

# Urdu Press: An Interpretation in the Progress of Muslim Public Opinion 1920-1947

Dr. Pravat Ranjan Sethi, Ph.D (JNU)

Email - pravatjnu@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *This studies focus on role of the Urdu Press in the changing scenario from 1935 onwards that saw the return of Jinnah on the political centre-stage after a self-imposed exile in London to lead the Muslim league as a resurgent party posing as a political adversary of the Congress in regaining or reclaiming its lost political space in Indian politics. It would be worth investigating how the Urdu Press reacted to the League's politics after the elections held under the Government of India Act of 1935, the assumption of Congress Ministries and the hardening of its stand against the Congress mass contact programme. Also by the growing of communalism and regional party like as Independent Workers Party (B.R. Ambedkar), Justice Party of Madras, Hindu Maha Sabha RSS, and other sectarian outfits. Is Urdu Press representing the Muslim Intelligentsia and the Middle Class either echoed the sentiments and concerns of the Muslim Commonalities.*

**Key Words:** *Hindu, Muslim, Urdu, Press, freedom, sectarian etc.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Indian Journalism has added enormously for national independence, democratic evolution, national integration and progress. It remains to play a major role in public opinion formation in spite of its limited reach both in terms of geographical area and population when compared to electronic media. The printed words, however, still has tremendous credibility and impact.

## 2. HISTORY OF THE PRESS IN COLONIAL INDIA:

The Indian Press had a stormy beginning and a variegated career. Unexpectedly enough, it was a British in the prime stage of British colonial rule who sought to blaze the trail of a free Press in undivided India. William Bolts was the first man to conceive a plan for initiated a newspaper press in India. In 1767, an effort was made by Bolts to start a newspaper, but it was nipped in the bud as the Government deported the author of enterprise. The Court of Directors sitting at Fort William directed that Bolts should be asked to 'quit Bengal and proceed to Madras on the first ship that was to set sail from that Presidency in the month of July next in order to take his passage from there to Europe in September.'

In India, the development of the press started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and played a significant part in the arousal of the people. There were countless reformers and popular leaders were connected with the growth of the press in India. By and large the vernacular press played an admirable role in creating social awareness and political consciousness in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Sepoy Mutiny the Indian language press developed rapidly owing to the increasing political consciousness of the people and the establishment of direct telegraphic communication between India and Britain in 1860. The Indian councils Act of 1861 stimulated Indian interest in political development. The majority of the newspapers and journals were in vernaculars though a few of them were in English.

The Indian press after the uprising of 1857 took a strikingly nationalistic colour without losing right of the paramount need to supply information to the public. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the mushrooming of vernacular newspapers besides English in different parts of the country. These newspapers became conscious of their political responsibilities and disparaged the reactionary policies of the British Government. They exercised great influence on moulding public opinions by denigrated the British policy on political, social and educational matters. With the progress of the Indian National Movement the Indian Press also nurtured and played an imperative part in creating national consciousness between the people.

The British passed many Acts from time to time to introduce censorship over the Indian Press, the most notorious being the vernacular Press Act of 1878 during the regime of Lord Lytton. The Indian press not only survived these restrictions but also emerged stronger. Despite the initial handicaps, the Indian press reflected the public opinion of the country. It made a substantial contribution in educating the people, in promoting political consciousness by exposing the exploitative nature of the British colonial rule and demanding increased participation of the Indians in administration. The drain of India's wealth by the English incurred vehement criticism from the Indian Press. The Indian Press also served as a potent force in fostering unity among the Indians.

In the period from 1870 to 1918 when the national movement was yet to become a mass agitation, the press was the chief instrument for carrying out the task of arousing, training, mobilizing and consolidating nationalist public opinion. Even the work of the Indian National Congress was accomplished these years largely through the press. In

the absence of any organization of its own, its resolutions and proceedings had to be propagated through the press. It is interesting to note that one-third of the founding fathers of the Congress in 1885 were commonly journalists.

### 3. NEWSPAPERS INSPIRATION BEYOND INTELLIGENTSIA:

Powerful newspapers emerged during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under distinguished and fearless leadership. Some of the significant newspapers were; The Hindu (English) and *Swadesamitran* (Tamil) under the Editorial-ship of G. Subramaniya Iyer, *Kersari* (Marathi) and *Mahratta* (English) under B.G. Tilak, *Bengalee* under Surendranath Banerjea, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* under Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh, *Sudharak* under G.K. Gokhale, Indian Mirror under N.N. Sen, Voice of India and *Rast Guftar* under Dadabhai Naoroji, *Hindustani* and Advocate under G.P. Verma, Tribune and *Akhbar-i-Aim* in Punjab, *Indu Prakash*, *Dnyan Prakash*, Kal and Gujarati in Bombay, Som Prakash, Banganivasi, and Sadharani in Bengal and a host of Hindi and Urdu newspapers in Delhi, United Province, Bihar, Calcutta and Punjab. In fact, there hardly existed a major political leader in India who did not possess a newspaper or was not writing for one in some capacity or the other.

The encouragement of the press extended for beyond its literate subscribers. Nor was it confined to cities and large towns. A newspaper would reach remote villages and then would read by a reader to tens of others. Gradually, library movements spring up all over the country. A local library would be organized around a single newspaper. The newspaper not only became the political educator; reading or discussing it became a form of political participation. Most of the newspapers in those days were published as a national or public services, often financed as objects of philanthropy, and run by political workers and agitators. Nearly all the major controversies of the day were conducted through the press. It also played the institutional role of opposing to the government. Almost every act and every policy of the government was subjected to sharp criticism, in many cases with great care and vast learning backing it up. 'Oppose, oppose, oppose was the motto of the Indian Press', thus the nationalistic press performed four major tasks to arouse political consciousness, to inculcate nationalism, to expose colonial rule and to preach disloyalty. In all cases, nationalist journalists, especially of Indian language newspapers had a difficult task to perform, for they had to combine simplicity and subtlety, to educate a semi-literate public and to convey true meaning without falling foul of the law. They performed the task brilliantly, often creatively developing the languages in which they were writing. The Urdu press did not lag behind its other counterparts. The first Urdu newspaper was started in what is present west Bengal in 1822. *Jam-e-Jahan* was the first bilingual published both in Persian and Urdu from 1822. *Kohinoor* was a weekly newspaper started by Munshi Harsukh Rai on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1850 and had the highest circulation of 350 copies at a time when other newspaper sold 100 copies on an average. Urdu guide was the first daily newspaper started by Maulvi Kabeer-ud-din in 1858 at Calcutta. *Roznamcha-e-Punjab* (1858) was published from Lahore.

After there was a surfeit of Urdu newspapers, *Zameendar* was the most prominent of these which started publication in 1903 from Lahore and had a circulation of about 30,000 copies. It was the first newspaper that used news from others news agencies and was extremely supportive of the Indian nation movement. A number of Urdu newspapers sprang up in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of these were started to support the national movement that was gaining momentum at that time. In 1912 two prominent newspapers were started *Naqeeb-e-Hamdard* later baptized Hamdard by Maulana Muhammed Ali Jauhar with the objective of educating the people and *Al-Hilal* by Maulana Azad which a very popular newspaper having the largest circulation after *Zameendar*. According to one estimate more than thirty newspapers and journals mushroomed during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these were daily, weekly and bi-weekly or monthly. Big or small in terms of circulation and reach, most of these newspapers espoused the cause of nationalism and took up the issues of the day. Prominent among these were *Inquilab*, *Musalman*, *Sarfaraz*, *Hamdam*, *Khadem*, *Jiddat*, *Khilafat Siyasat*, *Haqiqat*, *Jung*, *Sadiq-ul-Akhbar*, *Sandesh*, *Asr-e-Jadeed*, *Nawa-e-Waqt*, *Ujala*, *Jumhuriat*, and *Quami Awaz*. *Inquilab* was published from Lahore, *Musalman* from Calcutta, *Sarfaraz*, *Hamdam*, *Jiddat*, *Haqiqat* from Lucknow, and *Quami Awaz* was started by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1945 from Lucknow and later published from Patna and Delhi, *Asr-e-Jadeed* was published from Meerut.

Most of these newspapers echoed the sentiments of the Muslim society, both middle class intelligentsia and the masses underlining the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity for a broad based nationalist alliance at least until the mid-thirties when there existed neither a sharp communal political polarization between Hindus and Muslims nor any significant solidarity in the Muslim community. In this context the comment of *Mussalman* dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 1926 is significant 'we believe' wrote the Calcutta paper, that Hindus and Muslims must unite, that they will contribute their diverse culture, tradition, and history in order to build up a new wondrous type of nationality-as a nationality not simple and unitary, but strange, complex and multi-fold, like a jewel with many facets each in descent with the gleam of latent fire. At the height of the Khilafat and Non co-operation Movement, the Urdu press stood solidly behind the nationalist forces, besides condemning the treatment meted out to the sultan of turkey by Britain and her allies. Paper like *Al-Hilal* had earlier underlined the importance of politics based on religion. Interestingly until the mid-thirties the Muslim League remained in political wilderness and was described by a contemporary as reported in *Jiddat* (Lucknow 9<sup>th</sup> December 1933) and in the editorial comments of *Mussalman* (3<sup>rd</sup> July 1930) a soulless body, devoid of any

programme. Thus the Urdu press was no different from any other language nationalist press in reporting events of national interest and raising issues which were truly national rather than sectarian till mid-1930s.

#### **4. LAST PHASE OF THE URDU PRESS:**

The period from 1940 till 1947 was full of dramatic developments starting with the Lahore Resolution (March 1940) demand for Pakistan based on two-nation theory articulated by M.A. Jinnah and culminating in 1947 with the partition and achieve of freedom through many turbulent affairs. A host of major events took place on the path to freedom, the most prominent being the Quit India Movement (1942) and the formation of the Interim Government in 1946, which were somewhat distorted by the Mountbatten Plan of partition of India (3rd June 1947) that was an anti-climax to the heroic saga of India's freedom movement. It would be fascinating to examine the response and reaction of the Urdu Press to these developments. It would be worth scrutinizing its attitude towards demand for Pakistan and Partition, the congress and its policies, the British policies and plans and the impression on the muslim middle class, intelligentsia and the Muslim crowds.

#### **5. URDU PRESS AS AN AGENCY AND ITS PREDICAMENT:**

Here is a subjective question arising "Is Urdu press act as a monolith press agency or was it as divided house, some supportive while others opposing the partition." Whilst a plethora of literature has been produced on separation and its aftermath in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and other languages, not much seems to have been produced on the reaction and response of the Urdu press which also got divided into Indian Urdu press and Pakistan Urdu press like the peoples and territories of India and Pakistan. Divide and rule the British were experts; and in creating out of one language the notion of a separate 'Hindi' for Hindus in colonial India and 'Urdu' for Muslims, they used even the definition of languages to set their colonial subjects against one another. Abdul Jamil Khan suggests that London artificially divided India's Hindu and Muslim populations by splitting their one language in two, then burying the evidence in obscure scholarly works outside the public view.

The politics of self-expression became the dominant political culture in the Urdu middle-class milieu because the crucial matter of class could only be posited at the polar ends of political space. On the one hand, people were middle class by virtue of how they fashioned their bodies; this made corporeal and mental experiences central to political articulation. On the other hand, there was a characteristically middle-class way of connecting the increasingly alienated living spaces in modernizing cities with the vast expanses of the media universe; this gave self-expressionism its proclivity to flee into the abstract, the global and the meta-historical. What the colonised middle classes were unable to grasp politically was the space between these polar opposites: the world of concrete socioeconomic relations where class is immediately constituted. This inability has been attributed to the continuing dominance of a politics of interest – a system based on patronage networks and communal interest groups, which enabled the colonial state to exercise control over a society that it could not otherwise penetrate. The people of the Urdu middle-class milieu were part and parcel of this grid of power, but not as a class, only as self-interested individuals or as members of pre-political religious, caste or *biradari* communities.

#### **6. CONSUMPTION AND POLITICS: OUTLINES OF A CONNECTION:**

The most explicit and philosophically grounded approach to the politics of naming was to be found in the oeuvre of V.D. Savarkar. His famous pamphlet *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* actually started off with a meditation on the ontological status of names. This was necessary because the recasting of Hindu identity as 'Hindutva' was directly grounded in the belief that the abolition of the European term 'Hinduism' would lead to substantive changes in the nature of the Hindu community itself. Savarkar's reasoning went as follows: The very fact that a thing is indicated by a dozen names in a dozen human tongues disarms the concomitance between sound and the meaning it conveys. Yet, as the association of the word with the thing grows stronger and lasts long, so does the channel which connects the two states of consciousness tend to allow an easy flow of thoughts from one to another, till at last it seems almost impossible to separate them. And when in addition to this, a number of secondary thoughts or feelings that are generally roused by the thing get mystically entwined with the word that signifies it, the name seems to matter as much as the thing itself. . . . there are words which imply an idea in itself extremely complex The Consumption of Politics. This manoeuvre was necessary for Savarkar's entire political enterprise. He had to detach names from things in order to be free to create a new name – 'Hindutva' – that was independent of social structures on the ground; having done this, Savarkar then had to start to assume that there was some 'organic' substance to his neologism in order to give it relevance and solidity.

It would be erroneous to stereotype the Urdu press as supporter of partition or demand for Pakistan. While some supported the views of M.A. Jinnah and Muslim League, others supported the Congress and opposed partition while sturdily advocating better representation and more rights to the Muslims. The Urdu press of 1940s therefore can not be branded as communal or sectarian. It would be worth investigating as to whether the Urdu press fanned the flames of communalism and encouraged separatist tendencies as is generally believed.

## 7. CONCLUSION:

In Pakistan, by contrast, the cause of Urdu further fuelled by the emigration of so many Urdu-speakers to the new Islamic homeland found the most enthusiastic initial welcome. But this keenness to make Urdu the national language of the new country in the same way as Hindus in India were attempting to replace English with Hindi soon foundered on the linguistic realities so conveniently removed from the hurriedly drafted terms of the Radcliffe Commission, which was appointed to draw the partition line exclusively on the basis of communal majorities, district by district. Quite as proud of their premier Bengali culture as their Hindu cousins across the border in West Bengal, the inhabitants of East Pakistan soon made it clear that their accession to a South Asian Islamic state by no means implied their abdication of their Bengali heritage in favour of Urdu.

## REFERENCES:

1. Agrawal, S.P.(editor), Committees and Commissions In India, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2003.
2. Brass, Paul R., *The Production Hindu-Muslim violence in Contemporary India*, University of Washington Press, London, 2003.
3. Daechsel, Markus, *The Politics of Self Expression*, Routledge, London, 2006, p.162.
4. Faruqi, Arthur, *Redefining Urdu Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006.
5. Hasan, Mushirul, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*, Hurst & Company, London, 2003.
6. Maneta, Emily, *Peripheries in Kashmir and Hindi-Urdu*, John Benjamin Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2011.
7. Mujeeb, Mohammad, *The India Muslims*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2003.
8. Naim, C.M., *Urdu Texts and Contexts*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2004.
9. Noorani, A.G., *The Muslims of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.
10. Press in India, Office of the Registrar of Newspapers, Govt. of India, 1999.
11. Qaisrani, Sajid Mansoor, *Urdu Press in India*, Marshal Publications, Islambad, 1990.
12. Shah, Muzzafar, *The Urdu Press in India*, University of California, Berkeley, 1965