

Contribution of Rohilkhand to the Development of Journalism: A Historical Study

Mr. Ankur Gangwar¹, Dr. Mansoor Ahmad Siddiqui²

¹*Research Scholar History, M.J.P. Rohilkhand University,*

²*Department Of History, Gandhi Faiz-E-Aam (P.G) College, Shahjahanpur*

Abstract—Journalism has played a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, promoting democratic values, and strengthening national consciousness in India. While the history of Indian journalism has largely focused on major metropolitan centers such as Calcutta, Bombay, Allahabad, and Delhi, regional journalism has also made significant contributions to socio-political transformation. Rohilkhand, comprising the districts of Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Badaun, Rampur, Pilibhit, Moradabad, and adjoining regions of present-day Uttar Pradesh, emerged as an important center of journalistic activities during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Newspapers and periodicals published from this region played a vital role in the dissemination of nationalist ideas, promotion of social reforms, and articulation of local concerns. This paper examines the historical evolution of journalism in Rohilkhand, its contribution to the Indian freedom movement, and its continuing role in shaping regional identity and democratic discourse.

Index Terms—Rohilkhand, Journalism, Regional Press, National Movement, Hindi Journalism, Urdu Journalism, Uttar Pradesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

Journalism has often been described as the fourth pillar of democracy because of its role in informing citizens, scrutinizing authority, and fostering public debate. In colonial India, newspapers became powerful instruments of political awakening and social reform. They not only informed readers but also inspired resistance against British rule and promoted ideas of nationalism, liberty, and social justice.¹

The historiography of Indian journalism has generally emphasized newspapers published from Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Allahabad, and Delhi. However, regional centers also contributed substantially to the evolution of journalism. Among these, Rohilkhand occupies an important place because of its intellectual

traditions, educational institutions, literary culture, and political activism.²

Historically, Rohilkhand has been a culturally diverse region where Hindi, Urdu, and Persian literary traditions flourished simultaneously. This multilingual environment significantly influenced the growth of journalism. Newspapers published in Hindi and Urdu became important platforms for discussing education, agriculture, social reforms, communal harmony, and nationalist politics.³

During the Indian freedom struggle, newspapers published from Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Rampur, and neighboring districts served as effective channels for spreading nationalist ideas despite strict colonial censorship. Local journalists frequently faced prosecution, confiscation of printing presses, and financial penalties under the British Press Acts. Nevertheless, they continued their mission of informing and mobilizing the public.⁴

After Independence, journalism in Rohilkhand gradually shifted its focus from anti-colonial resistance to developmental issues, governance, rural development, education, and social justice. The emergence of digital media in the twenty-first century has further transformed the journalistic landscape while preserving the region's tradition of public engagement.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JOURNALISM IN ROHILKHAND

The emergence of journalism in Rohilkhand must be understood within the broader development of the Indian press during the nineteenth century. The expansion of printing technology, the spread of modern education, and the rise of political

consciousness created favorable conditions for newspaper publication across northern India.⁵

Bareilly emerged as one of the earliest journalistic centers in Rohilkhand because of its commercial importance, educational institutions, and administrative significance. Alongside Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Badaun, and Rampur gradually developed active newspaper cultures. Many newspapers were initially weekly publications that focused on local governance, agricultural concerns, education, and public welfare.

Urdu journalism developed particularly strongly in Rampur because the princely state's rulers encouraged literary and scholarly activities. Literary journals and newspapers published from Rampur enriched Urdu prose while simultaneously discussing contemporary political and social issues.⁶

The nationalist movement of the early twentieth century significantly expanded journalistic activities in the region. Local newspapers began reporting on the Swadeshi Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement. Editorials encouraged political participation and criticized colonial administrative policies, making journalism an integral component of India's struggle for independence.⁷

Although colonial censorship restricted freedom of expression through various Press Acts, journalists from Rohilkhand continued publishing articles supporting civil liberties and constitutional reforms. Their commitment established journalism as a respected public institution in the region.

III. GROWTH OF NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS IN ROHILKHAND

The history of journalism in Rohilkhand is closely associated with the expansion of print culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The establishment of printing presses in major towns such as Bareilly, Rampur, Shahjahanpur, and Badaun created opportunities for the publication of newspapers, literary journals, religious magazines, and educational periodicals. These publications gradually transformed into influential platforms for public discussion and political awareness.⁸

Initially, newspapers published from Rohilkhand primarily reported local administrative affairs, commercial activities, agricultural developments,

educational reforms, and social issues. However, with the emergence of Indian nationalism during the late nineteenth century, the regional press increasingly addressed political questions concerning colonial governance, civil liberties, economic exploitation, and constitutional reforms. Consequently, journalism became an important medium for connecting local society with the broader national movement.⁹

Unlike metropolitan newspapers that enjoyed relatively greater financial and institutional support, most newspapers in Rohilkhand operated under severe economic constraints. Editors often worked simultaneously as publishers, printers, writers, and distributors. Despite limited resources, these newspapers succeeded in creating an informed public sphere that encouraged civic participation and political consciousness.¹⁰

The multilingual character of Rohilkhand significantly enriched its journalistic tradition. Hindi newspapers primarily addressed rural readers, educational institutions, and emerging middle-class communities, whereas Urdu newspapers attracted intellectuals, scholars, government employees, and literary circles. Together, these publications promoted cultural exchange and strengthened regional identity while contributing to India's nationalist discourse.¹¹

IV. BAREILLY: THE LEADING CENTRE OF JOURNALISM IN ROHILKHAND

Bareilly emerged as the most influential journalistic centre in Rohilkhand because of its strategic location, educational institutions, commercial importance, and political activism. During the colonial period, the city became an important hub for printing presses and newspaper publication.

Newspapers published from Bareilly regularly reported developments relating to municipal administration, education, agricultural production, public health, and nationalist politics. Editorials often criticized colonial administrative policies, excessive taxation, and restrictions on civil liberties. Through investigative reports and opinion pieces, journalists encouraged citizens to participate in public life and demand administrative accountability.¹²

Educational institutions in Bareilly also played a significant role in nurturing journalism. Teachers, lawyers, social reformers, and students frequently contributed articles discussing social reforms,

women's education, communal harmony, and economic development. As literacy increased, readership expanded rapidly, making journalism an influential instrument of social transformation.¹³

The city's newspapers also maintained close intellectual links with important newspapers published from Allahabad, Lucknow, Delhi, and Banaras. This exchange of ideas enabled local journalists to participate actively in debates concerning nationalism, constitutional reforms, language politics, and educational policy.

V. JOURNALISM IN SHAHJAHANPUR

Shahjahanpur occupies a distinguished place in the political history of India because of its association with revolutionary nationalism and the Kakori Movement. This political environment also influenced the growth of journalism in the district.

Local newspapers served as effective channels for disseminating nationalist ideas among students, traders, farmers, and educated citizens. Editorials encouraged Swadeshi, indigenous education, economic self-reliance, and resistance against colonial exploitation. Although colonial authorities frequently monitored newspapers for "seditious" writings, journalists continued publishing articles that promoted political awareness.¹⁴

During periods of political repression, newspapers relied on indirect language, symbolic expressions, literary essays, and historical narratives to communicate nationalist sentiments while avoiding prosecution. This creative strategy enabled journalists to circumvent censorship without abandoning their commitment to public enlightenment.

Journalism in Shahjahanpur also promoted communal harmony by encouraging cooperation between different religious communities during the national movement. Newspapers frequently emphasized shared political objectives instead of communal divisions.

VI. URDU JOURNALISM AND THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION OF RAMPUR

Rampur State occupies a unique position in the history of Indian journalism because of its remarkable contribution to Urdu language, literature, and journalism. Under the patronage of the Nawabs of Rampur, scholars, poets, historians, and journalists

found opportunities to pursue literary and intellectual activities.

Urdu newspapers and literary journals published from Rampur discussed literature, education, philosophy, religion, politics, and international affairs. Although princely states generally exercised greater control over the press, Rampur nevertheless developed an intellectually vibrant journalistic culture that influenced neighbouring regions.

The famous Rampur Raza Library became an important repository of manuscripts, newspapers, and journals, preserving valuable records relating to journalism and literary history. The interaction between journalism and literary scholarship distinguished Rampur from many other regional centres of northern India.¹⁵

VII. JOURNALISM DURING THE INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The Indian freedom movement fundamentally transformed journalism throughout Rohilkhand. Newspapers no longer functioned merely as providers of information; they became instruments of political mobilization and national integration.

Journalists actively supported major national movements including:

- The Swadeshi Movement (1905)
- The Home Rule Movement
- The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22)
- The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34)
- The Quit India Movement (1942)

Editorials encouraged the boycott of foreign goods, promotion of indigenous industries, expansion of national education, and participation in peaceful political movements. Newspapers also reported arrests of political leaders, public meetings, protest marches, and nationalist conferences, thereby strengthening communication between local communities and the national leadership.¹⁶

British authorities responded by imposing censorship, confiscating newspapers, prosecuting editors, and restricting printing presses under various Press Acts. Nevertheless, journalists continued publishing articles defending freedom of expression and democratic rights.

REFERENCES

- [1] Natarajan, J., *History of Indian Journalism*. New Delhi, India: Publications Division, Government of India, 1997, pp. 15–20.
- [2] Mishra, K. B., *History of Hindi Journalism*. New Delhi, India: Vani Prakashan, 2010, pp. 52–58.
- [3] Jeffrey, R., *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press*. London, U.K.: Hurst & Company, 2000, pp. 35–44.
- [4] Natarajan, J., *History of Indian Journalism*. New Delhi, India: Publications Division, Government of India, 1997, pp. 92–101.
- [5] Natarajan, S., *A History of the Press in India*. New Delhi, India: Publications Division, 1962, pp. 110–125.
- [6] Robinson, F., *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 148–152.
- [7] Chandra, B., *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence*. New Delhi, India: Penguin Books, 1989, pp. 214–228.
- [8] Jeffrey, R., *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press*. London, U.K.: Hurst & Company, 2000, pp. 44–51.
- [9] Mishra, K. B., *History of Hindi Journalism*. New Delhi, India: Vani Prakashan, 2010, pp. 72–79.
- [10] Natarajan, J., *History of Indian Journalism*. New Delhi, India: Publications Division, Government of India, 1997, pp. 112–118.
- [11] Natarajan, S., *A History of the Press in India*. New Delhi, India: Publications Division, 1962, pp. 135–142.
- [12] Jeffrey, R., *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press*. London, U.K.: Hurst & Company, 2000, pp. 67–72.
- [13] Mishra, K. B., *History of Hindi Journalism*. New Delhi, India: Vani Prakashan, 2010, pp. 91–95.
- [14] Chandra, B., *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence*. New Delhi, India: Penguin Books, 1989, pp. 263–271.
- [15] Robinson, F., *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 150–156.
- [16] Sarkar, S., *Modern India: 1885–1947*. New Delhi, India: Macmillan India, 1983, pp. 245–258.