

Victim of a bloody attack: Why Charlie Hebdo is Important to France

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Every Wednesday, the newspaper kiosks in the French streets are full of the satirical covers of *Charlie Hebdo*. Using cartoons as illustrations, *Charlie's* sketches could be seen as crude, provocative or terribly funny. While the magazine may not be read by all French citizens, its strong satirical bent of work has ensured everyone knows *Charlie Hebdo*.

Mocking almost everything and everyone from religion to politicians, from businessmen to the French middle class, *Charlie Hebdo* would delight the readers with its dry humour, a trend that takes its roots in French history.

During the monarchy, satirical cartoons of the king or the priests would be circulated discretely among readers. The XIXth century-French cartoonist Daumier, mocking the French King Louis-Philippe, was in a way the ancestor of Cabu and Wolinski, killed today among other cartoonists at the Paris office.

Launched in 1969, *Charlie Hebdo* was born in the aftermath of the events of May 1968 when civil unrest was brewing all over French society. Of libertarian trend, *Charlie Hebdo* encountered rapidly troubles with powers of all kind. In 1970, the State censorship tried to forbid the newspaper after a cover mocked the death of former French President Charles de Gaulle.

The right to be rude, the right to be crude, the right to be pornographic at times... are at the core of *Charlie's* fight for freedom of speech. Its cartoonists and writers strongly believe that one should be able to laugh at everything, from genocide to fundamentalism. Black humour and raucous laughter were the beliefs *Charlie's* members subscribed to. Never one for subtleties, it always tried to jolt the reader into realisations, which for me worked very well.

To keep its belief in freedom of speech intact, the pages of *Charlie Hebdo* are free of advertisements. In the 2000s, the magazine enjoyed a weekly circulation of over 1 and a half lakh (considered good for France) but the recent years had seen a drop in its circulation to about 50,000 per week.

Charlie made a mark for itself with several covers on religions considered outrageous. In 2006, they published the cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed by Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten which had created a furore in the Muslim world. In 2011, in a special edition renamed *Charia-Hebdo*, Prophet Muhammed was drafted on the cover page of *Charlie*. A criminal fire destroyed the offices of the newspaper just before the release of this controversial edition. Since then, the journalists of *Charlie* had been under the protection of the police.

While religion formed a large part of its work, it was not the only target. *Charlie's* columnists and cartoonists would train their guns on all kinds of power structures and conservatives. With its political incorrectness, *Charlie Hebdo* carved its own unique space in the French press and gave a new way to mock our society.

The bloody attack on *Charlie* is an assault not just on the magazine or its journalists but on what they stood for : freedom of speech. It has struck at the very heart of the journalistic ideals, the French press stands for. *Je Suis Charlie*.

Hélène Ferrarini

P.S.

* "Why Charlie Hebdo is Important to France". NDTV (India). Story First Published: January 07, 2015 23:53 IST:

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/blog/why-charlie-hebdo-is-important-to-france-645633>

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