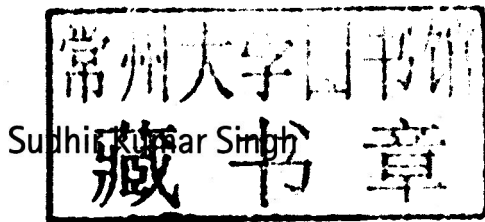


PRESS, POLITICS &
PUBLIC OPINION
IN
BIHAR

(1912-1947)

Sudhir Kumar Singh

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Public Opinion in
BIHAR
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**Press, Politics and Public Opinion in Bihar
(1912-1947)**

Dedicated to my

Father

Late Jagdish Narayan Singh

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January 2010

Dr. Sudhir Kumar Singh

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Introduction

The present book consists of six chapters. The first chapter is, '*Historical Background of Press in Bihar.*' In this chapter, an attempt has been made to trace the genesis and growth of press in Bihar. Press in Bihar started taking a rudimentary shape in the fifties of the 19th century and turned into a mighty force and a potent vehicle of social change and political resurgence only in a span of nearly sixty years. An attempt has been made to analyse, how press in Bihar, though essentially emerging as the representative of the educated bourgeoisie, did reflect the cross currents of the mental deliberations of the Bihari society. Its study reveals the nature of its response to various socio-economic problems of the region and its role in arousing and moulding the sub-national and national aspirations, which were hitherto, suppressed by colonial rulers.

The second chapter is, '*Press and the Creation of separate Bihar.*' In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the noteworthy contribution of press in the creation of separate Bihar. Press offered the rising educated bourgeoisie, an opportunity to have an intellectual tug-of-war over the fundamental question of the separation of Bihar from Bengal. It gave them a forum for debate to establish the rational behind separation. The *Behar Times*, which later came to be known as the *Beharee* became more vocal in its demand for a separate Bihar.

The third chapter is, 'Press and the Home Rule Movement and Gandhi's Arrival in Bihar.' In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse how newspapers in Bihar such as *the Bihar standard, the Express, the Behar Herald, the Hindustan Review* urged the people to participate in the political events. Newspapers of Bihar published the proceedings of almost all the public meetings in order to impart knowledge to the people about the objectives of Home Rule Movement. Moreover, I have also attempted to highlight the significant role of press in Bihar such as *the Searchlight, the Desh, the Mahavira, Tarun Bharat, the Behar Herald* during Gandhi's Champaran Satyagraha. They published events associated with Champaran movement in order to increase socio-political awareness of the people of Bihar.

The fourth chapter is, 'Press and the Gandhian Movements in Bihar from Non-co-operation Movement to Civil Disobedience Movement.' In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the role of press in Bihar to create public opinion in favour of Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhi. Previously, newspapers of Bihar did not lag behind to give wide coverage to the Montague-Chelmsford Reform Scheme later known as Government of India Act, 1919. After the suspension of Khilafat Non-cooperation Movement (March 1922), there was disintegration, demoralisation among nationalist rank. Here, press in Bihar contributed much to boost the morale of people. The newspapers gave wide coverage about the constructive works of No-Changers and the Council work of Swarajists. Another significant political development was the Simon Commission (1929). It proved to be a boon in disguise, as it helped in achieving not only the political awakening but also the seemingly impossible Hindu-Muslim unity throughout the country. Here again, press in Bihar did a tremendous job. An attempt has been made to analyse the role of newspapers of Bihar during the course of Gandhi's most organised mass movement known as Civil Disobedience Movement from 1930 to 1934. The newspapers, which played very important role in moulding favourable public opinion, were *the Searchlight, the Indian Nation, the Lok Sangharsh, the Behar Herald, the National Herald*.

The fifth chapter is, 'Press in Bihar from the Act of 1935 to the Attainment of Independence in 1947.' In this chapter, an attempt has been made to critically analyse the role of press in Bihar during the first ever election, under the Government of India Act, 1935 held for provincial legislature in Bihar in 1937. It was the press, which played decisive role to create public opinion favourable to Congress Party, which facilitated Congress rule in Bihar from 1937 to 1939. Press in Bihar did not lag behind to give wide coverage to August offer (1940), Individual Satyagraha (1940), Cripps Mission, Underground Activities during the Quit India Movement. The role of newspapers especially *the Searchlight* (15 July, 1918) and *the Indian Nation* (9th Feb. 1931) was commendable. They faced the ire of British Government during this period, but did not yield to the pressure of British administration. In this chapter, an attempt has also been made to analyse the role of press to pacify communal tension in Bihar during the period from 1944 to 1947. Newspapers' role to highlight the dimension of natural calamity (famine) of 1943 and the implications of the failure of Simla Conference (June 1945) was commendable. In this chapter, an attempt has also been made to analyse the role of press during the post war period, when British Government was sincerely thinking for transferring power into the hands of responsible Indian Government. These sincere attempts of British Government embodied in the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946), the Mountbatten Plan (1947), the Indian Independence Act 1947.

In the concluding chapter, an attempt has been made to assess the role of press in moulding the public opinion in Bihar resulting in subsequent political agitations against the colonial rule.

CHAPTER 1

Historical Background of Press in Bihar

Press is a full-fledged institution in our modern world, and the various media utilised by the press are generally called by, and now professionally united under, the common name of journalism. It leads us to the fact that the press is the structural aspect and journalism is the functional.¹ Rowland Wolsely, the famous American professor of journalism describes journalism in the following words,² "Journalism is the systematic and reliable dissemination of public information, public opinion and public entertainment by modern mass media of communication."

In modern age, the role of press is all-pervasive. It acts as a communicator of news and a source of information about the world, national and local events. It becomes an instrument of education and helps influencing social and cultural attitudes, establishing values and developing a climate for change. It also acts as a medium for voicing community objectives and raising civic consciousness, which form the basis of democracy and social advancement. It can also be a medium for the flow of ideas from leaders to people and from people to government.

In colonial India also, press was an effective instrument of the nationalists, both in transmitting the message of freedom

to the masses of India and raising public consciousness against the colonial rule. It acted as a unifying factor in our country, which was lacking national cohesion. It helped to build a sense of nationhood, established confidence in leadership and in post-independence era especially it contributed to the growth of democratic institutions and political stability crucial to the national development. Undoubtedly, it remained a motivating force throughout the period of struggle for independence and post-independence period as well. However, it is surprising that in spite of having extensive literature on the Indian nationalist struggle, most of the authors have ignored the role played by the press during the freedom struggle. The very significant relationship between the press and the Indian political institutions remains largely unexplored.

It seems imperative here to make a general historic survey of the advent of the press. The growth of the press falls in long chains of the development of the cherished fundamental instincts of man to interact with society. During ancient period ideas, thoughts and experiences of a community could be transferred to its coming generations only through oral traditions. There had always been chances of interpolations and alterations in this process. Hence, inquisitive mind of human beings developed the art of writing through certain fixed symbols, which ultimately, gave rise to various scripts. An allied development, that took place, was the use of writing materials. The art of manufacturing paper was devised for the first time in China and from there it travelled to Europe via the Arab world. Similarly, the invention of the art of printing was a remarkable technical development of the mankind and the credit for this once again goes to the Chinese enthusiasts. They were the pioneers in printing the first book entitled "*Hiraka Sutra*" in A.D. 868.³ From them the Arabs learned the art of printing with the help of wooden blocks. By the twelfth century A.D., Europeans got acquainted with the art of printing.⁴ Right from 14th century up to 16th century, European countries witnessed renaissance which hastened the phenomenal and technical pursuits. The invention of press was an interlinked phenomenon of the renaissance. We had no knowledge of the

press before 15th century A.D. It originated at Venice in Italy in the 15th century. In initial stage, these were printed by engraved wooden blocks. The first press was established by Gutenberg at Menz in Germany in A.D. 1450. He printed *the Bible* for the first time on straw-made paper in A.D. 1454. The origin of press in Italy dates back to A.D. 1466 when the first printing press was started in Rome. In England, the story of press starts from A.D. 1477 when Caxton started his press in Westminster for printing books in English language. By A.D. 1600 France, Holland, Spain and Belgium too saw the growth of press in their land. The growth of press marked the advent of new intellectual revolution. It broke the monopoly of a limited section over intellectual activities and now even artisans could buy and read books. This opened a new way for the development of science and technology as well as socio-cultural awakening. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a miraculous development of press in terms of number and quality. It became the strong advocate of the emergent capitalist and educated bourgeoisie in Europe.

Printing was introduced in India by the enthusiastic Christian missionaries who were eager to have more and more Indians converted to their religion. On Sept. 6, 1556, Christian missionaries established the first press at Goa⁵ from where the first book was published in 1557 A.D. But no press in India in modern sense, was started till the first half of the 18th Century. The press for the first time in India, was started with its broader sense in Bengal by those Europeans who, for obvious reasons, were dissatisfied with the Company's monopoly and administration.⁶

Before the publication of *Hicky's Gazette* an attempt was made to start a newspaper in 1768 by William Bolts⁷ who had resigned from the service of the Company after being censured by the Court of Directors for engaging in private trade. But his attempt could not materialise because, according to his confession⁸, "he had in his possession, many things to communicate which most intimately concern every individual." Bolt's intention to start a paper, naturally, alarmed official quarters and he was asked to leave Bengal and proceed to

Madras and sail from there to England.

It was J.A. Hicky who started to publish 'the first journal in India'⁹ from Calcutta in A.D. 1780 which is known to us by the name of 'Hicky's Gazette' or '*The Bengal Gazette*.' When Hicky started his weekly, he announced his motives in these words: "I have no particular passion for printing of newspaper, I have no propensity, I was not bred to a slavish life of hard work; yet I take pleasure in enslaving my body in order to purchase freedom for my mind and soul."¹⁰ Hicky described his publication as "A weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties but influenced by none." Using allegory, the paper made transparent insinuations about certain individuals. He pointed his attack on Warren Hastings, the Governor General and Elijah Impey, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He wrote, "Mr. Hicky considers the liberty of the press to be essential to the very existence of an Englishman. The subject should have full liberty to declare his principles and opinions, and every act, which tends to coerce that liberty, is tyrannical and injurious to the community."¹¹ It was a pity that within ten months of its appearance, Hicky's newspaper incurred the displeasure of the Government and it ceased to publish. But it was Hicky who first "enunciated the noble principle of the liberty of press"¹² for which the Indians had to struggle upto the termination of the British rule in India.

For the prolongation of British rule in India, the ruling authorities were in a search of effective weapon, which they found in promotion of loyal press. They wanted the press to be loyal and subservient to serve their ulterior designs and started to adopt some novel techniques. For example, to lower the rate of postage charge and such other facilities. In November 1780, the second Indian newspaper, *the Indian Gazette*, was started by B. Messink, who was connected with the theatrical company of Peter Reed, a Saltmerchant. Messink and Read secured the permission of Hastings to start this paper, which was considered to be a rival of Hicky's *Gazette*. Other newspapers followed. *The Calcutta Gazette* was started under Government patronage as an official gazette. *The Bengal Journal* made its appearance in February 1785, and in April of the same year, *the Oriental*

Magazine or *Calcutta Amusement* was published as a monthly paper. In January 1786, the *Calcutta Chronicle* appeared. Thus within six years of Hicky's pioneering *Bengal Gazette*, five newspapers made their debut on the Indian scene.

The *Madras Courier* founded by Richard Johnson on October 12, 1785 became the official organ of Government advertisements and notifications and was given postal services free of charge. The *Bombay Herald* published in 1789 was the first paper in the Bombay presidency. The *Bombay courier*, which made its appearance the following year, carried advertisements in Gujrat. The *Bombay Herald* soon afterwards merged into the *Bombay Courier* in 1792. The editors had learned by this time that in order to stay in business, Government patronage was essential.

Thus, through the spread of English education, liberal ideas of the west infiltrated first into Bengal and later in other parts of the country. It heralded a new age of reason. A spirit of critical enquiry into the past and the growth of new ideas and aspirations for the future marked this new awakening. Consequently, public organisations and associations grew which ultimately worked as a booster to the growth of press. Various organisations started their own organs to get their views and ideas communicated to a broader section of population. To a large extent, the press in India owed its origin to the ideological conflict and clash of various opposite groups.¹³ The different groups of men, caught in the cross-currents of ideas, felt the necessity of bringing out their own papers and journals for the propagation of their respective views and ideas.

The Christian missionaries felt that the periodicals or newspapers in the vernacular languages would serve as an effective tool to take the messages of Christ to the Indian people and baptise them in Christianity. It materialised into the publication of a monthly journal, *Digdarshan*¹⁴ in Bengali from April 1818 by the Seramepore Christian missionaries. Its another venture as the *Samachar Darpan*,¹⁵ this too in Bengali, in 1819 under the editorship of Kaire and Marshman. To facilitate an extra circulation of the *Samachar Darpan*, "Hastings lowered the rate of postage to "one fourth the post charge of the English

newspapers."¹⁶ His successor Lord Amhurst also patronised the *Darpan* by subscribing hundred copies of the newspaper which were sent to the government offices.

On the other side, the first newspaper published by an Indian was the *Bengal Gazette*. It was started by Gangadhar Bhattacharya in 1816, as may be inferred from the Government Gazette of 1818.¹⁷ However, the first Indian as well as the 'first Asian daily,'¹⁸ was *Mambay samarchar* which started its publication in Gujarati from Bombay. It was the first paper with indigenous mind and capital and it has kept itself publishing incessantly from its inception in 1822.

It is, thus, apparent that the origin of press on Indian soil did not owe to any political consideration initially, though it was destined to play a vital role in the political movement of the succeeding decades.¹⁹ In fact, the birth of the press was a manifestation of the all round awakening that was taking place with the foreign contact and the new education in the early years of the 19th century. By and by, their growth became fast and there were at least 212 newspapers by the year 1879-80 in vernacular languages²⁰ only.

From the very beginning, the press in India was under strictest surveillance and control. Henry Dundas, the President of the Board of Control, expressed apprehension as early as 1811 that "the very government would be shaken to its foundations if unlicensed publications were allowed to circulate over the continent of Hindustan."²¹

In a minute, in June 1820, the Governor of Madras, Hugh Elliot wrote:²² "Their (press) principal objects have been to disseminate the worst political doctrines of the times, to bring the constitutional authorities both in Europe and in Asia into contempt, to spread feuds in private society and to provide profits to lawyers from prosecutions of libels in the Courts of Justice."

Even liberal-minded statesmen like Thomas Munro and Mount Stuart Elphinstone were opposed to the freedom of press in India. Thomas Munro, who became the Governor of Madras in 1820, wrote,²³ "A free press and the domination of strangers are things which are quite incompatible, and which cannot long