

Status of indigenous issues coverage in state-owned media

♦ Lok Bahadur Chaudhary¹

Abstract

Voices on the neglect of indigenous people often go unheard, be it in the media or in government decision-making processes. The deprivation of rights faced by indigenous people deserves attention as a matter of discussion and the media should cover all the issues affecting indigenous people. This is necessary for their empowerment in terms of social and economic milieu.

A state-owned or government media refers to any media outlet that runs under government ownership and has state investment, either fully or partially. Gorkhapatra, Radio Nepal, RastriyaSamacharSamiti (RSS) and Nepal Television are the state owned media outlets of Nepal. Gorkhapatra particularly contributes significant taxes of its income to the government. There is a general understanding that the news content published or broadcasted by the outlet should cover the interests of all castes, communities, and classes. However, upon analysing the news content in Gorkhapatra, it was discovered that the coverage of indigenous communities is unsatisfactory.

The purpose of this study is to observe and analyze how indigenous news content is covered in state-owned media outlets, with main

1 Chaudhary is acting editor of gorkhapatraonline.com

focus on the numerical status of news. When observing the status of published news content in three different government media outlets, it becomes evident that government media outlets publish much better quality of content when it comes to other topics, but the content quality is significantly low on matters of tribal issues. The study concludes that these media should cover issues of all communities effectively in order to raise awareness and initiate empowerment among them.

Introduction

Indigenous people are original inhabitants of Nepal. According to the 2078 BS census, 35 percent of Nepal's population is counted as indigenous. This means 11 million 68 thousand 844 in numbers. Indigenous people refer to communities that live in a specific geography, have their own language, culture, traditions, and a distinct history. AadibasiJanajatiUtthanRastriyaPratisthan (The National Foundation for the Upliftment of Indigenous Peoples) Act, 2058 BS, defines indigenous peoples as a scheduled caste or community having their own mother tongue, traditional customs, unique cultural identity, distinct social structure, and written or unwritten history. According to the provision of this Act, cultural and linguistic communities in Nepal have been listed as indigenous peoples (Nepal AadibasiJanajatiAayog- Indigenous Peoples Commission Study Report 2082, page 14).

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country. Indigenous peoples play an important role in shaping the social, cultural, and historical structure of this country. The concept of an egalitarian society is considered to ensure inclusive representation with equal participation at various levels of the state. Article 261 of the Constitution of Nepal and the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples Commission Act 2074 BS have urged the government to protect the identity and rights of indigenous peoples and ensure their proportional representation in public bodies. The constitution has laid the foundation for inclusive democracy, paving

the way for proportional representation, social justice, respect for diversity, and building a just society. The constitution has made constitutional and legal provisions to ensure the identity, rights, protection, promotion, and effective representation of indigenous peoples. The constitution has opened the door to new hopes and possibilities for indigenous communities, who have long had limited access to the political and administrative structures of the state.

Many systems have progressed in Nepal, but the situation of the oppressed communities, including the indigenous people of Nepal, has not changed much. We have brought significant systemic changes through various democratic movements. We have changed the boards with different names in offices as per the system. But significant changes could not be realized due to the failure to change the thinking, behavior and conduct of the leadership that came to power. The system change did not work as expected by the people. In some places, indigenous figures came to leadership, but it was limited to showing inclusive representation (Rai, 2081).

The constitution entitles all communities, without any discrimination, to equal protection of the law. Discrimination is prohibited by law. It guarantees everyone equal and effective protection against any discrimination based on race, language, religion, colour, sex, and political or other opinions. Nepal is a party to International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169. This convention ensures the rights of indigenous peoples (Modi S, 2079, page 34).

The Constitution of Nepal 2072 BS, the Civil Service Act 2049 BS, and other relevant acts and regulations from public bodies have given legal recognition to proportional representation and an inclusive governance system. According to a study, the representation of indigenous people in government bodies is only 23.62 percent. However, the presence of indigenous people in high-level positions is very weak. The representation of indigenous people in the civil service is 16.9 percent. Representation in higher positions is low.

Indigenous people represent 32.5 percent of the Nepali Army. Although representation is relatively higher in middle and lower ranks, participation in the leadership level is weak. The Armed Police Force of Nepal has a 34 percent representation of indigenous people. There is no presence in special category positions. There is 30 percent representation of indigenous people in the Nepal Police, but not in the higher ranks. No indigenous people have reached the rank of Inspector General of Police till now.

The representation of indigenous people in Gorkhapatra Corporation is 20.1 percent. Their presence is comparatively higher in temporary and daily wage employment than in permanent and contract employment. After Krishna Bahadur Mahara became Communication Minister, Gorkhapatra began publishing two pages of language content every day, in addition to Nepali, starting from Asoj 1, 2064. These two pages, which began publication in the mother tongue, established themselves as a beautiful gift for inclusive democracy and a new Nepal (Sarvahari, 2077).

The presence of indigenous people in the National News Agency (RSS) is only 12.7 percent. Representation is limited to the lower levels. The participation of indigenous people in the Press Council Nepal is 23.7 percent. Representation is only at the auxiliary and lower levels. The representation of indigenous people in Radio Nepal is 35.3 percent. Women's participation is still weaker, not at the leadership level. The given statistics on indigenous people working in public institutions show that although the inclusion policy has created opportunities, there are still structural challenges. Although representation has increased due to the quota system, issues such as access to opportunities, institutional environment, dominance of upper-class communities, and gender inequality remain unimproved. There are still problems like directed negative comments towards employees who come through the quota system, promotions being dominated by nepotism and favoritism, and a lack of indigenous presence at the leadership level.

Some participation of indigenous journalists in media organizations is beginning to be seen. We should consider this an achievement. However, the road to reaching the destination is still long. We may still have a long way to go to achieve the racially egalitarian society we envision, and the corresponding media policies and structures. The fact that determined and confident journalists are ready for this is a source of encouragement for us all (Ghale, 2078).

A policy review is needed to make inclusion qualitatively effective rather than just looking at it numerically. Although the representation of indigenous peoples in public institutions has increased numerically, it has not been qualitatively effective. This study is based on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method analyzes news collected from government media outlets. Within the qualitative method, the practical challenges and workplace experiences of inclusive news publishing have been discussed and analyzed with editors and employees.

Results and discussion

Under the positivism philosophy, the media primarily tries to make news more readable through framing. The editorial team is always mindful of what kind of content readers will be attracted to when producing news. News is written, presented, and organized by keeping in mind the reader's interests and preferences. This principle also shows the power of the media. This principle focuses on news writing, presentation, and organization.

The results of this study are undoubtedly weak when assessed on the basis of inclusiveness. It is clear that the issue of indigenous peoples has received little importance in government media. The study suggests that to make government media effective, news from all classes, communities, and ethnic communities that have been marginalized by the state should be given priority. To begin with, the number of news posts is low. Comparatively, indigenous

issues have received more priority numerically on *gorkhapatraonline.com*. Radio Nepal comes second in terms of publishing indigenous news online. *Nepaltvonline.com* has the lowest number of news. The number of news stories on indigenous peoples was even lower.

Government media outlets are operated through public taxes. The state invests in the resources of the media. Therefore, the state media should be able to become a common reliable media for everyone. Government media should not discriminate and differentiate when it comes to coverage of news. However, the study shows that there is discrimination towards indigenous communities in terms of the quantity and quality of news. This is evident when a sampling of news published within a month was analysed. The results of the study are given below.

(a) Gorkhapatraonline.com

As per the number of news publications in the month of Asar 2082, 6,175 news items had been posted online. Out of this, 110 news items were related to indigenous people. In terms of percentage, this is only 1.78. Asar was a month of 32 days. On average, 192 news items were posted in a day. Dividing the 110 published news items related to indigenous peoples into 32 days, an average of 3 news items were published per day.

Looking at the list of published news, out of 199 news items published in Asar 1, 4 news items related to tribal people were published. Out of 185 news items published on Asar 2, only 2 were related to indigenous peoples. Out of 202 news items published on Asar 3, only 6 news items related to indigenous peoples. Similarly, out of 188 news items published on Asar 4, only 4 are related to them. On Asar 5, out of 204 news items published, only 5 were news items about indigenous peoples. On Asar 6, out of 220 news items published, only 2 were news items about indigenous peoples. Accordingly, on Asar 7, out of 174 news items only 3 news items related to indigenous people were published. On Asar 8, out of 198

news items published, only 3 news items were related to indigenous peoples.

Similarly, out of 195 news items published on Asar 9, there were 4 news items related to indigenous people. Out of 196 news items published on Asar 10, there was 1 news item related to indigenous people. Out of 204 news items published on Asar 11, only 3 news items related to indigenous people were published.

Out of 204 news items on Asar 12, only 5 news items related to indigenous people were published. Similarly, out of 188 news items on Asar 13, only 6 news items related to indigenous people were published. On Asar 14, out of 205 news items published, there were 5 news items about indigenous people. On Asar 15, out of 168 news items published, there were 3 news items about indigenous people.

Similarly, on Asar 16, out of 188 news items published, 5 were indigenous news items. On Asar 17, out of 203 news items published, 5 were indigenous news items. On Asar 18, out of 213 news items published, only 4 were indigenous news items. Accordingly, out of 199 news items on Asar 19, 3 news items related to indigenous people were published. Out of 203 news items on Asar 20, 4 were related to indigenous people. Out of 177 news items published on Asar 21, 2 news items were about indigenous people. Out of 200 news items published on Asar 22, 4 news items were about indigenous people. On Asar 23, out of 181 news items published, 3 news items were related to indigenous people. On Asar 24, out of 202 news items, only 1 news item related to indigenous people was published. On Asar 25, out of 216 news items published, 5 news items were about indigenous people.

Furthermore, on Asar 26, out of 185 news items published, only 2 news items were related to indigenous people. On Asar 27, out of 190 news items, only 1 news item related to indigenous people was published. On Asar 28, out of 137 news items published, there was no news item about indigenous people. On Asar 29, out of 181

news items published, there were 5 news items about indigenous people. Similarly, on Asar 30, out of 184 news items published, there were 2 news items about indigenous people. Out of 190 news items on Asar 31, 6 news items related to indigenous people were published. Out of 196 news items on Asar 32, 5 news items related to indigenous people were published. Looking at the number of news stories published in these patterns, it is a big disappointment for the indigenous communities.

(b) Radionepalonline.com

A total of 2,049 news items were published on Radionepalonline.com, in the month of Asar. Among these, only 52 news items on indigenous people were published. This is 2.53 in percentage. Dividing the number 2,049 by the number of days, it is seen that 64 news items are published in a day. When calculating the average of indigenous news publications, it is seen that 2 news items were published per day, which is very low.

Looking at the number of news stories each day, on Asar 1, out of 59 news stories published, 1 was an indigenous news story. On Asar 2, out of 72 news stories published, 1 was an indigenous news story. On Asar 3, out of 63 news stories published, 2 were indigenous news stories. On Asar 4, there were 64 news items published, but there was no indigenous news item. On Asar 5, there were 69 news items published, but there were only 3 indigenous news items. Accordingly, while 66 news items were published on Asar 21, there was no indigenous news item. While 79 news items were published on Asar 21, there was only 1 news item related to indigenous people.

Similarly, on Asar 8, when 86 news items were published, there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 9, when 67 news items were published, there was 1 indigenous news item. On Asar 10, when 73 news items were published, there were 3 indigenous news items. On Asar 11, out of 70 news items published, the number of indigenous news items was 5. On Asar 12, out of 67 news items

published, the number of indigenous news items was zero. On Asar 13, out of 53 news items published, the number of indigenous news items was 3. On Asar 14, out of 49 news items, only 1 indigenous news item was published. On Asar 15, out of 57 news items, only 2 indigenous news items were published.

Accordingly, out of 56 news items published on Asar 16, the number of indigenous news items was 1. Out of 54 news items on Asar 17, 6 were related to indigenous people. Out of 67 news items published on Asar 18, there were zero indigenous news items. Out of the 55 news items published on Asar 19, there were 2 indigenous news items. On Asar 20, out of 57 news items published, there were zero indigenous news items.

On Asar 21, there were 60 news items published, of which 2 were indigenous news items. On Asar 22, there were 75 news items published, of which 1 was indigenous news item. On Asar 23, there were 54 news items published, of which 1 was indigenous news item. Out of the 46 news items published on Asar 24, there were 2 indigenous news items. Out of the 70 news items published on Asar 25, there were 3 indigenous news items. On Asar 26, when 67 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was 1. Similarly, on Asar 27, when 66 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was zero. On Asar 28, out of 46 news items published, there was only 1 indigenous news item. On Asar 29, out of 74 news items published, there were 3 indigenous news items. Out of 62 news items published on Asar 30, the number of news items related to indigenous people was 3. Similarly, out of 49 news items published on Asar 31, there was only 1 news item related to indigenous people. It appears that 2 indigenous news items were published on Asar 32, while 97 news items in total were published. The number of news items published on Radionepalonline.com is 4,126 less than the number of news items on gorkhapatraonline.com. Similarly, the number of news stories on Radionepalonline.com is 58 fewer than the number of indigenous news stories published on

gorkhapatraonline.com. Overall, the number of news items is not satisfactory for the indigenous people.

(c) Nepaltvonline.com

A total of 1,020 news items were published in the month of Asar by this online publication. Out of this, only 12 news items related to indigenous peoples were published. This is 1.17 in percentage terms. Asar was the month of 32 days. When the published figures for each day are calculated, this number is 32. When we calculate the number of news related to indigenous people, it comes to minus 20. The number published in this online publication is likely to disappoint readers and the indigenous community.

Looking at the published news on a daily basis, on Asar 1, out of 31 news items published, there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 2, out of 43 news items published, there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 3, out of 33 news items published, there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 4, when 30 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was only 1. On Asar 5, when 38 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was 1. On Asar 6, when 31 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was zero.

While 28 news items were published on Asar 7, there were zero news items related to indigenous people. On Asar 8, 37 news items were published. No news items related to indigenous people were published. On Asar 9, out of 34 news items published, there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 10, out of 32 news items published, there was only 1 indigenous news item. On Asar 11, there were 32 news items published, but there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 12, there were 31 news items published, but there was 1 indigenous news item. On Asar 13, when 22 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was only 1. Accordingly, on Asar 14, when 18 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was zero.

There were zero indigenous news stories on Asar 15, while 27 news stories were published. There was 1 news story related to indigenous people on Asar 16, while 25 news stories were published. There were zero indigenous news stories on Asar 17, while 34 news stories were published. While 36 news items were published on Asar 18, indigenous news was zero. Even though 36 news items were published on Asar 19, indigenous news was still zero. On Asar 20, when 32 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was 1. On Asar 21, when 17 news items were published, the number of indigenous news items was zero. Out of 45 news items published on Asar 22, there was 1 news item related to indigenous people.

Similarly, on Asar 23, when 47 news items were published, there was zero indigenous news items. On Asar 24, when 40 news items were published, there was 1 indigenous news item. On Asar 25, when 32 news items were published, there was 1 indigenous news item. On Asar 26, there were 32 news items published, but there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 27, there were 22 news items published, but there were zero indigenous news items. Similarly, on Asar 28, there were 20 news items published, but there was only 1 news item related to indigenous people.

On Asar 29, there were 31 news items published, but there were zero indigenous news items. On Asar 30, there was 1 indigenous news item out of 28 news items. On Asar 31, there were 39 news items published, but there were zero indigenous news items. Even though 37 news items were published on Asar 32, the number of indigenous news items was zero. Looking at the statistics of the news published above, the news on Nepaltonline.com is 1,029 less than Radio Nepal. It is 5,155 less than the news published on gorkhapatraonline.com. The number of news related to indigenous peoples published on Nepaltonline.com is 98 fewer than in gorkhapatraonline.com. It is 40 fewer than in Radio Nepal Online.com.

According to Pushpahari Kyampa Rai, head of nepaltvonline.com, there is awareness to make the online version competitive in line with the times, but there is no manpower. He understands that the online version is only temporary with only four manpower working. He said that if the office management pays attention to this in the coming days, the online version can be made more competitive.

The statement of Gorkhapatra's digital coordinator, Naradmuni Gautam, is in line with that of Rai. Gorkhapatraonline.com lacks skilled manpower. Gorkhapatraonline is the youngest publication among the publications of the Gorkhapatra Corporation. As of now, there is not a single permanent employee on the online edition. The online edition is being operated by giving the responsibility of the online edition to three permanent journalists who are at the Gorkhapatra daily and hiring the remaining 20 contract employees. There is a shortage of manpower and physical infrastructure as well. He understands that it is difficult to compete in the market due to lack of resources. However, he said that efforts are ongoing to focus on research-based news and multimedia content to make Gorkhapatra's online publication competitive by mobilizing available human resources.

Similarly, according to Radio Nepal's spokesperson and acting Executive Director, Pushkar Raj Gautam, the lack of human resources is also the cause for low number of news and the lack of indigenous news content on radionepalonline.com. There are only nine journalists working online. There is a shortage of journalists who can go to the field and report. He admits that Radio Nepal's online publication has not been able to compete with other online publications in the market due to lack of infrastructure. He is committed to focusing on making online business more timely and professional in the coming days.

Conclusion

Looking at the number of news stories published by the three government-run online media outlets, there is a big difference

between them. Of the three, the online publication that publishes the most news is gorkhapatraonline.com. A total of 6,175 news items were published in June in the month of Asar. Out of this, 110 are related to indigenous people. After this, radionepalonline.com, under Radio Nepal, is in second place in terms of the number of news items published. In the month of Asar, 2,049 news items were published in the online publication. Out of this, 52 are indigenous news items. Nepaltvonline.com is in third position. In the month of Asar, a total of 1,020 news items were published on the online news portal. Out of these, only 12 are indigenous news items.

If we observe the newsrooms in Nepali media in terms of social and cultural diversity, the reflection shows a lack of diversity. The same situation is seen in the political sector and government services. After growing criticism, the quota system was implemented which has led to a step forward in the inclusion of these communities.

Nepali society is full of diversity in terms of language, caste, ethnicity, culture and tradition. There are 142 ethnic groups and 124 languages spoken here. The indigenous community has a demand that the image and character of the society should be reflected in the press as per the structure of the society. However, that demand has not been addressed yet. There is a belief that state-funded government media should represent the voices of all communities, but that has not been reflected in the results. The Constitution of Nepal has given us the right to complete inclusion. As per the provisions of the constitution, an inclusive structure should be created at all levels.

This study mainly relies on secondary news sources. However, an attempt has been made to make the study more robust by conducting interviews and focus group discussions with news editors. Editors have made various arguments for the inability to make online news content readable and of high quality. The primary arguments were a lack of manpower, lack of resources, and lack of professional

competitive thinking. Private online outlets operate in a competitive market. The main financial aspect to run online editions needs to be strong. To compete economically, the news content should stand out as well, which is lacking in online outlets of government media. Not much attention has been paid to increasing advertising online and competing with private media in news content. According to news editors, online versions of government media outlets also face criticism of the government. Structural reforms are needed to improve this.

This study shows that although government media outlets give some priority to indigenous content in terms of quantity, the qualitative content is very weak. Comparatively, Gorkhapatraonline.com excels in both quantity and qualitative content. However, NepalTVOnline.com and RadioNepalOnline.com were found to be weak in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Although the government media cover news based on inclusive principles, they were not found to cover content with the intention of setting an agenda. The news has been published in a way that makes it readable and that the coverage of the news is attractive.

However, the news did not appear to be given high priority. The complaints of indigenous peoples regarding news coverage by government media seem justifiable in light of these facts. In the coming days, it seems necessary that these media outlets give higher priority in news coverage focusing on all members of the community. This will help in maintaining unity of diverse communities. Another important aspect is that the number of indigenous journalists should also be increased to cover their issues more accurately in the days to come.

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