

Social Movements and Media: The Role of the Press in Advancing the Independence Movement during British Raj

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Abstract— *This paper deals with the media's role during India's freedom struggle in India examining three key social movements i.e., Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34), and the Quit India movement (1942). The study qualitatively analyzes 30 print media sources like newspapers, posters, and pamphlets on themes like legal consequences, calls for British boycott, and public resistance. Findings indicate how media effectively framed the narrative, mobilized support from the general public, and changed international perception—something of vital concern in giving shape to India's struggle for independence. Hence, the present research puts forward the dynamic interplay between media representation and change in society during colonial rule, along with the lessons about historical media strategies with their contemporary implications.*

Index Terms: Social movement, Indian freedom struggle, print media, resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

India's independence struggle is known to challenge colonial rule and eventually lead the country to become an independent nation. This exhibits how social movements can effectively alter the course of human history [1]. The role that social movements can play in bringing change to society is not something pertaining exclusively to the Indian situation. It is a fact that historically, grassroots mobilization has transformed societies from the civil rights movement in the United States to democratic revolutions across Eastern Europe [4]. This movement is an example of how much of a difference mobilization can make in causing societal change.

The Indian independence movement was heterogeneous and complex, comprising a long array of political, social, and economic wrongs perpetrated by British colonial rule [2]. Besides the struggle for political freedom, it was further instigated by a feeling of deep-seated inequalities and social injustices that had characterized Indian society over the years [3]. The participation of the oppressed and the lower castes in the struggle against the social order, contributed greatly to the development of the movement and its eventual success [3].

Scholars have studied the connection between social movements and media, particularly during political transitions and independence struggles, such as the Indian press's role in promoting the British Raj. The Indian press, during the colonial period, played a very significant role in forming public discourse and mass mobilization in support of the independence movement. The press was the medium through which nationalist ideas could be articulated and mass mobilization could be coordinated [5]. However, the nature of the relationship is complex. Control and censorship, often extended to not only protestors and rebels, but also the press,

making reporting on events and views tricky [6]. Despite all these odds, the Indian press became a strong tool in the freedom struggle in India and effectively utilized its reach to carry the voice of the independence movement and influence public opinion both within and outside India [2].

Fundamentally, it was not purely a political fight but social too, as it had the participation of many sections of the Indian population [7]. The press played an important part in reflecting and molding this social dimension by way of its reportage of activities and demands of many social movements and organizations.

This paper will examine the independence movement of India and the function of the press during that time to gain insights into the mechanisms by which social movements shape nations and change societal discourse.

A. Objectives of the study

1. To assess the representation of key social movements during India's freedom struggle in selected print media sources under the British Raj and examine the role of the press in advancing the independence movement
2. To identify themes and language patterns concerning the aforementioned movements

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The colonial rule in India had profound consequences for the Indian subcontinent. Economic exploitation, political marginalization, and growing aspirations of self-governance among people of India—interlinked to cause the eventual emergence of the independence movement. [2]. The freedom movement in India was not monolithic, as it represented many diversified civil groups and viewpoints [3]. Though the

Indian National Congress led the patriotic struggle characteristically, there were also effective movements among the lower-caste people and other downtrodden sections who wanted to challenge the dominant structure in society which significantly influenced the overall movement [4]. The colonial experience in India was felt also in the making of ethnic and religious identities, as different communities strived to point out their unique cultural and political aspirations in opposition to British rule [1]. The Revolt of 1857 was a significant challenge to the British, and it indicated the general resentment among the soldiers and civilians in India [9]. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance motivated mass civil disobedience movements all across India [10]. One of the greatest examples of tactical non-cooperation with the ruling British was the Salt March of 1930, led by Gandhi himself. The colonial policies, such as the Doctrine of Lapse, and the economic exploitation further fanned the flames of discontent and created the political platform for nationalist movements in the later period [11].

Between 1858 and 1947, the British Indian press played an important role in communication, education, and activism by providing a medium for public opinion, a site for fostering nationalist movements, and a space for articulating ideas about social reform. The Censorship of Press Act in 1799 initially imposed pre-censorship restrictions on the press, which was repealed later. The Press Act, 1835, or Metcalfe Act, gave wide scope to the press, while the Licensing Act, 1857, and Registration Act, 1867 introduced license provisions and fetters. The Indian Press Act, 1910 empowered the local governments to register newspapers and suppress propaganda. In 1780, James Augustus Hickey brought out the first newspaper *The Bengal Gazette*, and the Government, in 1872, took over *The Bombay Herald*, *The Madras Courier*, *The Bengal Journal*, *The Calcutta Chronicle*, etc., due to the criticism. The Vernacular Press Act in 1878 brought stricter control over newspapers but was repealed in 1882. In 1898, Section 153A criminalized defamation and inciting animosity, leading to countrywide protests and repressive laws. The press shaped public opinion and forwarded social reform [8]. The vernacular press such as *Amrita Bazar Patrika* gave nationalist leaders an outlet to voice anti-colonial sentiments [12].

Previous studies have thematically analyzed historical newspaper articles and identified recurring patterns of resistance and calls for independence at the time of launching of major movements [13]. Media coverage of the Quit India Movement was instrumental in galvanizing public support and international attention, thus accelerating India's journey towards independence [14].

The independence struggle of India helped the various liberation struggles across other colonial territories in the rewiring of geopolitics globally [9]. While the media during the independence struggle was able to reach the wider public, there are continuous debates on its successful and

comprehensive representation of regional diversities and social groups at the margins [15]. The media narratives during the post-independence period contributed much to the construction of a national identity that espoused non-violence and unity amidst diversity as an ideal [16].

A. Scope of the study

Through this study, historical uses of media during the Indian independence movement will be highlighted which can help scholars understand the current media portrayals of marginalized groups and minorities. This can lay groundwork for future researchers to underline any patterns or shifts in the media strategies across these periods in history and estimate their influence on public perception. It draws on comparisons, contrasts, and implications of the role played by the media in framing civilian attitude and political discourse.

III. METHODOLOGY

The three movements which will be taken up for discussion in this paper are: the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-1922, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-1934, and the Quit India Movement of 1942. A total of thirty print media sources including newspaper articles and clippings (national and international), posters, pamphlets and leaflets along with their headlines from these three primary freedom movements will be identified and drawn out for qualitative content analysis. The articles will be read for themes and language used. This will be done by coding the content, organizing thematic elements and evaluating their contribution to the cause of independence. Microsoft Excel will be used to organize these findings and synthesize them to make conclusions on the role of the Indian media in furthering the cause of independence. It will take a structured approach to understand how media representation during British colonial era influenced the trajectory of the Indian independence struggle.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Data from the different media sources has been analyzed for significant trends and insights and presented in this section. Fig. 1 illustrates the various print sources which have been used as representative samples for this study.

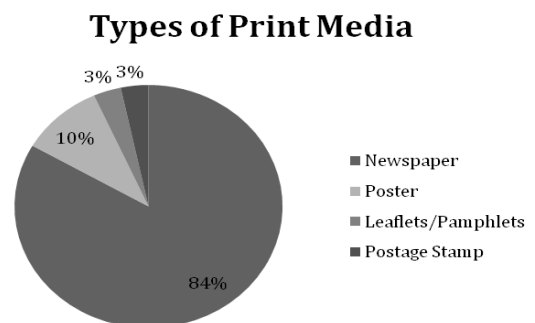


Figure 1. Types of print media sources analyzed

Out of the 30 print media sources selected for this research, most of them were newspaper clippings (83%) which were predominantly used for dissemination of news and opinions in British India. This is followed by other sources like posters (10%), leaflets or pamphlets (3%), and postage stamps (3%) which were also used as visual and textual mediums to spread messages for grassroots mobilization and symbolic communication.

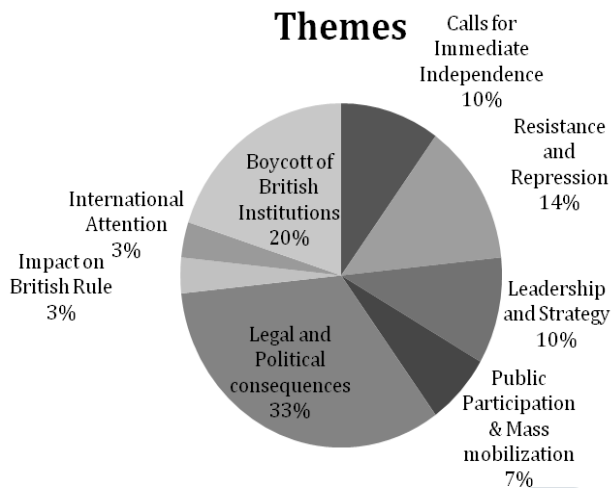


Figure 2. Themes and Messages

Fig. 2 demonstrates the different themes identified in the analysis of the sample text. Most of the messages covered the legal and political aftermath of the social movements (33%). There was extensive reporting on government measures to suppress the movement, including arrests, legal restrictions and the reforms in the government as a result of the protests. The next prominent theme was the call to boycott British products and institutions (20%) highlighting efforts to create and adopt alternative Indian substitutes. This was followed by the themes of resistance and repression (13%) which covered mass protests, strikes, and civil unrest, alongside reports on police and military repression.

3 of the sources demanded immediate independence, focusing on urgent withdrawal of the British from India- this was a key element of the movement's aims. 10% of the sources were centered on key leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress and, by doing so, emphasized strategic debates as well as tactics of nonviolent resistance. 7% of the sample covered widespread public participation in protests, a clear expression of the broad social and economic support base of the movements while 3% discussed how the movements paralyzed British governance and economic control, an indication of the movements' direct impact. Only 1 source reported on how the movements were viewed by the global community in for of reactions of foreign media, and governments.

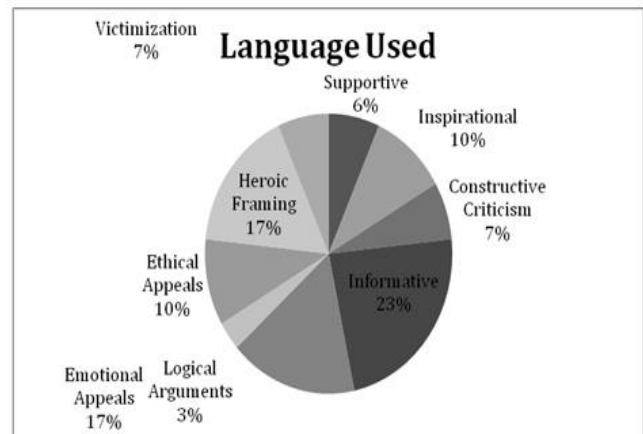


Figure 3. Language Usage

Fig. 3 depicts the different styles of language and tone used in the reports and print media messages circulated during the selected movements. Majority of the sources carried informative content (23%) with objective reporting and factual updates on the movements' activities to keep the public informed. The next major style of language used was emotional appeals (17%) and heroic framing (17%). Emotional tone and language was used to evoke strong emotional responses to enhance public engagement and solidarity while emphasis on heroism helped portray the movements and its leaders as heroes highlighting their bravery, sacrifice, and leadership. 7 % of all the articles openly supported the movement, its leaders, and causes through the tone of its language. 10% of the language was directed towards motivating and inspiring the audiences by emphasizing noble causes and sacrifices that were to be linked with the movement. 2 sources framed the movement and its supporters as victims of oppression or injustice, touting suffering and resilience in the face of adversity. 2 sources provided constructive criticism with respect to strategies of the movements, whereas 2 worked around the frame of the movement as a moral duty or fight for justice, by appealing to ethical principles and values. Only 1 source used factual data and logical reasoning to support the objectives of the movement by appealing to the rational perspective.

The findings of this study revealed that print media provided a space to give wide coverage of various social movements under the British Raj, often emphasizing and supporting the independence movement.

V. DISCUSSION

Out of the 30 sources on print media, 83% were newspapers; the remaining ones were posters, leaflets, and stamps. Themes identified in the texts were mainly legal and political consequences 33%; boycotting British products 20%; resistance/repression 13%. Other areas covered include key leaders and their strategies 10%; public participation 7%; impact to the British control 3% with a very low coverage of international views of 1%.

Language styles varied: 23% were informative, 17% emotional or heroic, 7% supportive and 10% motivational. Other smaller percentages included victimization, criticism, and moral framing; just 1% used rational arguments.

A. Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22)

The Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920-1922 was an important force mobilizing Indian public opinion against the British. During this movement, newspapers and pamphlets played a key role through which leaders like Mahatma Gandhi reached the public for the propagation of non-violent resistance and boycott of British goods. This, amalgamated with the Khilafat Movement, which was inspired by the slaying of the Turkish Sultan by the British, provided a collective non-violent struggle against the rule of the British. The Khilafat Movement, under leaders like Maulana Mohammed Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, united with the Non-Cooperation Movement, bringing Hindus and Muslims together. The Non-Cooperation Movement involved resigning from offices, withdrawing children from government schools, and boycotting foreign goods and the forthcoming election to the legislatures [17], [18].

Newspaper headlines emphasized Mahatma Gandhi's efforts for *Hindu-Muslim unity*, allied with the Khilafat Movement impelled by Indian Muslims. This coverage formed an essential phase in communal cooperation between Hindus and Muslims (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Newspaper clipping of The Bombay Chronicle dated 31 July, 1920

Fig. 5 depicts the different posters and newspaper clippings that called for the burning of foreign clothes which was a gesture of India's resolve to attain swadeshi and swaraj through the freedom struggle [17]. Three big bonfires of foreign clothes lighted up the nationalist fervor in Mumbai, then Bombay, in 1921.



Figure 5. Posters, leaflets, news clippings and postage stamps calling for boycott of British goods

A boycott of foreign goods, mill-made clothes included, was an integral part of the Swadeshi Movement of 1905-06, and it was revived by Gandhi in the Non-Cooperation Movement [18]. Within this framework, bonfires were organized consequent to public meetings arranged for the boycott. The first bonfire was inaugurated by Gandhi himself on July 31, 1921, at Elphinstone Mill, Bombay, which had an audience of about 12,000 people. The second and bigger bonfire took place on October 9 and had bigger crowds. The third bonfire, held on November 17 to protest the visit of the Prince of Wales, had an overwhelming crowd of almost 25,000 to show that nationalist feelings had reached a peak and public participation was very large in number [18].

A. Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34)

While the Non-Cooperation Movement was not about breaking any of the colonialist draconian laws, the successor movement to it, the Civil Disobedience Movement, broke the salt law and other colonial laws as a form of protest.

In its front page, the Bombay Chronicle dated 11 March 1922 carried news about the previous day's arrest of Mahatma Gandhi, a day following the protest march at Chauri Chaura. Elaborate accounts on Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi are indicative of how the media was strategically used in capturing and disseminating the essence of protest. The newspaper did more than inform its readers; it helped raise the profile of the movement internationally. It is this kind of media coverage that played a very important role in rallying support from within India and internationally in presenting the struggle for independence as an important and morally compelling issue.

The May 24, 1930, edition of The New York Times's headlines on the front page, "MRS. NAIDU JAILED;

200,000 IN PROTEST" and "Indian Civil Disobedience Chief Gets Nine Months--One Year for Third of Gandhi's Sons," reflect a very strong emphasis on the consequences of the Salt Satyagraha and the larger civil disobedience campaign [19].

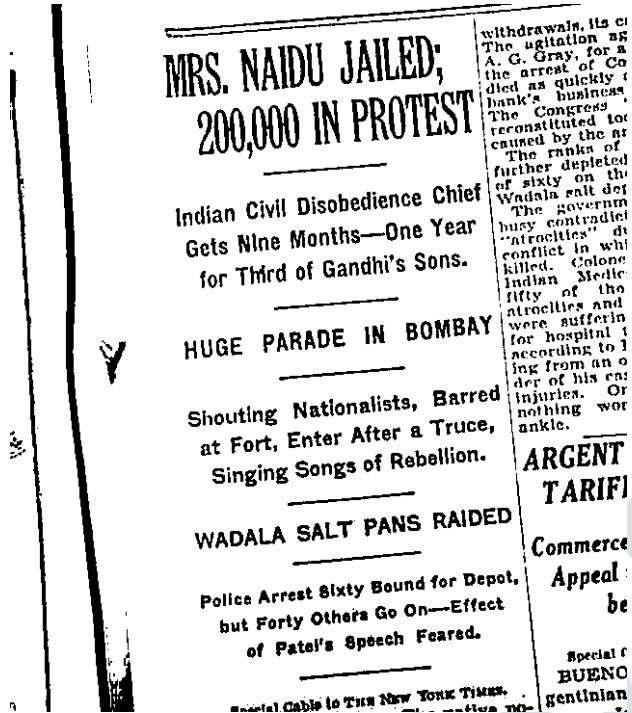


Figure 6. Newspaper clipping of The New York Times, May 24, 1930

The examples of Sarojini Naidu, "The Nightingale of India," going to jail and the mentioning of the huge protest by 200,000 people depicts how the media has documented and amplified the coverage of civil unrest and popular dissent against British colonial rule. To that extent, coverage of Naidu's imprisonment and high public reaction would go towards serving as a way of emphasizing commitment and sacrifice amongst the top leadership and great popular support behind the movement.

Detailed reports on the imprisonment of Gandhi's sons and the colossal parade in Bombay further illustrate the role of the media in capturing and communicating important events and mobilizations in the independence struggle. In this way, the front-page presentation of these events helped the media to greatly contribute to keeping public interest alive and manifesting the national and international impact of the movement.

In regard to effective media reporting on and garnering support for the cause of Indian independence, consider the February 31, 1930, edition of The New York Times. The front-page headline "GANDHI LISTS TERMS FOR PEACE IN INDIA" clearly expresses the role that the media strategically plays in highlighting some demands and negotiations as the movement unwinds [20]. According to Gandhi, if his "simple needs" were met, the Viceroy would

hear no more about civil disobedience—a condition of peace the media communicates right at the beginning to the reading global audience.

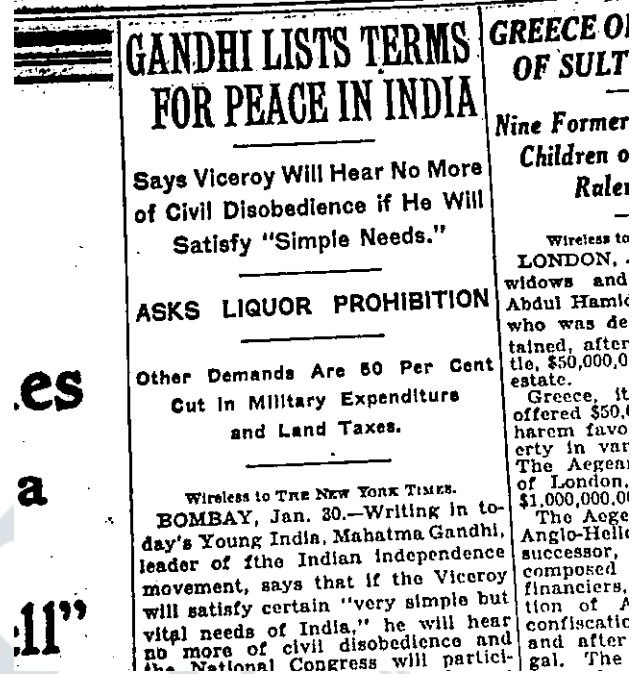


Figure 7. Newspaper clipping of The New York Times, February 31, 1930

This report on Gandhi's terms brings out how media coverage was used in framing the negotiation process and representing the independence struggle in structured and diplomatic light. Emphasizing on Gandhi's demands and the possibility of reaching a solution helped the newspaper to focus public attention upon pivotal moments of the movement and the pressures on the British authorities.

The headline "GANDHI WINS DEFIANCE FIGHT FOR INDIA" is carried across the front page of The Omaha Bee-News on March 5, 1931, to capture the essence of the significance of the signed Gandhi-Irwin Pact that day [21]. This headline reflects the media's role in mobilizing support for social and political movements by shaping public perception.

Media coverage, as reflected in the Omaha Bee-News, played an important part in informing people of the Pact's terms and its consequences. The headline captured that Gandhi was able to extract vital concessions from the British Government; through the newspaper coverage, the American public and the international audience—eagerly watching the changing political scenario taking place in India—were informed.



Figure 8. Newspaper clipping of The Omaha Bee-News on March 5, 1931

The headline, "Britain Seizes Gandhi as New Revolt Flares," on the front page of the Chicago Daily Tribune on August 1, 1933, says that Mahatma Gandhi was taken into custody on charges of renewed civil disobedience in Ahmedabad, India [22]. In this particular case, such a headline shows the role of the media in amplifying key developments during the independence movement and communicate to its audience the intensity of the struggle waged against the ruling circles of Britain.



Figure 9. Newspaper clipping of The Chicago Daily Tribune on August 1, 1933

The report of Gandhi's arrest and the subsequent coverage of the escalating revolt are good examples of how the media outlets were instrumental in documenting and publicizing major political events.

Headlines like "Gandhi Opens Drive for India Self-Rule" and "Britain Seizes Gandhi as New Revolt Flares" underlined the importance of the movement, gaining sympathy from the world's attention. In this way, milestones of the independence movement were continually marked and brought in front of the public view to keep up interest and passion for the global political struggle.

B. Quit India Movement (1942)

The Quit India Movement in 1942 was an important part of India's freedom movement. A call was made for an immediate end to British rule. Started on August 8, 1942, at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee, it staged a movement based on the increasing restlessness over British rule and the failure of the Cripps Mission to offer anything near self-government. The slogan of "Quit India" itself may have evoked complete independence, but it was Gandhi's call to "Do or Die" that really inflamed millions of minds all across the country. Papers ran detailed accounts of not only the leadership by Gandhi but also the arrest of key Congress leaders and widespread public unrest [23].



Figure 10. Newspaper clipping of The Indian Express, August 10, 1942

The Quit India Movement was an exposure of the vulnerability of British control and did much to further accelerate the process toward independence. Newspapers presented the movement as showing the increased demand for self-rule and galvanized support at home and in other countries; that made it a very important advance toward the eventual freedom of India.

VI. CONCLUSION

The multi-perspective approach of media coverage with facts and emotions supported by strategic framing had powerful mobilizing support for the independence movement. The focus on legal and political consequences thus shows the confrontational aspect of the movements vis-à-vis British colonial authorities, underlining the risks and problems which the participants of this campaign had to face. Varied communication channels include the use of newspapers, posters, and leaflets—all of these show an effortful attempt to reach diverse segments of society to assure maximal outreach toward involvement. The combinational use of supportive, inspirational, and critical voices shows a nuanced approach to how narratives are built, that help social movements reach its ultimate goals of introducing reforms and revolution in society.

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