

Dharma Adhikari. 2010. *A Compassionate Journalist: The Life and Times of Bharat Dutta Koirala*. Varanasi: Pilgrims Publishing.

This book gives a thick description of Bharat Dutta Koirala, a Nepali journalist now in his late 60s. It is a revised and updated version of the author's Ph.D. dissertation "A Nepali Quest for Journalistic Professionalism: The Public Life of Bharat Dutta Koirala," submitted to the University of Missouri, Columbia (Adhikari 2004). The dissertation sheds light on Koirala's life only until 2004, but for this book Adhikari has done further research on Koirala's life till 2008.

This book chronicles the contributions Koirala has made to develop journalism and media in Nepal. Adhikari has written about Koirala's life in a chronological order from his birth (1942) to events that mark his graceful aging in nine chapters. The book situates this life within socio-political, national and international scenarios, discussing organizations

Koirala was involved with and colleagues with whom he worked. Though Adhikari does not state this clearly, we can divide his life into three phases: before Koirala joined the Gorkhapatra Corporation (GC) in 1965, his activities in the Corporation in the next two decades and his life after he left the GC in 1984.

The first phase of his life is the time before he joined *The Rising Nepal* (TRN), an English newspaper published by the GC, as a senior reporter. The book shows how the education he got at the Jesuit-run St. Xavier's School in Kathmandu and the work he did as "a news analyst at the Information Service of the British Embassy" (p. 26), helped him to become a senior reporter of TRN.

In the second phase, Koirala got an opportunity to visit the US in 1968 under the International Visitors Program, sponsored by the US State Department and another opportunity to join the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (New Delhi) in 1972, to do a one year post-graduate course in Journalism and Mass Communication. In India, he became familiar with the ideas of Alan Chalkley, who stressed development journalism in developing countries. He also became accustomed with the Baha'i religious philosophy which emphasizes "unity among people, respect for diversity, and avoidance of political controversies" (p. 58) through an Iranian student, whom he later married. These two opportunities changed his worldview on journalism and the meaning of his life. When he became an editor of *Gorkhapatra* in 1976, a Nepali daily, he urged others to do reporting on rural activities. One example of this is the *Hāmro Gāūghar* column by Kishor Nepal. The government even summoned Koirala for recruiting Nepal, a supporter of the then banned Nepali Congress Party. As the General Manager of the GC, he helped in increasing facilities for its staff and in finding ways of making it self-sustainable through advertisements. During this time he also endeavored to use press freedom guaranteed after the Referendum in 1980, and maintain professionalism within the environment of controlled freedom. For example, then ministers like Hira Lal Bishwokarma and Sushila Thapa always insisted that Koirala should report their activities, which Koirala never cared for.

In the third phase, the book shows Koirala's engagements with different private media institutions like the Nepal Press Institute (NPI), the Worldview International Foundation (WIF), Himal Association, Media Services International (MSI), the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), etc. During this time, he was engaged in different activities like providing training to journalists, developing rural

communication through wall newspapers, audio towers and establishing community radios in Nepal.

The most interesting part of this book is the discussion of internal politics inside these organizations. Adhikari discusses the political interference from ministers and the Palace in these organizations. As an example the Social Services National Coordination Council, the organization which had to register NPI, refused to do so. According to Gokul Pokharel, one of the founders of NPI, this happened under the guidance of Chiran Shumsher Thapa, head of the Royal Communication Secretariat. Eventually, NPI was registered under the Ministry of Education.

Though it is an important book about the history of journalism, journalism education, development communication, media training, private radio, and even the Baha'i religion in Nepal, it also has some weaknesses. The eighth chapter which is titled "Radio-active 1999–2003," contains information on Koirala's daily activities including his views on different issues. This chapter also contains information on the activities of International Media Support (e.g., its support for the 2002 documentary made by Mohan Mainali, *Jogimārākā Jiūdāharū*), an organization Koirala was associated with. Information on all of these activities is useful but they don't fit under the title of the chapter; they have nothing to do with radio as such. It is interesting that most of these issues are discussed under the chapter, "Aging Gracefully, 1999–," in the dissertation. There is a repetition of ideas in various chapters which makes the book dull in some places. Whatever the reasons for these weaknesses, they reveal a lack of proper editing of the book. Further, Adhikari has based the work heavily on primary data he collected through interviews. In some places, he does not engage himself with available literature especially on the GC.

This book has tried to glorify the contributions Koirala made to the sector of communications in Nepal. For example, the author gives credit to Koirala for technically modernizing the GC. I think what Koirala did was the result of the National Communication Services Plan (1971), which aimed to improve both the hardware and software of the Corporation. Moreover, this book has highlighted the characteristics of Koirala as a good manager, mediator, helper, compassionate, etc. Using these positive words, the author has unintentionally glorified Koirala's contributions.

More than this, in some places the presentation is one-sided. While alleging that Yagya Bahadur Karki engaged in corruption inside WIF, he

has tried to include Karki's views. But Karki was unavailable to Adhikari. He has also stated that Chiran Shumsher Thapa interfered with NPI and WIF, but nowhere can we find Thapa's views in the book. Further, the author has used the Koirala version of the story to allege that NEFEJ finally captured Radio Sagarmatha. We don't see views from NEFEJ officials and on this Radio Sagarmatha issue as a whole, the book lacks information, and instead of presenting different views, it draws a hasty conclusion.

Despite these few weaknesses, I think this book deserves to be read. There is a serious lack of well-researched books on the history of communication, development communication and media NGOs in Nepal. This is a good book that covers these topics.

Reference

Adhikari, Dharma. 2004. A Nepali Quest for Journalistic Professionalism: The Public Life of Bharat Dutta Koirala. Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, Columbia.

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