



Twenty Major Newspapers and periodicals published between 1780 and 1900: A study

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Abstract

The period from 1780 to 1900 holds immense historical significance for Indian journalism. The *Hicky's Gazette*, launched in 1780 in Calcutta, was primarily intended for the British residing in India and is recognized as India's first newspaper. By 1900, Indian journalism underwent a profound transformation—from the intellectual dominance of British editors to the emergence of Indian editors, with Raja Rammohan Roy, the pioneer of the Indian renaissance, leading the charge. Journalism evolved from a British monopoly into a powerful medium for India's freedom struggle and renaissance. This research paper examines 20 major newspapers and periodicals published between 1780 and 1900, aiming to understand the history of Indian journalism and its role in the freedom struggle and renaissance.

Keywords: History of Indian Journalism, Indian Renaissance, Raja Rammohan Roy, Role of Press in Freedom Struggle

Introduction

It is a historical fact that journalism in India was initiated by European editors (Bayly, 1996) ^[1]. However, over time, its leadership passed into Indian hands, transforming the press established by the British into a vital tool for India's freedom struggle and renaissance (Chandra, 1989) ^[2]. Early Indian journalism does not reflect a particularly glorious history. The initial newspapers, founded by European editors, can be broadly categorized into two streams, reflecting the social, political, and economic landscape of the time (Jones, 2001) ^[3].

First Stream: Rebellious Editors against the company

This stream includes rebellious editors like William Bolts and James Augustus Hicky, who, frustrated with the East India Company's policies, began writing against it. While these editors courageously challenged the company's autocratic rule, their writings were often limited to scandals involving the wives of high-ranking officials (Parthasarathy, 1989) ^[4]. The content of these early newspapers was generally centered on personal allegations, with minimal focus on public welfare in the eyes of these early English editors (Das, 2005) ^[5].

Second Stream: Government-Supported Newspapers

This stream includes newspapers like *India Gazette* by Peter Reed and B. Messink and *Calcutta Gazette* by Francis Gladwin. These newspapers enjoyed government support, including free postal services and official advertisements. They primarily published news related to the East India Company, operating under governmental patronage and focusing on official notifications and advertisements. Their primary role was to counter the allegations published by rebellious editors (Bhattacharya, 2006) ^[6].

Thus, early English newspapers in India were driven by the company's profit and loss considerations, with little connection to journalism or the general public. Indian journalism reached its golden era only with the emergence of Indian editors, when it transcended personal interests to address social, economic, and political issues (Natarajan, 1962) ^[7]. This study examines major newspapers and periodicals published in India between 1780 and 1900 to

understand the history of Indian journalism and its role in the freedom struggle and renaissance.

Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the 20 major newspapers and periodicals published in India between 1780 and 1900.
2. To examine the evolution of Indian journalism from its European origins to its role in the Indian freedom struggle and renaissance.
3. To evaluate the contributions of Indian editors like Raja Rammohan Roy in transforming journalism into a tool for social and political reform.

Research Methodology

This research paper primarily utilizes secondary source materials, including historical texts, archival records, and scholarly articles. The research approach is descriptive and qualitative, involving a detailed analysis of the content, editorial stance, and societal impact of the selected newspapers and periodicals. Digitized copies of these publications, accessed through repositories like the National Digital Library of India, are examined to understand their historical context (Mishra, 2019) ^[8]. Thematic analysis categorizes the newspapers into rebellious and government-supported streams, while comparative analysis highlights the shift from European to Indian-led journalism. The study also draws on historical accounts to evaluate the socio-political environment and colonial policies that shaped early Indian journalism.

The Inception of Indian Journalism and the Emergence of Indians

Indian journalism is considered to have begun in Calcutta, during a time when proficiency in the English language was seen as a hallmark of modernity. This modernity and renaissance were led by Raja Rammohan Roy, a social reformer with a progressive outlook, proficient in Arabic, Sanskrit, Persian, and interested in English (Sen, 1993) ^[9]. Later, luminaries like Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Rabindranath Tagore, and Aurobindo Ghosh carried forward this tradition, spreading spirituality and humanism in Indian society. Despite numerous obstacles

created by the British government to hinder printing and journalism, the foundation of Indian journalism was laid. The British always viewed Indian newspapers with suspicion, leading to repeated attacks on press freedom. Newspapers operated by Christian missionaries received encouragement from the British government, resulting in the publication and dissemination of Christian-oriented papers even from major Hindi-speaking centers. These missionary papers promoted Christian values while seeking to undermine India's cultural heritage (Roy, 2011) [10]. Unable to tolerate such injustice, Raja Rammohan Roy articulated the purpose of his journalistic endeavors: "My sole objective is to present intellectual essays to the public that enhance their understanding and contribute to social progress. I wish to exert all my efforts to inform the rulers about the true conditions of their subjects, so that they may provide greater facilities to the people, and the people may become aware of the measures through which they can secure protection from the rulers and have their legitimate demands met" (Roy, 1822, as cited in Sen, 1993) [9]. Despite such humble intentions, the British rulers remained unmoved and consistently opposed newspaper publication in India. Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras, considered press freedom dangerous, stating, "Granting freedom to the press is dangerous for us. Foreign rule and press freedom cannot coexist. What would be the first duty of a free press? Would it not be to liberate the country from foreign rule? Therefore, if the press in India is granted freedom, the consequences are clear" (Munro, 1820, as cited in Barrier, 1974).

Thus, Raja Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) emerged as a pioneer of Indian journalism and the architect of the Indian renaissance. In the early 19th century, under British colonial rule, Roy transformed journalism into a powerful tool for social reform, religious awakening, intellectual discourse, and press freedom. Proficient in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Hindi, and English, he used his newspapers and periodicals to build public opinion against social evils like sati, child marriage, and casteism (Guha, 2010). His journalism not only awakened Indian society but also played a crucial role in informing British rulers about the grievances of the Indian populace.

Major Newspapers and Periodicals (1780–1900)

Bengal Gazette (1780) India's first newspaper, *Bengal Gazette*, also known as *Calcutta General Advertiser*, was launched on January 29, 1780, by James Augustus Hicky in Calcutta. This English weekly, printed on two pages, criticized the East India Company's corruption, exposing the plight of poor Indians and soldiers. Hicky's bold writings against Governor Warren Hastings and the Supreme Court led to an 80,000-rupee fine and imprisonment in 1781. The paper ceased in 1782 but laid the foundation for press freedom. Its journalism sparked investigations against the company in the British Parliament, inspiring future journalists and establishing the press as a powerful medium (Parthasarathy, 1989) [4].

India Gazette (1780) Launched in November 1780 by B. Messink and Peter Reed in Calcutta, the *India Gazette* was an English weekly supporting the East India Company. Focused on government notifications, trade news, and advertisements, it received postal facilities and financial support, competing with Hicky's *Bengal Gazette*. Its content was formal and administration-centric, giving minimal

attention to Indian societal issues. Operating under censorship, it avoided critical writing but contributed to the development of systematic journalism, laying the groundwork for organized press practices (Bhattacharya, 2006) [6].

Calcutta Gazette (1784) Started on March 4, 1784, by Francis Gladwin in Calcutta, the *Calcutta Gazette* was an English weekly promoting company interests. It published trade, shipping, and administrative news, supported by postal facilities. Its content maintained distance from Indian society and adhered to censorship, limiting its scope to the European community. The paper established administrative journalism in India, serving as a reliable source for official updates (Jones, 2001) [3].

Madras Courier (1785) The *Madras Courier*, launched in 1785 by Richard Johnson in Madras, was an English weekly dedicated to the company's interests in South India. It covered government notifications, trade news, and local events, supported by postal facilities. Operating under censorship, it prioritized European readers and contributed to the beginnings of regional journalism in South India, inspiring future publications in the region (Natarajan, 1962) [7].

Bombay Herald (1789) The *Bombay Herald*, started in 1789 in Bombay, was Western India's first English weekly. Focused on trade, shipping, and government notifications, it catered to Bombay's European and merchant communities. Operating under censorship, it laid the foundation for regional journalism in Western India, influencing the development of the press in the region (Das, 2005) [5].

Samachar Kaumudi (1821) Launched in 1821 by Raja Rammohan Roy in Calcutta, *Samachar Kaumudi* was a Bengali weekly focused on social reform. It addressed issues like sati, child marriage, and casteism, promoting Brahma Samaj ideals. Facing conservative opposition and censorship, it awakened the Bengali middle class and contributed significantly to the abolition of sati in 1829, marking a milestone in social reform (Sen, 1993) [9].

Mirat-ul-Akhbar (1822) Started in 1822 by Raja Rammohan Roy in Calcutta, *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* was a Persian weekly addressing both Indian and British readers. It covered social reform, press freedom, and administrative policies, opposing the Press Act of 1823. Closed in 1823 due to censorship, it enriched Persian journalism and inspired advocacy for press freedom, leaving a lasting impact on multilingual journalism (Roy, 2011).

Udant Martand (1826) Launched on May 30, 1826, by Yugal Kishore Shukla in Calcutta, *Udant Martand* was the first Hindi weekly. Written in a mix of Khari Boli and Braj, it covered news, scientific information, and social issues. Despite closing in 1827 due to financial constraints and lack of postal support, it laid the foundation for Hindi journalism, fostering linguistic consciousness among Hindi speakers (Mishra, 2019) [8].

Bangadoot (1822) Started in 1822 by Raja Rammohan Roy in Calcutta, *Bangadoot* was a trilingual (Bengali, Hindi, Persian) weekly promoting social reform, religious unity, and national consciousness. It fostered Hindu-Muslim unity but closed due to financial difficulties. Its diverse and inclusive content inspired multilingual journalism, contributing to the early development of Hindi journalism (Guha, 2010).

Samachar Darpan (1818) Launched in 1818 by the Serampore Mission, *Samachar Darpan* was a Bengali

weekly promoting Christian missionary values. It covered social reform and education but often criticized Indian culture. Operating under censorship, its content was considered missionary literature rather than journalism by some scholars due to its biased tone. Its influence was largely limited to the missionary community (Barrier, 1974). *Som Prakash* (1858) [2] Started in 1858 under Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's guidance, *Som Prakash* was a Bengali weekly focused on social reform and national consciousness. It addressed widow remarriage and education, criticizing British policies. Affected by the Vernacular Press Act, it fueled nationalist sentiments in Bengal, nurturing a significant section of nationalist intellectuals (Chandra, 1989) [2].

Amrita Bazar Patrika (1868) Launched in 1868 by Sisir Kumar Ghosh in Jessore, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was a Bengali weekly that later switched to English to evade the Vernacular Press Act. Its bold criticism of British policies made it a key nationalist voice, significantly strengthening the freedom struggle with its fearless and impactful content (Natarajan, 1962) [7].

Indian Mirror (1861) Started in 1861 by Keshab Chandra Sen in Calcutta, *Indian Mirror* was an English daily promoting Brahma Samaj ideals. It covered social reform and national consciousness, criticizing British policies. Its intellectual content made it a platform for educated readers, transforming the press into a national forum (Sen, 1993) [9].

Kesari (1881) Launched in 1881 by Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Pune, *Kesari* was a Marathi weekly advocating nationalist ideas and *swaraj*. Its fiery criticism of British rule led to Tilak's imprisonment but inspired the freedom struggle, profoundly influencing Marathi society with its passionate content (Chandra, 1989) [2].

The Hindu (1878) Started in 1878 by G. Subramania Iyer in Madras, *The Hindu* was an English weekly that later became a daily. Focused on social reform and national consciousness, it criticized British policies and became a leading voice in South India, appealing to the educated class (Natarajan, 1962) [7].

Tattvabodhini Patrika (1843) Launched in 1843 by the Tattvabodhini Sabha in Calcutta, edited by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, *Tattvabodhini Patrika* was a Bengali monthly focused on social and religious reform. It promoted widow remarriage and women's education, offering rational interpretations of Hindu scriptures. It awakened the Bengali middle class and contributed to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 (Sen, 1993).

Bangadarshan (1836) Started in 1836 by Harishchandra Ray in Calcutta, *Bangadarshan* was a Bengali monthly focused on literature and social reform. It revived Bengali culture through literary and thought-provoking content, influencing the Bengali renaissance despite conservative opposition (Guha, 2010).

Kavivachan Sudha (1867) Launched in 1867 by Bharatendu Harishchandra in Banaras, *Kavivachan Sudha* was a Hindi monthly focused on literature, social reform, and national consciousness. It enriched Hindi literature with poems, essays, and *swadeshi* ideas, uniting Hindi speakers and influencing the nationalist movement despite financial challenges (Mishra, 2019) [8].

Dharm Prakash (1859) Started in 1859 by Mansukh in Ahmedabad, *Dharm Prakash* was a Hindi monthly focused on religion and social issues. Later published in Hindi and Sanskrit from Agra (1867) and Urdu and Sanskrit from

Roorkee (1890), it supported the Sanatan Dharma Sabha. Its religious and educational content influenced religious communities despite censorship (Das, 2005) [5].

Suraj Prakash (1869) Launched in 1869 by Ganeshi Lal in Agra, *Suraj Prakash* was a Hindi monthly with an Urdu section called *Aftab-e-Aalamtaba*. It addressed social reform, education, and local issues, appealing to Hindi and Urdu readers. Despite censorship and financial challenges, it inspired bilingual journalism (Mishra, 2019) [8].

Conclusion

The findings of this research paper clearly demonstrate that journalism, initially started by the British in India, sowed the seeds of Indian nationalism. The entry of Indian pioneers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar transformed journalism into a vehicle for awakening national consciousness, challenging social evils, and advocating press freedom. These publications laid the groundwork for India's renaissance and independence movement, fostering a sense of unity and cultural pride. Early newspapers like *Bengal Gazette* established the press's potential to challenge authority, while Indian-led publications like *Samachar Kaumudi* and *Kesari* elevated journalism to a platform for social and political reform. The shift from company-centric content to public-oriented discourse marked a turning point, enabling the press to address issues like sati, education, and *swaraj*. The legacy of this period continues to influence modern Indian journalism, emphasizing its role as a catalyst for social change and public discourse. Future research should explore how these early journalistic efforts shaped regional identities, promoted linguistic diversity, and contributed to the global dissemination of Indian thought, particularly in the context of colonial resistance and cultural revival.

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