

## **I - Introduction**

This study attempts to analyze the state-governed meddling in press and media during the direct autocratic regime of King Gyanendra in Nepal in that, state, at its best tried to impose strict censorship through various directives and ordinances while media resisted it claiming that it was a heinous act of suppression against the prevailing constitution that had guaranteed the press freedom, freedom of expression and the people's right to information. It basically examines how the cartoons as popular genre of art by using lines, images and symbols in amusing and rather satirical way became more successful than the editorials, news items and critical writing in terms of attacking and resisting autocracy and media censorship. Along with the political implication of cartoons, this study also tries to analyze its aesthetic aspects that primarily provide pleasure and delight to its readers and observers like that of any other forms of art and literature.

Media is defined as “a means of mass communication e.g. TV, radio, newspaper” (Oxford Dictionary, 7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Generally, there are three types of media outlets that are important sources of information: print media (newspaper and magazines), broadcast media (television and radio) and more recently computer and the Internet. Role of all types of media in democracy is vital. Only when there is free and fearless media, people will be empowered and their rights to freedom of expression and opinion as well as right to information under which every citizen has the right to demand and receive information on any matter of public importance can be protected in an unhindered way. The more the free media functions, the more people's access to information increases. Regarding the role of free press in democracy Thomas Jefferson long before he became the President of The United States of America said: “were it left to me to decide whether we should have a

government without news papers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter” (TKP, 26 March, 005). Obviously, a ruler believing in democracy does not curtail the liberty of independent press. Neither he suppresses and tortures the media workers nor fears of any criticism. Rather, he finds its job to report the transparent ideas and to highlight democratic pluralism. That is the reason why Winston Churchill considered journalism as “a guardian that never sleeps as it protects freedom of the people” (TKP, 28 March 005). Quite contrarily, any authoritarian ruler finds the existence of art and free media as major obstacle to state and social order and begins the act of suppression on news reporters and journalists, ban on media houses, censorship and forcible pressure on media to change it as par with the authoritarian principles. In Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler attempted to dictate aesthetics. In 1937, he said:

Works of art that cannot be understood but need a swollen set of instructions to prove their rights to exist and find their way to neurotics who are receptive to such stupid or insolvent nonsense will no longer openly reach the German nation. "This led to a sharp decline in readership and the closing of nearly 1000 newspapers during the first four years of Hitler's regime". (Censorship, 194)

This shows that every despotic ruler tries to undermine the media, the journalist, artists and writers. During the royal regime, independent Nepali media suffered a worst form of suppression from the state. Security forces were stationed at the offices of media houses, army edited news, many journalists were warned, beaten up and arrested. The state tried to stop publication of newspapers and broadcast news fearing possible criticism. Binod Bhattarai comments on the nature of despotic rule and its impact in media. He says:

Press freedom is the first casualty of absolute rule. It is a time when the public voice, speech, writings, research or other forms of expression is snuffed out and people are denied their right to be informed. It was a similar situation in Nepal after king Gyanendra took over the reins of power through a military backed coup and enforced an emergency from February 1 to April 29, 2005. (1)

Whenever there is strict state control over media, the problem of censorship arises which is extremely harmful to the press freedom and people's access to information in that the state directives and ordinances serve as mechanisms to control over news and information by defining parameters of what can or cannot be published. It includes prior restraint and harsher penalties in response to critical journalism to dissuade journalists from reporting controversial news and information. Michael S. Sweeney defines the censorship in this way:

Censorship is the act of suppressing or deleting information that is considered objectionable on moral, political, religious, military or other grounds. The term is applied most often to interference by a government or an authority in interpersonal or mass communication. (189)

Censorship is antithetical to free media in a democratic country where the prevailing constitution has explicitly guaranteed full press freedom, freedom of expression and people's right to information. During the authoritarian rule of King Gyanendra, the control over Nepali press and media that was being developed as an effective tool for empowering people after the restoration of democracy in 1990 fell in crisis and the extremity of censorship that continued till his regime came to an end.

## **Regression**

In June 1, 2001 King Birendra and his entire family were wiped out in a massacre at the Narayanhiti Palace. An official board of inquiry came out with its investigation report stating that Crown Prince Dipendra was solely responsible for the incident who, in his drunken rage over their failure to agree to his marriage shot his family members and himself too. After the fatally injured Dipendra died three days after the shooting, Gyanendra, the middle brother of King Birendra, became the new king of the kingdom of Nepal. Soon after he became the king, king Gyanendra announced that unlike his late brother, he would be more than just a ceremonial constitutional monarch.

On October 4, 2002 King Gyanendra formally began his journey of exercising absolute powers by dismissing the parliamentary government headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba to whom he labeled 'incompetent' for his being unable to hold the elections in scheduled time and for his failure to stop the Maoist insurgency. Although he later reappointed the sacked Prime Minister Deuba after 8 months, the king and the army already had decisive control over the significant area of state matters. In the following twenty eight months, the king appointed three figurehead prime ministers before starting his direct autocratic regime on February 1, 2005 through a military backed coup.

Nepali media experienced direct censorship following the royal take over of 1 February, 2005. This is not the first case of state censorship in Nepali media. In 1960 King Mahendra had also mounted a coup arresting the political leaders and censoring the media. He institutionalized the Panchayat system which operated under the direct supervision and control of the King thereby establishing the autocratic regime for almost thirty years. The people's movement of 1980-90 helped overthrow the

Panchayat system and King Birendra, Mahendra's son and successor, was forced to restore multi party democracy leading to the formation of new constitution and the national elections with the king remaining as a constitutional monarch. King Gyanendra, Mahendra's middle son, just like his father, tried to retain the significant ruling powers by unconstitutional practice and transgression of the rule of law that continued until the second popular movement brought an end to the autocratic royal regime in April 24, 2006.

### **State of Emergency and the Censorship in Media**

On the very day of the military coup, King Gyanendra announced a state of emergency suspending half a dozen of basic rights such as freedom of expression and of the press. While his speech was being broadcasted in the state controlled media, military units were already mobilized in all media organizations to begin a strict regime of censorship. The state imposed censorship on media as its powerful weapon to restrain the people's access to information and began to create inner fear and harassment among journalists so that they began to practice censorship and self censorship as defined by Michael S. Sweeney in his article in which he says:

Censorship takes two basic forms: State imposed and self-imposed.

The first form is forced by a group in power on the individuals who are subject to the group's authority. It usually includes penalties or their threat that creates a “chilling effect” prompting individuals to impose censorship in themselves to avoid punishment. In addition to the negative reinforcement of avoiding penalties for unsanctioned expression, the second form includes a more positive voluntary self-censorship by individuals who decide for themselves that restricting their forms of expressions has its own merit. (189-190)

The state imposed censorship took variety of forms. Arrest, detention, intimidation, threat, harassment of journalist and obstacles on the movement of journalists were common. As part of the state of emergency, any news items about the security operation had to receive permission from the concerned authority before broadcast or publication. The state owned media *Radio Nepal*, *Nepal Television*, and the state owned news papers *The Rising Nepal* and *Gorkhapatra* were just the mouthpiece of the state that presented the events with a pro-government slant. The government policy to provide public advertisement materials only to the newspapers that supported the royal regime, tendency of repeatedly interrogating the journalists, seizure of the up linking equipments from media houses such as *Kantipur FM* and *Radio Sagarmatha*, threat to the editors of hostage takings in case of disobedience of the royal line were some glaring examples that show the growing government apathy towards free media. The government and military agents enforced a strict censorship of any material critical to the king, the army or the coup or supportive of the Maoist or the political parties. Nepalese journalists felt that such censorship and the military intervention on independent media had not occurred even in Panchayat rule. Taranath Dahal comments:

It is the first direct attack on media and journalists in the history of Nepalese journalism. Even at the time to the 1960 coup and at the height of the despotic Panchayat rule, security forces were not mobilized to control media and to enforce direct censorship. However, these times, all the offices of media were taken into control by the army and news matters were censored through military intelligent machinery. Army controlled all the media before the

government issued any verbal or written orders after the royal takeover.

(122)

Kiran Chapagain also views that Royal regime had never been so much hostile to media in the past. He recalls the terrible condition of journalists after the Royal take over. He says:

Misbehaviour and warning to journalists were synonymous of the royal regime. The hatred that the royal regime showed towards Nepalese journalists was never seen in the history of Nepalese journalism so far. Journalists received frequent threat and were warned of action incase news is published or broadcast. Media were dictated to what they should publish/broadcast and what they should not. Houses and rooms of many journalists were searched. Hundreds of journalists were summoned and interrogated by the army and police. (2)

The above citations justify that there was excessive suppression over media during the royal regime. Several studies have documented how the Royal regime censored and harassed the media. Similarly, Binod Dhungel in “Magh 19 Pachhi FM Radio Ko Dasa” (2005) (the predicament of FM Radios after Feb.1) has documented how the despotic regime harassed the independent radios and how the radio journalists fought against the censorship imposed on them.

The government enforced various restrictive directives and controversial ordinances so as to curb the media freedom. Various directives and censorship laws issued on varies dates between 2 February and 30 April 2005 became a major set back for the free press to move ahead. However, the government claimed that they were introduced for making the press more responsible. The government policy of controlling the media and imposing censorship in it raised million dollar question to

the verbal commitment of the king who in his proclamation had mentioned the role of free press in democracy. He said:

An independent press serves as the medium for raising the level of democratic consciousness. It plays a crucial role in the promotion of national interests. We believe that the press will make effective contributions in insuring that democratic norms and values inspire our life as well as governance. (TKP, February 2, 2005)

King in his speech showed his strong determination to promote the media and democracy and advocated in favour of its effective development. Contrary to the king's commitment, there was an immediate impact of censorship and harassment of journalists even before his take over speech ended. The self-contradiction in King's speech and practice had been observed by civil society, journalists and international community and even the common Nepalese people. Taranath Dahal finds king's use of the word 'Democracy' itself was problematic. He says:

The activities following the February one move have clearly substantiated that the king's move was motivated by an objective of destroying the norms and institution of a liberal democracy. Free practice of journalism is integral character of a liberal democracy. Fundamental civil liberties can not be realized in absence of the existence of pluralistic and free press. But citing the word “democracy” the king imposed totalitarian regimen and has continued his suppressive measures to completely destroy the existence of an independent and pluralistic press. (70-71)

Government directives, threats and the presence of army censors in editorial rooms aggravated the sense of inner fear and self-censorship which limited the media to



carry out its job in full fledged way. The state of such fear created by military intervention in media and the strategies to limit media was so massive and alarming that many editors and journalists began practicing self censorship which hampered the overall freedom of media. The state imposed censorship was direct that gave ways to self censorship which was much hazardous as Taranath Dahal remarks: "Self censorship in itself is a dangerous disease like cancer. It gradually destroys environment to challenge the direct censorship. Press adopts policy of self-censorship as life-saving strategy" (721).

As the imposition of a state of emergency took away the constitutional guarantees for media freedom, there was no room for them to fight against censorship. They did not feel free and censored their ideas thinking that they may come across any bad consequences if they didn't do it. The growing tendency of self-censorship prevented people from getting the right information on the one hand and on the other it impeded the opinion building process in the society which ultimately was a great deadlock to democracy.

### **Post Emergency Period**

The situation for journalists and press freedom did not improve significantly even after the state of emergency was lifted after three months in April 29, 2005. The king continued to rule directly. Nepal had already experienced a nine-months-long emergency (November 26, 2001-August 29, 2002). During that period, government forces and the Maoist rebels continued to try to muzzle the media brutally with intimidation, harassment, threat, censorship and obstacles to their movements. Journalist in far-flung districts continued to suffer physical and psychological tortures at the hands of security officials. They were called to the barracks and intimidated as well as held under the false charges of being terrorists. But the second state of

emergency imposed after the royal take over was excessively much fatal and destructive as the state attempted to weaken the rule of law, civil rights, democratic system and institutions in the pretext of boosting the morale of the army to combat the terrorism. Taranath Dahal finds king's move was false despite of whatsoever arguments he made to justify it. He says:

Control over media and communication means through militant personnel prior to the live-cast of the royal proclamation has proved that the move wasn't aimed at controlling "terrorism." To accept the king's move as a step taken merely to contain terrorism means that we are becoming victim of great delusion. (70)

Whatsoever arguments there might be behind the royal motive, the February 1, coup had certainly demolished the fundamental rights and freedom of the press and the Nepalese people. Control over Nepali press that was being developed as an effective tool for empowering people after the restoration of democracy in 1990 fell in crisis and the censorship, suppression on the news reporters and journalists, ban on media houses, and forcible pressure on media to change it as par with the authoritarian principles justify how crude and dominating the royal regime was. In a report entitled "Coups, Kings and Censorship" issued in February 2006, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) declared that "half the cases of censorships in the world in 2005 were in Nepal" (6).

In conclusion, the autocratic royal regime treated journalists and press in an uncivilized and imprudent way and Nepalese media was compelled to face a lot of difficulties that it had ever faced in its history. The suppressive measures of state to make the independent media as its lapdog was powerfully resisted by the journalists and media activists since the beginning of the royal regime.

## **Resistance to Censorship**

Despite the strict censorship and tight ordinances, Nepalese journalists except some sycophants stood against all kinds of atrocities of the royal regime even at the expense of their lives. This showed the daring example that Nepalese media working in the hard times through its continuous struggle for press freedom and freedom of expression became successful in safeguarding people's right to information. In addition, it also proved that Nepalese media stands as a major obstacle in the path of all sorts of authoritarian regimes. This does not mean that media freedom was possible only after the continuous struggle of some journalists and media workers, a lot of national and international media organizations, human rights activists, civilians, lawyers, diplomats, international community, political parties, writers, columnists and cartoonists as a whole, to a larger extent, resisted the state-censorship in media expressing solidarity and launching a campaign for the restoration of press freedom and democratic rights in Nepal.

Initially, there was a great confusion among journalists about what they should or should not report although there were some who were not hesitant to choose sides in what they saw as a struggle between democracy and the autocratic regime. There were also those who supported the king's rule. The king's take over speech became the matter of great shock and surprise to the journalists. Binod Bhattarai writes:

Never before had a journalist in Nepal faced such controls. The king's take over had also put a question mark on the future of democracy itself even though he had said that he would restore it within three years. The media was thus caught between their responsibility of informing the people about the uncertainties ahead and the restrictions

enforced by a regime that believed in ruling through control rather than public support. (IX)

A great confusion and dilemma among journalists about whether to support royal line or to choose democracy was soon over when the army officials stationed themselves at newspapers offices and read copy to decide what was printable and what was not. The direct intervention of military caused psychological distress among journalists and all independent newspapers not supportive of the king had to face harassment of one type or other. As result, a great sense of resistance was gradually developing in the mind of the journalists who staying in the condition of wait and see were planting the seeds of defiance which was sometimes deliberate, and sometimes subtle, sometimes direct and sometimes symbolic. Initially, they were hesitant about writing critically about the royal takeover but when they realized that there was no future for democracy and press freedom under the regressive acts of the king, they came out for street protests, showed negative reactions to the takeover, published critical writing and used variety of strategy to fight with censorship. By the end of the fist week, several newspapers started publishing newspapers and lead articles (editorials) which questioned the regime. Hard hitting editorials began to criticize the royal government as an editorials under the title “Reconsider” published in *The Kathmandu Post*, February 7, 2005 forcefully challenges the censorship in media laid down by the state:

As a legal entity governed by the law of the land, we're not in a position to challenge the government nor do we intend to do so. However, we strongly feel that the government should reconsider certain provisions to live up to the proclamation made by the king and let media play its role in nurturing democracy. The growth of media will never have detrimental effects on the society rather it will help the

country progress. In order to make the press independent, the provision of censorship should be removed and the right to information restored.

(2)

The king's ideas of "constructive monarchy" meant complete control over power and total shield from any kind of criticism. The government clamped down on broadcast of news bulletins by FM radio stations that rendered the thousands of broadcast journalists jobless. Nepal's FM stations had established a very good record by offering news, information and entertainment. Commenting on the direct interference of state in the FM stations, a FM operator in Pokhara funnily said "the FM stations that were offering Daal Bhaat and Tarkari (the staple diet in Nepal) have been asked to serve only noodles. Serving only noodles may cause health problems" (TKP Feb 8, 2005).

The writers and columnists deprived of expressing their ideas and opinions were also protesting the censorship and undemocratic behaviors of the state P. Kharel, encourages the journalists to remain active. He says:

A state of emergency when a host of fundamental rights remains suspended, cannot spell out normalcy for the Fourth Estate to function to the best of its professional ability and social responsibility. It is also a fact that a major test for journalists, at times of crisis, is to make their work not by being in the news but by carrying news. (TKP, March 14, 2005)

Another writer and professor Lok Raj Baral, arrested in February 7, 2005 and released after eighteen days strongly protests the imposition of emergency and criticizes the government. He remarks:

So even under democratic constitution that underlies constitutional monarchy and multiparty system, people are treated as praja or

subjects who are reticent about the affairs of the state. So, in many respects, the country is still at the threshold of postmodernism without however leaving the vestiges of medievalism (Feb 7, 2005, TKP).

Similarly, another writer D. B. Gurung discusses how the censorship is fatally injurious to the whole nation. He says:

What effects can 'censor' afflict to a nation. First, it deadens the intellectual potential and activities of the elite citizens. Second, it scoops out intellectual based on lies, and keeps the people in the dark. Third, people die unofficial deaths. Censorship is a dreadful form of corruption that defies truth; it is a crime against intellectual freedom and a grievous injury inflicted to democracy. And thus intellectuals, who take an opportunistic swerve to meet their vested interests at times of crisis, are intellectual gypers. (TKP, April 18, 2005).

In this way, various writers and critics powerfully raised their voices against state censorship in media that consequently helped encourage the journalist's mission of regaining media freedom, freedom of expression and people's right to information.

The journalists adopted other various strategies to resist the state censorship in media besides publishing the commentaries, articles and critical editorials. The humor and satire, pictures, symbolic protests and a greater part of jokes were made. *The Kathmandu Post*, Nepali's broadsheet English daily ran an absurd editorial entitled "Socks in Society" - an elaborate essay on how socks without holes are a prestige symbols in the poor country like Nepal. Many weeklies left blank spaces in the editorial column; the weekly *The Nepali Times* ran an editorial criticizing the rise in tree falling which was symbolic to the Nepali congress whose leaders had been arrested. Some newspapers like *Himal Khabarpatrika*, to make the censorship visible,

left blank spaces where the copy had been censored when the military units forced to fill up the space. *The Nepali Times* filled it with a picture of an infant born on February 1. Some of the editors deleted their news where it should have appeared as editor and publisher since they were not the true editors of their publication. Other types of protest were rallies, street protest, recitation of news on streets, deliverance of a blank pen, sheet of paper and dysfunctional radios to the communication minister and so on.

Of all those means and ways of protest the symbolic art like cartoons were most effective. The cartoonists with their creative art and artistic presentation gave a powerful blow to autocracy and censorship. Though they felt a strong challenge and fear of any possible harm, however, compared with other journalists they were bold to stand against the regime. Peshal Pokharal remarks:

The period after April 1, generally taken as dark period in the field of Nepali media was quite challenging even to cartoon journalism but cartoonists with their creative efforts and courage were more successful than the reporters, columnists and editors in terms of attacking autocracy and regression along with various political, social and administrative evils. (1, My translation)

Nepalese cartoonists during the repressive royal regime demonstrated their courage and tactic which was widely appreciated by Indian medias like Associate Press, The Times of India, The State as well as other medias of Europe and America. Taipei Times of 11 March 2006 writes “Nepal’s cartoonists say what reporters can’t say” (4).

Thus, with the collective efforts of all believing in democracy and press freedom as interrelated to preserve basic human rights and the people’s right to information raised the same voices against the strict censorship in media until the end

of royal regime was achieved by the second popular movement (Janaandolan Part 2). More specifically, the indirect and symbolic resistance was much vibrant in hitting hard the royal government which not only revealed the misdeeds but also was able to draw the attention of a large number of audience and readers.

**Reinterpretation of Dissertation:**

This study documents the condition of Nepalese media during autocratic regime of king Gyanendra (Feb 1, 2005-April 24, 2006) and tries to justify the fact that at the difficult time of autocracy and censorship, the symbolic arts like cartoons counteracted the repressive measures of the state authority more powerfully than any of the news items, news paper editorials and critical writings. It also attempts to foreground the importance of this underappreciated genre of art for the socio-political and religious reformation along with providing fun and amusement to its observers by means of humour and satire, images and symbols, voyeurism and so on. How the political cartoons produced during the royal regime could resist the autocracy and media censorship by making a sharp commentary on the government and the whole regime has been the focal point of this thesis. Since it is contextual reading of cartoons, I have not encompassed it with any of the western literary theories and criticisms.



## **II-Politics and Poetics of Cartoon**

Cartoons are the unique genre of art and at the same time almost an inseparable part of the media. They incorporate many poetical and rhetorical devices so as to create the self expressive meaning. Like any forms of literature, cartoons provide pleasure and delight to its viewers. Since cartoonists are the voyeur of the circumstances, they carefully trace out the socio-politico and cultural issues and problems in the cartoon usually in a humorous and satirical way. At the time of autocracy and censorship, they shape the public opinion and attitudes in the cartoon and use the cartoon as a symbolic sword to resist and attack the authorities thereby subverting state's power of domination.

### **Cartoon and Media**

Media is the theatre of cartoons with which it communicates to us. Cartoons have a wide range with the power to draw the attention of a large number of audiences. As a short, direct and artistic form of visual media, it is most impressive of all newspaper articles, books or novels. Cartoon messages are simple and receptive. So, they can have an immediate emotional impact on the audience. Chang -Tai Hung finds cartoon message more effective than the verbal messages. He says:

Cartoons are influential because they can be produced in large quantities and are capable of reaching large audience. Their reliance on pictorial representation renders them extremely effective because they are comprehensible even to those who cannot read, thus performing a function unmatched by the printed word. (124)

This citation claims that cartoons are mass art and they have power to draw the attention of large number of people. Cartoons mirror and comment on the society, conveying the spirit of the people with directness and vividness. It is extended from a

very small event to the state power having power to capture each and every aspect be it social, political cultural and so on just with the help of few lines and words. It can capture the attention of the people of all ages and status ranging from a child to an old man, from a rich to a beggar. So, it is the important part of the media for covering up multiple facets of expression. It may entertain teach or comment about the subject that even an illiterate person can perceive easily. Abhi Subedi opines that a cartoon is more powerful than any of the bulky books in attacking the deformities and in passing information to the people. He views:

A cartoon can capture, just in few lines, the essence of the events that is liable to be expressed in the thousand of words. Due to a cartoonist's imaginative power, his ability to comprehend the satire and his skill to trace the common sensitivity of time this medium gets its voice.

Cartoon is the most powerful medium in capturing the broad time and bringing it into minimal size. Its targets are both who construct and who distort the time. Either they might be like that of Hitler or of common paupers. A good cartoonist constructs the meaning by juxtapositioning both the semiotics and images; then the message becomes satirical. (vii) (My Translation)

The art of cartooning dates from pre-historic times. In those times, cartoons were used like the sculptures on the walls of churches and temples in order to attract the illiterate people towards their religion but it entered a new phase with the advent of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century which ultimately led to the publication of newspapers and magazines and then modern idea about free press and freedom of expression came on the fore. Advancements and refinements in the technology of print media prompted changes ranging from artistic style to a

broadening of the dissemination of cartoons. Now, the cartoons have been inevitable part of print media. As newspapers have wide circulation, cartoon messages easily reach to the public. Cartooning is also a kind of journalism because journalism is 'Work of collecting, writing, editing and publishing materials in newspapers and magazines or on television and radio' (Oxford Dictionary). Like a journalist, a cartoonist collects the subject matter, produces cartoon, edits it and sends it for publication or broadcast. Durga Baral says that both the cartoons and journalism are integral part of each other. He states, a cartoon is an inseparable part of journalism and journalism done by the means of caricatures and satirical drawing. Cartoon is also called a visual language." (v) (My Translation). Accepting cartoons as an essential part of the journalism most of the influential newspapers today publish the cartoons especially, political cartoons so as to draw the attention of audience toward the current socio- political and cultural issues and problems.

### **Political Cartoons**

Political cartoons have become a substantial medium of commentary which often take serious issues and present them in a manner which is not only funny and therefore more socially acceptable but also is designed to affect the viewer's opinion. Since political cartoons speak the public voice, people find their dissatisfaction over the authority got well expressed in the cartoons. Terry L. Seip says:

Political or editorial cartooning is a graphic art form that typically uses caricature, the exaggeration of personal features and attributes with the intent to influence opinion on a public personalities, event or issue.

Editorial cartoons are usually classified as primarily political or social but in modern democratic society's social, economic, and cultural and

foreign policy issues are often part of political discourse and are thus tied to political parties, factors and leaders. (527)

With use of caricature, exaggerated images and symbols, political cartoons greatly satire on those public personalities who go against the will and consent of the people. It also exposes the various national and international issues such as political disparity, suppression of the state and administrative evils such as mismanagement and corruption. The sole purpose behind all those cartoons is to influence opinion on those powerbrokers and to spread the social and political awareness to common people. Such cartoons can also be called the cartoons of ideas and opinions. They are primary visual means of communicating opinions and attitudes or of summing up situations. Humor may be present in it but it is not a necessary part as in such cartoons idea and opinions are more important than fun and amusement. Thomas Milton Kemnitz assumes political cartoons as cartoons of opinions and says that such cartoons are effective because they shape the public opinions. He writes:

The cartoon of opinion has had a long and varied history since Martin Luther employed it against his opponents. Its relation to other media of communication, its form and function, its contents and conventions and the means of its production has varied in different locales and at different times. Yet through all the changes, the strengths of the cartoon as a medium of communication have remained reasonably constant. It generally conveys its message quickly and pungently. Consequently, the cartoon is more likely to get its point across than other printed means of communication, many more people grasp the point of the cartoon on the editorial page than read the editorials or signed columns. When the cartoon was not linked to news paper and

when fewer people could read fluently, the disproportion. Between cartoon views and editorial readers may have been still higher in urban centers. (84)

Martin Luther's use of cartoons was extremely effective to attract the attention of those peasantry classes who could easily understand his real motive through pictorial representation. He used the political cartoons as visual propaganda in order to protest the catholic opponents. When he started the protestant reformation in Germany, he needed the support of the people of peasantry class but because they were highly illiterate, they couldn't apprehend his motive. So, he distributed them the broadsheet posters and illustrated pamphlets which became an effective strategy in winning the consent and support of those people that ultimately led him to a grand success.

Terry L. Seip also states that the use of political cartoons began with Martin Luther's campaign of socio-religious reformation during the early 1500s that greatly helped him to advocate his ideas and opinions. He says that as a visual propaganda those cartoons worked with clear and recognizable symbols so that people were easily motivated. He mentions:

Beginning in the renaissance and stimulated by the religious turmoil of the protestant reformation commencing in the early 1500s, artists created single pictures for posting or distribution, or sometimes bound them as a collection with text to advocate a particular position or opinion. Subjects included political concerns but it was religion that prompted the greatest output. In particular, protestant reformers produced prints attacking the pope and the catholic hierarchy and ritual; common were depictions such as that of a fiendish animal birthing papal figures or vivid visuals of Satan's demons casting

devilish pope into hell- all produced with clear, recognizable symbols such as papal vestments and diabolical caricatures; often no explanatory text was needed. (528)

This suggests us how powerful a political cartoon is in changing and shaping the mind of the people. As these cartoons use familiar symbols in humorous, usually satirical and emotive way they provoke an immediate positive or negative reaction on the part of its readers or observers. Though Martin Luther started political cartooning, its real development in print media began in the 19th century with the advent of mass press and the publication of Punch's cartoons. No sooner had the cartoonists began to make satire on political leaders and governments, they had to face the attacks and threats, censorship and libel laws as well as imprisonment. A cartoon has the power to shake the people who are in authority can be experienced when we read these lines written by Michel P McCarty. It reads:

Perhaps the least explored art form for serious historical analysis is the political Cartoon. The cartoon first flourished in the nineteenth century with the advent of the mass press and improved printing technology especially graphic reproduction. Politicians everywhere soon felt the power of political art in the Penny press; French officials winced at Honore Daumier's lithographs and sent him to jail for six months in the 1830's for a cartoon ridiculing Louis Philippe. In the early 1870's New York's Boss Tweed is said to have feared Thomas Nast's stinging caricatures in *Harper's Weekly* more than any attack in print, since cartoons carried their message even to the illiterate. Most of the best known political cartoonists of both the nineteenth century and today

seem to be idealistic loners using art as sword in the battle of public opinion. (30-31)

Political cartoons obviously work as a sword, a powerful symbolic sword that does not harm on flesh but into the brain. Unlike other sources and means of media that work with elaborated verbal details, a political cartoon just by using some lines, images and symbols is capable of giving a great blow to the people ranging from a civil servant to a politician, political party and even the monarchs. Sometimes, these cartoons also expose the very personal life of the public personalities. Thomas Milton Kemnitz finds them as a weapon of propaganda that bears the power of resistance and capacity for exposing the sexual and other personal habits of monarchs and public personality humorously. He states:

In content as well as accessibility, the characteristics of the cartoon have changed little. It can match any other media for invective and is an excellent method for disseminating highly emotional attitudes. It has been employed frequently and effectively as an aid in building up resistance to the politics of politicians and as a weapon of propaganda generally in ridicule. The cartoon also is an ideal medium for suggesting what cannot be said by the printed word. When cartoons were sold separately, they weren't subject to the censorship and libel laws hampering newspapers. Thus at times such as in England in the eighteenth century or Germany in 1848 cartoons have commented upon the sexual and other personal habits of monarchs and politicians. Even after the cartoon was incorporated into newspapers and journals, Matt Morgan in 1867 could draw a cartoon referring to the immorality of the Prince of Wales and subsequently label it "Scandal of the

season" when he reprinted it as part of another cartoon. This could have been stated so explicitly in words. Even today the cartoon is used for attacks on politicians that would be difficult to sustain in any other media. (84-85)

A political cartoon is also not without the risks. Sometimes cartoonist will have to face the official threats and punishments so intensely that they even are compelled to leave their own country. In 1997, Popoli, a noted Cameroonian cartoonist was ordered to stop caricaturing the wife of the President and senior politicians. As he disobeyed, he received the warnings of killing. Sussman states the events. He says:

Popoli ignored the warnings and was forced to flee the country in December 1998 after receiving numerous death threats and after his home was invaded at night by two assumed intruders- he was not home that night- whom he believes wanted to eliminate him. Popoli announced his departure from the country in a front page cartoon carrying the thought bubble" I will survive". Using the Internet, he was able to file his comic strips and cartoons from his country of exile. He returned to Cameroon a few months later. (110)

Any despotic ruler or government doesn't like to be criticized and ridiculed by the common people. So, they cast a severe hatred and anger to those people whom they feel are their enemies. So, either they ban the cartoon or impose censorship or sentence jail for cartoonists. In Nepal, during autocratic Rana and Panchayat regime, any criticism against the state and



FIGURE 4 Self-portrait of Nyemb Popoli (Paul Nyemb Ntoogae), the cartoonist who was forced to flee the country for fear of his life. [Published in *Le Messager* (Cameroon) on December 29, 1998. Reproduced with permission.]



government was liable to be severely penalized.

The relation between media and political cartoons are a key ingredient in modern journalism because they mirror the socio- political and cultural contexts convey the emotions that other materials do not, shape the popular sentiments and thus become the effective tool of persuasion. More importantly, they make even greater strides during the resistance to censorship and autocracy than any other means of media.

### **Cartoon as an Art Genre**

Art is a creation or expression of beautiful especially in a visual form e.g. painting, sculpture etc. Since a cartoon is visual, aesthetically pleasing, beautiful and artistic like that of painting and sculpture, it is also an art. Ram Kumar Panday finds cartoon as a distinct art with specific purpose. He says:

Cartoon differs from other picture in making, amusement, providing information and delivering reformation messages. As a simple and direct art, less beauty or grace, it has much strength and uniqueness. It is unique art form with a peculiar purpose and paradigm. (15)

Another writer Susan Slyomovics finds a cartoon much more bold and powerful than a photograph or a film. According to him, a cartoon is not simply an art to amuse the people as he views:

A Cartoon image is short and direct and does not move when you look at it. Condensing history, culture and social relationships within a single frame, a cartoon can recontextualize events and evoke reference points in ways that a photograph or even a film cannot. Like graffiti jokes and other genres of popular culture, cartoons challenge the ways we accept official images as real and true. (21)

C. K. Lal studies cartoons from Marxist point of view and takes them as counter-art to change the stereotypical situation. According to him, other arts are stereotypical and they can not bring change in the society but cartoons can. He says:

When art is widespread in a society, there goes rooted status quo to the deep. In the society where classical music, philosophy, literature or arts are spread, there is not any political change or if it would be, either that will be with violence like that of Voltaire in France, Nietzsche in Germany or Tolstoy in Russia. For long and permanent change, counter arts: Pop music, one act play, short story, article or cartoon become more effective. The counter arts movement that flooded after 1990 in Nepal have tried to show the hope of organizing democratic culture. (4) (My Translation)

A cartoon is sharp, vibrant and direct. It reveals the social reality as well as empowers people. “A Cartoonist in his cartoon art sometimes gives power even to the powerless people. A person feeling completely powerless get rebirth after getting into him/her in cartoon.” (Abhi: X) (My Translation)

In the given cartoon, an angry woman with tattered clothes is snatching the pen from the hand of her husband and giving him the broomstick that she had been using for a long time. On the left corner, their small son is crying, may be, by hearing the quarrel of his parents. The woman looks bold and revolutionary and the man looks angry and surprised. Snatching the pen and giving the broomstick to husband is a daring example in a patriarchal society. The cartoonist empowers a woman figure in



this cartoon who is representative of all those who are under domination of their husband or families. In addition, this cartoon also gives message that parents' quarrel may create psychological effect on children.

### **Humour and Satire**

Humour and Satire is at the heart of cartoons .Ram Kumar Pandey claims cartoons as most powerful drawing of humor-satire world. He says that the primary aim of a cartoon is to provide delight and pleasure to its audience but cartoonist also puts some thoughts in it. He writes:

An exaggerated amusing illustration caricaturing satirically a person or event with some thoughts is a cartoon. A special form of art to present amusing appearance with the help of colorful exaggerated and satirical shape is a cartoon. In fact, too broad and too narrow definitions are not sufficient to clarify the nature of cartoon from an illustration. (1)

A cartoon blending with humor and satire is most effective of all in imparting long-lasting impression on the audience. Chang-Tai Hung asserts that a good cartoon entails the elements like fine technique and vivid presentation of the idea that enforces us to think for sometime. For him, in a cartoon idea is much more important than the artistry. He views:

The cartoon is a unique visual art which combines biting images and humorous contents to make a strong commentary. As a rule, the cartoonist makes use of distortion and exaggeration and reduces complex situations to simple images, treating a theme with a touch of immediacy. A cartoon can mask a forceful intent behind an innocuous façade; hence it is an ideal art of deception. A good cartoon, of course, entails fine technique and vivid presentation of material; but artistry is

only secondary to a cartoon's main purpose. It is the idea that takes economy of line; a good cartoon does more than making viewers laugh or cry: It inspires us to think. (124)

A cartoon art becomes effectively good when it gives certain message or profound idea so that we may seriously think on it. That is possible only when there is perfect blending of humour and satire.

This heart-pounding Moroccan cartoon produced by *Filali* makes a strong commentary on George Bush. In this cartoon, Bush as a prostitute with money that has been tucked under his costume is dancing in front of a composite alcohol-imbibing Saudi-Israeli customer. The cartoonist makes a biting satire on Bush's suppression on Golf-war by portraying him as a



lover of money and in sexual frenzy. The facial expression, distorted images and uncommonly matched body size is extremely artistic in this cartoon.

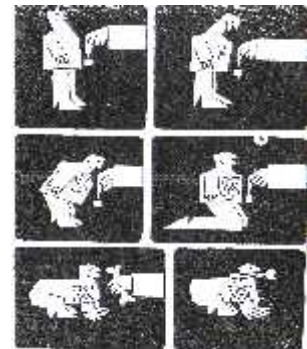
Humour and satire is quality of being amusing or comical and attacking foolish or wicked behavior by making fun of it, often by using sarcasm and parody. (Oxford Dictionary) A cartoon combines both comical and amusing elements as well as blistering satire. It creates effect and meaning through twisting and turning of body organs and through poking fun and satire on certain individual/s, event/s or system.

## Imagery and Symbolism

Cartoons use familiar images and symbols in humorous usually satirical and emotive ways deigned to provoke an immediate positive or negative reaction on the part of the reader. By bringing together those images and symbols, cartoonists create meaning which is satirical. Abhi Subedi finds cartoon is the blending of both. He views:

Semiotics of cartoon, its humming sound should be recognizable. The scholar of semiotics French writer Roland Barthes has thus interpreted it- what is semiotics? It is an image, a part of humming recognizable to me. If not recognized, there is no essence of semiotics. Cartoon is exactly the same blending art of images and symbols. (ix) (My Translation)

Cartoons can communicate significantly through images and symbols. The given cartoon of six strips symbolically tell us how the greed for medal deteoriates one's dignity. In the first strip, the man is self-confident and dignified. But as he begins to receive the medal, he begins to loose his dignity. At last, he almost becomes like a dog.



C.K. Lal says that lines are the ancestor of words. He views that though a cartoon is complete expression in itself, an additional caption makes it more beautiful. He says:

People had begun to draw picture before they started the script. Wall pictures of the caves are the representative of ancient society. Lines have their own rhymes, rhythms and tone in color. And, with their combination give birth to geometrical music. Although, painting is

complete expression in itself, additional caption makes it lively. The combination of lines and words give the cartoon specialty. (2) (My Translation)

A cartoon without captions or speech balloons has to do more with images and symbols to interpret the essence of the cartoons. The more bold and recognizable they become, the more self-expression is made.

The following cartoon allegorically presents two objects: chair and bone. Compared with tussle for bone between two dogs, it has tried to hit a great satire on the political leaders' craze for chair. Artistically this cartoon is vibrant and symbolic that communicates us with clear message. So, it is a unique art.



In a nutshell, cartoons are the unique genre of art because of their artistic presentation, clear ideas and self-expression. With use of images and symbols they create meaning and such meaning provides humorous and satirical impression on the part of audience.

### **Voyeurism**

The word voyeur means person who gets pleasure from watching in secret others undressing or engaging in sexual activities (Oxford Dictionary) and such practice is called voyeurism. Voyeur in a cartoon is an observer who looks at the activities with curious eyes and sometimes with positive or negative reaction.

Generally, we find that a cartoonist himself is voyeur in his cartoon. A man with striped cap in most of Rajesh K. C's cartoons is seen observing the events with watchful eyes. He rarely participates in dialogue or in an action rather listens or looks

at it. Sometimes he brings his own innovative ideas and perspective in the cartoon. Being a keen observer of socio-political and cultural contexts of the nation and society, he presents his particular vision with which one may be agree or disagree. He expresses his idea about how he takes or feels of something. Abhi Subedi denotes that a cartoonist chooses subject for his cartoons according to socio-politico and cultural contexts and the intensity of the subject. He says:

A cartoon not only does have political meaning but also social, cultural, rhetorical and even sexual meaning. But in a place where there is not discussion about politics where political leaders hold responsibility of people's fate and destiny, where education too falls under the political agenda, in such a place, a cartoon grabs the subject with appropriate choice. (X)

Because a cartoonist himself is the voyeur, he makes an appropriate choice of the issue and shapes it in cartoons. The race, gender, class, faith and socio-cultural view points of the cartoonist also affect it. Sometimes though he tries to remain neutral and unbiased, he falls in the formal complexity of his cartoon. In this cartoon, the cartoonist foregrounds the female figure



with thick hips, short and transparent clothes. She looks almost nude. We also see a male voyeur keenly observing the female body. Excited with voyeuristic gratification in speech balloon he speaks: “Congrats to me, congrats to you. Please hold this award!”

Similarly, Paul Conrad's following cartoon evokes unmatched experience in our mind. For depiction of a horrifying scene of nuclear test resumption, he chooses a victimized nude girl because he wants to gratify the sexual impulses of male voyeurs like himself. Males usually regard women as passive, lustful, timid, emotional and powerless like that of what Socrates called women as "unfinished men". The women

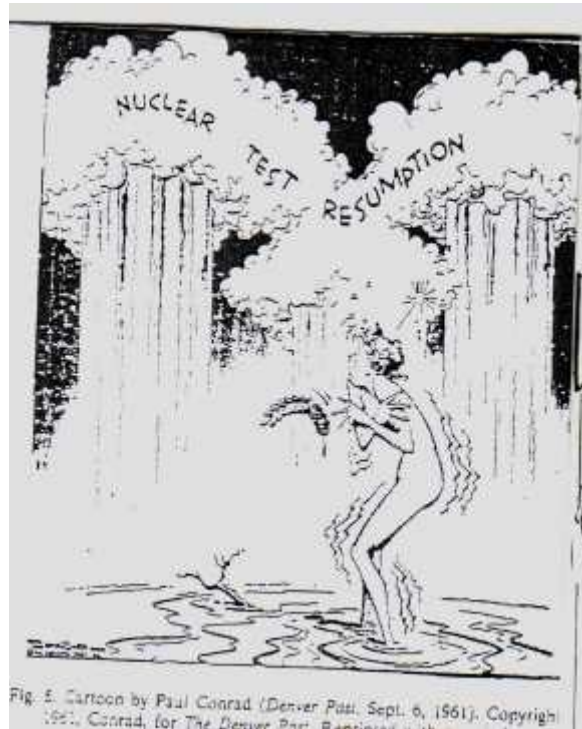


Fig. 5. Cartoon by Paul Conrad (Denver Post, Sept. 6, 1961). Copyright 1961, Conrad, for The Denver Post. Reprinted with permission.

become the subject of interest for all male voyeurs so is the reason cartoonists portray them to draw attention of a large number of male audiences. Have there been female cartoonists, they would portray the male figures in distorted and whimsical way.

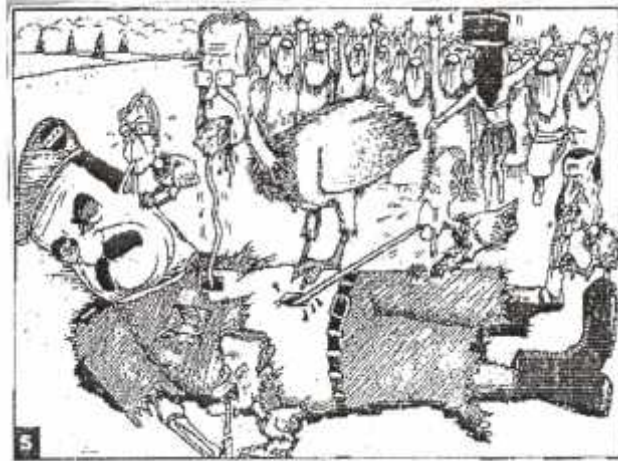
Sometimes, a cartoonist presents his idea so powerfully that the cartoon becomes the subject of great challenge to authority or particular culture or community and it may create satire and excitement, even sometimes, contradiction too. Prophet Mohammad's cartoon produced in Denmark with a bomb in his head stirred the entire Muslim world. The Muslims feeling greatly offended in their religions faith, severely criticized it. Similarly, Batsayan's cartoon published on *The Kathmandu Post* in August 21, 2005 created a great political Tsunami to king Gyanendra's autocratic rule. In it, Girija Prasad Koirala, a Congress leader is shown carrying the carcass of a donkey that symbolically represents the decline of constitutional monarchy. Greatly shocked with the cartoons, the state demanded clarification and "some of the place apologists even ventured to say that all the property of the cartoonist should be



confiscated and that he should be sentenced to death”(Baral: Viii).The tension or contradiction that a cartoon creates when the cartoonist sides with one particular ideology or culture etc. He empowers his interest and ideology while neglecting and satirizes others.The Christian artists depict Mohammed as their opponent. Batsayan severely attacked autocracy in favor of the ideology of democracy.

Society shapes a cartoonist’s identity and intention. “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx: 194). There is explicit division and hierarchy in the social classes: rich and poor, high and low, whites and blacks, oppressor and oppressed, dictator and dictated, armed and armless and so on. Such division is well manifested in the cartoons and we can guess why and how the cartoonist as a voyeur has condemned or criticized other classes by highlighting the issues and problems of a particular class.

In this cartoon by Derquaovi, four vultures representing different leaders including Bush are tearing at the flesh of prone Saddam Hussein while Arabs turn their backs on the scene and giggle away,



following the lead of a belly dancer. To heighten the mix of the profane and the sacred, the dancing girl performs the gymnastic feat’ of balancing the holy black stone, or Kabba of Mecca on her head. This is a perfect example of faith Voyeurism in which we see the explicit division between Arab Muslims and Christian Americans.

In nutshell, cartoon is a unique genre of art because of humour and satire, imagery and symbolism, allegorical indications, voyeurism and so on. As a powerful art and means of media, it assumes its power for symbolic attack and visual protest which is more effective than a military power of the state. It is an intellectual arm that does not harm on the body but in the mind of the oppressors and autocrats who try to under estimate the power of the common people.

### **III- Resistance to Autocracy and Censorship**

Literally, the term "Resistance" means an "influence or force that hinders or stops something" (Oxford Dictionary). It is such an antagonistic force that strongly opposes something and attempts to shield the secure position or existence of something that it belongs to. Unlike rebellion that usually is the use of armed force, resistance is the effective use of verbal, written, symbolic or any other indirect means of opposition that may not harm on the flesh but into the brain of an individual. It is such an intellectual arm that may sometimes pose a great threat and challenge to the authority.

In most of the countries ruled by authoritarian regimes, the basic democratic principles such as human rights, rule of law, press freedom and freedom of expression are systematically undermined with the imposition of strict censorship and tight ordinances. In such a situation, the suppressed view points come on the fore to resist the government with various methods and fore to resist the government with various methods and approaches. In response to military domination of the state power, the writers, artists and journalists use their intellectual power and resist the authority by means of symbolic and indirect protests. The journalists, who suffer much under such despotism, adopt various indirect and symbolic strategies so as to prevent themselves from the official retribution and harassment. George A. Krimsky talks about it. He says:

Journalists in restricted countries learn to amass an array of "tricks" for avoiding retribution and censorship such as the use of indirect terminology and seemingly mundane morsels of information to address sensitive issues. Audience learns how to interpret those "coded" signals as well. In one notable example, the public learned of the capture of a

violent criminal whose rampages were suppressed by censors, simply by noting a small article in the state newspaper that a police officer had been "awarded for bravery." Readers knew exactly what they meant.

(413)

Basically, of all those methods and strategies to criticize the authority and resist the censorship, means of visual protests especially cartoons are most safe and effective. As a unique genre of art and a part of media, it can speak a unique genre of art and a part of media, it can speak more louder than the words. And, as it is artistic, amusing and beautiful, it can impart immediate emotional impact on the audience. Cartoon messages are simple and direct so can be easily understood even by the common people. With use of humour and satire, images and symbols, they poke fun on the authority, criticize it and traces out the accurate picture of subordination and domination. Cartoons can subject the ruling classes, individual politicians, the forces of law and order and the whole regime to a blistering satire.

These cartoons by Popoli, a Cameroon cartoonist greatly illustrates the condition of media under the autocratic rule of the president Paul Biya. In the first cartoon, the President is giving speech saying "This is a free country" but in the background, we see Pius Njawa, a journalist of Le Messenger who is in jail.



**FIGURE 2** The title of the article this cartoon illustrates reads "Frequent Lies." In the cartoon, the president (Paul Biya) says "This is a free country" while the journalist, Pius Njawa, is in jail in the background. [Cartoon by Nyemb Popoli (Paul Nyemb Ntoogue), published in *Le Messenger* (Cameroon) on January 6, 1998. Reproduced with permission.]

Popoli shows what a tyrant says and what he actually does. In the second cartoon, the President Biya is shown in the form of a snake trying to swallow the journalist. The image of the President in the form of a snake symbolically tells us how dreadful the tyrant is in attacking the free press and journalists. Thus, both the cartoons are outrageously vitriolic and deliberately shocking. They have powerfully attacked the autocratic regime of President Paul Biya and censorship imposed during his rule.



FIGURE 3 The president of Cameroon, Biya, is shown as a snake trying to swallow a journalist. (Cartoon by Nyeurb Poyoh (1997) Nyeurb Poyoh, published in *Le Message* [Cameroon] in December 1997. Reproduced with permission.)

At the extreme period of king Gyanendra's autocratic rule in Nepal, Nepali media lost its freedom as the government directives, ordinances and censorship restrained it. The imposition of the state of emergency suspended many provisions of the 1990s constitution including the freedom of expression and the right against censorship. At this period, even the cartoonists felt a strange challenge and fear of any possible harm, however compared with other journalists, they were bold to stand against the regime. Peshal Pokhrel lauds the praise of those cartoonists who launched a campaign against the despotic government. He says:

The period after April 1 generally taken as the dark period in the field of Nepali media was quite challenging even to cartoon journalism but cartoonists with their creative efforts and courage were more successful than the reporters, columnists and editors in terms of attacking autocracy and regression along with various political, social and administrative evils. (1) (My Translation).

Similarly, C.K. Lal talks about the role of a symbolic art like cartoons in such a difficult time when people are not allowed to be critical to the authority. He says:

Hard Times is an insurgency period for words and definitions where in writers instead of abstract expression begin to construct meditative writing. The broomsticks of the artists instead of revealing in inherent truth fall in the trap of formal complexity. Like energy. The art never lies but its transformation goes on. These are many witnesses of hard Times in Nepalese history but the cartoonists are the real interpreters of the time. Though less in number, they have been proved to be powerful in terms of the effect they impart on people. (34) (My Translation)

In fact, Nepalese cartoonists during this troubled era, sparked a strong repercussion in political arena and fueled the opposition to the government which was mired in Chaos and confusion. With the critical pictorial images they galvanized their distress and discontentment; shaped the public sentiments and opinions. As censors paid more attention to the painted materials but less to the cartoons, they tactfully reiterated the charge that government was flawed and that the continuing dictatorship of the king threatened to undermine the fragile democracy and to plunge the country into chaos. To circumvent censorship, they camouflaged their real intent, layers of meanings were marked behind the nonetheless unambiguous images. The juxtaposition of reality and fantasy made cartoons a resounding success and that had a considerable effect to keep the censorship at bay.

### **Cartoons: Resistance to Autocracy**

The uniqueness and significance of cartoons as important sources of media lie not only in their depictions of events but also in their allegorical and symbolic

interpretation of the problems of the day. The following cartoon indicts the ineptitude and oppression of the royal government that prevented free movement of people. In the pretext of defeating the Maoist rebels, it implemented such ordinances but the common people became victim of it. The military cop on the top symbolizes the use of military power under which the ordinances were forcefully manipulated. The anguished look of the man creates eerie feeling in the mind of the viewers. As a political cartoon, the cartoonist has shaped his idea in it. Carefully drawn with force and intensity, he has given a deadly blow to autocratic government almost ruled by the military power.

In the following cartoon, a boy is about to wash the feet of an unidentified person (Perhaps the king!) by pouring water over it and a third person may be a pundit of royal rule is instructing him what to do next. "The present authority and its supporters' trick of making future generation puppet and worshipper of an individual has been ridiculously exposed in this cartoon by Batsayana (Durga Baral)." (Peshal: 27) (My Translation)

The cartoonist has conjured up the images and symbols both to air his view and to influence contemporary perceptions of the government. As a matter of great criticism, announcement of the then education minister Radha Krishna Mainali's



"Nationalist Education" was greatly shocked to many. Bishnu Sapkota says:

Our nationality is not any worship of a dynasty and mythical kings. If nationality does have a meaning, it is one that emanates from a

common feeling of belongingness towards the nation. If I have to become a nationalist the way Mainali defines it, I would be proud to be antinationalist." (TKP, June 1, 005).

The given cartoon combines biting images and humorous context to make a strong commentary on the despotic government that had detained the political leaders and in a sense prevented them even from having their hair cut.



The cartoonist's support and sympathy to the leaders and anger to the autocracy can be realized in the cartoon as detained leaders have been empowered with the images of ferocious look and pointed fingers which in turn are against to the government's cruelty.

The senseless formation of the Royal Commission for corruption control (RCCC) has been humorously presented in this cartoon so as to attack the stupidity of the government. The use of familiar symbols, images, gestures and figures with less caption words has created the





sculptural effect in this cartoon. Divided in the two sections of the same subject, it allegorically shows the tragic downfall of the RCCC character. RCCC was especially formed by the king with a purpose to penalize the political leaders in the pretext of abusing authority but when its legitimacy was questioned, it was dissolved later on.

Art speaks its own language and even a political art has its own stylistic and aesthetic concerns. In the following cartoon, the cartoonist just by exploiting certain lines, figures and words has been successful to convey a great and subtle message to the audience. A man is carrying the parliament building in order to place it

somewhere inside the palace. The bold letters at the top reads:

"Constructive Role." The cartoonist pokes fun on king's so called "constructive role" of



dissolving the parliament, a symbol of democratic institution.

### **Cartoons: Resistance to Media Censorship**

Since the cartoonists were the voyeurs of circumstances, they symbolically and artistically traced out the then reality in their cartoons. At the extreme conditions when the news reporters and journalists were under the severe inspection of the armies, the cartoonists were even able to lead the views of editorials, news and critical articles.

The following cartoon frames a picture of military intervention in the editorial room. It presents an army personnel sitting inside the room of a chief editor and editing the news. Peshal Pokharel remarks about this cartoon in this way:

[ . . . ] this cartoon obviously portrays a picture of the direct interference of security organ in the press and media in order to make them repressed and handicapped. It is the realistic portrait of horror and terrorism as faced by the present means of communication. (27)

(My Translation).

This cartoon has a self expressive value which is easily understood even by the common people.

The cartoonists used their cartoons as subversive propaganda against the government's suppressive measures to journalists and censorship. Juxtapositioning of images between both oppressors



and oppressed, power abuser and victim conjured up the images of the then reality. As they were sympathetic to other journalist and were in favour of the press and media freedom, they established themselves as a powerful rival to the authorities.

The given cartoon is a barbed commentary on government's harsh treatment to the journalists. The journalist kept in the cell is visited by the communication minister who expresses his satisfaction over the



condition of the journalist and suggests him to continue it. As the idea is given much value in this cartoon, it inspires us to think. The caption has further added the essence to it. The ferocious look of the 'journalist indicates the widespread aggression and discontentment with the royal sycophant's idea to curb the press freedom.

A cartoon without caption words and speech balloons is usually considered to be the best cartoon. Such cartoon has a self expressive value because the symbols and images work more vividly manifesting the allegorical idea that can be perceived if we minutely observe and analyze it. The following cartoon allegorically presents the idea about how the press freedom was

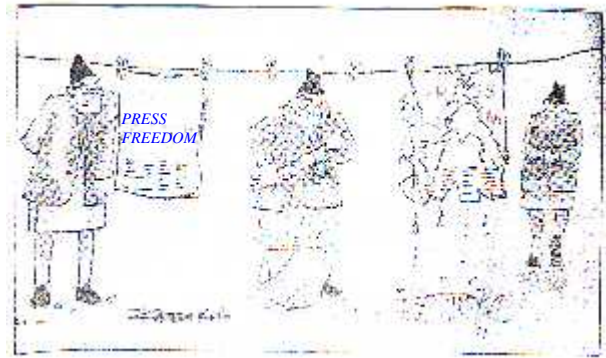
severely curtailed by the government.

The newly washed cloth in the form of a news paper with a tag" PRESS

FREEDOM" has been squeezed in

such a way so that it has finally lost its

original shape. The distorted image of the cloth provokes the idea about how the censorship has crushed the people's aspirations for press freedom. The nature of despotic rule has been ridiculed with the artistic imagination of the cartoonist.



A cartoon is a unique visual art which combines biting images and humorous contents to make a strong commentary. It exposes the ills of the government, ridicules the nature of the politician and laughs at them. The following cartoon articulates feelings in a very skilful touch of humour and satire. The minister in response to the complain made by the journalist about censorship speaks those lines. While we read it and look at the gestures of the man, we can't keep laughing. A man with a striped cap at the door is keenly



You journos have been freely covering me, my speeches, my visits...blah! blah! blah! And still you say you're being censored.

observing the scene. He has not participated in the action rather watching with curious eyes. So, he the voyeur in this cartoon. As the cartoonist himself is the voyeur, he has shaped his personal feelings with the intent to emphasize self-mocking behaviour of the royal sycophants.

The self contradictory nature of the despotic government can be experienced also in the following cartoon. The speaker, (Tulsi Giri, Vice-chairman of the royal



government) declares that "There is no press freedom like ours in the world" but at door we see an army carrying the journalist blind-folded. This shows the absolute picture of royal tyranny over the press

and media that what it says and what is really does in practice are quite different. The visual language itself is sufficient to communicate with us.

In conclusion, Nepalese cartoonists in the troubled era of autocracy and censorship with their creative imagination and artistic yet bold presentation through the cartoons could speak more powerfully than the journalists. They used the cartoons as symbolic and visual protest so as to attack on the government.

#### IV - Conclusion

As resistance to autocracy and restrictions on media and freedom of expression, a large part of struggle has been made in the stream of human history. The rise of the authoritarianism and one party government along with other religious and cultural orthodoxies rooted in the society have become major setback on the way to freedom of expression. Since long, many poets, writers and philosophers have been advocating in favor of democracy, press freedom and peoples' rights to information and against to the censorship and absolutism. John Milton who is hailed as the father of modern intellectual liberty in his famous 1644 pamphlet *Areopagitica* said: "Give me liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience above all liberties" (Censorship: 193). This he said in response to the censorship imposed by British monarchy and clergy who demanded him a license from the church before the publication of his pamphlet. Milton's *Areopagitica* thus is considered to be an important appeal for press freedom in which he argued for freedom to think and to express ideas even those that ran afoul of orthodoxy. His ideas were echoed during the Enlightenment and the democratic movements that followed. Thomas Jefferson, the precursor of libertarian ideals advocated that any kind of tyranny is hindrance to the free human reasoning. At the time of The French Revolution (1789) he said: "The free expression of thoughts and opinions is one of the man's most precious rights. Every citizen may therefore speak, write and publish freely except that he shall be responsible for the abuse of that freedom in cases determined by the law" (censorship: 193). Michael S. Sweeney argues that Jefferson's ideals were even supported by the French king and the National Assembly but within few years, strict regime of Censorship on free press and media followed and at the time of Napoleonic despotism it became more intense. He says:

The Declaration supported by King Luis XVI and adopted by the constituent assembly was compromised in only two years when the assembly banned slander against civil servants. More restriction on free press and speech followed and editors were jailed until during the Napoleonic era, only newspapers that supported Napoleon were allowed. Demands for greater free expression fueled the revolution of 1830 and helped to topple the Bourbon monarchy. (193)

A despotic ruler does just opposite to what he says and what he does is disliked by the majority of the people. When King Gyanendra began his direct autocratic regime by the military backed coup on February 1, 2005, he declared his strong commitment to the strengthening of democracy, free press, human rights and rule of law but in practice he dissolved the parliamentary government, suspended the fundamental rights of the Nepalese people as guaranteed by the prevailing constitution (1990) and began detaining and intimidating the political leaders, journalists, human rights activists and even the common people that created a long term political and social turmoil in the country. With the direct military intervention in media houses and editorials rooms and with the series of harsher penalties and treatment enforced by the strict directives and ordinances, the state created inner fear and harassment among journalists so that they were forced to practice censorship and self-censorship which ultimately hampered the free flow of information. As the government was foundered in political disarray, it tried to suppress criticism and intensify the dispensation. Any matter supportive to the king was highly encouraged but if critical it was liable to be severely punished. Thus, Nepali media which was flourished significantly after the restoration of democracy in 1990 was systematically undermined by the state power governed by the military backed force.

Regardless of its identity, Nepali media represented itself as one of the most powerful stakeholders in resisting the autocratic government for the creation of democratic citizenship and maintenance of rule of law in the country. By building up interface with the people and civil society and making the people aware of their basic rights and freedom, it assumed its power with the public support that greatly helped to confront the military power of the state and to topple down the autocratic regime.

At the difficult times when the newspapers reporters, editors and columnists were less free in articulating their ideas and opinions, cartoonists by means of their art of humor and satire made the sharp commentary on the authoritarian dogmas and principles of the state, mocked at the uncanny nature of the king and his servile followers and established themselves in favor of democracy and press freedom. They politicized their art and presented them as a visual protest to criticize the authorities. They also proved that cartoon as a genre of art does not only provide pleasure and amusement but also it can be a powerful tool to fight against all kinds of atrocities and inhuman activities.

A cartoon speaks through media. So, media is the means, a stage through which cartoon messages reach to the approach of people. Since cartoons help to disseminate information and message as well as provide fun and entertainment to the people, it has a supplementary relation to the media. The political cartoons are called the cartoons of ideas and opinions because they raise serious issues, shape the public voice and impart a long lasting impression on the audience. Sometimes political cartoons work as visual propaganda in order to protest the opponents. Martin Luther used it against the catholic opponents during his social religious reformation movement which got a high-sounding success.

A cartoon is unique form of art genre because it has certain characteristics such as the particular style and method of drawing with exaggerated images, symbols, gestures, voyeurism as well as humorous and satirical sketch of the pictures. It is highly stylized, deviated and exaggerated and unlike other arts, it inherits an invisible symbolic power to correct the wrong and rotten norms of the society; to lead the political leaders in the right path and to give certain message to its observers. Other stereotypical arts can't bring socio-political changes in the country but the cartoons can. They work as counter art to change the stereotypical situation, to empower the poor, marginalized and dominated people and incite them to search for their identity and existence.

Cartoons work with humor and satire as well as symbolism, imagery, voyeurism and allegorical indication. A cartoon is blending with humor and satirical touch and that create meaning through twisting and turning of body organs and through poking fun and satire on certain individual, events or system. As an art, it works with bold lines, expressive images and symbols. Cartoons with just images and symbols have much self expressive value however captions and speech balloons add more essence to the cartoon. As the cartoonist himself is the voyeur or keen observer of the events, sometimes he also inculcates his personal feelings and viewpoints in his cartoon art. The race, class, gender, religion, nationality and the particular ideology of the cartoonist also affect in determining the perspective of the cartoonist.



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