

Pakistan movement and role of Muslim Press

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In the era of oppression and suppression, under the tyranny of dictators or failure of political systems, press becomes voice of change. Similarly, the press plays a significant role in the freedom movements. The Pakistan movement was no exception. Muslim press influenced public opinion and mustered support for the movement.

The existence of Muslims Press in the subcontinent, before and after the war of 1857 was rather insignificant. The newspapers like Sho'la-i-Tur, Khair Khwahan-i-Khalq and Akhbarul-Alam were notable for publishing political news and thought-provoking editorials to raise political and national awareness amongst Muslims. Of these publishers, the most influential was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who published revolutionary periodicals like Scientific Society and Tahzibul-Akhlaq. Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq was a monthly magazine which was published on the pattern of the British journal Spectator. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan helped Muslims to adopt new ideas and develop their acceptance for modern education. Initially, Sir Syed's newfangled ideas were not welcomed by common Muslims but gradually penetrated into a limited receptive circle.

Some contemporary newspapers also tried to follow in the footsteps of the Tahzibul-Akhlaq. Agra Akhbar was one of the dauntless newspapers which kindled the fire of freedom. Other newspapers like Khairu'l-Muwaiz, Dabdaba-i-Sikandari and Manshur-i-Muhammadi presented Muslims' point of view.

After Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Abdul Halim Sharar tried to awaken the Muslims out of political lethargy through his journals, Dilgudaz and Ittihad. His distinguished publication was Muhazzab. Abdul Halim Sharar was a staunch advocate of a separate political identity for the Indian Muslims and wanted them to distance from the Congress. In one of the editorials of Muhazzab in 1890, he gave the idea of the division of the sub-continent which, in his opinion, was the only solution to Hindu-Muslim problems. It was the novel idea presented in any Indian press for the first time. The daring journal "Urdu-i-Mu'alla" of Hasrat Mohani always published his revolutionary thoughts against the foreign rulers.

When the World War I started Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar in an editorial in The Comrade, under the caption, "Choice of the Turks", supported the cause of Turkey in the Balkan war. It helped Muslims after 1957 to unite on a common objective. Soon after, The Comrade and its Urdu counterpart Hamdard was declared forfeited to the Government, however later, The Comrade once again started publishing but finally, it was permanently closed. In his farewell message, Maulana Muhammad Ali wrote: "we have lived because we have dared, and we shall still dare, and we shall still live."

The Hamdard also earned a great reputation in the Indian press as a Urdu language journal, but it could not continue for a long time.

Towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century the Hindu newspapers, novels and other writings concentrated Hindu revivalism. Articles on Brahm Samaj and Arya Samaj began to make their way into the mainstream English and Hindi media. These activities of Hindu press forced Muslim press to present counter-narrative of other communities of India, particularly Muslims.

On one occasion when the Hindu press bitterly attacked Dr Sir Muhammad Iqbal for his historic address at the Allahabad Session of the All India Muslim League (AIML), only three Muslim papers namely "Inqilab", "Muslim Outlook" of Lahore and "Hamdam" of Lucknow supported Iqbal's point of view and demanded the establishment of the Muslim state in the North-West India. The Muslim press in the late thirties gave considerable publicity to the various schemes for Partition and paved way for the Lahore Resolution of the All India Muslim League.

There was a marked change from appeasement to resistance in the Muslims' mood henceforth, which could be seen in the Muslim newspapers, confident defiance in the attitude of Bengali Muslims was growing into an open challenge. A revolutionary poem was recited at the Muslim League Conference at Mymensingh in March 1941. This poem was published in the Bengali daily Azad which ignited the Muslim youth to adopt a steadfast position for a new country for Muslims' economic wellbeing. The Muslim



press spread this narrative to the educated Muslim readers who in turn helped Muslim masses to form their own opinion for the Pakistan Movement. Although the British Government tried its best to repress and strangle the Muslim press but it succeeded to establish its prestige and associated itself with the desires and aspirations of the Muslim community.

Realising the importance of the press, after the Lahore Resolution, the Quaid-i-Azam launched a "Create Muslim Press Campaign" and collected funds for the purpose. He founded the "Dawn" in October 1942 as a daily from Delhi and placed it under a trust of which he was the Managing Trustee. The Quaid-i-Azam also started "Manshoor" an Urdu daily from Delhi which was the official organ of the All India Muslim League. This bright and fancy daily was edited by Syed Hasan Riaz. However, this paper could not succeed and had to close down after a couple of years.

In 1947 riots, the mobs burnt the offices and the printing press of "Dawn" in Delhi. As a result it was closed temporarily, only to reappear from Karachi after the creation of Pakistan.

Muslim League had a very strong press support, particularly in Urdu. Delhi had Anjaam, Jang and Manshoor in Urdu, and Dawn in English, Lahore produced Inqilab, Nawa-i-Waqt and Zamindar in Urdu. Earlier, Lucknow had its Hamdam. Calcutta produced Asr-i-Jadid in Urdu, Azad Bengali and Star of India in English. There were many besides these prominent newspapers.

The Muslim press in Delhi was strengthened by the appearance of "Jang" and "Anjam" which in 1947 shifted to Karachi. Both papers supported the Muslim League. One of the most prominent journalists of that era was Mir Khalil-ur-Rehman, who with his newspaper Daily Jang, strongly advocated the Pakistan cause with thought-provoking articles and editorials and coverage of corner meetings of Muslim League all over India.

From Lahore, appeared "Eastern Times" originally sponsored by Ferozsons under the temporary editorship of Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali. He was followed by F K Khan Durrani who had written a number of books on Muslim politics. Though shabby in appearance and deficient in equipment, it did play a significant role in projecting Muslim viewpoint. For a couple of years there existed in Lahore the "New Times" weekly started by Malik Barkat Ali which acted as the mouthpiece of AML.

From Calcutta appeared a daily named "Star of India", first under the editorship of Pothan Joseph and then of Lawrence P Atkison. Owned by Kh Shahabuddin and his family, it did good work in interpreting Muslim politics but was later replaced by "Morning News" jointly owned by Abdur Rahman Siddiqi and Kh Nurrudin, brother of Khwaja Shahabuddin. The Morning News was more vigorous in its approach for Muslim cause and continued publishing till after partition and was later shifted to Dacca, subsequently bringing out an edition from Karachi too. This was and is now edited by Mohsin Ali. It was taken over by NPT in 1963 and consequently closed down in 1993.

Elsewhere a number of weeklies also sprang up. "Star" in Bombay was edited by Aziz Beg. Another weekly of the same name from Allahabad was sponsored by Sir Shifaat Ahmed Khan, "Decean Times" from Madras and "Muslim Voice" from Karachi which was owned and edited by Pir Ali Muhammad Rashdi.

A great problem for the Muslims was that the API and the UPI news agencies were controlled by Hindus. The news of the Muslims were either blacked out or distorted. Therefore, a news agency named Orient Press of India was launched. Though financially weak and under equipped, it did help in circulating news about Muslim politics.

The "Statesman" and the "Civil and Military Gazette" of Lahore realising that the chances for the projection of the Muslim viewpoint were small, initiated special weekly features on Muslim politics.

Under private enterprise, quite a number of Urdu papers also came in the field. Among these was "Ehsan" edited by Maulana Murtaza Ahmed Khan Maikash and Chiragh Hasan Hasrat. Appearing from Lahore, it was the first paper to install a teleprinter and courageously worked as a mouthpiece of AIML. Later the two editors resigned and established "Shahbaz" a new daily from Lahore which was a much better specimen of journalism than Ehsan. Maulana Maikash was an editorial writer of repute and was considered the best after Maulana Ghulam Rasul Mehr.

From Calcutta appeared "Azad" in Bengali under the editorship of Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan who had served as



He remained the Chief Editor till 1968 when he died at the age of 100 years. This paper shifted to Dacca in 1948 and had the largest circulation among Bengali papers in the former East Pakistan.

“Millat” appeared from Peshawar under the editorship of Rashid Akhtar Nadvi and “Tanzeem” from Quetta with Nasim Hijazi as editor. Though, ill equipped, these papers played a significant role in countering Congress propaganda in areas where its influence was great. Several other papers were started from other cities of the sub-continent.

Another important addition to the Muslim Press was “Nawa-i-Waqt” of Lahore that appeared as a daily in July 1944 with Hamid Nizami and Hamid Mahmud as the co-founders. Earlier, it appeared as fortnightly with Shabbar Hasan as editor in 1940. The paper was technically sound and courageously supported the Pakistan Movement.

In February 1947, “Pakistan Times” appeared from Lahore under the aegis of the PPL with Mian Iftikharuddin holding a majority of shares. Its first editor was Desmond Young, formerly of the Statesman who was followed by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. This fully equipped paper was at par with the Civil and Military Gazette. Its role during the Civil Disobedience Movement was notable.

Some underground papers were also started in Lahore when the Khizar Cabinet had banned publication of the news of Civil Disobedience Movement. These papers were cyclostyled and distributed on a large scale. Side by side with the papers like “Jang”, “Zamindar”, “Inqilab”, “Asr-i-Jadid”, “Khilaafat” and others, the Muslim press made its best efforts in mobilising opinion and energies of the Indian Muslims in support of the Pakistan Movement.