

A Survey of the Press in Tamilnadu in the Early Phase of National Movement

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Abstract

Nationalism was sharpened and spread throughout India and it reached to all section of people with the help of press. Thus the press played a very vital role in creating political consciousness and spreading nationalism. The tide of patriotism and nationalism rose in India by leaps and bounds with the emergence of the press. The press not only highlighted the tendency of the British imperialism but also roused the spirits of the Indians towards attainment of freedom. The Indian press both English and vernacular helped to mobilize public opinion, convene provincial and national conferences and organise political movements. This article clearly indicate that how press created great impact on nationalism.

Key Words : Nationalism, Growth of the Press.

Introduction

Meaning and Rise of Nationalism

Nationalism is a belief, creed or political ideology that involves individual identifying, or becoming attached to, one's nation. Nationalism attributes national identity, by contrast with the related construct patriotism, which involves the social conditioning and personal behaviours that support a state's decision and actions.

The modern age is characterised as the 'Age of Nationalism'. During the fifteenth century the Renaissance culture and Humanism, in the sixteenth century the Protestant Reformation and in the eighteenth century the Enlightenment paved the way for nationalism in European countries. Likewise during the nineteenth century the national awakening emerged in the colonial India and it gave birth to the movement for freedom from colonial rulers. Subsequently, the national awakening and the national movement produced various discourses on nationalism. Gooch said that "Nationalism is an organism, a spiritual entity and all attempts to pierce its secrets by the light of mechanical interpretations break down before the test of experience." Hence so many factors influenced the rise of nationalism in India. First and foremost the factor that contributed to the rise of nationalism in India was the British rule and its bureaucrats, their indifferent attitude, their policies and programmes which were vital factors which aroused nationalism in India. The imperialist tendency of the English and their political exploitation played a significant role in the growth and development of the

nationalism. Under the western education system besides the English language, modern science and technology were also taught which not only added to the knowledge of the people, but also widened their national horizons. The study of English literature helped them to develop the feelings of freedom, equality and democracy and they began to realize that bondage of slavery to the English empire was very troublesome for them. Hence, they restored to their own culture and the feeling of nationalism flourished in them.

Another important factor which contributed to the rise of nationalism was the tremendous development of the press. The tide of patriotism and nationalism rose in India by leaps and bounds with the emergence of the press. The press not only highlighted the tendency of the British imperialism but also roused the spirits of the Indians towards attainment of freedom. The Indian press both English and vernacular helped to mobilize public opinion, convene provincial and national conferences and organise political movements. The Indians, who fostered nationalism, used it as a weapon to popularise their political programmes, policies and methods of struggle among the masses.

Thus the nationalism in India which appeared as a sequel to the rising political consciousness among Indians in different parts of the country in the second quarter of the 19th century had its genesis in the political organizations that came to light prior to the establishment of Congress in 1885. The early sessions of the Congress gave a definite shape to the nationalist sentiments of the natives of different parts of India and consequently it paved the way for the firm rooting of the Indian nationalism in British India. Her movements spread like a wildfire throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Growth of the Press in India

In India the printing press was brought by the Christian Missionaries towards the close of 15th century. In 1536 Jaao de Bustamante, a Spaniard brought a printing press to India, he joined the Society of Jesus and adopted the name Jaao Rodrigues and was ordained in 1564. However, Jaao Consalves of Goa was the first among the Indians to make types of Indian Script. He made types of Tamil letters, miscalled, "types of the Malayalam Language" and used them for the printing of St. Francis Xavier's *Doutrina Christa* in Tamil in 1598. The attempt made by the Jesuits missionaries to make use of the printing presses for the propagation of Christianity was an impetus to printing works. Thus they set up printing presses at Goa and Punnaikayel in Tirunelveli district. As in Europe, in India the printing press was utilized initially for publishing religious literature. They were

later used for publishing periodical containing general news and views.

Growth of the Press in Tamil Nadu

Richard Johnson a printer in the service of the government of Madras was considered as the founder of the first newspaper in Tamil Nadu. He started the *Madras Courier* on 12 October 1785, a weekly consisting of four pages of twenty by twelve inches and enjoyed official favours and receives governmental advertisements. Hegeau Foid served as its editor. In 1791, he resigned the job and started a new journal called *Harkaru*. This paper was stopped when he died in 1794. In 1795 John Coldingtam started the *Government Gazette* of Madras. Subsequently, G. Humphreyan an Englishman, published the *India Herald* a paper without obtaining proper permission from the government and hence he was arrested and deported.

In 1836 was born *The Spectator*, first published by D Ochterlony, then C Sooboo Moodeley and C.M. Pereira from the Spectator Press. The weekly, which became tri-weekly in 1846 and a daily in 1850, was eventually swallowed by *The Madras Times* which in turn was taken over by *The Mail*. Though there came into existence several other publications, they had no serious aim other than publishing official news and carrying out government printing works.

A strong journalistic tradition was established in Madras only with *The Madras Times*. It was started by the Gantz brothers in the year 1858. This was also the year income tax was introduced in India by the Governor Charles Trevelyan. Hence *The Madras Times* got off to a good start, with quicker news from England, a stick with which to beat the Government and a dedicated effort to bring Indians and Britons closer after the horrors of 1857. Under Charles Lawson and Henry Cornish, *The Madras Times* thrived. *The Madras Times* was founded as a bi-weekly in 1835-36, though most sources point to 1859, the year of its supposed acquisition by Gantz and Sons, as the founding date of the newspaper. Gantz and Sons also acquired *The Spectator*, the first major newspaper in *South India*. The paper was converted to a daily in 1860. *The Madras Times* flourished throughout the second half of the 19th century. During the 1870s and 1880s, the paper was edited by William Digby Seymour. *The Madras Times* was purchased by business magnate John Oakshott Robinson in 1921. The paper was subsequently merged with *The Mail*.

It was in the early years of that century that *Indian Capital*, as anticipated, found its way into *The Madras Times*. By 1911, the paper began appointing Indians

as its staff and by World War I was fully Indian owned. But it was never quite sure whether it was fish or fowl, white or brown.

On the realization of the effectiveness of the press in formulating public opinion and following the example of the missionaries and the government, the various sections of society based on trade, race, caste, religion and community started newspapers to voice their grievances and to draw the attention of the government. In 1831 the *Religious Tract Society* published the first Tamil monthly magazine, the *Tamil Patrika*, which enjoyed the support of the government. But it did not continue for long, for it ceased publication in 1833 for want of patronage.

In 1844 Gazulu Lakshmanarasu Chetty, a Telugu merchant, launched *The Crescent*, a newspaper, to defend the rights and privileges of the Hindu community and supported the Madras Native Association. The *Crescent*, meant as a 'counterblast' to *The Record*, a missionary journal. *The Madrasee* was founded soon after, it was found that Madras had no room for two 'native' papers in English and they were merged under *The Madrasee* banner. *The Madrasee*, however, in 1877 sided with the Anglo-Indian Press in criticizing the appointment of Muthuswami Aiyar as the first Indian judge of the Madras High Court, thereby offending its readership, and shortly afterwards had to fold up.

The Mail and *The Times* provided G Subramania Aiyar, one of the founders of *The Hindu*, not only exemplary stylistic model to follow but also gave him a *raison d'être* during his first quarter century of journalistic activity. Their unwillingness to condemn the despotism of bureaucrats, their reluctance to expose the abuses of power, their rather ostrich-like views of "fairness and justice" was the gauntlet waiting to be picked up by anyone who would dare. And ready to dare was Subramania Aiyar. It was in 1878 that the 23-year-old Subramania Aiyar and a fellow schoolmaster and friend, M. Veeraghavachariar, together with four law students, had started *The Hindu*. They printed 80 copies in a 'Black Town' press, Srinidhi, in Mint Street, promising a four-anna weekly every Wednesday. When the students became lawyers, they prudently parted company with the fiery former schoolmasters, who now settled down to filling a long-felt need for "a native organ in the metropolis of Southern India", treading boldly where others had failed.

The Europeans in their endeavor to safeguard their commercial interests and defend the British government's policy started the *Madras Times* in 1860 with George Romilly as its editor. The *Madras Mail* representing the wealthy section of the

Europeans appeared in 1868. Most of the editorial staff were from England. The *Madras Mail*, the first evening paper in India, was to begin with, efficiently managed and adequately financed.

Between the birth of *The Madras Times* and the era of *The Hindu Mail* rivalry, Madras readers were offered a number of other papers, but few lasted long. In 1901, Kamala Sathianathan, the first woman who had her B.A and M.A. from the Madras University, started *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, it was the first women's magazine in India. And in 1905, C. Karunakara Menon, one of the pioneering staff of *The Hindu*, started *The Indian Patriot* 1924. In 1921 was born Madras' first morning paper, *The Daily Express*, the time it merged with *The Mail* on the initiative of J O Robinson of Spencer's, who amalgamated both papers as well as Higginbotham's under the banner of Associated Publishers (a name in printing still going strong). Unperturbed by the establishment, Brock founded a paper to entertain. The paper featured a women's page, a children's corner, a magazine section, cinema news and the first crossword puzzles in South Indian newspapers.

The Indian Express to be started in 1932 by a Ayurvedic doctor, Varadarajulu Naidu, who has been described as the 'Tilak of South India' and who had founded *Tamil Nadu*, an outspoken Tamil weekly that had grown into a daily by 1927, Within a year, Ramnath Goenka took over *The Indian Express* and proceeded to build a newspaper empire that today publishes from 11 cities in six states and two union territories! *The Indian Express* has come a long way from its Mukar Nallamuthu street days. When the *Express* premises were gutted in 1940, *The Hindu* rented it its old offices at 100 Mount Road, where the *Express* remained till after the War, when it acquired the beautiful buildings and gardens of the Madras Club – and allowed them to deteriorate.

More successful than the *Daily Express* was *Swarajya*, started in 1922 by T. Prakasam to support the Non Co-operation Movement. The successful lawyer gave up his practice, even returning his clients' fees in unfinished suits, and threw himself into journalism. For 12 years *Swarajya* ran as a daily, but then failed because of bad management, though it survived as a weekly till the late seventies. For fifty years after *Swarajya*'s flourish, no other newspaper in English made an impact on the Madras journalistic scene. Then, in 1983, *News Today*, a lively evening daily, arrived. Though it filled the gap left by *The Mail*, it offered readers none of the establishment-oriented, staid dowdiness *The Mail* had; instead, it has concentrated on the Tamil Nadu political scene,

enthusiastically partisan on all issues, it had brought to English journalism in Madras.

Contribution of Tamil People to the Press

Since the commencement of the 20th century, political awakening in Tamil Nadu gained momentum. For this phenomenon, press in general and Tamil press in particular was main instrument. Being a tool for the National Movement the press was destined to change the very nature of the struggle for freedom in Tamil Nadu.

The task of inculcating the spirit of Indian nationalism in the Tamils and involving them in the struggle for freedom from foreign yoke was borne by individuals and organizations alike. Both national and provincial elites, associations like Balabharatha Sangam and the Desabaktha Samajan, the English press, stage artists and authors used different media to kindle the flame of nationalism and intensified the struggle for freedom. Yet the role played by the Tamil press surpassed all these attempts put together. It brought to the fold of National Movement a large number of vernacular literates because of its distinct advantage of regularity and continuity which other media like public speeches, books, pamphlets, bhajans and theatrical performances lacked.

The earliest Tamil papers were the *Rajavritti Bodini* and the *Dina Varthamani*, both first appearing in 1855 and carrying general articles and translations from the English language Press. The first politically conscious Tamil journals were Salem Pagadala Narasimhalu Naidu's fortnightlies, *Salem Desabhimani* started in 1878, and *Coimbatore Kalanidhi*, started in 1880. But it was Subramania Aiyar who decided that it was necessary to start a journal that would help educate the largest number of Tamil-speaking people in modern politics and self-government.

The appointment of T. Muthuswamy Aiyar, a Brahmin lawyer, as the first South Indian judge of the Madras High Court in 1878 excited the indignation of the local European community and their press. *The Hindu* defended the appointment of Muthuswamy Aiyar and condemned the editorial that appeared in *The Madras Mail*. As a weekly, *The Hindu* filled in the vacuum created by the absence of an Indian owned of public opinion and acted as a buffer between the local people and the British rulers. It represented the opinions educated Indian and ventilated people's grievances. The increasing circulation of this paper made its founders convert it into a tri-weekly in 1833 and daily in April 1889.

G. Subramanian Aiyar understood this situation and therefore established the first newspaper in Tamil,

Swadesamitran as a weekly. He published *The Hindu* and *Swadesamitran* till 1898. The next year he made it a daily, the first in Tamil. From 1899, for 17 years, *Swadesamitran* was to remain the only Tamil daily till the pro-British, anti-Congress *Dravidian* was started in 1916. When the extremist movement began, the only potential newspaper in Tamil was the *Swadesamitran*. Although it rose to the occasion to spread the ideal of swadeshi, it did not reflect the real spirit that was slowly engulfing the subcontinent. In these circumstances, the new force of nationalism intensified by the British reprisals, energized a group of young men in Madras to bring out a political journal. The result was the starting of *India* on 4 May 1906 by S.N. Thirumalachari. In its name, the paper visualized a united India transcending barriers of caste, religion, language and region. Subramania Bharathi was the editor of this paper. S.N. Thirumalachari, found in Bharathi a blend of religious fervour and patriotism, the two essential qualities that were most needed for a journalist to effectively interpret the message of nationalism to the masses. Swadeshi movement thus had the support of two newspapers the *Swadesamitran* and *India*, each differing in content and style from the other. Extremist nationalism to the former was a political necessity and to the latter a religious mission. If the voice of *Swadesamitran* was a wail of frustration and anger that of the *India* was a clarion call for heroic deeds and sacrifice.

Having understood the basic rationale of starting the *Swadesamitran* Narasimhalu Naidu commented, "G. Subramania Aiyar was conscious that those with a knowledge of English are a small number and those with a knowledge of Indian languages the vast majority. He felt that unless our people were told about the objectives of British rule and its merits and defects in the Indian languages, our political knowledge would never develop. It was because of this conviction that he founded the *Swadesamitran*."

In 1904, G. Subramania Aiyar appointed C. Subramania Bharathi as the sub-editor of the *Swadesamitran*. He is known for his patriotic songs came to be called the national poet subsequently. He later left the *Swadesamitran* and became the editor of the *Chakravarthini* in November, 1904 and *India* in April, 1906 and ventilated his views on nationalism in their columns. As the verses composed by Bharathi published in the paper were of anti-British overtones, the government issued an arrest warrant on him and tried to prevent the publication of the *India*. But he continued to publish it in exile from Pondicherry till 1910. S. Subramania Siva, an ardent extremist, was the editor of the *Janana Bhanu*. Though the paper

earned a name for its bold and fearless writings, it was closed down in 1916 because of paucity of funds.

The *Mitran* considered the British rule in India as providential and beneficial. While vigorously supporting the swadeshi and boycott it wavered in the pursuit of swaraj. But right from its inception the *India* of Bharathi was militant in outlook. It despised the elitist nature of the provincial Congress. It was very harsh in its criticism of the moderates. Both the papers suffered persecution simultaneously on 21 August, 1908. As a result the *Swadesamitran* bore the stamp of the moderates for the next eight years. The *India* remained the lonely voice of extremist wilderness until 1910. Both the papers in their own way prepared the ground for mass involvement in nationalist politics.

In July, of 1914 she purchased another paper *The Madras Standard* an Anglo-Indian paper. It was the oldest paper in the city, which had been founded in 1841 and passing in 1892 into the hands G. Parameswaran Pillai, followed a more extreme policy. He had been expelled from the Maharaja's College Thiruvananthapuram at the age of 18 for his political writings. He was 21 when he took over as the editor of *Madras Standard* and changed it into a weekly. He also founded the Madras Social Reform Association. When the *Madras Standard* was acquired in 1892 a 21 year old editor, G. Parameswaran Pillai, who made the tri-weekly a daily and thundered against the establishment both Indian and British. In the year 16 October 1909, the *Madras Standard* was transferred to the hands of P.N.Raman Pillai, a Hindu Malayali, the 40 year old newspaper. During his editorship the paper had a circulation 2,150. After a year in June 1911 the *Madras Standard* changed the editorship to A. Ramasesha Aiyar, B.A., a Hindu 36 year old Brahmin. But it was unknown and quite unpopular. It was neither edited nor even printed properly. But Mrs. Annie Besant did wonders. She Said, "It was a rag," "I will make it good." Her hopes were realized. From a circulation of a few hundreds she built it up with astounding rapidity, and it reached a circulation of 30,000, the largest Anglo-Indian paper at the time.

On 1 August, 1914, Besant gave a new name to the paper, *New India*. This was not merely a change in name only, but something more. The motto of the new paper was "For God, Crown, and Country". The paper contributed a lot to the National Movement.

Conclusion

Nationalism was sharpened and spread throughout India and it reached to all section of people with the help of press. The Indian Press both English and vernacular helped disseminating new

political thoughts, and served as a Vehicle in reaching out to the masses. The discourse the press created on the nationalism, discussions it created among the readers, were useful to mobilize public opinion among the masses against the hegemonic British imperialism. The regular publication of articles related to nationalism, the focused editorials articulated the mood of the country. They not only continued to create national consciousness among the people but also expressed their displeasure and discontentment over their oppressive policies of the British government. The press during the freedom struggle created a space for political thinking, constructive debates on issues and also offered valuable suggestions to the rulers. Among them *The Hindu*, *prapanchamitran*, *Swadesamitran*, *Dravidan*, *Desabaktan*, *Hindu Nesan*, *Naradan*, *Logakari*, *Christian Patriot*, *The Examiner*, *The New Leader* are a few to be mentioned. They all did commendable works in creating political consciousness and national awakening.

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