

History of Hindi Journalism in Patna (1872-1912)

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ABSTRACT

The impact of Western culture on India led to the growth of modern vernacular journalism. Infact, modern vernacular journalism in India arose out of the controversies of the day, and religion seemed to be the chief, though by no means exclusive concern. In due course, it played a significant role as the creator and interpreter of public opinion and ultimately paved the way for the growth of nationalism in India. The pace of growth and development of journalism was not even everywhere within the country. Bihar, a predominantly Hindi-speaking state supposedly lagged behind in the vernacular journalism, particularly Hindi journalism. Patna, the capital of Bihar, came out to be an arid and abstract zone for the growth of Hindi journalism. It virtually won the stigma of being “a grave yard of journals and magazines.”

Keywords: Journalism, Hindi, growth, Bihar.

INTRODUCTION:

For better understanding of the development of Hindi journalism in Bihar, and Patna in particular, it is necessary to delve deep into and go back to Calcutta, the nerve centre of the East India Company's activities in India in the initial years. The city of Calcutta played a very important role in the history of journalism in India. It was here that the first journal of India, the *Bengal Gazette* took its birth. Hicky who had come to India in 1771 started the publication of *Bengal Gazette* after five years of residence in Calcutta. It was "a weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties, but influenced by none." Hicky's weekly was followed by several others both in English and Indian languages. Mention may be made of '*Dig Darshan*' '*Udanta Martanda*' and '*Bangadut*'. '*Dig Darshan*' a monthly journal edited by J.C. Marshman, appeared in April 1818 from Serampur by the Baptist missionaries and used to be printed in three languages, including Hindi. The Christian missionaries adopted Hindi as the medium for propagation of their faith among the local people. *Udanta Martanda* was brought out on 30 May 1826 by Yugal Kishore Shukla, a Vakil in Calcutta Court who was proficient in English, Sanskrit, Persian and Bengali besides Hindi. It is considered as the first journal in Hindi. It was an eight-page weekly. It used to be printed in Nagari script and appeared on every Tuesday. Its annual subscription was two rupees. It had been brought out with a view to enable the Hindus to read the news-items for themselves without depending on others and to cherish the fruit of their own language'. It, however, did not live long for want of funds.

Ram Mohan Roy's *Bangadut* was started on 10 May, 1829 under the editorship of Nilratna Haldar. Its Hindi edition was put under Rajkrishna Singh. This was followed by the publication of *Banaras Akhbar*, in 1845 under the patronage of Raja Shiva Prasad Gupta, *Sitare-i-Hind*. It was the first journal to be published in Hindi-speaking region. In 1846 Maulvi Nasiruddin brought out a paper *Martanda* in five languages, including Hindi. After this a number of vernacular journals appeared in Calcutta. Banaras, Agra, Gwalior and other places in north India. In 1861 there were seventeen news papers; eleven in Urdu and six in Hindi.

Bihar being a predominantly Hindi-speaking region, the absence of a news-paper in that language was acutely felt. Towards the end of 1872, one Madan Mohan Bhatta, a Maharashtrian Brahman settled in Biharsharif, brought out the Hindi weekly *Biharbandhu*. It was published by Sri PuranPrakash Press of 79, Maniktalla Street, Calcutta. Madan Mohan Bhatta was influenced by Tilak with whom, the necessity of evolving Indian languages to meet the needs of the times began to be recognised and the needs were simplicity and subtlety—simplicity to reach a wider public, subtlety to convey a meaning which, while maintaining loyalty to the British throne and to the concept of Empire, stretched criticism to the utmost. The *Biharbandhu* continued to be published from Calcutta for two years and then Madan Mohan Bhatta felt various bottlenecks in the way. Thus, the publication of the *Biharbandhu* was transferred to Patna City. At Patna the *Biharbandhu* was edited by Keshav Ram Bhatta, Younger brother of Madan Mohan Bhatta. He was succeeded by Pandit Damodar Shastri. In its issue of the 14th July 1874 the editor said, "this Patna newspaper used to be printed at Calcutta, Bangala-knowing people corrected its proof, its language was also defective and suffered from grammatical mistakes."

It is generally believed that *Biharbandhu* had the honour of being the first Hindi newspaper published from Bihar. But researches have shown that *Biharbandhu* had a rival to share this honour. The 1960 edition of the *District*

Gazetteer of Monghyr mentions the name of a monthly journal *Dharma pracharak* which started its publication from Monghyr in 1874. This journal was brought out both in Hindi and Bengali by a Brahmo Samajist, Krishna Prasanna Sen, who became famous later by the name of Paribrajak Krishnanand Swami. This paper was published for several years and its office was shifted to Banaras later on. As its name indicates it was mainly a religious paper.

The *Biharbandhu* as said earlier, began to be published from Patna from 1874 and continued to serve the cause of Hindi. It expressed satisfaction when Hindi was introduced in the law courts of Bihar in 1880. It also concerned itself with social problems and in 1878 several articles advocating removal of -social evils were published in it. In 1882 its publication was stopped for want of funds. It reappeared in 1883. During the period 1890-93, it started taking interest in the politics of the day and openly supported the Indian National Congress. Much under the spell of nascent nationalism, it tried to inculcate patriotism among the readers. In 1922 it boldly observed "were I to be reborn after death, I wish, I did so in Bharat so that I could render service to the country with renewed vigour and fresh spirit." This paper, however, could not succeed in pulling itself out of the financial difficulties as a result of which it had to close its publication for good in 1925. The Bhatta brothers also launched a modest Hindi journal named the *Mahabharata* which too could not last long.

Besides *Biharbandhu*, *Mahabharata* and *Dharma pracharak* some more journals appeared in Patna. Hasan Ali, who was a teacher of the Patna Normal School and was formerly associated with the *Biharbandhu*, brought out a monthly journal named *Motichurin* 1878-79. The magazine, however, did not live long. A *Hindi Gazette* was started about the same time under the editorship of Sohan Lal, Headmaster of the Patna Normal School. After some time the *Gazette* shifted its publication to Calcutta. In 1880, Pandit Badrinath, a teacher of the Patna Collegiate School started a monthly named *Vidya Vinod* under his own editorship. In the same year another journal *Dharamaniti Tattwa* appeared from Patna.

An outstanding contribution to the growth of Hindi journalism in Patna was by Bhudeva Mukhopadhyay, a Deputy Inspector of Schools. He was already running a *Bodhodaya* press in Calcutta. He opened a branch of that press in Bankipore, Patna as 'Branch Bodhodaya Press' in 1875-76. He impressed upon Babu Ramdeen Singh to establish a press and bring out Hindi journals. This led to the establishment of the Khadagvilas Press at Patna. Lala Khadag Bahadur Malla of Majhauri estate after whose name the press had been christened was a very close friend of Babu Ramdeen Singh. He showered his favours freely on the press. In 1881 Ramdeen Singh brought out a monthly named *Kshatriya Patrika*. Ramdeen Singh patronised the publication of *Bhasha prakash* in 1883, *Harish Chandra Kala* in 1887, *Dwij Patrika* in 1890, revived the publication of *Vidya Vinod* in 1892 under the editorship of Chandi Prasad Singh; and in 1897 purchased the proprietary rights of the monthly *Brahman* of Pratap Narayan Mishra. The year 1897 also witnessed the publication from Patna of two monthly magazines—*Samasya-purti* and *Shiksha*. The former was brought out by the students of the Bihar National College and the latter was the fifth monthly Hindi publication sponsored by the Khadagvilas Press under the editorship of Ram Ran Vijay Singh, son of Ramdeen Singh. All these journals purported to be literary organs devoted themselves mostly to the enrichment of Hindi literature.

All these publications were either monthlies or weeklies. People had also started feeling the need of a daily newspaper. The first Hindi daily was *Samachar Sadhbarasan* which was started by Shyam Sundar Sen from Burra bazar, Calcutta in June 1854. It used to appear both in Hindi and Bengali. The first Hindi daily to be published in Bihar was *Sarwa Hitaishi*, which started its publication in 1890 from Patna. Its editor was Mahabir Prasad. Ambika Prasad Bajpai, however, thinks that *Hindi Bihari* which started its publication in 1913, was the first daily to be published from Bihar. This view does not appear to be correct in face of what has been stated above regarding *Sarwa Hitaishi*. J. Natrajan in his book *History of Indian Journalism* has mentioned that with the out-break of the First World War a number of weeklies were published as dailies. He has given a list of such papers and the *Hindi Bihar* figures in that list. This also dismisses Bajpai's view and that *Sarwa Hitaishi* remains as the first Hindi daily of Bihar.

There being no lack of enthusiasm or dearth of literary-minded persons in Bihar, it is not surprising that the beginning of the twentieth century was marked by a number of notable publications. A monthly magazine named *Bharat Ratna* was started from Patna in 1901. It was followed by *Kshatriya*, *Hitaishi*, *Aryavarta* from Dinapore, Patna, *Udyoga* and *Chaitanya Chandrika*. *Udyog* was edited by Vijayanand Tripathy, a famous poet of the time and *Chaitanya Chandrika* by Krishna Chaitanya Goswami, a literary figure of that time. The latter two were literary monthlies and carried pictures also. This literary activity was not confined to Patna alone but it spread to many districts of Bihar.

Bihar was separated from Bengal in 1912 and Patna became the capital of the new-born province. Soon after two journals namely *Kshatriya Samachar* and *Hindi Bihari* started their publication at Patna. The latter was sufficiently vocal in regard to topical matters.

Its clear from the above accounts that the seeds of journalism were sown at Calcutta which was then the seat of governmental activities and it was but natural that public opinion should have started taking shape there. It is also evident that in regard to vernacular press, Hindi journalism not only took the clue from but started its march along with the Bengali press.

It may also be mentioned that the publication of Hindi journals and newspapers had not yet become professional. Advertisement did not have that importance which it was to acquire later on. It was not aimed at utilising it for material gain rather it was launched as a spirit of private philanthropy mostly by scholarly type of people who thought that it was necessary to develop the language in order to make it a powerful instrument of public opinion. In most cases the editors themselves were the founders and publishers. This was one of the reasons why the publication of *Biharbandhu* was transferred to Patna.

It's a fact that compared to other vernacular journalism, Hindi journalism in Bihar, and specially Patna, could make little headway. It was mainly due to lack of respect for Hindi among the people at large. Many journals took vanished. Many journals took birth and after sometime it vanished. Many journals were shelved even in the embryo. But once Hindi enlisted the official support, it started making a dent into the remote areas in Bihar.

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