



History of Indian press and censorship

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Abstract

The Portuguese were the first in India to start a Press in 1550, first book was also published by Portuguese missionaries in 1557. Only in 1684 the first British press was established.

The 'Bengal Gazette' or the 'Calcutta General Advertise' was the first Indian newspaper started by James Augustus Hickey in 1780. Therefore, he is considered as the "father of Indian press" and sometimes, "The Bengal Gazette" newspaper is also known as Hickey's Gazette. This paper attacked the corrupt practices of Company officials and also criticized the government policies. And hence this paper was closed in just two years in 1782. But soon other newspaper were started like Indian Gazette, The Bengal Journal, Calcutta Chronicle, Madras Courier, and Bombay Herald. And this effort of Hickey laid the foundation of press in India.

The first Indian to publish a newspaper was Gangadhar Bhattacharya who brought out the in English. In 1818 Digidarshan was started as the first Bengali weekly by Marshman from Srirampore. On December 4th 1821 Raja Ram Mohan Roy started Samvad Kaumudi and Persian weekly Mirat-ul-Akhbar in 1822.

It was the Press act of 1835 which proved to be the liberator of Indian press. It scrapped down the restrictions imposed previously, by the government. The period between 1835 and 1856 was the period of liberty for Indian press and the real evolution of press happened.

Keywords: James Augustus hickey, Bengal gazette, samachar darpan, vernacular press act, censorship

Introduction

Bengal was the pioneer in the field of Indian journalism. The first vernacular newspaper, Samachar Darpan was published in 1818 in Bengali language with efforts of Serampore missionaries-William Ward, Carey and Joshua Marshman. Later on many social reformers and nationalist leaders came forward and started Newspapers. Rajaram Mohan Roy's Mirat-ul-Akbar, Gangadhar Bhattacharya's Bengal Gazette, G Subramaniya Aiyar's Hindu and Swadeshmitran, Surendra Nath Benerjee's The Bengalee, Dadabhai Naoroji's Voice of India, Tilak's Kesari and Maratha are the worth mentioning. All these newspapers aroused nationalistic feelings amongst common masses. These Newspapers were established as profit making ventures but seen as rendering national and public services. They had very deep reach and their impact was not limited to towns and cities; these newspapers reached the remote villages. In this way they not only provided political education but also political participation. People were now aware of government policies and scrutinize their misdeeds. As a result, Government started imposing restrictions through various acts and regulations.

Regulations and evolution of Indian Press

Censorship of Press Act-1799, lord Wellesley

It was enacted by the Lord Wellesley, anticipating French invasion of India. It imposed almost wartime press restrictions including pre-censorship which was later relaxed by the Lord hastig. As per this act, every newspaper should print the names of printer, editor and proprietor. Before printing any

material it should be submitted to the secretary of Censorship. This Act was abolished by William Hastings.

Licensing regulations, 1823

This regulation was enacted by the John Adams. According to this regulation, every publisher should be in possession of a license from the government. A press without a license was a penal offence. A penalty of RS 400 was imposed on defaulters and also the press could be ceased by the government. Government could cancel the license. The restriction was directed mainly to Indian language newspapers or those edited by the Indians. Charles Metcalfe abolished the Act.

Press Act of 1835 or Metcalfe Act

Metcalfe (Governor General – 1835 – 36) known as the "liberator of the Indian press". He repealed the Licensing regulation, 1823. During his tenure Printing Press grew rapidly. The new Metcalfe act 1835 required the publisher to follow a registration procedure and give a precise account of premises of publication.

Licensing Act, 1857

This act was imposed during the 1857 revolt to restrict the publication. This act also imposed licensing restriction and the right to stop publication and circulation of book, newspaper or printed matter reserved with the Government.

Registration Act, 1867

By this act, the liberty given to Press by Metcalfe in 1835 was

stopped. This act was regulatory, not restrictive, nature. Now every newspaper was required to print name of publisher and place of publication. Also a copy of publication was to be submitted to the local government within a month.

Vernacular press Act, 1878

This was the most repressive measures taken by the government against the Indian press. During the reign of Lord Lytton, there were more than 600 vernacular newspapers which were published in local language and most of them were critical of government policies. This act was placed to punish the seditious writings. The provisions of the Act are given below:

- a. The district magistrate was empowered to call upon the printer and publisher of any vernacular newspaper to enter into a bond undertaking with the Government not to cause disaffection against the government.
- b. Any doubtful material should be printed only after permission of government.
- c. The magistrate's decision would be final and no appeal could be made in any court of law.
- d. The magistrate could give warning to the vernacular newspaper and also forfeit their security.

The vernacular press act was severely criticized all over the country. It was regarded as a Strangling Act or Gagging Act. This act was finally repealed by Lord Ripon in 1882.

Newspaper (Incitement to offences) Act, 1908

This act empowered the magistrates to confiscate press property which published objectionable material likely to cause incitement to murder/acts of violence against the Extremist nationalist activity.

Indian press Act, 1910

This act was a revision of the Vernacular Act that empowered the local government to demand a security at registration from the printer/publisher.

Press regulating Act 1942

Registration of journalists was made mandatory. Limitations were imposed on the messages regarding civil disturbances. Prohibition of news was imposed regarding acts of sabotage. Limitations on headlines and space given to news on disturbances. Limitations on headlines and space given to news on disturbances. Government had the authority on arbitrary censorship.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, we can say that the evolution of Indian press was fraught with developmental difficulties, illiteracy, colonial constraints and repression. It aroused the feeling of nationalism and disseminated the ideas of freedom and became a prominent tool for freedom struggle. Nationalist leaders like Bal Gan gadhar Tilak, Surendra Nth Benergee, Gopak Krishna Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi and others used Press to communicate with people of far flunged and awakened them to the path of freedom struggle. All these

leaders constantly fought with the government for the freedom of press and contributed greatly in the development of press in India.

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