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Comments on Adhikari and Mathe by Onta

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The sections of this paper that narrate the flow of events after the 1 June royal carnage, and the inadequacies of the Probe Commission, repeat what has, by now, become common knowledge in Kathmandu. Hence these sections do not attract any commentary here. With respect to the sections that describe what the media did and did not cover, these too fail to provide much new information. Apart from accusing the international media of having “bad faith” when it came to reporting events related to the happenings of 1 June, there is nothing novel in this paper by Adhikari and Mathe. Those who are familiar with the way in which internationally dominant media outlets treat stories from the margins of the world would not have been surprised by what was reported both in the visual and print media.

Hence I would like to make only three brief points regarding the analysis of the coverage:

1. The long shelf life enjoyed by Nepal in the international media in early June was mainly due to the fact that the events provided a “love and murder” story in a royal context. Love, murder and royalty, what better combination could the international audience ask for? If we can just remember this fact, not much energy need be spent complaining about the failures of the international media. Beyond that, what would be required for a truly convincing analysis of the performance of the various international media outlets, is a close textual reading of the different electronic (including Internet) and print reports. Unfortunately such an analysis is not the substance of this paper. If this had been done, the paper would have served some purpose.

2. Since close textual analysis is not in the agenda of this paper, it has become easy for the authors to suggest that all members of the international press were gullible enough to believe the findings of the Probe Commission. In early June, this writer was contacted by journalists working for The Washington Post, The Times (UK), BBC Radio, ABC Radio (Australia), The Asian Wall Street Journal, Doordarshan, Star TV, Rediff.Com, and Ananda Bazaar Patrika. Not a single journalist who contacted me believed that the Probe Commission had done a thorough job. Each one of them was suspicious of its findings, and some of the reports they filed – I have not had the opportunity to see or read all of them – make this point explicitly through recourse to quotes from various Nepali sources. Hence I must ask the authors to

come up with evidence to back their accusation.

3. The long list of questions that the authors produce as “questions that the international media might have posed but did not”, might seem new to a forum like the Himalayan Research Bulletin, but for a reader based in Kathmandu, they are the same questions that have been raised by various commentators in Nepali newspapers many a time. If this paper is being entertained in the Bulletin as an academic contribution, then it is fair for this reader to expect references to the various writings published in the Kathmandu media – many of which are available on-line – where these questions have been raised previously. Just the writings of Khagendra Sangroula would suffice to make my case. Even if this article is being published as a journalistic commentary, then it is not asking for too much to say that such an acknowledgement should be made explicitly.

Now some comments on just two of the assumptions made by the authors:

1. The authors write, “Nepal’s independence, democracy and human rights... might have been gravely threatened by these assassinations.” They fail to show why it is justified to make this assumption – especially the matter regarding the independence of Nepal. They also fail to tell us why the international media needed to show concern about these specific topics, in relationship to the royal carnage. Amongst the electronic and print reports that have been aired or published before and since the carnage, plenty of references have been made to the difficulties of Nepali democracy and the situation regarding human rights in Nepal, especially in light of the Maoist violence. Instead of paying attention to this fact, the two authors repeat a favorite slogan of the conservative royalists in Nepal, which links the Nepali monarchy with the existence of Nepal as such. At a time when widespread discussion about republicanism in Nepal already exists (and the Maoists represent only one camp in this discussion), it is tragically hilarious to realize that Adhikari and Mathe have not been able to discard a slogan of Panchayati vintage.

2. The authors write, “Since the assassination, the monarchy in Nepal has become controversial with the result that the popular confidence in the monarch that was the basis of national unity has been shattered....” Only ignorant analysts (or those who are in a hurry to misrepresent Nepal to equally ignorant audiences in Stockholm) would actually go on record and say that the Nepali monarchy has become controversial *only* since the assassination. One can recall hundreds of articles of the 1980s vintage that spoke about the doings of the

Nepali monarchy during its absolutist phase, which might wake up such analysts. Then there are a few articles that give a good idea of the power play enacted by King Birendra during the making of the 1990 Constitution of Nepal. One can then refer to many articles of the post-1990 era that questioned the dominant portrayal of King Birendra as a perfect constitutional monarch and highlighted his role in keeping the location of the army ambiguous in democratic Nepal. As I have argued more than once elsewhere, the latter fact facilitated the growth of the Maoist movement.

Monarchy as the basis of Nepali unity is a popular slogan amongst the royalists in Nepal, who need only be reminded that *andolarkaris*, in early 1990, demanded that King Birendra and Queen Aiswarva leave

Pamphadevi image?) for the way in which they had mishandled the trust of the Nepali people at large during the Panchayat era. In addition, there is plenty of scholarly literature that has argued for the multiple bases of Nepali unity even within dominant narratives of Nepali nationalism. This writer has examined the case for Nepali language and the *bir* national history of Nepal – both consolidated during the Panchayat era even as they had their roots in the politics of identity executed by variously exiled Nepalis in British India in early 20th century – at some length.

Space does not permit me to examine some other incredible assumptions made by the authors. All said and done, I learned nothing from this paper about the events of 1 June, their interpretations, and the way in

