

## **HINDU, MUSLIM AND SIKH PRESS IN THE PUNJAB**

**(1900 TO 1919)**

**Attar Singh**

**Assistant Professor of History,**

**Ch. Bansi Lal Govt.College, Loharu (Bhiwani) Haryana**

The latter decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century created proper atmosphere for the rise of educated middle class in the Punjab. Teaching, law, journalism, medicine, engineering, etc. became new professions of the Punjabi elite. Many educated Punjabis adopted journalism as profession in order to serve the nation, province, class and in several cases communal interests. Press as an agency was deemed a significant channel for presenting viewpoints opinions from tradition to modernity. Many papers expressed their view points in quite broader way on the rapid change in socio-cultural milieu. Moreover, the rise of socio-religious movements paved way for better understanding of different aspects of national life.

The press in India became an important media for the struggle between British imperialism and Indian nationalism. It acted by and large as a vehicle of struggle between rival communities and paid attention towards such tensions which were growing within a community. Since the emergence of the provincial and national organizations, it emerged as potential force in national life. As far as the newspapers and journals were concerned, these 'were either sectarian or the mouthpiece of various classes of cliques' of the educated elite in the region under study. Only a handful of papers were there in the province which were printed in English. There were 101 papers-weekly, bi-weekly, daily and monthly – published in English, Urdu, Hindi, Gurumukhi, Persian, Sindhi etc. in 1899.

There were basically three categories or papers in the province. First category belonged to those papers which supported the Congress and nationalist view point. Such papers were owned both by the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh journalists who deemed nationalist thinking utmost in their minds. Second category of papers consisted more prominently of such Muslims who had either been supporting Syed Ahmed Khan or the government views. The tone of such papers became more violent when Syed Ahmed Khan started criticizing the aims and objects of the Congress in 1887-88. The third type of papers were those which rarely discussed the politics but laid more emphasis on social, religious, cultural and other aspects of general nature.

The communication and print media in the province consisted of the paper of many languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, English and in several cases Sindhi, Arabic and Persian languages. If we analyse the tone of the papers, it can fairly be said that the press reflected a high degree of

communal orientation by the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian missionaries. The number of Urdu papers has the highest as compared to other papers. Urdu had basically become a common lingua-franca of the province after the Dispatch of Sir Charles Wood, 1854. This Despatch provided enough opportunity for the growth of Vernacular languages which primarily became medium of instructions upto higher secondary level.

Then communal trend as discussed above was shown by 76 papers in the Punjab in 19<sup>th</sup> century. American historians N.G. Barrier and Paul Wallace have produced a list of newspapers of the Punjab in a monograph. Second important source of information is the Report on the Native Newspapers and Journals of the Punjab province which continued to publish a list of papers every year in the content of the volumes. According to these sources, there were 15 Islamic related newspapers which favored Muslim organizations. Around 30 papers were primarily inclined towards various Samaj organizations. There were 10 papers which expressed Sikh views in the province. Around 20 papers continued to show interests in different caste organizations. Three papers supported the cause of princely states of the Punjab.

There were limited number of papers in the last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century but within 20 years (1880-1900) there was an immense increase. According to the Reports of Punjab Native Newspapers, this increase was five times i.e. from 24 to 116 in 1900. The largest number of papers were in Urdu whose percentage was around 81.86%. The medium of public instruction preferred by the students from the primary to secondary education was Urdu. This language was prevalent in Government offices, courts, and other public concerned institutions. The following table shows the percentage of different papers in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century Punjab.

Survey of the Indian society in the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century shows that the Indians were greatly concerned with the newly emerging trends in the traditional Hindu-Muslim frame works of the society. First and foremost was the distinction created by the Punjabi elite; second by the rise of new socio-religious movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Anjumans which were primarily responsible for generating a good deal of heat in the Indian society resulting into the lost of earlier cohesion. The third was the notion of incapability of social good conduct among the low-born Indians. Such causes did create a great animosity in the society and the Britishers were chiefly responsible for such distinctions which ultimately led to the division of the country.

It would be now pertinent to discuss the nationalist Hindu press in the Punjab. There were many well known Hindus who had powerful pen at their disposal. Pt. Gopinath and Govind Sahai, sons of Pt. Mukand Ram, were quite popular in the field of journalism. Their newspaper Akhbar-i-Am was a nationalist paper and chiefly sympathized with the aims and objects of the Indian National Congress. This paper attacked both the foreign and internal policies of the Indian Government. This

paper was famous for its scurrilous writings. Its editor Gopinath was fined Rs. 600 under section 153 A and 292 of Indian Penal Code for such inflammatory writings.

There were several other papers owned by the Hindus. Prominent among were the Mitra Vilas (Lahore), Kohinoor (Lahore), Taj-ul-Akhbar (Rawalpindi), Punjab Samachar (Lahore), Rifa-i-Am (Sialkot), Khair Andesh (Ambala), The Tribune (Lahore) etc. The tone of all these papers was nationalist and gave full publicity to the Indian National Congress. Though the anti-Congress papers opposed the national movement yet they gave all the details pertaining to its activities. It is true that the tone of the pro-Congress papers was different than those which were in the opposite camp.

The Akhbar-i-Am which was started in 1880 was a cheaper paper and had a large circulation in the province. It had 2500 daily circulations while its weekly annual subscription was two and half rupees. It discussed all aspects impartially and allowed quite short and cryptic editorial comments. It exercised considerable influence on the public. This paper condemned the conduct of the Muslims of Lucknow who had petitioned the local government that the Congress should not be allowed to hold its annual session at Lucknow in 1899. The paper warned the Muslims and further wrote: "Such useless efforts cannot injure Congress movement. It is a body of educated and honest political reformers who are endeavoring to ameliorate the condition of this country under the benign rule of British Government."

Some of the nationalist papers were sorry to remark that there was 'no enthusiasm in the Congress' because government did not consider its demands embodied in its resolutions. The sessions of the Congress held every year in the last week of December when the Congressmen used to be active temporarily. The Congressmen collected money to meet its expenses. It spent 60,000 rupees every year but 'no permanent effect was produced.' Some Hindu and Muslim papers made feasible efforts to unite both the communities. Akhbar-i-Am, Rifa-i-Am, Khair Andesh, Kohinoor, Punjab Samachar, Paise Akhbar, Mulla-Do-Piazza, Rafiq-i-Hind, Punjab Punch, Wafadar etc., endeavoured to constitute a United public opinion in order to get the demands conceded by the British Government. Many papers praised the Muslim rulers and criticised those European writers for denouncing them. Akhbar-i-Am praised Turkey for giving shelter to the Jews who were ousted by Russia. This paper preferred Muslim rule since even Aurangzeb did not expel the people of different religion. Even in Persia not a single Yazdi was expelled from the country by the Persians. But the Christian governments did the opposite and adapted revengeful and blood-thirsty policies. Though the Muslim rulers wasted enough amount of money on several expeditions yet the country remained prosperous because the wealth of nation was not drained off to outside the boundaries. In spite of the exclusion of the Hindus from the governmental jobs, the money earned by the Muslims continued to form a part of India's wealth.

Akhbar-i-Am criticized those newspapers and journals which created hostility between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Criticising the stand taken by such papers, it wrote that all such papers should bear in mind that it was the Mahammadans who were ungrateful as Muslims oppressed to the Hindus very much. The journalism of this kind was treated as a shameful journalism. Another Hindu owned paper Taj-ul-Akhbar whose editor was Jiwan Ram published a communication in which he complained that certain vernacular papers had begun to show the seed of discord between the two prominent communities inhabiting India. Such news papers should refrain from pouring oil on the flame. The same cautioned that 'if these papers continue to pursue their present policy, they are certain to cause a general conflagration which will reduce the country to ashes.'

Akhbar-i-Am which was the brain child of Pt. Mukand Ram, a Kashmiri Pandit and a good Hindi scholar, became a very influential paper in a short period due to its nationalist approach. Mitra Vilas and People's Journal were two other Hindi and English Weeklies published by him. Gopi Nath son of Mukand Ram ably conducted the paper and prominently focused on political and general news. This paper bitterly criticized the policies of the government for not paying much attention to the prayers of the Congressmen. This was true to a certain extent. It firmly believed in the Unity and patience which ultimately would pay a lot in the last. It continued to advise the Congressmen: "A patient is never anxious to swallow a bitter pill but he cannot get well unless he does so. Can the doctor open the patient's mouth and trust the pill down his throat, the result was certain to be satisfactory. It is true that in the case of the Congress the patient is a great paramount power. There is, however, no doubt that if the people combine in laying their grievances before it, they will assuredly gain their end one day."

The prominent Hindu papers were staunchly committed to the propaganda work of the Indian National Congress since its foundation. When some papers started criticizing the demands of the Congress, Hindu-owned press did not like the attitude of such papers as the National Congress aimed at bringing about the prosperity of the country, establishing feelings of patriotism and philanthropy among the Indians and strengthening the friendly relations between the rulers and the ruled. The Akhbar-i-Am also concentrated to the three objects of the Congress: "To acquaint government with the measures to be adopted for correcting the defects in the administration of the country; to try to infuse a national spirit in the hearts of the natives by ties of sympathy and union; to strengthen the relations of friendship and affection between the rulers and the ruled."

The Congress had partially succeeded in attaining these objects and exhorted the people to join the movement. Hindu-owned press of the province gave full coverage to the proceedings of the Congress held every year at different places. The Congress leaders deserved for their sincerity and singleness of purpose and marked the increase in its membership every year. It became the grand assembly. Many papers expected that if the Congress were to forego one or two of its demands out of

consideration for the Muhammadans who were not without their political grievances, it would attain a far greater measure of success than it otherwise could.

With the advance of the public opinion, Indian press began to gain influence and strength. The Indians living in different parts of the country started working together for the common purposes and concentrating their thoughts, ideas and activities to a common focus for the attainment of the political rights and privilege. The nationalist press all the time and throughout the country kept on urging the people to unite under a common good and common destiny. The defects and uses of the press are well described by a Congressmen in the following lines: "It is not contended that a section of this press was not altogether amendable to the charge so often leveled against it, that it was as inefficient as it was ill-informed and injudicious; but it can hardly be denied that on the whole the much-abused Indian Press acted not only as a powerful adjunct towards popular education, but might have with a little more sympathetic treatment been easily turned into a useful guide to a more popular administration."

The Anglo-Indian press was by and large growing jealous towards the nationalist press. During this period, a clear distinction between these two sections of the Indian press was taking place. The nationalist press of the Punjab communicated the news of the rise and growth of the nationalist struggle to the Punjabi public. This landmark in the change of attitude can be found in these newspapers of the Punjab. The Punjab Punch, Wafadar, Taj-ul-Akhbar, Vakil, Har Dil Aziz, Akhbar-i-Am, Khair Khwaha-i-Kashmir etc. advised that both the Hindu and Muslim communities should live together with amity and understand the sensibilities of each other. When both the communities were destined to live together and had infact lived peacefully for many centuries, the folly of falling out for petty reasons was pointed out by a number of papers which warned people that it would lead to misery to the country as a whole.

The government held the bait of patronage to those papers which would support its administration. Many Governor-Generals including provincial governors attempted to purchaser a number of its copies on the condition that all articles would be submitted for perusal before their publication. Many editors bargained with the government in order to get advertisement in return for its loyal tone. The journalists of nationalist papers paid no attention towards such greed of the government. Though there were several papers which supported officials' view point yet the provincial government patronized the Haftewar (Lahore) and Punjab Patriot (Lahore) by purchasing a large number of their copies. The Punjabi-press not only felt this but protested against the favour given to those papers. Many editors formed an Association of Vernacular editors of Punjab

In the conclusion, it can be observed that the Britishers did not find the union of the Hindus and Muslims safe for their imperial interests in the country. After writing a book, Indian Mussalimans, by W.W. Hunter in 1876, the attitude of the Britishers began to change towards the Muslims. In spite of

the fissiparous tendencies of the government officials, journalism in Punjab emerged a distinct instrument of forces of modernization solely emerged from Western liberal thought. This media not only acted as a watch-dog but forcefully put forth the genuine demands of the Indian people before the rulers. It not only created the feelings of nationalism but also taught the political leaders to fight constitutionally. It covered almost all the issues of social economic, religious and political relevance in its columns. The nationalist papers owned by the people of any community rendered very valuable services to the cause of India's freedom struggle. But the communal paper vitiated the socio-religious atmosphere in the province as well in other parts of the country. Almost all aspects of Indian politics were properly discussed at length by the Punjabi press. Moreover, sincerely reflecting the plurality of the Punjabi society, the press carried a variety of reactions to these different problems. But it contributed a lot than merely reflecting reactions. It is quite relevant to observe that without the emergence of political organizations, public opinion such crystallisation would scarcely have been possible. But these political organizations could not have been formidable forces without the advantage of influential mass medium which the journalism provided them. That is how the Indian press and the Indian political development had a mutually causal relationship.

### **References:-**

1. Imperial Gazetteer of India (Punjab) Vol. XX, p. 374.
2. See Reports on Native Newspapers, Punjab Province from 1890 to 1919.
3. Surendranath Banerjea deemed journalism as an important service to the cause of nation. When he visited different cities and towns of northern India in 1877, 1881, he persuaded leaders of public opinion to start papers in order to awaken other Punjabi-elite took to journalism as a profession.
4. Singh, Mohinder (ed.) History and Culture of Punjab (Delhi 1988) p. 151.
5. Mazumdar, A.C., Indian National Evolution (Madras 1917) p. 39.
6. Taj-ul-Akhbar (Rawalpindi) August 15, 1896, Reports, PNN, September 1896
7. Davis, Emmett, Press and Politics in British Western Punjab, 1836-1947, p. 85.
8. Narain, Prem, Press and Politics in India. 1885-1905 (Delhi 1970), p. 84.
9. Hard Dil Aziz (Dera Ismail Khan) March 5, 1899; Akhbar-i-Am(Lahore) March 30, 1899, Reports PNN, March 1899.
10. Rahbar-i-Hind, July 15, 1895; Reports PNN, July 1895.
11. The Tribune, August 3, 1901.
12. George Hamilton to Curzon, London, September 19, 1901; Curzon Papers.