

*Original Research Article*

**JOURNALISM IN BRITISH ERA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE  
INDIAN SPECTATOR (1884-1885)**

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**Abstract:**

*Rise of British Period in India was an outcome of Political disunity among Indian states. Lack of economic sufficiency, social distinctions and rivalry, faith in out dated practices and non-availability of scientific and rational approach were the other factors lead to establishment of foreign rule in the country. Initially British traders and administrators of the British East India Company carefully expanded their field of activities. Early Governors like William Bentinck, Thomas Munro, Mount Stuart Elphinstone tried to secure support of locals and extended the rule. They realised the need of spread of education, scientific approach and train people to run administration. Therefore English education is introduced, Press is started to form and educate public opinion which will be helpful for them to consolidate the rule. In course of time Indians enlightened with the new scientific education and new language and literature started writing. Establishment of various press houses at Calcutta and publication of newspapers mostly weekly's in English and later in Persian and Bengali brought the freedom of expression forefront. Several Newspapers started coming up in Bombay... next to Bengal. Along with British Parsi and Hindu publications emerged and started publishing papers in Gujarati, Marathi and English. Indian Spectator was one well known weekly started publishing from 1880 and rose to prominence shortly. It has initiated social awakening along with political in Bombay and other parts of the country. Mr. Behramji M. Malabari an editor of The Indian Spectator raised the prominent issue of Child marriage and wanted to bring reform in the same by passing of legislation. He used Spectator as a medium to create awakening among the masses. This paper is an attempt to show how journalism, introduced by the British proved successful in social and political awakening.*

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**Introduction**

British Rule in India brought many new trends in political, economic & socio-cultural life of Indians. New administrative structure and uniform law code brought the unification of the politically scattered Indian regions. New economic policies gave rise to new industries and new revenue systems. Similarly advent of English education and Press gave rise to new activities like learning English language and literature. The expression of new ideas started coming through new writings by Indians in English as well as in vernaculars. Rabindranath Tagore, R.C. Dutta, Ramkrishna Pillai and Raja Ram Mohan Roy started writing in English on various issues.

Newspaper writing was a prominent form of expressions of English educated Indians in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. James Hickey in his 'The Bengal Gazette' (1780) started describing and criticising the policies of British Government. 'Calcutta Chronicle' (1786), 'Madras Courier' (1788), 'Bombay Herald' (1789) and 'Bombay Gazette' (1791) were

the other newspapers started in two other presidencies. The 'Bengal Journal' (1795) and 'The Telegraph' (1796) were other popular papers, most of them were weekly papers. Vernacular newspapers like 'Vangal Gazette' by Gangadhar Bhattacharya, 'Digdarshan' a monthly by Serampore missionaries in 1818. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's 'Sambad Kaumudi' (1821) in Bengali and Mirat-ul-Akhbar (1823) in Persian, 'Samachar Chandrika' and 'Tatvabodhini Patrika' were the other prominent Bengali papers started by men like Devendranath Tagore. Journalism started taking roots in India.

Bombay Presidency was next to Bengal to initiate English education and Press, 'Bombay Samachar' and 'Jam-E-Jamshed' in 1830 and 1831 were the pioneers. 'Rast Gofar' by Dadabhai Naoroji was another Gujarati paper started in 1851. Along with Gujarati, Marathi journalism step in with 'Mumbai Darpan' by Balshastri Jambhekar in 1832. This was the beginning of new era of imparting information with analysis of current scenario. 'Prabhakar' and 'Dhumketu' of Bhau Mahajan played a pivotal role in creating public opinion in Maharashtrian intelligentsia. Tilak, Agarkar, Chiplunkar, Phule were the stalwarts who used journalism as an instrument to give support to socio-economic reforms and thereafter to the rise of nationalism. Similar newspapers in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Telugu, Tamil etc. were started. Indian journalism started flourishing during these days. Passing of 'Licensing Act' (1857), 'Press and Registration of Book Act' (1867), Vernacular Press Act (1878) were some efforts on the part of British Government to control the expressions and activities of Indian press.

Second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century was an eventful period. After the Revolt of 1857, universities were set up in Calcutta, Bombay & Madras presidencies. Various political and socio-religious reform organisations were established in different parts of the country. The Indian National Congress and Indian National Social Conference were founded with pertinent objectives and methodology to work. Rise of economic nationalism and aggressive nationalism gave impetus to movements against the British Government. Famine and epidemics added to the miseries and of exploitation of people. Amidst the chaos social reform movement was progressing ahead. The debate of whether the social reform precede to political movement was going on. The nationalists like Tilak and his followers were of the opinion that priority is to be given to political movement, social evils can be rectified after attainment of independence. Reformers like Agarkar were of the opinion that it is important to educate the masses first by introducing reforms, then only they may unite for the freedom movement. The city of Bombay and Pune were the hubs of socio-religious reform movements and political activities. They were also the centres of learning, and rising number of middle-class people gave rise to intelligentsia and their active participation in British rule.

Parsees form major part of intellectual and economic activities in Bombay and Pune. Parsee philanthropist donated for educational institutions, orphanages, hospitals and run several newspapers Behramji Merwanji Malabari, a Parsee journalist was one among them. In last two decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, he worked as an editor of two weekly English newspapers 'The Indian Spectator' and 'Voice of India'. He also started a monthly publication (Magazine) in 1901 with the name 'East and West'. This paper is an attempt to analyse the contribution of 'The Indian Spectator' during the most crucial years of 1884 and 1885 when the Indian National Congress was founded and Behramji M. Malabari himself became a part of social reform movement along with journalism to eliminate the social evil of child marriage and widowhood attached to it. According to him there should be Age of Consent for consummation of marriage. Early marriages and early consummation leads to premature pregnancy, death of a girl mother and birth of very weak off springs. This custom hampers the physical and mental growth of girls which in turn hampers the social progress. Malabari wanted to create public opinion on this issue by putting before the people various cases taking place in the country. Newspaper becomes the medium of this interaction; credit goes to rise and growth of printing press during British period. The original issues of 'The Indian Spectators' were used as a primary source to describe the work of

a Malabari in initiating important social reform and role of Indian Spectator in creating political awareness among the people at the same time.

#### ‘THE INDIAN SPECTATOR’

The above mentioned weekly started in 1880 and was very difficult to run financially but with the help of Mr. Cowasji Jehangir it has continued. But within few years it was among the well-known newspaper in the town as well as in the presidency. The editor Mr. Malabari was alert about the happenings in India and abroad. Its price was four annas per issue and annual subscription was Rs.10. Paper was of total 20 pages contained many advertisements. London News, News from Kathiyawar, Notes from Madras, Stray thoughts from Bengal,

Editorial Notes and Editorial article were the parts of paper. London Times in 1882 wrote “A considerable portion of the English Press of India is written by natives; and many of these so called Anglo-Native papers are written with great ability and in excellent idiomatic English. Such are the Indian Spectator of Bombay, the Hindu Patriot and the Indian Mirror of Calcutta”<sup>1</sup>

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The issue of 13<sup>th</sup> January 2 published a note on the sad demise of Keshab Chandra Sen is given. He writes about the contribution of Mr. K. C. Sen in the work of Brahma Samaj & social reform attached to it. This issue also discusses about the Ilbert bill & how various papers reacted to the bill. Exposition of ideas in support to British view and opposition from Indians is noticeable in this issue.

Similarly, the issue of 27<sup>th</sup> January 1884 3 gave coverage on ‘Bombay local self-government bill & also information on the state of Hyderabad & rule of Nizams. The versatility of the paper is in treating various subjects as per the need of the day. The issue of February 1884 4 writes on Personal Hygiene & effects of smoking on health. The issue of 9<sup>th</sup> March 5 gives detailed information on Railways and the need of its extension. An open letter to the Nawab of Hyderabad, Salar Jung, was published, in which an appeal was made to issue economic reforms in the state. The issue of 13<sup>th</sup> April 1884 gives various local news, including the review of a book published by Pandita Ramabai on ‘Stree Dharma Niti’. Views of Mary Carpenter regarding social reform were published 6. A detailed article on the conditions of Czarist Russia was also published.

The issues of 18<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> May 1884 gives information on India’s foreign trade along with the statistics which show the rising trade activity, in contrast of the lesser returns given to India. The issue of 8<sup>th</sup> June 1884 discussed about the raising the threshold for the age of candidates who wish to appear for Civil Services Examinations. The question raised was why the age limit in Cyclone was 24 when it was 19 in India.<sup>7</sup> The issue of 10<sup>th</sup> August 1884 has descriptive articles on underground telephone wires in the city of Bombay where 34,000 people reside in every square mile. An example of the city of Paris & Berlin is provided. <sup>8</sup> This shows the awareness of the editor with respect to world affairs. The news about translation of Max Muller’s lectures on Indian Religion & Culture in 8 Indian languages is also published. There is also a mention of Mr. Govind Vasudev Kanitkar being responsible for the translation of these lectures to Marathi. With these mentions, Mr. Malabari attempts to put the actual interpretation of religious ideas given in the Shastras forth in front of people.

The issue of 31<sup>st</sup> August 1884 states the opinions of people on Malabari’s notes on ‘Infant marriage and enforced widowhood’ he circulated on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1884. Through an article titled ‘The Problem Explained’ published in the issue of 7<sup>th</sup> September 1884, Malabari explains the nature of the system of child marriage in its various forms across Rajputana, Gujarat, Bengal & Maharashtra and how the solutions mentioned in his notes can be helpful irrespective of the diversity in the systems. He strongly objected the unequal marriage pattern where there was a vast age difference between the groom and the bride as this pattern increased the possibility of early widowhood. <sup>9</sup>

In the issue of 14<sup>th</sup> September 1884, Malabari again writes about the problems faced by the girl wives in case of ill-sorted marriages where husbands were so cruel that they felt scared for their lives. In an attempt to curtail this practice Malabari even urged the Government to impose a tax on child marriage as found in the issue of 21<sup>st</sup> September 1884. In the issue of the Indian Spectator published on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1884, an article titled 'The East and West' describes the criticism by another newspaper titled 'The Reis and Rayyet' which states there are hardly some instances of child marriages in India most of them are just 'betrothals' that is fixing only. While comparing the marriages taking place in Europe and America he says "Europe lives in the present, with an eye on future, at the same time remaining true to her past traditions. India on the contrary lives only in the past and even therein she is not true to her best tradition." This wider perspective provokes people to think about the existence of out dated and evil customs. In one of his articles published on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1884 he openly explains that caste differences hamper the reform movement. Malabari passionately explains his idea behind demanding legislative action against the social evils like child marriage and problem of widow remarriage. Unequal marriages are equally hazardous for social health.

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The months after revised publication of Malabari's 'Notes' in October 1884 large scale discussions were floated through- out the country in support and in opposition of the Infant marriages and problem and statistics of child some time virgin widows. The Indian Spectator of 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1885 published views of senior British official Mr. Allen Hume in this regard.<sup>11</sup> For him the solution of many problems of the country like of social, political and economic development it is required that people should get education first , try to understand the nature of polity, society and then involve in struggle for social justice or national liberation. There were several responses from the country on Hume's writings which suggested people to get education first than the reforms. Issue of 15<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1885 has published the article with the title 'Save the widow' which states that it is also important to make laws for the safety of widows just like for the married women. Indian Penal Code should take care of the same.

Issue of 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1885 contains a review of the book written by Mr. Dosabhai Framji on 'The History of Parsis'. This issue also contains the write up of Malabari titled 'Society and the State' says about the plight of Hindu widows as described by Mr. Raghunath Rao. He stated seven proposals which are absolutely necessary for ameliorating the conditions of widows, 1. Marriage is optional 2. Marriageable age for the male is from sixteenth year. 3. Marriageable age for females is from her eleventh year. 4. In the case of a girl widowed before sexual intercourse, the bride may be legally married to another, with Vedic rites; and, without them, if she be a non -virgin. 5. Their children are legitimate 6. Virgin widowed, whether re-married or not, have no lien on their first husband's estate as they do not belong to his Gotra. 7. Widows who have come into possession of their husbands' estate shall forfeit it, and it shall pass on to the next heirs, if they are proved to have had sexual intercourse during their widow hood. <sup>12</sup> These were the demands and provisions already mentioned in 1856 Act but people tend to forget things which are not of their own benefit. Here Malabari's work and his genuine efforts strongly advocated the reform. The issues of Spectator on 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1885 focused on Military Policy of British Government and dacoits' taking place in Pune and Thane Districts.

In the issues of May 1885 there were continuous discussion and opinions were published in other news papers like 'The Pioneer', 'Amrit Bazar Patrika' 'The Indian Union', Times of India' and many others. Public opinion was began to form. An article with title, "A Hindu Lady and Her Woes" has been published in the Spectator dated 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1885 published the opinions of Rukhmabai about the custom of early marriage practised in India. <sup>13</sup> Several articles in issues of September, 1885 on Railways in India and Indian Administration were published to show the other side of the British administrators, it was the work of creating political awareness. Also the opinions expressed

by Indians without mentioning their names were published. In the issue of 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1885 readers got the opportunity to read a series of articles on Indian Patriots started with Dadabhai Naoroji 14 and continued in consistent issues. The Indian Spectator dated 22<sup>nd</sup> November has published one article titled ‘Social reform in India- ways and means’. It talks about the rising hand for help in reforming the evils. Malabari received support in Punjab to a large extent in his campaign of social reform and accordingly resolutions have been passed by many associations and Sabhas there.

### **Conclusion**

The overall environment in 19<sup>th</sup> century was of support to the reforms. Karachi Letters a series added during these years this shows the national level circulation of the paper. Local news, News related to Parsis, activities in the city of Bombay, Governor’s decisions were covered in Editorial Notes of ‘The Indian Spectator’. The worldwide happenings, News from University of Bombay, Book reviews were also published for several times. These were some unique features of Indian Spectator. British period witnessed the rise and growth of social awareness, knowledge of economic problems among the natives and analysis of political systems by the media like press started. Importance of liberty and Democracy began to emerge Press was thus a major source of information to the newly rising English educated intelligentsia.

### **Notes**

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The Indian Spectator dated 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1884, Vol. IV pg.no.288-289

The Indian Spectator dated 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1884, Vol. IV Page no. 453

The Indian Spectator dated 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1884, Vol. IV Page no.628

The Indian Spectator dated 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1884, Vol. IV Page no.708

The Indian Spectator dated 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1884, Vol. IV Page no.748

The Indian Spectator dated 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1885, Vol. V Page no.94

The Indian Spectator dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 1885, Vol V/9 page no. 171

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