

# Role of the Press in Rousing National Consciousness in Uttar Pradesh (1900 - 1920)



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## Abstract

The press not only accelerated the evolution of the Indian nationhood, but also enlightened the people and largely influenced and directed the course of the national struggle. It proved a chief instrument through which the nationalist minded Indians spread the message of patriotism as well as modern economic, social, and political ideas. The north western provinces, which covered largely the present Uttar Pradesh, is known as the place of two great communities – the Hindus and Muslims, their two great religions, the Hinduism and the Islam and their two languages – Hindi and Urdu this confluence is also reflected in the development of the press. Press in the United Province, as a powerful agency was silently shaping and moulding public opinion on a much larger scale. Newspapers, both in English and Vernacular did a lot in developing national consciousness among the people. The Indian press was created by those who for various reasons were dis-satisfied with the company's administration and monopoly, in which the official policy was criticised and Indian point of view was put forward. It put forward the ideas of democracy, self-government, industrialization etc. and enabled the people living in different parts of the country to exchange views with one-another.

**Keywords:** The Press, National Consciousness, U.P. (1900-1920)

## Introduction

Before 1900, the press in the United Provinces was not in a satisfactory state. Though a number of newspaper sprang up in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first Hindi newspaper was published from Kanpur in 1823, named 'Udant Martand' edited by Jugal Kishor Shukla.<sup>1</sup> It lived just for one year. Among the English newspaper the 'Pioneer' was founded in 1865 from Allahabad and set a new pace. The 'Pioneer', English daily was a prominent organ which generally defended the views and actions of the British government and administration of India. The first nationalist paper in the united Provinces in English was 'The National Herald', started in 1879 by pandit Ajodhya Nath. Till the year 1875, there were about 65 vernacular and non-vernacular papers in the united provinces.<sup>2</sup> The press during this period was inclined more to the development of social and religious interests of the people. It also criticised government policy in the field of education, health, irrigation and agriculture, from time to time.

## Aim of the Study

Main object of this study is to understand the role of press in sharpening and developing Indian national consciousness in Uttar Pradesh from 1900 to 1920.

The Indian nationalism found an organisational expression on an all India basis in the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Indeed it was after the birth of the Congress that the press shaped into a powerful force in public life. The Indian press drew its strength and sustenance from that body as the congress turned to

be the mouthpiece of Indian ambition and aspiration. Thus the turn of the century heralded a new era in Indian politics and consequently in the development of the press.<sup>3</sup>In 1900, the number of newspaper being published from the north-west Frontier provinces and Audh rose to 109, out of which 72 were in Urdu, 32 in Hindi and 2 in Hindi-Urdu.<sup>4</sup>

The press in the United Provinces mostly drew its inspiration from Bengal and Bombay journals, but the press in the United Provinces was moderate in expression in comparison to that of Bombay and Bengal. The Newspapers in the United Provinces were published in Hindi, Urdu and English and most of them were weekly newspapers. Among these newspapers, some of them set a new pace. They were nationalist in character, critical of the measures of the government and advocated full racial equality, and the claims of the Indians to manage, control and run the country. They had been carrying a ceaseless propaganda in the cause of Indian nationalism and political reform. Among such newspapers which were widely read and popular with the readers, and infused in them political sentiment and consciousness of nationality were as follows:-

#### **English Newspapers**

As the English was the medium of instruction during this period, most of the papers sprang up in English language. The most prominent of them were as follows:-

#### **The Advocate**

The Advocate, a nationalist newspaper of Lucknow was published twice a week. It was started by Ambika Charan Majumdar and Bishan Narain Dhar.<sup>5</sup> With the course of time, the Advocate became a powerful organ and exercised a good influence on the public mind. The 'Advocate' praised the works of the Congress for its liberal ideas. It criticised the extension of Curzon's viceroyalty and raised its voice against the exclusion of the Indians from the higher posts, especially in the military and called it 'Imperialism with vengeance.'<sup>6</sup> The 'Advocate's popularity began to decline when it passed in the hands of moderates in 1905.

#### **The Indian People and the Leader**

Another English weekly that sprang up in 1903 from Allahabad was the 'Indian People', started by Mr. Nagendra Nath Gupta, with the help of Mr. Sachchidananda Sinha.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Sinha was its founder director, who later brought C.Y. Chintamani to Allahabad in 1903, to help him in bring out the 'Indian People'. The Paper supported the Boycott movement and condemned the partition of Bengal. It had polite sympathy with the Bengali cause.<sup>8</sup> It also

Supported the bonfire of British goods. Such an attempt of Ramananda Chatterjee, in a meeting of Kayastha Pathshala on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 1905.<sup>9</sup> was supported by the Paper.

The 'Indian People' lived for a short tenure of six years. It was merged with the 'Leader' in October, 1909 when the paper was said to have been started by Madan Mohan Malviya.<sup>10</sup>

In 1905, feelings ran high in India, due to the partition of Bengal and press in India also passed through an amazing hysterical period.<sup>11</sup> The broadening and deepening of the nationalist press of various hues, papers expounded the ideology and methodology of struggle for national freedom conceived by the new school of militant nationalism. They were the organs of agitation against the partition of Bengal and of propaganda of Swadeshi and Boycott. Leaders, such as Pheroze Shah Mehta, Sir Dinshaw Wacha and G.K. Ghokhle, were deeply conscious of the need of an organ of opinion which would expound their views point. At this instance of dis-satisfaction the 'Leader', came into existence.<sup>12</sup>

The 'Leader' began its magnificent career when C.Y. Chintami became its editor. It became one of the foremost papers of the country. It was the authentic voice of the moderate leadership of the Congress and with the formation of the 'liberal Party' became its organ.<sup>13</sup> The 'Leader' supported the use of the 'Swadeshi'. It wrote in one of its article that we could win and retain 'swaraj' only by the use of Swadeshi Cloth. Though the paper supported the moderates but from time to time it also condemned the repressive policies of the government and printed the opinions of such leaders as were not wholly moderates. It published one of the speeches of P.D. Tandon, who condemned the Rowlett act and said that to resist even the Rowlett act, what was now needed was to break such laws, breaking of which could at once be noted by the executive.<sup>14</sup> The 'Leader' was the notable newspaper which reflected the liberal school of journalism and like other liberal papers, supported the policies of the Congress critically. Though a number of newspapers sprang up in the first decade of the century, but still the condition of the press was not satisfactory, on the other hand the vernacular press had to suffer in the hands of the Bureaucracy. Several politicians took up the cause of the press and opted for a more strong and influential press. In one of his speeches, Mr. Gokhle remarked, ".....Nowhere ..... Is the press so weak in influence, as it is with

us?"<sup>15</sup> He regretted that there was no daily newspaper. MotiLalNehru started his own daily in English, the 'Independent'.

### **The Independent**

MotiLalNehru, who worked with the 'Leader', found it timid. He was conscious of the fact that his own province (the United Provinces) did not possess a daily newspaper expressing the advanced nationalist viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> It was the Punjab happenings that totally changed his outlook and his whole legal and constitutional foundations were shaken by them and his mind was gradually prepared for that change which was to come a year later. Not satisfied with the leading moderate newspaper the 'Leader' he had started his own paper in English i.e. the 'Independent' from Allahabad in 1919.<sup>17</sup> The paper lived for a short tenure of four years.

The 'Independent' was the first newspaper that began to advocate Gandhi's policy and became a political asset in 1920. Pt. MotiLal Nehru, proudly wrote to Gandhi ji on September 17, 1920, that 'it is the only daily in India to support the full programme of Non-co-operation.'<sup>18</sup> While defining the aim of the newspaper, MotiLal wrote, 'The 'Independent' has come into existence to lay bare the soul of a nation, of a people ripening into nationhood, of communities, merging into people, of individual growing into a community. How shall it approach its noble work? Or better still how not? Not along the facile line of opportunism, the fatal line of least resistance.....but by bringing the fierce light of day to play upon dark spots whenever they exist.'<sup>19</sup> No doubt, the 'Independent', fulfilled its mission by bringing facts with a consciousness of high minded generosity. During the period of its tenure, the 'Independent' spoke on every political development. It took up the cause of the peasants and published a number of articles under the title 'The Rae-Bareilly Tragedy.' In one of its articles, while criticising the attitude of the government towards Kisans it wrote, 'History they say repeats itself. In the month of April, in the ever memorable year 1919, the heart of Amritsar City was soaked with the blood of Indians, slain most wantonly and cruelly.....Britain still hold India..... the British Empire still continues its iniquitous career.....And so it is that Indian blood is again shed.....And what of the kisans? Poor, miserable, down-trodden men and women in want ever suffering, seldom complaining .....their blood lies on the banks of Son River, their body not under thin layer of sound air in the open, prey to the beasts who feast on the dead.... They have the police and the minions of

the Taluquaders torturing them, beating them and imprisoning them.'<sup>20</sup> These articles remarked the new crimes of the colonial regime.

Apart from its support to the peasant movement, the 'Independent' continued to raise the banner of Non-co-operation, gave its fullest support to Gandhi's constructive programmes of charkha and khadi. It served the congress official view-point and continued to stir the nerves of the Indians by its articles and thereby rendered its valuable contribution in the awaking of the public mind.

### **The Kayasth Samachar and Hindustan Review**

The Kayasth Samachar, English monthly was launched in 1899 as an educational magazine by Mr. Ramanada Chatterjee, Principal of Kayasth Pathshala. It became a remarkable magazine under Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha. While underlining the close and almost inseparable link between journalism and nationalism, it is essential to remember that the term nationalism in formative years of modern India was broad and comprehensive, including every facet of national life and thought. Besides political and economic aspiration, it came to include the desire for social reform and regeneration, educational progress and cultural development and an all-round national advancement. Dr. Sinha was among such journalist, who had a far bigger object. He had made the Kayasth Samachar, a remarkable magazine, dealing not only with current political subjects, but as well as social, economic, literacy and educational subjects. The Magazine acquired a new place in 1900, when it began to deal with political subjects and came to fulfil the long felt need of an organ of Indian public opinion, as then realised by the congress, not only in the united provinces but in the whole of the northern India.<sup>21</sup> In 1903, the trustees of the 'Kayasth Samachar', changed the name of the magazine to a more comprehensive name of 'Hindustan Review.'

The 'Hindustan Review', did an enormous service to public life by popularising sound political ideas and disseminating a healthy public opinion on current controversies through the medium of its literary supplements and book review sections.<sup>22</sup> The 'Hindustan Review', rendered a special service in fostering inter-communal unity. It criticised the communal representation as the most mischievous feature of the British policy. It stated that it is not good for the Mohammedans to be taught that their political interests are different from that of the Hindus.<sup>23</sup> It also warned the government against the separate electorates as 'the opening of

Pandora's box.<sup>24</sup> It also urged the Muslims to unite with the Hindus in the cause of the nation and stated that, "if we were elected by a common electorate we shall come into close contacts."<sup>25</sup> In this way the 'Hindustan Review' continued to urge its large number of readers to work for communal amity.

#### **Hindi Newspaper**

During the beginning of the twentieth century, Hindi journalism also got impetus and saw a great revival. A number of Hindi newspapers came into existence. In 1907; Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya started the 'Abhyudaya', a weekly newspaper. For about two years, Malviya, worked as its editor. He used his paper mainly in propagating the proposal for kasha vidhyapeeth but simultaneously it also reflected the contemporary problems. It was converted into a daily newspaper in 1915.<sup>26</sup>

In the early years of the century, Hindi journalism dealt largely with literary, social and religious subjects and occasionally with education, agriculture and trade. Only a few journals like 'Hindi Pradeep', of Bal Krishna Bhatt, the 'Kesari' (1907), which was a Hindi version of Tilak's 'Kesari', the 'Karmayogi' the 'Abhyudaya' of Pt. Malviya and 'Pratap' of Ganesh Shanker Vidyartha, dealt with political questions.<sup>27</sup>

In the line of Hindi journalism, the 'Swaraja' of Allahabad, played a remarkable role in rousing the national consciousness in the united provinces. It was started in 1907 by Shanti Narayan. The 'Swaraja' faced 7 prosecutions due to its objectionable writings as well as long imprisonment of the editors of 'Swaraja'.<sup>28</sup> One of its editor, Mr. Hoti Ram Verma, whose writings were considered highly objectionable by the government acquired a fame for preaching an aggressive nationalism.<sup>29</sup> He, along with his associate Ram Swarup were arrested and sentenced for five and three years respectively.<sup>30</sup> The paper raised its voice against the British rule as 'the tyranny of the foreigners must be ended and along with it the unholy policy of western education.'<sup>31</sup> The 'Karmayogi' was another paper, that propagated the revolutionary ideas, but was suppressed one year after its publication.

As in those days, Hindi was not the medium of instruction, most of the papers, sprang up in English in the united provinces. It was at the Calcutta session in 1920, that the politicians voiced their concern at the absence of a recognised national language. This view was also shared by Mahatma Gandhi and he lost no time, since then, in propagating Hindi, as the

medium of instruction. This inspired, Mr. Shiv Prasad Gupta, a millionaire of Banaras, to launch a newspaper in Hindi.

Mr. Shiv Prasad Gupta founded 'Aj' at Banaras on September 5, 1920. Its policy was directed towards reaching the masses.<sup>32</sup> The policy of 'Aj', aimed at 'stirring for the complete indecency of India by the spread of nationalism and the consolidation of the Indian people as a self-respecting, homogeneous whole working for their goal by their own efforts.'<sup>33</sup> The 'Aj' espoused the cause of independence for India with the cultivation of international good relation and sought to establish itself as national institution, comparable in influence with 'London Times'. It set the standard of Hindi journalism and consciousness of the importance of Hindi gave a fresh impetus to Hindi Journalist.

#### **Urdu Journalism**

It is difficult to trace with complete accuracy the beginning of Muslim newspapers. The 'Aligarh Muslim Gazette' founded in 1866 by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is said to be the first Muslim Paper. It was a weekly newspaper. Another important weekly was 'Al-Bashir' of Etawah. This paper took a notable part in the Hindi-Urdu controversy that occurred during 1899-1900 and bitterly attacked Sir Anthony Macdonnell for his Pro-Hindi view in not less than seventy articles. The paper was anti-Hindu from the beginning. These newspapers did not have much impact on the Muslim mind as they were as ignorant of world affairs as the Muslim readers.

In 1903, 'Aligarh Monthly', which was published both in English and Urdu was a notable paper and became a medium of intellectual discussions.<sup>34</sup> Urdu journalism, in its new garb, development between 1910-1920. In 1922, Hamidul Ansari Founded 'Madina' at Bijnor. It achieved a considerable influence over Muslim opinion.<sup>35</sup> In the same year Maulana Abdu Bari established the 'Hamdard' in Lucknow. During the 1st World War, due to the repressive policy of the government the press did not grow much but in 1919, 'Haqiqat' was brought out from Lucknow. 'Azad of Kanpur', edited by S.S. Nigam, was also a notable paper of the time and became an exponent of nationalism.

#### **Conclusion**

Thus, it is sufficient to say that the Press in U.P. proved a powerful weapon not only in sharpening and developing Indian National consciousness but also in acceleration social, economic and cultural awareness. The Nationalists found it a weapon in their hand for popularising among the people the ideas of

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representing government, democratic institutions, and home rule and of independence. It was the vital role of the Press in building strong national consciousness among people of united provinces.

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