



Mains Marathon

Day 44: Development of the press in India was a rollercoaster ride. Analyse how the press became a symbol of national unity and voice in the Indian freedom struggle? (250 Words)

23 Aug 2022 | GS Paper 1 | History

Approach / Explanation / Answer

Approach

- Briefly explain the emergence of Press in India.
- State the contribution of press in nationalism and struggle for independence
- List the restrictions placed by the British government.
- Give a suitable conclusion.

Answer

Press in India started with the first newspaper, **The Bengal Gazette or Calcutta General Advertiser, by James Augustus Hickey in 1780.** Press in its initial phase was primarily an outspoken critic of the misdeeds of British administration and its officers.

Some examples of early newspapers are: **Payam-e-Azadi” or the Message of Freedom (1857) by Nana Saheb Peshwa, The Hindu and Swadesamitran by G. Subramaniya Aiyar, The Bengalee by Surendranath Banerjea, Voice of India by Dadabhai Naoroji, Kesari (in Marathi) and Maharatta (in English) under Balgangadhar Tilak.**

Contribution of Indian Press:

- **Propagation of national ideology:** The early phase of the nationalist movement from around 1870 to 1918 focussed more on political propaganda and education than on mass agitation or active mobilisation of masses through open meetings. The Indian National Congress in its early days relied solely on the press to propagate its resolutions and proceedings.
- **Connected the masses:** The newspaper's impact was not limited to cities and towns; **these newspapers reached the remote villages**, where each news item and editorial would be read **and discussed thoroughly in the 'local libraries.**
 - Through its wide reach the press connected the masses in the country. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, through his newspapers, was among the first to advocate bringing the lower middle classes, the peasants, artisans and workers into the Congress fold.
- **Spread Awareness:** In these newspapers, government Acts and policies were put to critical scrutiny. They acted as an institution of opposition to the government. **The press made people**

aware of the colonial exploitation.

Restrictions by Government

- Government on its part had enacted many strident laws, such as **Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code**, which provided that anyone trying to cause disaffection against the British Government in India was to be transported for life or for any term or imprisoned up to three years.
- **The Vernacular Press Act (VPA) of 1878** was designed to 'better control' the vernacular press and effectively punish and repress seditious writing. The act came to be nicknamed "**the gagging Act**". The Act discriminated between English and vernacular press, and offered no right of appeal.
 - Under VPA, proceedings were instituted against **Som Prakash, Bharat Mihir, Dacca Prakash and Samachar**. Amrita Bazar Patrika turned overnight into an English newspaper to escape the VPA. In 1883, Surendranath Banerjea became the first Indian journalist to be imprisoned.

The Role of the press was significant as it acted as a **breeding ground for discontent voices of India**, which saw prevailing narrative of colonial authorities as false and wanted to register their protest.

Nationalist Leaders such as Tilak and Gandhi through their newspapers and editorials took advantage to reach to the readers of the remotest parts of India. Thus, generating a nationalistic feeling and mobilizing the masses to fight for freedom of a "Nation" - an imagination which already had grasped minds of masses in urban and rural areas alike.

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