

Chapter IV

The Tamil Press

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the beginning, growth and development of the Tamil Press are analysed. Major divisions of growth in its evolutionary path, its beginnings, contribution of the missionaries, emergence of the sectional and nationalistic presses, initial Tamil newspapers, endeavours of various personalities including the Tamil poet C. Subramania Bharati, social divisions and consolidations around the press, and the attitude of the British administration towards the Press are presented under relevant subheadings. Facts and figures are presented in an objective manner and moderation of any kind is not effected here. This is to let the happenings speak for themselves in a truthful manner. This way it shall be checked for veracity upon need and compared with the conditions that lead to the present scenario with regard to the Press and mass media. Half baked or softened narration of the very industry that is expected to express truth in a bare and naked manner amounts to an approach that is illogical and hypocritical. Moreover as the effect of communal consolidation and social mobilisation caused by newspaper industry has been imperious upon the society, mincing of words in a diplomatic and euphemistic manner, with a preformed assumption or conviction that every reader will be able to read between the lines and understand what is intended in a proper

perspective, is dispensed with. Finally, as diverse sources fed this chapter, end of mark references and footnotes are spared and a fairly long list of references is provided instead at the end of the chapter.

4.2. Major Divisions of Growth

The Press in Tamilnadu grew in four major stages namely Missionary Press, Sectional Press, Dravidian Press and Nationalist Press. Missionary Press refers to initial and sustained printing endeavours by Christian Missionaries of the Catholic and Protestant Churches that marked the beginning and growth of printing in Tamilnadu. They introduced many printed materials in Tamil for religious teachings and spreading of Christian faith. Sectional Press refers to the newspapers and journals published by various sections of the society based on religion, trade, race, caste and community. Here, the contribution of the missionaries of the Catholic Church was both unparalleled and unsurpassed. Moreover Muslims and many other communities started their own newspapers. Dravidian Press refers to the newspapers and journals published by the Justice Party and its organs. It comprised non-Brahmins and was against the near total domination of Brahmins in public administration, education and religion. The Justice, Non-Brahman and the Dravidan were Dravidian newspapers. Nationalist Press was a vague term coined for the sake of convenience. It was meant to diminish and suppress the anti-Brahmin movements. It comprised newspapers which were writing in favour of the Brahmin dominated Indian National Congress and its ideals (S. Muthiah, 2008). They put forward

colourful words and concepts like nationalism, home rule, independence and freedom. The Hindu and the Swadesamitran were the nationalist newspapers.

Thus, the Nationalist Press in Tamilnadu was anti-government and the Dravidian and Anglo-Indian Presses were pro-government. Yet, the chronological development, social evolution, range of activities, technical growth and stated mission and objectives of the four offshoots had many overlapping and interdependent aspects. Moreover, before the Independence, they were fully accountable to and under the control of the British empire. Although their functions and operations were restricted by religious, community or group aspects, as a whole they lead to social awareness, language development, cultural consolidation and knowledge enhancement. For example, while the Dravidian Press worked for the welfare of non-Brahmins, the Sectional Press worked for the betterment of the respective religion, race or caste. However, this did not break the social fabric. Conversely, it served as a bargaining agent for social equality with enhanced flexibility, reciprocity and respect due for others.

4.3. Beginnings and Evolution

The press in Tamilnadu, and India as a whole, owes its origin to the religious zeal of the Christian missionaries. In particular, Jesuit missionaries of the Catholic Church are credited with the introduction and early development of printing in South India. The missionaries regarded the press as one of their primarily vehicles for spreading the Christian faith. They set Goa and

Tamilnadu as their most important bases of activity. Therefore, along with Latin and English, local languages like Malabar Tamil and Konkani gained priority in printing. Likewise, Protestant Fathers patronised by the British East India Company, and Hindu pundits were also the forerunners in this endeavour. Once the Church fathers realised the importance of the local language, they began to disseminate religious teachings in the local language. This in effect caused the development of vernacular print culture in India. This also paved way for other religious establishments to promote their respective religious causes and teachings. In this regard, Tamil is the first non-European language to find space in the modern printing culture in the world.

In 1536 a Spaniard named Jaao de Bustamante brought a printing press to India. He joined the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and was ordained with the adopted name Jaao Rodrigues. He was the pioneer among the Indian printers. The press was set up at the College of St. Paul in Goa, where a seminary is functioning till this date. The first printing material produced by this press was a Christian literature in Latin. Along with Jaao de Bustamante, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Henrique Henriques, shares the credit for pioneering the early printing endeavours in Tamil. Henrique Henriques was an acknowledged European scholar in Tamil language. Born a Portuguese Jew, he had converted to Christianity. He was assigned as Jesuit Superior in Punniyakayal and was entrusted with the preparation of Christian works in Tamil. Punniyakayal is now in Tuticorin District and is called Punnakayal. It was also referred as Punikael

in ancient texts. He arrived on the Fishery Coast of Tuticorin in 1547. The Fishery Coast was originally called Pearl Fishery Coast. It extends from Tuticorin to Cape Comorin, which is Kanyakumari. The coast is still famous for pearl diving and all other types of fishing activities. During his stay Henriques produced five different books in Tamil script and language. He had it printed at various Jesuit settlements, including Cochin and Goa on the West Coast. In addition, he compiled a Tamil Grammar and a Tamil Dictionary. Although these two compilations were never printed, they are widely used by other Europeans until now. Contemporary and latter scholars acclaim Henriques as the first great European Scholar of any Indian language [(Graham Shaw, 1993) and (Stuart Blackburn, 2006)]. In 1575, Henriques was relieved of his missionary duties on the East Coast and sent to Goa. There, Henriques was assisted by Father Pedro Luis, a junior Father who joined the Jesuit order in 1562, in preparing texts and types of Tamil language. Finally, Tamil types were cast in Goa by a Portuguese blacksmith Joao Goncalves. These designs and cuts of the first font of Tamil types were pursuantly perfected by Father Joao da Faria in Kollam, Kerala, with the assistance of Pedro Luis. Thus, the stage was set for printing and release of the first of Henriques' five books in Goa in 1577. It was, 'Doutrina (or Doctrina) Christam en Lingua Malauar Tamul - Tampiran Vanakam'. It was the catechism of the Catholic Church originally written in Latin by St. Francis Xavier. Printed in October 1578, this was the first ever book printed in an Indian language, that too in Tamil. A confusion however was

either Tamil was miscalled as Malabar (Malayalam) language or the Portuguese themselves called Tamil as Malabar language. Henriques' two other books printed at Cochin were Confessionairo in 1580 (to mean, A Confessionary) of 214 pages and Flos Sanctorum in 1586 (to mean, Holy Flowers, narrating the lives of Saints) of 669 pages.

Christian missionaries made good use of the printing press for the spread of Christianity. This gave impetus to printing works. Tamil translation of catechism literatures were thereafter printed at varying lengths. Of them, notable one was printed by a Portuguese Marcos Jorge in Cochin on November 14, 1579 with 127 pages. The missionaries set up printing presses at Goa and Punnihakayal, the two most important bases of the Catholic Church then in India. Therefrom, the Church was engaged in missionary works up to the northern end of the Coromandal Coast. It is the coast stretching from Cape Calimere, which now is Kodiakkarai, to the mouth of the Krishna River in Andhra Pradesh. Here it is to be noted that these developments took place even as other historical places including Madurai were still confined to the use of copper plates and stone inscriptions. In addition, many Tamil books and newsletters was printed earlier than the first printed and dated books of even Russia (1563), Africa (1624) and Greece (1821).

In 1679, the Portuguese printed the first Tamil-Portuguese Dictionary at their press at Ambalkad near Trichur in Kerala. For their part, Danish missionaries too established a press at Tranquebar (now Tharangambadi in

Nagapattinam District) in 1712. Tranquebar was then a Danish colony. There, two Lutheran missionaries of Germany named Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Lutkens printed literature for propagating the Protestant Creed. Moreover, they published the first copy of the New Testament in Tamil in 1714. For this exemplary work, they were assisted by Tamil scholars of that time.

During the Seven Years' war, in 1761, the British General Eyrecoote captured Pondicherry (now Puducherry). After the war, he found a press among the loot and spoils and brought it to Madras. Yet, as it could not be operated for want of a printer, it remained idle in Fort St. George for years. Afterwards, it was given to one Fabricius, a Tamil scholar in Madras, on condition that the printing works of the Company should be given preference. Fabricius made good use of the printing machine for religious purpose. He also published dictionaries in 1779 and 1786.

This is the time when the first newspapers appeared in Tamilnadu. Richard Johnson, a printer at service in the Government of Madras, was the founder of the first newspaper in Madras. He started the Madras Courier on 12 October, 1785. It was a weekly consisting of four pages of twenty by twelve inches. The Government patronised it and provided advertisements. Subsequently, as the news inputs increased, the paper added two more pages. However after six years, the editor of the Madras Courier, Hugh Boyd, started an independent paper, the Hircarrah in 1791. The name literally meant a messenger or a spy. While Madras Courier continued, Hircarrah ceased

publication when Boyd died in 1794. Another newspaper was published in 1795 by Robert William. It was Madras Gazette, which keenly competed with the Madras Courier to secure official printing works. Their cutthroat competition forced the government to distribute the printing and advertisement works evenly between them. Thereafter the Government Gazette was introduced in Madras by John Coldingham. Moreover, the Government of Madras established a press at Egmore in 1800 and printed the Madras Asylum Almanac. This newspaper is still acclaimed as one of the most valuable sources of the history of Madras. In the meantime an Englishman, G. Humphreys published the India Herald without obtaining permission from the government. For that, he was arrested and deported.

4.4. Missionary Influence and the Emergence of Sectional Press

Various sections of society looked up to the missionaries for the latter's zeal to promote Christianity. These sections also observed that the press served as an effective medium in the hands of the missionaries. Here, unlike what was made to appear and believe, the missionary zeal was self-motivated. It was nothing to do with the official patronage of the government of Madras, for the British were obsessed with business and administration in India and elsewhere. Also predominantly, the missionary work originated from the Catholic Church, which was nothing to do with the Protestantism endeared by the British. Notwithstanding, it was easy for other religious groups to satisfy themselves and convince others that the otherwise Christian nature of the British was the

instrumental force behind missionary works. Even more, the missionary work in education, healthcare and social equality, which resulted in the care and/or uplift of the downtrodden, destitute, aged and sick people, was wrongly equated to proselytizing. Thus, social mobilisation and consolidation achieved by the Christian missionaries obliged the enthusiasts of other religions to act upon in defending their religious faith. Therefore, after realising that the press could be used as an effective tool to formulate, reinforce and even bend public opinion, these sections based on trade, race, caste, religion and community began to start newspapers. Furthermore, they saw that the government was hellbent upon controlling the flow of information to the public. Thus, not only did they use these newspapers to voice their grievances, but also to consolidate their groups or communities on similar lines.

4.5. Initial Tamil Newspapers

Tamil newspapers and journals were apolitical in the beginning. The first Tamil monthly magazine was released in 1831. It was Tamil Patrika published by the Religious Tract Society. Although it enjoyed the support of the government, it ceased publication in 1833 for want of patronage. Similarly, Gazulu Lakshmanarasu Chetty, a Telugu merchant, launched the Crescent in 1844. He launched it for Hindu merchants of Madras and to defend the rights and privileges of Hindu community. Supported by the Madras Native Association, the paper fought for the abolition of commercial concessions granted to the East India Company. Yet, infighting, transfer of power in 1858

and the death of Lakshmanarasu Chetty in 1868 caused the Crescent to become defunct. In 1860, the Madras Times was started with George Romilly as its editor. It was an European endeavour both to safeguard their commercial interests and to defend the British government's policy.

Pursuantly, the Madras Mail appeared in 1868. It was the first evening newspaper in India. Most of its editorial staff were from England. Also, it had been one among the very few newspapers which were efficiently managed and adequately financed. Although it represented the wealthy section of the Europeans in India, the Madras Mail acted as a bridge between the affluent and the laymen. More clearly, although the Europeans in India were divided into two groups, the rich and the poor, the Madras mail facilitated their joining hands in carrying on the pro-government propoganda. Thus, it served well the role of defending the British rule in India. In addition, it took over another newspaper, the Spectator, which had been in publication since 1836. Another newspaper with similar objective was The Anglo Indian. It was published by the Anglo-Indian Association of Madras. It served to promote the interests of the Anglo-Indian community, its services and trade. In the due course, this paper too went into the hands of the Madras Mail like the Spectator. It was therefore obvious that these three newspapers wielded considerable influence on the administration and the intelligentsia. However, their circulation was limited to the small groups of administrators, Anglo-Indians and their clients. Viveka Vilasam appeared in 1865 with the stated objective of counteracting the

missionary propaganda. It was promoted by non-Christian Tamil intellectuals. However it went into oblivion. Sources of reference for this journal are also very minimal.

The Hindu was the first mainstream newspaper owned by Indians. It was established on September 20, 1878 by G. Subramania Iyer and five others in Madras. Published initially as a weekly, it represented the opinions and grievances of educated upper class Indians. Moreover, The Hindu acted as a bridge of understanding and communication between the ruler and the ruled. More clearly, as G. Subramania Iyer and a few others in The Hindu were Anglophiles in their early years of journalistic endeavour, The Hindu was positioned as a buffer between the readers and the British rulers. It softened the readers' passions against the British kindled by many other nationalistic forces. As circulation increased, the Hindu was converted into a Tri-Weekly in 1883 and again a Daily in April 1889. It eventually went into the hands of S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, a nationalist, who edited this paper from March 1905 until his death in 1923. In the course of time it came to be regarded as India's national newspaper.

Although several newspapers came out at that time, there was not one Tamil newspaper to serve the needs of the people. G. Subramania Iyer understood this situation and established the first newspaper in Tamil, the Swadesamitran. He published both The Hindu and the Swadesamitran until 1898. However, he left Hindu and devoted himself to the Swadesamitran. The

Swadesamitran enjoyed popularity among the people of Tamilnadu. Like Hicky's Bengal Gazette, the Swadesamitran was a major journalistic development in the history of Tamil newspapers. Therefore it is presented below under a separate subheading. The Hindu also came out from Madras as an English daily in the year 1899. In 1917, a Tamil daily Desabhaktan was started by T.V. Kalyansundara Menon. Following that, in 1925, Swarajya was published as yet another Tamil newspaper. It was closely followed by another Tamil newspaper in 1927 named, Tamil Nadu. Yet, they failed to provide a sustained competition to the Swadesamitran and The Hindu.

4.6. Swadesamitran - The First Tamil Newspaper

Swadesamitran was the first newspaper published in Tamil. Also it was the only newspaper in South India printed in a local language during the British rule. It was founded by G. Subramaniya Iyer in 1882, four years after The Hindu was started. Published from Madras, it was one among the earliest newspapers of Tamilnadu. In addition, Swadesamitran was the longest in print and remained in publication for the next 103 years. Swadesamitran meant 'friend of self-rule'. The newspaper's mission was to create awareness among the Indian public regarding the economic backwardness and alleged discriminatory practices of the British government in India. Its target audience was the educated higher class people. It had a progressive policy like Western newspapers that aimed at cultivating a strong and loyal opinion among its target audience. Swadesamitran's founder and editor G. Subramaniya Iyer was one of

the founding members of the Indian National Congress. Also he, along with five others, was the founder, editor and sponsor of The Hindu. However, as G. Subramania Iyer's political views differed from that of the fellow owners of The Hindu, he quit The Hindu and dedicated himself to the cause of the Swadesamitran.

Swadesamitran was founded as a Tamil weekly newspaper. However, in 1899, it became the first Tamil daily. For a very short period between 1898 and 1899, it was published as a Tri-Weekly. Swadesamitran had the largest and the most widespread circulation of any Tamil publication in the Madras Presidency. It enjoyed a monopolistic prominence for more than three decades. Furthermore, it was not limited to Madras Presidency, but was circulated in the entire south India. Even more, it went to Upper and Lower Burma, Ceylon, Penang, Singapore, the Federated Malay States, Sumatra, Borneo, China and South and East Africa. From hamlets to cities, it was ardently read by everyone including landlords, merchants, officials, women and students. It did not have any real competitor until 1925, the year when the newspaper Swararajya was started. Swararajya was followed by Tamil Nadu in 1927 and Dinamani in 1934. Yet, these three newspapers were unable to shake the primacy of the Swadesamitran until the 1950's.

G. Subramania Iyer's dedication and pugnacious style made Swadesamitran as the most sought after newspaper by Tamils living in the four corners of the world. Swadesamitran became even popular when the evergreen

Tamil poet Subramania Bharati joined as a Sub Editor in 1904. He was writing radical opinions against the British rule. However, Subramania Bharati left Swadesamitran in 1906 and started his own weekly, India, published from Pondicherry. However, he was to rejoin later in 1920 and work for it until his death in 1921. In the meantime, G. Subramania Iyer and his son T.S. Viswanathan wholly focussed on the Swadesamitran. Initially, G. Subramania Iyer had been an Anglophile, that is, at that time, an admirer of England and English customs and manners. However, he became a trenchant critic of the British rule after the arrest of Lala Lajpat Rai in 1905 and the pursuant agitations in Punjab. Thereafter the Swadesamitran turned virulently anti-British. It had incisive articles and opinions penned by nationalist writers like Subramanya Bharathi and V. V. S. Iyer, who professed radical doctrines against the British.

As the newspaper kept on condemning the Crown's oppressive methods against Indian nationalists in strong terms, G. Subramania Iyer was arrested in 21 August, 1908 on sedition charges. Hard labour and jail life broke him and Mr. Iyer was a beaten man thereafter. He was released only upon giving a written undertaking that he would never write anything against the British government. Moreover, during his arrest, the Swadesamitran's offices in Georgetown area of Madras were extensively searched. To add to the wound, G. Subramania Iyer was seriously ill with leprosy in 1915. Following that, he handed over the newspaper to A. Rangaswami Iyengar of The Hindu group of

publications. A. Rangaswami Iyengar was the nephew and right hand man of Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, the patriarch of the Kasturi family with which The Hindu still remains under publication. Thus, Swadesamitran went into the hands of nationalistic forces whom made Swadesmitran a new, potent and pervasive force in the placid atmosphere of Tamil Journalism (S. Muthiah, 2008). The new owner, A. Rangaswami Iyengar, brought in his kin C.R. Srinivasan to manage the newspaper.

After the transfer of title to The Hindu, Swadesamitran was made a Public Limited Company and named, The Swadesamitran Limited. It reached the heights of popularity in the 1930's and remained so for about three decades, much after the Independence. The publication purchased the antique Whiteaway's Building on Mount Road (now, Anna Salai) in Madras and moved there the newspaper office. Whiteaway and Laidlaw's was a famous 19th century a firm for textile retailing, tailoring and selling of household requirements. It branded itself as 'Furnishers and General Drapers' and had branches throughout the British India as well as in the capitals of many other British colonies in the East. The building was subsequently renamed Victory House to mark the success of the Quit India Movement. However, some authors hold that it is an older name entitled by Whiteaway's, the company that had built and owned the building, to commemorate the Allied victory in the Great War (World War I). Whatever the truth, Tamil journalism grew up there as most of the pioneering activities of the Swadesamitran took place behind its walls.

C.R. Srinivasan made Swadesamitran such a success that the building is still remembered as the home of the Swadesamitran.

During its lifetime, the Swadesamitran had four Editors namely G. Subramania Iyer (1882-1915), A. Rangaswami Iyengar (1915-1928), C.R. Srinivasan (1928-1962) and C.S. Narasimhan (1962-1985). After the death of C.R. Srinivasan in 1962, the Swadesamitran began to fade. In the 1970's it was losing to the competition of Alai Oosai and Dina Thanthi. As rivals were slowly but steadily eating its market share with their new and modern journalistic practices, the sad end to the newspaper that created Tamil Journalism was inevitable. It ceased publication and underwent liquidation in 1985. One of the famous Tamil writers, Asokamitran, was working with the Swadesamitran in its struggling last days. He wrote political opinions in a pseudo name Kinkaran. In his 'Ashokamitran Katuraigal', he described the doomsdays of the Swadesamitran as it was losing its reader base to its competitors. The essays sensitively narrated the death of the newspaper.

As a literary masterpiece of political analysis, Swadesamitran represented almost the entire Tamil reading public. It coined a set of new Tamil words to deal with science, politics and administration. It is also credited for innovating a whole new Tamil vocabulary. It had the most comprehensive news coverage among all the regional language papers of that time. Bharati in 1914 acclaimed G. Subramania Iyer as the one who made Tamil Journalism a fact of the world despite his imperfect early training in Tamil. Bharati went on to hail

that Mr. Iyer dared and succeeded in establishing a Tamil daily journal which, with all its faults, was the most useful paper in the Tamil country. Additionally, the following two cases bear testimony to the enormous influence and popularity of Swadesamitran. First, Swadesamitran remained a medium for advertisement in its time that had few equals. Largest advertisers in England and America preferred the Swadesamitran for their advertisement needs. Second, the editor of the Swadesamitran was the only representative among vernacular publications in the Madras Presidency to receive an invitation to attend the Imperial Durbar held at Delhi by Imperial Majesties King George and Queen Mary in 1911.

Finally, alongside the Swadesamitran, its editors conducted a small scale general printing business in Madras. The press had four Wharfedale machines driven by electric motor. About 40 people were employed there.

4.7. Contribution of C. Subramania Bharati to Tamil Journalism

The national poet C. Subramania Bharati edited Chakravarthini in November 1904. Moreover he started India in April 1906. Bharati ventilated his views in the columns of these two newspapers. As the newspaper India was under his full control, his verses published in that paper had extremely anti-British overtones. Therefore the government issued an arrest warrant on him and tried to prevent the publication of the India. Yet Bharati continued to publish it in exile from Pondicherry until 1910. Another adherer of extreme nationalism was S. Subramania Siva. He edited the Janana Bhanu, which

earned a name for its bold and fearless writings. However, it was closed down in 1916 due to paucity of funds.

Bharati was the pioneer of cartoons in Tamil. He employed them a good deal in his journal, India. Bharati's cartoons were themed on the exploitation of India by the British. Even more, his cartoons disparaged the Moderates, who held soft viewpoint about the British. His traditional lore drew from ancient Tamil proverbs, Hindu mythology, Pancharatna Tales and Aesop's Fables. His style of representation was a garden or zoo full of wild and domesticated animals, below which to put an elaborate commentary about the cartoon. Bharati had more than one cartoonist to bring out his ideas. However, Bharati's journal exclusively for cartoons named Chitraveli did not take off. Later, Weeklies such as Ananda Vikatan and Kumudam firmly secured the place of cartoon in Tamil journalism. Cartoons of Tamil journals secured international acclamation. For example, the famed Review of Reviews published from London has appreciated Tamil cartoons.

4.8. Muslim Press

Muslims for their part started newspapers to defend their communal and religious interests. Live-ul-Islam and Saiphul Islam were the two most prominent Muslim newspapers. Of them, Live-ul-Islam was a weekly newspaper edited by Mauli Haji Sheik Miran Mohiud-din. It had a circulation of one thousand copies. The Saiphul Islam edited by S.S. Mauli Ahmed Sayid Sahib was more community oriented and strove hard to promote Muslim

interests. These two newspapers exercised considerable influence upon the Tamil speaking Muslims. The third newspaper Quami Report edited by M.A. Majid Sharar was more nationalistic in character. It catered to the needs of the Urdu speaking Muslims in Madras. Its editor was called 'a turbulent journalist'.

4.9. Dravidian Press

At that time Brahmins enjoyed near monopoly in public services and religious establishments. Nearly all other classes remained backward both socially and economically. This led to the inevitable conflict between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Therefore leaders of the non-Brahmin communities organised the Justice Party in the Madras Presidency with the aim of destroying the Brahmin monopoly. The origin of the Dravidian press was closely connected with these developments. As the support of the British administration was essential for the realisation of its aims, the Justice Party adopted a pro-British attitude. The party published three newspapers namely The Justice (in English), Non-Brahman and the Dravidian. These three newspapers remained the chief organs of the Justice Party and its Non-Brahmin Movement. The Justice Party won the election of 1920 in the Presidency and formed the ministry. As a result, the Dravidian Press raised the bar of its opposition to the Congress and its newspapers. The Congress Party, in retaliation, plotted the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 and the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. These movements contributed to the popularity of the Congress in Tamilnadu. Consequently in 1937 the Justice

Party was defeated and exited from power. This in turn led to the gradual decline of circulation of the Dravidian newspapers. However, the Self Respect Movement founded by E.V. Ramaswami and the atheist propaganda helped the Dravidian Press to regain some lost ground.

4.10. Diminishment of Sectional Press

Until 1916, the Press in Tamilnadu was the monopoly of Brahmins. The Hindu and the Swadesamitran, the two leading papers in Tamilnadu, were edited and financed by the Brahmins. Obviously, these newspapers were trying to safeguard Brahmin interests. However after 1916, the trend changed and the nationalist press emerged. The change from a sectional press to the nationalist press was primarily owing to the grievances that the elite entertained against the British. After the creation of the Congress Party in 1885 and as the Indian elite came to have more and more contact with the Western civilisation, they reflexively took up the cause of freedom so that their fast eroding grip on the society shall be clawed back and reinforced. For that, it began to shed, albeit superficially, its communal bias which had been evident until the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, this press showed an inclination to write for the liberation of country. Secondly, the advent of the Non-Brahmin movement in 1916 made it essential to divert public attention away from anti-Brahminism. For that freedom struggle came as a handy issue of the times. Therefore an environment was created that freedom struggle, not internal differences, should remain as the foremost and common issue. Thirdly, the Home Rule League was

founded by Annie Besant to carry out a coordinated propaganda against the British rule in India. She started two newspapers, the New India and the Commonweal, to propagate the ideals of her League. These newspapers along with the League commanded much influence over the Brahmins. Hence, the Brahmin newspapers in general decided to follow her lead. Fourthly, non-Brahmin personalities like T.V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar and P. Varadarajulu Nayudu started newspapers in order to contribute their part to the freedom struggle. Their respective papers, the Desabakthan and the Tamilnadu, had writings that were in favour of the Congress. Moreover, these newspapers were aimed at giving a broader national outlook to the Press. These aspects contributed to the erosion of the communal trend pursued by Tamil newspapers.

4.11. Nationalist Press

The nationalist press remained anti-British until the British left India. It collaborated with nationalist leaders of that time to communicate anti-British political ideas from those leaders to the common people. The part played by it was unique in the sense that the Press wilfully offered to serve as an utility for the politicians. It facilitated the reach of leaders and ideas to greater number of people than any speech could achieve at the public meetings. Here, in order to spread an ill-feeling among the readers against the British in India, the nationalist press took up political and economic issues. Although, at the beginning, it did not possess adequate funds and manpower to carry on this risky venture, the necessity and desperation outweighed the difficulties and

risks.

Firstly, a perspective was forcefully created within the minds of the common man that should anyone exhibit national loyalty, patriotic behaviour and/or correct way of thinking, he/she should remain anti-British. Moreover it was indoctrinated that being anti-British alone engenders within an individual every positive and right behaviour towards the society and the nation. Real patriotism, readiness to suffer and willingness to make sacrifice of quite some good hearts enormously helped the nationalist press to reinforce this thinking. Thus, they were able to conceal their ulterior motives, if any, and shortcomings thereby making friends with common people until Independence was achieved. For, up to that time, the common man had been having much reservations about Indian elites comprising mainly Brahmins and caste Hindus.

Another element was that the common man was not at all in despair to be liberated from the British as it was made out to believe. On the other hand, the elite wanted desperately themselves and their activities freed from the British purview. Therefore they were badly in need of mass mobilisation as their shield even if it was a bought or bent one. Furthermore, although in reality the general public had nothing to do with the British administration, the euphoria of a section of the people bought by inflammatory writings was portrayed as the united upheaval of the whole India against the British. Hence real and burning issues were pushed to backseat with great power and effort and the British was made the common enemy. In addition, religious

consolidation was also effected. In this regard, primitive, animistic, naturalist and tribal people were brought into the Hindu umbrella.

Yet another important development during that period was the spread of Theosophical Society and its ideas in the country. A section of scholars especially American War Veterans are of the view that the Theosophical Society is mostly to blame for India's independence from Britain (Robert Howard, 1991). First, the Theosophical Society managed to change British policy so that the British became unpopular with the native population, particularly the elites. Annie Besant was then the President of the Society. She started the Home Rule League in 1916. Also she published one of the largest English newspapers, the New India, in which she strongly criticised British rule. More importantly the newspaper worked on the lines that as if the newspaper should always write against the administration and remain anti-government. In this connection she was arrested in June 1917 and ordered to undergo internment. Moreover, New India's security deposit was forfeited and the British attempted to eliminate the newspaper. Yet, Indian leaders of that time, with unproven internationalist influence, came to her rescue and made her the President of the Indian Congress Party. Moreover, many leaders admired as great freedom fighters followed in the steps of Annie Besant and led Indian people against British rule.

In short, nationalism was forced upon the public above individual, family, community and social interests. In addition, the nationalist press and

leaders strove to lead the public only by the latter's blindfolded ebullience with nationalistic passions. This endeavour was carried out irrespective of the latter's preferences, attitudes, opinions and/or reservations. A number of papers appeared after 1916 to carry on this propaganda. Even some newspapers of the sectional press, like the Desabakthan of T.V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, changed their old path of addressing the grievances of their caste and community to become nationalist in character. No further theoretical proof is needed for all these developments as the socioeconomic conditions India has been witnessing since her Independence stand as the living witness.

4.12. Newspapers of the Transition Period

The Transition Period refers to the period immediately before and after the Independence. It shall be taken roughly as between 1930 and 1960. On September 11, 1934, S. Sadanand of Free Press (Madras) Limited started Dinamani. The paper also took over Indian Express (now, The New Indian Express) from Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu in 1932. Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu had founded Indian Express in 1931. Earlier, he had also founded Tamil Nadu in 1925. With regard to Dinamani, it became a worthy challenger to the contemporary newspapers. It positioned itself as a vibrant and lively Tamil newspaper which had separate sections for women, children, cinema, fine arts and book review. It even had a column dealing with Muslim news events. More than anything, it was a cheap newspaper relative to its news coverage that presented news and views in a different manner. Its newsworthiness, content,

language and presentation outlasted many newspapers. While its editors set an initial target of 8,000 copies, its circulation reached 20,000 copies in the first two months itself.

Dinamani's aggressive positioning caused the demise of newspapers like Tamil Nadu, India and Jayabharati. It even challenged the supremacy of Swadesamitran. Yet a split occurred among Dinamani's editors which led to the Group's taken over by Ramnath Goenka in 1936. Thereafter, the Group witnessed enormous growth and began a new era in Indian journalism. Until now Dinamani is one of the dominant newspapers of Tamilnadu. Its first editor T.S. Chokkalingam started a Daily, Dinasari, on his own in 1944. However, Dinasari did not last long in the face of powerful contenders like Swadesamitran, Dinamani and The Hindu. T.S. Chokkalingam's yet another newspaper, Sudhantira Sangu, earned the wrath of the colonial government.

In 1942 Dina Thanthi (to mean, daily telegraph) was started by a barrister, S.B. Adityan. The paper was aimed at semi-literate people at the lower strata of the society. Dina Thanthi gained immediate popularity with the intended target audience as it added an element of sensationalism in its news presentation. Dinamalar was established by T.V. Ramasubbaiyer in the year 1951 in Thiruvananthapuram, the Capital of Kerala State. However, later it was shifted to Tirunelveli in South Tamilnadu. The newspaper actively propagandised for the merger of Tamil areas in Travancore of Kanyakumari District with Tamilnadu. With its characteristic photographic coverage,

Dinamalar showed itself as the champion of social causes. Moreover, Dinamalar was the first newspaper to introduce offset printing in 1981.

In those years, the Swadesamitran, Tamil Nadu and India were one-anna dailies. Another Tamil daily, Jayabharati was priced a quarter anna. The broadsheet Dinamani was priced at half an anna.

4.13. Attitudes of Individual or Sectional Publications

Nearly all newspapers in Tamilnadu promoted the interests of their respective communities. The Anglo-Indian press was an exception. It always remained pro-government until 1947, and enjoyed official patronage. More than that, it opposed any newspaper that criticised the policy or action of the government. As opposed to the nationalist press, the Anglo-Indian press helped the administration in its effort to create public opinion in favour of British rule. The Muslim Press worked for the welfare of its people. It adapted a policy that served its interests best. The circulation of Muslim papers was mostly limited to the Muslims. Yet, its contribution and influence were overwhelming. The Dravidian Press backed by the Justice Party adapted a pro-British attitude. It worked for the welfare of non-Brahmins and was basically opposed to the Brahmin dominated Congress and their newspapers. Often, the Dravidian Press joined hands with the Anglo-Indian Press to oppose the nationalist papers' attempt to create a public opinion against the British. Moreover, since the Justice Party was patronised by the officials, the Dravidian press remained neutral and silent on economical and political issues that went against the

British administration. The Justice Party became the ruling party in the Presidency in 1920 and continued its opposition to the nationalist press until it remained power in 1937.

4.14. The British Standpoint towards the Press

Press censorship was introduced by the Government of Madras as early as December 1795 to restrict news concerning the army, information considered indiscreet and publishings detrimental to the interest of the administration. Moreover the reality was that the comments on government's policies and measures often offended the ruling class. In this situation the Military Secretary was entrusted with the task of scrutinising the newspapers in Madras. Although pre-censorship was abolished in 1818 by Lord Hastings, it was not implemented in Madras. Yet, except for the occasional attacks on the administration and the criticisms of British religious policy, the Indian owned newspapers did not give much difficulty to the Government of Madras until 1885. With the rise of nationalism, the newspapers began to attack the foreign rule with much vigour. In addition, they attacked the pro-government newspapers too.

After these developments, the British administration did not pursue a permissive policy towards the Press. It was not soft either. Whenever embarrassed, criticised, exposed or cornered, the British Government invoked the Press Regulations of 1823 for restriction, penalisation, confiscation, jailing or deportation of editors and properties. This happened to the Indian and

British owned newspapers and their editors alike. Yet, the press very often disregarded censorship instituted by the Governors General like Wellesley and Warren Hastings. What happened to James Augustus Hicky and his Bengal Gazette, and James Silk Buckingham and his Calcutta Journal, did not crush the fighting spirit of the press in India. In 1825 Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted to represent the difficulties of the newspapers to the government through the Native Press Association, but it proved futile.

The Vernacular Press Act (1878), The Press Acts (1908 and 1910) and Assumed Emergency Powers during the Great War (1914-1918) helped the British control anti-government writings in the Press. Also it counted upon the support of the Anglo-Indian and the Dravidian Presses which tried to create a public opinion in favour of the British rule. More clearly, the attitude of the British administration was not to suppress the Press but weaken the political polarisation and arousal against them.

4.15. Conclusion

In this chapter the history, evolution and development of the Tamil Press were analysed. The Missionary era newsprint showed the contribution of Christian missionaries to printing and social development, besides their religious zeal. In addition the missionaries secured a place for Tamil and its literature in printing.

Three things are clear with regard to the press of the pre-Independence era. First, government patronage or tacit approval was essential to run a

newspaper. Second, unlicensed and anti-government materials were dealt with iron hand. Third, although several publications came out, they had no other serious aim than publishing official news and carrying out government printing works.

Regarding the post-Independence era newspapers, many of them claimed themselves as nationalist publications from the beginning. Yet their values were hardly nationalist in character but were at the core promoting the interests of particular communities as well as dominant or elite mindsets. Thus whether its nationalistic values reflected and enclosed every section of the society was questionable.

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