

# Patriotism Vs Loyalty: The Dilemma of the Indian Press During the World Wars

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**Abstract**—The period of the World Wars presented a complex challenge for the Indian press, caught between emerging nationalist sentiments and the expectations of loyalty to the British Empire. The article "Patriotism vs. Loyalty: The Dilemma of the Indian Press During the World Wars" examines how newspapers in India navigated these conflicting demands. On the one hand, nationalist leaders and sections of the public saw the wars as opportunities to push for political reforms and eventual self-rule, advocating for patriotic calls for Indian rights. On the other hand, the British colonial authorities expected the Indian press to uphold loyalty to the Crown and support the war efforts, often backed by strict censorship policies.

This investigation reveals the press's subtle yet significant role in shaping public opinion, negotiating with the colonial power, and preserving the nationalist spirit amidst war-induced restrictions. By examining key case studies, the article illustrates how this delicate balancing act contributed to the evolving identity of the Indian press as both a tool for resistance and a vehicle for colonial control.

This article explores the unique dilemma faced by Indian newspapers during World War I and World War II as they navigated their role in the socio-political landscape. During the wars, the Indian press became a battleground for competing loyalties, shaped by colonial censorship, government propaganda, and nationalist fervor. Newspapers were often caught between the pressure to support Britain's war efforts, portraying them as a global cause, and their growing commitment to India's nationalist movement, which saw the wars as opportunities to press for independence.

Ultimately, the article underscores the complex role the Indian press played in shaping public opinion during the World Wars. It demonstrates how newspapers served as instruments for colonial control and national awakening, revealing the broader tensions between empire and emerging nationhood.

**Keywords:** Press, War, Dilemma, Colonial, Loyalty, Independence

## INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century they marked a period of profound turmoil for the Indian subcontinent, as the First and Second World Wars tested the limits of its colonial relationship with the British Empire. The World Wars were pivotal moments in global history, and for India, they represented a period of profound political and social transformation. Caught between the demands of British colonial rulers and the rising tide of nationalist fervor, the Indian press faced a unique and complex dilemma: balancing patriotism with loyalty to the British Crown.

During both World Wars, India was still a British colony, and the political and social landscape was marked by a complex interplay between colonial rule, emerging nationalist movements, and socio-economic challenges. If we talk about the political landscape during the first world war, India was a key part of the British Empire, and its political institutions were dominated by the British. While Indians held some positions in provincial governments under the Indian Councils Act of 1909 (Morley-Minto Reforms), real power remained with the British. The British enlisted India's resources and manpower for the war effort, promising post-war political reforms. Approximately 1.3 million Indian soldiers served in various theaters of the war, and significant economic resources were diverted to support the British military effort. And By the time of World War II, the demand for complete independence had gained significant momentum. The INC, now under the leadership of figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, demanded full self-rule. However, the British declared India's involvement in the war without consulting Indian leaders, sparking widespread discontent. In response

to the British refusal to grant independence, the INC launched the Quit India Movement, demanding the British leave India. This mass civil disobedience campaign was brutally suppressed, with most of the Congress leadership imprisoned. The British attempted to secure Indian support for the war by sending Sir Stafford Cripps with proposals for dominion status after the war, but the Indian leadership rejected these as insufficient.

On the other hand, we saw the social landscape, Both wars placed immense economic pressure on India. During World War I, heavy taxation, inflation, and food shortages led to widespread distress, particularly in rural areas. World War II intensified these problems, culminating in the Bengal Famine of 1943, which killed millions due to food shortages and British policies prioritizing wartime needs over local welfare. The wars accelerated industrialization in India, especially in sectors like textiles, steel, and chemicals. This also led to the growth of an industrial working class, who began to organize for labor rights. Trade unions and workers' strikes became more common during this period. Social reform movements aimed at challenging traditional hierarchies, particularly related to caste, were gaining momentum. Leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, advocating for Dalit rights, began to push for social reforms alongside political changes.

The dilemma of Patriotism vs. Loyalty faced by the Indian media during the World Wars is a significant aspect of India's colonial history. At its core, this dilemma arose from the conflicting pressures between the rising nationalist sentiments within India and the colonial regime's demand for loyalty to the British Crown, especially during times of global crisis like World Wars I and II.

India was a British colony, and its political, social, and economic structures were deeply influenced by British interests. The Indian press, though limited in scope due to illiteracy and other social challenges, had become a critical platform for political expression and mobilization. Since the late 19th century, newspapers have played a prominent role in the freedom struggle, becoming a vehicle for nationalist leaders to promote ideas of self-rule, swaraj, and independence. However, the World Wars complicated this scenario. As Britain engaged in global conflicts, it expected loyalty from its colonies, including India. The British government

exerted substantial pressure on Indian newspapers to align with the empire's war efforts, support military recruitment, and suppress any content that could be considered subversive. The Press Act (1910), The Defence of India Act (1915), and other censorship laws imposed heavy restrictions, enabling the colonial government to shut down publications that seemed to incite dissent or foster anti-British sentiment.

The dilemma of patriotism versus loyalty not only defined the role of the Indian press during the World Wars but also had lasting effects on media freedom and political journalism in the subcontinent. It also reflects the broader struggle of the Indian people during the World Wars—a struggle to assert their identity and rights under the weight of colonial oppression, and a fight to balance the demands of loyalty to an oppressive regime with the deeper, more powerful calls for freedom and self-determination. And it also The tensions of that period underscored the press's potential as a force for political change, even under heavy censorship. It also solidified the press's role as a battleground for ideas, where the fight for freedom could be waged through words as well as through political action.

#### Dilemma of Patriotism

On one side of the equation was patriotism—the Indian press's commitment to the growing nationalist movement. The freedom struggle had gained considerable momentum, with leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Jawaharlal Nehru influencing public opinion. The Indian public increasingly desired self-governance and saw Britain's involvement in the wars as an opportunity to press for political concessions. Newspapers such as Kesari, The Amrita Bazar Patrika, and The Hindu began promoting anti-colonial sentiments, albeit carefully to avoid severe reprisals. For many Indian journalists, expressing patriotism meant subtly criticizing the war or questioning India's forced participation in a conflict that served British imperial interests more than Indian aspirations. Yet, they had to navigate strict censorship laws and the threat of imprisonment, fines, or the shutting down of their presses. As a result, many newspapers adopted coded language, metaphors, and indirect commentary to communicate nationalist ideas without outright defiance.

### The Pressure of Loyalty

On the other side was the pressure to demonstrate loyalty to the British Crown. Britain, as India's colonial ruler, demanded that the press support its war efforts. Many newspapers were torn between the nationalist cause and the need to avoid punitive actions by the colonial authorities. The press, as a vital institution, often had to comply with demands to publish pro-war propaganda or suppress coverage of nationalist movements that were perceived as undermining the British war effort. Loyalist newspapers, often run by British sympathizers or those reluctant to risk the repercussions of defiance, actively supported the British cause. They justified their stance by emphasizing that India's loyalty could lead to political reforms after the war, as Britain had promised during World War I. However, after the war ended when those promises largely went unfulfilled, the press grew increasingly disillusioned.

For example, according to Madan Mohan Malviya "India's loyalty to England rests not on hopes alone but on the more solid foundations of faith...And true to each other, bound in indissoluble ties of union and friendship, the might of England supported and strengthened by the might of India, we will present an invincible front to the war Lord of Germany and every other power, great and small, that must wish to measure its strength with the British empire."<sup>1</sup>

The Bengalee said, "Behind the serried rank of one of the finest armies in the world, there stands the multitudinous people of India, ready to co-operate with the government in the defence of the Empire, which for them means, in its ultimate evolution, the complete recognition of their rights as citizen of the freest state in the world. We may have our differences with the government- and what people have not?- in the presence of the common enemy, be it Germany or any other power, we sink our differences, we forget our little quarrels and close our ranks and offer all that we

possess in defense of the Great Empire, to which we are all so proud to belong and with which the future prosperity and advancement of our people are bound up."<sup>2</sup>

V.P. Madhava Rao, C.I.E. in his speech at Baroda asked the people to present a united front to the world and show them that Britain had at her back the support of every one of the various races and creeds and religions that formed the Great Indian Nation.<sup>3</sup>

The Muslim Hitaishi wrote, "The British Empire is known as a Moslem Empire. For under no

Other sovereigns on earth are there such a large Muslim population as under the British sovereign? In particular, no other sovereign is such a friend either of Islam as is the British sovereign. Such being the bounden duty to show our sympathy for it in all ways during this time of danger."<sup>4</sup>

Muhammad Ali editor of the Comrade and the Hamdard expressed that the worst which he had feared for some months past had, to his deep distress, come to pass. His advice to the Muslims was that, whatever their feelings, it was their clear duty to assist their Government to the fullest extent of their power in maintaining the peace of India during this supreme crisis.<sup>5</sup>

The Times of India said, "There is no falling off in the steady stream of gifts of every kind from the ruling princes, Indian nobleman and indeed from all classes in India towards the various war funds and associations engaged in the troops abroad with comfort and necessaries."<sup>6</sup>

The Daily Mail stated, "The action of India touches us more deeply because it comes from people that are not bound to us by ties of blood. It is proof that the British Empire had a spiritual existence in which neither distance, time, climate, nor color can destroy and that it represents ideals for which all its citizens are prepared to live and die."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> . Legislative Council's Proceeding, India (1914-1915), p.19

<sup>2</sup> . Hodder and Stoughton, India and the War (Comments of the Indian Press), London, p.56

<sup>3</sup> . G.A. Nateesan and Co., Indian Demands, Madras, p.263

<sup>4</sup> . Hodder and Stoughton, India and the War (Comments of the Indian Press), London, p.56

<sup>5</sup> . The Statesman, November 5, 1914, p.4

<sup>6</sup> . The Times of India, October 7, 1914, p.7

<sup>7</sup> . The Amrit Bazar Patrika, October 8, 1914, p.7

Many newspapers and editors attempted to strike a balance between patriotism and loyalty, walking a tightrope between their allegiance to the Indian independence movement and their fear of retribution from the British authorities. For instance, while publicly supporting Britain's involvement in the war, some editors allowed subtle nationalist views to be expressed in editorials or opinion columns, offering readers an undercurrent of resistance. This balancing act often led to internal struggles within the editorial boards of newspapers and a form of self-censorship, where editors avoided certain topics or chose a more ambiguous language to protect their publications. But some editors wanted to take a more militant stance against colonialism, while others preferred a more cautious approach to avoid outright confrontation with the government. This ideological split sometimes mirrored the broader nationalistic movement itself, where moderate leaders advocated for constitutional methods of achieving self-rule, while more radical factions pushed for immediate independence and outright defiance.

#### CONCLUSION

The experience of navigating this dilemma during the World Wars had a lasting impact on the Indian press. It exposed the limits of press freedom under colonial rule and highlighted the role of the media as both a tool of resistance and an instrument of colonial control. The lessons learned during this period would influence the post-independence press in India, shaping its approach to issues of freedom, responsibility, and the role of media in a democratic society.

The dilemma of patriotism versus loyalty not only defined the role of the Indian press during the World Wars but also had lasting effects on media freedom and political journalism in the subcontinent. The tensions of that period underscored the press's potential as a force for political change, even under heavy censorship. It also solidified the press's role as a battleground for ideas, where the fight for freedom could be waged through words as well as through political action. As India moved closer to independence, the experiences of the World Wars served as lessons in resistance, resilience, and the power of journalism in a colonial context. The press's delicate balancing act during these wars ultimately helped shape a post-colonial India where the media

continued to play a critical role in safeguarding democracy and promoting accountability.

The World Wars were periods of intense political and social upheaval in India. The wars accelerated the decline of British colonial power, fueled nationalist sentiments, and set the stage for India's eventual independence in 1947. The press, as a key player in disseminating information and shaping public opinion, found itself at the heart of this turbulent era, navigating the complex interplay of patriotism and loyalty.

During both World Wars, India was caught between growing demands for self-rule, the repressive measures of British colonialism, and the complex social changes driven by economic hardship and political mobilization. The period was marked by rising nationalism, communal tensions, and a struggle for freedom that would culminate in India's independence shortly after World War II. The wars exposed the contradictions of colonial rule and sowed the seeds for the end of the British Empire in India.

The dilemma faced by the Indian press during the World Wars represents a significant chapter in the history of Indian journalism, illustrating the complex interplay between patriotism, loyalty, and the struggle for independence. The press was caught between two powerful forces: the colonial government's expectation of loyalty and the Indian public's growing nationalist sentiment.

Throughout the World Wars, Indian newspapers had to navigate strict censorship, propaganda, and the consequences of their editorial choices. While some publications chose to align with British interests, promoting the war effort and displaying loyalty to the colonial regime, others took a more nationalist stance, subtly or overtly critiquing British policies and advocating for India's independence.

This period also saw the evolution of journalistic strategies to bypass censorship, such as the use of coded language, allegory, and the strategic placement of articles. These methods highlighted the resilience of the Indian press and its commitment to the broader nationalistic cause, even under oppressive circumstances.

The Indian press's experience during the World Wars highlights a critical period where the ideals of

patriotism and loyalty came into direct conflict, forcing journalists and newspapers to make difficult choices under the weight of colonial oppression. These experiences reflect the broader struggle for freedom and identity that defined India's path to independence.

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