

***THE PRINT MEDIA AND INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE***

**Dr.Y.Samuel P.W**

**Abstract**

The Press arrived on the scene as a breath of fresh air in the suffocating and stifling atmosphere of the English colonial rule. It served as a beacon of light and a lamp to the path of the people walking in the dark wilderness of the British rule. It exploded onto the scene as a powerful weapon to ignite the imagination of the masses in the context of the imperial rule. They were fountain of inspiration providing a sense of perspective and direction. In 1857, *Paygam-e-Azadi* started publication in Hindi and Urdu, calling upon the people to fight against the British. The paper was notorious from the British point of view. It shows the boldness of the Press in fiercely opposing the autocratic British rule.

As illustrated in the above paragraph, The Press of all hues and kinds played an unarguably pivotal function in the Indian National Movement. It contributed to social reforms and the growth of nationalism in India. The Press popularized the ideas of nationalist organizations and leaders. It provided propaganda and educated the masses with regard to political matters and developments.

Undoubtedly it was the colonial master who first brought the Press to India. British missionaries had a vital role to play in the establishment of the printing press. The establishment of the printing press in India led to newspapers and Hickey's *Bengal Gazette* was the first newspaper.

**Keywords**

Press, stifling atmosphere, English colonial rule, beacon, dark wilderness, powerful weapon, ignite, imagination, a fountain of inspiration, perspective, direction, public opinion, political education, political participation. opposing, autocratic , British rule., pivotal function , Indian National Movement, social reforms, nationalism popularized, ideas , propaganda, educated, political matters.

### **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to study the role of the Press in the Indian National Movement. Various leaders and factors played an important role in India's Freedom struggle from the British colonial rule. In this struggle the Press had a significant part to play. The Press arrived on the scene as a breath of fresh air in the suffocating and stifling atmosphere of the English colonial rule. It served as a beacon of light and a lamp to the path of the people walking in the dark wilderness of the British rule. It exploded onto the scene as a powerful weapon to ignite the imagination of the masses in the context of the imperial rule. They were a fountain of inspiration providing a sense of perspective and direction. Three newspapers published a 'Farman' by Bahadur Shah Zafar. The Farman asked the people of India to oust the British from India. The newspapers were the first Hindi daily *Samachar Sudhavarashan*, the Urdu newspaper *Doorbeen* and the Persian newspaper *Sultan-ul-Akhbar*. These newspapers faced Government suppression. In 1857, *Paygam-e-Azad* started publication in Hindi and Urdu, calling upon the people to fight against the British.<sup>i</sup> The paper was notorious from the British point of view. It shows the boldness of the Press in fiercely opposing the autocratic British rule.

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### **Trajectory of press in the freedom struggle**

It is fascinating to trace the trajectory of the Press in general and newspapers in particular during the Indian National Movement. The Press had a potent presence at all stages of the National

movement. During the era of the revolutionaries, the Press rendered yeoman service as far as the dissemination of the ideas of the revolutionaries is concerned. The revolutionaries were not impulsive mercenaries who wielded the gun and the bomb. They knew very well the compelling power of the Press and used it to great effect.

A number of revolutionaries started a plethora of newspapers to ignite the minds of the masses and to enthuse them. Barindra Kumar Ghosh started a newspaper called *Yugantar*. The editor of *Yugantar*, B.N Dutt had to face trial for allegedly anti British activities. Shyamji Krishna Verma published from London *Indian Sociologist*. It dispersed information of the Indian freedom movement related activities that occurred in England notably at the India House. *Sandhya* was another publication which was fiercely critical of British policies. A number of editors had cases filed against them and were tried for treason and sedition.

Several revolutionary organizations started their publication. The ideas of the *Gadar* party were circulated through a journal. The journal, also called *Gadar* was printed in English, Marathi, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati and Urdu. It had a readership over a wide range running into lakhs of copies.<sup>iii</sup> These publications came not only from India, but also from abroad. An associate of Lala Hardayal named Pandit Ramchandra published *Hindustan Ghadarin* English. In Paris, Lala Hardayal, in collaboration with Madam Cama and Sardar Singhraoji Rana brought out *Vandemataram* and *Talwar*. The journal *Vandemataram* chalked a revolutionary path in the Indian National Movement. The editor of *Vandemataram*, Aurobindo Ghosh was accused and tried for anti-British activities.

The Government supported several Hindi language newspapers.<sup>iv</sup> The journal *Kavi Vachan Sudha*, started by Bhartendu Harish Chandra was strident in its assault on the policies of the British which was tyrannical for the ordinary multitude of the masses. As a result, Bhartendu Harish Chandra was forced to quit from his post of Magistrate.

Calcutta was not just producing Bengali and English newspapers, but Hindi ones as well. One prominent Hindi journal of Calcutta was called *Bharat Mitra* whose publication started in 1878. Several Hindi newspapers critiqued the British Government and championed the cause of India's freedom. The prolific Ramanand Chatterjee started *Vishal Bharat* in Hindi. He also started *Modern Review* in English and *Pravasi Patrain* Bengali. Ambika Prasad Vajpayee published *Swatantra* whose title was self-explanatory as far as its intent was concerned.

The surge of nationalism engulfed in its wave the Press in all parts of the country. In Lahore, the journal *Milap* was brought out by Mahashaya Khushal Chand. Another prominent Hindi journalist was Ganesh Shanker Vidyarthi who championed communal harmony among Hindus and Muslims. He published *Pratapn* from Kanpur. Krishna Dutt Paliwal brought out *Sainik* from Agra which became a staunch propagator of nationalism in Western U.P. The noted Congress leader, Swami Sharadhanand, started the publication of Hindi journal *Vi rArjun* and Urdu journal *Tej*.<sup>v</sup>

Gujarat did not remain untouched by the upsurge of nationalism and the appeal of the Press. Amritlal Shet brought out the Gujarati Journal '*Janmabhumi*' which became a mouthpiece of national struggle. Similarly, another Gujarati periodical *Saanjvartman* played an outstanding part below the editorship of Sanwal Das Gandhi who had exceptionally noteworthy responsibility in the Quit India Movement in 1942. In Bihar, Dev Brat Shastri started publication of '*Nav Shakti* and *Rashtra Vani*'. Sachidanand Sinha started the publication of *Searchlight* under the editorship of Murtimanohar Sinha. The weekly *Yogi* and the *Hunkar* also contributed very much to the general awakening.

As observed in the preceding paragraphs, a plethora of publications were in circulation which played a dominant role in the Indian freedom movement. There was no part of India where the Press did not play a fearless and courageous role in the face of severe repression. A.G. Horniman prepared the *Bombay Chronicle*' as a potent tool to endorse revolutionary patriotism. He printed stunning accounts of Jallianwala Bagh slaughter for which one journalist of his paper,

Goverdhan Das, was sentenced to three years' incarceration by a martial court. A.G Horniman also was a victim of the British witch hunt that followed.

### **Yeoman Service of the Press**

It was the press which played an important role in the diffusion of the ideas of the Indian National Congress. Those who occupied the front seats in the first ever Congress session held in Bombay in December 1885 included some of the editors of Indian newspapers.<sup>vi</sup>

An interesting fact is that several of the Indian National Congress Presidents were journalists, editors and publishers. Bharat Ratna Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was the editor of the daily *Hindustan*. He was the President of the Indian National Congress on four occasions in 1909, 1913, 1919 and 1932. He also started an English-newspaper, *The Leader* published from Allahabad in 1909. He was also the Chairman of *Hindustan Times* from 1924 to 1946. His efforts resulted in the launch of its Hindi edition named *Hindustan Dainik* in 1936.<sup>vii</sup>

At the inaugural session very important resolutions were passed by the editors of various newspapers. G. Subramanya Iyer who was the editor of the newspaper *The Hindu* proposed the first resolution at the inaugural session. His resolution dealt with the question of Indian administration. Mr. Chiplunkar proposed the second resolution. He urged the Congress to fight against the India Council. The India Council was the body which governed India from England. He asked for the obliteration of the India Council. The third and fourth resolutions were proposed by Dadabhai Naoroji. Apart from being a stalwart moderate leader of the Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji was also an eminent journalist of the day.

Ferozeshah Mehta was the President of the Indian National Congress in 1890. In 1910, he started *Bombay Chronicle* an English weekly newspaper, which became an important nationalist voice of its time, and an important chronicler of the political upheavals of a volatile pre-independent India.

Lala Lajpat Rai inspired the publication of three journals, the *Punjabi*, *Bandematram* and the *People* from Lahore.<sup>viii</sup> The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi used the Press right from his early days in South Africa. During his stay in South Africa, Gandhiji had brought out *Indian Opinion* and after settling in India, he started the publication of *Young India*; *Navjeevan*, *Harijan*, *Harijan Sevak* and *Harijan Bandhu*.<sup>ix</sup> Subhash Chandra Bose was associated with the Press in the capacity of acquiring the paper *Forward* and *Advance* which later attained national status. Jawaharlal Nehru founded the *National Herald*.

There were several newspapers focusing on a range of issues dealing with social reform, economic awakening, and informing public opinion. But some newspapers played a pivotal role in the freedom struggle against the British. One such paper was the *Hindu Patriot*. The activism by the paper resulted in the Government appointing the Indigo Commission to look into the misery of the Indigo cultivators. Another paper which faced repression due to its criticism of the British government was the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.

### **The Press in Maharashtra**

Maharashtra produced stalwart leaders as far as the Indian national movement was concerned. They were prolific writers with a brilliant grasp of the events of the time which they narrated through newspapers. The early prominent leader of Maharashtra was Mahadev Govind Ranade. Ranade wrote in the *Gyan Prakash* as well as the *Indu Prakash*. Mahadev Govind Ranade wrote on a range of issues dealing with social reforms, and political freedom. Lokmanya Tilak started a weekly in Marathi called *Kesari*. He along with Agarkar and Chiplunkar started another weekly journal, *Maratha* in English. The contribution of *Kesari ad Maratha* has been well chronicled.

The Editor of the '*Daccan Star*' Nam Joshi also joined them and his paper was incorporated with *Maratha*.

Tilak and Agarkar were convicted for writings against the British and the Diwan of *Kolhapur*. Tilak's *Kesari* became one of the leading media to propagate the message of freedom movement.

It made the anti-partition movement of Bengal a national issue. In 1908, Tilak opposed the Sedition ordinance. He was later exiled from the country for six years. Hindi edition of *Kesari* was started from Nagpur and Banaras.<sup>x</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Unarguably the Press was a very important pillar in the struggle against the British with regard to critiquing their policies and demanding complete independence. It is unlikely that without the Press, the important leaders of the Indian national movement would have been able to disseminate their ideas to the masses on such a massive scale. The Government on its part had enacted many strident laws, such as Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code which provided that anyone trying to cause disaffection against the British Government in India was to be transported for life or for any term or imprisoned up to three years.

But the nationalist-minded journalists had evolved many clever ways to subvert these legal hurdles. For instance, writings hostile to the Government used to be prefaced with sentiments of loyalty to the Government or critical writings of socialists or Irish nationalists from newspapers in England used to be quoted. This was a difficult task which required an intelligent mix of simplicity with subtlety.<sup>xi</sup>

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**Bio**

Dr. Y.Samuel P.W is an Assistant Professor in Department of History in CHM College, Ulhasnagar. He can be contacted at [sammywesley2003@yahoo.com](mailto:sammywesley2003@yahoo.com)