THE PRESS IN BENGAL

I

In the year 1780 Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of the Bengal Presidency, wounded Philip Francis, the leader of opposition in his Council, so severely in a duel that he was compelled to go home. In the same year it occurred to one Mr. James Augustus Hicky, a "most eccentric creature apparently possessed of considerable natural talents, but entirely uncultivated".¹ that great benefit might arise from setting on foot a public newspaper in this country, nothing of that kind ever having appeared. Upon his types and other printing requisites therefore reaching him from England, he issued "Proposals for printing a News-paper, in Bengal, to be published every Saturday, by J. A. Hicky, under the title of The Bengal Gazette, or Calcutta Advertiser" (actually published as Hicky's Bengal Gazette; or Calcutta General Advertiser, and later as Hicky's Bengal Gazette; or The Original Calcutta General Advertiser). It is India's first newspaper and it was published as "A Weekly Political and Commercial Paper, Open to all Parties, but influenced by None", on 29 January 1780. Before it was published, "Such informations as are either useful or entertaining, and tending to promote the trading Concerns of industrious individuals," and "the Numerous Notices, Advertisements, etc." were "handed about by Harcarrahs, in Manuscripts," for which their "useful intentions" were "defeated by the impossibility of their being attentively regarded".²

The state of society and letters, when Hicky set up his printing press and brought out the first newspaper of India in Bengal, was of a very low order. Cock-fighting and horse-racing, drinking and gambling, and fierce political and commercial rivalries led to frequent duels of which many ended ill. It was a privilege of all gentlemen in those days from a Governor-General downwards, to murder one another by rule. It is no wonder, therefore, that Hicky, despite his pledge in the 'Proposals' that "no anecdote Personal or Domestic that can possibly convey the smallest offence to any single individual, shall ever be inserted" in his paper, very soon made it a channel of personal invective by attacking ladies and gentlemen of all ranks, high and low, in the most wanton manner. Several prosecutions were instituted against him as the printer and publisher of the Bengal Gazette, till in March 1782 his types were seized, the paper was closed, and he was utterly ruined. It is true that he was a kind of "a wild Irishman" who could not conduct his paper with common prudence and decorum. But there was hardly any code of decorum or sign of prudence in high or low society at the time. He, and the newspaper of which he was the editor, printer and publisher, were the tragic victims of the times. Yet it must be said to the credit of the editor of the first newspaper of India
that he had not surrendered to the will of the rulers of his time, although he was a member of their race, and that he had fought passionately for the freedom of press, rotted in jail for that, and was ruined in consequence.

At the end of the 18th century the Viceregal airs began in Calcutta. Public dinners were given at the Government house on the New Year’s days and the King’s birthdays to the "gentlemen of the Settlement", and "a ball and supper to the ladies at night". At these entertainments everybody "appeared in full dress, with bags and swords". Each toast, the king, the Queen, the East India Company, the Army and Navy, the Commander-in-Chief, Success to the British arms in India, was followed by a salute of twenty-one guns, from cannon drawn up for the purpose in front of the Court House.3 The India Gazette, The Calcutta Gazette, The Bengal Hurkaru, The Calcutta Courier, The Calcutta Cronicle, The Calcutta Monthly Journal and other papers followed in quick succession Hicky’s newspaper in the last two decades of the 18th century, when Calcutta was resounding with these gun-salutes of public dinners and pistol-shots of duels. The Governors-General, Cornwallis, Wellesley, Minto were all very much sensitive to press criticism, and the editors were frequently harassed for 'improper' and 'intemperate' articles, though less brutally than the poor Hicky was. In view of the political crises he was facing, Marquess Wellesley thought it necessary to subject the press to a rigorous supervision. A rigid press censorship was imposed by him on 13 May 1799. Every copy or proofsheet of a newspaper was required to be submitted to the Secretary for scrutiny before publication. Suppression of the paper by force and immediate deportation of the Editor to England was the penalty for breach of any of the regulations. The editors, none of whom was Indian at the time, were rather coerced to consider it "as a duty incumbent on them to comply in every respect to the Regulations of Government".4 This was the condition of the newspapers in India, published and read by Europeans, when the eighteenth century drew to its close.

II

In 1800 the College of Fort William was instituted by Wellesley in Calcutta, much against the will of the Directors, for training up young writers as efficient civilians. The study of Bengali, Hindusthani, Parsee and other 'native' languages was made imperative on them, and qualified persons, versed in these languages, were invited to join as teachers in the College. In 1800 the Baptist Mission was also founded in Serampore, and the Mission Press started printing works in Bengali and other provincial languages. "From this time forward writing Bengali correctly may be said to have begun in Calcutta; a number of books were supplied by the
Serampore Press, which set the example of printing works in this and
other eastern languages" (emphasis added). It may be said also that from
1800 onwards, after the foundation of the Fort William College and the
Baptist Mission, the field was steadily widened for the impact and
assimilation of Eastern and Western cultures in this country. The progress
was speeded up after the foundation of the Hindu College in Calcutta in
1817. The Bengali language was struggling to break away from its
traditional metrical bondage to become a suitable vehicle for modern
thoughts and ideas, problems and complexities of life, till in 1818 a
regular periodical could be brought out in it. The first Bengali periodical
was monthly Digdurshan, published in April 1818 by the Serampore
Missionaries and devoted to subjects of historical, geographical and
commercial interest. It was followed by the Bengali weekly Samāchār
Darpan (23 May 1818) published by the same Missionaries, containing all
the important news of the day, including editorial observation. Although
J. C. Marshman was the editor of the paper, eminent Bengali Pundits were
employed to assist in the editorial work. The first Hindu who established
Press in Calcutta was some Baboo-Ram, "a native of Hindoosthan". He
was followed by Gangakishore Bhattacharya, a Bengali compositor at the
Serampore Press, "who appears to have been the first who conceived the
idea of printing works in the current language as a means of acquiring
wealth." and published a weekly paper called Bāṅgal Gazetėe in
collaboration with Harachandra Roy. This Bāṅgal Gazetėe is the first
Bengali periodical published by a Bengali. On the appearance of a
newspaper in Bengali language, the Oriental Star (16 May, 1818)
remarked: "Amongst the improvements which are taking place in Calcutta,
we observe with satisfaction that the publication of a Bengali newspaper
has been commenced. The diffusion of general knowledge and information
amongst the natives must lead to beneficial effects; and the publication
we allude to, under proper regulations, may become of infinite use, by
affording the more ready means of communication between the natives and
the European residents." As Samachar Darpan was published on 23 May,
1818, it appears from the date of the above comment that the Bangal
Gazette might have been published a few days before it. Besides the
translation of civil appointments, government notices and regulations, it
contained "such other LOCAL MATTER as were deemed interesting to
readers, into a plain, concise and correct Bengalee language," and no
pains or trouble were spared "to render it as interesting as possible". "No
publication of this nature having hitherto been before the Public," the
Proprietor hoped that "the community in general will encourage and
support his exertions in the attempt which he had made, and afford him
a small share of their Patronage". Bengali prose was still in its swaddling
clothes, and the point to render the news as far as readable in "plain,
concise and correct Bengali is therefore important in the above notice,
Harachandra and Gangakishore were both inhabitants of Serampore and as
pioneer publishers of Bengali books and periodicals they have, therefore, some claim to Caxton’s celebrity in our country.

Harachandra was not an ordinary man. In a Bengali work of Rammohan Roy his name is mentioned and we come to know that he was closely associated with his Āmiya Sabha. This Āmiya Sabha was founded by Rammohan sometime in the year 1815 after he had finally settled in Calcutta, with the avowed purpose of free discussion of such social and religious problems as child-marriage, polygamy, caste system, widow remarriage, idolatry, and female education. It was the first modern association of its kind in our country where free discussion of social problems was regularly held and which helped in the creation of kind of public opinion on such problems. But mere discussions in an association cannot be effective in influencing the mass of people outside it. Some other powerful medium is required for that. Realising this, Rammohan Roy published three journals in course of a few months in 1821-22, the bilingual Brahanical Magazine or Brāhman Sebadhi in English and Bengali (September 1821), the Sambād Cowmoodee in Bengali (4 December 1821) the Mirat-ul-Ukhbār in Persian (12 April 1822). The advent of these papers, with pronounced liberal views on traditional social matters, broke the indifferrence of people and they were rouse from their mental slumber. Opinion began to circulate, and ideas, strange and new, got wings. They clashed inevitably with the old ones, and consequently the conflict imparted a new mobility to a hitherto stagnant society. It produced a favourable atmosphere for the growth of a national press. Sāmāchār Chandrikā, a conservative Bengali periodical, appeared to counteract the social influence of the liberals (5 March 1822). In October 1823 another Bengali periodical, Sambād Timirnāshak, was brought out to strengthen the hands of Chandrika, and the liberals took up the fight with energy and courage in their weekly Bangaddōtt (9 May 1829). The establishment of the Brahma Sabha by Rammohan (20 August 1828) and the abolition of Suttee by William Bentinck (4 December 1829), intensified the conflict between the Liberals and the Conservatives, and the battle of words in the Bengali press reached its climax by the end of the twenties.

The English press, in general, was very much annoyed at the prospect of the 'native' press growing in influence and popularity. A cry was raised to stifle it in its inception. There were few exceptions, however, like Silk Buckingham’s The Calcutta Journal (1818) which welcomed the Bengali press as useful and beneficial to the interests of the 'natives' and of the British Government. Reprimanding Buckingham for patronising the Cowmoodee, the Asiatic Journal wrote: "A Journal published in the language of the natives, conducted by natives, designed for the perusal of the native Indians, and of them almost exclusively, is set on foot, avowedly, if Mr. Buckingham is to be credited, for the purpose of fomenting their accidental discontents, of opening their eyes to the defects of their rulers, of encouraging and giving utterance not to their
complaints, but to their remonstrances." It pleaded for the reimposition of press censorship, withdrawn by Lord Hastings in 1818. The Calcutta Monthly Journal also could not join with those who welcomed the Cowmoodee as "a light for the Gentiles," chiefly because "political discussion is not suited to the prejudices or the capacities of an uneducated people". It appears strange that the British diehards apprehended so much trouble from the infant 'native' press at a time when there was hardly any scope for so-called 'political' discussion in it, and when it commanded very little people's support "ranging considerably under a hundred to perhaps two hundred subscribers". But the national press, once born, could not be strangled, and it began to grow in popularity as it grew in years. By the time Rammohan Roy braved the hazards of a voyage to England in 1830, it had grown in its early adolescence, and been able to stretch its vision to the distant horizon of political freedom, if not the entire Indian people, at least for its new middle class' patrons.

It was Rammohan Roy who laid the foundation of our national press in more than one national languages, Bengali, Persian and Hindi, in the twenties of the last century. Although he was not the editor of any paper, the bi-lingual Brahman Sebadhi, the Bengali Cowmoodee, the Persian Mirat, the tri-lingual Bangadoot and the English Bengal Herald (1829), were all directly sponsored and patronised by him. In all these enterprises he got the whole-hearted economic and moral co-operation of his close friend and associate Dwarkanath Tagore. He helped to raise the moral tone of the press above the level of the contemporary English periodicals, and tried to make his countrymen, irrespective of caste and class, conscious of their political, social and human rights. When Buckingham was deported to England for criticising a Government measure in his Journal and press restrictions were reimposed by Adam in 1823, Rammohan fought bravely in defence of a free press against the Act. He put forward a memorial to the Supreme Court of Calcutta for nullifying Adam's Press Regulations. Recalling his unique courage and patriotism on that occasion, one of his counsels remarked on his first death anniversary meeting in 1834 that "a man born and bred in Britain could not have come forward more completely heart and soul in support of that which was the cause of his country, that Rammohan Roy did in 1823".

III

The background for the next stage of development of our national press was provided mainly by the Young Derozians in the thirties and forties, and the social reform movement launched by Vidyasagar in the fifties. A large number of Bengali periodicals came out in this period of which the most important are the Sambadh Pravākar (28 January 1831), edited by
Iswar Chandra Gupta; the *Gyanweshan* (18 June 1831), edited by Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee and later by Rashik Krishna Mullick and Madhub Chandra Mullick; *Sambad Purnachandroday* (June 1835), *Sambad Bhaskar* (March 1839), *Vidyadarshan*, (June-July 1842), *Tatwabodhini Patrika* (16 August 1843), *Sarvasubhakari Patrika* (August 1850), *Bibidarthaka Sangraha* (September 1851), *Bangavidya prakashika Patrika* (September 1855), *Mashik Patrika* (August 1854), and *Education Gazette O Saptahik Barabaha* (4 July 1856). The influential bi-lingual papers of this period are the Bengali-English *Bengal Spectator* (April 1842) and the Bengali-Hindi *Samachar Sudhabarshans* (June 1854). The Bengalis, in this period, gave a new lead to English journalism also. *The Reformer*, published from the Bangadut Press in 1831, edited by Prasanna Coomar Tagore, the mouthpiece of the Young Derozians—*The Enquirer* (1831)—edited by Krishna Mohan Banerjea, *the Hindu Intelligencer*, founded and edited by Kashiprasad Ghosh in 1846 and the *Hindoo Patriot* founded in 1853, edited by Girish Chandra Ghosh and later by Harish Chandra Mukerjee and Kristodas Pal, are some of the outstanding English papers conducted by the new generation of Bengali intellectuals which set a new tone and standard of English journalism in Bengal.

Events of tremendous social consequence followed in quick succession in the thirties. In the very beginning of this decade, on 17 January 1830, the orthodox Hindus founded *Dharma Sabha* under the immediate impulse of fighting out the Government order for the prohibition of Suttee; on January 1830, the Brahm Samaj was firmly established in its new building at Jorasanko; on 27 May 1830, the celebrated missionary Alexander Duff arrived at Calcutta with his wife to launch vigorously his campaign for conversion to Christianity; on 19 November 1830, Rammohan Roy sailed for England. The young students of the Hindu College, under the inspiration of their young Eurasian teacher H.L.V. Derozio, became so vociferous about the evils of Hindu religion and society, and the urgent need of their reform, that even the liberal Hindus got panicky. Withdrawal of students from Hindu College began, and the young teacher Derozio was charged by the College Committee for inculcating these ideas against Hinduism among the young students of the Hindu College. Derozio was forced to resign on 25 April 1831. In the midst of this confusion the Christian missionaries succeeded in making converts to Christianity, Moheb Chandra Ghose in August 1832, Krishna Mohun Banerjea in October 1832, Gopinath Nandi in December 1832 and Ananda Chandra Majumdar in April 1833. These conversions, though small in number, were in quality quite different from those among the backward castes and classes. These were the first baptisms that had ever taken place in India among the better classes who had acquired a good Western education. These became, therefore, the theme of conversation and discussion with every group of people, in every society, club and association, in every school, college and institution, and even in
every circle. "Hundreds, or even thousands of Baptisms among the low caste, or no caste, or illiterate grades, generally would not have excited a tithe of mental stir and inquiry then exhibited........"13 When our society was thrown in the whirl of this wild confusion and facing a grave crisis, Rammohan Roy died in Bristol on 27 September 1833. The situation, therefore, drifted without control. The ultra-Radicals and their opponents the Conservatives dominated the scene, with the go-slow liberals, consisting mostly of Rammohan’s associates, fudging in helplessly.

The wave of commotion grew less violent as days passed by, but the spirit of enquiry and discussion thus evoked continued to manifest itself in two ways. The first appeared in the formation of a large number of cultural societies and associations in which the urge for free discussion became a sort of mania, and its manifestation, both in frequency and variety, was often carried to bewildering excess. The second and the more important way in which the newly awakened spirit manifested itself, was through the medium of the press. And Charles Metcalfe stoked this fire of enthusiasm by liberating the Press from its shackles in 1835. Everything was favourable for the development of a healthy free press in our country. Pravākar, Purnachandrodaya and Bhāskar, published in the thirties, were all moderately liberal papers, tied neither to the Radicals nor to the Conservatives. Although the first two had never been consistently liberal in social matters like Bhāskar, they displayed much courage in criticising many administrative measures of the English, affecting the life of our people, and in voicing the economic grievances of the growing Bengali middle class. Pravākar possibly surpassed all its contemporaries in this criticism by making it pungently satirical, and Bhāskar excelled in vigorous style of writing and boldly progressive social views. But none could surpass the young radical group’s Gyanweswan and the Enquirer in the freedom of criticism and the boldness of ultra-radical views. "A people can never be reformed without noise and confusion; the absurd prejudices of the Hindus can never be eradicated without violent persecution against the reformers. We have undertaken this task" (The Enquirer).14 This was the spirit which stimulated the writings of the young radicals. Against this the Samāchār Chandrikā, then a full-fledged organ of the orthodox Hindu Dharma-sabhaite, thundered vehemently, provoking the ultra-left to swing more violently to extremism. The Reformer of Prasanna Coomar Tagore had always been very sober in presenting its liberal views. That is why the overzealous radicals attacked it as 'half-liberal'. In the thirties the most interesting controversy in the press centred round the problem of social reform between the two wings or sects of progressives, called the half-liberal (The Ramohanities) and the ultra-radicals (the Derozians). What is more interesting is that a section of the English press, particularly the Bengal Hurkaru and the India Gazette, intervened in the situation and tried to persuade the ‘ultra-radicals’ to come to terms with the so-called ‘half-
liberals' and fight unitedly against the conservatives. Criticising the ultra-left the India Gazette wrote: "Here as well as elsewhere there is a conflict going on between light and darkness, truth and error, and it is because we cannot fully approve of the temper and proceedings of those who have our best wishes that we now advert the subject, in the hope of leading them to a more correct appreciation of the circumstances in which they are placed, and to the adoption of better adapted means for the promotion of their object." Supporting it the Bengal Hurkaru wrote: "We agree with our contemporary of the India Gazette that some of the Hindoo reformers in their abhorrence of superstitions have been in some instances carried away by the violence of their feelings into foolish extravagances and very idle bravodes." It pointed out that the angry and irritating discussions between the two sects in the press can do no good to either party and may seriously injure the cause which both equally profess to have at heart.

After about a decade (1827-28 to 1837-38) of social turmoil and tension, of angry bickerings and protestations, the atmosphere gradually cooled down in the forties. This was evident both in the formation of a qualitatively different kind of learned societies and in the appearance of a new type of national periodicals, in English and Bengali, sober in tone and content. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (16 May 1838) and the Tattwabodhini Sabha (6 October 1839) both were organised by the new generation of Bengali intellectuals, and their moral influence was much wider and deeper than that of the earlier Atmiya Sabha of Rammohan or the Academic Association of the young Derozians. The bi-lingual Bengal Spectator (1842), the Bengali Tattwabodhini Patrika (1843) and the English Hindu Intelligencer (184) were much superior in tone and style to their predecessors. The changed attitude of the Derozians was also manifest in the constructively progressive writings of the Bengal Spectator. The Tattwabodhini Patrika, with its elegantly forceful and rationalistic writings on religious and social reform, contributed mostly in the forties and fifties by Akshay Kumar Dutta and Pundit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, exerted overwhelming influence on the new educated Bengali middle-class. By the middle of the fifties the curve of social tension was again ascending, owing to the movements of widow remarriage (4 October 1855) and the prohibition of polygamy (27 December 1855) launched by Vidyasagar, and the subsequent legalisation of Widow Remarriage by the Act of 16 July 1856 and the first marriage performed under the Act on 7 December 1856. The social commotion produced by these momentous events, and the bifurcation of people's opinion on the break-up of such hoary customs and conventions, are amply reflected in the rich crop of writings in the contemporary national press and in the efflorescence of our national literature, mainly in satires and dramas.
IV

We have now arrived at the great turning-point of our history. The Sepoy Mutiny broke out in 1857 and the Indigo Disturbances in 1859-60. It would not be correct to say that these upheavals led suddenly to the birth of a national consciousness in the sixties, which gradually grew to a maturity afterwards. Political consciousness does not flash on people suddenly, but it appears at first as a glimmer and then by degrees grows clearer and brighter. From the middle of the twenties to the end of the fifties two forces, mainly responsible for moulding the consciousness of people, were steadily gathering strength. One was the gradual spread of English education in different parts of India, and the other was the steady rise of the national press in English and Vernacular languages. The effect of the first was that the English language was welding the 'peoples' of different nationalities into one patriotic mass, with a community of feeling on Indian matters, by overcoming the barrier of provincial languages. The English press, conducted by the educated middle class in different provinces, paved the way for the emergence of an all-India national consciousness in the forties of the 19th century. The Vernacular Press, on the other hand, cleared the obstacles to the seeping down of this national consciousness from the upper sphere of the English-educated middle class to the ground-level of the masses. And although our national press, both English and Vernacular, was then most occupied with religious, educational, social and economic matters, and least of all with political, it cannot be denied that the consistent criticism of Governmental measures and policies on such matters, growing bolder and louder day by day, contributed much to the awakening of a national consciousness, based on the healthy mental habit of independent thinking. This is corroborated by the following evidence of Rev. James Long, a keen and intelligent observer of social events of his time, before the Indigo Commission of 1860:

"But my own enquiries and duties have brought two causes prominently to my notice, as conducing to independence of mind among the masses: first, English education, happily spreading in the country among the natives, in giving them a sense of freedom, leavening their minds with a regard to a sense of justice, and imparting to them an English tone of revulsion against oppression. It is also welding the natives of different Presidencies into one patriotic mass, with a community of feeling on Indian subjects. Thus a native of Calcutta, on a recent visit to Bombay, was enabled to address numbers of Parsees and Guzeraties in English; though they knew nothing of each other's Vernacular. A pamphlet was published by a native in this city, some time ago, in English, and was reprinted by his countrymen in Madras and circulated widely. Madras and Bombay, like Calcutta have newspapers in English, conducted by natives, and advocating the views of educated natives.

"The influence is radiating downwards. The substance of those
newspapers and pamphlets in English are being communicated orally or by means of translations to the masses of the people.

"The Vernacular press is rising into great importance, as a genuine exponent of native opinion, and it is to be regretted that the European community pay so little regard to its admonitions, and warnings. It is the index of the native mind. In 1853, I visited Delhi, Agra and Lucknow, and particularly examined the statistics connected with the Vernacular press in the upper provinces, and I remember the impression with which I left Delhi after I had been through its lanes and gullies, exploring the localities of its Vernacular press. I felt then very strongly, how little the Europeans of Delhi and other cities were aware of the prodigious activity of the Vernacular periodical press, and the impression it was evidently producing on the native mind as tested by the avidity with which books, treating on native and political subjects, were purchased.

"The progress of the Vernacular press in Calcutta may be thus shown: Works printed for sale, were—

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>In 1826</td>
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"Social question occupy much of the attention of the Vernacular press; thus the controversy on widow marriage gave rise to twenty-five different publications in Bengali. The subjects of early marriage and female education have also been amply discussed. . . . . Bengali newspapers, such as the Bhaskar and Prabhakar are circulated widely, even as far as the Punjab, for wherever Bengalis go (the Bengali like the Jew, is a wanderer, and is to be met with in every part of Northern India) they keep up a correspondence with each other in their own language and read their native papers. Thus on a visit to Benares, three years ago, I was in a part, called the Bengali-tolla, inhabited almost entirely by Bengalis, who used the Bengali language. Two Bengali newspapers have mofussil correspondents, who give them the news of the district, and to each Bengali newspaper is attached a translator of English newspapers; hence the native mind is much more familiarised with political movements both in Europe and India, than the Anglo-Indian commonly imagines. I take up the Bhaskar of last Thursday as a specimen of what is ordinarily given in a Bengali newspaper: there is an editorial on the Income Tax, in which the policies of Lord Auckland, Lord William Bentinck, Lord Hardinge, Lord Dalhousie and Runjeet Singh are reviewed; then an editorial on Lord Clyde's leaving India; then an article on Sir Charles Trevelyan and on the Raja of Burdwan; then news about China and about the Indigo Commission; the price currents, Assam steamers, Sir George Clerk, Gwalior, Oude, and Lady Canning. A Bengali paper is also published in the remote district of Rangpore; the last number, for instance, contains offers of
prizes for Vernacular essays; an editorial on the Moslem rule; the Rajah of Kooch Behar's movements; the Indigo Commission, and an article on gas.

"The amlas of the courts, the state of the police, the character of magistrates are constant subjects of criticism in these papers. I remember reading sixteen years ago, a series of powerful articles in the Bhaskar, exposing with most caustic wit the abuses of the courts.

"Now, to my certain knowledge, indigo planting has been for the last sixteen years the subject of incessant attacks in those native newspapers, and the opinion of those papers filters down to the mass".19

The evidence of Rev. James Long has been quoted at length for its obvious bearing on our subject. Even a casual perusal of the Bengali periodicals in the fifties will confirm his statement that although the Vernacular Press was then devoting itself to social questions, yet its fearless, critical tone was loud enough to echo down to the common people and make them conscious of their right to think and speak freely on the actions of an alien ruler. Of course, the seed of political consciousness thus sown took time to sprout out. In fact, throughout the decades after the fifties till about the end of the 19th century, the seedling of our nationalism remained fragile and required cautious caressing.

The political limitations of our national press were set by the interest of the newly propped-up aristocracy and the rising commercial and educated middle-classes. It was financed and controlled by them and the editors were free to move only within the field fenced by the financiers. When Harischandra Mukherjee, the editor of the famous Hindoo Patriot, was asked by the Indigo Commission, "You are the Editor of the Hindoo Patriot?" he replied, "I do not hold myself the responsible editor of the paper, but I have sufficient influence with the Proprietor to make him adopt any tone of policy I deem fit". In reply to another question, "What general line of advice you gave to the ryots who applied to you for it?" he said, "I invariably advised them to apply to the district authorities in the proper form of redress, and to go to the next appellate authorities if they found no redress at the hands of the district authorities. I cautioned them against ever committing any breaches of the peace, or committing themselves in any manner by acting illegally". The reply is significant. The control of the political rudder, which is 'loyalty' to the English rule and 'peaceful' ventilation of grievances, was never lost by the Hindoo Patriot even in the midst of its valiant fight in defence of the ryots' interests and against the tyranny of the planters. Pravākar and other Bengali papers also followed the same policy. It was for this reason that the rebels, during the Sepoy Mutiny, could not evoke any sympathetic response from our national press. It is true that the press then was put under severe restrictions by Canning. But that is no reason why it should go over to enumerating the benedictions of British rule and crying down frantically the mutineers as a lump of social rabble. But this was done by almost all the papers and periodicals of the time, without
exception, because the middle-classes were not then ready to tolerate any open revolt against the English ruler.

V

This middle-class nationalist consciousness was strengthened in the sixties and seventies, and its associational base was broadened from the Landholders' Society of 1837, through the Bengal British India Society of 1843 and the British Indian Association of 1851, to the Indian Association of 1876. It was flowing through other channels also like the Patriot's Association (1865), the Hindu Mela (1867) and the Students' Association (1875). The Brahmo Samaj movement became a potent and living force in this period, under the dynamic leadership of Keshub Chandra Sen. It was Keshub who first made use of the platform for public addresses and revealed the power of oratory over the people's mind. Surendranath Banerjea, Ananda Mohan Bose, Sivanath Sastri, Motilal Ghose and others were drawn into the new social milieu and they tried to give it a nationalist form and content. The Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act (1878) during Lytton's regime, the Ilbert Bill and the Contempt Case against The Bengalee in 1882-83, provoked widespread national agitation. A chorus of protest was raised by the press, and the movement by Speeches and writings in platform and press, rose to its peak in the early eighties. In the middle of this decade, in 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded.

In the social field, as in the political, profound changes were taking place. The Brahmo movement under the leadership of Keshub Chunder Sen and the Temperance movement under the leadership of Peary Churan Sircar, were creating deep impressions on young minds. The schism in the Brahmo Samaj, owing to the marriage of Keshub's daughter with the Maharaja of Coochbehar, bypassing the Civil Marriage Act III of 1872, of which he was himself the architect, had serious social repercussions. The most precious contribution of Brahmoism, a liberalised educated thought in social and religious matters, was openly challenged by an extreme Hindu orthodoxy. The fight between the early Brahmos and the Dharma-sahaites in the thirties was now taken over, as a kind of social legacy, by the neo-Brahmos and the Hindu revivalists. What is historically more significant is that the cause of these Hindu revivalists was morally reinforced by the pro-Hindu political trend then prevailing. The new nationalism, as it was predominantly led by the educated Hindu middle-class, was being reared up in the cradle of a resurgent Hinduism.

The national press in Bengal faithfully portrays this social picture in the second half of the 19th century. The social and political movements of the period gave fresh impetus to journalism. The old Hindoo Patriot was "then the leading Indian paper in Bengal, under the editorship of that prince of Indian journalists, Kristo Das Pal", exercising great
influence over the educated middle-class and the Government. The Indian Mirror, founded by Keshub Chunder Sen in August 1861, quickly rose to fame and popularity for its liberal social and political views. The Bengalee, founded in 1862, was turned into a powerful weapon of political propagandism under the editorship of Surendranath Banerjea from January 1879. The weekly Brahmo Public Opinion (1878) had considerable hold on a section of young Brahmos at the time. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, first published as a Bengali weekly from Amrita Bazar village in Jessore district on 20 February 1868, was issued as a bi-lingual English-Bengali weekly from Calcutta in the early seventies. When Lytton's Vernacular Press Act was passed on 14 March 1878, it was converted into a full-fledged English weekly from 21 March 1878. Two English weekly papers, having considerable influence, were added to these in the eighties, the Reis and Rayyet founded and edited by Sambhu Chunder Mookerjee in 1882 and the Indian Nation, founded and edited by N. N. Ghosh in 1883.

While some of the old veterans were continuing their existence, quite a number of new Bengali periodicals appeared in the field during this period. Of these the weekly Somprokāsh, first projected by Vidyasagar and published on 15 November 1858, "attained the foremost place among the Bengalee newspapers". Pundit Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan, an inhabitant of Changripta village in 24-Parganas (now Subhasgram), wherefrom the paper was regularly published from April 1862, "taught his native brethren of the journalism craft a new style of journalism". It was followed by the Sulava Samachar in November 1870, the Bangabasi in December 1881 and the Sanjibani in April 1883. These three Bengali weekly papers held sway in the social and political field of Bengal in the last quarter of the 19th century. Two Bengali monthly periodicals, the Bangadarshan (April-May 1872), founded and edited by the famous novelist and intellectual Bankim Chandra Chatterji, and the Bharati (July-August 1877), edited by Dwijendranath Tagore, Swarnakumari Debi, Rabindranath Tagore and others, became the harbinger of the new literary and cultural renaissance in Bengal.

The Sulava Samachar was a weekly pice paper under the management of the Indian Reform Association, founded by Keshub Chunder Sen after his return from England, in November 1870. It was the first enterprise of its kind in India, and it created a great sensation, meeting with an unprecedented success. Keshub's friends and associates, regardless of their social position, started hawking the paper from street to street, and by the end of the seventies its circulation rose to 5,500 copies, compared to Education Gazette's 1168 copies and Somprokāsh's 700 copies. The bi-weekly Bangamitra (Calcutta) and the monthly Bhārat Sramajibi (Baranagar) had each a circulation of 4000 copies, although the 'dailies' then existing could not exceed an average circulation of 600 copies. The 'weekly' was then the most widely read paper, not the 'daily'. The novelty and success of Sulava simulated imitations, till the Bangabāsi was started by Jogendra
Chandra Basu as a 'cheap' paper, followed by Krishna Kumar Mitra and others of the Sanjibani. In the middle of the eighties the Bangabasi went to
the top with a circulation of 12,000 copies, and by the middle of the nineties
it leapt over to 20,000 copies, quite a formidable figure for a Bengali weekly
in those days. Other weekly papers like the Banga-nibasi (8000 copies), the
Samaya (4000 copies) and the Hitavadi (3000 copies) were making headway
in the closing decade, but none had been able to reach the level of Bangabasi's popularity. We shall come to the meaning of this trend of
circulation later.23

VI

So long all the newspaper printers and publishers had congregated in
Calcutta, to the detriment of political and intellectual life in the country
at large. In the decades following the Mutiny, printing of books and publishing
of periodicals in Bengali language became widely diffused to the great benefit
of the political and cultural life of the rural people. Not only printing and
publishing greatly increased in Calcutta, but presses were set in many other
district towns and villages. A good number of periodicals came out, of which
the Sādāhrani of Chinsurah (Hoogly), the Grāmbārt Prakāshikā of Kumarkhali
(24-Parganas), the Bhārat Mihir of Mymensingh, the Dacca Prakāsh, the
Hindu Hitaihini and the Garib (Poor) of Dacca and the Grambasi of Uluberia
(Howrah) commanded good local circulation. In 1877-78 the Bhārat Mihir
and the Sādāhrani had an average circulation of about 600 copies each. In
1889-90 in Dacca town the Garib had a circulation of 3,000 copies and
the Dacca Prakash 1200 copies, and about 800 copies of the Grāmbārti were
sold in a backward village like Uluberia in Howrah. Writing on the importance
of village papers, the Grāmbārt Prakāshikā pointed out on 5 July
1884 :"The educated classes have learnt to discuss political questions from
their contact with Englishmen. But how many in a population of 7 crores
can boast of English education? The educated natives have indeed made
great agitation on such subjects at the ilbert Bill, the Arms Act, the Licence
Tax, and so on. But do the mass understand them? The failure of these
agitations plainly shows that they do not. The brag of a few town papers
is worth nothing at a time when the village people have no mouth-piece,
have no leader, and have no means of expressing their ideas". The grievance
of Grambarta is just and reasonable, but there is no doubt that by the middle
of the eighties village people were definitely having their mouthpiece for
expressing their own ideas.

Even a cursory analysis of the circulation trend of leading Bengali
periodicals in the period under review, reveals that the lead given by
Keshub's neo-Brahmoism in the social and political field was usurped,
before long, by the Hindu revivalists. The astonishing popularity of the
Bangabasi clearly indicates the ideological triumph of Hinduism over
all other current thoughts and ideas. The new nationalist movement, and
the consciousness it was generating, was going willy-nilly the Hindu way.
The religious spell of Sri Ramakrishna, and irresistible dynamism of Swami
Vivekananda, the idol of young Bengal after Keshub, swept all obstacles
away from its path of progress. Neither the resolutions, not the aims
and objects, of the Indian Association or the Indian National Congress
on Hindu-Muslim unity and equality, could divert this drift to wider
channels. The educated Muslim middle-class could not then emerge with
sufficient strength to march side by side with the Hindus. The Muslim
press Chronicle also was then lagging far behind the Hindu press. Except
The Moslem Chronicle and the Mohammadan Observer (1866) and the
later Mohammadan Observer (1882), there was no other periodical worth
mentioning, voicing Muslim demands at the time. This rift in the early
history of our nationalism gradually widened as the educated Muslim
middle-class grew stronger and stronger. And we had to pay for this
early rift heavily with a later 'Divided India'.

The history of our press further reveals that our nationalism, at least
in its formative period in the second-half of the 19th century, had
persistently clung to the ideal of middle-class wish-fulfilment. It was
growing more and more indignant through the decades against the
pernicious policies and measures of British Government, but never had
the idea of gaining complete freedom from foreign rule, even by so-called
constitutional means, been ventilated through its columns. Writing about
the trend of the press in 1880, Richard Temple observed: "Of the native
newspapers published in the English languages, as yet few in number, some
are distinguished by loyalty and good sense as well as by cultivated ability,
and are creditable products of the new education; as for instance, the 'Hindu
Patriot' of Calcutta. Others are notable for a latitude of criticism which
though extreme, does not transgress the limits ordinarily claimed for
journalism. Of the vernacular newspapers, which are much more numerous,
many are signally and consistently loyal, while preserving independence
in their thought and freedom in their criticism. Others again have been
disfigured occasionally by writings which, though not actually seditious
or reasonable, are objectionable in their political tendency and likely to
have the effect of causing ill-feeling against British rule, whether that effect
is intended or not." 24 Temple's observation calls for serious attention in
the sense that he should have no interest in minimising the anti-British
nationalist character of our press. It is better to illustrate our point with
some examples of press comments on relevant subjects of the time.

When Northbrook was the Viceroy of India (1872-76), he tried his
best to lighten the burden of taxation on people. He vetoed the Bengal
Municipal Bill, and refused to reimpose the income tax. A report of a
public meeting held at Jayarampore village in support of Northbrook's
action was published in Amarita Bazar Patrika on 20 February 1873. After
the meeting was over, songs of joy with drums and cymbals were sung in the streets. The theme of the song was this:

Sound the name of Hari with the joy of love.
This is an auspicious day, O Ye subjects.
From the burden of Municipal tax,
being compassionate to his subjects,
The Lord Sahib, the abode of great virtues,
has set us free.
Let us all with one mind offer unceasing prayer
That Shyam, the son of Sri Nanda,
would preserve him in happiness.

The same paper reports the theme of a play, called 'Mother India', staged at the National Theatre of Calcutta. It was this: "Mother India was represented as sitting gravely with her left cheek resting on her left hand, her face beautiful but sad. Her sons, emaciated for want of food, were lying asleep by her side. They awoke, asked for food and wept. Mother India said, 'the Goddess of Fortune, Lakshmi, has forsaken me, I cannot offer you anything'. The sons replied, 'what can we do then? We have no opportunity for trade, industry, or employment'. Mother India urged them to appeal to the Queen. When they were doing that, an Englishman suddenly came and kicked them out brutally. Mother India cried, 'O Harish, O Grish, O Ramgopal, whither have you gone?' Then another Englishman came, rebuked the former Englishman and consoled the Mother saying that the Queen will grant her prayer. Northbrook would remove all her sorrows and sufferings as Queen’s representative in India." This drama was staged in 1873 in the National Theatre of Calcutta.

In 1878 the Sadharani wrote: "We can assure our Government of our unflinching loyalty to the British rule; and warn them that they will but injure their own interests by ignoring public opinion as expressed in the newspapers." The assumption of Ripon's viceroyalty (1879-84) was to some extent a relief to the Indian people after the reactionary administration of Lytton (1876-79). One of his earliest acts was the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act. He also introduced democratic principles into the municipal administration of our country by making the constitution of the Local Boards and the Municipalities broad-based on the elective system (October 1881, May 1882). At the end of his viceroyalty, India was convulsed by an unprecedented explosion of racial feeling, ignited by the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill, brought forward by the Law Member Sir Courtenay Ilbert in 1883. By the existing law, no Indian judge could try a European on a criminal charge except in the Presidency towns. Now that a certain number of Indians were going up to the higher ranks of the Civil Service, it was necessary to empower them with the same rights and privileges as those enjoyed by their European colleagues. This provoked a loud protest among the indigo planters who, together with the
English mercantile community of Calcutta, started agitation against Ripon. The controversy spread to England and was taken up by the press and in parliament. A European Defence Association was started and one lakh and fifty thousand rupees were subscribed towards it. Eventually Ripon had to yield to the pressure of the European vested interest and the bill was amended so as to give Europeans the right of trial by a jury half of whom must be European, in criminal cases.

This ill-judged anti-Indian agitation of the Europeans, directed against Ripon made him a popular hero in Indian eyes, and extraordinary demonstrations of affection took place at the time of his retirement in December 1884. "His journey", says Meredith Townshend, "from Simla to Bombay was a triumphal march such as India had never witnessed—a long procession in which seventy millions of Indians sang hosanna to their friend". Ripon had done nothing, had taken off no tax, had removed no burden, had not altered the mode of government one hair's breadth. Then why this affection was shown to him? It was shown because, "he was only supposed to be for Indians and against Europeans, and that sufficed to bring every Indian in a fervour of friendship to his side" (emphasis added).24 The Bangabasi wrote: "Is there nothing to learn from these unheard of demonstration? Demoniac Englishmen! Worshippers of brute force! Learn good policy from this. Prove that you possess true humanity, by restraining despotic propensities. India is not yours. You are not come here to ruin her. India belongs to the Indians. Lord Ripon with the heart of a God has by the greatness of his soul done that which lakhs of bayonets have failed to do."25 This agitation strengthened the forces which speeded up the birth of the Congress movement. Before the year was out the first National Conference was held in Calcutta (December 28-30, 1884). "It was the reply of educated India to the Ilbert-Bill agitation, a resonant blast on their golden trumpet."26 In the next year the Congress was born.

The Indian press in general, and the Bengali press in particular, had emerged in one generation after Mutiny, from an obscure position, into an organ of great power. Lytton's Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, the Ilbert Bill agitation in 1883-84, and other measures had had their effect in galvanising the press into fresh life. By the middle of the eighties, after the birth of the National Congress, the press was recognised as a kind of constitutional opposition, and as days passed by the increasing importance of this recognition was assured. But the Congress could not set the limits of this 'constitutional opposition' to the press, which went along its own way with remarkable courage and independence of thought. At the second session of the Congress, held in Calcutta in 1886, the Chairman W. C. Bonnerjee asked his audiences, "Would it have been possible even in the days of Akbar for a meeting like this to assemble, composed of all classes and communities, all speaking one language? Such a thing is possible under British rule, and British rule only." The Congress urged then for the enlargement of the Legislative Councils and wider opportuni-
ties for admission to the higher ranks of the Indian administration. It was dominated in its early days by the moderate outlook of the upper strata of the educated and commercial classes. The Government also went a great way at the time in satisfying its demands by modifying the Indian Civil Service regulations in 1886, and by enacting the Legislative Councils Act of 1892. But the press was not satisfied with these crumbs of concessions. A large section of it grew restive with the moderatism of the Congress. It soon appeared, in Bengal particularly, that a section of the press was drifting towards extremism and becoming bitterly critical of the Congress policy. It was no longer possible for the press in Bengal in the nineties to assure the British rulers of its "unflinching loyalty" as was done by the Sādhārani and other in the seventies. In 1890 even the Uluberia weekly Grāmbāsi pointed out sarcastically that there was no necessity of watching the movements of "the Congress delegates, because the Congress was a thoroughly loyal movement and the Congressists were a thoroughly loyal people." In 1895 the Bangabasi wrote: "We, the English educated people, demand that the English government should appoint us to all high posts in the public service, and think that as soon as we secure all post we become free, for freedom consists in securing high posts in the public service. Now the 'friends of India', that is the Englishmen who are patrons of the Congress, are very shrewd men and know which way the wind blows. They have taken a select few of the most advance of the English educated Indians into their confidence. Patting them in the back, they say, "Bravo, my dear boys, Bravo! We the English people only want the spread of commerce and the extension of territories. You, the English-educated Indians want liberty, and employment in the public service. So let us make a bargain. You hold Congress meetings and agitate and we make money." It is evident from this criticism that the germ of our nationalism had already sprung into adolescence. The Congress was lashed by the press to shake off its infantile illusion of having freedom under the British tutelage, and to break away from its upper-middle class fold.

Events that led to the strengthening of this will to freedom began to move faster in the closing years of the last century. The complete failure of the monsoon in 1896 plunged the heart of India into the most horrible famine even then known under British rule. By the spring of 1897, over 40,000,00 people were involved and the mortality was very heavy. A newepidemic broke out in the shape of bubonic plague in Bombay in 1896, and injudicious official measures employed in the house-to-house searching and evacuation of premises, led to rioting and the murder of two British officers in Poona. The murderer Damodar Chapekar was subsequently executed. The whole of Western India simmered with angry disapproval of the measures taken by Government. The deportation of the ātrā brothers, prominent sirdars of Deccan, and the trial and sentence of Bal Gangadhar Tilak on a charge of inciting to disaffection in his newspaper, the Kesari, were other events which quickly followed. In 1898 the section of the Penal
Code relating to seditious writing was amended so as to curb the turbulence of the press. But, despite the Penal Code, the wave of discontent began to foam through the columns of newspapers, from Bengal to Maharashtra. Even the educated middle-class was now beginning to claim self-government as a right. Gokhale, in his evidence before a Royal Commission in 1897, gave spirited expression to this view: "A kind of dwarfing or stunting of the Indian race is going on under the present system. The moral elevation which every self-governing people feels cannot be felt by us". The unanimity of the press was as marked as the increase of its influence. Its tone was not only negatively critical, but positively assertive, and the same tone characterised its utterances in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Poona, Lahore and Lucknow. All are identical in their spirit and in their common object, aiming and converging at the formation of a single national ideal—the birth of a new India and a free India. In the midst of this troubled atmosphere, which was further aggravated by Curzon of kedleston, the nineteenth century drew to its close. When the twentieth century dawned, the morning glow of a new and free India was clearly visible through the political storm-clouds.

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