

The Powerful Role of Print Media in India's Fight for Independence: A Study

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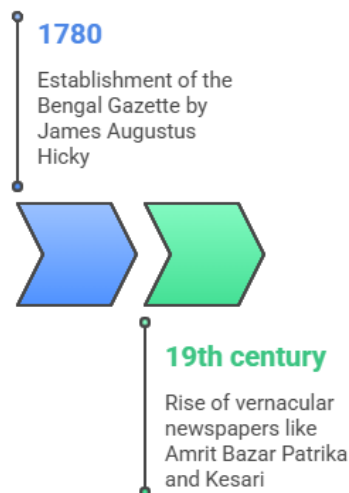
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Abstract

The freedom struggle of any nation is shaped by multiple forces, including political activism, grassroots mobilization, and communication strategies. One of the most influential tools during India's fight for independence from British colonial rule was print media. This paper explores the pivotal role that newspapers, journals, and pamphlets played in shaping public opinion, awakening national consciousness, and fostering a collective identity among Indians. From the early vernacular press to English-language newspapers, print media served as both a platform of resistance and a means to educate, mobilize, and inspire.

Introduction

The Indian struggle for independence was more than merely a political revolution; it was also a rising of social and cultural consciousness. While mass movements and charismatic leaders formed the visible front, a silent yet powerful revolution was brewing in the background — the revolution of the printed word. The press played an indispensable role in spreading nationalist sentiments and uniting people across diverse languages, regions, and religions. This paper examines how print media became a tool of resistance and a catalyst for India's independence.



catalyst for India's independence.

Print media in India began with the establishment of the *Bengal Gazette* in 1780 by James Augustus Hicky. Although initially serving colonial interests, it soon became a medium for Indian voices. The 19th century saw the emergence of vernacular newspapers like *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, *Kesari*, *Sudharak*, and *Bangadarshan*, which played a vital role in articulating public grievances and nationalist ideologies.

Print Media as a Platform of Resistance

Nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (*Kesari*), Mahatma Gandhi (*Young India*, *Harijan*), and Bipin Chandra Pal (*New India*) used newspapers to reach the masses. Through editorials, opinion pieces, and reports, they challenged British narratives and inspired resistance.

In a time of limited access to formal education, newspapers became schools of political thought. They informed citizens about events such as the Partition of Bengal, Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and the Quit India Movement, allowing people to form informed opinions and participate in protests.



instrumental in promoting Swaraj.

- *Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Bengali) – From being a weekly to a nationalist daily.
- *Swadesh Mitran* (Tamil) – Advocated for self-rule and social reform.

Many newspapers also addressed social issues like caste discrimination, untouchability, and women's rights, aligning social reform with national liberation. This broadened the movement's appeal and integrated the struggle for freedom with a vision of a just society.

Mahatma Gandhi, an accomplished author, had faith in the moral strength of the media. His publications (*Young India*, *Harijan*) focused on principles such as truth, non-violence, and self-sufficiency. Gandhi perceived journalism as a means of service rather than a commercial enterprise, and he utilized it to engage directly with ordinary individuals.



Censorship and Repression by Colonial Authorities

The colonial government recognized the threat posed by print media and enacted strict laws to curb its influence, including the Vernacular Press Act (1878), Press Act (1910), and several sedition laws. Many editors were imprisoned, newspapers were fined, and publications were banned. However, this repression often backfired, increasing the public's sympathy toward the freedom movement.

Although English newspapers served the educated upper class, newspapers in local languages reached a wider audience. They made political ideas accessible to rural and non-English-speaking populations, thus expanding the base of the freedom struggle.

Examples include:

- *Kesari* (Marathi) – Founded by Tilak,

Aim and Objectives of the Study

1. To study how Print Media helped accelerate the Indian independence movement.
2. To understand the importance of Print Media in Freedom Struggle.
3. To study the role of print media in independence.

This study aims to explore how national journalism contributed to and inspired Indians in their development, as well as the role it played in the freedom movement. Leaders and social reformers of the country, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Subhas Chandra Bose, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, and others, motivated the people of India to fight against the atrocities and injustices committed by the foreign government and to express their opposition. In colonial India, under British rule, the Print Media became a powerful tool for the indigenous population. Despite the strict restrictions imposed by the British government on Indian Print Media, particularly regarding freedom of speech and expression, the national press never hesitated to contribute to the freedom movement. In spite of the bans, rules, and guidelines, Indian leaders and social reformers courageously confronted the British government, leaving no stone unturned in their pursuit of freedom, ultimately achieving their goal.

Review of Literature

Early Beginnings and Vernacular Press: Historians such as **S. Gopal** and **Bipan Chandra** argue that print media played a crucial role in shaping national consciousness from the early 19th century. The establishment of the *Bengal Gazette* in 1780 by James Augustus Hicky marked the beginning of a press that, although initially serving colonial interests, became an avenue for Indian voices. Scholars like **R.K. Gupta** and **P.C. Joshi** have highlighted the shift in the vernacular press in the 19th century, with publications such as *Kesari*, *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, and *Sudharak* using their platforms to voice public grievances and nationalist sentiments. These newspapers, primarily in regional languages, played a vital role in reaching out to the masses, especially in rural areas where English newspapers had little impact.

Nationalist Leaders and the Press: **S. C. Jain** and **V. K. Vashist** have emphasized the role of nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, and Bipin Chandra Pal in utilizing the press as a tool for political awakening. In their writings, these leaders used newspapers as a medium to connect with the common people and spread the ideas of Swaraj, self-reliance, and civil disobedience. Tilak's *Kesari* is often cited as an example of how the press became a platform for challenging British rule and advocating for a self-governed India. Gandhi's own journals, *Young India* and *Harijan*, were pivotal in spreading his ideology of non-violence, truth, and social reform, as highlighted by **G. V. Desani**.

Press Censorship and Colonial Repression: Scholars such as **Ayesha Jalal** and **Sumit Sarkar** have explored the impact of colonial censorship on the Indian press. The British government enacted several laws to suppress the nationalist press, including the *Vernacular Press Act of 1878* and the *Press Act of 1910*. These laws aimed to restrict the freedom of the press, especially publications that criticized colonial rule or promoted nationalist agendas. Despite these efforts, as noted by **N. R. Ray** and **S. P. Singh**, censorship often had the opposite effect, strengthening the resolve of nationalist leaders and rallying the public in support of the freedom movement. Newspapers like *Kesari* and *Amrit Bazar Patrika* continued to defy colonial authorities, risking imprisonment and fines, and became symbols of resistance.

The Role of Print Media in Social Reform: The press also played a significant role in advocating for social reforms, including the fight against caste discrimination, untouchability, and the promotion of women's rights. **J. K. Ghosh** and **S. M. Saha** argue that newspapers like *Swadesh Mitran* and *Kesari* often linked the struggle for political freedom with the need for social justice. These publications helped promote

a vision of a just society, where freedom was not just about political independence but also about social equality and empowerment.

Gandhi's Ethical Approach to Journalism: Gandhi's influence on Indian journalism has been the subject of extensive research, particularly regarding his belief in the ethical power of the press. **S. S. Bose** and **N. K. Chatterjee** have written about Gandhi's perspective on journalism as a tool for service, not business. Gandhi's journals, particularly *Young India* and *Harijan*, emphasized truth, non-violence, and self-reliance, and he used them to reach out directly to the masses. These journals were more than just political platforms; they were educational tools that taught people about their rights, duties, and the importance of unity in the struggle for freedom.

Print Media's Legacy in Post-Independence India: The legacy of print media's role in India's freedom movement continues to influence the media landscape today. **K. K. Aziz** and **R. K. Mehta** argue that the press, through its contributions to the freedom struggle, laid the foundations for a free and vibrant media system in post-independence India. The transformation of print media from a means of opposition to a significant influence in democratic engagement is explored in their writings, emphasizing the ongoing importance of media in influencing public perception and political discussions in contemporary India.

Methodology

The methodology employed to realize the research objectives. The discussion centered round the rationale of the study, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study/ aim, demarcation of the research, the population, the sample, and sampling technique,. The info collection process and also the process to research the collected data were described of these were to confirm that the objectives of the research were achieved.

We used both primary & secondary data in this study. Original data was gathered from the survey, and additional information was sourced from research articles, books, journals, online resources, and magazines, among others.

Research Design

Survey method constitutes the planning of the research study. It was conducted in Ghaziabad. The researcher restricted it to grasp the results of "The Powerful Role of Print Media in India's Fight for Independence"

Sample Size

The target population comprised to different age group, gender and Income group. Total 100 samples were taken up by the researcher.

Sampling

Getting a sample in a very research study is incredibly important. This can be because all members of the study area can't be studied .The sampling procedure for data collection for this study is through purposive sampling technique.

Instruments:

The primary data was collected by a questionnaire. The findings and conclusions have been drawn based on the survey results on the topic.

Respondents:

The participants of the research were made up of various age ranges, genders, and income levels.

Procedure of data gathering:

The questionnaires were distributed among the respondents from different age group, gender and Income group.

Area of study:

The area of the study is Ghaziabad.

1. Do you believe print media played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle?

The table presents survey data on whether people believe print media played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle. According to the responses, a significant majority—61%—agreed that print media was instrumental in the fight for independence. This indicates strong recognition of the role newspapers, journals, and pamphlets played in spreading nationalist ideas and uniting people against British rule. On the other hand, 22% of respondents disagreed, suggesting that they either underestimate the influence of print media or believe other factors were more significant. Meanwhile, 17% chose "Can't Say," reflecting uncertainty or lack of awareness about the topic. Overall, the data highlights that most people acknowledge the important contribution of print media during India's struggle for freedom.

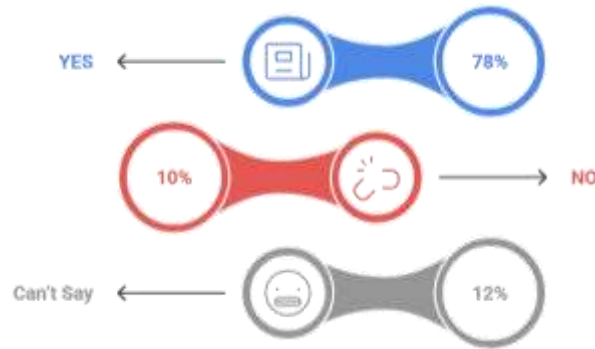
	Responses	Percentage %
YES	61	61%
NO	22	22%
Can't Say	17	17%
Total	100	100%



2. Was the British government afraid of the growing influence of Indian newspapers?

The table reflects public opinion on whether the British government was afraid of the growing influence of Indian newspapers during the freedom struggle. A clear majority—78% of respondents—believe that the British were indeed fearful of the rising power of the Indian press. This suggests widespread recognition of how influential newspapers had become in awakening political consciousness, exposing colonial injustices, and mobilizing public opinion against British rule. Only 10% disagreed, indicating a small portion of people who may feel the British either underestimated or managed to control the press effectively. Meanwhile, 12% responded with "Can't Say," possibly reflecting a lack of information or certainty about the issue. Overall, the data underscores the strong belief that the British saw the Indian press as a threat to their control and attempted to suppress it through censorship and restrictive laws.

	Responses	Percentage %
YES	78	78%
NO	10	10%
Can't Say	12	12%
Total	100	100%



3. Did the vernacular press have more impact than English newspapers during the freedom movement?

The table shows opinions on whether the vernacular press had more impact than English newspapers during the freedom movement. A majority of 58% believe that the vernacular press had a greater influence, likely because it reached a wider audience by communicating in regional languages, making nationalist ideas accessible to the masses. Meanwhile, 32% think English newspapers had a greater or equal impact, possibly valuing their role in influencing educated elites and international opinion. The remaining 10% were unsure. Overall, the data suggests that most people recognize the crucial role of the vernacular press in spreading the freedom movement at the grassroots level.

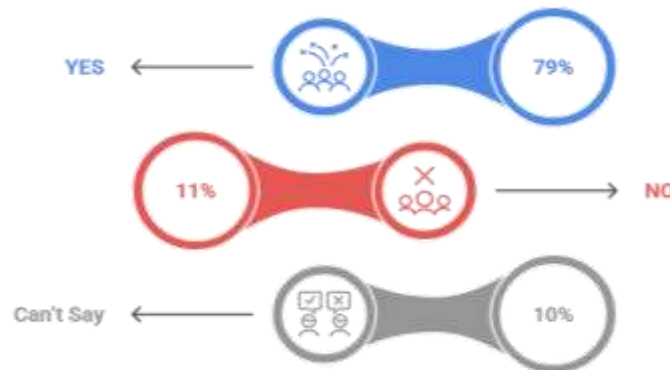
	Responses	Percentage %
YES	58	58%
NO	32	32%
Can't Say	10	10%
Total	100	100%



4. Were freedom fighters justified in using newspapers to spread nationalist messages?

The table reveals that a strong majority—79% of respondents—believe freedom fighters were justified in using newspapers to spread nationalist messages. This reflects broad support for the press as a legitimate and powerful tool in the struggle against British rule, helping to inform, unite, and inspire the public. Only 11% disagreed, possibly questioning the ethics or risks involved, while 10% were uncertain. Overall, the data highlights the general consensus that the use of newspapers was an essential and justified strategy in India's fight for independence.

	Responses	Percentage %
YES	79	79%
NO	11	11%
Can't Say	10	10%
Total	100	100%



5. Was the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 intended to suppress free speech?

The table shows a clear consensus on the purpose of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, with 92% of respondents agreeing that it was intended to suppress free speech. This overwhelming majority reflects the widely held view that the British government introduced the act to curb the growing influence of the Indian-language press, which was actively spreading nationalist ideas and criticizing colonial rule. Only 3% disagreed, and 5% were uncertain. Overall, the data strongly supports the interpretation that the act was a deliberate attempt by the British to silence dissent and control the flow of information among the Indian population.

	Responses	Percentage %
YES	92	92%
NO	3	3%
Can't Say	5	5%
Total	100	100%



6. Did Mahatma Gandhi's journals (*Young India*, *Harijan*) significantly influence public opinion?

The table indicates that 68% of respondents believe Mahatma Gandhi's journals, *Young India* and *Harijan*, significantly influenced public opinion during the freedom struggle. This suggests that a majority recognize the impact of these publications in spreading Gandhi's ideas on non-violence, civil disobedience, and social reform. Meanwhile, 25% disagreed, possibly viewing other forms of activism as more influential, and 7% were unsure. Overall, the data highlights that Gandhi's writings played an important role in shaping public thought and mobilizing support for the independence movement.

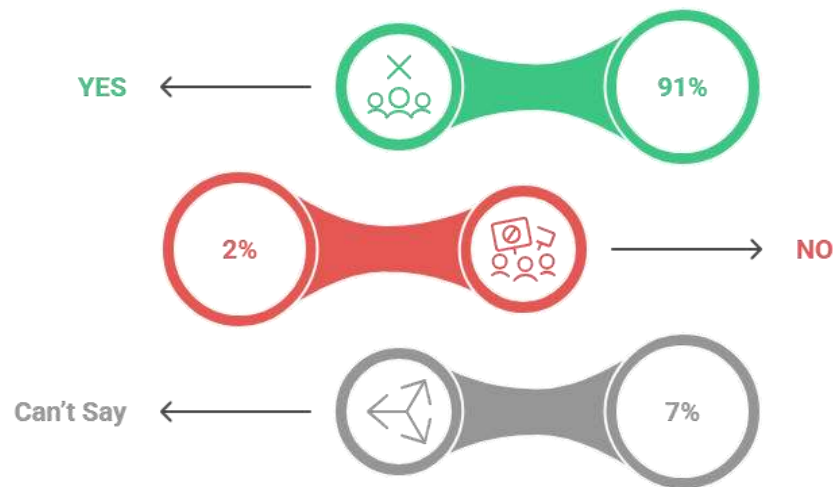
	Responses	Percentage %
YES	68	68%
NO	25	25%
Can't Say	7	7%
Total	100	100%



7. Should students today learn about the role of newspapers in the freedom movement?

The table clearly shows that 91% of respondents believe students today should learn about the role of newspapers in the freedom movement. This strong majority reflects the importance people place on understanding how the press contributed to India's independence by spreading awareness, uniting people, and challenging colonial rule. Only 2% disagreed, and 7% were unsure. Overall, the data emphasizes the widespread belief that educating students about the historical impact of newspapers is essential for appreciating the power of media in shaping social and political change.

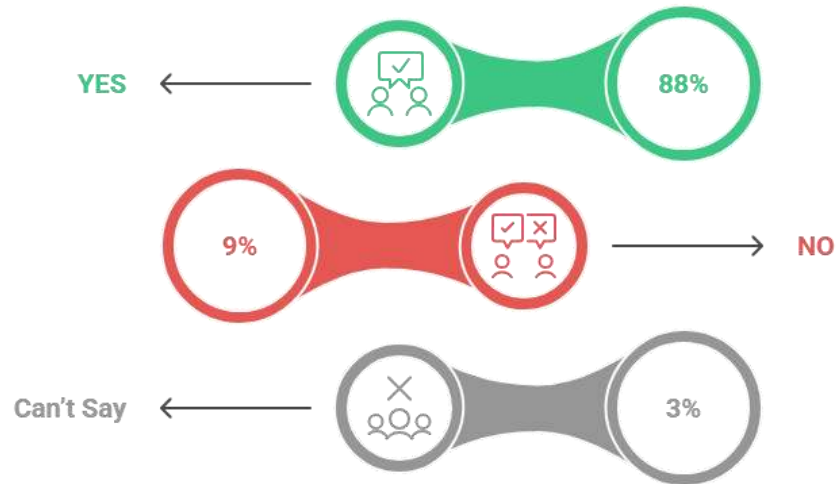
	Responses	Percentage %
YES	91	91%
NO	2	2%
Can't Say	7	7%
Total	100	100%



8. Is the impact of print media during the freedom struggle still relevant for understanding today's media?

The table shows that 88% of respondents believe the impact of print media during the freedom struggle is still relevant for understanding today's media. This indicates a strong belief that the historical role of newspapers in influencing public opinion, promoting social change, and holding power to account continues to offer valuable lessons for the modern media landscape. Only 9% disagreed, and 3% were unsure. Overall, the data highlights that most people see a clear connection between the media's past and its ongoing role in shaping society and democracy today.

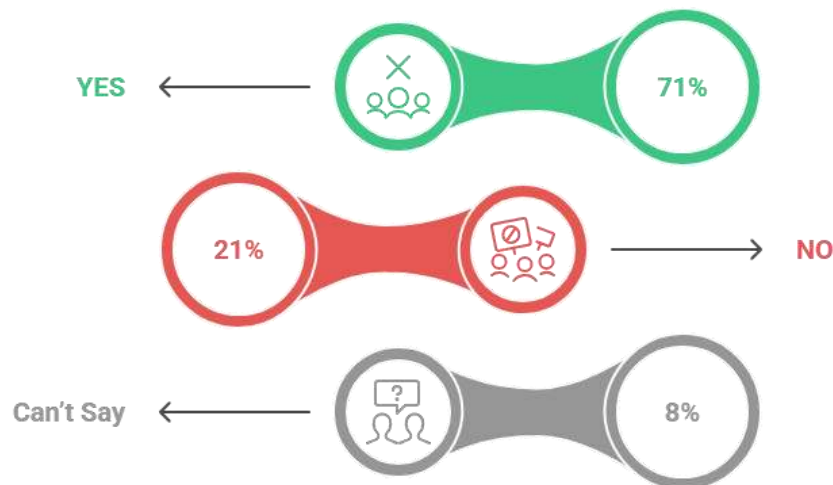
	Responses	Percentage %
YES	88	88%
NO	9	9%
Can't Say	3	3%
Total	100	100%



9. Was censorship of the press a major challenge for freedom fighters during British rule?

The table shows that 71% of respondents believe censorship of the press was a major challenge for freedom fighters during British rule. This majority reflects the understanding that strict British control over publications made it difficult to spread nationalist ideas and report on colonial injustices. In contrast, 21% did not see censorship as a major issue, possibly believing that freedom fighters still found ways to communicate effectively. Meanwhile, 8% were uncertain. Overall, the data suggests that most people recognize press censorship as a significant obstacle in the struggle for independence.

	Responses	Percentage %
YES	71	71%
NO	21	21%
Can't Say	8	8%
Total	100	100%



Summary

The survey data reveals a widespread recognition of the significant role played by print media during India's freedom struggle. A clear majority, 61%, believes that print media was crucial in the fight for independence, highlighting the importance of newspapers, journals, and pamphlets in spreading nationalist ideas and uniting people against British rule. However, 22% of respondents disagreed, possibly underestimating the impact of print media, while 17% were uncertain.

A strong majority (78%) acknowledges that the British feared the growing influence of the Indian press, recognizing it as a tool for awakening political consciousness and mobilizing public opinion against colonial rule. The vernacular press, in particular, is seen as having a greater influence (58%), due to its broader reach in regional languages, though 32% still value the role of English newspapers.

The survey also reveals that 79% of respondents believe freedom fighters were justified in using newspapers to spread nationalist messages. The Vernacular Press Act is widely seen as a deliberate attempt to suppress free speech (92%), reinforcing the view that the British sought to control the flow of information. Gandhi's journals, *Young India* and *Harijan*, are also recognized as having had a significant impact on public opinion, with 68% of respondents agreeing on their influence.

In terms of education, 91% of respondents believe students today should learn about the role of newspapers in the freedom movement, underscoring the importance of understanding the historical impact of print media. Additionally, 88% of respondents see the impact of print media during the freedom struggle as relevant to understanding today's media landscape, emphasizing the ongoing lessons it offers in shaping public opinion and promoting social change.

Finally, 71% of respondents recognize press censorship as a major challenge faced by freedom fighters, highlighting the obstacles posed by British control over the press in spreading nationalist ideas and exposing colonial injustices. The data as a whole underscores the critical role of print media in India's struggle for independence and its continued relevance in today's media environment.

Conclusion:

The survey's findings unequivocally support the importance of print media in India's fight for independence. Its influence in promoting nationalist ideologies, bringing people together, and organizing opposition to British colonial control is acknowledged by a sizable majority of respondents. The information emphasizes the concern British officials had regarding the growing impact of the Indian press and the obstacles presented by censorship. It also underscores the importance of the vernacular press in reaching broader audiences and the pivotal role of leaders like Gandhi in using newspapers to shape public opinion. Overall, the survey emphasizes the ongoing relevance of understanding the historical role of print media in shaping societal and political change, both in the past and in today's media landscape.

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