

The Contribution of Press in the Separation of Bihar from Bengal

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Abstract-On 1st April, 1912, Bihar was declared a separate state or province. The journey was not smooth, rather the leaders initiating or demanding the separation of Bihar and Bengal had to overcome numerous hurdles but the contribution of the Press in the movement was unimaginable. It was the Press of the time, especially the newspapers who offered the English educated bourgeoisie class an opportunity to ponder upon the fundamental question “Partition or no Partition” through frequent intellectual tug of wars. It also provided a platform to the educated mass to debate on the rationale of partition. The paper explores the journey undertaken by the Press to reach the summit of the dream dreamt by the Biharis to put an end to the injustices suffered by them in various fields.

The creation of separate Bihar served as a landmark event both in the history of India and in the history of Bihar. Various factors such as the growing political consciousness, suppression of Hindi because of being linguistically different from Bengal, progress of English education, and lack of employment opportunities for Bihar triggered the spark behind the commencement of the movement for the separation of Bihar from Bengal. English educated Biharis who pioneered the movement upon realizing the gravity of the situation included leaders such as Sachchidanand Sinha, Mahesh Narayan, Syed Hasan Imam, Purushottam Prasad Sharma, Akhaury Basudeva Narayan Sinha, Mazahurul Haque, Muhammad Saffuruddin, Ali Imam, Deep Narayan Singh, Rajendra Prasad, Sri Krishna Sinha, Tajeshwar Prasad, and Ram Dayalu Singh. They aired their grievances in the interest of the Biharis in some important newspapers like *Bengal Magazine*, *Bihar Bandhu*, *Samachar Chandrika*, *Qasid*, *Behar Times*, *Behar Herald*, *Bengalee*, *Al Punch*, *Indian Mirror*, *The Behar News*, *The Beharee*, *Daily Hitavadi* etc. They articulated their concern about how the union of Bengal and Bihar proved disastrous for the economy of Bihar which affected mainly the middle class. Due to fewer numbers of English educated Biharis, the scope for jobs in Bihar remained limited as highlighted by W.S. Atkinson, Director of Public Instruction of Bengal in his report dated May 03, 1861, and acknowledged by R.P. Jenkins,

Commissioner of Patna Division in his annual report on the education system, in his province, 1871.

Bihar Herald, though originated in Patna, in the interest of the Biharis, soon turned into an organ exclusively of the Bengali community of Bihar and from 1890, its bitter hostility towards the Biharis’ demands for separation from Bengal, was prominent. Likewise, Urdu papers such as *Murgh-i-Sulaiman*, *Qasid*, and *Nadir-ul-Akhbar* failed to fulfill their primary purpose of championing the cause of the Biharis.

An article entitled “A Bihar Village” published in the Bengal magazine of 1881-82 threw light on the peasants’ alarming economic condition but there was no clear cut demand for separation of Bihar from Bengal, the movement being limited to the grievances of the Biharis. *Bihar Bandhu*, one of the eminent newspapers of the times, recounted that the Bengali lawyers in Bihar were against the implementation of Devnagri script in the Courts and often discouraged their clients to file cases in the Court in Hindi. The Urdu weekly *Qasid* blamed the Bengalis for getting prioritized in receiving state patronage. The construction of railway line between Bengal and Bihar facilitated the Bengalis to visit Bihar, finish their work and return back to Bengal. In 1881, a political unrest broke out in Bihar when the Bengalis opposed Sir Ashley Eden, the Governor of Bengal’s decision to reserve certain jobs exclusively for the Biharis.

The two English educated Biharis, Dr. Sachchidanand Sinha and Babu Mahesh Narayan, with the help of Saligram Singh and Biseshwar Singh of the Kulharia family, Mahabir Sahai, Nand Kishore Lal and other contemporary prominent public figures started an English weekly, *The Behar Times* in 1894 from Patna which mainly highlighted the discriminations, the Biharis had to endure. This publication, edited by Mahesh Narayan, soon turned the agitation of the last decade of the nineteenth century into an organised struggle for the separation of Bihar and Bengal led by able leaders. The struggle spread like wild fire throughout Bihar transcending all the obstacles created by the Bengali papers. Several public meetings were organised with the one point agenda of separating Bihar from Bengal. Lord Macdonell, a distinguished member of Indian Civil Service, came up with an article in *The Pioneer of Allahabad* supporting the cause of the Biharis which acted as a great boost for them. *The Pioneer* raised its voice against issues such as absence of Bihari Medical College, ignorance of Biharis in several important fields like growing scholarship to Bihari medical students, recruitment, administration of Calcutta University etc. The injustice extended to such an extent that there were only three Biharis among sixty subordinated Judges in Bengal. In 1899, the issues specifically

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demanding, included mainly the appointment of officers in different estates of Bihar, viz. Dumaraon Estate, Deo Estate, Hathwa Raj etc. It was the first time, at that moment, the *Bengalee*, a Bengali newspaper admitted that Bihar was being ignored by the British government though they out rightly rejected the idea of separate Bihar, in fact Surendra Nath Banerjee cautioned the Biharis against the separation scheme.

The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed premature death of most of the Hindi papers due to lack of little support from the Hindi reading people; *Bihar Bandhu* being the exception but it opposed the separation, fearing its consequences. Urdu papers, especially *Al-punch* played a more active role opining that, without separation, the Biharis, backward in education as they were, would never be able to secure a fair share of the posts in administration.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when the government was contemplating about bifurcating Bengal into East Bengal and West Bengal, in an article in the Muslim Chronical, Dilwar Hussain, a retired Inspector of Registration, suggested a separation of Bihar, reminding the people over there of their glorious past. Other supporters included an ex-Lieutenant Governor of lower province, Sir Charles Stevens; Sir Henry Cottas, Furrel, formerly the editor of the *Calcutta Review*, the *English man* and *The Statesman* and Ganga Prasad Verma of Lucknow, the editor of the *Advocate*. They alarmed the Biharis not to participate in the struggle of 1905-1911 in support of the Bengal. *Bihar News* supported Lord Curzon's proposal of the partition of Bengal in the name of administrative convenience, considering it to be a rational cause but it was opposed by *Behar Herald* which urged the Biharis to participate in the Swadeshi movement as it will provide moral support while asking for the separation of Bihar.

With the reconstitution of *The Bihar Times* in April 1906, its name was changed into *Beharee*, at the same time, with the death of its editor Mahesh Narayan in 1st August, 1907, the publication passed into the hands of Syed Hasan Imam, Sachchidanand Sinha, Purushottam Prasad Sharma and Akhaury Basudeva Narayan Sinha but their crusade of a separate Bihar remained unchanged. In 1908, a 'Bihar Provincial Conference Committee' was formed uniting the three articulate classes of the province, the educated bourgeoisie, the native aristocrats and the upper strata of the Muslim community which included Ali Imam, Hasan Imam, Mazaharul Haque and Muhammad Saffurudin, holding its first session in April but it was criticized by all Bengali papers for not adopting the Swadeshi or the Swaraj resolution. In 1909, at Bhagalpur, Deep Narayan Singh's effort aided in the organisation of its second session, chaired by Sachchidanand Sinha, in presence of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

The session was held again in 1910 under the presidentship of Deep Narayan Singh at Muzaffarpur. *The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, the then mouthpiece of the Bengal. *Bengalis* criticised the speech of Deep Narayan Singh but it inspired other conferences held soon after like Bihar Students Conference which was inaugurated by Dr. Rajendra Prasad in 1906 and included Sri Krishna Sinha, Tejeshwar Prasad and Ram Dayalu Sinha; the Bihar Industrial Conference and many others. In 1911, at the Fourth Bihar Provincial Conference, Gaya, unanimously a resolution was passed demanding the reunification of East Bengal and West Bengal and a separate Bihar along with Orissa and Chhotanagpur under separate governorship which was highly appreciated by the *Indian Mirror*, *Daily Hitavadi*, the *Bengalee* etc. Though the government was seriously thinking of nullifying the bifurcation issue of Bengal, this conference alarmed them. King George V soon arrived in December 1911 to pronounce the creation of a new Lieutenant Governorship in Council, administering areas of Bihar, Chhotanagpur and Orissa as early as possible. Finally, a new province was formed on 1st April, 1912. Each and every Bihari rejoiced at the announcement. The hindi papers, *Mithila Mihir* of Darbhanga, *Bihar Bandhu*, *Arya Varta*, the *Ghar Bandhu*, *Shiksha*, *Jain Gajet Narad*, *Lakshmi Updesh Lahri*, *Bajrangi Samachar* celebrated the success and expressed their gratitude to the Emperor. *Beharee* was converted into a daily in honour of their achievement as the prime role and contribution for this success must be owed to the press, in particular the *Behar Times* alias *Beharee*.

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