

## **The Press and the Nation: A study on the Growth of the Indian National Consciousness through Print Media**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Newspapers played a crucial role during the Indian freedom movement by effectively arousing the sentiments of the people and mobilizing them against British misrule. The press not only created awareness about political and social issues but also facilitated the spread of ideas for a representative government among the public. Furthermore, it heightened the people's understanding of their own circumstances in India. The struggle for press freedom against the British government was integral to the national movement, demonstrating the significance of the press as a powerful tool for communication during that time.

### **HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE**

The historical development of the press in India can be traced back to the ancient practice of inscribing writings on walls and stones, dating back to several centuries before Christ. This early form of communication evolved with the invention of paper and writing materials, leading to the maintenance of state records in a rudimentary form. The enduring presence of Emperor Ashoka's edicts, renouncing violence after the Kalinga war, serves as a testament to the early origins of the press in India.

During the Mughal rule in India, the system of information developed to ensure the flow of information between the Centre and the peripheries, as well as between different centres in a more scientific and organized manner. The Court historians such as Abul Fazl, Khwafi Khan, and Munshi Kazim used akhbarat or waqai' as sources, as modern newspapers were not yet published during this period. The waqais, or earlier forms of newspapers, were utilized as sources of history. For example, Mir Jumla's Waqai-nawis and Shahabuddin Talish' s diary from Mir Jumla's campaign to Kooch-Bihar and Assam are considered primary sources, elevating waqaya-nawisi to the level of historiography. It is important to note that history writing, literature, journalism, and art of every age have

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their own historical relevance and cannot be separated from it.

Printing Press and the East India Company: During the 16th to 18th centuries, newsletters were regularly written by news writers appointed by rulers and were circulated on a daily or bi-weekly basis. The first printing press was established in Bombay in 1674, followed by the second in Madras in 1772 and the third in Calcutta in 1779. This system of collecting and reporting news in manuscript form continued to thrive in North India until the events of 1857.

The practice of disseminating news through newsletters persisted until the East India Company began its rule over India. It is believed that the dissemination of these newsletters may have influenced James Augustus Hickey to start the Bengal Gazette on 29 January, 1780. The newspaper was described as 'A weekly Political and Commercial Paper Open to All Parties but Influenced by None'. Despite this, Hickey's paper struggled and ultimately closed in March 1782 when an order was issued for the seizure of the printing types.

The transition from handwritten newsletters to printed newspapers marked a significant shift in the way news was shared and consumed. This period of transition laid the foundation for the development of modern journalism in India, setting the stage for the diverse and vibrant media landscape that exists today.

In 1818, James Silk Buckingham embarked on his journalistic journey in India as an editor for the Calcutta Chronicle. During this time, he was approached by a prominent business figure to advocate for their ideas and beliefs. Subsequently, Buckingham established another newspaper called the Calcutta Herald, using it as a platform to address various issues and challenges within Indian society. His efforts were supported by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, often referred to as the 'father of Indian language journalism.' Roy, recognized by Jawaharlal Nehru as a pioneer of the Indian press, made significant contributions to Indian language journalism and advocated for a free press. He published and edited several journals, championed social causes, and defended Vedanta philosophy against criticism from Christian missionaries. Notably, his publications such as 'Sambad Kaumudi' in Bengali (1821) and 'Mirat-UL-Akbar' in Persian (1822) were characterized by their nationalist and democratic orientation.

#### **CENSORSHIP AND CONTROL- GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO REGULATE THE PRESS:**

The East India Company's increasing scrutiny of newspapers led to

the imposition of strict restrictions on printing presses and editors. In 1795, censorship was introduced in Madras, requiring The Madras Gazette to submit all material for publication for scrutiny. Similarly, in Bengal, papers such as the Bengal Journal, Indian World, and Bengal Hurkaru and Chronicles faced disapproval from the East India Company's authorities. Subsequently, a series of legal restrictions were imposed on the press.

The regulations implemented in May 1799 marked a significant shift in the newspaper industry, mandating the inclusion of the printer, editor, and proprietor names in every issue. Additionally, all material intended for publication was subject to scrutiny. This period also saw a surge in the establishment of missionary-published newspapers in Bengal between 1813 and 1818, including publications such as Dig Darshan, Samachar Darpan, and the Friend of India, which eventually laid the foundation for The Statesman.

The Adams regulations of 1818 introduced further guidelines, granting editors a degree of freedom while closely monitoring the content of their papers. During this time, the press began to voice criticisms of the administration, prompting the issuance of the first press ordinance in 1823. This ordinance imposed stricter laws and had a more profound impact than any previous regulations. These developments reflect the evolving landscape of newspaper publication and governance during the early 19th century. The regulations not only aimed to bring transparency to the industry by requiring the disclosure of key personnel behind newspapers but also sought to maintain a level of control over the content being disseminated to the public. The emergence of missionary-published newspapers and subsequent governmental responses illustrate the complex interplay between freedom of the press and regulatory oversight during this period.

### **PRESS AND INDIAN UPRISING**

Overall, the period spanning from 1799 to 1823 witnessed a series of pivotal moments in the history of newspaper regulations in Bengal, laying the groundwork for the evolving relationship between the press, governance, and public discourse.

During the Indian uprising, the press played a significant role in escalating tensions through its highly provocative statements in both correspondence columns and editorial notes. The Anglo-Indian press, in a retaliatory manner, exaggerated the tone of the Indian nationalist press.

In response to this situation, the government, under Lord Canning, enacted the Gagging Act on June 13, 1857. This legislation aimed to regulate the establishment of printing presses by making licensing mandatory, particularly in cases where the circulation of printed materials needed to be restrained. The government justified this act by claiming that there were gross misrepresentations of facts and that readers were inadequately informed about the government's actions.

The Vernacular Press Act, implemented on March 1, 1878, aimed to exert strict control over newspapers. This law granted authority to district magistrates and police commissioners to compel printers and publishers to refrain from publishing certain materials, to request security, and to seize any printed content considered objectionable. As a result of this act, regional newspapers faced significant challenges. In response, Amrita Bazaar Patrika transformed into an English daily and changed its name to Anand Bazaar Patrika. The implications of the Vernacular Press Act had a profound impact on the landscape of Indian journalism during that time.

During Lord Curzon's tenure as the Governor-General of India in 1889, several significant measures were implemented that further strained the relationship between the British government and the Indian population. The partition of Bengal and the enactment of the India Official Secrets Act, 1889 were particularly contentious, leading to strong opposition from the press. The press vehemently opposed these measures, which were perceived as detrimental to the interests of the Indian people. Additionally, the implementation of draconian laws such as the Press and Registration of Books Act, along with Sections 124-A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code, created significant obstacles for the press in carrying out their work. As a result, numerous nationalist leaders including Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghose, B.C. Pal, and Lokmanya Tilak, among others, were arrested for their involvement in the press.

The response from various newspapers varied, with publications such as The Madras Standard, New India, Bombay Chronicle, and Maratha taking divergent stances on the issues at hand. In 1914-1915, approximately 180 newspapers were required to provide security deposits and pledge support to the Government. This move was indicative of the government's efforts to exert control over the press.

However, over time, there was a shift in the press's approach towards the British government in India. By 1918, the number of

newspapers mandated to deposit security with the government had reduced significantly to only 30, marking a notable change in the dynamics between the press and the authorities. The evolving relationship between the press and the British government in India during this period reflects a complex interplay of power dynamics, resistance, and adaptation. The challenges faced by the press in navigating stringent laws and regulations, coupled with the arrest of prominent leaders, underscored the significant role played by the media in shaping public discourse and challenging oppressive measures.

Ultimately, the shifting landscape of press-government relations during Lord Curzon's tenure serves as a compelling historical example of the tensions and negotiations that characterized colonial India. It highlights the resilience and agency of the press in confronting adversities while also adapting to changing circumstances within a challenging socio-political environment.

### **PRESS AND GANDHIJI**

During the period of 1925-1946, Gandhi ji's influence on Indian journalism was profound, shaping the landscape of opinion journalism and the proliferation of newspapers in various Indian languages, notably Hindi and English. This era also witnessed the dominance of editorials over news content in the Indian press, reflecting Gandhi ji's ideology and the civil disobedience movement.

Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement garnered significant support from several newspapers, which aligned themselves with his cause. However, the government's response to this growing dissent was the issuance of a notification prohibiting the printing and publishing of any material that could potentially incite opposition to the prosecution of war. This marked a pivotal moment in the relationship between the press, the government, and the freedom of publication.

In response to these challenges, the All India Newspapers' Editors Conference (AINEC) was established (1940) with the primary objective of upholding the high standards and traditions of journalism, safeguarding the freedom of news publication and commentary, and representing the press in its interactions with the public and the government. This initiative aimed to consolidate the collective voice of the press and protect its autonomy in the face of increasing government intervention.

The period also coincided with Mountbatten's announcement of the plan to partition India into two independent nations. This development

elicited a mixed response from the newspapers, as noted by Krishna Murthy, with a general tone of acquiescence and satisfaction regarding the impending realization of India's freedom.

Overall, this era marked a significant juncture in Indian journalism, characterized by the intertwining of political movements, governmental restrictions, and the emergence of organized efforts to uphold journalistic integrity and freedom. The influence of Gandhi ji's ideology, coupled with the proliferation of newspapers in diverse languages, contributed to a dynamic and transformative period in Indian journalism history.

**Freedom's Voice: The Indian Journalism and the Newspapers:** In 1835, when Charles Metcalfe assumed the role of Governor-General, he implemented a relaxation of several press restrictions. According to N. Krishna Murthy, the Bengal Gazette, founded by Gangadhar Bhattacharya, was the first Indian-owned newspaper. The press in various Indian languages began to progress rapidly, with Urdu and Persian papers in north-west India gaining a significant readership. Additionally, the Marathi and Gujarati press started to establish their influence. Furthermore, newspapers in Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Oriya, Assamese, and Punjabi emerged around 1850 or later.

The 1857 war of independence had a significant impact on the growth of the press in India. The curtailment of press freedom led to a setback in the development of newspapers and journalism. However, despite these challenges, several influential newspapers emerged from Bengal, such as Nil Darpan, Patriot, Shome Prakash, Indian Mirror, and Bengali. These newspapers played a crucial role in shaping public opinion during that time.

Pt. Jugul Kishor Shukla made history by publishing the first Hindi newspaper, 'Udant Martand' in Kolkata in 1826. This marked a significant milestone in the history of Indian journalism. Additionally, 'Banaras Akhbar'(1845) from Kashi became one of the first weekly newspapers published in any Hindi state.

The transformation of journalism in India took a dramatic turn with the introduction of the Amrita Bazar Patrika in 1868 by Ghosh Brothers. Initially published in Bengali, the newspaper later transitioned to the English language. This shift had a profound impact on the landscape of journalism in India and was even praised by Vladimir Lenin as 'The best nationalist paper in India'. The Amrita Bazar Patrika played a pivotal role in

the growth and evolution of Indian journalism, becoming a trusted source of information and inspiration for national leaders.

Bharatendu Harishchandra's contribution to promoting social, economic, and academic reforms in Hindi regions cannot be overstated. His publication of 'Sudha' in Hindi-speaking areas created significant impact and contributed to what is now known as the Bharatendu Age in Hindi literature and journalism. This era not only fostered awareness among Hindi-speaking people but also sparked a strong reaction against British repression.

In conclusion, the period following the 1857 war of independence was a transformative time for Indian journalism. Despite facing challenges, newspapers and journalists played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and driving social change. The contributions of individuals like Pt. Jugul Kishor Shukla and Bharatendu Harishchandra, as well as influential newspapers like Amrita Bazar Patrika, left a lasting impact on the evolution of Indian journalism.

During this period, there was a significant establishment of noted English language newspapers in India. The Times of India, founded in 1861 by Robert Knight, was formed through the amalgamation of four papers - The Bombay Times, The Courier, The Standard and The Telegraph. Additionally, three other prominent English newspapers - The Pioneer, Civil and Military Gazette, and The Statesman (founded in 1875 by Robert Knight) - also emerged. In Madras, The Mail and The Hindu (founded in 1878 by G. Subramaniam Aiyer), which is currently the largest circulated paper, were established soon after. This era also saw a surge in the Indian language press, with numerous newspapers in major Indian languages coming into existence, particularly in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Tamil, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Punjabi, and other languages.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several prominent newspapers emerged in India, catering to different linguistic and regional audiences. Publications such as Bande Matram, Kesari, and Maratha provided news and information in Hindi, Marathi, and English, respectively. Additionally, Swadeshimitrani served the Tamil-speaking population. However, these newspapers faced numerous challenges, including stringent restrictions on news gathering, printing, and distribution. Despite these obstacles, the period also witnessed the rise of periodical journalism with the establishment of publications like

The Illustrated Weekly in Bombay and The Hindustan Review in Calcutta. This period marked a significant growth in the Indian media landscape, with the emergence of a diverse range of newspapers and periodicals catering to various linguistic and regional communities.

The early 20th century saw the emergence of several influential Hindi publications that played a significant role in India's freedom struggle. Saraswati, the first popular Hindi monthly, was published by Chintamani Ghosh in 1900, followed by the launch of Pratap, a revolutionary weekly by Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi in 1910. These publications served as platforms for expressing the aspirations of those seeking independence from British colonial rule.

The appearance of Prabha in 1913, from Vidyarthi's 'Pratap Press' of Kanpur, further contributed to the cause of freedom. Chand, an allied journal with Prabha and Pratap, also made a notable impact by sowing seeds of discontent against the British government through its publication of Nand Kumar's 'Phansi.'

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the continuation of this trend with the establishment of journals such as Aajby Shiv Prasad Gupta and the Hindi version of Navjiwan by Mahatma Gandhi. Additionally, Acharya Shiv Poojan Sahay began editing the monthly journal Adarsh in 1922, further contributing to the dissemination of ideas related to independence and social reform. Munshi Premchand, a prominent figure in Hindi literature, also made a significant contribution to the political and literary landscape during this period. His journal, Hans, which he started in 1930, reflected his strong opposition to British colonialism and his support for the ideals of Gandhism. Through his writings and editorials in Hans, Premchand vehemently criticized the British rule, often facing punitive measures as a result.

In the final issue of Hans in September 1936, Premchand's essay 'MahajaniSabhyata' stands as a testament to his evolving revolutionary consciousness and unwavering commitment to the cause of Indian independence. These publications and their contributors played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, fostering a spirit of resistance, and mobilizing support for the freedom struggle. Their impact on the socio-political landscape of the time was profound, leaving an indelible mark on the history of India's fight for Independence.

The evolution of Hindi journalism in India has been closely intertwined with the country's struggle for independence. Throughout this



period, Hindi journals and newspapers have played a pivotal role in shaping social and political consciousness. By championing nationalist ideology and fostering a strong sense of national identity among the masses, Hindi journalism has been instrumental in the freedom movement. The contribution of these publications has been widely recognized and appreciated by the Indian people.

### **CONCLUSION**

During the Indian freedom movement, the press played a crucial role in advocating for independence and serving the public interest. Unlike today's profit-driven media, the press of that era was driven by a sense of nationalism and a commitment to promoting the freedom movement. The press had a wide reach and penetration among the public, stimulating the renowned library movement in the country.

This movement extended to remote villages, allowing individuals from all walks of life to access news content and editorials, fostering political consciousness and encouraging participation in the freedom movement. Prominent newspaper editors such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Ghosh, Tilak, and Iyer scrutinized various acts and policies of the British government, using their platforms to rally the masses to join the fight for independence. Despite facing oppressive laws imposed by the government, such as the Censorship of Press Act (1799) and the Vernacular Press Act (1878), journalists employed clever strategies to subvert these obstacles and continued to motivate people to participate in the freedom struggle. The government's attempts to curb the independence of the press only served to strengthen its resolve. The press emerged as an institution of opposition to the government, using its powerful platform to propagate political ideas and advocate for freedom.

Maintaining freedom of the press was a challenging task that required a delicate balance of simplicity and subtlety. Despite the obstacles, the Indian press remained steadfast in its commitment to serving the public and advancing the cause of independence. In conclusion, the press during the Indian freedom movement demonstrated its unwavering dedication to the public good and played a significant role in shaping the course of history. Its legacy serves as a testament to the power of media in advocating for social and political change.

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