

CONTRIBUTION OF NEPAL TELEVISION TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF NEPALI POLITICS THROUGH LANGUAGE, ART, AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the significant role of Nepal Television (NTV) in the advancement of Nepali politics, focusing on its contribution to the preservation and promotion of Nepali language, art, and culture. Before the establishment of NTV in 1985, Nepal lacked its own television network, and urban areas, particularly Kathmandu, were primarily exposed to Indian television, mainly through Door darshan. Television was a luxury limited to the wealthy and was not widely seen as an essential tool for education or national unity. In response to the cultural threat posed by foreign media, King Birendra initiated the creation of NTV with the aim of protecting Nepali language and culture. Despite challenges such as financial constraints, limited technology, and a lack of trained personnel, NTV was launched as a national broadcaster with a vision to promote Nepali identity. This study uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through interviews with media experts, former NTV employees, and cultural historians, while secondary data includes existing literature on Nepal's media history, cultural studies, and political discourse. The objectives of the research are to examine how NTV influenced the development of a national television culture, its role in promoting Nepali language and arts, and its impact on political and cultural expression over the past four decades. The findings demonstrate that NTV has been a critical tool for national unity, cultural preservation, and the shaping of Nepali politics, contributing significantly to the country's identity in the face of global media influence.

KEYWORDS

history, audio-visual journalism, media, cultural encroachment.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal Television (NTV), established in 1985, has played a pivotal role in shaping Nepal's political, cultural, and linguistic landscape. Before its creation, Nepal lacked a domestic television network, and urban areas, particularly Kathmandu, were dominated by foreign media, especially Indian channels like Door darshan. In a nation where television was once a luxury, NTV's inception was a visionary move by King Birendra to safeguard Nepali language, culture, and national identity against the growing influence of foreign media.

NTV's arrival marked the beginning of a national television culture that would promote political engagement, cultural expression, and linguistic preservation. Its programming has been instrumental in fostering a unique Nepali identity, providing a platform for political discourse, national unity, and the celebration of Nepali art and traditions. Over the past four decades, the network has contributed significantly to shaping a media culture that resonates with the aspirations and challenges of the Nepali people.

Television's rise as a global medium began in the 1930s with the establishment of institutions like the BBC and NBC. It gained widespread popularity after World War II, and the 1960s saw the expansion of satellite technology, accelerating the medium's global reach. In Nepal, the establishment of NTV in 1985 marked a significant turning point. On December 29 of that year, NTV began regular broadcasts on the birthday of King Birendra, offering Nepali audiences a chance to access content tailored to their own language, culture, and political context. This allowed Nepal to break free from the influence of foreign media and embrace a broadcasting model that reflected its national values and concerns.

As of 2024, Nepal boasts 246 television channels, many of which contribute to promoting Nepali identity, but NTV remains a foundational force in this development. Its pioneering role in broadcasting not only influenced the media landscape but also had a lasting impact on political discourse, cultural preservation, and language use in the country. Through its diverse programming, NTV continues to shape Nepali politics and society while preserving the richness of Nepali heritage. The network's influence remains central to the ongoing evolution of Nepal's media, culture, and national identity.

Study Methods and Limitations

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine Nepal Television's (NTV) role in the advancement of Nepali politics, language, art, and culture. It focuses on NTV's influence in shaping national identity and its contribution to the preservation and promotion of Nepali language and cultural heritage. The research is based on an extensive review of secondary sources, including books, journal articles, newspapers, and online resources, which provide valuable historical context and insights into NTV's development and impact. Primary data is also collected through interviews with key figures in Nepal's media, such as NTV staff, media scholars, political analysts, and cultural experts. These interviews offer in-depth perspectives on how NTV has influenced political discourse, cultural expression, and the use of Nepali language over the years. Data is analyzed using descriptive and analytical methods, allowing for a thorough understanding of NTV's contributions. However, the study has some limitations. It relies primarily on qualitative data, which may not fully capture the broader statistical impact of NTV. Additionally, the diverse scope of NTV's programming makes it difficult to generalize its influence in all areas. Finally, the study is constrained by the availability of sources and the perspectives of those interviewed, which may not represent all viewpoints. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide

valuable insights into NTV's influence on Nepali politics and culture.

Nepali Society and Television Culture

Television culture in Nepal began to take root in the 1960s and 1970s, but it remained largely confined to the wealthier segments of urban society. After India started television broadcasts in 1959, some affluent families in major Nepali cities, especially Kathmandu, imported television sets from places like Hong Kong and Singapore, paying high prices to enjoy foreign broadcasts. By the 1970s, a small number of households in urban centers had access to television, and some enterprising individuals in Kathmandu began showing video films through VCRs for a fee, helping to popularize television viewing (Parajuli, 2008).

The advent of television in Nepal gained momentum in the 1980s, particularly with the broadcast of India's 'Ramayana' serial, which attracted large audiences in both India and Nepal. As Singh (2012) notes, the serial was so popular that thousands of Nepalis purchased televisions to watch it, and even those without sets visited neighbors to see the show. This widespread interest in television highlighted the growing influence of visual media in Nepali society.

Despite the increasing popularity of television, there was concern about the dominance of Indian media and the potential erosion of Nepali language, culture, and traditions. Many feared that if Nepal did not establish its own television station, its cultural identity would be at risk, especially as Indian television and Hindi films began to have a strong influence (Gautam, 2004). However, there were also arguments against introducing television, given the country's economic challenges and the limited access to electricity. Some leaders believed it was a luxury that would benefit only the elite, with a television set costing up to 40 times the monthly salary of a government employee (Singh, 2008).

Amidst these debates, King Birendra recognized the need for a national television network that would serve the dual purpose of preserving Nepali language and culture while providing a medium for national unity. This led to the creation of the *Nepal Television Project* in 1984, which, after overcoming significant challenges, began regular broadcasting in 1985. Nepal Television's launch marked a significant turning point in the country's media landscape, offering a platform for the promotion of Nepali politics, language, and culture while also contributing to the development of a unique television culture in the country.

Purpose of Nepal Television

In 1985, the Nepal Television Project, initially under the Ministry of Communication, was transformed into a national institution with the goal of advancing public awareness through the protection and promotion of Nepali language, culture, and natural resources. It was tasked with fostering national interest by harnessing the power of modern technology and international broadcast standards. As part of this mission, NTV was established with a mandate to serve the nation according to commercial principles, in line with the Communication Institute Act of 1971. This placed NTV under the authority of the government, alongside other key media institutions like Gorkhapatra, Radio Nepal, and the Rashtriya Samachar Samiti, but with a unique role in the visual media landscape (Nepal Gazette: December 29, 1985).

In its early stages, Nepal Television faced significant challenges, including limited experience, technological infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled manpower. Despite these hurdles, NTV made a remarkable leap forward. On December 29, 1985—coinciding with King Birendra's birthday—the station began its regular color

broadcasting, initially airing daily from 7 pm to 9 pm. This marked the beginning of NTV's journey in shaping Nepali politics, culture, and language, eventually positioning it as a key tool for national unity, cultural preservation, and political communication across the country.

A television operated by trainees

Even though television was established, there was an absolute lack of manpower required for it in Nepal. Therefore, two trainers were brought from Finland with the help of World View International. Those two instructors who worked as producers of national television programs in Finland trained 32 trainees. According to Chitrakar (2024):

What is television in training? How are news and programs produced? What is a camera? How to run? How do I edit the scene? What is sound? What is the importance of light and sound on television? How to write audio visual news? How to take an interview? How to produce documentaries and programs? The trainees got an opportunity to learn about basic subjects like (Interview, June 17, 2024) Advance training was given to the same trainees after the first phase of training. Ghimire (2024) remembers the situation at that time as follows:

After receiving the training, great enthusiasm filled the trainees, we started the work but there was no technology. For making five documentaries reflecting Nepali culture, the project received a set of beta cams (camera, editing set) from the Finnish. With the help of those tools, documentaries were made about the religion and culture of the Newar, Limbu, Tharu, Dhimal, Sherpa castes. They took the copyright, but Nepal Television had the right to broadcast it (Purushottam Ghimire, June 6, 2024).

The project selected trainees based on the principle that if there is talent, then there is no educational qualification. According to Shah (2024): Nor was there any guarantee that they would get a job after the training. Paiha also did not decide who would get the responsibility at which level and position. By working round the clock without pay (volunteers) for nine months, those trainees made a historic contribution to the establishment of Nepal Television. Their dedication and hard work, working round the clock from 8 am to 3 am the next day, was unprecedented (Nir Shah, interview, May 20, 2024). In the early days, most of the scenes were broadcasted on Nepal Television without any scenes and the news was taken by the National News Committee.

Modern infrastructure and technology

Two years after the establishment of Nepal Television, the South Asian Cooperation Organization (SAARC) summit was held in Kathmandu on November 2 to 4, 1987. The previous conference in India was telecast live on Door darshan. On that occasion, the leadership of Nepal Television made the palace, and the government agree to increase the capacity of live broadcasting of the conference. According to Shukla (2024):

The previous year's conference in India was televised live. When the conference is about to be held in Nepal, we put a proposal before the government that we should improve the technology to live and the budget was also approved. On October 25, 2044, a broadcasting center was established at Phulchoki Hill in Lalitpur, and the reach was extended beyond Kathmandu Valley. An outdoor broadcasting van and a camera were bought for live broadcasting. In this way, for the first time, live broadcasting of the conference was possible through its own resources. After making a technological leap from VHS, Umatic Low-Wand, Nepal Television started broadcasting on Umatic High-Wand. (Interview, June 18, 2024)

Thus, within two years of its establishment, Nepal Television's broadcasting, which was limited to the

Kathmandu Valley, expanded to some parts of the Terai. In the year 1991, with the construction of a building with its own studio inside the Singrdarbar premises television took a leap in terms of physical infrastructure. By the year 1993, it had expanded its broadcasting to most parts of the country. By introducing Outside Broadcasting Van (OB Van) and Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) technology, the ability to broadcast live from anywhere in the country has been expanded.

Protection of Language and Culture

Nepal Television could not commercialize its editorial policy in four decades of its establishment. Even though journalism is said to be the voice of the voiceless, Nepal Television has maintained the policy of giving the highest importance to the speech of big people and the voice of power since its inception. But with its establishment, news, programs, telefilms, interviews, and interviews were broadcast in Nepali language. According to King Prithvi Narayan Shah, divided into four castes and thirty-six characters, Nepal has a diversity of language, religion, and culture. Since its inception, Nepal Television has been producing and broadcasting documentaries and television programs based on various languages, cultures and religions. As a result, foreign channels have helped to stop encroachment on the language and culture of Nepal.

The main challenge is quality

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal underwent significant changes in its media landscape, largely due to the liberalization of policies and the push to open new television channels across the country. This period saw a rapid increase in the number of television stations, but it also introduced challenges related to quality, relevance, and audience engagement. The government distributed broadcast licenses without a comprehensive study of the country's needs, leading to a saturated market with many channels offering similar content. By 2024, there were 246 licensed television companies operating in Nepal, both for terrestrial and satellite broadcasting (Department of Information and Broadcasting, 2024). However, despite the proliferation of channels, many Nepali TV stations still prioritized the speeches of political leaders and official narratives, often neglecting the interests and desires of the general public.

One of the key challenges faced by the Nepali television industry is the lack of skilled manpower and a strong business model. As Shukla (2024) observes, many television operators launched channels with little understanding of management or programming strategy, believing that revenue would flow in effortlessly once broadcasting began. However, without a clear business plan, proper research, and investment in quality content, most channels struggled to attract a significant audience and failed to expand their advertising market.

In the face of increasing competition from digital platforms and social media, traditional Nepali television has faced a steady decline in viewership. The rise of Google, YouTube, OTT platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has reshaped the global media landscape, providing audiences with greater access to diverse content. The digital revolution has posed a significant challenge to television, with the rise of social media platforms changing the way people consume content. Bhattarai (2024) notes that while television once served as a central medium for family entertainment, the rise of on-demand content tailored to individual preferences has shifted audience attention toward social media, further fragmenting the media landscape. Traditional television programming, now often uploaded to social media platforms, has struggled to adapt to the different language, style, and content needs of online audiences. Social media requires a different approach, one that is more interactive, immediate, and often sensational, which contrasts sharply with the traditional, slower-paced format

of television.

In the digital age, content has become "king" (McLuhan, 1964), with high-quality, engaging programming having the potential to reach far wider audiences than ever before. As Bourdieu (2024) emphasizes, the power of visual media now extends beyond traditional platforms like cinemas and television, as films, news, and entertainment content are all easily accessible via YouTube and OTT platforms. These platforms have empowered individuals to create and share content, making the production and distribution of visual media more democratic, and further eroding the dominance of traditional television.

For Nepal Television (NTV) to continue contributing meaningfully to the advancement of Nepali politics, language, art, and culture, it must adapt to these technological shifts. This means moving beyond simply broadcasting content and engaging more deeply with the evolving media consumption habits of Nepali audiences. To remain relevant, NTV must prioritize high-quality, culturally resonant programming, invest in skilled personnel, and explore new ways to integrate digital platforms with traditional television broadcasts. By doing so, NTV can continue to play a vital role in shaping Nepali politics and culture, promoting the Nepali language, and fostering a sense of national identity in an increasingly globalized and media-saturated world.

CONCLUSION

After four decades of operation, Nepal Television (NTV) has played a pivotal role in promoting Nepali language, culture, and identity. As Nepal's first and most influential television network, NTV has been essential in preserving and showcasing the country's diverse ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. Through its original programming, documentaries, and news, NTV has contributed significantly to national unity, cultural pride, and the advancement of Nepali society. However, NTV has faced challenges in adapting to a rapidly evolving media landscape. Over time, the focus shifted from producing original, high-quality content to replicating content from other sources, which often fails to resonate with the changing tastes of younger audiences. Additionally, NTV has struggled with a lack of investment in staff training and professional development, resulting in a shortage of skilled personnel and a growing exodus to more dynamic fields, especially digital media. The rise of social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook has further eroded NTV's audience base, as viewers now have access to more interactive and on-demand content. To maintain its relevance, NTV must embrace new technologies and digital platforms while continuing to prioritize cultural content that reflects Nepali identity. By investing in innovation and high-quality programming, NTV can remain a cornerstone of Nepali politics, culture, and language in the digital age.

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