

PRESS-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS IN THE SUBCONTINENT UNDER THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

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Abstract

This paper briefly reviews press-government relations during the East India Company's Rule (1600-1857) in South Asia. The paper begins with a short background on the beginning of the press in pre-colonial India. It examines the nature and evolution of the press during the Company's Raj and its relations with successive viceroys and other colonial rulers. The paper also reviews tactics of the colonial rulers to suppress the vernacular press. Under the authoritarian concept of the press and sociological perspective of conflict theory a historical descriptive, and analytical approach has been adopted in this paper to review relevant literature and derive conclusions. The analysis revealed that the press in the subcontinent emerged owing to Britain's colonial ambitions to collect information about rival powers, Christian preachers, and dissenting employees Company. The last was the prime reason that led to an adversarial relationship between the press and the regime in India from the very beginning. Initial press criticism of the regime was justifiable but also very scandalous. The Muslim press was mainly targeted on the eve of the 1857's War of Independence. Regime's ties with a few newspapers also remained cordial as some leaflets even supported the suppression of the native people and the press in 1857.

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Some anti-press laws, i.e., the Censorship of Press Act (1799), the Licensing Act (1823), the Press Act (1835), and the most draconian law, the Gagging Act (1857) were also enforced during the Company's regime.

Keywords: The company, authoritarian theory, conflict theory, sociological framework.

Introduction

As a practical process, academic discussion, and mega research activity, the sub-area of the press-government relations is a vital, influencing, hotly debated, and an extremely complex sector in political communication inside the broader field of mass communication. Both the government and the press (nowadays the media) are the two key, very dynamic, mutually interdependent, but adversarial organs of the modern-day state. The press is mainly dependent on the government's advertisement money for its survival and news about various sectors of the government and its day-to-day activities to fill the space. Similarly, the government is reliant on the press to showcase its functioning and propagate its political agenda before the masses.¹ This relationship develops interdependency. The most important role of the press is to perform its watchdog role to protect the fundamental rights of the people, to check the government not to misuse its power and authority, and to hold the regime accountable to the public.² This core function of the press causes adversarial press-government relations.

Although in some rough form the press existed in the subcontinent in ancient times as well as during the Muslim rule (712-1857),³ the foundation of modern press system in the Indian subcontinent was laid down by some Englishmen during the period of the East India Company's expansionist campaign to bring the entire India under its colonial occupation.⁴ This initial press had come into existence in reaction to the endless excesses and misuse of authority by the East India Company's rulers and massive corrupt practices within the rank and file of its employees. This arduous initiative to expose all the malpractices of the Company's elite was undertaken by some former and nonconformist employees. Hence, from the very first day, the press in India

was founded on the basis of an intense rivalry between the Company's regime and its pioneers.⁵ This relationship has been briefly reviewed in this paper.

Theoretical Perspective

This study has been conducted under the authoritarian concept of the press, one of the four traditional theories stated by Siebert in 1950,⁶ and the Sociological framework of the conflict theory posited by Lewis Coser and Ralf Dahrendorf in the 1950s. The authoritarian theory holds that the press must at all times be loyal and obedient to the regime to maintain order in society and achieve its political objectives. It further states that the press must abstain from any sort of criticism of the regime, its functionaries, and the prevailing societal order. Furthermore, and in case of any violation, the regime reserves the right to punish the press by imposing fines, closing newspapers, or confining journalists.⁷ The conflict theory assumes that societies exhibit structural power divisions and resource inequalities, which lead to conflicting interests.⁸ According to Karl Marx, societies are always in a state of unending struggle between the powerful and the powerless to gain control over the limited economic resources. Instead of the public will, the powerful maintain social order through the use of force and dominance and, thus, the poor and the weak classes are brutally suppressed.⁹

Both of these theories are applicable to this study, as the East India Company's regime during its unjustified rule over India, suppressed the press and the native people with an authoritarian mindset and used all means and ways to tame the newspapers and silence all critical voices. The sociological critical theory also seems very relevant in this study, as the Company's regime kept a rigid control over all the financial and other resources, plundered the wealth of India, and deprived the native people of all basic human (civil, political, and economic) rights. In this case, the press as a powerless and suppressed group struggled very hard for its own rights as well as the people's rights and consequently faced all brutalities of the regime.

Background

The well-recorded history of the press in the subcontinent is traced back to September 1556, with its first arrival from Europe¹⁰ along with the advent of European merchants and Christian missionaries in the southern Indian coastal areas. No formal press system was operative in the subcontinent before the arrival of the Western nations in this region. However, traces of some sort of royal espionage and information system mainly established for domestic security to watchfully monitor and preempt any sort of internal revolt and penetration of disguised spies into the enemy's territory to defend the sultanate from external threats can be found in the ancient era of Chandragupta Maurya,¹¹ and during the Muslim period as well.¹²

Around the 15th century, impressed by the enlightenment movement, some European empires thought of launching civilising missions across the world with the formation of colonies and trade ties. With this intent, Spain and Portugal made an imaginary division of the globe through the Treaty of Tordesillas on 7 June 1494 and began its colonisation process in different parts of the world.¹³ After Vasco da Gama had built trade ties with the Calicut dockyard—a centre of the spice trade in the southwest of India, King Manuel I (1469–1521) of Portugal also started portraying himself as the Lord of Arabia, Persia, and India.¹⁴ In the early 16th century, Spain had secured its colonial position in Southeast Asia, as in 1524 Charles V created the Council of the Indies as a lawmaking body for the colonies.¹⁵ France and Great Britain also followed suit. Beginning with the formation of the French East India Trade Company by Colbert in 1664, France maintained its colonial possessions in India until 1763.¹⁶

The British East India Company was formed under a Royal Charter conferred by Queen Elizabeth I on 31 December 1600 to exploit trade opportunities in the South and East Asia. Earlier, the Spanish and the Dutch had already monopolised mercantile, especially the spice, trade in the region. The British naval fleet defeated the Spanish and Portuguese flotillas in 1588 and 1612, respectively.¹⁷ First, the English mercantile cavalcaades fortified their positions at the shores of southern India. Later on, they started incursions into

mainland India in the eastern and south-eastern parts. By the end of the 18th century, the Company's occupation had stretched up to Delhi until the dethroning of the last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1857.¹⁸ During this expansionist campaign in India, months-old newspapers and magazines would be supplied from Britain through the sea route, which would usually take months to reach India.

Causes of Evolution of the Press in Modern India

One main cause of the evolution of the press in modern India was the European powers' intent to colonise the world under the garb of civilising and enlightenment movements. A counterpart to these plans was the church protectionist strategy to defend and propagate Christianity.¹⁹ So another reason for the opening of the press in India was to preach Christianity and convert the Indians to it.²⁰ While busy in annexing the whole of India, the unfair mercantile activities, vested monetary interests, and the lust for power and influence led to mutual rivalries and disputes within the rank and file of the Company's top-most officials.²¹

This rivalry caused split of the British nationals into two opposing camps: One consisted of the Company's Loyalists and the other mostly comprised of retired and ousted employees who were arch-critics of the Company's policies and actions.²² In the last quarter of the 18th century, some of the dissenting employees of the East India Company initiated news pamphlets, to pinpoint and criticise illegal activities and non-stop transgressions of the Company and its top brass. In retaliation, the Company's adherents and defenders also resorted to the criticism of the adversaries in a similar fashion by issuing pro-Company leaflets and consequently pioneering the beginning of formal newspapers in India.²³

Another reason for the need of local newspapers was the prevalence of an environment in India in which the native masses used to get news and information in the form of oral or interpersonal communication and the British colonialists had to consume months old newspapers and magazines arriving from the UK on ships via the sea route.²⁴ Moreover, desirous of reading in their native language,²⁵ the English citizens encamped in the Indian subcontinent

wanted newspapers that would provide them with a variety of readings and information. They needed to know about their compatriots working in the whole of India, the news about activities of other European contenders in the region, such as the French and the local Indian rulers and princes, and to be well acquainted with the overall activities of the East India Company.

The Beginning of the Press in India

The first-ever attempt to introduce a newspaper in the subcontinent was made by a British citizen William Bolt in Calcutta, who had earlier remained an employee of the Company for about 13 years and had then quit his job in 1768. Bolt had also fixed a placard on the door of the Calcutta Council Hall in 1768, aiming to induce someone to start the trade of printing press. His crusade against the Company's interests displeased its apex management, which led to Bolt's arrest and subsequent expulsion to England. According to Padmanabhan, Bolt attempted to start his newspaper in India in 1776 in order to beat a retreat under the disapproving gaze of the Court of Directors of the Company, but all his attempts were skillfully and successfully spoiled.²⁶

Another Englishman who succeeded in launching a newspaper during the Company's rule and ushering in a new era of press-government relations in the region was James August Hickey. His news gazette appeared in such an environment in India where no indigenous and formal news publications existed and the British citizens would read old newspapers. The first-ever issue of Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Advertiser* appeared on 20 January 1780, along with a lofty and imaginative commitment to put the news into a new pattern of neutrality, factuality, and accuracy under the East India Company's rule.²⁷ Hicky's news publishing style resulted in direct confrontation with the Company's executives. Andrew Otis painted a picture of the situation in these words:

The extent of corruption in the city was staggering, and embezzlement and nepotism were rampant. After a rival paper was set up in November 1780 with support from the EIC, and allowed to post its copies for free, Hicky

started to believe his newspaper was being punished...it marked the beginning of Hicky's war against the EIC in print...The next week, he started an anti-tyranny, anti-corruption, and pro-free speech campaign using his newspaper as his platform, and words as his weapons.²⁸

Niazi pin-pointed that right from its very birth, journalism in the Indian subcontinent emerged as non-conformist to the rulers and for that reason, the newspapers' owners and journalists had to suffer. According to him, the pioneering idea of starting a newspaper was hit upon by Hicky, while he was imprisoned by the Company's heads.²⁹ Hicky is also remembered as the founding father of scandalous and vulgar press reporting. However, his journal laid the foundations of the struggling character and adversarial nature of journalism in South Asia.

East India Company's Relations with the Press

The pioneer press in India was the product of acrimony with some British citizens and the East India Company owing to the latter's serious illegalities, unlimited corruption, and the misuse of unrestricted power by the Company's executives. All initial newspapers during that time were launched, owned, and managed by the British nationals. In response, the Company also encouraged and sponsored pro-regime magazines to defend its unaccountable activities in the subcontinent. Hence, from the very first day of the birth of the press in India, the foundation of hostile relations between the press and the Company's rulers were laid down.³⁰ Padmanabhan remarked that the East India Company was not favourably disposed towards the press; its officials were suspicious of journalists and newspapers from the very beginning and were also intolerant of any kind of criticism. However, the early press in the region survived and somewhat succeeded in functioning just because of the Englishmen who obtained strength and inspiration from the free press in the UK.³¹ Moreover, punitive measures against the Anglo-press, its proprietors, and journalists included fines, bans, closures, confiscation, limited imprisonment of newspapers' owners, and their ultimate exile to England.

The early press in India was also not as ideal, impartial, and objective as could be thought of. Critics have questioned Hicky's claims of truth and neutrality, as he drastically attacked the Company's loyalists but spared Sir Philip Francis, the leading opponent of Governor-General Warren Hastings (1773-1785) and a member of the four-member council appointed by the Prime Minister Lord Frederick North, to rule the British possessions in India. Sir Francis was a key supporter of Hicky, who dedicated an ample portion of his two-pager news-sheet for insulting and launching scandalous attacks on the personal lives of the Company's employees as well as Governor-General Hastings.³² Resultantly, Hicky was detained and fined for his serious allegations against the Company and disobedience to the rulers. He was the first-ever journalist and editor in the subcontinent to be fined and imprisoned. So was his newspaper to be seized and finally closed.

Hicky also attacked the first church missionary at Calcutta John Zachariah Kiernander blaming him for selling a printing machine to his (Hicky's) opponent and a pro-Company newspaper, the *India Gazette*, which was jointly owned by two British merchants, B. Messenk and Peter Reed.³³ The *India Gazette* worked as a spokesperson for the Company, vehemently responding to allegations of Hicky's magazine and even counterattacking him. Hicky's *Gazette* ceased publication on 23 March 1782 after Warren Hastings issued orders to confiscate his printing types. His *Bengal Gazette* lived for a brief and eventful span from 1780 to 1782.³⁴

The East India Company also locked horns with another well-known newspaper, the *Bengal Journal* launched by Thomas Jones in 1785.³⁵ In the start, its US-origin editor William Duane was more placatory to the regime. He entered into an accord with Lord Hastings to publish the Company's official ads and in return got discount in postal charges. The French Revolution of 1789 also stirred the French colonies in Asia and on 3 May 1790, in Chandernagore a few miles away from the British-administered Calcutta, a horde of local citizens expelled the Frenchmen from the city who sought asylum in Calcutta.³⁶ The Calcutta-based English Commandant Cornwallis was at daggers-drawn with his French counterpart Canaple in Chandernagore,

owing to Canaple's impartiality in the Company's military struggle against Tipu Sultan in Mysore.

Meanwhile, Duane printed material in support of the French Revolution and also published an unverified report of Cornwallis's death in a fight with Tipu Sultan. Duane had attributed this news article to Canaple.³⁷ It invited the wrath of Viceroy John **Shore** (1785-1786), who ordered Duane to offer his regrets to Cornwallis. In a conciliatory meeting over the matter, instead of apologising, Duane argued in favour of 'the rights of man'. As a result, he was imprisoned in Fort William for some time. Duane fiercely expressed his outburst against the nexus of the local British and French commander, for jointly curbing the liberty of the press.³⁸

Duane's stiff resistance confirmed his passion for press freedom under the Company's rule.³⁹ It led to his resignation from the journal's editorship and he started another magazine under the title *Indian World*. Duane's objectivity, steadfastness, and expertise caused an upsurge in the circulation of this paper, as he unearthed the Company's unlawful activities, internal irregularities, and the dismal condition of the English soldiers on a regular basis. Resultantly, the Company's authorities compelled Duane to auction his assets as well as the magazine. The last issue of the *Indian World* appeared on 17 December 1794. Duane was also arrested for some time, his entire possessions were impounded and ultimately he was sent back home in 1795.⁴⁰

Antagonism towards the East India Company's regime of the press was not limited to only one or two newspapers. When the *Bengal Hurkaro* edited by Charles Maclean, adopted a critical tone on the Company's policies, its editor was forced to leave India in 1798. The *Madrass Gazette*, initiated by R. Williams in 1795, was also targeted owing to its objective and critical reporting.⁴¹ The Company's regime censored the *Madrass Gazette* and another critical newspaper the *Madrass Courier* set up by Richard Johnson, an official printer. In Madras, for the first time, censorship was introduced by the regime in 1795, when the *Madrass Gazette* was forced to get all official orders from the Military Secretary vetted, before publication. Later on, both these newspapers were deprived of free-of-charges postal services and when the magazines

protested, the burden of these charges was shifted to the readers at the receiving end.⁴²

Apart from the hostile press, there existed some pro-Company newspapers, which were either launched by some of its loyal servants or favoured by the Company. The first-ever newspaper in Bombay under the title *Bombay Gazette* was launched on 25 June 1790 by W.S. Cooper and another one, the *Bombay Herald* began on 13 July 1790. Both were loyal to the East India Company and disseminated the activities and interests of the regime with a sympathetic tone. They avoided any sort of conflict with the regime to win official recognition and favour and thus survived.⁴³ In the last two decades of the 18th century, around two dozen weekly or monthly magazines appeared in the Indian subcontinent under the Company's rule. The total circulation of these English-language newspapers reached around 3,000.⁴⁴

In 1795, the Company's government turned against the *India Herald* and ordered rigorous scrutiny of its content before publication.⁴⁵ In fact, this newspaper was being published without any authority by one Humphreys, who was later on, arrested for unauthorised publication of the magazine.⁴⁶ Another British citizen, James Silk Buckingham launched a bi-weekly *Calcutta Journal*. It became a premium newspaper in no time, owing to its high-quality content and excellent presentation. This news-sheet also exposed the crimes and offences of the Company and its officials with logical and factual criticism. According to Buckingham, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, "The prime responsibilities of an editor are to remind time and again to the rulers their obligations, to caution them rigorously about their mistakes and to propagate unpleasant realities." This professional and objective approach led to the revocation of Buckingham's license and his subsequent deportation to England in 1823,⁴⁷ which is another remarkable instance of hostility between the press and the regime of the East India Company.

The fervent desire of the Company's higher echelons to control the press reached a new extreme in 1799, when the British business tycoons, traders, and the Agency House of the Company mutually agreed to establish additional newspapers. All aspirations for an independent press and normal

press-government relations during the East India Company's era faced a real test in the era of Governor-General Richard Wellesely (1798-1805) when the regime interpreted any sort of criticism in newspapers as lurking Jacobinism. During this period, under the new press rules and regulations of 1799, no newspaper could be published until the entire proofs, along with advertisements of the newspaper, were to be put up to the regime and got a prior official nod. Any breach of this law would mean the ultimate expulsion of the editor from British India.⁴⁸

In September 1952, the Indian Government formed a Press Commission headed by Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha along with 10 other members. The commission published its recommendations in 1954, which also included the history of the press in India as a background to the report. Sheri J. Natarajan, former Editor of *The Tribune* was also a member of this commission, who later on compiled the background of the report under the title *History of Indian Journalism*, which is considered an authentic work on the birth of the press in India, press-government relations in the Colonial era, and the untiring efforts of the press for its freedom and its trials and tribulations.⁴⁹

The native press of the subcontinent played an important role in the political struggle and resistance for freedom from the foreign rule by the native Indians. The Hindi paper *Patriot* started in 1853, *The Mirror* and the Bengali language Weekly *Amrita Bazar Patrika* fervently disapproved of misdeeds of the colonial rule, called for attention to problems of the people, and vigorously advocated for grant of civil rights to the people. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* went all guns blazing against the ruling imperialists through its reportage and editorials. It is also termed as the first native Indian newspaper, which exercised investigative journalism.⁵⁰

The 1857 War of Independence also caused racial division in the press along the lines of the British Press and the Indian Press. The British journalists whimpered in coarse blood revenge against the Indians for the rebellion, whereas the vernacular press compassionated with the mutineers. The native press adopted a nationalistic tone and appealed directly to the masses because it spoke their own language.⁵¹ On this occasion, the colonial press was

almost spared to exercise freely and the Indian languages newspapers were sternly suppressed. Ironically, some local newspapers, such as the *Punjabi*, the *Lahore Chronicle*, the *Mofussilite*, and the *Bengal Hurkaro* also took the side of the Company's regime and supported restraints over the non-compliant native press.⁵² Thus, the genocide of Indians at the hands of the Company regime to curb the revolt further worsened relations of the native press with the foreign rulers.

During the critical days of the Indian War of Independence, an English language newspaper *Friend of India* in Seerampur city was issued a warning on account of publishing an article on the centenary of the famous battle of Plassey. The licence of another journal *The Hindu Intelligencer* of Calcutta was revoked on account of its criticism of the government. Some Muslim-owned Urdu and Persian newspapers *Doorbeen*, *Sultan-ul-Akhbar*, and the first Hindi language magazine *Samachar Sudhavarashan* were also punished on the pretext of provoking the mutiny. The licence of another Urdu newspaper *Gulshan-i-Naubahar* was also annulled and its entire press equipment was confiscated.⁵³ During the War of Independence of 1857, the overall tone and tenor of the Urdu press was mostly anti-British and pro-insurgents. After observing the anti-British attitude of the Urdu press, Lord Canning, the then Governor-General of India, remarked that the vernacular press had inculcated the bold and aggressive attitude in the Indian people under the guise of publishing news. This job was done in a very shrewd and clever way, he said.⁵⁴

During the uprising of 1857, Maulana Muhammad Baqir (father of Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad), and Editor of the *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* was the first Muslim journalist who was martyred by the British regime on the vague suspicion of having killed an Englishman, the Principal of Delhi College Mr Tailor.⁵⁵ In fact, Maulana Baqir had given him refuge in his home for several days and had made every possible effort to save him from the mutineers. Another Muslim journalist, the Editor of *Sadiqul Akhbar* Jamil-ud-Din was put on trial and jailed for three years.⁵⁶

The rebellion of 1857 dealt a severe blow to the Muslim press. Several newspapers were violently sealed by the British Raj and many others were

forced to shut down owing to severe financial crises. Natarajan revealed that in 1853 the total number of Urdu language newspapers throughout India was 35 and in the post-Revolt period after 1857, this figure sharply fell to 12; and that out of this meagre number, only one newspaper was under the supervision of a Muslim editor.⁵⁷ Another conflicting figure is stated by Tahir, Naghmana, and Baloch, that before the 1857 Independence War, the total volume of the Indian Urdu press was 103, which comprised of the newspapers and the printing presses as well.⁵⁸ Another contemporary research scholar, Dr Tahir Masood, listed some 122 Urdu newspapers in India prior to 1857.⁵⁹ Veteran journalist Zamir Niazi asserted that during the post-1857 period and the last quarter of the 19th century, 32 Urdu newspapers were being published across India.⁶⁰

Salient Features of the Press during the East India Company Era

Following are some of the salient features of the Indian Press while in its infancy and during the era of East India Company:

- 1) Circulation of each of these newspapers was very limited that ranged from 100 to 200 copies and readers were mainly British nationals largely associated with the Company. The regime was not much concerned about any possible impact of these papers on the residents. The only concern before the Company's high-ups was the possible dissemination of the massive wrongdoings of this mercantile enterprise to the UK, which could have earned a bad name for them.⁶¹
- 2) The main sources of news for these papers were the handwritten leaflets of the Indian states, handouts of military officers about wars and conquests, statements and day-to-day official and social engagements of the Company's elite, and administrative and commercial affairs of the Company. Another key source of news for the English press was the months-old UK's newspapers that would be supplied to India through the sea route.⁶²
- 3) The first of the Indian press was founded by the retired and banished employees or conflicting Britons due to their personal grudges or enmities with the Company or its top officials. Beside genuine

criticism, they also made personal attacks on the ruling class and their families and, thus, founded vulgar and scandalous journalism.

- 4) The Company's regime also sponsored and supported the launch of newspapers that would defend and propagate its official stance. It caused division in the press, aggravated ties with the regime, and also led to the beginning of a pro-regime and conformist press.
- 5) In the first three decades (1770-1800) of publication of newspapers during the Company era, no press laws existed in India to regulate the newspapers. In case of any complaint against the newspaper or its editor and dispute with the regime, other criminal laws and rules and regulations would be applied to punish the press.
- 6) Several tactics were used to gag the press. If a Briton inimical to the Company's interests or its high-ups planned to launch a paper, he would be instantly deported to the UK. If a journal caused distress to a top member of the British community and it did not submit an instant apology, at first, postal facilities of the paper would be withdrawn. If it continued displeasing the authorities, it had to pass through the censorship process. If the editor was irreconcilable and un-amenable to the dictates of the rulers, he was ultimately sent back.

Press Acts and Laws Introduced by the Company's Regime

Despite experiencing several punitive measures, the pioneer English press functioned freely and fearlessly during the initial three decades of its inception. Moreover, the vernacular press originated during the 19th century and became the voice of the native people and also contributed to levelling the ground for the 1857 War of Independence. Desi (native) newspapers played a key role in setting the stage for the revolt. Apprehensions of the Company's regime regarding press freedom and its possible outcomes constantly increased. Until 1799, the British-origin press was handled and controlled without any press laws. However, when the number of newspapers increased, later on, it was felt necessary by the Company's regime to have laws

to regulate them. The following key laws and acts were introduced from time to time.

- i. The first-ever press law 'the Censorship of Press Act' was initiated by the Company's regime under Governor-General Lord Wellesley (1798-1805). All newspapers were required to carry the names of the proprietor and editor and the content was to be examined by the regime prior to publication. Another main purpose was to prevent the publishing of defamatory content against British citizens. Journals, pamphlets, and books were also brought under the ambit of this law in 1807. Lord Wellesley was personally very harsh towards the newspapers. Press laws of his time fixed news journals to have names of the printer, editor, and proprietor on top of the page, identify themselves to the regime's Secretary and to place all intended news material before him for prior and formal approval. Sunday was made a mandatory off-day for the Newspapers. Failure to obey these press regulations was an instant exile from India. Reproduction of Western press content was also proscribed.⁶³
- ii. In 1823, John Adam (January to August 1823) introduced the 'Licensing Act' forcing all publishers to obtain a license from the regime for their publications, failing which could cost them Rs.400 fine and ceasing of the press. The press freedom granted by Lord Hastings was ended through this act, which was later repealed by Lord Charles Metcalf (1835-36). A well-reputed editor Raja Rammohan Roy filed a memorandum against the Press Ordinance (1823) to the Apex Court and the Privy Council and then closed publication of *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* in protest against this oppressive law. Roys' petition is known as 'The Charter of the Freedom of the Press'.⁶⁴ He also protested in 1827 against another unfair and prejudiced law 'the Jury Act' that initiated discrimination against the press even in the courts of Justice.⁶⁵
- iii. Unlike Wellesely, Minto, Adam, and Amherst, Lord Metcalfe (1835-36) was liberal-minded and favoured a free press in India. Hence, he introduced the Press Act (1835), which is also called the 'Metcalf Act'. He also

- annulled the License Regulating Act of 1823, won the label of 'Liberator of the Indian Press'⁶⁶ and thus enjoyed a good relationship with the press.
- iv. The 1857 War of Independence resulted in the notorious 'Gagging Act' by Lord Canning (1856-1862). All types of curbs were imposed on the press that largely affected the native newspapers. However, eager to recover his level of approval in India after the 1857 bloodshed, Canning limited the timespan of this act up to one year, which ended on 13 June 1858.⁶⁷
 - v. During 1857, the 'Licensing Act' was also enforced to curtail pro-revolt and anti-British publications. This law empowered the regime with the right to stop all sorts of publication and circulation of books, magazines, newspapers, and other printed material.⁶⁸

Having faced the unsuccessful revolt in 1857, India was brought under the direct British rule in 1858. It was further decided to harden control over the native press. Hence, in 1878, the Vernacular Press Act-IX was promulgated. Being a discriminatory law, it was also called as 'the Gagging Act'.⁶⁹ It was followed by the introduction of many other anti-press laws until 1947.

Personal Attitudes of the Company's Rulers towards the Press

Personal attitudes of Governor Generals played a pivotal role in press-government relations during the East India Company's rule. Governor-General Lord Wellesley (1798-1805) was personally very harsh and oppressive against the press. Press laws and regulations during his rule proved as stumbling blocks in the way of the development of the Indian press. Following Wellesley, Lord Minto (1807-1813) almost treated the press in the same manner. Due to such a dreadful environment, the press could not progress during Wellesley and Minto's periods.⁷⁰

Lord Hastings (1813-1823), replacing Minto, possessed liberal and progressive views regarding the press and education. He relaxed restrictions on the press, which were applauded by both the Indian and European Communities. However, he introduced some general rules to guide editors in order to avoid publication of news that may affect the government's authority or damage the general public's interests.⁷¹ The situation reversed when John

Adam (January-August, 1823) succeeded Hastings as the acting Governor-General. He instantly withdrew the government's leniency towards the press, because Adam had earlier served as the Chief Censor in the previous regimes.⁷²

Like Adam, Lord Amherst (1823-1828) also continued the same pattern of gagging the press, viewing that the Court of Directors of England never supported a free press in the Indian Colony. During his time, Warden, the Chief Secretary of the Bombay Municipality was the real owner of the *Bombay Gazette* and *Bombay Courier*. When these newspapers reported their anti-Company coverage, Adam had to introduce the 'Press Regulations of 1825', barring employees of the Company to have any type of connection with the press. The press witnessed another period of respite when William Bentinck (1828-1835) succeeded Adam in 1828. He initiated reforms in press regulations. He was also in favour of the Indian native languages press. As Bentinck's reputation as a reformer grew, the Indian language newspapers began to flourish.⁷³

Lord Metcalf (1835-36) was also a liberal like Bentinck and believed in press freedom.⁷⁴ On his invitation and initiative, Lord Macaulay—a renowned liberal scholar and politician—drafted a press act supposedly to be amalgamated into the code being drafted by the Law Commission. Macaulay favoured the new Act and termed the existing Licensing Act as erroneous. On 3 August 1835, supported by Metcalfe, the Council unanimously passed the new Press Act, which is termed as the most liberal press act in the Indian history.⁷⁵ The new law was made applicable to the entire territories of the East India Company. This Act favoured the growth of the Indian press.⁷⁶ After Metcalfe, Lord Auckland (1836-1842) also supported the liberal press and a harmonious relationship was maintained between him and the editors of the Calcutta's newspapers.

Conclusion

Under the framework of the authoritarian concept about the press and the sociological perspective of the conflict theory, this brief review inferred that the birth of press in Modern India was the result of European powers',

especially Britain's, colonial, expansionist, and mercantile expeditions in South Asia, Church Missionaries' Movements for preaching of Christianity, reading legacy of the English people, monitoring of other Western and native rivals in the region by the Company's regime, the rivalry of dissenting employees with the East India Company, intra-Company rifts, and misuse of power. However, the main cause of the emergence of the press in the subcontinent was the defiance of some former employees of the Company to criticise its policies and activities through newspapers, which also led to an adversarial relationship between the government and the press in India from the very beginning.

The initial but unsuccessful effort to introduce a newspaper in India during the Company's era was made by William Bolt in 1776. James August Hicky was the first one to launch a newspaper titled *Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Advertiser* in 1780. Hicky made valid and justifiable criticism over the Company's regime but also introduced sensational, scandalous, and biased journalism in India. His relations with the Company's regime remained very conflicting, which ultimately resulted in his detention and closure of his newspaper. Relations of the East India Company with other newspapers—such as the *Bengal Journal*, the *Indian World*, *Bengal Hurkaro*, *Madras Gazette*, *Madras Courier*, *India Herald*, *Calcutta Journal*, the Hindi language *Patriot*, *The Mirror*, the Bengali Weekly *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, etc.—also remained awful. In the beginning, the Company's regime regulated the press through the application of other rules and procedures.

From the analysis, it was also disclosed that the native newspapers, especially the Muslim-owned press was particularly targeted during the critical days of the 1857 War of Independence on the suspicion of being pro-rebellion. Even the Muslim editor of *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* Maulana Muhammad Baqir was murdered by the Company's Regime. Relations of the regime with a few pro-Company newspapers, such as the *Bombay Gazette* and the *Bombay Herald* remained very cordial. Some other newspapers such as the *Punjabi*, the *Lahore Chronicle*, the *Mofussilite*, the *Bengal Hurkaro* and several other little famous leaflets also supported the Company's regime on account of its 'crush the

mutiny campaign' and suppressing the native press and, hence, won the favour and support of the regime.

It was also revealed that some press related laws, mostly of suppressive and authoritarian character, were also introduced during the Company's era. These included the first-ever press law 'the Censorship of Press Act' during Wellesley's (1798-1805) era, the 'Licensing Act' introduced by John Adam in 1823, the 'Press Act of 1835' by Metcalfe, and the most awkward law 'the Licensing or Gagging Act' ushered by Lord Canning during the 1857's War of Independence.

During the entire period of the East India Company's regime, the press was dealt with in a manner of official suppression and tight control. However, the nature of press-government relations during the Company's era was also affected by the personal attitudes of its various rulers. For example, Governor Generals such as Wellesley, Minto, Adam, and Amherst were personally very ruthless and rigid against the press. They introduced many anti-press rules and regulations and the press suffered a lot during their times. On the other hand, some rulers of the Company, such as Hastings, Bentik, Metcalf, and Auckland, owing to their liberal outlook, gave some respite to the press and eased a few restrictions over the newspapers. Press-government relations during the time of these rulers remained a bit cordial. From the above brief review, it may be concluded that, overall, adversarial nature of press-government relations prevailed in British India during the era of East India Company.

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