

# ***War of Independence 1857 and the Role of Urdu and Persian Newspapers***

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## **Abstract**

*Much has been written on the causes and consequences of the War of Independence 1857, as one of the most significant events of the history of Subcontinent. Both historians and fiction writers have drawn conclusions from diverse perspectives of the War. But still many of its facets seem to be enveloped in ambiguity. The role of press during the War is one of those dimensions which still need further exploration and analysis by the researchers and historians of today. This paper seeks to develop a causal relationship between the difference in Hindu-Muslim stance during the War and the role of Urdu and Persian newspapers in shaping the public opinion in general, and of Muslims of India in particular. The paper would also focus on the British attitude and actions against the 'Native Press' during and after the War, as one of the indicators of the impact and strength of this press. The reflections of the contents of some important newspapers would also be included to help in analyzing this press as main representative or spokesman of the Muslims of Subcontinent.*

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### **Revisiting History**

The War of Independence, which was fought in 1857, is also said to be the beginning of a new era in the history of British India that ended in 1947. The last days of British rule in India in the words of H.V. Hodson were “the climax of a double struggle, at the same time for the national independence by Indians generally and for self-assertion by the Indian Muslims”. Digging out the roots of this divide in the aftermath of the War of 1857, he points towards four main reasons that gave strength to the concept of Muslim nationalism in India: the unfavourable attitude of English ruling class towards Muslims as they regarded the Muslims the mainspring of rebellion; the increasing role of Indian (mostly Hindus) educated and commercial classes in the public life in the country; the decreasing role of Muslims as soldiers and administrators due to increasing supremacy of the British, their emancipation of the States and their later suspicious attitude towards the Muslims, and finally the neglect of modern higher education by the Muslims out of both frustration and hatred on religious and cultural grounds. According to Hodson, the transfer of power in India could have been achieved much earlier if the issue of Muslims nationalism was not there.<sup>1</sup> The double struggle which Hodson has pointed out began after the War of Independence of 1857.

### **Causes of Revolt and Hindu-Muslim Approach to the War**

In fact, a lot has been written or said about the causes of division of the Subcontinent in 1947 as well as about the revolt which took place in 1857 and which is believed to be the milestone in the beginning of a new struggle for independence. Although the War of Independence 1857 was fought shoulder to shoulder by both Hindus and Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent, it will not be realistic to undermine the existence of a void between the two at that point of time as well. This is the reason that Muslims had to pay a higher price for it later. This void kept widening with the passage of time and finally resulted in the struggle of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. They had different reasons to confront the British rule in India and this difference of approach

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1 H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.9.

towards the revolt was also reflected in the reporting of the War in English, Persian and Urdu Newspapers of that time. This War which is also termed as a failure, especially by the scholars of European origin, affected the course of Indian history in many ways. It paved the way for the beginning of a new era of governance in British India, ending the rule of East India Company. This most written about event of the past had many dimensions; some of them yet to be uncovered.

Dr. Mubarak Ali raises three pertinent and objective questions while exploring the motives of the War:

- i. Was it a result of curtailing the privileges of the ruling elite like nawabs and rulers of princely states or was it a peasant's rebellion against East India Company's new revenue policy?  
OR
- ii. A conspiracy hatched by Nana Saheb, Rani of Jhansi and Hazrat Mahal ? OR
- iii. Indians were happy with the policies of the British but Muslims instigated them to revolt?<sup>2</sup>

In fact, it can be said that the anti-British uprising was largely confined to upper India and was fuelled by a number of reasons: the grief of the Indian sepoy; the anger of princes and princesses dispossessed by the British; and the resentment of the upper classes and castes at being treated by the British in law courts at par with lower class Indians, are cited as some of the major causes.<sup>3</sup> The objective analysis and interpretation of the above mentioned probabilities needs a detailed argument and deliberation but it is a fact that War did not engulf the whole of India. Although its fallout was widespread but basically it was fought in three areas; Delhi and adjoining areas, Agra, Oudh and Central India. It started from Meerut on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1857, engulfed Delhi on 11<sup>th</sup>, Luknow on 30<sup>th</sup> May and Banaras and Kanpur on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1857.

Moreover, one must not forget the fact that this War was not an immediate result of a mass movement rather it was a revolt of

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2 Dr. Mubarak Ali, *Bartānvī Hindūstān* (Lahore: Fiction House & Action Aid International Pakistan, 2007), p.68.

3 G.N.S. Raghavan, *The Press in India: A New History*, (Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1962), p.17.

the soldiers serving in the Indian army. Truly speaking this War was not only an overt expression of dissent against foreign rule, but at the same time this was also a clash of different economic, financial, administrative, legal, educational and, warfare systems. There were multiple causes of this revolt other than the one that is often stated as the major cause — the case of the new Enfield rifles — by the scholars and historians of British origin. Other causes include Lord Dalhousie's new policy regarding the services of the sepoys according to which the sepoys of Bengal army were being paid less than their counterparts in the army of Bombay and Madras; and the annexation of Indian States especially the state of Oudh from where at least 75,000 troops of Bengal Army were recruited. This annexation was instrumental in disaffecting the Bengal Army against the Company.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to this and besides very potent economic reasons, for a section of Indians, especially Muslims, there was a strong desire for Muslim rule over Christian-British rule. They wanted to bring back the Mughal rule through Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor. In this way pressure kept mounting against Company's colonialism from all sides: educated and uneducated, Indian and English educated, professional and the working class, Hindu and the Muslims. Finally this combined force erupted and took the shape of the War of Independence.<sup>5</sup>

The main focus of this research is to analyze the role of Urdu and Persian newspapers during the War of Independence in qualitative and quantitative terms through content analysis, so that a link may be established between the Muslim's stance during the War and the role of Urdu and Persian newspapers, as former were supposed to be the spokesmen of Muslim sentiment during the War. This dimension of the War seems even more significant when

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4 Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Indian Mutiny 1857-58*, (Osprey Publishing 2007), p.25.

5 Dr. Datidar Sachi Ghosh, "From the First Indian War of Independence to Another War" in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the War of Independence 1857*, University of Peshawar, June 2008 (Peshawar: Department of History, University of Peshawar, 2008) p.38.

it is combined with the fact that Urdu press was completely wiped out from Delhi and Lukhnow after the War.<sup>6</sup>

### **The 1857 Saga and the Press**

Although, the War of Independence 1857 is considered to be the most written about event of the world history, but still many of its dimensions seem to be enveloped in confusion and elusiveness and the role of the press is one of them. The enforcement of the Gagging Act of 1857 is a testimony to the significance of press during the War in the eyes of the rulers, which made it necessary for the newspapers to obtain license for printing<sup>7</sup>. In fact till May 1857 there was no change in the laws governing the newspapers in India.

When the War broke out in May 1857, the Indian press had no less than, 75 years old tradition. Apart from English language press, which was largely patronized by the British ruling class and yet was confined to the elite of Indian society, a number of Persian, Urdu, Bengali and other vernacular papers have had their roots in the society as a whole. This press may be classified into four categories.

1. English and vernacular press that enjoyed full support and patronage of East India Company, their officers and other English citizens, and was playing its role accordingly. *Jām-i Jahān Numa*, *Fawā'id al-NaDrīn*, *Qirān al-Sa'adayn*, *Kōh-i Nūr*, *Qadar al-Akhbār*, *Kurrachi Advertiser*, *Lahore Chronicle* and *The Panjabee* are only a few to mention.<sup>8</sup>
2. Those English, Bengali, Persian and other language newspapers, which were founded by educated Indians, like Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Dawarka Nath Tegore, Hari Dutt and many others. Their reformist press was different from that of Delhi and adjoining areas. These nationalist Indians used their press with a complete understanding of the changing political economic and cultural environment with major focus on development of society and the people.

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6 Dr. Masood Tahir, *Urdū Ōalāfat Unīswīn Ōadi Main* (Karachi: Fazli Sons, 2003), p.475.

7 Abdus Salam Khurshid, *Journalism in Pakistan* (Lahore: The Caravan Book House, 1986), p.31.

8 *Ibid.*, pp.19-29.

3. There were some Urdu newspapers that were supported by the rulers and Nawabs of Indian States, mostly to please the newspaper owners or to make use of them for achieving certain goals. For example, Raja of Nepal, supported *Banaras Gazette*. *MaDhar al-Surūr* of Bharat Pur, *Gawaliar Gazette* and *Bāgh-o-Bahār*, Banaras come in this category.
4. Those Urdu and Persian newspapers which were coming out from the areas where war actually broke out, like Delhi and adjoining areas, Lukhnow, Agra and Banaras. An analysis of the available contents of these newspapers especially of the period when war was being fought can provide some insight about the role of Urdu and Persian newspapers in motivating Muslims of India to revolt against the external power and restore Muslim rule legacy in the Indian Subcontinent.

Before embarking upon the analysis of role and significance of the press during the war it is pertinent to have an understanding of the then government press relations and the relevant laws to govern the press during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Press and Company's Policies**

In the press history of India, the first fifty years of Nineteenth Century are quite significant due to many reasons, especially in the context of 1857 revolt. A brief chronology can provide the changing relationship between rulers and the press. It will be interesting to note that the beginning of nineteenth century in the Subcontinent was marked by issuance of fresh directives for the conduct of newspapers through Governor General's advisory council. Issued on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1801, through this order, newspaper owners and editors were warned and directed to get their newspapers content checked by the Chief Secretary or Secretary Public Department prior to publication in the newspapers.<sup>9</sup>

Other important events related to the growth of the press were:

- Vernacular press founded in the Subcontinent, to represent the sentiments of the masses.
- The growth of the press in the first twenty years remained slow due to strict control on the press.

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9 Mohammad Attique Siddiqui, *Hindūstāni Akhbār Nawīsī* (Karachi: Indus Publications, 1980), p.98.

- From 1801-1818 new restrictions were imposed on press, as many as five times in seventeen years period. John Adam as head of the Censor Department had a very harsh attitude towards the press.
- In 1813 Lord Hastings, the new Governor General, restored some liberties for the press. In 1818, he abolished the Censor Department and many newspapers came out during this year.
- The second decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the beginning of newspapers in Indian languages. Christian Missions and Bengali Hindus brought out these newspapers. Baptist Mission of Seeram Pur took the lead and during 1816-1830 brought out five Bengali papers and one each in Persian and Hindi.
- Motivated by the efforts of Baptists Mission, educated Bengali Hindus entered into the field of journalism. The most significant among them were, Balganga Dhar Tilak, Raja Ram Mohan Rai and Hari Dat.
- Being frustrated by the consequences of the battles of Plassey and Buxar, the Bengali Muslims remained distant from both modern education and the press. The only newspaper from Bengal was *Samachar Sabhara Jandra*, which was brought out by a Muslim Sheikh Aleemuddin from Calcutta in 1831.<sup>10</sup>
- In 1823, Lord Hastings resigned as Governor General, and former Censor Officer, Mr. Adam, assumed the temporary charge of the office. Within a short period of time he enforced the first Press Ordinance in December 1823 for the newspapers, books and printing presses. According to the new law, acquiring license was made mandatory for printing of newspaper & books and for operating printing presses. This law, which was initially enforced in Bengal Presidency, was aimed at limiting the press freedom to a great extent. The same law was challenged in the court and two appeals were filed. Raja Ram Mohan Rai was one of the appellants. Both appeals were dismissed and in protest Raja Ram Mohan Rai closed down all three of his newspapers<sup>11</sup>.
- On 30<sup>th</sup> December 1825, another order was issued from London that prohibited all members of legislative council, all civil and army officers or any government officials including priests to have any relationship with newspapers and magazines. They

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10 Tahir, *Urdū Ōalāfat*, pp.64-79.

11 Siddiqui, *Hindūstāni Akhbār Nawīsī*, pp.174-180.

were also barred from writing in any such publication. The order was enforced in Bengal, Madras and Bombay at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

- In January 1827 government of Bombay also enforced similar restrictions for the newspapers, which were enforced in Bengal presidency by John Adam four years ago. These restrictions were also applicable on other publications and printing presses.<sup>13</sup>
- Year 1828 was the harbinger of luck for the newspapers in India because Lord Bentinck, who was a great supporter of press freedom, was appointed as Governor General of India. A new era for the growth of public opinion in India started, Raja Ram Mohan Rai once again entered in the field of journalism with new zeal and enthusiasm. Along with Bengali newspapers, bilingual press came into being. Bombay did not lag behind, in the year 1831, ten English newspapers were coming out from Bombay, Marathi language press was also started in this period.<sup>14</sup>
- In August 1835, Governor General Charles Metcalf enforced a new law, which lifted many restrictions and introduced declaration instead of license. Metcalf had to pay the price and Lord Auckland was appointed as the new Governor General of India. He maintained a balanced policy and consequently the number of daily and weekly newspapers was increased substantially.<sup>15</sup>

This chronology of events and subsequent legislation can provide us an insight of the environment in which the vernacular press was to be born, gain momentum and play a role in the historic events to be unfolded in the years to come.

### **The Uprising and Onslaught of Communication Technology**

While determining a causal relationship between the War of Independence and the role of media (only print at that point of time) it would not be irrelevant to mention the power of communication technology in subverting the same. Major General Sir Henry Bernard, commander of forces at Umbala, 130 miles north of Delhi was the first senior officer in a position to react to

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12 *Ibid.* p.191.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*, p.196.

15 *Ibid.*, p.220.



the revolt because he had managed to receive a telegraphic message on the afternoon of 11<sup>th</sup> May from Meerut via Delhi.<sup>16</sup> Aitzaz Ahsan pointed to this aspect by saying:

It was said later that the telegraph saved the British Raj in India. Even as Meerut was burning, 'and although the line [from Meerut and to Agra] had remained opened long enough for the postmaster's sister to send a message to her aunt telling her not to pay a proposed visit to Meerut as sepoys had risen in revolt, when the second official telegram was dispatched to Agra the line was cut after the transmission of the opening sentence.'<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Shuja Nawaz in his recent work has also hinted in the same direction when he mentioned the spread of mutiny in a very short span of time and maintained that it was only due to the fact that 4,044 miles of telegraph cable had been strung up in India.<sup>18</sup> The fact of the matter is that even then the most lethal power was the command and control of communication technology which is still valid in today's globalizing world.

### **The War and the British Fear of Native Press**

Generally speaking the role of vernacular newspapers in United India can be described in two phases; before the War of Independence and after it. Prior to the War all reformist movements of India were less political and more social in character and these movements were supported by the newspapers like those of Raja Ram Mohan Rai. The course of vernacular Indian press had changed drastically due to the events which took place in the country before, during and after the War. It turned more political and radical after the War of Independence.<sup>19</sup> Consequently political associations were formed by educated Indians in the Presidency cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. With the formation of political associations Indian-owned newspapers sprang up in various parts of the country in different vernacular languages and in English; also termed 'Native Press' by the

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16 Barnes, *The Indian Mutiny*, p34.

17 Aitzaz Ahsan, *The Indus Saga from Pataliputra to Partition* (Noida, U.P.: Lotus Collection Roli Books Pvt., Limited, 2005), p.302.

18 Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.10.

19 Dr. Mubarak Ali, "Press: M'ashrati Tarraqi ka aik Zari'a", in *HRCF Press: Freedom and Responsibility — A Tribute to Nisar Usmani* (Lahore: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2004), p.20.

British. Newspapers published in Indian languages reflected and strengthened popular sentiment. In a report prepared by Rev. Long for the government in 1859, he wrote,

The opinions of the native press may often be regarded as the safety valve which gives warning of the danger. Thus had the Delhi native newspapers of January 1857 been consulted by the European functionaries, they would have seen in them how the natives were ripe for revolt, and were expecting aid from Persia and Russia.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the British authorities were not totally ignorant of the role of native press in support of the revolt. This realization is further testified with the enforcement of new press law just after one month of breaking out of war.

### **Enforcement of the Gagging Act 1857**

Promulgated by the Governor General Lord Canning on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1857, a new press regulation was imposed in whole of the India as an immediate result of the 1857 uprising. According to the new law, the Adam regulations of 1823 were enforced on the press throughout the country. The Governor of Bombay Lord Elphinstone supported the statement of Sir Thomas Monroe which said,

Free press and domination of strangers are things which are quite incompatible and which cannot long exist together.... our Government in the country can never be a popular government in any sense of the term... if the unrestricted liberty of the press is incompatible with this form of the government, and with the continuance of our rule in this country, it must be curtailed.<sup>21</sup>

On one hand the government of East India Company was determined to curtail the press freedom to make the native rebellious press toe the official line, on the other, the Anglo-Indian press started campaigning against the Muslims and demanded their literal extermination and exclusion from all government posts. The Gagging Act was also supported by the Anglo-Indian papers like, *The Panjabee* and *Lahore Chronicle* from Lahore and *Sindian* and *Sind Kossid* from Karachi.<sup>22</sup>

Another evidence to testify the power of the vernacular press to support the revolt and the British fear about it, comes from an

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20 Raghavan, *The Press in India*, p.18.

21 *Ibid.*, p.19.

22 Khurshid, *Journalism in Pakistan*, p.42.

official circular no. 1341 of 1857 issued from the office of H.L. Anderson, Secretary, Government of Bombay, to the Commissioner of Sind on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1857 which says,

Sir, I am directed by the right honourable the governor in council to request that you will have to warn the editors of all native newspapers published within the limits of your charge not to make any statement in their columns in the subject of alleged mutineers in the Bombay army without the permission of the Government.<sup>23</sup>

In February 1857, another Anglo-Indian newspaper *The Mofussilite* from Agra demanded censorship for the native newspapers.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, *Lahore Chronicle* made Indian Muslims its main target:

Now there is no doubt about the fact that the conspiracies of the Muslims were at the bottom of revolt and they deserve to be severely punished, since so long as there are Muslims they neither can nor will change their opinions.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the British rulers had to make use of all three weapons to curtail the power of native newspaper as a means to suppress and control the magnitude of the War; the legislative, the executive and the Anglo-Indian, favoured, favourite and tamed press.

### **War of Independence & the landscape of Urdu and Persian Press**

This fact cannot be denied that Urdu language press in the Subcontinent was born in the hands of the colonial rulers, but at the same time it had rebellious sentiments in its roots right from the beginning. The first phase of Urdu press in the Subcontinent is spread over a period of twenty years from 1837 to 1857. *Jām-i Jahān Numa*, the first Urdu newspaper of Subcontinent had marked the press history during 1822-23, but it did not continue as Urdu paper for long and was converted into Persian very soon. In Northern India, Urdu press grew after 1840. According to Dr.

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23 Circular No. 1341, Bombay Castle, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1857, Sindh Archives, Acc. No.7411, File No.3, Vol. No. 14, 1857, Content 3 Restrictions on Press, p.68.

24 Dr Abdul Salam Khurshid, “1857 main Øalāfat kā Kirdār”, in *Quarterly Tareekh*, (Lahore) Special edition on 1857, Vol.3, No.36, 2009, p.247.

25 *Lahore Chronicle*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1857, cited in Abida Samiuddin, “Freedom Struggle and Urdu Journalism during the Nineteenth Century” in Asghar Ali Engineer ed., *They Too Fought for India’s Freedom: The Role of Minorities* (Gurgaon: Hope India Publications, 2006) p.127.

Tahir Masood the period from 1844 onward witnessed the fast growth of Urdu press, while during 1851 to 1856, it remained fastest. In this period newspapers were brought out from 29 cities of India, but main centres were Delhi, Agra, Madras, Lahore, Lukhnow, Banaras and Bombay<sup>26</sup>. In other words all those areas where freedom battle was fought also happened to be the main centres of Urdu journalism, and hence this fact may help us in developing a causal relationship between the two. According to one source, the Urdu press of India, before the War of Independence, was consisted of 103 newspapers including printing presses, while another research scholar of recent times, Dr. Tahir Masood, has listed some 122 Urdu newspapers, from all over India prior to 1857 uprising.<sup>27</sup> For this analysis some of these papers have been selected, which played significant role during the War. These newspapers not only fought this battle side by side with the rebels but they reflected the inner unrest prior to the War. These fearless and bold communicators of public sentiments were few in number, had little circulations but were very clear about their objectives and thus enjoyed a high penetration and widespread access. The most prominent among these freedom fighters were, *Dillī Urdū Akhbār*, *Øadiq al-Akhabār*, Delhi, *Ùilism-i Lukhnow*, *Sahr-i Samrī*, Lukhnow, *×abīb al-Akhabār*, Badayun, *Umdat al-Akhabār*, Baraili and *Akhabār-i Murtaðaī*, Peshawar in Urdu language and *Sirāj al-Akhabār* Delhi, *Sullān al-Akhabār*, *Dūrbīn* and *Gulshan-i Naubahār*, Calcutta in Persian<sup>28</sup>. The newspapers published in Urdu and Persian reflected and strengthened the public sentiment against the foreign rule. According to Jagdish Chatervedi,

It was in 1857 itself that Payam-i-Azadi started publication in Hindi and Urdu, calling upon the people to fight against the British. The paper was soon confiscated and anyone found with a copy of the paper was prosecuted for sedition... two newspapers in Urdu and Persian respectively, Doorbeen and Sultan-ul-Akhabar, faced trial in 1857 for having published a firman by Bahadur Shah Zafar urging the people to drive the British out of India.<sup>29</sup>

26 Tahir Urdū Øalāfat , pp.319-20.

27 *Ibid.*, pp.1090-1098 & Siddiqui, *Hindūstāni Akhbār Nawīsī*, p. 449.

28 *Ibid.*, pp.359-60.

29 Raghavan, *The Press in India*, p.18.

The onslaught continued, Mr. J. Natrajan in his famous work on the history of Indian press, documented on the basis of government records, declares that as the revolution broke out all the newspapers of north-western provinces stopped publication. He further elaborates that in 1853 the number of Urdu newspapers was thirty-five which, in 1858, came down to only twelve, out of which there were six old and six new newspapers; and out of these twelve, the editor of only one newspaper was a Muslim.<sup>30</sup> The spirit of leadership inspired by the Urdu press was severely criticized by Garsan Datasi, he wrote:

On the occasion of distribution of these ill-omened cartridges, Indian papers which were already showing readiness in spreading dissatisfaction took advantage of unlimited freedom and incited Indian people to refuse to handle these cartridges and persuaded them that by playing this trick the English wanted to convert Indians to Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

The policies adopted by the British regarding the native or vernacular press as the fallout of the revolt, are indicative of the fear of the then rulers from its capability to turn the course of events against them. This can be seen as an endorsement of the penetration of this press at the mass level.

### **Reporting the War: Some Reflections from Urdu and Persian Newspapers**

*Dillī Urdū Akhbār* of Moulvi Mohammad Baqar, who was sentenced to death by the British rulers on charges of supporting the mutiny, is said to play the most courageous role during the War. This newspaper, that earlier had a very careful tone, seemed completely changed once the revolt started. The text of the paper that contained the news of revolt began with the verses of Holy Qurān, the editor declared:

The mighty rulers whose strength, rule and administration, could not even imagine of the downfall, it did happen in the blink of an eye ... Most of the people still think whether this all has happened or they are still in a state of dream.<sup>32</sup>

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30 J. Natrajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, Vol. 1 (Delhi: Publications Division 1956), pp.54 & 68.

31 Datasi Garsan, *Khuḷbāt* (Orangabad: Aujuman-i Taraqqi-e Urdu, 1935), pp.183-84.

32 Tahir, *Urdū Ōalāfat*, pp.359-60.

In the subsequent text the editor gave an objective eyewitness account of the events that took place on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1857 in Delhi. The paper continued to publish the contents that reflected different dimensions of the revolt; these contents were filled with anti-English sentiments. In the subsequent editions the paper kept on providing the details of the events, especially the edition of 17<sup>th</sup> May 1857. Attique Siddiqui has reproduced the full text of that paper. Following are the extracts of the news items published in the issue of 24<sup>th</sup> May:

Kol: It has been heard that four companies of Kol appeared before the king after disgracing the English, killing every Englishman they came across and allowed the people to loot the treasury and the public looted it thoroughly and everyone grabbed what he would catch hold of.

Lucknow: It is reported that in Lucknow Englishman suffered the way they feared. It is also rumoured that the brother of the deposed king who was known to be mad has occupied the throne and the state is being ruled in his name.<sup>33</sup>

Maulvi Mohammad Baqir had to pay very heavy price of his courage, his son veteran Urdu writer and poet Moulana Mohammad Hussain Azad and his family suffered a lot, their property was confiscated and was forced to leave Delhi.

*Øadiq al-Akhhbār* is another prominent newspaper which took active part in motivating the people to revolt against English rule and which openly conveyed the sentiments of the rebellions to the masses. In the beginning of year 1857 Indian newspapers in general and Urdu newspapers in particular, gave lot of coverage to news stories of Briton-Iran War. The coverage of events was highly anti-Briton. *Øadiq al-Akhhbār* also published such stories in large number. Jamiluddin Khan Hijr, editor of *Øadiq al-Akhhbār* and his newspaper were extensively quoted during the trial of last Moughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. The recorded account of the trial also provides details about this paper through cross-examination of an official witness Chunni Lal. According to his version *Øadiq al-Akhhbār* was an anti government paper which had a circulation of two hundred copies and was popular among all sections of society. *Øadiq al-Akhhbār* while supporting the revolt

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33 Samiuddin, "Freedom Struggle and Urdu Journalism", p.121, translated extracts from Siddiqui, *Hindūstāni Akhhbār Nawīsī*, p.385.

also published fatwa of 35 Ulema in which fight against British was openly declared as Jihad. After the War of Independence the editor of *Øadiq al-Akhhbār*, Jamiluddin Khan, was arrested on charges of misreporting against the Government and was sentenced to jail for three years.<sup>34</sup> The paper was started in 1954 as Persian newspaper but switched over to Urdu after two years.

***Øilism-i Lukhnaw*** started in 1856 by Maulvi Yaqub Ansari as an Urdu weekly from Lukhnow almost after five months of forcible annexation of the state of Oudh. The contents of the paper were filled with the anti-Briton sentiments. Although its life was only eleven months but due to its bold content and courageous criticism of the British rulers, the paper acquired a respectable position among the contemporaries. The policy of newspaper was a reflection of courage and boldness. The paper truly mirrored and heavily criticized the deteriorating circumstances of the state of Oudh after coming under the British administration. Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah was a hero of the War of Independence, who was known for his rebellious activities even before the War. *Øilism-e Lukhnaw* reported his arrival in Lukhnow in these words:

Ahmadullah Shah who is stationed in Ghisyari Mandi, speaks whatever he wants, very bold person, always surrounded by people, strives orally when news reached to officials, they decided to avenge.<sup>35</sup>

In the edition of 1<sup>st</sup> May 1857, the paper pointed towards the beginning of revolt and its reasons. On one hand it kept depicting the increasing uprising in the country on the other it used to describe the power and strength of China and Iran as compared to that of Briton. The paper was forced to close down after the War.

***Sullān al-Akhhbār*** was brought out by Rajab Ali Lukhnavi in 1835 as a Persian weekly from Calcutta. Almost all the newspapers from Bengal took an entirely different position during the War of Independence from that of the papers from Delhi or adjoining areas. Distinctively, *Sullān al-Akhhbār* was one of the few newspapers that carried the text of Delhi proclamation in its edition of 10<sup>th</sup> June 1857. The paper was also known for its bold criticism on policies of East India Company. In an era when news sources

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34 Siddiqui, *Hindūstāni Akhhbār Nawīsī*, pp.402-03.

35 Tahir, *Urdū Øahāfat*, p.385.

were very limited, this paper regularly covered the important events from all over India. *Sullān al-Akhhār* also took a clear position on the murder case of William Frazier, the resident of Delhi, in which Nawab of Lohore was implicated. The paper published the proceedings of the case, even refused to accept the verdict of court and termed the death sentence of Nawab Shamsuddin as murder. The paper continued till 1862. After the War of Independence, many newspapers were implicated in criminal cases on charges of publishing seditious material; *Sullān al-Akhhār* was also one of them.<sup>36</sup>

*Sirāj al-Akhhār*, this paper was court gazette of Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar. Initially it was brought out as hand written diary of the court and in 1841 it took the printed shape. A spokesman of the Mughal court published detailed account of the events of 11<sup>th</sup> May in the form of a comprehensive report. With the failure of the War of Independence, this paper also ceased to exist. We can find its references in the trial proceedings of Bahadur Shah Zafar.

*Gulshan-i Naubahār* started publishing in 1851 under the editorship of Abdul Qadir. This paper just like its contemporary *Sullān al-Akhhār* used to write against policies of East India Company without fear of subjugation. Consequently, this newspaper was also subjected to revenge of the British rulers, its printing press was confiscated and the paper was forced to close down after the War. The main reason of this persecution was the publication of severe criticism on Company's annexation policies.<sup>37</sup>

In fact the Persian and Urdu newspapers of that era played a vital role in creating and forming anti-British public opinion, even prior to the War. When the war finally broke out, their tone became even bitter against the policies of the East India Company and expression of dissent and discontent became louder. The content of almost all the Persian newspapers are found to be filled with disclosures of the ruler's wrongdoings. *Mah'alam Afroz*,

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36 Chakraborty Biplab, "Indian Response to the First War of Independence" p.42. Tahir, *Urdū Ōahāfat*, pp.112-14.

37 Siddiqui, *Hindūstāni Akhhār Nawīsī*, pp.405-06.



*A'isan al-Akhbār* and *A'inah-i Sikandri* are the few other newspapers of this cadre.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, these had to pay very heavy prices in the form of forcible closures, trials and punitive action even life sentences.

### Conclusion

This brief account of the contents of some important Urdu and Persian newspapers and of their coverage of the War of Independence 1857, at least clarifies some ambiguities related to the role of Urdu and Persian newspapers during, before and after the War. The overview of the papers from January to September 1857, clearly indicates that sudden break out of the War was not so sudden, rather things had started turning towards that end earlier and Urdu and Persian press was very well aware of this uprising which was clearly reflected in the tone of Urdu as well as Persian newspapers coming out of the areas where this War was actually fought. Though few in numbers, they had a great role to their credit in sowing and ripping the seeds of revolt in the masses, and finally translating the same into action. The 1857 revolt is often named as First War of Independence and described as the joint effort of all the natives of India against foreign colonial rule. But the dilemma here is then why Muslims of India had to pay a much higher price of this dissent? The answer besides other factors also lies in the type of leadership both communities were influenced with; Urdu press in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century had acquired a nationwide growth and status, but in terms of standard and impact it lagged far behind the English and Bengali press. The Urdu and some of the Persian papers played a vital role in sensitizing public against the British policies and rule in India but without logical understanding of the changing times. At that time the Muslim empire of Mughals in India was already wounded with internal conflicts and had practically lost grip over the affairs. Indian States, on the other hand, were loyal to their privileges rather than the people. In these circumstances the mood of Urdu Press was more sentimental than rational and the tragic end of War of 1857 further traumatized this press. The death of Maulvi Muhammad Baqar, punitive action

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38 Akhlaq Ahmad Ahan, "1857 aur Fārsi Akhbārāt", in *Quarterly Tareekh*, (Lahore) Special edition on 1857, Vol.2, No.35 (2009), pp.370-76.

against the editor of *Øadiq al-Akhhār*, and the persecution of other newspapers which took clear position during the War, is indicative of the fear of the rulers from the power of that press. The impact of this War was far less in Bengal than in central India, although Bengal was the region from where all the battles for the political rights of the people were initiated including the battle for the freedom of expression. The reformist press of educated Bengali Hindus, who decided to fight and defeat the foreign rule politically and through social reforms, mostly influenced this region. The Urdu and Persian papers of Delhi and adjoining areas will always be remembered for their courage and quality of reporting but at the same time they proved incapable to gauge the magnitude and other dimensions of War and its consequences; for that Muslims of India had to suffer in the years to come and the void between the two communities expanded and finally emerged in the form of two-nation theory which later translated into creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India.