

**An Analysis of Role Played by News papers during Indian Freedom Movement
with Reference to Kumaunand Garhwal Region**

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Abstract

Press paid a significant role during the Indian freedom movement. It was the primary tool for carrying out the fundamental political duties of arousing, training, mobilizing, and consolidating nationalist public opinion, which included political propaganda, education, and the establishment and transmission of nationalist ideology. Newspapers served as mouthpieces for the independence struggle on both a national and provincial scale. During these years, the National Congress's work was mostly performed through the press. Newspapers were not published for profit, but rather for national or public service. The present paper explores the significance of newspapers in Kumaon and Garhwal region in raising social consciousness and emphasizing the importance of attaining independence from the British.

Keywords: Indian Freedom Movement, Press, Newspapers, Kumaun, Garhwal

Introduction

“Just as street lights and the rounds of police constables bring to light anything wrong or unjust happening on the roads in the dark, the editorial pen brings to light the injustices and the wrongs of the administration.”

The above quotation comes from the inaugural edition of *Kesari*, a Marathi monthly started by Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1881 (Arikara, 2018). In an attempt to limit the independence of the Indian press and the expression of opposition of the British administration, British India established the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. This prompted many writers to pick up their pens courageously and continue to publish nationalist pieces advocating *Swaraj*, openly criticising British rule, and inciting people to action. They demonstrated that the pen was really mightier than the sword and newspapers helped in promoting patriotic feeling among the masses. The press was the main instrument to carry out different political tasks. The formation of different national groups, the work of the National Congress, the resolution of the meeting and the proceedings of these meetings were all carried out through newspapers.

Brief History of Press at National Level

History of press in India lies in 18th century when James Augustus Hickey started The Bengal Gazette in 1780 which described itself as "A weekly Political and Commercial Paper open to All Parties but Influenced by None" (Dua et al., 2017). The newspaper was largely devoted to gossip, rumour, and sensational and sob tales concerning the East Indian Company personnel, where he himself worked as a clerk but it was closed in March, 1782 when an order was issued for the seizure of the printing types. In 1818, another English man James Silk Buckingham started a newspaper called Calcutta Chronicle and little later another paper called Calcutta Herald that started focusing on the issues and problems concerning socio economic and political in nature which was supported by Raja Ram Mohan Roy as well (Shareef, 2021).

The publications of Raja Ram Mohan Roy like *Sambad Kaumudi* published in Bengali in 1821 and *Mirat-UlAkhbar* published in Persian in 1822 focussed more on nationalist and democratic issues. During the first stage of Press i.e., 1780-1826, the East India Company started imposing various restrictions on Press and freedom of speech like the censorship of press and the diverse acts such as the censorship of Press Act 799, Press Ordinance Act 1823 intended to bring all the newspapers under the scrutiny of the British Government. Raja Ram Mohan Roy strongly stood for the freedom of Press and was the first person to challenge the British Administration. His contribution to Indian Journalism mainly lies in his fight against the British Raj for free Press for which he is also known as the father of Indian language journalism (Sharma, 2019). During the initial stage of the national movement in India, the battle against the British government for press freedom was a vital aspect of the national movement. There was also a steady increase of vernacular press in India. Lok Manya Bala Gangadhar Tilak started two Marathi journals, *Kesari* and *Maratha* to foster nationalism among his fellow Indians. Tilak bravely highlighted the essence of *Kesari* while harshly denouncing the rising nature of people to please the British Government. Pandit Jugul Kishore Shukla was the first person to publish a newspaper in Hindi, called *Udant Martand* in 1826. *Indian Mirror* was another popular newspaper published in Hindi.

The period from 1851 to 1900 is the second stage of the growth of Indian Journalism. The most essential aspect of the second stage was the rapid emergence of Indian nationalism among Indians as a result of the Indian press. Various newspapers from various parts of the country came into vogue, such as *The Hindu* in 1878 by G. Subramaniam Iyer, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* in 1868 by Ghosh Brothers, *The Times of India* in 1861 and *Statesman* in 1875 by Robert Knight, and *The Tribune* in 188 by Sardar Dayal Singh Majithia (Shareef).

The period from 1900 to 1947 is the third stage in the growth of Indian Journalism. This period also witnessed the conflict between the patriotic and pro-British press. Mahatma Gandhi understood the power of the press and utilized it as a formidable weapon against

British authority. Through his publications, he constantly encouraged people to join different anti-British-government groups. When Gandhi was on trial for sedition in 1922, the whole Indian nation witnessed a magnificent response. Newspapers such as The Indian Express and The Hindustan Times were acknowledged as patriotic publications that grew in terms of their reach and impact among Indians. This period also saw a tremendous development in the press, with the introduction of news agencies, news services, and the increase of coverage of international news. (Shareef)

Newspapers in Kumaun and Garhwal

Samay Vinod was the first vernacular paper from the region. In the year 1868, Jai Dutt Joshi a lawyer from profession started it in Nainital. He was the owner and editor of this paper. It was related to Hindi and Urdu and was published fortnightly from Nainital press. Senior author Shakti Prasad Saklani says that this was the first of the letter to be published in the native language from the entire Himalayan region (Shukla, 2021). In this paper apart from social issues, government policies and critical articles were published. The issue of September 1876, the paper criticised the biased behaviour of courts, it also criticised the British bureaucrats. In the next issue it also described the British oppressive like the medieval rulers (Rawat 2016). This paper could be published only for ten years and the last issue of *Samay Vinod* which is mentioned in Vernacular Press Report is dated 1 April 1877. However, newspapers related to Hindi continued to be published after this.

The more enduring *Almora Akhbar* came into existence in 1871. It was the first paper in the nation that lasted for 48 years i.e., from 1871-1918. This paper voiced against the atrocities of the British and became the mouth piece of people on various issues. *Collie-Begar*, child education, ban on liquor, rights of women etc. were the main problems that the paper focussed upon. Apart from social and political issues, the paper also promoted native culture and tradition. From 1913 onwards it was edited by famous leader Badri Dutt Pandey after which its circulation increased from 50-60 to 1500 (Rawat, 2016, p.481). It started publishing articles of prominent leaders of Kumaun such as Mohan Joshi, Har Govind Pant, Govind Ballabh Pant, Laxmidutt Shastri. *the participation of local leaders to Congress sessions and the efforts of Kumauni students studying in cities, encouraged the national spirit among the masses.* The paper also did not lag to criticise the misdeeds of major British officials and local bureaucrats. Hence it started pricking the officials which led to its closure in 1918.

After the closure of *Almora Akhbar*, *Shakti*, a weekly paper edited by Badri Dutt Pandey was published from 1918. *Shakti* was nationalistic, violent and candid in its approach from the beginning. It played a vital role in encouraging masses in the last three decades of the national movement and also acted as a weapon for the freedom movement leaders. Its first issue was published on 15 October 1918 (Rawat, 2016, p.479). The paper played an important part in movement against *collie-begar* system because the editor Badri Dutt Pandey and most of the writers were prominent leaders of the movement. *Begar* generally implied unpaid forced labour which had three forms- *collie begar*, *coolie utar* and *collie burdayash*. All these were commonly referred as *coolie begar*. However, *coolie begar*

specifically meant forced labour without any payment. Coolie *utar* was different from coolie *begar* because it carried an obligation of minimum wage payment, although it was often taken without payment. Coolie *burdayash* referred extraction of different forms of produce such as fuel, milk etc. for officers, soldiers etc. (Pathak, 1991). Discussing about the contribution of Shakti against Collie *Begar* system Dr. Shekhar Pathak informs that “*Shakti* was asked to stand security of Rs 6,000 for articles it had published between November 1920 and April 1921” (Pathak 2021). Finally a *major triumph came in 1921 with abolition of the Collie Begar system under the leadership of Hargovind Pant, Lala Chiranjilal and Badri Datt Pandey*. Mahatma Gandhi was very impressed with this movement Gandhiji wrote about this movement in *Young India* stating "its effect was complete, it was a bloodless revolution." (Coolie-Begar movement, 2021)

Apart from *Almora Akhbar* and *Shakti, Kurmanchal Samachar* published from Almora between 1893-1904, *Garhwal Samachar* published during 1902-1904 and 1913-1915 and *Garhwali* from 1905 to 1952 also highlighted inappropriate policies of the British. The two most important issues against which the people of the region protested were coolie begar system and forest policies of the British government. The British implemented such policies which snatched away the traditional rights of natives from the forests. In one of its issue *Garhwali* criticised the forest policies of the British Government. *Garhwali* was edited by three editors i.e., Girija Dutt Naithani, Tara Dutt Gairola and Vishambahr Dutt Chandola during its life span. Dr. Bhuwan Sharma believes that *Garhwali* focussed on both local and national topics such as the First World War, Press Act, different conventions of Congress, massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, non-cooperation movement, the Second World War etc. Thus, *Garhwali* played an important role in spreading the awareness about national and international issues in remote areas of Garhwal. This paper also promoted culture and literature of Garhwal. In its first issue, it published a poem “*Utho Garhwaliyon!*” written by Satya Sharan Raturi (Rawat, 2016, p.489). It provided platform to new poets to express their views. Under the editorship of Vishambhar Dutt Chandola, the paper motivated people to collect folklores and published many articles about folk literature and also introduced literature of the West to the local people. Thus, *Garhwali* began a new era of native literature and culture which came to be known as *Garhwali Yug* or *Chandola Yug* (Rawat, p.489). Monthly paper *Purushartaw* was another paper from Garhwal region but it was short lived from 1918 to 1923. It was edited by Girija Dutt Naithani and was published from Bijnor. It also criticised Press Act, Rowlatt Acts etc. Another paper *Tarun Kumaun* (1922-23) was published by Barrister Mukundilal, who was an active member of Congress; hence this paper played a vital role in spreading the ideologies of Congress. (Rawat, p. 491)

Conclusion

The newspapers coming out of Kumaun and Garhwal played an important role in the freedom movement. They were used as tool to communicate and unite people by the nationalist leaders. They provided the platform to the freedom fighters to raise their voice against the British policies and also focussed on various social issues. These newspapers also informed the people about national and international affairs and played a crucial role in

awakening the people even in remote areas to fight for the freedom. They also promoted culture of the region and contributed in literary development by giving opportunities to native writers.

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