. The objective of the journalists was to obtain full press freedom. The goal was to achieve rule of law and end impunity through free and fearless media presence. But it is a pity that media could not perform its duty so effectively after the establishment of a democratic republic and people's elected government mainly on account of law and order problem in the country. It is a matter of concern that the government has not taken up the issue of ending impunity seriously despite repeated requests of FNJ. Last year proved more challenging for Nepali press as compared to 2007. The media can exercise its role only when citizens can utilize their rights.

Increasing Impunity

The state of impunity in the country has reached an extreme level in the past few years. We have had to face great challenges due to the culture of impunity. The situation has only been aggravated by the government protecting those involved in attacking the media. The government, instead of bringing the guilty under the purview of law, protected ruling political parties and its sister organizations which are indirectly involved in attacking media. It was expected that the rule of law would prevail after the end to chaotic political situation and successive unelected governments. The impunity spread widely during the transitional phase, directly affecting the media. In recent times, it has almost become a trend for even hardcore criminals to get away Scot-free.

The murderers of journalist Dekendra Thapa and journalist Birendra Shah are still not punished. The government commission formed to probe JP Joshi's killings did not submit its report and the case filed against the abduction of Prakash Singh Thakuri was withdrawn. Uma Singh's murder case was not properly investigated. After mounting pressure from FNJ' nationwide protests and international circle, the government filed the case in the court in hurry. No proper investigation has been carried out. The government paid no heed to FNJ's demand to form an investigation commission to probe the killing of journalists during the conflict. The state has not taken any initiative to compensate the families of killed journalists and to educate their children.

Not only that the government has failed to implement any of its past agreements and commitments. Last year, abductions, threats, mental and physical tortures leading to eventual death of those on the receiving end became a routine incident. The government instead of taking action against the guilty allowed them to find shelter under the aegis of political parties.

This has directly affected the journalists and the media. This year attacks on the journalists have been terrifying. The journalists have become the victim of impunity across the nation (from Eastern Region to Far Western)

Women Journalists are even more insecure

In total, the insecurity among the journalists has heightened. The women journalists became the victim of various attacks. This trend is surprising. Why has the number of targeted women journalists increased? The answer is not easy. The women journalists all over the country were psychological victims of various kinds of attacks. Most of them faced displacement from their job due to increasing insecurity. If this situation does not improve, there is a grave danger that the number of women journalists will go down even further. Even now, there are not many women journalists. In this state of affairs, how can we assess the future of Nepali women journalists?

Self Censored Journalism

Another increasing trend in Nepal's journalism arena is self-censorship. This trend owes a lot to the prevailing state of impunity and lack of security. This is a very dangerous situation, but in the current circumstances not unnatural. There is no debate that the prevailing environment is not at all conducive for free and professional journalism. Nepali journalists have a fear psychosis. It is not possible to report factually in such a mental state. The situation is especially grave in middle terai and eastern hilly areas. With journalists out in the districts, practicing self-censorship, capital centric media houses have been directly affected. Nepali journalism is thus facing behind in factual reporting.

Press at Risk

There were many attempts to psychologically terrorize the press this year. The journalists and the media institutions became the victims of various attacks. Attacking media houses, vandalizing vehicles, torching newspapers, smashing media equipments and stopping newspaper publications were some of the incidents that took place during this period. Himal Khabarpatrika, Ankush Dainik, Ganatantra Weekly, Aujar Dainik, Mofashal, Mukti Radio, Ram Roshan Radio, and newspapers published from Dhankuta, Ilam, Panchathar, Morang, Rupandehi, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dadeldhura, Sindhuli, Sunsari, Jhapa, and Janakpur were attacked. These only represent few incidents. Likewise, Annapurna Post, The Himalayan Times, Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post- the daily newspapers faced obstruction in the publication. These incidents reflect that Nepali press is operating under huge risk. The number of such incidents is increasing.

Journalism in Eastern and Madhesh Crisis

In the past few years, profession journalism in Mid Madhesh and eastern hills have faced serious crisis due to impunity, insecurity and self censorship. The number of media houses has gone up drastically in Madhesh but a huge need to be done to improve the quality. In Madhesh, criminalization of politics and criminalization of other professions has directly affected journalism. In Madhesh all announced and unannounced, known, unknown, social, armed, unarmed and political and apolitical groups want to control the media and use it to their advantage. This kind of problem is also prevalent in the eastern hilly region though not in full velocity as in the Terai. There is no doubt that Madhesh movement and insurgencies being carried out by other armed groups that came into existence after the movement started has affected journalism in Madhesh.

Journalist movement for safeguarding of profession

The press right is not possible unless the citizen's rights are first secured. That is why the press has always supported civil movements. Press movement, which was directly associated with the civil movement, is now focused on ensuring professionalism and commercial security. Media is still struggling to ensure professional rights, security and freedom of press. FNJ has tried to draw national and international attention during its movement.

A professional attitude is today's necessity for the development of journalism. But for this, Nepali press needs security and professional expertise. FNJ has been demanding that the government guarantee both.

No civil right will be guaranteed in the absence of press and freedom of expression and FNJ's movements revolves around this as well.