

# History of Journalism

India has a long history of the freedom struggle that included various challenges.

The freedom of the Press in India has also endured a saga of fights against draconian authorities which attempted to suppress information.

## Pre-independence

The first newspaper in India is credited to James Augustus Hickey, who launched The Bengal Gazette, also known as the Calcutta General Advertiser, in 1780. The paper lasted just two years before being seized by the British administration in 1782 for its outspoken criticism of the Raj.

Several other newspapers followed such as The Bengal Journal, Calcutta Chronicle, Madras Courier, and the Bombay Herald. All of them, however, were curtailed by censorship measures imposed by the British East India Company.

Throughout 1799, 1818 and 1823, the colonial administration enacted several Acts to regulate the press in the country. The legislative outlier during this period was the Press Act of 1835, better known as the Metcalfe Act, which introduced a more liberal press policy.

This lasted till the revolt of 1857, after which, a perturbed foreign administration, shaken by the mutiny, introduced the Licensing Act in 1857. It gave the colonial administration the powers to stop publication and circulation of any printed material.

In 1867, the administration enacted the Registration Act, which required every book or newspaper to bear the name of the printer, the publisher and the place of publication. Additionally, all books were to be submitted to the local government within a month of their publication.

One of the most stringent regulations on the freedom of the press in India was the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. Introduced by then Viceroy, Lord Lytton, this act provided the government with extensive rights to censor reports and editorials in the vernacular press. It was an attempt to prevent the vernacular press from criticising British policies. The measure was an answer to the shortcomings of the 'Gagging Act', which the press was impervious to.

With reference to the Vernacular Press Act, a special mention of Bengal's Amrita Bazar Patrika gives a glimpse into the spirit of the Indian press at the time. After the Vernacular Press Act was imposed, Amrita Bazar Patrika began publishing in English too, as the Act was not imposed on English newspapers.

Four new measures were enacted between 1908 and 1912 — the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 1908, the Press Act of 1910 and the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act of 1911.

The Press Act of 1910 particularly hit Indian papers hard. It empowered the local government to demand a security fee for any 'offensive content' against the government. Nearly 1,000 papers were prosecuted under the Act.

Mahatma Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha widely used the Press to rally the masses against the British. This further heightened the tension between the Press and the government. With Gandhi's arrest in 1930, the government enacted The Press (Emergency Powers) Act of 1931. It gave the provincial governments censorship powers.

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 brought further restrictions. The government demanded stiffer censorship, in spite of the Press Emergency Act of 1931. It controlled all international news that was coming in.

Against such acts of censorship, the All-India Newspapers Editors' Conference was conceived. It was aimed to be a protector of press rights in the country. It fought with the British government to lift the restrictions and advocated for better relations with the government.

## Post Independence

The Press Enquiry Committee was set up in 1947 with the aim of examining press laws in the light of fundamental rights formulated by the Constituent Assembly.

In 1951, the Press (Objectionable Matters) Act was passed along with an amendment to Article 19(2), which empowered the government to demand and forfeit security for publication of "objectionable matter". It remained in force till 1956.

A Press Commission was set up under Justice Rajadhyaksha in 1954. A major recommendation of the committee was the establishment of the All India Press Council. It was formally established on 4 July, 1966, as an autonomous, statutory, quasi-judicial body, with Justice J.R. Mudholkar, then a judge of the Supreme Court, as chairman.

Other Acts passed include Delivering of Books and Newspapers (Public Libraries) Act, 1954; Working Journalists (Conditions of Services) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955; Newspaper (Price and Page) Act, 1956; and Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publications) Act, 1960.

Today, there is no formal body that exclusively deals with the freedom of Press in the country. All matters concerning the freedom of the Press falls under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which states that "All citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression..." . These freedoms are restricted under Article 19(2) that prevents absolute power under 19(1).

Other self-regulatory organisations such as the Broadcasters Association (NBA) and Broadcast Editors Association (BEA) were established. The Editors Guild of India self-regulates the news content aired on television.

The electronic media complies with the guidelines of Central News Media Accreditation Guidelines, 1999, which falls under the Central Press Accreditation Committee that grants accreditation to the representatives of media organisations.

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