**The Nationalist Press in India**

Though media and reporting were practised during Mughal times in India the press in the

modern sense came into existence in the early part of the 19th Century. The first

newspapers were bulletins brought out by officials of the East India Company mainly as a

means of exchanging gossip and to air grievances. The Bengal Harkuru and Bengal

(Hickey’s) Gazette were examples. (show copies). The Company authorities did try to

curb this but it was essentially an exchange of ideas between its British employees and

management.

In the second and third decades of the 19th century Indian nationalism began to grow as a

concept. Ram Mohun Roy, one of the men responsible for the infusion of new ideas in

the country, also started the first nationalist newspaper. It was called the Mirat-ul-akhbar. Mirat-ul-Akhbar was a Persian language journal founded and edited by Raja Rammohan Roy. The newspaper was first published on 12 April 1822. It was published on weekly basis on Fridays.

Divisions within Indian society was the major problem facing anyone who had embarked

on the road to building and uniting a nation. Common factors had to be emphasised.

Rationalism rather than superstition or the diktat of the clergy were other important

developments all over the world during the 18th and 19th centuries.

That is why the initial tone of the nationalist newspapers in India was reformist – evils

like sati were identified. Campaigns were run against them. A sympathetic British

administration run by Company officials were persuaded to pass legislation to check

these evil practices.

Caste was seen as a major obstacle to unity among members of the newly emerging India.

The urgent need for social and religious reform thus formed the content of most of the

early newspapers.

The First Indian war of independence or the Sepoy Mutiny (as the British called it) in

1857 was a turning point. Subsequent to this event the British government took full

control over Indian administration.

The 1857 event signalled the diminishing power of the middle feudal classes like

zamindars and the rise of the new middle classes belonging to the professions who had

received the new western style education. As administration became serious business for

the British authorities, the new Indian middle classes started clamouring for a share in

power. The Indian National Congress was formed. To give expression to their views and

aspirations papers like the Amrit Bazar Patrika were founded. In the beginning these

papers concentrated on demanding Indianisation of the growing administrative services.

Later this graduated to the demand for responsible government and self-government. But

they did not pay much attention to social reforms.

William Bolts, an ex-employee of the East India Company attempted to start the first

newspaper in India way back in 1776. Bolts had to beat a retreat under the disapproving

gaze of the Court of Directors of the Company. The Bengal Gazette by James Augustus

Hicky was started in 1780. The Gazette, a two-sheet newspaper, "specialised" in writing

on the private lives of the Sahibs of the Company. He dared even to mount "scurrillious

attacks" on the Governor-General Warren Hastings' wife, which soon landed "the late

printer to the Honourable Company" in trouble.

Hicky landed himself a 4 months jail term and Rs.500 fine, which did not deter him.

After a bitter attack on the Governor-General and the Chief Justice, Hicky was sentenced

to one year in prison and fined Rs.5,000, which finally drove him to penury. These are

the first tentative steps of journalism in India.

B.Messink and Peter Reed were plaint publishers of the India Gazette, unlike their

infamous predecessor. The colonial establishment started the Calcutta Gazette. It was

followed by another private initiative the Bengal Journal. The Oriental Magazine of

Calcutta Amusement, a monthly magazine made it four weekly newspapers and one

monthly magazine published from Calcutta, now Kolkata.

Madras, now Chennai: The Madras Courier was started in 1785 in the southern

stronghold of - yes, Madras, which is called Chennai now. Richard Johnson, its founder,

was a government printer. Madras got its second newspaper when, in 1791, Hugh Boyd,

who was the editor of the Courier quit and founded the Hurkaru. Tragically for the paper,

Boyd passed away within a year of its founding - it ceased publication too.

It was only in 1795 that competitors to the Courier emerged with the founding of the

Madras Gazette followed by the India Herald. The latter was an "unauthorised"

publication, which led to the deportation of its founder Humphreys. The Madras Courier

was designated the purveyor of official information in the Presidency.

Bombay, now Mumbai: Bombay, surprisingly was a late starter - the Bombay Herald

came into existence in 1789. Significantly, a year later a paper called the Courier started

carrying advertisements in Gujarati. The first media merger of sorts: The Bombay

Gazette, which was started in 1791, merged with the Bombay Herald the following year.

Like the Madras Courier, this new entity was recognised as the publication to carry

"official notifications and advertisements".

Some of the nationalist press did, however focus on the need for reforms in the social

sectors like education, health and the removal of untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi’s

Harijan and Ramananda Chatterjee’s Modern Review can be mentioned as examples.