INTRODUCTION
The Dawn of Indian Independence: The Voice of English Newspapers

Introduction

Importance of the Subject

In the History of India, there cannot be any event, more significant than the freedom movement and the independence of the country which was ruled by the British for about 200 years. It is needless to say that the British never considered India their own land and ruled over the country with the primary motive of enriching England, their homeland by draining away all the wealth from the conquered country. At the dawn of Indian independence, India with all her natural resources and huge manpower was economically backward, a skeleton of the once world's most beautiful country. Large sections of people were poor and illiterate although once India had been the home of one of the oldest civilisations of the world. The British rulers had been primarily concerned with the governance of the country, not its growth. Their policy of laissez faire was often a cover for lack of real concern for the fate of the helpless millions over whom they had power.

From various sources we come to know about the pitiable plight of India. During the years 1800 -1900, more than thirty-two million Indians died of starvation. There were as many as thirty famines in the 90 years from 1857 – the last being the one in Bengal in 1943 which took a toll of 3 million lives. While on the one hand increasing taxes affected mainly the small farmers and reduced them to a state of landless beggars due to indebtedness, on the other hand the British were successful in building up an administrative machinery suited to their requirements in laying a communication and transport network, in teaching English language to a small urban elite. While on the one hand the political leaders were cherishing the golden dream of being the rulers of a new India, on the other hand thousands of freedom fighters sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country and thousands other died due to communal riots provoked by the shrewd politicians.

During these years, the English newspapers played a crucial role acting as a chronicler, depicting the true picture of India, creating awareness among people and contributing to the freedom movement by championing its cause and for
which it suffered tremendously at the hands of the British. Numerous restrictions were imposed on the English newspapers but the repressive policy failed to deflect most of the newspapers from their chosen path. Just as the freedom fighters could not be suppressed at the point of gun or before the noose of the strong hanging rope, similarly the English newspapers advocated a determined struggle against the colonial rule.

The newspapers were popular amongst the enlightened, educated Indians as well as the common mass, as these newspapers were widely read aloud in the streets and squares to large audiences, eager to know the latest political news.

The Press became a mass organiser and propagandist that immensely promoted the influence of the extremists as well as the moderates and also highlighted the policy of the Britishers, making them clear to the common readers. While the growth and development of the English newspapers in India was profusely facilitated by the Nationalist movement for freedom, they also lent a tremendous boost and served as effective instruments of the nationalist struggle against the British. They frequently took up cudgels with the authorities and transmitted the message of freedom to the masses of India and raised the public conscience against the repressive British regime and its atrocities in India. Inspite of the Gagging Act and other restrictions imposed on the Press, the English newspapers played a very important role from the beginning to the end in the National movement particularly at the dawn of independence.

The newspapers made people aware of the day to day activities of the Indian National Army, the policies and actions taken by the Congress and Muslim League, the role of the Cabinet Mission in India, the internal problems and unrest, political and social conditions of the time, ultimately the achievements of the much awaited independence at the cost of partition and perpetual enmity between the two Nations – India and Pakistan.
The English newspapers played the role of chroniclers, recording the everyday happenings and moulded the public opinion. From the newspapers we come to know that the general common mass, both Hindu and Muslim were against partition; particularly, the village people didn't even have much idea about Jinnah. In his appeal for co-operation, Lord Pethick Lawrence said in January 1, 1946—”1946 will be a crucial year in India's History.” He also said, “I believe the whole of the British people earnestly desire to see India rise to the full and free status of an equal partner in the British Commonwealth...........It must be a plan under which authority can be transferred to Indian control under forms of Government which will be willingly accepted by the broad mass of India’s people so that the new India will not be torn and rent by internal strife and discussion.\(^3\)

This statement stands in contrast to what happened after 15\(^{th}\) August, 1947 when India emerged a new Nation and two dominions were born, as has been expressed by Hiren Mukherjee at the dawn of independence—”There is a suspicion, which can not just be wished away that our independence today has many a lacuna, that we have been proffered a piece of bread which might well taste like stone, that problems like that of the states and of Hindu-Muslim antagonism are the product of many and dubious machinations. Such worries there are and will be.”\(^4\)

Such worries are there, indeed, even in the 21\(^{st}\) century and the 3\(^{rd}\) millennium although Samjhota Express has been running between Delhi and Lahore. Even today thousands of innocents are losing their lives due to terrorist attacks here and there, sometimes due to bomb explosions, sometimes at the gunpoint. The newspapers were eloquent before independence, at the dawn of independence and in independent India.

The English newspapers depict a true picture of the time, making us aware of the price we had to pay for the priceless freedom. They were the voice of people which was suppressed by the subjugating powers to hide the truth. Both Nehru and Jinnah — hungry for power, failed to see the real intention of the Britishers behind the partition. Undivided India would have emerged the most powerful
Nation of the world. The Britishers could realise that, as it was undivided India which had fought against the Britishers for achieving freedom. Again, partition was done in such a way that some of the Muslim dominated areas remained in India while Hindu dominated areas remained in Pakistan. While the Hindus were ruthlessly driven out of Pakistan many Muslims remained in India as ours is a secular country. The far-sighted Britishers could understand what great damaging impact it would have on the economy, political situations and social condition of India.

Mountbatten himself has confessed “I had absolutely no idea that it was going to be a bloody sight worse after the transfer of power, than before – no idea of what I was in for” Most affected States were Bengal and Punjab as these two States had to bear the brunt of partition as the majority of freedom fighters belonged to Bengal and Punjab. The list of martyrs who were hanged to death at Celular Jail is an evidence of this fact where Bengal tops the list closely followed by Punjab. The sharp knife of the British ripped apart the two States leaving countless number of people deprived of their land and home transforming them into refugees.

The situation had become worst in 1947, before Independence and the British failed to deal with the disturbances but the fact is that the British had ignited the fire of hatred between the two communities and made them enemies of each other. The disturbances of 1947 were initiated by the communities against one another in the presence of a Government which was to transfer power to an unknown successor or successors not later than June 1948. The cause for this disturbance was to secure a more favourable position of one community or the other on the transfer of power.

The two communities, representatives of the two Nations fought everywhere – markets, fields, villages, cities and gradually it took the shape of violent mass terrorism. Under the heading “IMPOSSIBILITY of Hindu-Muslim Unity “ Morning News 1947 says, “some Hindus and ‘Nationalist’ Muslims have been shouting
the slogan of Hindu – Muslim unity, but recent happenings have proved the impossibility of unity. The Congress and the Hindus should know that Muslims have awakened and are prepared to make every sacrifice for the achievement of Pakistan,” said Khan Abdul Qaiyum Khan, addressing a large gathering at Zamrud Mahal Talkies. In the same paper of the March issue was published – “Calcutta Muslims Celebrate ‘Pakistan Day’ “ and the news under it was “Calcutta changed overnight into an orchard of green flags – woke up on Sunday to celebrate ‘Pakistan Day’ with the solemnity and determination worthy of the occasion. Section 144 Cr.P.C., which had been promulgated in the city was strictly observed by the Muslims and neither any procession nor any open air meeting was arranged by them”.

The March 30 issue says “Curfew in Calcutta to continue till April. Tension continues in the affected areas. The police fired 63 rounds and have arrested 51 persons on the spot; and the March 31 issue reports about the serious riots which broke out in Bombay – “Communal disturbances suddenly broke out in 3 localities of Central Bombay late in the evening. Stray assaults are reported from various localities. Calcutta situation remains unchanged. Military called out in Howrah. Over 30 rounds fired, 200 arrested – Varsity Exams postponed – Suburban trains curtailed.”

Such was the situation in India before the much awaited independence and the use of Press as a weapon of non-violent agitation had provided an alternative to violence, revolts and secret underground movements. The modus operandi adopted by the distinguished editors, journalists and authors have left a unique legacy of outspokenness and patriotic fervour. The leading articles, the press reports, the inspiring articles published while the country was in the throes of its freedom struggle are valuable treasures of the country’s historical literature. The contribution of the Press and its role in the attainment of independence was unique and memorable. It will continue as a cherished episode in the histories of the oppressed and subject people who succeeded in overthrowing an alien rule largely without malice or racial prejudice. Papers like National Herald, The Hindu, Hindustan Times, The Times of India, The Statesman, Amrita Bazzar Patrika, Bombay Chronicle, The Radiance Weekly, the Dawn, Hindustan
Standard, The Indian Express, National Call, Delhi, Free Press Journal, Bombay, The Searchlight, The Tribune, The Hitvada, The Leader, The Pioneer, Maratha and hundreds of other English newspapers became the voice of India at the dawn of its Independence. Hence, the importance of the subject is to acknowledge and highlight the contribution of English Press in India in the freedom movement.

Indian Independence was achieved at the cost of a great loss which is irrecoverable. Independence was preponed intentionally which had a dire consequence. As it has been rightly said 'Pen is mightier than sword' the contribution of English Press is in no way less important than the sacrifice made by the martyrs and patriots. India’s freedom movement continued for many decades; then why it became so necessary to prepone the historical event at the dawn of it? Why was the Press gagged several times and attempts taken to keep the general mass into the darkness of ignorance? How far the Hindu and Muslim leaders and the shrewd, diplomatic British were responsible for the partition of India, giving rise to the permanent problem of terrorism and enmity? Had the self interest and selfish attitude of the political leaders of undivided India opened the eyes of the British who realised that simply by separating the Hindus and the Muslims and by dividing India into two Nations they will be able to curb the power of India, the country which had tremendous potential at that time and which would have emerged the strongest Nation of the world today? Mahatma Gandhi’s most cherished dream was Indian Independence and he was the only one who raised his voice strongly against partition; what compelled him at the end to accept this absolutely wrong decision? Even after the completion of six decades of Indian independence these questions still trouble our mind because what we have lost is more than what we gained.

Background 1942 – 46, History of National Newspapers

The Second World War had tremendous impact on India and other colonies all over the world. Germany’s attack on Soviet Russia and Japan’s on U.S.A. made the war truly global. The astonishing success of Japan in the earlier stages
brought the war right to India's door. A situation was created when it seemed imminent that India herself would be attacked. The Japanese ships had appeared in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman & Nicobars were included to the Japanese Navy. United States suggested to the British that they should come to terms with India to win India's willing cooperation. The British government was requested to conciliate the Indian leaders and upto a certain point they had to change their policy. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were released from the jail but they felt that they were victims of circumstances and not the masters of their destiny. There was difference of opinions among the Indian leaders. Gandhiji was convinced that the British Government was ready and willing to recognise India as free if India offered full cooperation in the war. According to him though the government was predominantly conservative and Mr. Churchill was the Prime Minister, war had reached a stage where the British would have no opinion but to recognise the freedom of India as the price of cooperation. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad thought that the British Government was anxious for the cooperation of the Indians but were not willing to give freedom to India but he failed in making Gandhiji realise it.

A Press Conference was held in Calcutta where Abul Kalam had expressed his views and said that if Japan attacked India, all Indians should join hands to defend the country but that was possible if they were free from all bonds. 'The Times' and the 'Daily News of London' commented on the Press Conference and said that there seemed to be a difference of opinion between Gandhiji and the Congress leadership. One more important change in the Indian political scenario was the campaign started by Subhas Chandra Bose for active opposition to war. He was imprisoned and after his release left India. For about a year there was no news about him until in March 1942, he made a speech which was broadcast by the Berlin Radio. It became clear that he was in Germany and was trying to organise an anti-British front from there. The Japanese propaganda against the British occupation of India also gained intensity and a large number of people were effected. A section of people
believed that Japanese attack had weakened the British power. Although Gandhiji was in favour of non-violence and Subhash Bose had openly sided with the axis powers, Gandhiji had deep admiration for Subhash Bose. As the war crisis deepened, people expected that there would be a change in the British government's attitude to the Indian problem. This actually happened and the outcome was the Cripps Mission of 1942.11

Sir Stafford Cripps came to India on 23rd March, 1942. He had brought with him the following summarised proposals which were embodied in a Draft Declaration.

(1) In order to achieve the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India, the British Government proposes that steps should be taken to create a new Indian Union which will have a full status of a Dominion.

(2) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, a constitution-making body shall be set up. Unless the leaders of the principal communities shall have previously agreed on some other method, this body shall be elected, under the system of prepositional representation, by an electoral college consisting of the members of the lower houses of all the Provincial legislatures for which new elections would have been held. The Indian States will be invited to appoint representatives – the proportion between British Indian and States representatives to correspond with the proportion between their total populations.

(3) The British Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the constitution so framed on two conditions. First, any Province or Provinces which are not prepared to accept the new constitution will be entitled to frame by a similar process a constitution of their own, giving them "the same full status as the Indian Union." Indian States will be similarly free to adhere to the new constitution or not. In either case a revision of their treaty arrangements will have to be negotiated.

(4) The second condition is the signing of a treaty to be negotiated between the British Government and the constitution – making body to cover all "matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands, “ particularly the protection of racial and religious minorities in accordance with the British Government’s past undertakings.
Until the new constitution can be framed the British Government must retain control of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India in co-operation with the peoples of India. To that end the British Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.

The Cripps' proposals, however, did not appeal to the Congress. Apart from the virtual partition of India, which, the long-term proposals involved they were open to another serious objection, namely that the rulers, not the peoples of the Indian States, would determine their future.  

Before coming to India, Sir Stafford Cripps had written to the Viceroy that he would like to meet the representatives of different bodies and a Conference was arranged in Delhi which was attended by 1400 delegates from all over India. The session was so impressive that even the British and the Anglo-Indian Press, which normally tried to belittle the importance of nationalist – Muslims, could not ignore it. They were compelled to acknowledge that this Conference proved that Nationalist Muslims were not a negligible factor. Even the Statesman and the Times of India wrote leading articles on the Conference.

The Cripp's Mission failed. Gandhiji went for a nationwide civil disobedience movement with a view to making England to Quit India. From the Axis Camp first Germany and then Japan gave an all out help and support to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose to organise his Azad Hind Government and Azad Hind Fauj (I.N.A.) so that he may wage a war to liberate India.

Throughout this period i.e., from 1942 – 1946, we find the English newspapers taking an active role voicing their opinions on different happenings. As reported by the Bombay Chronicle about the situation in Bombay on 9th August 1942: "All-day protest demonstrations in city. Police open fire in six different areas, five
Without suppressing any fact, the newspaper has given a vivid description of the torture inflicted by police under the British government on the general mass.

The Hindustan Times Weekly, New Delhi issue reports: 

"Firings: Lathi Charges: Mass Arrests Five killed and 149 arrested in Bombay, police open fire a dozen times. Congress declared unlawful."

Simultaneously we find reports on Govt. of India's (British) warning to the newspapers for publishing facts as reported by Tribune. Publication of News about Civil Disobedience Movement – Govt. of India's warning – Tribune, Lahore, Monday, August 10, 1942:

"Working committee members taken into custody – Congress Committees Declared Unlawful – Round up of Congress Workers all over country." This was the situation in the country. All members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested along with Gandhiji. This was reported by the Tribune –

"Mahatma Gandhi has been arrested. The Congress President Maulana Azad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr.Vallabhai Patel, Mrs.Sarojini Naidu and other members of the Congress Working Committee have also been arrested."

The Bombay Chronicle gives a true picture of the situation in September, 1942:

"Congress Procession Dispersed in City – Crowds Hold up Traffic: Best Bus Burnt – Police Resort to Lathi Charge, Tear Gas and Firing – A lathicharge to disperse a Congress procession near Pydhoni on Sunday evening resulted in the arrest of twelve persons and injuries to twelve others – Crowds hold up road traffic."
The same paper reports about situation in November:

"Three Killed in Firing by Military Patrol in Delhi – Alleged Attempt to Damage Railway Track – Firing and Lathi Charge on Ahmedabad Processionists."

The Amrit Bazar Patrika reports about the Japanese Air Raid on Calcutta area:


Hindustan Times hints at Gandhi – Jinnah Talks:

"Gandhi – Jinnah Talks Break Down" – "League Leader sticks to Lahore Resolution – Counter proposed by Mahatma rejected" – "Not the End of our efforts."

The same paper reports about Maulana Azad’s warning to Britain in 1945:

"Use of Indian Troops in Far East Must Stop."

Hindustan Times reports:

"Nation celebrated Congress Diamond Jubilee" and the National Herald sounded Patel’s voice: "Time for final notice to British" – says Patel – "Quit India" – League invited to work for freedom.

The Bombay Sentinel reports about the historic trial which started in Red Fort:

"INA officers face charge of waging war against King. Shah Nawaz’s Diary discloses Army was disgusted with Japanese tactics."

According to National Herald:

"Over 1,000 killed: 2,000 injured – Calcutta situation deteriorates." Everywhere a picture of unrest was captured by the newspapers and brought to the general mass.

Hindustan Times reports about the planned rioting in Calcutta:

"Those who planned the ‘Direct Action Day’ have to answer for all the killings and maiming and burning and looting in Calcutta. Neither their advice to their party men not to resort to ‘direct action’ nor their appeals for peace after murder stalked the city’s
streets can cancel out their direct incitement to violence. For weeks they were busy spreading panic and left people in doubt as to what they were about.” Such was the reaction of the newspapers who always sympathised with the common mass and voiced their opinion for the cause of people and their freedom.

Quit India Movement and INA trials proved that nothing other than complete freedom could resolve the Indian deadlock. International development was also against continued domination of India by the British. The revolt of the Indian naval ratings in Bombay (February 1946), strike in the Air Force and signal Corps of Jabbalpur in addition to widespread general strikes and demonstrations both in British India and Indian States were ominous signs for British hegemony in India. Hindu – Muslim riots rocked the country particularly Bengal. The British Government, successful in their strategy decided to quit India. In pursuance of this decision they sent a Cabinet team consisting of Pethick Lawrence, Stafford Cripps and Albert Alexander to design a scheme for the transfer of power. This team known as Cabinet Mission reached India on 24th March, 1946.

Between April 1 and 17 they interviewed 472 persons in 182 sittings but the proposal put forward by the Cabinet team failed to bring diverse opinion together and hence the Mission failed. Had this proposal been accepted and worked out, division of India could have been avoided.

Gandhiji initially welcomed the proposal but after examining its inherent contradictions opined it as “worse than Pakistan.” The Muslim League resolved for acceptance stating “it would ultimately result in establishment of Pakistan.” The goal of Pakistan was not changed. The Viceroy proceeded to implement the scheme by forming an interim coalition ministry. He invited presidents of major political parties to work out modalities. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was then President of the Congress. Muhammed Ali Jinnah refused to sit with Maulana Azad. He said, “Hindus were enemies but non-league Muslims were traitors.”
Congress, in order to pacify Jinnah, withdrew Maulana Azad and elected Jawaharlal Nehru as its President in a special session of AICC on 7th July, 1946. Yet, Mr. Jinnah didn't turn up. A council of ministers including six Hindu members from the Congress, five Muslim members from the Muslim League and one each from the Sikhs, Indian Christians and Parsees was formed by the Viceroy. The selection was peculiar as the names suggested by the Congress was altered by the Viceroy without any consultation and agreement of Congress. The Viceroy replaced Sarat Chandra Bose by Harekrishna Mahatab. Names of Dr. Jakir Hussain and Smt. Amrit Kaur were deleted. On the other hand Congress objection to the inclusion of Sardar Abdur Rub Nistar of Muslim League who was defeated in 1946 election was ignored. The Muslim League was authorised to nominate Muslim only but their list included one Hindu of Scheduled Caste community Jogendra Nath Mondal.

In spite of the acts being suspicious and harmful, the Congress working Committee did not reject the Viceroy's list though the members felt humiliated. Gandhi and the socialist group in the Congress objected to it seriously. Accepting the list meant burying of National character of the Congress and reducing it to a communal body. Yet the deflated Congress, for the sake of independence wanted to give a chance to the proposal.

The Statesman saved the situation by publishing the substance of a letter written by Mr. Jinnah to the Viceroy, in which he had asked for a number of assurances, some of which were quite injurious. Soon it came to the knowledge of all that Jinnah had been assured by the Viceroy. He was found to be acting in a partisan manner. The Cabinet Mission had to step in to settle the matter.

It is again a Press Report that created the final deadlock. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his press briefing on 10th July, 1946 in Bombay gave his own views about the changing character of grouping clause. Being asked he said, “Constituent Assembly would be free to meet all situations as they arise.” This provided Mr. Jinnah with a very convenient handle which he was desperately searching.
Already he had been emboldened by the secret assurance of the Viceroy. On the 29th of July, 1946, Jinnah made the League Council withdraw its acceptance to the Cabinet Mission Plan and resolved to achieve Pakistan by "Direct Action." The date fixed for Direct Action was 16th August, 1946. It turned out to be a day of ruthless killings of the Non-Muslims, particularly Hindus in League dominated areas. Bengal experienced the worst nightmare in the form of reality. Thousands of people were killed; thousands more were injured. Many were dumb witnesses of the murder of their kith and kin before their eyes. Eye witnesses of that time gave description of a horrible scene of an injured person whose stomach was ripped open and the intestines came out, running to save his life holding the bleeding injured portions with his hands.

The Viceroy had no alternative left but to invite Congress to form the interim Government. This Cabinet was headed by Jawaharlal Nehru and the other members were Sardar Ballavbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Asaf Ali, C. Rajagopalachari, Sarat Chandra Bose, John Mathai, Sardar Baldeo Singh, Saffat Ahmed Khan, Jagjivan Ram, Sayed Ali Jaheer, C. Harmusji Bhaba. The ministers took charge on September 2, 1946. On the next day Saffat Ahmed Khan was stabbed by a Muslim youth for accepting congress nomination.

The Viceroy was inconvenienced by the "Direct Action" Killing in Calcutta. Gandhiji asked him to resign. The Viceroy advised Muslim League to join the interim government as otherwise the Central government might not wait long to take steps against Muslim League to stop riots. Muslim League thereafter joined the interim government with Liaquat Ali Khan, I.I. Chundrigar, Abdur Rab Nistar and Jagendra Nath Mondal as members in the Cabinet. Congress had to drop Sarat Chandra Bose, Saffat Ahmed Khan and Syed Ali Jaheer in order to accommodate them. The League denied collective responsibility of the cabinet. They opposed anything and everything proposed by Congress. Unreasonable obstinacy inside the government and inhuman riots outside made people sick physically as well as mentally. The Direct Action of Muslim League pushed India towards partition. Unethical demand by Muslim League under the leadership of
Jinnah, subtle and effective help of British Government and dumb acceptance of everything by Congress led to the division of India. The Nationalist newspapers remained witness of the facts through their protesting columns inspite of the oppressive treatment by the Britishers.

**History of Nationalist Newspapers**

The emergence of Nationalist Press was an unintended consequence of the introduction of printing press into India by Christian missionaries. An unforeseen consequence was the strengthening of national consciousness through speedy and widespread communication between national leaders and the people and through improved mutual awareness among those living in different parts of India.²⁹

The new era of journalism in the English language marked a new stage in the history of freedom struggle in India. It is a reality, a fact although very ironical. On 29th January, 1780, an Englishman, James Augustus Hicky, often referred to as the father of Indian journalism produced the first newspaper, the Bengali Gazette in English. This weekly publication was declared as a "political and commercial paper open to all parties but influenced by none." After six months of its publication on September 2, 1780, the Bengali Gazette wrote that it was not profitable to import European goods into India, since there was absolutely no demand for them, even in a large city such as Madras.³⁰ About two months later in November 1780, the Government stopped the circulation of Bengali gazette exactly ten months after its publication "for failure to promote British economic interests." This is what may be called the first censorship of the Press in India.

In 1857, after the Sepoy Mutiny, the then Governor General Lord Canning dealt a severe blow to both Indian and British journalists by controlling and eliminating those newspapers which published anti-British or anti-imperialist material. The rigid attitude of the Britishers towards the Press remained intact for a long time.
It was understood by the authority that the newspapers in addition to reflecting social ideas to people were instruments of suspicion and sedition.

The financially strong, British owned section of the Press was not particularly interested in having an increased coverage of Indian events. In June 1896, Gandhiji came to India from South Africa and during his stay here published a pamphlet under the title "The grievances of the British Indians in South Africa" which came to be known as Green Pamphlet. Copies of the Green Pamphlet, which included extracts from the Open Letter, were sent to all the newspapers and leaders of political parties.31

A brief summary of the Pamphlet was wired to London by the representatives of Reuters which included the observations on the Pamphlet made by two British owned newspapers – The Pioneer of Allahabad and The Times of India, Bombay. The summary again was cabled to South Africa and the provocative report was: "A pamphlet published in India declares that the Indians in Natal are robbed and assaulted and treated like beasts and are unable to obtain redress. The Times of India advocates an inquiry into these allegations." In the absence of a domestic news agency, Indian owned newspapers serving an Indian readership could not speedily report events of interesting happenings in various parts of the country.

Newspapers could afford to have domestic news gathered only if they pooled their resources. The time became ripe towards the close of the first decade of the 20th century. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1884 by Allan Octavian Hume who had urged the graduates of the Calcutta University through an open letter to rise against the foreign rule and face challenges of self sacrifice for the freedom of India. In such a background of political tension, the founders and editors of leading newspapers attended the first session of the Indian National Congress in 1884, held in Bombay. Among those who attended were
M.G. Ranade, founder – Editor of the Indu Prakash, Navendra Sen, Editor – The Hindu, W.S. Apte – The Maratha, B.N. Matabari – Spectator, the Editors of The Tribune, The Hindustan, The Indian Union and The Crescent. Press coverage by nationalist dailies of the first Indian National Congress was markedly different from the reporting of the Anglo-Indian Press. The Indian owned Indian Mirror of Calcutta gave an elaborate description of the gathering of people from various states of India at their own expense. It reported “what great advances India is rapidly making and a self-sacrificing spirit is fast springing up among the native races.” According to the Indian Spectator, Bombay and Amrit Bazar Patrika, Calcutta – the event of the Indian National congress was the first step towards great national awakening.

From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century there was a struggle between the Authority and nationalism and the freedom of the Press. The popular movement against Bengal’s partition had created sustained interest in political developments. Boycott and Swadeshi had their impact far beyond the borders of Bengal. Reports received by the British government of India from the intelligence bureau showed that by the end of 1905, the Swadeshi movement had affected 23 districts in the United Provinces (present U.P), 15 towns in the Central Provinces (present M.P.), 24 towns in Bombay Presidency, 20 districts in the Punjab and 13 districts in the Madras Presidency.

Even official news, which was of immense interest to the British owned section of the Press, presented problems. The Government moved to the hill-station of Simla for nearly half a year from Calcutta which was the capital first and then from Delhi and correspondents of each newspaper had to move up and down with the government.

The first Indian to function as a political correspondent at the capital was Keshab Chandra Roy. He soon made a mark, representing numerous newspapers at various points of time including the Tribune of Lahore, the Indian Daily Mail of Bombay, the Amrit Bazar Patrika and the British owned Indian Daily News of
Calcutta etc. It was from a pooling arrangement with three European fellow journalists that the idea of a news agency grew in K.C.Roy's mind. He was the pioneer and then there was considerable sympathy for the entrepreneurs of this new venture, according to A.S.Iyengar, that newspapers in India began to realise the importance of the agency in the spread of news and one after another subscribed to its service.

While A.S.Iyengar identifies the year of formation of API as 1908, J.Natarajan in his work mentioned that it was formed in 1910. Usha Nath Sen was deputed to Calcutta, Madras and Bombay in succession to open up branch offices and to fix subscription rates with newspapers. After running for three years from 1910 in the face of financial difficulties, K.C.Roy decided to accept the offer of merger with Reuters. The understanding between them was that the domestic news supply to newspapers would continue to be under the name of the Indian Associated Press of India. Later on K.C.Roy started another agency of his own – the Indian News Bureau but could not continue for long.

The new side of API's work was looked after from Delhi and Simla by the quartet of K.C.Roy, Usha Nath Sen, Iyengar and Durga Das. From 1920 to 1935, Iyengar and Durga Das functioned as special correspondents of individual papers, including virtually all the principal Indian owned nationalist dailies in addition to their work for API. This enabled them to greater access to news sources. K.C.Roy died in September 1931. In 1933 his other three contemporaries founded 'Roy's Weekly ' - a journal of political news and analysis which ran till some years after independence.

In 1920 Mahatma Gandhi started a newspaper called Young India in three languages – English, Hindi and Gujarati. He also established Navjeevan Press to publish books in Indian languages. His simple ideas were expressed in Indian newspapers started by him which had far-reaching political influence throughout the country. His journalism was very influential in mobilizing all social and ethnic
groups in India and arousing young and old, men and women against British domination.

The Free Press of India was started by Sadanand in 1927. Public opinion was moulded entirely by the news supplied from day to day and it was difficult to mould healthy public opinion because of the monopoly in the supply of news by subsidised news agencies. Although Sadanand's fellow directors were eminent personalities like Walchand Hirachand, G.D.Birla, Pheroze Sethna, Purushottamdas Thakurdas, M.R.Jayakar etc, the full weight of imperial authority was deployed to thwart the patriotic enterprise. Official pressure was exerted on the directors and four of them resigned in 1929 and the fifth resigned in 1931. The Press Ordinance of May 1930 came down ruthlessly on all newspapers publishing Free Press news.


United Press of India was started in 1933 by Bidhu Bhushan Sengupta in Calcutta, supported and patronised by Dr.Bidhan Chandra Roy, the renowned physician and later on the Chief Minister of West Bengal. UPI gradually expanded, taking over most of the personnel of the Free Press of India.

From the early 1940, a limited amount of competition was faced by API from another domestic news agency the Orient. Established by some prominent Muslim League leaders with official encouragement, it enjoyed the patronage of the Nizam's government of Hyderabad. Although API sold its news service to British owned newspapers most of whom were hostile to Indian nationalism, the majority of its subscribers were Indian owned newspapers who were basically nationalists, varying from moderate to the radical.
The peculiar position of API as a British controlled news agency trying to serve a largely Indian - owned Press during the colonial period was discussed in the course of an interview with Durga Das conducted in December 1971 by B.R.Nanda as part of the Oral History Project of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in New Delhi. When Durga Das was asked how the British ownership of the news agency affected his dispatches, he replied: "Fortunately K.C.Roy was a hundred percent patriot and he believed in promoting the nationalist movement as honourably as a news agency could. That is, we would not twist facts. But it was open to me to give Gandhi one column or give him quarter of a column. My invariable practice was to give Gandhi and to every other Congress leader of consequence, the maximum space."

Durga Das admitted that K.C.Roy saw to it that material in which the government was interested got good publicity. But he also published extensively the activities of the nationalists. By providing material they influenced the beliefs of the people much more effectively, both in India and abroad because their telegrams were used by Reuters.

Mahatma Gandhi also appreciated the importance of communicating with the people through the Press. Once it was suggested by Durga Das and A.S.Iyengar that the Subjects Committee meetings which preceded the plenary Congress sessions and where the decisions were made, might be thrown open to the Press to avoid any type of speculation. Gandhiji had the fear that free expression of opinion might be affected. It was further suggested that two representatives of API would prepare a summary of the proceedings which Gandhiji would go through and approve. He agreed to the proposal.

Like the National leaders, the British authorities also found Pressmen useful as a channel of communication with the people. Breaking the wartime restrictions one newspaper of Calcutta exposed the horrors of Bengal famine which was intentional. Nehru said in his address to the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference in February 1946 that it was only after this that the news began to
spread which was allegedly suppressed by the British Government. The newspaper whose contribution he acknowledged was the Statesman, then British owned. That newspaper is proud of the role it played. The Statesman courageously decided that the war effort would be incomplete without exposure and correction of civil and military inadequacies. The authorities were not pleased when the paper exposed the horrors of the famine.

How much the National leaders depended on the newspapers is clear from the letter written by Jawaharlal Nehru to M. Chalapathi Rao, the Editor of the National Herald on 26th May, 1946:

"As you are aware, the situation in Kashmir has taken a very serious turn. All the press messages coming from there are not only censored but are practically official messages. Both the API and UPI are completely under the influence of the State authorities. Some arrangements have been made, however, for news to be brought by messenger daily to Rawalpindi and Lahore. I have asked that this news be sent on to you by telegram or letter. You will get messages from Shamlal Kaul, Lahore, about the Kashmir situation. These may be considered authentic, but you should naturally exercise your own discretion in regard to them."

By reporting the activities and statements of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and other leaders of the freedom movement, the Nationalist newspapers made their own contribution in the spread of national consciousness among the educated middle class who were the vanguard of the struggle for independence.

The writings in the national press in India have inspired the Indian people to take a deeper interest not only in the political struggle for freedom, but also for economic and social justice. The regular reading of newspapers or listening to others regarding newspapers became the most important factor in politicizing the Indian people against the British domination and making them aware of their
lack of freedom and also of their heritage. During various stages of freedom struggle such as Home rule, Salt Satyagraha, Non-Cooperation, Quit India etc., the nationalist newspapers succeeded in exercising tremendous influence and mobilizing public opinion against the British rule.

In March 1947, at the dawn of independence, the Government of India appointed an Inquiry Committee to examine the Press Laws. The recommendations of the Committee with its list of amendments, alternations and modifications of several laws were on the Statute book. The Committee made for reaching recommendations to the Press and Registration of Book Act, the Indian States (Protection) Act, 1934 and the Indian Emergency Powers Act 1931. It proposed the total repeal of the Foreign Relations Act 1932 and its replacement by a new and comprehensive legislation34. It also recommended the retention of the Official Secrets Act and Sections 124 A, 153 A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code which dealt with disaffection, communal hatred and “tempering with the loyalty of the armed forces.” The Committee’s recommendations on the Constitution in 1949 have greatly influenced the freedom of the Press and the evolution of the media in independent India for over a few decades.
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