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Role of Journalism and Indian Freedom Movement

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Abstract

Nationalism is a feeling of bonding with the country. Nation cannot be confined in geographical boundaries. In India, nationalism has born as a revolt to British rule- a revolt to get political and economic freedom. In the era of British rule, media played crucial role in giving birth to the feeling of nationalism in the poverty stricken people. Media was used as tool to communicate and unite people by the nationalist leaders to fight for freedom from the foreign rule. Media played a crucial role in awakening the people to fight for the freedom. Journalists, reformers and freedom fighters recognised the strength of written word and used it as a tool to spread the word about freedom and essence of nationalism. Press, in pre-independence era was used to revolt against the wrong policies of the government and to eradicate the social evils prevailing in Indian society.

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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.” A quote from ‘Kesari’ a weekly run by Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Indian freedom movement was ignited by the fearless journalist and philosophers of India who sacrificed for the freedom of expression and freedom of country. History of press in India is full of arrests, imprisonments and punishments for voicing out the opinion of people. In the pre-independence era, press was a wakeup call to the poverty stricken people who were ruled by the British due to their lack of awareness and unity. Freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan etc.

“Bhagat Singh and his colleagues wrote mainly for these newspapers and journals including Pratap, Bande Mataram, Kirti (Punjabi) and Matwale. To escape detection, he used several pen names including Balwant Singh, Vidrohi, B.S. Sindhu.” describes Bhagat Dogra.

Press

When we say word ‘press’ it generally is perceived as news media- especially newspaper.

Press plays a vital role in every nation to inform and unite people as it voices out the thoughts and ideas of the masses for the masses. Its high influence on the minds of readers was rightly recognised and utilized by the freedom strugglers at the time of British rule. No doubt, rules and regulations of that time were completely against voicing out any piece of idea against the policies

of the government. It was the courage of those brave journalists who grabbed even the smallest space available in the media to bring the attention of people towards the wrong doings of the present governance. With the limited resources and basic techniques available with them, they came up with dailies, weeklies not only in English but also in regional languages. Press was not only used to condemn the wrong doings of the administration but also to bring social reforms in the society by breaking the superstitions and false beliefs like untouchability, Sati etc.

History of press in India lies in 18th century when James Augustus Hickey started The Bengal Gazette in 1780. In 1820's, Ram Mohan established nationalist press and started his reformist publications namely: The Brahminical Magazine, it was printed in English, The Sambad Kaumudi which was published in Bengali and the Mirat-ul-Akhbar, this was started in Persian. By 1830, there were 33 English publications along with 16 regional language publications. In 20th century, even Mahatma Gandhi recognised the strength of press and started his publications in Gujrati and English to spread the word of freedom. In this paper, a study of secondary data is done. This paper will focus on the contribution of seven fearless journalists of pre-independence era who struggled hard and suffered to contribute for the freedom movement in India:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, K Ramakrishna Pillai, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh, G Subramania Iyer

Discussion

Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born in 1772 in a Brahmin family at Radhanagar in West Bengal. He got the traditional education prevalent in 18th century. He was proficient in various languages like Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, besides Hindi and his mother tongue Bengali. His contribution towards the Indian media is unquestionable. In 1821 he founded his press at Calcutta but was closed down in 1823 due to protests against the Press Regulations Act of 1823. Later, he started religious periodical – the Brahminical Magazine followed by his three journals- the Reformer, the Inquirer and the Gyan Auneshun. His publications mainly focused on Hindu journalism with a progressive approach and social reforms. “Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a forecaster of religious and social reforms, much of which he achieved

through his journalistic skills. His greatest contribution to Indian language journalism was perhaps his petition to the British government against the Vernacular Press Act of 1823. The Supreme Court rejected his petition. But he again petitioned; this time to the monarchy.” says Abhiram Mohan in his article, ‘Indian Press and Raja Ram Mohan Roy’

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Colombia encyclopaedia describes Bal Gangadhar Tilak as, “Indian nationalist leader. He was a journalist in Pune, and in his newspapers, the Marathi-language Kesari [lion] and the English-language Mahratta, he set forth his nationalist ideals. He sought a Hindu revival based on Maratha traditions and independence [swaraj] from Britain.”

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was born in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra in 1856. He was one of the biggest architects of modern India who advocated Swaraj- independence. He was a social reformer and freedom fighter. His famous declaration, “Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it” served as a stroke to the revolutionaries of freedom struggle. Due to his great impact on the minds of people, British government termed him as the "Father of Indian Unrest". He believed that for the growth of any nation, independence is the basic necessity. To achieve his nationalist goal, he started two newspapers- 'Mahratta' (English) and 'Kesari' (Marathi). In both the papers, he focused on spreading awareness among the people about their strengths and to encourage them to be self-dependent. He used it as a medium to unite people to fight for the freedom of the country. He openly condemned and questioned the policies of rulers. During the famine and plague epidemic in India, Tilak fearlessly reported the irresponsible and indifferent attitude of the government towards the sufferings of the people. As a social reformer, Tilak advocated education for women and women empowerment.

K Ramakrishna Pillai

K Ramakrishna Pillai also known as Swadeshbhimani- the patriot. He was known with this name due his work as an editor in the newspaper namely the same. K Ramakrishna Pillai was born in 1878 in Athiyanoor, the erstwhile princely state of Travancore (presently known as Thiruvananthapuram). He was a journalist and a writer by profession. His contribution towards the freedom movement journalism is matchless. He is a prominent journalist of pre-independence era in Malayalam. He

openly criticised the policies of British rule and the kingship of Travancore in his paper. He highlighted the issues of corruption, exploitation and extravagance on the end of the rulers which resulted in the shut down and cease of the paper and printing press in 1910 and K Ramakrishna Pillai was banished from Travancore by the British police.

Madan Mohan Malaviya

Madan Mohan Malaviya was born in 1861 at Allahabad. He is well known for his notable contribution in the freedom movement of India. In 1887, he started working as an editor in Hindi daily named 'Hindustan'. When

British government tried to bring in the Press Act and Newspaper Act in 1908, Malaviya started his campaign against it and called All India Conference at Allahabad to protest it. It was the time that he felt the need of an English paper to reach to maximum people to spread his word and as a result he started his English daily with the help of Motilal Nehru namely the 'Leader' in 1909.

He acquired the dying 'Hindustan Times' in 1924 and also started its Hindi edition 'Hindustan' in 1936. His work was dedicated bring social reforms in the society by eradicating the evils of untouchability from the society. He focused on removing the caste barriers in the culture of the country.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak



Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh



Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh

Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh were both brothers born to a rich merchant in Jessore District in Bangladesh. They started one of the oldest newspapers of South Asia and oldest in Bangladesh, Amrita Bazar Patrika in 1868 originally in Bengali language.

Both the brothers advocated freedom of speech and run various campaigns against the exploitation of Indians in the hands of the rulers. In their daily, they condemned the policies of rulers and advocated the civil liberties. Many a times, their printing house was imposed with penalties but they kept their nationalism high and kept fighting and criticizing the wrong doings of the administration. It was the editorials of their paper that forced the re-entry of Subash Chander Bose in West Bengal.

G Subramania Iyer

Ganapathy Dikshitar Subramania Iyer was born in 1855 in Tanjore, Madras. He was a leading Indian journalist who founded 'The Hindu' in 1878, a social reformer and freedom fighter. His paper was well recognized since its beginning. He used it as a tool to support the Indian freedom fight and oppose the British rule. He used the power of his pen to bring social reform and wrote various rebellious articles which resulted in many legal actions against the paper. He campaigned for the social reforms in Hindu society. He even remarried his widow daughter which resulted in social boycott of Subramania Iyer. Throughout his life he struggled to support widow remarriage and desired to abolish untouchability and child marriages.

Written words have tremendous power, a power of altering the mind and thoughts. The fearless journalists and reformers of pre-independence era utilized it to bring a revolution in India. It was used as a technique to reach

to maximum people and ignite the flame of nationalism among people. It was the struggle and sacrifices of those brave reformers that took the Indian freedom movement to the next level. Journalism played the role of lighthouse in the freedom struggle by guiding the path of the people. Today's democratic media owes a lot to the patriot and fighter journalists of British ruled India.

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