

## Coverage of International Events by Bihari's Newspapers (From mid-18th to mid-20th Century)

Abhay Kumar Singh\*

The importance of Bihari newspapers could be well realized not only as the constructive opposition giving helpful suggestions for their remedy.<sup>1</sup> They did not stop by merely giving suggestions to the government alone but also gave similar constructive counsels to the Indian people for the progress of India. They were advised to boycott the purchase and the use of foreign goods for the benefit of Indian economy. They even wrote gazals, poems, allegorical stories, dramas, etc. to highlight the foreign character of the British rule and its consequences. It was pointed out with the help of history, that even the English had once been slaves of the Norman kings. The French (1789) and the American (1776) revolutions and other historical events fortified their faith in the ultimate liberation of the subject people from tyranny and foreign

Thus the present paper will an endeavor to pinpoints the great international events in order to inculcate lesson from the happenings to arouse the cause of national movements and imbibe the liberal thoughts of the west.

The writings of these papers and their possible impact on the people brought about a situation which made the imperial policy makers nervous about the ultimate faith of the empire. They found in them, the initial vigor of nationalism which if unchecked, might overtake the whole country and finally submerge the empire. The situation had not drifted to the volcanic level for the simple reason that any organized political party dedicated to the cause of the liberation of the nation was yet to be born, the grounds for their political propaganda, technique and programme were already being prepared by vernacular journalism. To prevent such an eventuality the English government set itself to the task of devising ways and means to check the flow of history.

**\*Research Scholar Department of History J. P. University, Chapra**

The advent of the 20th century was a landmark in the history of the Indian freedom movement. International events such as the Russo-Japanese war, the Russian Revolution (1905), the struggle for self-government in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey, China and other countries which took place at the beginning of the century accelerated the pace of the Indian liberation movement.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say that Italian patriots Mazzini and Garibaldi became the object of inspiration during the Indian independence movement. It is generally held that the influence of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Risorgimentos had been limited to mostly English speaking Indians or at best to a few Indians speaking Marathi or Bengali. The influence of Italian nationalist leaders and Italian Risorgimentos was felt in every nook and corner of India through the biographies of Italian patriots like Mazzini and Garibaldi in Bihari newspapers and periodicals.<sup>4</sup>

Historical biographies of Italian nationalist leaders, particularly those of Mazzini and Garibaldi, were written in nearly all the major languages of India – Bengali, Gujarati, Garhwali, Marathi, Malayalam, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Not only the works and ideas of Mazzini were translated in different languages but the biographies of Italian nationalist leaders were written with inspiring and firing preface.

The first biography of Mazzini was written in 1879 by Jogendranath Vidyabhushan (1845-1904) in Bengali entitled Mazzini to Navya Italy (Mazzini and new Italy) followed by many biographies of Mazzini and Garibaldi.<sup>5</sup> N.C. kelkar's Guiseppe Garibaldi (1901) in Marathi was a patriotic literature.<sup>6</sup>

The biography of Anita, wife of Garibaldi, was also published in Bengali. Similarly, Lala Lajpat Rai wrote biography of Mazzini and Garibaldi in Urdu in 1895. The first biography of Mazzini in Hindi appeared in 1900 by G.D. Sharma. The first biography of Mazzini in Marathi written by L.G. Ghanekar was published in 1899.<sup>7</sup> V.D. Sawarkar wrote the Marathi version of Mazzini autobiography which was published at Poona in *Abhinav Bharat*. Godavarish Mahapatra wrote a biography of Mazzini in Oriya in 1930. In Telugu Mazzini's biography appeared in 1930. Narismha Ishwarbhai Patel's biography of Garibaldi in Gujarati was published in 1907. Punjabi version of Mazzini's Duties of Man appeared in 1912.

These biographies of Italian patriots appeared at a time when the process of arousing national consciousness among Indians had just started. These biographies were knowingly kept brief so as to maintain

the interest of the newspaper readers. The authors of these biographies were mostly important and well-known personalities of different communities. The foremost among these biographies was that of Sawarkar's on Mazzini. It was a revolutionary piece of work in which Sawarkar openly gave Mazzini's message to the youth of India to fight for the liberation of their motherland.

The purpose of vernacular newspapers through these historical biographies of Italian nationalist leaders was to educate the masses and to arouse national consciousness in the country.<sup>8</sup> The lives and deeds of Mazzini and Garibaldi and the general history of Risorgimento became a model of Bihari newspapers.

The ideal of the *Beharee* was based on American patriotism—first the State and secondly the Republic.<sup>9</sup> So after securing a separate province of Bihar the paper concentrated on national problems. When the *Beharee* ceased publication in September 1917, the revolutionary movement which believed in the cult of the bomb and revolver and armed rebellion had been well organized and had gained momentum. This was a period of national awakening in various parts of the world and numerous international events took place having far reaching influence on India.<sup>10</sup> The Russian Revolution led the Indians to believe that an autocratic government could also bend before mass agitation. This event gave fresh impetus to revolutionary activities in India and spurred the Indian revolutionaries abroad. The fighters for freedom came in contact with the Russian revolutionaries and socialist ideas and began to test the efficacy of Russian methods and techniques of struggle. In 1918, when the *Searchlight* launched its publication all these influences were at work.

The *Searchlight* took up the cause of revolution and gave due publicity to revolutionary activities to generate new awakening among the people of Bihar and by doing so incurred the displeasure of the government. The *Searchlight* highlighted the importance of Russian Revolution and commended its architect, Lenin, whose philosophy had made a powerful impression on the minds of the Indian revolutionaries. Lenin consistently advocated the cause of national self-determination and supported the struggle of other countries for freedom.<sup>11</sup> In 1908 when Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was sentenced for six year imprisonment for publishing two articles in the *Kesari* in praise of Khudiram Bose, whose prosecution was followed by a big strike in Bombay, Lenin

hailed it as the first political strike in India. Lenin noted the upsurge of the Indian national movement with keen interest. He condemned the partition of Bengal by the British in 1905 and hailed the mutiny of Indian soldiers in Singapore in 1915.<sup>12</sup> The October revolution in 1917 accelerated the growth of Indian national movement and the Indian revolutionaries met Lenin in delegation to seek his support to oust the English from India.<sup>13</sup> The death of Lenin was mourned throughout India in 1924. After his death the idea of the Bolshevik revolution began to spread all over India with greater speed than ever before and the people of India entered the world arena fully awakened and determined to win their freedom.

Russian Revolution in 1905 fired up the imagination of Indian revolutionaries. "The revolution that has been affected in Russia after years of bloodshed... may serve as a lesson to other government and other people."<sup>14</sup> The *Yugantar* issued a threat: "In every country there are plenty of secret places where arms can be manufactured". It advocated the plundering of post-offices, banks and government treasuries for financing revolutionary activities. The newspaper also observed that "not much physical strength was required to shoot Europeans".

The *Searchlight* hailed Lenin as one of the mightiest personalities of modern world and the October revolution as one of the greatest revolution in history.<sup>15</sup> Writing in its Facts and Comments column in passing away of Lenin, the paper said :Lenin's death carried away one of the mightiest personalities of the modern world—a personality as complete as it was powerful. Few men had the privilege to read their obituary notices in their lifetime more frequently than this, the once simple peasant of Russia who carved out a position for himself second to none in this mighty age...<sup>16</sup>

On April 30, 1908, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose threw a bomb on a carriage in Muzaffarpur in order to kill Douglas Kingsford, the Chief Presidency magistrate, but by mistake killed two women travelling in it.

Praising the bomb throwers, the newspaper *Kal* wrote "The people are prepared to do anything for the sake of Swaraj (self-rule) and they no longer sing the glory of British rule. They have no dread of British power. It is simply a question of sheer brute force. Bomb, throwing in India is different from bomb-throwing in Russia. Many of the Russians side with their government against these bomb-throwers, but it is

doubtful whether much sympathy will be found in India. If even in such circumstances Russia got the Duma, then India is bound to get Swaraj.”<sup>17</sup>

Bal Gangadhar Tilak defended the revolutionaries and demanded immediate self rule. He was arrested and a British Kangaroo court sentenced him to six years in a Burma jail. Days after Tilak’s trial, Russian leader Vladimir Lenin published an article titled “Inflammable Material in World Politics” in which he wrote that the British, angered by the mounting revolutionary struggle in India, are “demonstrating what brutes” the European politician can turn into when the masses rise against the colonial system.

Leon Trotsky, a Russian revolutionary and the founder of the Red Army, felt Gandhi was a fake freedom fighter. In an open letter to the workers of India, written in 1939, he wrote: “The Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with, and dependent upon, British imperialism.... The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi. A fake leader and false prophet!...” Trotsky believed India’s exploitation would be redoubled and striped in order to rebuild war-torn Britain. “Gandhi is already preparing the ground for such a policy”, he wrote “Double chains of slavery will be the inevitable consequence of the war if the masses of India follow the politics of Gandhi. All the Trotsky’s prediction would have come true if the rebel Indian National Army had not driven a stake of fear through British hearts.

Contrary to it the *Beharee* was opposed to the revolutionary movement in India and abroad.<sup>18</sup> The bomb throwing by Khudiram Bose in 1908, in Muzaffarpur was condemned by Sachchidanand Sinha in his presidential address to the Bihar provincial conference in 1909, and the *Beharee* wrote a long editorial condemning extremist violence. The *Beharee* also condemned the activities of the Indian revolutionary ShyamjiKrishnavarama in London and his Indian Sociologist for extolling Dhingra as a martyr to the cause of Indian Independence.

During this period revolutionaries were very active in every parts of the country as members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, the most prominent revolutionary organization of India connected with the Ghadar Party and the Dacca Anushilan Samiti. The Hindustan Republican Association was formed by Sachindra Nath Sanyal at Benaras in 1923 along with Jogesh Chatterjee of Dacca to launch a revolution to oust the British from India. Its object to be achieved by propaganda carried on by an open and secret press. Its programme

include collection of arms and ammunition, arrangement of safe hiding places for arms and shelter for absconders and underground workers, collection of detailed information about location of police station, banks and shops of arms and ammunitions.

The immediate object of the Hindustan Republican Association, which followed the footsteps of the Bolshevik Russia, was to set up a socialist republic in India<sup>20</sup> on the principle of universal suffrage and to abolish all systems of exploitation of man by man.

The connection of the Hindustan Republican Army with Bihar was manifested through the activities of the Patna Yuvak Sangh and the activities of revolutionaries in the state.<sup>21</sup> The Patna Yuvak Sangh was set up by Manindra Narayan Roy, a sub-editor of *The Searchlight* to arouse political consciousness among the Bihari youths with a view to preparing them for armed revolution to oust the British from India. The activities of the Patna Yuvak Sangh had the full backing of *The Searchlight* and the paper had reserved a special column to publish the day to day activities of the Yuvak Sangh. A report published in *The Searchlight* press says, “the Sangh as silently but steadily has been working towards the realization of its object, mainly to organize young men for their welfare, intellectual, physical and moral and to harness their energy to national and humanitarian services according to the varying needs of time”.<sup>22</sup> According to a government report two revolutionary leaders Bhupendra Nath Datta and Subhash Chandra Bose visited the Sangh in March 1929, to lecture on advanced politics. They praised the Russian and Chinese revolutionaries and exhorted the Indian youths not to submit to slavery.

The report has commended *The Searchlight* for providing the Sangh an all-out support. It says, “thanks to the authorities of the *Searchlight*, we get practically all-important dailies and periodicals free of cost and good use is made of them by our members.”<sup>23</sup>

In May 1928, Francis Balaz of the Unitarian College Club, Romania, visited Bihar and distributed revolutionary leaflets. He stressed the need for unity among the youths of all countries. *The Searchlight* published his speech delivered in Patna and other Bihari papers also gave him much publicity.<sup>24</sup> His speech greatly influenced the youths of Bihar.

On August 3, 1929, Manindra delivered a lantern lecture at Rakabganj, Patna City, which was seditious in character and tended to promote hatred between the Europeans and Indians. His other lecturer delivered on August 10, 1929, was in the similar vein with the only differ-

ence that he had made references to Russia, Turkey, China and Persia.<sup>25</sup> He said that the Russian overthrew their oppressive government and established a good government. Referring to Turkey and Persia, he said that Kamal Pasha and Reza Khan destroyed the previous government and established their own governments. Besides, China was also better governed and there was not there who could not get food. In the end he said that India should bring “Rashtra Biplav” as other countries had done.

Bihari newspapers viz. the *Searchlight*, commented on International Press Conference also. International Press Conference was organized by the League of Nations, and held at Geneva from August 26 to 29, 1927. The session lasted for six days (exclusive of Sunday) and the gathering was indeed memorable. It was the first independent Press Conference of the whole world<sup>26</sup>, and thus differed from those previously held. The conference was attended by 38 countries represented by 63 delegates 20 assessors and 35 experts, representing not only states which were members of the League, but also all others, and of the different categories of press interest—newspaper proprietors, cable companies, press bureau and journalists, associates, besides representatives of the International Cable Association and of the Great Britain, French and German newspaper distributing houses.

“A very large number of resolutions were keenly debated upon and ultimately adopted. Their full texts would cover several columns of a newspaper, but all of them can be divided under three main heads, namely, communication, circulation and journalistic facilities, in other words, the collection, the transmission and the circulation of news. The link in the chain was the resolution of the conference to extend the freedom of the journalists for the fulfillment of his primary duties. Other resolutions passed were mainly affecting the question of communication with a view to effect improvement in news transmission. The third and the last subject dealt with, which, in a sense, was the most important, was that of protecting news, both before and after publication, against unfair appropriation. The question was more keenly and more warmly debated than any other before the conference and it represented a real triumph for journalistic statesmanship.”<sup>27</sup>

We thus see that the Indian newspaper including the Bihar newspaper viz. the *Indian Nation*, the *Beharee* and the *Searchlight*, and the journals wrote about the international events and inspired the Bihari youths for freedom from British regime.

### References :

1. Choudhary, V.C.P., *Imperial Honeymoon with Indian Aristocracy*, K.P. Jaiswal Research Institute, (K.P.J.R.I), Patna, 1980, p. 107
2. Srivastava, N.M.P., *A History of the Searchlight*, KPJRI, Patna 1998, p. 2002
3. Srivastava, N.M., *Colonial Bihar Independence and Thereafter a History of the Searchlight*, KPJRI, Patna, 1988, pp. 95-96.
4. Srivastava, Gita, “Historical Biographies of Italian Nationalist leaders in Indian Literature during the Freedom Movement in India”, in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 55th Session, Aligarh, 1994, p. 831.
5. Natrajan, J., *History of Indian Journalism*, New Delhi, 1997, p. 65
6. Das, Sisir Gupta, *History of Literature*, Vol. 1, Sahitya Academy, 2000, p. 264.
7. Tikekar, S.R., Lokmanya Tilak, Some Eminent Indian Eitdors, Publication Division, 1981, p. 68
8. Choudhary, V.C.P., *op.cit.*, p. 420
9. Srivastava, N.M.P., *op.cit.*, p. 200
10. Srivastava, N.M.P., *Growth of Nationalism in India: Effects of International Events*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1973, p. 185
11. Srivastava, N.M.P., *Lenin and Indian Revolutionaries*, United Asia, Vol. 23, 1971, pp. 311-320.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sen, Mohit, *An Autobiography*, National Book Trust, 2007, p. 181
14. *The Bengalee*, 25 May 1906
15. Kumar, N., *Journalism in Bihar*, Secretariat Press, Patna, 1971, p. 185
16. *The Searchlight*, January 30, 1924
17. *Russia and India Report*, 15 August 2014, Rakesh Krishnan Sinha
18. Srivastava, N.M.P., *Colonial Bihar: Independence and Thereafter a History of the Searchlight*, KPJRI, Patna, 1988, p. 199
19. Jha, J.S., *Aspects of History of Modern Bihar*, KPJRI, Patna, 1988, p. 38
20. Srivastava, N.M.P., “Struggle for Freedom: Activities of Hindustan Socialist Republic Army in Bihar” in *Journal of the Bihar Puravid Parishad*, Vols. 738, 1983-84, pp. 510-20.
21. *The Searchlight*, January 26, 1978
22. Report of the working of the Patna Yuvak Sangh 1928-29, Patna.
23. *Ibid.*
24. DIG (CID) to Chief Secretary, GBO, 2 February 1931
25. Srivastava, N.M.P., *op.cit.*, p. 214
26. Sinha, S.N., ‘A Selection from the Speeches and Writings’ by B.B. Mishra in “the Indian Nation”, Patna, 1935, p. 484
27. *Ibid.*

