

Birth of urdu journalism in the indian subcontinent assignment

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Discussing the difficulties in tracing the developments in the language press, J. Natarajan, in his pioneering and famous History of Indian Journalism, said that “ an important impediment” was that no “ coherent connected” record of progress and growth of the Press was available in each of the languages. The case of Urdu Press, which is the second oldest language press of the Sub-continent after Bengali (the mother tongue of Bengal), and the first in the rest of India, is no exception. Its observers and researchers have resorted to premises, hypotheses and even oversight wherever they could not lay their hands on some definitive record.

But the field is not without omissions. Jam-I-Jahan Numa, the first printed Urdu newspaper of the Subcontinent, is an outstanding example of oversight. Those who had written about it had dismissed it as an attendant of East India Company’s Administration merely because it carried the insignia of the British Government in its masthead for the first six years of its long existence. This assumption has been effectively defused by Mr. Gurbachan Chandan, a former head of the Urdu Desk in G. O. I’s, Press Information Bureau, in his 248-page Urdu book Jam-i-Jahan Numa, Urdu Sahafat ki Ibtida.

He spent over two years in researching the particulars of the book whose original record lay buried in the National Archives of India, New Delhi and the Oriental Section of the former British Library, London. On the basis of his findings, Mr. Chandan says, “ the very first brick of the edifice of Urdu Journalism was laid amiss by its historians who dismissed this firster as of no consequence. ” He has traced and vastly quoted from an official “ review” of the paper, prepared by the then Chief Secretary of the Government, Mr.

William Butterworth” Bayley who found “ Jam-i-Jahan Numa” to be capable of turning into “ an engine of serious mischief”. A product of deep research, the book, published by Maktaba-i-Jamia Ltd. , New Delhi, brings out, for the first time, the facts about the birth of printed Urdu journalism in the sub-continent. Incidentally, it is the only full-length publication available on the subject in any language. India’s Urdu Press is the successor of the oldest manuscript journalism which appeared in Persian in the sub-continent under the Mughal Administration and earlier.

With the advent of the printing press and western journalism a little after the establishment of the British government in Bengal, a brainy entrepreneur of Calcutta, Hari Har Dutt by name, floated the first Urdu newspaper under the title of “ Jam-i-Jahan Muma” (a Persian term meaning Mirror of the World) in March 1822, just six years after the first short-lived Bengali journal, “ Bengal Gazette” was published. Jam-i-Jahan Numa, the first-ever attempt to inscribe Urdu prose for the new faculty of print journalism, set the format, column arrangement, the front page make-up and the editing pattern.

This pattern was followed by almost all the Urdu papers which appeared in the first half of the 19th century in other parts of the country. The language at that time was called Hindostani and the publisher of “ Jam-i-Jahan Numa” gave the same name in his application for license (declaration) for publication of the paper. He simultaneously got it for Persian also which was at that time the language of the nobility, the intelligentsia and the literate society, for the last nearly 300 years.

Hari Har Dutt, however, chose to launch his paper in Hindostani which was the medium of conversation of the common people, whom he was keen to serve. The paper consequently suffered an initial setback because there was no readership in Hindostani proper. So about two months after the launching of his Urdu paper, the founder switched over to Persian but his love for Urdu did not wane. A year later, he added an independent and regular 4-page supplement to his Persian edition and continued it for about five years. The Persian version, however, survived for over 60 years, a record-run during the period.

The paper's founder was an employee of the East India Company, friendly with William Hopkins Pears Company, a British trading group. The paper's professional appearance led the observers to assume that it was a semi-official gazette, a protege of the Company's Administration or a toady paper. The result has been that for over a century, the scholars and votaries of Urdu journalism have looked down upon this pioneer as a satellite. Dubbing it as an appendix of British establishment, they have sought to dump it in the dustbin of history.

Perhaps that is why the stakeholders, both in India & Pakistan, have so far failed to observe March 27, 1822 the day when the first issue of the "Jam-i-Jahan Numa" saw the light of the day, as Urdu Journalism Day. Mr. Chandan dispels this trend with documentary evidence. His discovery of the official "review", prepared by the then Chief Secretary of the Govt, vests this precursor with a new identity and status. Mr. Bayley's assessment, based on direct monitoring of the first six month's issues of the paper, shows that

though cautious, it was an instrument of political wakening. Perturbed by its writings, Mr. Bayley was convinced that the only way to curb the trends evinced by the “ Jam-i-Jahan Numa” and other native papers was to enforce a stringent law for the Press. This led to the issuance in 1823 of the first Press Ordinance against which Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought a legal battle and then closed down his Persian paper, “ Miraet-ul-Akhbar”, in protest against the British Govt’s refusal to withdraw the ordinance. This was the first protest, by a language paper, against a curb on the Press.

The author also presents the background and milieu of the birth of Urdu journalism and society in India touching substantially on the contribution of the Mughal bureaucracy which had a sizeable strength of Hindu scribes who actively took to Persian which was the sole official language under Todar Mai, the Revenue Minister of emperor Akbar. He revised his predecessor, Sher Shah Suri’s order favoring both Persian and Hindi (Devnagari) for maintenance of official records. The Mughal rulers established a regular cadre of newswriters who reported on events of direct and special interest to the imperial administration.

Their newsletters were meant only for the ruler and his chosen ministers and there was no public distribution of these newsletters ok “ Waqai” (reports), formally called “ Akhbars”. Their reporters were called “ Waqai Nigar” (events writers) and “ Akbhar Navis” (news writers). The author has given quite a few examples of these reports and claims that if the printing apparatus, which was brought in India in 1575 for propagation of Christianity by the Portuguese missionaries, had been in common vogue here, language

journalism would have started nearly 300 years before it actually did and was euphemistically credited to the “boons of British rule”.

A group of Portuguese missionaries had presented a set of newly invented printing machine to Mughal emperor Akbar but he was not impressed with this metallic gift after observing its somewhat clumsy specimen of printing in English. Though bereft of consumer printing press, India, however, had a network of seasoned Waqai Nigars or reporters till almost the end of the 18th century operating for their local rulers and chiefs in various parts of the country. After the fall of the Mughal empire, several of these reporters were employed as local informants by the British East India Company's officials who did not know Persian.

The book does not rest at the birth of Urdu journalism in the sub-continent but also gives a lot of new and interesting information on the evolution of Urdu Society and the roots of several important language and communal problems of today. It explains how the British imperialist fostered and encouraged internal dissensions here to reap harvest of their nefarious designs. It further unfolds how the first Persian printed papers, which emerged out of the mature manuscript journalism, daringly denounced the British designs.

Perhaps for the first time, we find a sizeable survey of Persian newsletter journalism in this book. The originators of this Persian Press later founded the Urdu Press which was the guiding light of many other sections of language Press for about the first three quarters of the 19th century. “Jam-I-Jahan Numa” led the caravan of the new consciousness. After six years of its

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birth, it established its own printing press and also cast off the insignia of the British Govt. from its masthead. A secretary of the then Govt. Mr. A. Sterling, described it as “ the best native newspaper of its time, cautious and intelligent. ” Its copies reached the offices of Urdu and Persian newspapers in various parts of the country which made good use of it. One reason why Jam-i-Jahan Numa had been ignored was the near non-availability of its record. The author, inspite of his strenuous efforts and inquiries from leading figures of the Urdu world, has been unable to come across the dates of birth and death of the founder of the paper, Hari Har Dutt.

However, it is established that he was the son of Tara Chand Dutt, a close media associate of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The grateful people of Calcutta named a street in Tara Chand Dutt’s name in their town. The author, whose research has been confined to the Urdu edition of “ Jam-i-Jahan Numa”, however, is not disheartened at his inability to find these dates and believes that efforts should continue on the long Persian record of the paper and in the early history of Bengal journalism.

However, the wealth of material presented in the book, out of the record inquired into by the author, throws abundant light on the origins of Urdu journalism It goes a long way to expose the unconcern, indifference and oversight of our researchers and historians have been extending towards certain aspects of Urdu journalism. This is particularly evident in Pakistan where basic material on such subjects is extinct. Being nearly as old as Bengali journalism, Urdu journalism has been the nursing ground of the

temper and consciousness of the most important part of the 19th century which shaped the minds of new India.

The book has won two Academy Awards namely Urdu Academy, Delhi, and Urdu Academy, UP. The book Jam-i-Jahan Numa was published in 1992. Since then, Mr. Chandan has published several path-breaking books on Urdu Journalism, the latest “ Urdu Sahafat Ka Safar” being released in 2007 by two G. O. I. Cabinet Ministers: Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Minister, Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs and Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde, Minister, Power. This Book covers the period from the origin of Urdu Journalism to 2005, marking early 21st century and offers latest statistical data on Urdu Press.