



Indian Nationalists and the Development of Press:

A Historical Outline

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Abstract:-

Right from the early nineteenth century, defence of civil liberties, including the freedom of the press, had been high on nationalist agenda. As early as 1824, Raja Rammohan Roy had protested against a resolution restricting the freedom of the press. The early phase of nationalist movement from around 1870 to 1918 focussed more on political propaganda and education, formation and propagation of nationalist ideology and arousing, training, mobilisation and consolidation of public opinion, than on mass agitation or active mobilisation of masses through open meetings. For this purpose the press proved a crucial tool in the hands of the nationalists. The Indian National Congress in its early days relied solely on the press to propagate its resolutions and proceedings. Many newspapers emerged during these years under distinguished and fearless journalists. These included Hindu and Swadesamitran under G. Subramaniya Aiyar, The Bengalee under Surendranath Banerjea, Voice of India under Dadabhai Naoroji, Amrita Bazar Patrika under Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh, Indian Mirror under N.N. Sen, Kesari (in Marathi) and Maharatta (in English) under Balgangadhar Tilak, Sudharak under Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Hindustan and Advocate under G.P. Verma. Other main newspapers included, Tribune and Akbhar-i-am in Punjab, Gujarati, Indu Prakash, Dhyan Prakash and Kal in Bombay and Som Prakash, Banganivasi and Sadharani in Bengal. These newspapers were not established as profit-making business ventures but were seen as rendering national and public service. In fact, these newspapers had a wide reach and they stimulated a library movement. Their impact was not limited to cities and towns; these newspapers reached the remote villages, where each news item and editorial would be read and discussed thoroughly in the 'local libraries' which would gather around a single newspaper. In this way, these libraries served the purpose of not only political education but also of political participation. In these newspapers, government acts and policies were put to critical scrutiny. They acted as an institution of opposition to the Government. 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 ” upto three years. But the nationalist-minded journalists had evolved many clever stratagems 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. The national movement, from its very beginning, stood for the freedom of press. The Indian newspapers became highly critical of Lord Lytton’s administration especially regarding its inhuman treatment to victims of the famine of 1876-77. The Government struck back with the Vernacular Press Act,. 1878.

Keywords:-

Press, Britishers, Newspaper, Congress, Indian, Anglo, Patrika, Papers.



Introduction:-

Indian nationalists and Anglo-Indian bureaucracy frankly admitted the fact that press was a significant media for the communication of all information and knowledge. In order to know the views and news of Indian newspapers especially the vernacular papers, Indian Government established an office of Translator of Native Newspapers into English in all the provinces. The government came to know the views of Indians about different branches of Indian administration. A moderate leader of Pre-Gandhian period frankly admitted that the press emerged as a most significant media for dissemination of political education in India. The Indian press took up for discussion the day-to-day administration of India such as Indian civil service, separation of executive from judicial function, Indian representation in the legislative councils, police oppression, etc. In the last decade of the 19th century, the tone of the press became to some extent bitter due to the politico-economic situations of the country.

The Indian press made position of Indian Government quite uncomfortable. The government ordered its different branch officials that no information should be communicated to the press. Consequently, the Indian Government passed the Indian official Secrets Act (Act XV) to maintain the secrecy of official proceedings and records. Lord Curzon amended this Act so as to place civil matters parallel to naval and military matters and to make all Anglo-Indian and pro-government papers did not like the attitude of the Indian Government and vehemently criticized the proposal of the government.

The passing of the vernacular Press Act, 1878 by Lord Lytton was repealed by Lord Ripon in 1881. It gave great impetus in Indian after the repeal of vernacular press act, 1878. Like other provinces, many liberal papers like the Tribune, Akbar-i-Am, Rifa-i-Am, Rahbar-i-Hind etc. came into existence due to liberal policy of Lord Ripon. Not only in Punjab but different parts of



the country witnessed the beginning of liberal vernacular papers. Coming upto the period of Lord Curzon, Indian press had attained maturity. Lord Curzon realized the tone of the Indian press as a bitter one and made all efforts to control the vernacular papers and put a vigil on even the communication of official.

There were certain issues such as the introduction of Legislative Council and its representative characters, Indian Civil Service, separation of executive from judicial function, police oppression etc. caught the attention of the press and educated Indians at broader level. The Punjabi leaders such as Lala Murlidhar, Lala Lajpat Rai, Lala Harkishan Lal, Gokal Chand Narang, Duni Chand etc. Demanded the introduction of Legislative Council for the Punjab province but the Indian Government did not pay due attention to this demand. The leaders of the Indian National Congress have been demanding the reform and expansion of the councils since 1885. A Punjabi delegate Lala Murlidhar who attended the first session of the congress as a representative of the Tribune spoke for the creation of Legislative Councils for the North-Western Province and Punjab as the Anglo-Indian bureaucrats did not realize the problem of the people and also knew 'little of their wants and wishes'. How could they know their grievances, as they were not representatives of the people. He continued to observe: "We must have real direct representation then we shall be able to minimize the influence of the men who are not representative of the people".

It is a fact that due to absence of the representatives of the people in Legislative Councils, woes and wishes of the people could not be heard. Lala Lajpatrai, a delegate from the Punjab attended the session of the congress at Allahabad in 1888 second the resolution presented by the resolution on reforms of the Legislative Council and evidently decried the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy for not fulfilling their promises proclaimed in different pronouncements made by the highest British authorities from time to time.

Lala Lajpatrai was unhappy to note that the same Indian patriot Syed Ahmed Khan who said Indian revolted in 1857, as they had no voice in the Legislative Councils. He showed no opposition to the nominee of the government to the councils but objected to the Indian representation therein.



Why Shyed Ahmed opposed the elective system to the Councils? He was afraid that the Hindus would be elected due to their numerical strength in different provinces. Lajpat Rai did not like the change in the behavior of Syed Ahmed Khan who made sarcastic remarks about the congress leaders. Criticizing this attitude, Lajpat Rai said "this most loyal of Indian Mohammedans who now stigmatizes us as traitors, 30 years ago demanded for Indian reforms of the same character as we now after 30 years of education and progress pray for in the resolution.

The congress leaders including press continued to put pressure on the government on the issue of the Legislative Council and reforms therein. The Congressmen ultimately succeeded in getting the Indian Councils Act passed in 1892. The leaders of the Punjab had hopefully been waiting that their provinces would also get an independent legislative council. But their hopes shattered when they saw no extension of this Act to the province of the Punjab. It was declared that Punjab would get the legislative council only after five years. The Act 1892 empowered the members of the council to ask questions and participate in the annual budget but without having the right to vote. The Act passed 1892 failed to realize the desired hopes of the Indian people but it was deemed as a departure as far as the Indian politics was concerned.

The delegates of the Punjab who had been continuously advocating for the establishment of Legislative Council for their province thanked the government for the creation of Legislative Council to the Punjab in 1892. The Indian leaders though expressed annoyance as far as the act of 1892 was concerned but contended as it liberalized the Legislative councils however to a very limited nature. The bill expressed the hope that selection of members would be framed liberally. But when the rulers framed, it felt short of the expectations of the Indians. The congressmen expressed their feelings in negative when rulers were framed because the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy had not given real effect to the spirit in which the act of 1892 was conceived.

Lord Curzon's administration was severely criticized as an 'ill-starred administration'. He took many anti-people steps which had made the Indian situation very critical and his most devoted admirers did not agree with this proposition that he had strengthened British rule in India. He asserted that 'India was a country the Englishmen were to monopolize for all time all power, and talk all the while of duty'.



The congress session held at Banaras reiterated its stand on the expansion of the imperial and provincial legislative councils to make them more representative to the wishes of the Indian people. The Congressmen continued to say that England's chief aim was not merely to govern India efficiently to make her self-governing and for this larger representation was needed.

The Indian leaders through platform and press recommended an increase in the number of non-official and elected members and grant to them of the right of dividing the councils in financial matters coming from them. They asserted that the time had arrived when the Indian people should have a larger share in the administration of their country. They firmly believed that each of the provinces of India should be given right to send at least two members to British Parliament's House of Commons. There was flat demand that three Indians of high caliber should be appointed as members of secretary of state for India's Council. Last proposal was the appointment of the Indians as members of the Governor-General's executive council and one Indian each to the executive councils of Bombay and Madras.

The Congressmen continued to criticize the creation of separate electorate in the imperial and provincial Legislative Councils. They proposed the government that separate electorate system should not be extended to the local bodies. Such introduction would create problems further for the development of national unity and the fostering of the national ideal.

The Congress from the very beginning has been taking up the issue of inclusion of Indians into civil services as it was deemed important as a demand for the political and economic necessity. The educated Indian class treated it a very significant aspect as they were after the government services in order to capitalize their education. The association of educated Indians is quite large number in the civil services and holding the Civil Services Examination in India and England simultaneously was the biggest demand of educated Indians. This demand continued to be repeated every year to influence British opinion on this issue.

It was the growth of new education, which prepared the Indians to compete for the civil services. When Indians began to compete for the civil services, the Britishers became jealous. Some British official proposed the government that Indians should be given only some petty judicial or



revenue office. The Congressmen continued to assert that the competitive examination should be held in England and India simultaneously. It was also suggested that the successful candidates in India should be sent to England for further training and study. It was also urged that the maximum age for candidates for entrance into the Civil Service should be raised to 23 years.

The Congressmen continued to say that the Charter Act of 1833 had clearly indicated that justice would be done to the Indian people. However, when the Charter Act was renewed, Indians did not know their rights and the policy of England toward India. In this Act, it was clearly laid down: “That no native of the said territories, nor any natural born subject of his Majesty resident therein shall, be reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, color or any of them, be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the said company”.

It was the dawn of 19th century; the situation began to change when a large number of Indians started coming out from the college and universities of India. Most of them were interested in governmental jobs for their subsistence. In 1876, Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India, reduced the maximum age of Civil Service Examination from 21 to 19 years. This reduction was aimed at primarily make it more difficult for Indians. The educated Indians opposed the reduction of the age limit, as it was prejudicial to the Indians interests.

Surendernath Banerjee and Anand Mohan Bose denounced the action of Salisbury through platform and press. Surendra Nath Banerjee had already qualified and join the Civil Service in Bengal but was dismissed on account of a small fault. So his dismissal and reduction of age-limit caught the attention of the educated Indians. The Indian Association assigned Banerjee to travel all over India to mobilize support in favor of memorandum for the submission to British Parliament. It was made a national question in order to strengthen the national movement. His travel not only focused the attention of the Indian public but also encouraged the discussion in India.

The composition of the Secretary of State for India’s council was such that it composed of retired civil servants. It was the advisory body to the Secretary of State for India who ruled India through this council. When Sir William Wedderburn was elected Member of Parliament he was



elected the Chairman of the India Parliamentary Committee and Herbert Paul as Secretary. Herbert moved a resolution In the House of Commons for holding of the competitive examination simultaneously in India and England on 2 July 1893.

The dream of Indians the representative institutions would be fulfilled only when Indians were given due share in the administration of their own country. The attitude of the Anglo-Indian press was indifferent for the demands of the Indian people and did not want to see the decrease of powers of the British Civil Servants. Wedderburn supports India's case to Civil Services and clearly criticized the policy of the government as tending to inefficiency and want of economy.

The public commission was appointed to enquire into admission of Indians to the Covenanted and the Statutory Civil Service. The English were given a larger portion of share in the higher service while Indians were denied the same post with same salaries. The Indian press observed that the strategy behind the appointment of the commission was to shut the doors of the government services for further admission of Indians into the covenanted service. Majority of the members of the commission belonged to Indian Civil Service class who did not prefer a large number of Indian shares in the higher posts.

The Punjab nationalist papers like the Tribune, Akhbar-i-Am, Rifa-i-Am, Punjab Samachar etc. supported not only the reduction of salary but also the member of posts reserved for the Europeans. The examination for the higher posts should be held simultaneously in India and England and raised the age-limit for the Indian candidate appearing for these posts in the examinations. It was also urged that if the government liked to play just India and intended to economies, appointments of Indians were quite just. It was the Anglo-Indian press and some Muslim leaders Syed Ahmed Khan opposed the argument given by the nationalist press and leaders.

Many supporters of India's cause in Britain such as Henry Fawcett, Charles Bradlaugh, William Digby, A.O. Hume, William Wedderburn etc. advocate the India's cause and proposed the government to make full use of India's educated elite in order to save a big amount of money of Indian exchequer. Both Dadabhai Naroji and Wedderburn advocated the holding of



competitive examination in India and England simultaneously in Parliament. A resolution was carried securing a narrow majority- 84 members voted in favor and 76 against the resolution. The following resolution was passed in the House of Commons: “that all the competitive examinations here to for, held in England alone for appointment to the Civil Services of India, shall henceforth be held simultaneously both in India and England, such examinations, being identical their nature, and all who compete being finally classified in one list according to merit”. This was in spite of the efforts made by government to prevent its supporters from voting the motion was passed.

Though the commission favored the raising of age-limit from 19 to 23 yet the holding of simultaneous examination in both the countries was clearly rejected by the commission. Provincial Civil Service was created but it could not serve the purpose of the educated Indians. The educated Indian observed that it was their natural right to have said in the administration of their country. It was infect an injustice done to India by the refusal of simultaneous examinations in India and England since this service was purely an Indian.

The judicial system was the next item taken by the pres. The Congress in its session took up the issue when its leaders stated that ‘the time has one arrived when the system of trial by jury may be safely extended into many parts of the country where it is not at present in force’. The Congressmen evidently praised the British rule for just and righteous cause Rule of Law with common codification, peace, and stability were highly praised by them and termed as ‘blessings of the British rule in India’. The judicial system basically worked in the favor of the British but ignoring completely the Indian society. There were numerous instance of miscarriage of justice despite the earnest attempts of the administration and higher courts.

The judicial system founded in the country by the alien rulers was undoubtedly a new one but it put check on the executive authority. In order to dispense justice properly, the leaders of the public opinion started agitation on two aspects in the country. One was the separation executive from judiciary functions and other was related to the extension of the system of trial by jury.



The separation of judiciary from the executive function was deemed an essential reform by the press and the Indian leaders. In order to make separation of both the functions, a representation was submitted to the Indian Government, which was signed by the retired British judges. The Congress started agitation on this issue and passed resolutions in many of its sessions. The early Congressmen continued to oppose the union of executive and judicial powers from the very beginning. The Congress sent a memorandum to the British Government but Secretary of State for India, George Hamilton, did not consider it as it had not been passed through the government of India. Wedderburn clearly pointed out that it did not require any further increase in expenditure on the administration. He even urged the House of Commons to appoint a commission to concede and suggest some practical scheme for the separation of both the functions.

The Indian leaders denounced the executive officers who brought pressure upon the subordinate judicial officers to obtain a large percentage of convictions in police cases. Wedderburn emphasized that the principle of strict impartiality be followed in regard to the appointment and promotion of judges to maintain the integrity of judiciary. It was also necessary that judiciary should be made free from the possible executive pressure.

The proposal to restrict jury trial was strictly disliked by the Indians, as the government officials desired strict punishment for them. The Deputy Magistrates had earned a lot of notoriety in this concern because there was pressure from the higher authorities on them. It had become a popular proverb: “No conviction, No promotion”.

The Anglo-Indian press in India continued to write that the jury system considerably afforded protection to the Englishmen and did not accuse them of any guilty. After great pressure, the jury notification issued by the government was withdrawn. It was indeed a grand success of Indian leaders in this concern.

In the conclusion of the chapter, we may say that the leaders and press criticized the British government for its anti-people activities. The leaders through sessions of the Congress exposed the colonial nature of the British rule and did not restrain them from oppression and exploitation.



The nationalist's papers continued to record all the incidents of officials cruelties in India. The platform and press were only two medias through which Indians could air their views and wishes. Through memorials, petitions and prayers, Indians continued to present the grievances of their brethren in order to redress at earliest possible to the Indian authorities. It can fairly be said that this period belonged to the period of petition, prayer and please. In such situation, Indian people started preparing for more and more actions, which became feasible only in Gandhian era.

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