THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF THE PRESS

The Indian Press, like the Indian National Congress, which was founded on the western models, in spite of all its defects and lapses, as well as its numerous disadvantages and difficulties, played an important part in the evolution of the national life; its chequered history is remarkable evidence of the growing political consciousness of the people.

The history of the Press in India does not date back earlier than 1780. From that time, to the first decade of the 19th century, it was conducted in English and managed and edited by Englishmen only. The Anglo-Indian and the vernacular press came much later to the scene.

The vernacular papers were at first few and very feeble. ¹ The 'Sambad-Kaumadi' of Raja Ram Mohan Roy came out as the pioneer champion to advocate the cause of liberty of the Press in India. Though it was generally devoted to social, religious and educational questions, it was bold enough for the first time to scrutinise the acts of the administration also.

¹ East India native press collection.
No. 71 (Reference to one of the minutes of Lord Macaulay where he makes the statement that "the papers printed in the languages of India were few and exercised very little influence over the native mind").
From 1799 to 1834 the Press in India was kept under strict censorship, and there were several instances of European editors, who had too sharply criticised the Government, being deported to Europe. 1

In 1835, the Government of Sir Charles Metcalfe, restored the freedom of the Press and it was from this time the vernacular Press began to develop and the anglo-Eurasian Press gradually came into existence. 2 The "Gagging" Act of Lord Canning necessitated by the exigencies of the Mutiny, was in force only for a year, and did not much interfere with the normal healthy expansion of the Press. The only stipulation in normal times was that printing presses and newspapers should be registered. 3

But, the "death knell of the Vernacular Press" came in March 1878, when Lord Lytton telegraphed and secured permission from the Secretary of State for the piece of stringent legislation which he thought was urgently needed for a better control of the Vernacular Press. 4

The Vernacular Press Act IX of 1878 (an act for the

1. The Indian Press - Margarita Barns - P.43
2. Selections from the papers of Lord Metcalfe by J.W. Kaye.
3. Act XXV of 1867.
4. The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon - Gopal - P.68.
better control of publications in Oriental languages) was passed at a single sitting and became law on March 14, 1878.

The worst feature of this measure was its application only to the Vernacular Press, and its total exemption of the English Press. 1 There was no more severe critic of this Press Legislation of 1876 than Gladstone, who considered the law as a contradiction of the spirit of the age and a disgrace to British authority. It seemed to him to have destroyed the Indian Press in a single day. 2

But, though it may have gagged the Vernacular Press, the Act gave a considerable impetus to Indian political life, and eventually turned out to be a weapon in the armoury of politically conscious Indians with which to attack the Government and make an appeal to popular sentiment.

In Calcutta, under the inspiration of Surendranath Banerjee, in January 1, 1879, the Indian Association launched the publication of the newspaper 'Bengalee' as the chief organ to help the work of their political propaganda. 3 It have the rising middle classes an idea of their power, experience in agitation and drew them together in defence of

2. The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon - Gopal - P.68.
their common interests. It was through the 'Bengalee' that
the middle classes imbibed a lesson which they never forget
and which they have ever since utilised in many useful
directions. It indeed marked a definite and progressive
stage in national evolution.

In Madras the only province where the Press Act
was not enforced, the result of the passing of the Press
Act and the ensuing wave of feeling that swept across the
educated classes throughout India, quickened popular feeling
and its immediate result was the foundation of the newspaper
'Hindu' on September 1878, under the auspices of an able
group of editors in Southern India. They were G. Subramania
Aiyer, Amenda Charlu, Veeraraghava Chari and Rangiah Mallu,
the group of strong Congress adherents.

In Bombay also, says Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, "the
Act aroused a controversy and occasioned an outburst of
feeling which have seldom been excelled in bitterness in the
eventful history of the last forty years." 2

Sir Pherozeshah's friendly counsel to the government
was that "the result of the system of licensing involved by

---
1. Indian National Evolution - A.C. Mazumder - P.6
   (letter written by Pherozeshah Mehta to the 'Times of India')
the Act of 1878 would annihilate nothing but the honest advocacy of useful criticism so it would deprive the government of all trustworthy means of keeping itself well-informed of the real inner feelings and thoughts of the people. Deprived of free and sincere criticism, it would hardly know how to steer its way through servile adulation or scurrilous abuse. 1

Lord Ripon wanted to bring back "this very sentimental and imaginative people into sympathy with the government again." 2 His Act III of 1882, repealed Acts IX and XVI, of 1878. This reform was warmly received. 58 editors of vernacular journals from all parts of India thanked the Viceroy and assured him that as representatives of the people and loyal subjects of the Empress, they would strive, as they had always done, to prove equal to the grave responsibilities of freedom. 3

This marked a new turn in Indian politics and consequently in the development of the Press.

2. The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon - Sopal - P. 68.
journalism writes Pat Lovett, (a contemporary journalist working in India) "as it is understood in the West, dates in India from the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885. There were generals before Agamemnon and there were editors before Surendranath Banerjee, but the influence of the Press on the administration of the country, and the political education of the intelligentsia, never made itself felt with so much force as it did now."

The close connection between the growth of the Press and the development of political opinion can be seen by the fact that many of the political leaders were themselves or editors of newspapers and used them as channels for political propaganda. Of the 72 delegates to the first Indian National Congress of 1885, 12 were connected with journalism and several others, like Dadabhai Naoroji, who did not sign as newspapermen had edited or owned newspapers at some time in their lives.

The names of the 12 newspaper delegates at the first sitting of the Congress were as follows:

1. Journalism in India - Pat Lovett.
2. Rast - Goffar, editor Dadabhai Naoroji.
   (At one time he also edited the 'Dnyan-Prasarak') and contributed articles to the Samachar Darpan, a Gujarati daily. Masari - P.64.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of the Delegates</th>
<th>Names of the Newspapers</th>
<th>Place of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babu Jamnadas</td>
<td>'Nassims'</td>
<td>Agra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babu Muralidhar</td>
<td>Indian Spectator</td>
<td>Ambalé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.G. Chandravarkar</td>
<td>Indu Prakash</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.G. Mookerjee</td>
<td>Nababibhakar</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narenranath Sen</td>
<td>'Indian Mirror'</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.P. Narasimhulu Naidu</td>
<td>Crescent</td>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manohar Ganga Prasad Varma</td>
<td>Hindus thani</td>
<td>Lucknow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Subramania Aiyar</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Madras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. M. Sane</td>
<td>Dynan Prakash</td>
<td>Poona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishna Das Pal</td>
<td>The Hindu Patriot</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitaram Hari Chipnomkar</td>
<td>Quarterly journal of the Sarvajanik-samha.</td>
<td>Poona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. G. Agarkar</td>
<td>Desari and Marathi</td>
<td>Poona</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That the influence of the newspapers was growing can be gauged from a statement which came from the impartial Serampore missionaries writing in their organ 'The Friend of India', where they observed:

"How necessary a step this (the development of the Native Press) was for the amelioration of the condition of the natives no person can be ignorant of, who has traced the effects of the Press in other countries. The natives themselves soon availed themselves of this privilege and there are hopes that these efforts will contribute essentially to arouse the native mind from its long lethargy of death and encourage them to inquire into what is going forward, in a world of which Asia forms so important a portion and urge them to ascertain their own rights and situation." ¹

The first decade of the 20th century was a memorable period in the annals of Indian journalism. In 'New India', Sir Henry Cotton in 1904 summarised the significance of the importance of the Native Press at the beginning of the century.²

The outpouring of Indian aspiration and the unmistakable yearning for Indian nationality find their utterance through a

---

¹ The Indian Press - Margarita Barns - P.126.
² 'New India' - Sir Henry Cotton - P.6.
newspaper Press, now becoming a potent factor in Indian politics and in the annual meetings of the Provincial and National Congresses.

"The Indian Press" writes Sir Henry, "has grown in one generation from struggling obscure and fretful efforts into an organ of great power, criticising the measures of government with remarkable independence and vigour, continually checking the abuses of executive authority and permeating all classes of the community who are animated by its energy and proud of the ability and patriotism with which it is conducted."

The first decade of the 20th century inaugurated a brilliant phase of development for the Indian Press and its public influence.

In January 1900 G.A. Natesan first published his "Indian Review". He had served an apprenticeship on the "Madras Times". He had ability and knew the craft of journalism. It was his ambition that the journal should have as its contributors both Indians and Englishmen who were in a position to add to the country's welfare. By 1900 he had already

1. New India - Sir Henry Cotton - P.6
2. The Indian Press - Margarita Barnes - P.317.
established a flourishing printing business and he was therefore his own printer, publisher, manager and editor. Numerous political biographies, collections of speeches by leading politicians of symposia of their views on current questions enlightened men's minds and tried to reveal to the nation the spirit of the age. Sir C. Y. Chintamani, a distinguished Congress worker, was also starting to make his mark at this time in journalism through the able and efficient editorship of 'The Leader' of Allahabad. Along with him N. C. Kelkar was becoming equally prominent in the world of press.

The formation of the Associated Press, at about the beginning of the century, gave newspapers the opportunity of covering a wider field of news than would have been possible with their individual resources. 1

K. C. Roy described as "the cleverest news ferret and scoopist of Indian journalism", 2 became the director of the Associated Press and eventually played an important part in Indian politics and propaganda, and became a member of the Legislative Assembly.

As regards propaganda in the press in England, an urgent need was felt by the British Committee of the Congress —

1. The Indian Press - Margarita Bams - P. 320.
2. Ibid.
for a well-organised political organ to give expression to Congress opinions and the Congress cause in England.

In its early stage in the year 1890, the British Committee established the journal 'India' to place before the British public an Indian view of Indian affairs. At first the journal was issued at irregular intervals with William Digby as editor. In 1892, it became a monthly, being issued on the second Friday of each month; and on the 7th of January 1898, it first appeared as a weekly with a most competent journalist, Gordon Hewart, as its able and wise editor. The influence and circulation of this news increased rapidly both in India and England.²

Lord Curzon, in his private correspondence in June 1899 wrote to the Secretary of State for India, Lord George Hamilton:

"'India' is very widely distributed, and exercises an important influence over the Native Press. And a month later he wrote again, "on the list of subscribers of 'India' are the names of nearly all the leading Zamindars. The paper is said to be popular."³

---

1. Sir William Wedderburn and the Indian Reform movement. P.106
2. Allan Hume - By W. Wedderburn - P.97
The Special correspondent of the *The Times* bore witness on the other hand to 'India's' public influence in England. It wrote of 'India' as the 'Chief purveyor of Indian News to a large part of the Liberal Press.'

Through this journal, reports of the proceedings of the National Congress made some thousands of politically-minded people in England aware of the existence and aims of the new Indian organisation.

The expenses of production were of course considerable. "The British Committee in London were promised Rs. 8,000 annually from the Calcutta Congress Standing Committee." 2

The Constitution of the Committee was confirmed by a resolution of the 1899 Congress and an annual sum was voted for its support. Even then, in later years the burden of expenses became increasingly heavy for Sir William Wedderburn, who was the chairman of the British Committee to the end of his life.

In 1893 and 1895 Maharajah of Darbhanga, gave Rs.8,000 to the special fund for 'India'. 3 In Bombay Sir William

---

2. Private Correspondences India. P.228.
3. Ibid. Part II. Vol.XIV
   (Lord Curzon to Lord Hamilton June 28th 1899. P.63).
Wedderburn received a certain measure of support from Sir, P.H. Mehta and his friends. Gopal Krishna Gokhale not only spent time in raising contributions and enrolling subscribers for the weekly journal, but gave the useful service of some of the members of his Servants of India Society to the cause of the advancement of the paper, 'India'. The paper came under the efficient guidance of H.E.A. Cotton in 1906 and remained so till the end of 1921. He made a free distribution of the weekly copy of 'India' to members of parliament, journalists, political associations, clubs and reading rooms, and thus placed before the British public the case of India, her needs and grievances.

"The newspaper Press" wrote Sir Henry Cotton, in his book 'New India', "is now recognised as a kind of constitutional opposition, and with the growth of this recognition its importance is assured. In every campaign of agitation the power and influence of the Indian Press have been augmented."

"The unanimity of this Press is as marked as the increase of its influence. The same tone characterizes its utterances in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Lahore, and Allahabad. There is no doubt of its meaning, its character, or its

destination. " A single note is struck in every large town in India newspapers are now published, identical in their spirit and in their common object, all aiming and converging at the formation of a single political idea." 1

The Press developed during this period, 1885-1908, with rapid strides from the humble beginnings of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's 'Sampad-Naumadi' to the position which it came to occupy as "a great instrument of propagandism."

Surendranath Banerjee, the editor of the widely-circulated paper 'Bengalee', relates Pat Lovett, "could organise public opinion with unusual skill and efficiency." 2 The paper was founded by Surendranath as editor and proprietor in 1879. It continued to be a weekly newspaper from 1879 to Feb. 1900, and then was converted into a daily.

"I soon discovered," wrote Surendranath Banerjee in the year 1900, "however that a daily English paper in Bengal, advocating Indian interests, was: fast becoming an immediate demand. Public Life was growing and the demand for early news was increasing." 3

1. A Nation in Making - S.N. Banerjee - P.68.
2. Journalism in India - Pat Lovett.
In the Punjab the most powerful medium of the Press to give expression to growing public opinion was 'The Tribune' under the proprietorship of Harkishen Lal. It was the most powerful exponent of the Congress. A confidential report of the government of India in January 1890 gives the following note about the paper 'The Tribune':

"It is really a native paper, though written in English and is much read by the present generation of educated natives. It is an eager advocate of the Indian National Congress." 1

In late years there was a mounting volume of discontent in the Punjab which found expression through Lala Lajpat Rai and his paper 'The Punjabee' published in English. 2

In Bengal Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, started publishing two weekly papers, 'The Karmoyogin' and 'The Banda-Mataram' in English with a view to organise the Nationalist party on new efficient lines and 'Yugantar' in Bengali for educating public opinion.

Sri Aurobindo in the editorial column of 'The Karmoyogin explained the motto of the paper as follows: 3

---

2. Young India by Lala Lajpat Rai.  
"The Karmoyogin" will be more of a national review than a weekly newspaper. We shall notice current events only as they evidence help, effect or resist the growth of national life and the development of the soul of the nation. If there is no creation in thought, there must be disintegration, if there is no advance in ideas there must be death and defeat.

This paper 'Karmoyogin' was regularly reprinted along with sister Nivedita's contribution under the title 'The ideal of Karmoyogin'.

Lokamanya B. Tilak, in Poona, became the editor of the 'Kesari' on 22nd October 1887, and the 'Mahratta' on the 3rd September 1891. He supervised these journals as proprietor till the end of his life, and though the editorship was occasionally transferred to others, his predominant influence was always vigilant on them.

At the time of Tilak's death the circulation of the 'Mahratta' stood at about 2,000 copies a week. The 'Kesari' was a more widely read paper with a circulation of over 35,000 copies per week. It exerted a very great influence over the national life of Maharashtra.

The first ten years of Tilak's ownership of these papers was burdened with a heavy debt. But with financial

1. The Life of Lokamanya Tilak - D.V.Athalye P.325.
2. Ibid.
support from the Raja of Kolhapur, Tilak started bi-weekly copies of the papers.

In Bombay, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta along with his Congress friends Tyabji and Telenag, felt an urgent need for an Indian owned daily newspaper in English to uphold Congress views. 1

The "Advocate of India", which he started along with Jehangir Murzban began well with the support of D. Wacha and G.S. Iyer, but its success was short-lived. Later Pherozeshah's paper 'The Bombay Chronicle' met with real success. 'The Bombay Chronicle', wrote G.K. Gokhale, helped him and Mahatma Gandhi very much in their passive resistance campaign in later years. 2

Even Montagu seemed to have been impressed by the paper and remarked about the successful brilliance of the paper and its exponents. Public opinion in the country was thus gradually gaining strength every day both in volume and intensity. The official Government report of January 1890 writes:

"The Press of India is rapidly increasing in strength and influence. It is not to be supposed that these newspapers exercise an influence on their subscribers only. These newspapers are widely circulated from hand to hand, they are read—

aloud to circles of listeners; the statements in them are repeated by readers or listeners to others. The influence thus exerted by the press, is of course great and widespread.

This is confirmed by Lord Curzon.

"To me it is transparent," writes he, "that public opinion in India has been growing all the while, and is daily becoming more powerful." 1

The change of public consciousness was noticed by all. "The Press in India has become, wrote Sir Henry Cotton, "a power in the land, and its voice peals like trumpet-note from one end of India to the other. It's an organ of propaganda for the Congress". 2

In the years following the partition of Bengal agitation and the political unrest, the Govt. issued new Press Laws to curtail the liberty of the Press.

Gopal K. Gokhale, addressing the Viceroy's Legislative Council, expressed the following opinion:

"The Press in one sense to the Government is like a custodian of public interests, and any attempt to hamper its

1. The Life of Lord Curzon - Ronaldshay Vol. II P.326
2. 'New India' - Sir Henry Cotton
freedom by repressive legislation is bound to affect these interests prejudicially, and can not fail in the end to react upon the position of the government itself.

Deobhrai Naoroji, appealed to the government through the Congress to repeal the Press laws and ensure the freedom of the public opinion.