



JETNR

Journal of Emerging Trends and Novel Research

JETNR.ORG | ISSN : 2984-9276

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

THE MIGHT OF THE PEN: HINDI JOURNALISM AND THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT (1826-1885)

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Abstract:

The article explores the essential role that Hindi-language journalism played during the early phases of India's independence movement from 1826 to 1885. It emphasises the establishment of *Udant Martand*, the first Hindi newspaper, and highlights the significant contributions of Bharatendu Harishchandra. The analysis argues that Hindi journalism served both as a cultural assertion for marginalised communities and as a medium for expressing political identity and social ideals. Drawing on concepts such as print capitalism and the bourgeois public sphere, the discussion identifies three distinct phases of development: the initial stage with *Udant Martand* (1826–1845), the mid-century consolidation following the 1857 events (1845–1867), and the transformative Bharatendu era (1867–1885). The article also examines the effects of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, colonial language policies, and the Hindi-Urdu controversy as significant factors that shaped the evolution of the press. Contributions from key figures, particularly Bharatendu Harishchandra, are analysed to illustrate how they fostered a politically engaged Hindi readership. Ultimately, the article argues that Hindi journalism constituted a foundational act of resistance that laid the groundwork for future nationalist mobilisation and shaped the socio-political landscape of the time.

Keywords: Hindi journalism, colonial India, vernacular press, *Udant Martand*, Bharatendu Harishchandra, print culture, public sphere, Hindi-Urdu controversy, nineteenth-century South Asia.

1. Introduction

The history of Indian journalism under British colonialism is inseparable from the history of Indian nationalism. The press, in both its English-language and vernacular manifestations, served as one of the primary institutional spaces in which colonial subjects negotiated, contested, and ultimately challenged the authority of the imperial state. Among the various vernacular traditions that emerged in the nineteenth century, Hindi journalism occupies a uniquely significant position. Emerging from the cultural heartland of northern India — the Hindi belt encompassing the United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, and Rajputana — Hindi newspapers and journals gave voice to a

politically conscious, reform-oriented, and increasingly nationalist intelligentsia whose influence would prove decisive in the subsequent decades of organised resistance to British rule.

The period between 1824 and 1885 constitutes the foundational phase of Hindi journalism. This era witnessed the birth of the first Hindi newspaper, the gradual proliferation of the vernacular press, the Hindi–Urdu language controversy, the alignment of Hindi journalism with Hindu social reform movements, and the crystallisation of an editorial culture explicitly anti-colonial in orientation. The year 1885 is significant not only because it marks the founding of the Indian National Congress, but also because by this point Hindi journalism had matured sufficiently to constitute a coherent institutional force capable of mobilising public opinion at a regional and, to some extent, national scale. As Benedict Anderson (1983) has argued in his influential study of nationalism, print capitalism plays a constitutive role in the formation of "imagined communities," and Hindi journalism in this period exemplifies precisely such a process — the construction of a shared linguistic, cultural, and political community through the medium of the vernacular press.

This article is organised into seven sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides historical context for the emergence of Hindi journalism, examining the colonial press environment and the social conditions that enabled and necessitated vernacular publishing. Section 3 examines the pioneering period of Hindi journalism from 1824 to 1857, focusing on the key publications of this era. Section 4 analyses the transformative impact of the 1857 uprising on the Hindi press and the intensification of nationalist sentiment. Section 5 explores the role of Hindi journalism in the social reform movements of the 1860s and 1870s, particularly its relationship with Hindu revivalism and the Arya Samaj. Section 6 examines the Hindi-Urdu controversy and its implications for Hindi journalism as a vehicle of political identity. Section 7 traces the consolidation of the nationalist Hindi press in the years leading up to 1885. The article concludes with an assessment of Hindi journalism's lasting contribution to the independence movement.

2. Historical Context: The Colonial Press Environment

The history of the press in colonial India begins not with vernacular publications but with the English-language newspapers established by European settlers, merchants, and officials in the late eighteenth century. The Bengal Gazette, founded by James Augustus Hicky in 1780, is generally acknowledged as the first newspaper published in India (Natarajan, 1962). However, the colonial state quickly moved to regulate and suppress an independent press: Hicky's paper was shut down within two years, and successive measures — including the notorious Press Regulations of 1799, the Licensing Act of 1823, and the Press Act of 1835 — defined the contested terrain on which both English and vernacular journalism would develop throughout the nineteenth century.

The regulatory framework established by the colonial state had complex and contradictory effects on vernacular journalism. On the one hand, censorship and licensing requirements constrained press freedom and created significant obstacles for publishers with limited financial resources. On the other hand, the colonial administration's promotion of printing technology, initially for missionary and administrative purposes, inadvertently created the infrastructural conditions for vernacular publishing. The establishment of the Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800, with its emphasis on the study of Indian vernacular languages, including Hindi and Urdu, played a significant role in standardising and codifying the Hindi language and producing a generation of linguistically trained scholars and administrators who would later contribute to Hindi literary and journalistic culture (King, 1994).

The introduction of the printing press to northern India, facilitated by both missionary activity and colonial administrative needs, was a prerequisite for the emergence of Hindi journalism. The Serampore Mission Press, established in 1800 by William Carey and his associates, was among the earliest institutions to print texts in Hindi

and related vernaculars (Oddie, 2001). By the 1820s, presses capable of printing in Devanagari script were operational in several northern Indian cities, including Calcutta, Banaras, and later Lucknow and Delhi. This technological infrastructure, combined with the growing literacy of an urban professional class — comprising teachers, lawyers, merchants, and government employees — created both the means of production and the readership for vernacular newspapers.

The intersection of several overlapping processes shaped the social context of vernacular journalism in northern India: the consolidation of British colonial administration, the displacement of traditional Mughal and nawabi patronage networks, the emergence of new urban professional classes, the spread of English education through government-funded institutions, and the gradual crystallisation of communities defined by language, religion, and caste. These processes generated both the grievances that gave Hindi journalism its political edge and the social groups that constituted its primary audience. As Francesca Orsini (2002) has shown in her comprehensive study of the Hindi public sphere, the reading public for Hindi journalism in the nineteenth century was predominantly urban, largely upper-caste, and composed principally of the literate professional classes of the United Provinces and Bihar.

3. The Pioneering Phase: Hindi Journalism from 1824 to 1857

The founding moment of Hindi journalism is conventionally identified with the publication of *Udant Martand*, which first appeared on 30 May 1826 in Calcutta. Established by Jugal Kishore Shukla, a Hindi scholar from Kanpur, *Udant Martand* — whose name translates roughly as "the Rising Sun of News" — was a weekly publication that represented the first systematic attempt to publish a Hindi-language newspaper for a Hindi-speaking readership (Misra, 1972). Shukla's enterprise was motivated by an explicit concern for the interests of Hindi-speaking people, whom he believed were poorly served by existing English- and Persian-language publications. The inaugural issue of the newspaper announced its purpose as the dissemination of useful knowledge and news to those who could not access information in English, thereby articulating from the outset the democratic and inclusive impulse that would characterise the best Hindi journalism of the nineteenth century.

Udant Martand was, by any measure, a pioneering but precarious enterprise. Published in a mixture of Braj Bhasha and Khari Boli — the two principal registers of written Hindi current in the early nineteenth century — it struggled to find subscribers and advertising revenue in a market dominated by English and Persian publications. Shukla repeatedly petitioned the colonial administration for a government subscription, which would have provided essential financial support, but these petitions were denied. The paper ceased publication in December 1827, after less than two years, having failed to achieve financial viability (Sharma, 1981). Despite its brief lifespan, *Udant Martand* established several precedents that would prove influential for subsequent Hindi journalism: the explicit identification of a Hindi-speaking readership as a distinct constituency with its own informational and cultural needs, the use of accessible vernacular prose rather than highly Sanskritised or Persianised registers, and the publication of news and commentary that was relevant to the everyday concerns of northern Indian communities.

The period between the closure of *Udant Martand* in 1827 and the 1857 uprising saw the gradual expansion of Hindi journalism, concentrated primarily in the key urban centres of northern India. Banaras (Varanasi), as the preeminent centre of Sanskrit learning and Hindu cultural life, emerged as the most important hub of Hindi publishing. The *Banaras Akhbar*, founded in 1845 by Raja Shiv Prasad "Sitare-Hind," was among the most significant publications of this period. Although Shiv Prasad himself was associated with the colonial administration and his editorial stance was often accommodationist rather than confrontational, the *Banaras Akhbar* represented an important step in the

professionalisation of Hindi journalism and the development of a Hindi prose style suited to journalistic purposes (Dalmia, 1997).

Other significant publications of this period included the *Samachar Sudha Varshan* (1854), established in Calcutta by Shri Shyam Sundar Sen, and the *Sarvhitakari*, which appeared in Agra around mid 1850s (King 1994). These publications were diverse in their orientations, ranging from literary and cultural concerns to social reform and the dissemination of scientific knowledge, but they shared a common commitment to the development of Hindi as a literary and public language and to the education and enlightenment of Hindi-speaking readers. The *Prabhakar*, founded in Bombay by Bal Shastri Jambhekar in 1832, though primarily in Marathi, also published sections in Hindi and contributed to the emerging culture of vernacular public discourse (Natarajan, 1962).

A crucial development in this period was the establishment of the *Hindi Pradeep* in 1877 — though slightly beyond the pre-Mutiny phase — and the earlier publication of various literary and religious journals that, while not exclusively political, created the reading habits and institutional infrastructure that would support explicitly political journalism in the subsequent decades. Equally significant was the expansion of government vernacular schools under the educational policies of the 1840s and 1850s, which, whatever their primary administrative purpose, substantially increased the literate population capable of reading Hindi publications (Metcalf, 1994).

The ideological character of pre-1857 Hindi journalism was complex and not uniformly anti-colonial. Many editors and publishers maintained cautious relations with the colonial administration, partly from prudence given the regulatory environment and partly because many were themselves beneficiaries of colonial employment or patronage. Nevertheless, even within these constraints, Hindi newspapers of this period consistently advocated for the interests of Hindi-speaking communities, criticised social injustices including caste discrimination and the treatment of women, and published material that implicitly or explicitly questioned the legitimacy of colonial priorities. As Veena Naregal (2001) has argued, the vernacular press in this period operated as a space of "differential modernity" in which colonial subjects appropriated the technologies and forms of modern print culture for purposes that were not always aligned with colonial intentions.

4. The Uprising Phase: The Revolt of 1857 and Hindi Journalism

The uprising of 1857 — variously described in historiography as the Sepoy Mutiny, the Indian Mutiny, the First War of Independence, and the Great Rebellion — constitutes a watershed moment in both Indian history and the history of Hindi journalism. The uprising and its brutal suppression by the British fundamentally transformed the political atmosphere in northern India and profoundly affected the character and content of the vernacular press.

In the immediate aftermath of the uprising, the colonial government enacted the Gagging Act of 1857 (subsequently replaced by the more comprehensive Press Act of 1867), which imposed severe restrictions on the press and significantly constrained the freedom of both English and vernacular publications. Several Hindi newspapers were suspended or closed, and editors who had published material sympathetic to the uprising faced prosecution. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, enacted under Lord Lytton, represented the most aggressive attempt by the colonial state to suppress vernacular journalism, requiring magistrates to demand bonds from publishers of vernacular newspapers as security against the publication of seditious material (Barrier, 1974). This legislation provoked widespread outrage among Indian intellectuals and editors, including those of the Hindi press, and paradoxically served to galvanise nationalist sentiment by demonstrating the fundamentally repressive character of British rule.

The uprising of 1857 also had a more subtle but ultimately more important effect on Hindi journalism: it accelerated the politicisation of the Hindi press and sharpened its nationalist orientation. The mass violence of the uprising, the

brutal reprisals of the British forces, and the abolition of the Mughal dynasty and its replacement by direct Crown rule created a new political consciousness among Hindi-speaking educated elites. The tone of Hindi journalism after 1857 became markedly more assertive in its defence of Indian cultural values, more critical of colonial policies, and more explicit in its identification with Indian rather than British interests. Newspapers such as the *Samachar Sudha Varshan* (1854), which had initially maintained a relatively cautious stance, became increasingly outspoken in their criticism of colonial governance in the years following the uprising (Misra, 1972).

The post-1857 period also saw the emergence of several new and more explicitly political Hindi publications. Among the most important was the *Hindi Pradeep*, founded in 1877 by Balakrishnan Bhatt in Allahabad (Prayagraj). The *Hindi Pradeep*, published continuously until 1902, is widely regarded as one of the most significant Hindi publications of the nineteenth century and as one of the most important early vehicles of nationalist discourse in Hindi. Bhatt, who was also a prolific novelist, essayist, and literary critic, used the *Hindi Pradeep* as a platform for social criticism, cultural commentary, and increasingly overt anti-colonial advocacy. His essays, which combined sharp political analysis with literary sophistication, helped to establish a model of engaged Hindi journalism that influenced subsequent generations of editors and writers (Orsini, 2002).

Bharatendu Harishchandra, the towering figure of Hindi literary and cultural life in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, also played a decisive role in the politicisation of the Hindi press. Through his own journals — including *Kavi Vachan Sudha* (1868), *Harishchandra Magazine* (1873), and *Harishchandra Chandrika* (1874) — Bharatendu championed Hindi language and literature, criticised colonial economic policies, particularly the drain of wealth from India to Britain, and promoted a vision of Indian cultural self-sufficiency and dignity (Dalmia, 1997). His famous couplet — "nij bhasha unnati ahe, sab unnati ko mool / bin nij bhasha gyan ke, mitai na hiya ka shool" (Self-language is the root of all progress; without knowledge in one's own language, the pain of the heart cannot be removed) — encapsulated the linguistic nationalism that drove much of the most politically charged Hindi journalism of the period.

5. The Renaissance Phase: Social Reforms and the Hindi Press

The relationship between Hindi journalism and the social reform movements of nineteenth-century India was complex and mutually constitutive. Hindi newspapers and journals were not merely observers of social reform; they were active participants in the debates, controversies, and campaigns that defined the reform agenda of the period. Conversely, the social reform movements provided Hindi journalism with its most engaged and committed readership, its most prolific contributors, and its most compelling editorial purpose.

Among the most important of these movements was the *Arya Samaj*, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. The *Arya Samaj*'s programme of Hindu religious reform — rejecting idol worship, challenging caste hierarchy, promoting widow remarriage and female education, and insisting on the authority of the Vedas — found extensive coverage and support in the Hindi press. Several leading Hindi editors and journalists were closely associated with the *Arya Samaj*, and the movement's publications, including the *Arya Patrika* and the *Satyarth Prakash*, exercised significant influence on the character of Hindi public discourse. Dayananda Saraswati's use of Hindi — rather than Sanskrit or English — as the medium of his reformist message was itself a significant endorsement of the language's public status and contributed to the legitimation of Hindi journalism as a vehicle of serious intellectual and political discourse (Jones, 1976).

The relationship between Hindi journalism and Hindu revivalism, however, was not without tensions. The assertion of Hindi as the language of Hindus in northern India — an assertion that became increasingly prominent in the 1870s

and 1880s — had obvious implications for the linguistic and religious minorities who were excluded from this formulation. The identification of Hindi with the Devanagari script and with Hindu cultural traditions, while politically effective in mobilising a broad constituency, also introduced sectarian elements into the Hindi public sphere that would prove problematic in subsequent decades. As Alok Rai (2001) has argued, the late nineteenth century saw the gradual construction of a "Hindi Hindu Hindustan" ideology that fused linguistic, religious, and territorial identity in ways that were politically potent but intellectually exclusionary.

Hindi journalism in this period also engaged extensively with the question of women's education and social status. Publications such as the *Bala Bodhinim Patrika* (1874), founded by Bala Shastri in Pune and later extended to northern India, and the *Stri Darpan*, which appeared in the 1880s, addressed issues of female education, child marriage, and widow remarriage from a reformist perspective. The coverage of women's issues in the Hindi press was not uniformly progressive — many editors maintained ambivalent or conservative positions on questions of gender and caste — but the very presence of these debates in the pages of Hindi newspapers represented a significant expansion of the public sphere and demonstrated the capacity of vernacular journalism to address questions of fundamental social importance (Anagol, 2005).

The coverage of famines, particularly the devastating 1876–1878 famines in the Deccan and the later famines in northern India, represented another important dimension of socially engaged Hindi journalism. Hindi newspapers documented the human cost of these disasters, criticised the colonial government's inadequate relief measures, and made the connection between colonial economic policies — particularly the export of grain and the fiscal priorities of the colonial state — and the vulnerability of Indian peasants to recurrent starvation. This coverage, exemplified by Bharatendu Harishchandra's essays on the subject, contributed to the growing critique of colonial economic policy that would become central to nationalist discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Misra, 1972).

6. The Politics of Linguistic Identity: The Hindi–Urdu Controversy

Among the most consequential political developments in which Hindi journalism was implicated during this period was the Hindi–Urdu controversy — the prolonged and intensely contested debate over the relative status of Hindi written in Devanagari script and Urdu written in the Perso-Arabic script as the official language of the courts and administration in the North-Western Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh). This controversy, which had its roots in the colonial government's administrative decisions in the 1830s and 1840s, reached a critical phase in the 1870s and 1880s, and the Hindi press was both a product and a driver of the linguistic mobilisation it generated.

The Hindi–Urdu controversy was not simply a linguistic dispute; it was a contest over cultural identity, political power, and the social status of competing communities. For Hindu professionals, merchants, and intellectuals in northern India, the promotion of Hindi in the Devanagari script represented an assertion of cultural dignity and political entitlement in the face of what they perceived as the historical privileging of Persian and Urdu by the Mughal administration and the continuing, if more ambiguous, preference of the colonial government for Persian and Urdu-educated Muslims. For Muslim communities, the promotion of Urdu was equally a matter of cultural identity and political survival. The colonial government's language policies became a focal point for the competitive mobilisation of Hindu and Muslim political identities that would have long-lasting and ultimately catastrophic consequences for the subcontinent (King, 1994).

Hindi journalism was central to the Hindu side of this controversy. Newspapers and journals consistently advocated for the official recognition of Hindi in the Devanagari script, publishing petitions, editorials, and correspondence that emphasised the numerical predominance of Hindi speakers, the historical depth of the Hindi literary tradition, and the practical inconvenience to the majority Hindu population of conducting official business in a script and

vocabulary primarily associated with Muslim educational culture. The most significant organised expression of this advocacy was the Nagari Pracharini Sabha (Society for the Promotion of the Nagari Script), founded in Banaras in 1893 — slightly beyond our period but the culmination of trends clearly visible by 1885 — which coordinated the campaign for official recognition of Devanagari and closely associated with the leading Hindi editors and literary figures of the period (Orsini, 2002).

The Hindi press's engagement with the language controversy was not merely instrumental — it was also constitutive of the phenomenon it reported on. By consistently representing Hindi as the language of "the Hindus" of northern India and by framing the controversy as a matter of communal interest and dignity, Hindi newspapers helped to create and reinforce the equation between Hindi, Hinduism, and Hindu political identity that became one of the defining features of the north Indian political landscape. As Christopher King (1994) has shown in his study of the Hindi language movement, the campaign for Hindi was simultaneously a campaign for Hindu cultural and political rights, and the Hindi press was the primary medium through which this campaign was articulated and disseminated. It is important to note, however, that the identification of Hindi journalism with Hindu communalism was neither complete nor uncontested during this period. Several Hindi editors maintained a more inclusive vision of Hindi as the common language of all residents of northern India, regardless of religious affiliation. The poet and editor Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, who would later become the dominant figure of Hindi journalism in the early twentieth century, represented a strand of Hindi thought that, while deeply committed to promoting Hindi, was also concerned with the social and cultural uplift of all communities. The relationship between Hindi journalism and communal politics in this period was thus characterised by tension and negotiation rather than simple equation (Dalmia, 1997).

7. The Consolidation Phase: Rise of Nationalist Press (1877–1885)

The decade between 1877 and 1885 saw the consolidation of Hindi journalism as an explicitly nationalist institution and its growing integration with the broader movement for Indian political rights, which culminated in the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. This period was marked by several developments that transformed the character and significance of the Hindi press: the intensification of anti-colonial sentiment in the wake of the Vernacular Press Act and other repressive measures, the emergence of a new generation of professionally trained and politically committed Hindi journalists, the growth of Hindi reading publics in urban centres across the Hindi belt, and the increasing coordination between Hindi journalists and English-language nationalist intellectuals.

The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, as noted above, had the paradoxical effect of stimulating rather than suppressing Hindi journalism. Although several publications were initially intimidated into compliance, the outrage generated by the Act — both within India and among liberal opinion in Britain — created a political climate in which the defence of press freedom became a nationalist cause in itself. When the Act was repealed in 1882 by the incoming Liberal government under Lord Ripon, the Hindi press responded with jubilation, and the episode reinforced the growing conviction among Hindi editors that political engagement and advocacy were not merely permissible but essential functions of journalism. The period of the Ripon viceroyalty (1880–1884) generally, with its tentative gestures towards greater Indian participation in local governance through the Local Self-Government Act of 1882, generated both hopes and frustrations that were extensively discussed in the Hindi press (Bayly, 1975).

The Ilbert Bill controversy of 1883–1884 was another major political episode that galvanised the Hindi press and sharpened its nationalist orientation. The Ilbert Bill, which proposed to extend to Indian magistrates the power to try European British subjects in criminal cases, provoked a fierce racist reaction from the British community in India that shocked and outraged Indian public opinion. Hindi newspapers covered the controversy extensively and

passionately, using it to expose the racial hierarchy that underpinned British colonial rule and to argue for the fundamental equality of Indians and British subjects before the law. The episode provided Hindi journalism with some of its most powerful arguments for Indian political rights and self-governance, and demonstrated the Hindi press's capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to major political events (Seal, 1968).

The institutional landscape of Hindi journalism by the mid-1880s had changed substantially from the fragile and intermittent beginnings of the 1820s. Major publications such as the *Hindi Pradeep* (1877) in Allahabad, the *Bharatmitra* (1878) in Calcutta, the *Saar Sudhanidhi* in Banaras, and the *Brahman* (1884) in Kanpur represented a diverse and relatively stable ecosystem of Hindi publications, each with its own editorial character and readership but united by a shared commitment to the promotion of Hindi language and culture and the advocacy of Indian interests. The print runs of these publications, though modest by later standards, were sufficient to sustain a genuine public sphere in which political ideas circulated, were debated, and influenced the opinions of an educated readership (Orsini, 2002).

The relationship between Hindi journalism and the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 deserves particular attention. The Congress, established through the initiative of A.O. Hume and a group of English-educated Indian professionals, represented the institutionalisation of Indian nationalist politics at a national level. From its inception, Congress leaders recognised the importance of the vernacular press in reaching audiences beyond the English-educated elite, and several leading Hindi journalists attended the early Congress sessions and reported on them extensively. The *Bharatmitra*, in particular, became closely associated with the Congress cause and helped to build a Hindi-reading constituency for the organisation's political programme (Misra, 1972). The relationship was not without tensions — some Hindi editors felt that the Congress was too closely modelled on British institutions and insufficiently attentive to the cultural and religious dimensions of Indian national identity — but the broad alignment between Hindi journalism and Congress nationalism would prove enduring and productive.

By 1885, Hindi journalism had thus traversed a remarkable distance from the precarious experiment of Udant Martand sixty years earlier. It had developed a sophisticated editorial culture, a recognisable set of political commitments, a substantial if still limited readership, and a proven capacity to engage with the major political events and controversies of the day. It had contributed decisively to the development of a vernacular nationalist discourse and to the construction of a Hindi-speaking public capable of conceiving itself as a political community with shared interests and a collective future. In all these respects, Hindi journalism between 1824 and 1885 had laid the foundations for its even more significant role in the organised independence movement of the following decades.

8. Conclusion

The role of Hindi journalism in the Indian independence movement between 1824 and 1885 was foundational, multifaceted, and historically consequential. Beginning with the pioneering but short-lived *Udant Martand* in 1826, Hindi journalism developed over six decades into a complex institutional field that engaged simultaneously with the demands of cultural identity, social reform, religious revivalism, and anti-colonial politics. This paper has traced the key phases of this development — from the fragile beginnings of the pre-1857 period through the politicisation following the Great Uprising, the engagement with social reform movements, the Hindi–Urdu controversy, and the consolidation of the nationalist press in the years leading to 1885.

Several conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, Hindi journalism was not simply a medium for the transmission of pre-existing political ideas but was itself a constitutive force in the formation of nationalist consciousness. Through the construction of a vernacular reading public, the development of new forms of political discourse in

Hindi, and the consistent advocacy of Hindi cultural identity against the cultural hegemony of both Persian/Urdu and English, the Hindi press helped to create the very community whose interests it claimed to represent. In this sense, Anderson's (1983) framework of print capitalism and the imagined community is directly applicable to the Hindi case, with the important qualification that the community being imagined was not only "Indian" in a broad sense but also specifically and assertively "Hindi Hindu" in a way that had important implications for religious and linguistic minorities.

Second, the relationship between Hindi journalism and anti-colonial politics was not linear or straightforward. In the early decades, many Hindi editors maintained cautious or accommodationist relationships with the colonial state, and the explicitly political character of the Hindi press developed gradually in response to specific political provocations — the repressive legislation of 1878, the racial politics of the Ilbert Bill controversy, the economic critique of colonialism developed by Bharatendu and his contemporaries. The politicisation of the Hindi press was thus a process of learning and adaptation rather than a fixed programme, and it produced a journalism that was genuinely responsive to the political conditions of its time.

Third, the contribution of individual editors and intellectuals — Jugal Kishore Shukla, Balakrishan Bhatt, Bharatendu Harishchandra, Raja Shiv Prasad, and others — was decisive in shaping the character of Hindi journalism. These were not merely journalists in the technical sense but public intellectuals who used the medium of the press to advance coherent visions of Indian cultural and political life. Their work gave Hindi journalism an intellectual seriousness and a literary quality that distinguished it from mere information dissemination and contributed to its capacity to form and influence public opinion.

Finally, the period between 1824 and 1885 established patterns and precedents that would prove enormously influential for Hindi journalism in the subsequent decades of organised nationalist agitation. The model of the engaged editor as both journalist and political activist, the association of Hindi journalism with Hindu cultural nationalism, the use of the vernacular press to build political constituencies in the Hindi belt, and the relationship between Hindi journalism and the broader nationalist movement — all these features, established during this foundational period, shaped the character of Hindi journalism through the twentieth century and its contribution to the eventual achievement of independence in 1947.

In summary, Hindi journalism between 1824 and 1885 was far more than a minor episode in the history of the Indian press. It was a crucible in which the political consciousness of the Hindi-speaking people of northern India was formed, tested, and ultimately directed toward the goal of national liberation. Its history deserves far greater attention from scholars of colonialism, nationalism, and the history of the press than it has hitherto received.

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