

Growth of Journalism in India and its Contribution in Freedom Struggle: A Study on Fearless Journalist of Pre Independence Era

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Abstract

India is known to be one of the largest democracies in the world and it takes almost 190 years for India to get freedom from British rule. During the British era one of the biggest problems that freedom fighters, revolutionaries faced was an appropriate channel for the proper dissemination of information among the public. To meet this purpose, press played a crucial role. It helps to arouse the feeling of Nationalism and unity among the people and also motivate them to participate in Indian freedom movement. During freedom movement press mainly newspaper were used by various leaders for propagating their ideas among the masses. In pre independence era press also face lots of restriction and draconian policies of British government like censorship of press under which acts like Vernacular Press Act or Gagging Act were imposed but they always take a firm stand against all these odds. Press was used as a weapon by reformers, freedom fighters or journalist against the draconian policies of government and also to educate people. Through this research article we try to keep focus about the growth of Journalism in India and to also mark the contribution of fearless journalist of pre independence era who fought against the British government and struggled for Indian freedom.

Keywords: *Indian Press, Freedom Movement, Censorship, Independence.*

Introduction

The history of Indian press almost covers a long span of time of about two hundred years during which it struggled against every single social and political odd in the society. Indian press had a glorious history which defines its vital role and importance in the struggle for Indian freedom movement.

The history of Journalism in India during pre-independence era can be broadly divided into following phases:

Phase I (1780-1826): It saw the beginning of journalism in India. James Augustus Hickey published Bengal gazette or also known as Hickey Gazette on 29th January 1780 and became the first person to start a newspaper in India. The main essence of his journalism was to take revenge and criticize East India Company. Later in 1818 James Silk Buckingham started his journey in India as an editor with "Calcutta Chronicle" when he was called by some business tycoon to promote their ideas and philosophy. After some time he published another newspaper "Calcutta Herald" through which he raised issues and problems related to Indian society. He also gets support from Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was known as father of Indian language journalism. His publications like 'Sambad Kaumudi' (Bengali) 1821 and 'Mirat-UL-Akbar' (Persian) 1822 were the publications which had nationalist and democratic orientation. During this phase East India Company try to impose various restrictions on press which includes censorship of press. Draconian Acts like censorship of Press Act 1799, Press Ordinance Act 1823 to bring all the newspapers under the Government scrutiny before their publication were imposed on newspaper. Ram Mohan Roy stood for a free press and was the first one to challenge the administration. When Press ordinance act was imposed, along with Dwarkanath Tagore, Harchandra Ghose, Chandra Kumar Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Raja Ram Mohan Roy submitted a

memorandum to the Supreme Court arguing in favour of freedom of press in India. The fight against British government for press freedom has been an essential part of the national movement in India. In this phase we also saw a rise of Vernacular press in India. Pt. Jugul Kishor Shukla became the first person to publish a Hindi newspaper 'Udant Martand' in 1826. Another popular newspaper in public of that time was The Indian Mirror.

Phase II (1851-1900): It witnessed the rise of Nationalism among the Indian press. The national movement was possible because of the awareness created by the press among the public whether its political or social. Using press as a strong tool for communication, they were able to inherent their ideas between the people about their representative government. The press also made the people more aware about their own situation in India. During this phase various newspaper comes to existence from various parts of country like 'The Hindu' (1878) by G Subramaniam Aiyer, 'Amrita Bazaar Patrika' (1868) by Ghosh Brothers, 'The Times of India' (1861) by Robert Knight, 'Statesman' (1875) by Robert Knight, 'The Tribune' (1881) by Sardar Dayal Singh Majithia. During this phase Indian press also witness the various seditious acts like vernacular press act which has a prime motive to suppress the vernacular press (The regional Press) in the country. Due to this act regional newspaper had to suffer a lot and because of this Amrita bazaar patrika over nightly turns into an English daily and also change the name of newspaper from Amrita Bazaar Patrika to Anand Bazaar patrika. Indian National Congress was also founded in 1885 which also remind us about the history of patriotic Indian press. Establishment of Congress also strengthens the nationalist aspirations of the people in India. Prominent members of Indian National Congress are eminent Journalist and editors of newspapers, which includes people like Dada Bhai Naoroji ranade and Narendranath Sen.

Phase –III (1900-1947): Whether it's Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905, Swadeshi Movement, Surat Session of Indian National Congress press always plays an important role. This phase saw the differentiation in the role of Indian press into 'moderate and 'radical' tendencies within relation to tactics and strategies of freedom movement. We also saw the struggle between the nationalistic and pro British press. Mahatma Gandhi also understands the power of press and he used press as a weapon against British. Through his article he motivated people to participate in various movements against the British. In 1922 when Mahatma Gandhi undergo through trail for charges under sedition, nation witness a heroic response. Newspaper like 'Indian Express' and 'the Hindustan Time' were termed as nationalistic newspaper and continuously progressing in term of their reach and influence among the people. This phase also sees the significant professional development in press with advent of news agencies, news services and also the expansion of coverage of foreign news in india. Another journal Vandematram started by Subodha Chandra Malik, Chittaranjan Das and Bipin Chandra Pal in 1906 which played a crucial role in freedom struggle in India. This phase also see the rise of newspaper like "Indian Express.

Through this research article we will try to put lights into the contribution of five fearless journalists of pre-independence era who struggled hard and suffered to contribute for the freedom movement in India:

James Silk Buckingham: - James Silk Buckingham was the one who contributed a lot when we discuss about his contribution in Indian journalism. Even Rangaswami Parthasarathy describes him as the father of Indian Journalism in his book. It was 1818; James Silk Buckingham launched as editor of the Calcutta Journal which was started by some Calcutta merchants to propagate their view. Buckingham assumed the editorship of Calcutta Chronicle but later on he started his own newspaper Calcutta Journal. The first issue of Calcutta Chronicle came on the streets of Calcutta on 2nd October, 1818.

Calcutta Chronicle declared that it would be a register of political, commercial and literary views.

A biweekly newspaper having eight pages enjoyed a healthy circulation Through his newspaper James Silk Buckingham commented on various issues of Indian society which included social, political, commercial and literary views and news. Therefore, Buckingham's Journalism is totally different from Hickey's idea of Journalism which mostly contained gossip, scandals, scurrilous writing and have nothing to do with Indian society and its problems. He was not afraid in criticizing the social evils like sati, polygamy, child marriage and also not afraid of slamming the failure of government to put a full stop to it. He delivered much importance to views and news from different journals of Persian and Bengali in his newspaper. He strongly supported Indian language (Vernacular) press and stand for its right to exist and stand for the voice and opinions of the people. British authorities were angry on his continuous criticism of the policies of British Government. Lastly in 1823, John Adam, the then acting Governor-General, deported Buckingham back to England. Buckingham known to be the first real journalist in India who stood for truth and fight for journalism. First Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru also described him as one of the "earliest defender of the freedom of press in India "who is still remembered" in the country. Buckingham was source of inspiration for the Indian Journalism.

Rajaram Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was born in an orthodox Brahmin family in the village Radhanagar, West Bengal. During his early days he had acquired remarkable command and proficiency in various languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian Arabic and his mother tongue that was Bengali. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was described by Jawaharlal Nehru as a founder of the Indian press. Roy's contribution to Indian language journalism is unparalleled. Ram Mohan Roy stood for a free press. He published and edited various journals, fought against social odds and defended attacks against Vedanta philosophy by the Christian missionaries. He founded the Sambad Kaumudi (**moon of intelligence**) in 1821 in Calcutta. Calcutta Journal which was edited by James Silk Buckingham gave him enough popularity through his columns .Raj Ram Mohan Roy also started a newspaper in Persian language 'Mirat ul Akhbar'(mirror of news)in 1822, but close down it in 1823 due to his protests against the Press Regulations Act 1823. This weekly newspaper was in Persian language, which was the official language of the Mughal Empire, published on every Friday. This weekly gave proper space to coverage of different events including national international events. Press regulations of 1823 had more strong laws and impact than any other that had been in force earlier. He also brought out a religious periodical, the Brahminical Magazine, to counteract the missionaries' propaganda. Journal like The Reformer, The Inquirer and The Gyan Auneshun , all connected with Ram Mohan Roy, represented the school of progressive Hindu journalism held the field in Bengal till as late as 1891. He founded Brahma Samaj in culcutta in 1828 .He also lead various campaigns to battle against the social evils like sati pratha, polygamy and child marriage etc. He raised his voice regarding property inheritance rights for women. Through his writing Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted to make people aware about political and social status of India. Raja ram Mohan Roy always stood for a freedom of press and believe free press can act as a bridge between the government and the society. These publications gave birth to Indian journalism as these newspapers were dedicated for the public and in their own languages.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Bal Gangadhar Tilak or Lokmaya Tilak also known as the father of Indian unrest. His purpose of bringing awareness within the people and took them into a new era, creating hopes between them and their implantation started taking root in his mind. Tilak a social reformer and freedom fighter was first to advocate Swaraj- Complete Independence. His famous declaration "Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it" served as fuel to

revolutionaries who are struggling for the freedom. To spread nationalism among the people, Tilak decided to publish two newspapers “Kesari” in Marathi and “Maratha” in English language.

Tilak always wanted to be fearless and had explained about the nature of ‘Kesari’ as – ‘Kesari will fearlessly and impartially discuss the issues within society. He strongly condemns the increasing nature of people to satisfy the British government in the country. He also emphasized that the articles published in ‘Kesari’ will be synonym for its name ‘Kesari (lion)’. He propagated anti British content using simple but direct language. In the year 1893 he started Ganesh festivals and in the year 1896. Shivaji festival to stimulate nationalism amongst young Maharashtrians. He was sentenced to 18 months in prison for allegedly support the Chapekar brothers in their killing of Rand the official in charge of plague operations in pune. During the famine and plague epidemic in India, Tilak fearlessly reported the irresponsible and indifferent attitude of the government towards the sufferings of the people. Tilak became an all India hero after this episode and the title of Lokmanya was given to him. In 1908 when bomb attacks became common on the government. It again resorted to harsh measures against the press. At this time though tilak condemned the attacks against individuals and the use of violence. But he held the government’s attitude responsible for it. For this article again Tilak was sentenced to 6 yrs in prison in Mandalay, Burma. Tilak always believed that journalism can be used as a tool for creating public opinion. When charges of treason leveled against him he argued for almost 21 hours and 10minutes inside the court. He made clear that the newspapers have all the right to create public opinions. He also emphasized that it was not only a duty of a newspaper to bring out to the notice of the government about the nature of powers in the political life of a country but also alarm them against such powers. He stood firm that he had not committed treason.

As a social reformer, he was a true supporter of education for women and women empowerment.

Sisir Kumar Ghosh

A man with incomparable knowledge and standards, Sisir Kumar Ghosh, was sharp, wise and sufficiently courageous to go up against the might of the British rulers – for open intrigue displaying quite an accurate depiction of a true advocate of free press. In spite of the fact that media was still in an dawning stage in the 18th century, the paper he altered – *Amrita Bazar Patrika* – set out to straightforwardly to reprimand the unjustified policies of the British Government thusly helping in framing the national feeling. Sisir Kumar along with his brother Motilal Ghosh started a weekly newspaper in Bengali language and named it after their mother Amrita as, “Amrita Bazar” on the 20th of February 1868. The very main reason of starting the newspaper was to stand up and fight for the cause of peasants who were exploited by Indigo merchants. Amrita Bazar newspaper shifted to Calcutta (now Kolkata) due to an abrupt outburst of plague and started functioning as a bilingual weekly, publishing news and views in two languages i.e. English and Bengali. Since Ghosh was a fearless writer, there arised many situations where due to his approach Patrika was accused of sedition and fined repeatedly. It’s anti Government approach and influence among the people was thorn in the flesh of the government.

Under the editorial ship of Ghosh, Amrita Bazar Patrika became to be known a nationalist newspaper during the British rule. Firstly it was edited by Sisir Kumar younger brother Moti Lal Ghosh, who did not have formal University Degree but was a well self taught person. The paper got instant popularity for its honest coverage and caustic campaign against injustice. Vladimir Lenin describing it as **“The best nationalist paper in India”**. Amrita Bazar Patrika indeed had an important role in the growth and evolution of the Indian journalism.

During Indian freedom movement, newspapers played a vital role in arousing the sentiments of people about the motherland and also motivating people against their misrule under British rule. In this context, the role played by Amrita Bazar Patrika group was so prominent that the national leaders were depending on it for correct information and for getting genuine inspiration. As a dynamic editor Ghosh portrayed the mismanagement of the Britishers in December 31, 1868, through his paper by writing: **“The Bengalis are resolved to contradict the oppression of the Englishmen at each progression.”** While supporting the reason for India's autonomy, in 1875 Ghosh set up the political outfit, India League, alongside Kali Mohan Das, Shambhuchand Mukherjee and Jogesh Chandra Dutt. The patriot association pre-dated the establishing of the Congress Party. Despite the fact that trying to animate the white collar class, the masses and framed predominantly with the target to instill patriotism inside each Indian, The India League was replaced by The Indian Association on 26th July, 1876.

Sisir Kumar Ghose, the founder editor of Amrita Bazar Patrika, always believed in the policy of survival of the fittest. Apprehending ill/ motive and stringent action by the government under Vernacular Press Act he made its editor to convert it into full-fledged English weekly with effect from March 21, 1878 the second week of operation of the Act. Whether it was financial misuse or denial of common freedoms, the Patrika went against all the administrations, blasting against the decision colonialists through its reportage and publications. And finally in 1891 Patrika turned into a daily and became to be known to be the **first Indian-claimed English paper** to attack into insightful news coverage. Sisir Kumar Ghosh also launched various forceful campaigns against restrictions on civil liberties and economic exploitation in India. He wanted Indians to be given important posts in the administration.

G Subranmaniam Iyer

G Subranmaniam Iyer was a social reformer and freedom fighter who chose to fight his battle of freedom by establishing two prominent newspapers, one being The Hindu, which is still considered as most respectable newspaper and the other was one of the first Tamil newspaper Swadesamitran.

Subranmaniam Iyer tried to use his newspaper as a vehicle to reform the society but he was caught up in defamation cases, which left him financially empty, handed. He served as editor for the publication in 1908; he was prosecuted and sentenced for sedition by British government. While Subramaniam Iyer was more comfortable in writing in English but he started Tamil newspaper Swadesamitran four years after the Hindu was established. He inspired Tamil people to join the freedom movement through his writings.

Conclusion

During Indian freedom movement the main aim of press was not to make profit but rather to serve the public and encourage the freedom movement for independence. In fact in this era press became nationalistic and it had a wide reach and penetration among the public and stimulated the renowned library movement in the country. Library movement was not only restricted to cities or towns but also in the remote villages, where every individual could read news content, editorials and also discussed thoroughly. This helps Indian citizens to have some political consciousness which later turns into about their political participation in Indian freedom movement. Through these newspaper editors whether it's Raja Rammohan Roy, Ghosh, Tilak or Iyer they scrutinize the various acts and policies of British government. They all fought against the british government and through their works , they always encouraged masses to participate in freedom movement. Newspaper portray as an institutions of opposition to the government. The government itself imposed various strident laws to curb the independence of newspaper like Censorship of Press Act (1799), Vernacular Press Act (1878), Gagging Act (1857), Indian Press Act (1910) but journalists bring forth much clever strategies to subvert these legal hurdles. They fought against these draconian laws and remain motivating people to participate in the freedom struggle. This was a difficult task which required an intelligent mix of simplicity with subtlety. Freedom of the press was of utmost importance as it was a powerful tool to propagate political idea and Indian press performed it well.

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