



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

ROLE OF PRESS IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT OF KERALA

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Abstract: The 'Press' has become a powerful social institution. Government, Executive, Judiciary and the Press are the four important pillars of a free society. This is proved by the fact that the press has been glorified as the Fourth Estate. The press had played a crucial role in the development of national movement in Kerala. It has been the most popular and strong weapon of information propaganda. This article intended to examine the role played by major newspapers of Kerala and how it mobilizes the public opinion on socio-economic problems and focuses the attention of Government. The press acted as the most important force for attaining freedom and stood as a source of inspiration in the fight for reforms.

I. INTRODUCTION

The "Press" moulds as well as mirrors all complex process of modern life. It facilitates the exchange of ideas on a mass scale in the shortest time. The press reaches an immense public and influences the consciousness, the feelings, the stock of information and the reasoning process in the wild fields of politics and public affairs. With the press's help, conferences are mobilized, controversies settled, movements organised and institutions developed. The press is a powerful weapon of all actions of those who occupy the positions of the society and hold the destiny of peoples in their hands. The press became a central medium through which the western ideas of freedom and democracy began to infuse among the middle class members, and gradually among the masses.

Press and the National Movement in Kerala

Printing started in Kerala only after the advent of the Europeans. The Jesuit missionaries arrived in Kerala during the period of Portuguese itself. Though the primary aim of the missionary priests was the conversion of local people to Christianity, they had started many educational institutions and started printing as a part of their religious propaganda. The first printed book in Malayalam was published only in 1772, the printing having been executed in Rome. Dr. Herman Gundert and Benjamin Baily had shown much interest in the printing and publishing Malayalam books during the nineteenth century.

Baily started the CMS press in 1821, and he published an English-Malayalam dictionary in 1846. However, the most important English-Malayalam dictionary was written and published by Herman Gundert, a native of Germany, in 1872. Gundert was a Basal missionary, and he had contributed in various fields of knowledge. The *Rajyasamacharam* published from 1847 by the Basal mission at Thalassery was the first journalistic publication in Malayalam. The credit for bringing out this pioneering publication goes to the German missionary, Dr. Gundert. Next came the *Paschimodayam*, a monthly, published by the Basal mission at Thalassery from 1847, it was intended to disseminate western knowledge among the people of Kerala. Unfortunately, the *Rajyasamacharam* stopped publication at the end of 1850, and the *Paschimodayam* in the middle of 1851.

The *Western Star* was published in 1860 from Cochin in English and had as its editor Charles Lawson who later started the Madras Mail from Madras. Another paper named *Keralapatrika* also appeared from Cochin in 1870. The credit for having brought out a publication that had a regular newspaper attributes goes to Davajee Bhimji, a Gujarati merchant. He started a printing press at Cochin called *Keralamitram* press and published the *Keralamitram* in 1881. It contained news as well as articles of literary and cultural interest. The paper was fortunate in getting as its first editor the services of Kandathil Varghese Mappilai who later founded the *Malayala Manorama*. Another periodical that was published from Calicut was the Kerala *Sanchari*. It had its editor Vengayil Kunjirama Nayanar who becomes famous by his pen name Kesari.

English weekly named *West Coast Spectator* started its publication from Kozikode in 1879. The weekly was edited by Dr. Keys an Englishman and was printed by Vakil Poovadan Raman from the Spectator Press. In the areas of Cochin and Malabar, many writers were highly critical of administrative vagaries. The *Mitavati* and the *Sahodaran* wrote against the evils of the caste system, social inequality and autocratic administration. While in Travancore, the *Malayala Manorama* vigilantly fought for the recognition of the political claims of unrepresented communities. In Malabar the *Mathrubhumi* constantly endeavoured to make its readers fit for the assumption of political responsibilities..

T.K. Madhavan, the editor of the *Deshabhimani* and a brave patriot and idealist, created a sense of unity and self-respect among the depressed classes who were inspired to stand up for the rights. Murkoth Kumaran, editor of the *Gajakesari*, was an elegant writer and critic. Several provoking articles on social reform appeared in the *Vivekodayam*, published by the famous poet, N. Kumaranasan. M. Ramunni Nair, a brilliant satirist who wrote a number of articles under his pen name Sanjayan, was inspired by Gandhian ideology. He exposed the ridiculous aspect of contemporary society and administration. Thus the press was ready to formulate a national policy and they contributed a lot to the propagation of national feeling among the people of Kerala.

British Malabar played a great part in the national movement, culminating in India's independence in 1947. In Malabar a District Congress Committee was created in 1908. A branch of the All India Home Rule League was found by Mrs. Annie Besant in 1916 started functioning in the district. The passing of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms by the British Parliament produced despair among the Indians. In 1919, under the dynamic leadership of Gandhiji non-cooperation was started and the movement also reached Malabar. The press of Malabar propagated the movement among the Malayalis. Various regional

newspapers played their part in developing anti-British feeling in the people's mind and were ready to fight for the freedom of the country from foreign rule.

Malayalam journalism has produced two outstanding journalists in Kerala, K.C.Mamman Mappila, editor of *Malayala Manorama*, and K.P.Kesava Menon, editor of *Mathrubhumi*. *Malayala Manorama* was started as a weekly in Kottayam in the princely state of Travancore in 1890. It was founded by Kandathil Varghese Mappila who was a talented writer and a pioneer in various fields. The great majority of the state's people were illiterate, and was hardly any news paper then. It became the duty of *Malayala Manorama* to fight for the upliftment of the depressed classes, the spread of education, the eradication of superstitious beliefs and practices, and political justice for all. The first editorial was an appeal for the education of the Pulayas' an oppressed community of Kerala.

Mathrubhumi was started its publication from Calicut in 1923, as an organ of the Indian National Congress, which had launched the Non-cooperation movement under Gandhiji's leadership. K.P.Kesava Menon was the editor and he made the paper a presenter of the forces fighting for freedom from its beginning. It is a newspaper in Malayalam and its objective is to give comprehensive factual news of national, provincial and world events, to shape and direct public opinion on popular lines and to keep people informed of modern developments in all walks of life, maintaining all the while the best traditions of journalism. In 1923 the first edition of *Mathrubhumi* was published. It aimed to arouse the national feelings among the people for the attainment of freedom. *Mathrubhumi* started a weekly in 1923 at a time when the freedom movement shook India and its reflection in Kerala. It was a long time of well-known writers who regularly wrote in the weekly such as Vallathol Narayana Menon, Ulloor S. Parameswaran Nair, G.Sankarakurup, Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, S.K.Pottekkad, P.Kunhiraman Nair etc. *Mathrubhumi* under the energetic leadership of Kesava Menon played a memorable role in the freedom struggle and did much to spread the principles of Gandhi and the Congress.

K.Ramakrishnapillai, one of the foremost journalists of Kerala, occupied a great position in those days as a fighter for the freedom of the press. Fearless and upright, his powerful pen mercilessly slashed corruption, nepotism and autocracy in Travancore. He adopted journalism as his profession on 14th September 1899, assuming charge as editor of the *Kerala Darpanam*. He aimed to make the people conscious of their civic rights and responsibilities and contribute to the intellectual advancement of contemporary society. In 1901, he became the editor of *Kerala Panchika*, and in 1903, of the *Malayali*. He began to publish a series of articles on public themes, which attracted the attention of the people and the Government. His criticism of the vagaries of administration offended the loyalist members of the board of management of the *Malayali* and he was compelled to resign in November 1904. At this time, Abdul Khadar Moulavi of Vakkom, a Muslim community leader, invited K.Ramakrishna Pillai to be the editor of his paper *Swadhesabhimani* published from Anjengo and he accepted and assumed the editorship in 1906.

Swadeshabhimani K.Ramakrishna Pillai's effort can be treated as the beginning point of such a strand in Travancore. The pages of *swadeshbhimani* of which he was the editor from 1906-1910 speak volumes of the bravery and extremism and democratic ideals that he exhibit in his fight against the state. He requested to the people to fight for their rights and work for a government which functions according to their wishes. He also pointed out that but for the presence of British power; there would have been

revolutions in the princely states. It is important that he was the first author in any Indian language to attempt a biography of Karl Marx. The Diwan of Travancore took an immediate step to enact a rigorous Press regulation to strangle criticism. He decided to deport Mr. Pillai from the state. On 26th September 1910 by a royal proclamation the *Swadeshabhimani* was suppressed its editor banished from the state, and the press confiscated to the Government. Every section of public opinion denounced the action of the Government in the country. The leading news papers hailed him as a hero and condemned the Government.

The Sahodara Prasthanam, started by K. Ayyappan, was basically an association against the social inequalities propounded by the caste system. He organised a literary organisation called 'Vidyaposhini' and a news paper called 'Sodaran' was also started. Western thinking and literature, Birth control, social reform etc., were topics of importance to the *Sodaran*. Ayyappan's journalism was not sensationalistic but educative and value based. He found and used it a powerful device to diffuse ideas of socialism, liberty, equality, fraternity, free-thinking and effective weapon to fight against caste discrimination, exploitation of any kind and the tyranny and oppression of the priesthood and political absolutism.

Kesari was started by Balakrishna Pillai, with editorials, thesis and criticisms, considered to be the renaissance period of Malayalam literature. The political articles of *Kesari* attempted the Diwan Watts to implement the Newspaper Regulation Act in 1926. Balakrishna Pillai started 'Prabodhakan' an independent weekly by himself and when the Government cancelled its licence was, on the same day published *kesari* with no difference in the contents of *Prabodhakan*. Balakrishna Pillai was a progressive philosopher and intellectual critic and a true journalist who fought for the democratic rights of his people and that great journalist brought into light the political and cultural transformation of the people of Kerala. A.K. Pillai, published *Swarat* in 1921 was the chief instrument through which the Congress messages began to be disseminated among the people. It became a powerful weapon for Vaikom satyagraha.

The growth of the Muslim League in Malabar resulted in increasing self-consciousness among the Mappilas. *Al-Amin*, a periodical started by Mohammed Abdhurahiman in 1924 to encourage the spirit of nationalism and community uplift, stimulated Mappila awareness of their heritage and need. Its proposed aim was to strengthen the national movement. In 1930, the printing press of *Al-Amin* ceased to stop through a government Ordinance. After the independence, the followers of Abdul Rahiman again started *Al-Amin* as an evening daily from Calicut.

The Malayala Rajyam, started from Quilon during the early days of active political movement, had its first editor in C.V. Kunjuraman. The main aim was to publicise the ideals of Congress. *Baje Bharatham*, was a daily published from Travancore for Congress messages and it could be branded as a political newspaper. It was under the editorship of M. Mathunni from Chengannur and S. Sankaran Pillai. In 1930, Gomati started as an evening newspaper, *Gosree* and it was printed in Vidyavinodhini press, Thrissur. The editor was Kunnath Janardhana Menon first editor, later K.V. Raghavan Nair and its aim was to spread daily news among the people and encouraged national feelings. *Deepam* was first published from Ernakulam in 1931, by Thomas Paul and brothers. It encouraged the freedom movement and helped almost the responsible struggle of Travancore and Sir C.P.'s Government banned it.

The *Chandrika* started publication in 1934 as a weekly from Thalassery, and it became the official organ of the Muslim League. T. Mohammed was its first editor, and after few years, it became a newspaper

in 1939 as K.K.Mohammed hafi as editor. The *Prabhatam* was launched in 1936 with E M S Namboothiripad as the editor but was closed down within six months. It resumed publication in 1938, was conceived of as a newspaper that would inform and act as a centre of discussion. In 1939, K.M.Chacko started *Puradwani* as a daily and it supported state congress movements. In 1941, started the daily *Deena Bandhu* from Thrissur and its editor was V.R.Krishnan Ezhuthachan. It worked to promote national movement. However, when the editor was in jail during the Quit India movement, the Cochin government banned it. With the growth of socialist movements in Malabar, *Deshabhimani*, the organ of Communist party published as a weekly from Kozhikode in 1942, M.S Dev Das as its first editor. In 1946, it became a newspaper. Though the Government of Madras banned the paper in 1948, its publication was re started in 1951.

Conclusion

Thus the different newspapers of Kerala helped to develop national feelings among the people of Kerala. They stood united to fight for their freedom struggle under the efficient leaders of Kerala. The press had played an important role in promoting political, social and economic factors and cultural outlook of the people.

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