

Pakistan's Press and Politics in the First Decade (1947-58): An Analysis in Structural-Functionalist Perspective

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the relations between the press and the governments in Pakistan in the first decade after independence in 1947. The press that faced the toughest of the times in the sub-continent before the partition had to encounter difficult situations of new kind afterward. How did the press react to the repressive actions of the rapidly changing governments in the first decade? And what were the reasons for taking actions against the press in the governments' view? These and many other significant aspects have been undertaken in the preceding lines. Similarly, economy of the country and its effects on the functioning of the press has also been studied with the presumption that an economically weak press is feeble to the actions of the government as compared to the stronger one. How did the press survive and what measures it took for its viability have also been examined in the paper. The society and its role in protecting the press as a social institution have also been focused. Some of the dramatic changes in the societal behaviour have been observed and studied. Besides, what difficulties and problems the press faced in the first decade, which hindered its institutional development process, are analyzed and summarised.

The Pre - Partition Press – A Prologue

The press had the status of non-conformist and was inimical in nature in its relations with the foreign rulers before the partition. The relations with the British regime were not like that appeared after the partition; rather the press performed more sacred duties of acting as an agent for freedom. However, after the partition in 1947, the crusading nature of press-government relations changed to adversarial.

In most of the cases, the editors were also the owners of the newspapers and were deeply involved in politics. Examples include Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who owned and edited many newspapers over the years, Moulana Zafar Ali Khan edited and owned daily *Zamindar* and daily *Comrade*, Moulana Muhammad Ali Johar, Moulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Hasrat

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Mohani and many others edited and owned newspapers, which played a pivotal role in the fight for freedom of Muslims in the sub-continent.

The journalists at that time were deeply involved in politics and were engaged in constant war with the British rulers. 'Politics was their passion, slogan and song'.¹ For them, the life and politics were synonymous and the pen was supposed to be used as 'a crusader for freedom and not as means for creating literary artefacts'.²

In 1937, there were only 32 English dailies and the same number of weeklies, which increased to 51 dailies and 258 weeklies before the eve of partition in 1947.³ Such a drastic increase happened in the circumstances, when the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims appeared to be quite inevitable. The obvious reason for this increase was the effective role of the press that it played in the creation of Pakistan. Nonetheless, it was the time when the press was more volatile due to oppressive actions of the foreign rulers.

This nature of press-government relations developed after the war of independence in 1857. The colonialists started a reign of terror after the war, which resulted in change of nature of press-government relations. Earlier the press was in an embryonic phase and was fighting for the right of free expression. The Charter of Freedom of the Press that was presented by Ram Mohan Roy in 1823 against the government regulation restricting the freedom of the press clearly indicated this nature.⁴

However, the British rulers taking the press as the main instrument of stirring the normalcy introduced stringent regulations to control this fierce social force. As a result of these steps, only 12 Urdu newspapers could survive out of total of 35 before the war.⁵ And, only one newspaper was edited by a Muslim journalist.

Although Hindu newspapers also waged a full-scale war against the rulers; however, the Muslim newspapers were regarded as the fomenters of revolt and its chief beneficiaries.⁶ But this suffrage could not change the press. Rather, it became more object-oriented and violent. Daily *Institute Gazette* of Syed Ahmad Khan carried the motto which read, "To permit the liberty of the press is the part of the Government, to preserve it is the part of the free people".⁷

When the press's criticism of the foreign ruler mounted by end of the first decade of 20th century, the British rule introduced the Press Act 1910 to gag the press. Sir Herbert Risely while introducing the Act said, 'the press proclaimed openly and by suggestions or allusion, that the only cure for the ills of India is independence'.⁸ The printing houses were directed to

obtain fresh declarations under this Act and securities were also required to be deposited. Moreover, the Magistrates were given discretionary powers to exempt any printing house from depositing security.

The Press Act played havoc with the press in the Indian sub-continent. Action was taken against more than 1990 newspapers, out of which 286 were issued warning to mend their behaviour towards the government, security of 705 newspapers was forfeited, and declaration of all new printing houses was cancelled.⁹

All India Muslim League declared the Press Act as 'the most objectionable piece of legislation – a slur on Government'.¹⁰ The press as a whole faced all the odds boldly with the assistance of people. The journalists were sentenced to imprisonment for different reasons for over years and the newspapers had to pay heavy financial costs for their daring stance against the government.

To add ferocity to the Press Act 1910, the government promulgated the Public Safety Ordinance and the Press Ordinance in 1930. These ordinances struck the press hard; consequently it faced the toughest of the times.¹¹ The atrocities of the press did not end here. Defence of India Act, Central Publicity Board, The Press Act 1922, Press Emergency Powers Act 1931, Criminal Law Amendment Act 1932 and many other minor laws were introduced / promulgated to bring the press to its knees.

After the Pakistan Resolution in 1940, there had been many newspapers that played a significant role to oust the alien rulers from the Indian sub-continent. They did not agree to any compromise with the British rulers and never bowed their heads even under hard-pressed circumstances.

From the war of independence in 1857 to the partition in 1947, the government applied all means to gag and control the press. During this time, the press-government relations had not been friendly and pleasant due to their positions on extreme ends on a continuum. The press as a whole went all out to cultivate opinion against the British rulers and it supported all those movements that were meant to oust the foreign rulers from the sub-continent. Although Hindu press equally suffered the reign of terror by the British government; however, the Muslim newspapers were the main targets of the regime. The Muslim press sacrificed their freedom for the cause of larger freedom of the country from the despotic rule of British government.

Analysing the situation of journalism in the Indian sub-continent, it can be said that the press survived even under extreme odds. The press had negligible support from private sector to boost its economy and face the

antagonist government. What appear more logical to comment on are two factors. Firstly, the press had ideological backing. And an ideology provides power.¹² The professional standards of the press were dictated by its ideology on the basis of which it fought with the despotic rulers and survived. The profession of journalism was taken as a mission and not a business to earn money. That earned the press a high degree of respect from the masses.

Secondly, the people and the press had one and the same objective for which they had been fighting since long. That was freedom from the alien rule. The press played up rather functioned for the peoples' objectives. It was the prime reason that daily *Zamindar* was managed to pay Rs.56,500.00 on eleven different occasions as security deposits.¹³

Jinnah and the Press

Stanley Wolpert tributes Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the following words:¹⁴

“Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three.”

Primarily, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a lawyer and a constitutionalist. He had a very clear perception of individual's rights and freedom and especially the freedom of the press. He advocated many cases for preserving the press freedom even without any invitation.¹⁵ He always welcome the criticism and disagreement to his point of view and considered it an education.¹⁶ Jinnah backed his view on individual liberties in the following rights,¹⁷

“I do maintain, and I have drunk deep at the fountains of constitutional law, that a liberty of a man is the dearest thing in the law of any country and it should not be taken away in this fashion”.

His ideas regarding the press freedom and responsibility of the press were highly commendable. He expressed his ideas on many occasions. On one of the occasions when he was addressing the Imperial Legislative Council in 1913, he said,¹⁸

“I believe in criticizing government freely and frankly, but at the same time that it is the duty of every educated man to support the government when the government is right”.

Jinnah vehemently criticized the Press Act 1910. He condemned other laws as well which were introduced to curtail the freedom of press. He

regarded the parliamentarian as clergymen having no right to investigate the activities of the journalists.

When Pakistan came into being, the press was not quite developed. Lahore was the centre of journalistic activities. Besides, some newspapers were being published from Sialkot, Gujranwala and Karachi. In East Pakistan, Dhaka and Chittagong were the main centres of journalism. The main newspapers were *Pakistan Times*, *Civil and Military Gazette*, *Zamindar*, *Inqalab*, *Ehsan*, *Shahbaz*, *Dawn*, *Nawa-e-Waqt*, *Unjam*, *Morning News* and *Jang* after the independence.

The journalists had idea of their power and responsibilities which was realised by Jinnah just before the independence. He said to the Muslim journalists' gathering in March 1947,¹⁹

“You have great power. You can guide or misguide people. You can make or mar the biggest personalities. The power of the press is really great, but you must remember that this power which you are wielding is a trust.... At the same time I expect you to be completely fearless, if I go wrong or for that matter, the League goes wrong in any direction of its policy or programme, I want you to criticize it honestly as its friend, in fact, as one whose heart is beating with the Muslim nation”.

Jinnah took interest in the development of the Muslim press in the Indian sub-continent. Daily *Dawn* and *Manshoor* were published under his supervision. However, he never interfered in the internal affairs of the newspapers, and the fact was admitted by the editors too.²⁰

In his short life as the Governor General of the newborn country, he never deviated from his principles of fair play and free expression. Whenever any newspaper vomited poisonous thoughts through the articles or editorials, he left it on the other newspapers to make the press accountable for its deeds by portraying the true picture.²¹

He was against the laws imposing restrictions on the fundamental human rights and liberties of the individual and the press. His remarkable stand on the subject becomes evident when we read his statement about the law presented before him for signature curtailing the press freedom:²²

“All my life I have been fighting against these black laws, now you expect me to sign it. No, I will put my foot down on it”.

Burgeoning Democracies and the Press

The early death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah was not only appalling for development of the press, but it was also proved disastrous for the

process of democratization in the country. He respected the freedom of expression, while the flip top status was given by his successors who distorted it and took it as an instrument of exploitation. Soon after his death, the press became the target of hate and distrust for the rulers. The law, which was rejected by Jinnah, got singed and appeared as Public Safety Ordinance in October 1948. Khawaja Nazim-ud-Din who replaced Mohammad Ali Jinnah after his death as the Governor General in September 1948 signed the said ordinance. His companion was Liaqat Ali Khan as the Prime Minister who held that position on August 15, 1947.

The Government of Khawaja Nazimuddin

Pakistan was carved out in a desperate urgency. It came into existence with horrible loss of life and property, and the migration of millions of dazed and destitute men, women, and children. The cost was heavy in terms of human suffering. But this is what the Muslims wanted and this is what they achieved - a homeland of their own. They could now worship, practice their religious faith and develop their culture in freedom. Moreover, independence had opened up a bright future for the Muslims, who hoped for a better standard of living, economic development, prosperity and a fuller life.

But it seemed in those early years (1947-58) that the immense sacrifices might have been in vain. For Pakistan had struggled from one major crisis to another, fighting to ward off the problems which threatened the nation. These problems were the rehabilitation of over seven million people who were to be fed, sheltered and made functional for the country, the distribution of assets, the accession of princely states and the water dispute.

When Khawaja Nazimuddin took over control of the government, he had to address all these problems. Although he was a capable politician, but he lacked sufficient foresight to tackle the issues of grave significance of the time. He could not handle the issue of famine scare, which was cultivated by the media and was labelled as 'Quiad-e-Qillat' (leader of scarcity).²³ It happened to be the case when opposition forces in the country started taking advantage of his weak control on the affairs of the state.

Same was the condition for the press. It initiated criticism of the government. Consequently, Central Special Powers Act was employed by the government against daily *Zamindar* of Moulana Zafar Ali Khan.²⁴ The fourteen days ban on its publishing resulted due to its criticism on the

Kashmir policy of the government. The newspaper and its editor / owner were not new to this kind of actions by the government.

It happens in the politically weak regimes that actions against the press are initiated. Primarily, the weak political governments lack courage to face dissent and criticism from any corner. Governor General Khawaja Nazimuddin was also of that nature who did not tolerate dissent voice and had a relatively weak political government.

He excessively used the Public Safety Ordinance against the newspapers that posed threat to his government. Under this ordinance, the government had the discretionary powers to stop publishing of any newspapers without furnishing any reason for its action. Moreover, this ordinance empowered the police to enter and search any newspaper office without any search warrant and the police could take into its custody the publishing material it deemed dangerous for the people. Daily *Safeena* was closed down under this ordinance and no evidence was produced to justifying the action against the press.²⁵

Similar actions were taken against magazines like *Sawaira*, *Naqoosh* and *Adab-e-Latif*. A few newspapers responded against the government's action while many a newspapers praised the action on the pretext that these magazines were publishing unethical material.

The government harassed the journalists to bring them to a track where it had complete control on their activities. Faiz Ahmad Faiz and some other journalists were arrested, fined and securities from their newspapers were demanded for their inappropriate behaviour.²⁶ The chain of arresting the press did not end here, there was a long list of the journalists who were arrested and persecuted on false justifications and were directed to toe to the line of the government.

There had hardly been any newspaper that expressed its conscience and was not persecuted for its deeds. From top to the bottom on the list of journalists, there was hardly any journalist who did not receive at least a warning for his wrong behaviour; provided he went on calling upon his journalistic responsibility. Even the editorial with a name – an example of its own kind, was published to criticize the government of its deeds.

Drawing the boundaries between India and Pakistan resulted in many tragic events. In an almost frantic, cruel hurry the commission divided districts, villages, farmlands, water and property.²⁷ Thousands of innocent men, women and children were caught unaware. The result was that many hastened across the border, leaving their homes, land and personal property to seek refuge. Panic, fear, revenge and reprisals followed. Both

India and Pakistan were soaked in blood. It left on Pakistan's doorstep seven million refugees.

The government of Pakistan faced acute dearth of resources to cater to the problems of refugees. Economic disorder added insults to the injury, instead resolving the problems. Moreover, growing dangers on the borders with India did not help the government to concentrate on the issue of rehabilitation of refugees in the country. History of the world hardly witnessed such a mass exodus of people from one country to the other.

Internal political problems of Provincial Assemblies and grouping in the ministers made the government vulnerable before the press. The situation aggravated up to the extent that the Governor rule was imposed in Sindh to avoid further deterioration of the normalcy in the province.²⁸

The period of Governor General Khawaja Nazimuddin and Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan was a phase of extreme emergencies. It had to address issues of great significance and it was in need of assistance from the institutions of the country. The bureaucracy with the British legacy took these issues very lightly and instead of helping the government in resolving these issues created bureaucratic bottlenecks for the people and the government. The press being cognizant of these problems started criticising the government functionaries. The government was intolerant to the press criticism, so it waged a war against it.

The result of a series of ordinances and Acts the government introduced / promulgated curbing the freedom of the press rather taming it to follow the official line. Due to delicacy of the political and economic problems, the government wanted the press to publicise only "officially certified truths". However, the press had just passed a phase where it was engaged with the foreign rulers. Hence, it did not accept the official line to follow and the result was adversarial relations with the Khawaja Nazimuddin's government.

The Government of Ghulam Mohammad

Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan while addressing a public meeting in Rawalpindi was shot dead on October 16, 1951. It was the second most tragic event since independence in 1947 – the first was the early death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. These tragedies in less than four and half years of birth of the country proved extremely hazardous as a group of three clever people got control of the government.²⁹ These three persons were Ghulam Mohammad, Iskandar Mirza and Choudary Mohammad Ali Bogra.

After the death of Liaqat Ali Khan, an ex-bureaucrat Ghulam Muhammad with the help of bureaucracy managed to become Governor General of Pakistan. Palace intrigues met with triumph. General Iskandar Mirza who was the Secretary of Defence and had strong backing of the army supported Ghulam Mohammad in his attempts to become Governor General. Choudary Mohammad Ali, the then Secretary General, took over the sensitive ministry of Finance. Governor General Khawaja Nazimuddin relinquished the Governor General slot and took over the position of Prime Minister on October 19, 1951.³⁰

Governor General Ghulam Mohammad in a spade to look at the weaknesses of the prime minister dissolved his government on April 17, 1953. This action was taken when an artificial famine situation developed through the press and the press protested against his government claiming him to be the source discontentment in the country.³¹ Nonetheless, his removal from the government resulted in handing over of the country's fate into the hands of bureaucracy.

National Assembly became a powerless institution and it was forced to accept Mohammad Ali Bogra as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. He was earlier working as ambassador to the United States of America and was given the slot of premiership on April 17, 1953. The Governor General became so strong that he selected the federal cabinet.

When the government was completely conquered, the house of Governor General initiated campaign against the press. The Governor General knew the powers of this institution, and he knew too the weaknesses of his government. As it happened in every government that was weak and lacked popular support, this government also introduced and promulgated laws and regulations to control this powerful institution. Public Safety Ordinance 1948 was reactivated; Pakistan Security Act 1952 and Official Secrets Act 1923 were imposed again which were tools of control for the despotic rulers.³²

These Acts were used time and again against the newspapers that did not follow the official line of action. Rather the government officials threatened the newspapers with the use of this law. However, a segment of the press took strict notice of these threatening calls from the government and declared it as usurpation of fundamental rights.³³ Almost all the newspapers had to suffer the atrocities inflicted by the government using these laws, with an exception of a few newspapers, which were used to be the official spokesmen.

The most deplorable aspect of this regime was corrupting the press as an institution. Some of the newspapers were bribed and awarded financial assistance for mumming their words against the government.³⁴ even a few newspapers had national significance and gallantly participated in the Pakistan's movement.

On March 6, 1953, martial law was declared throughout the city of Lahore with the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Major-General Muhammad Azam Khan, as the Chief Administrator of Martial Law. The Lahore Martial Law was the army's biggest exercise yet in the management and application of force in civil affairs. A past master in showmanship, General Azam used this opportunity to the maximum advantage and emerged as the most publicized general of the Pakistan Army.³⁵ With his unbounded energy and force of personality, multiplied manifold by absolute power at his command, he struck much awe in the hearts of civil functionaries: they would simply shudder before him.

Freedom of information and military rule stand opposite to each other. This Martial Law ratified the notion. With the imposition of Martial Law, complete censorship on the press was imposed in the city, which had the bulk of the national and almost the whole of the opposition press.³⁶ Every bit of news and comment that appeared had to go through the military censors and carry the stamp of their approval before publication. The General would allow nothing even remotely critical of martial law to appear in the press.

The Lahore Martial Law, being the first in the country, held newspaper editors in terror and they did not quite know what might incur the wrath of the all-powerful General. The Director Public Relations, Punjab, on the orders of his government, had frequently advanced large amounts of money to certain Lahore newspapers engaged in fanning the agitation.³⁷ He had also given money to individuals taking a prominent part in the movement. Under these circumstances some sections of the public came to believe that the Punjab Government was behind the movement, and that Mr Mumtaz Muhammad Khan Daultana, its Chief Minister, was sponsoring it financially.

The press and the PR agencies played their full part in projecting the image of the military's unflinching efficiency and resourcefulness. Everyone talked of the military as the only institution that could deliver the goods and save the country. The Lahore martial law was at once, an opportunity for the armed forces to test their own ability to do things and a moment for the realization of their basic human failings. Unfortunately, while the opportunity was seized the moment was missed. They let their soldierly

naiveté belittle or dismiss the grim reality of their growing political involvement.

Officers were treated and projected as popular heroes and leaders. Everyday news photographs showed them presiding over public functions, addressing people, touring city areas for on-the-spot surveys, opening new markets and public buildings. The photographs of a hugely smiling and profusely garlanded Chief Martial Law Administrator became an almost daily feature. Nearly all the press reporters and photographers, in due course, came to be known to him by their first name. The popularity that the CMLA had gained was marvellous.

Governor General Ghulam Mohammad and Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra loosened control on the government affairs. The press, on the other hand, became more aggressive in its news contents. The result was a series of actions under the repressive laws and ordinances against the press. Almost 31 newspapers were closed down for different periods, 15 newspapers were closed down for one year, seven newspapers were for six months, while 15 newspapers were asked to deposit securities.³⁸ Similarly, warning notices were issued to numerous papers to mending their behaviour.

The Government of General Iskandar Mirza

In October 1955, Major General Iskandar Mirza and General Ayub Khan forced Ghulam Mohammad to depart from the slot of Governor General. General Iskandar Mirza became the Governor General – as being the third Governor General of Pakistan. After the imposition of first constitution in 1956, Iskandar Mirza took oath as the President of Pakistan.

Interestingly, no prime minister could stay longer with Iskandar Mirza. He changed four prime ministers and that too in almost one year. It was partly because of the tug of war for the slot of premier in the country, and mostly because of the political games played by the President Iskandar Mirza.

The regime of Iskandar Mirza was not much different from his predecessors. He used the same tactics of muzzling the press. Repressive measures to control the sharp edges of the sword were taken, besides controlling the economic conditions of the press through official advertisements, security forfeitures and newsprint control.

Dozens of newspapers were closed down for various span of time. The court of law proved these steps of the government as illegal and acquitted the victimized newspapers from fine and editors from imprisonment.³⁹

The reaction of the press against the illegal and oppressive actions of the governments from 1947 to 1958 was no less than a surprise. The most significant reason for this surprise was its earlier response to the illegal and regressive actions of the colonial rulers. The press knew well how to respond to the illegal acts of the government. Some powerful journalists and proprietors had suffered all odds with no remarkable and qualm of their conscience.

Pakistan Newspapers Editors Conference (PNEC) and Council of Newspapers Editors (CNE) were the main organs of the editors and proprietors. Similarly, the main journalists' body was the Federal Union of Journalists. However, it was dismaying to learn that PNEC and CNE had different objectives to follow and were fallible to the governments. According to the Report of the Press Commission⁴⁰,

“They (PNEC and CNE) did not, however, make any contribution to the cause for which they had come into existence. Both these organizations claimed to represent the editors in general, but in fact they never commanded the allegiance of more than a few editors. One section of the editors tried to dominate and assert its superiority over the other. The inevitable followed. Both these organizations suffered and ended by ceasing to function. It appears that there is greater solidarity among the organizations of working journalists than those of editors”.

The press failed to understand the political situation prevailing in the country. It welcome every ruler and hailed them as liberators. The press and journalists were awarded for their misunderstanding and loyalty to the governments in the shape of heavy official advertisements, huge newsprint quota, free trip abroad, plots either free or at through away prices.⁴¹

The governments were too weak on political fronts and lacked popular support. Bureaucracy and military came in a position to blackmail the political leaders. No aspirant leader was in the government that could prove to be the ray of hope for the people. After the death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan, a big leadership crisis emerged. Political instability prevailed throughout the decade. No Governor General and Prime Minister could stay longer in the government and faced his fate earlier due to palace intrigues. Such political situations resulted in a state where the press had to play its role of criticising the government.

However, the weak political governments never leave such a vacuum for the press. They introduced strict policies to minimize the role of the press. Laws and regulations were introduced to control the jingoistic moves of

the press, and direct and illegal activities like bribing the journalists were also initiated. This resulted in the absence of professionalism in the behaviour of individual journalists. Long practice in such a fashion vanished the chances of its revival and the political scene also did not change. The very nature of the press of fighting for its right of free expression diluted.

Moreover, the institutional norms, which were developed over a long period of time in the fight with colonial rulers, became extinct. The press was divided into many groups. Editors and Owners bodies developed political and economic objectives and were fighting all out without any care for the norms of professionalism of the institution. Individual journalists, with a few exceptions, focused on personal gains and left behind the demands of the profession.

In a nutshell, the appearance of the press as a fighting force that emerged during the colonial regime disappeared in the first decade after the creation of Pakistan. That's why it did not go for any hue and cry when General Ayub Khan imposed Martial Law in the Country in 1958.

Economic Impasses and the Press

Economic productivity is the main predictor of the media stability, media growth, and freedom from government control.⁴² Because, economy is the lifeblood for any organization. Economically independent press can exercise relatively more freedom. Its focus of interest is the market, which feeds it and not the government. The government in that case becomes the focal point of press activities and its major function of guiding and highlighting the government weaknesses for improvement becomes more obvious.

The means of finances available to the press matter in giving it a direction.⁴³ This issue relates to the survival of the press. If the press does not fulfill the demands and desires of its financing agency, it has to face problems in its economy. However, the case of a country goes somewhat different where private sector is extremely weak and is incapable of financing the press.

In the mid of 20th century, the private sector was weak in most of the developing countries. The situation in Pakistan was graver as it had been hit by enormous problems due to the partition. The press had left with only one option of getting its lifeblood and that was the government.

Moreover, the Pakistan's rulers believed that keeping the press under control, and denying access to information, was one of the ways to defend

- and cover up - the country's weaknesses. The most significant method of control was controlling the economic means of the press. And the weak political governments in the first decade took great advantage of this tool.

With only one exception to the Jinnah regime, all the successive governments geared this method of control. Press laws and regulations were used to fine the press with an objective to make it bankrupt on financial ground. If it had not resulted in the disclosure of the newspaper as happened in some cases; however, the use of these laws made the press fragile.

The government provided direct finances to some of the newspapers for their soft corner.⁴⁴ Several newspapers were at the brink of bankruptcy. But the government of the time supported them not for the cause of the press; rather they supported the government point of view and were ready to be used as the mouthpiece of the establishment. Surprisingly, a few newspapers, which never bowed their heads even before the colonial rulers, were on the government payroll. The economic fragility made them so vulnerable.

Before partition, the people (the readers) assisted in depositing the securities that were asked by the government from the newspapers, which were engaged in the fight of freedom. Now, these newspapers lost this avenue of generating finances for their survival and became easy prey for the government.

In September 1954, a Press Commission was established to look into the affairs of the press. This Commission focused more on the economy of the press and recommended certain suggestions to the government.⁴⁵ These recommendations disclosed the weak areas of the press, which were, exploited in future course of work by the successive governments.

Moreover, the official advertisements rested on the government's discretion. Whenever the government felt anything against it in any newspaper, it stopped the advertisements. *Dawn* suffered the thunder when it published a news about the stoppage of official advertisements for the daily *Evening Star*.⁴⁶ Same happened to be the case with *Pakistan Economist*, *Mirror* and *Variety*. Their copies for government offices were also banned which dropped their circulation sufficiently.⁴⁷

Other setback for economy of the press was its low circulation. Due to low literacy and weak country's economy, the newspapers had extremely low share to their economy from the circulation. Other reason for low circulation was slow political process in the country. Although the governments were on rapid change; however, the people were not

involved or instrumental in the change process. Other reason for low circulation could be the lack of investigative reports on the government activities in the newspapers' contents. The press carried the official handouts, press releases and routine news items. For important news and unbiased coverage of the political events, the people relied more on the foreign radio broadcasts. This happened to be tarnishing for the press, as it could not give due portrayal to the political events due to strong official controls.

The most significant question as how did the press face acute economic issues before partition, and why it became so fallible to the governments afterward? Apparently, it seems that before partition the people were with the press and they supported it morally and financially whenever any law or regulation hit it. It (the press) was a mission, which turned to be a commercial activity after partition. The press with a cause died after the independence, while a press with political motives took birth. That's why the governments, which were also weak, targeted the weaknesses of the press. They avoided criticism by imposing restrictions on the press through ordinances, laws and regulations.

Society and the Press

The relationship between the press and the government changed dramatically in the years following independence. Newspapers and reporters, which had tended to be critical of the government and were fighting for independence, became increasingly critical of the governments, officials and institutions in the 1950s. This was partly due to the increased secrecy demanded by the government in its affairs for its escalated weaknesses and to the growing involvement of journalists/owners in the politics. The journalists earlier viewed themselves as watchdogs of the government and of the public interest.

Pakistan appeared on the map of globe as the seventh most populated country. It had a well-defined urban and rural centres in the mid of 20th century. Almost 75 percent of the population dwelled in the rural centres. The class that held powers in the social setup was also well known and distinguished. Feudal, bureaucracy and politicians were forming different groups in the society that were holding the centres of power. Army as the most organized institution had its own standing on every significant affair of the state.

In a social system where social groups are well defined and easily distinguishable, the press cannot remain undisputed. However, in a less differentiated and less distinguished social setup the press does not seem

to be active in overt conflicts.⁴⁸ Former appears to be the case in Pakistan as the press was dragged into conflicts either by the government against the masses who were uneducated or a powerful group used the press against the government. One way or the other, the press had been the main sufferer. To save its skin, the governments in the first decade used the press to play up its policies among the masses and to pose the influential groups in the society that the government was flawless. Defiance of the press to be used as the carrier of the official handouts resulted in the gagged press.

The governments in the first decade attempted the press to highlight the facts that were favourable to them. In such a situation, severe conflict is the natural outcome.⁴⁹ The newspapers were receiving tailored facts and press advices either to play up a news item or its converse. A time came when the newspapers editors used the arithmetic techniques to prepare the newspaper.⁵⁰

The masses were totally ignorant of the prevailing situations between the press and the governments. There had not been any occasion when the people came to rescue the press against the government repressive actions. However, it happened many times in the colonial regime when the people assisted the press in its stand against the foreign rulers. But these were extraordinary circumstances the people and the press had faced.

As mentioned earlier, more than 70 percent of the population had rural base. And it happens in exceptional cases when rural population develops any kind of relationship with the press. Contrarily, increased urbanization tends to increase the media role in the society and makes it accountable for its deeds as well.⁵¹

A surprising picture appears when the situation before and after the independence in 1947 is analyzed. The events before partition indicate that the people were highly politically socialized and were well aware of the political motives of the colonial rulers. But, this high level of political socialization ceased to exist after the partition when the press faced draconian laws and its freedom was sufficiently curbed. What were the reasons of such u-turn change in the behaviour of the masses? The apparent reason seems to be the interlocutor of the press. Earlier, it was a common enemy for the masses as well as for the press – the colonialists. While, the situation afterward appeared to them as an internal affair.

Concluding this discussion, it can be said that the society was under-developed and masses were too ignorant to rescue the press in its struggle to preserving its fundamental right of free expression. Low

literacy and high population concentration in the rural setup did not pose any threat to the governments in order to avoid taking repressive actions against the press.

Conclusion

The press witnessed dramatic change in its relations with the government after the independence. The despotic rule over night changed to the most liberal and democratic one. The press laws and regulations were kept aside and the ruler, the founder of the country, allowed the press to play its role in the nation building process. And it did so, indeed. According to *Comrade*⁵²,

“In the extraordinary quick development of this country, the press had a very big share. It has opened the eyes of the people and taught them to dream dreams. Still more important, it taught them how to realize those dreams. The Muslim papers, both in English and Urdu, have performed their duties nobly, from the *Social Reformer (Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq)* of Sir Syed to the smallest newspapers or magazines”.

Nonetheless, this aura of freedom for the press could not prevail longer. After the death of Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan, the power lusty politicians and colonial relegated bureaucracy played havoc with the press. All those laws and regulations were put in action which were used less excessively even by the colonialists. Regressive actions from all the dimensions were introduced to curb the press freedom tightly.

The political governments did so to avoid criticism of the press and to avoid being exposed to the masses. They are corrupt and lacked political support from the masses, so were scared of the press. The exploitation of evacuee property for massive personal gains was the first instance of widespread corruption in Pakistan. In such circumstances, they were somehow justified to disallow the press to perform its duties.

Suppression of information was an obsession the bureaucracy inherited from its colonial masters, and marking files `TOP SECRET' came naturally to them. On the other hand, the military, as the master of the country, deemed it beneath its dignity to share information with the civilians. Consequently, the press became the victim, as it had to do what the other main players did not like.

Moreover, the press was affected by the acute economic backwardness in the country. The private sector's contribution in boosting the political economy of the press was almost negligible. Taking advantage of the situation, the government attacked from this side and obtained the desired

results – the meek press. The economy not only affected the newspapers, but also helped to make this institution corrupt. The newspapers for their survival accepted bribes and financial assistance from the government in return of extending its support to the government policies and closing eyes on its malpractices. Same was the fate of individual journalists who were corrupted by the government functionaries throughout the decade.

Other significant feature was the lack of support from masses. The society being uneducated and in the absence of a foreign ruler after independence could not realize the delicate issue of curbs on the free expression. Resultantly, no assistance had been seen from the masses for the survival of the press.

Political problems not only affected the economy of the press badly as low foreign investment and less industrialization have been observed in the first decade, but it also tarnished the peoples' image of the newly created country. And combined both the problems – weak polity and economy, affected the press so badly that it could not differentiate between the pre-partition and post partition regimes.

No efforts were exerted to make the press professionally sound and responsible in nature. Observing the political scenario, the political proprietors of the newspapers focused more on mustering power in the social setup instead of improving the standards of journalism. The press bodies' role was no less than remorse. The journalist bodies up to some extent fought for their right of fair play.

The norms of the press that were set in the long war with the colonialists vanished in the first few years. The newspapers fought their war of survival separately after the independence, which reflected the press as segmented units and not as an institution. No objectives were defined collectively at any platform and no code of ethics was defined to self regulate the institution of press. The result was reins of the press in the hands of the government, because the people in the institution were not ready to accept the responsibility of regulating and controlling itself. That's why the recommendations of the Press Commission in 1954 were accepted without any qualm of conscience by the press, which was no less than a Martial Law Regulation. The journalists accepted it because they had a few good points in terms of their pays and emoluments. While, it was extremely hazardous for the press as an institution. The lack of institutional outlook resulted in such a traumatic outcomes.

End Notes

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