

The American Media And Gandhiji's Campains In Indian Movement

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Abstract :

The argument is not convincing; it clearly overstates both the evil conditions prior to the British rule. It attributes material progress solely to alien rule rather than to the general march of science which has coincided with the period of British dominance. At best the imperialist case smacks too much of the occupations of another man's house by saying, "I keep order in the household and I keep the other burglars out." American press opinion, concerning Indian national list struggle vis-à-vis Mahatma Gandhi. A small section of the US media, having Anglophilic proclivities, often reflected pro-British prejudice in its reprotings on India Led by Christian Science Report and the New York Heral Tribune, this section had placed heavy reliance on the "facts" supplied by the British Information Service in the United States. It is noteworthy that this agency published a brocgyre or brochure entitled, "Fifty facts About India". Where ever it went in India hostile crowd everywhere displayed placards and banners that read "Go back, Simon", but the Philadelphia Inquirer had altogether different analysis to convey.

Keywords : British rule, US media, American press, non-cooperation movement.

Introduction :

Three board trends appear from the perusal of American press opinion, concerning Indian national list struggle vis-à-vis Mahatma Gandhi. A small section of the US media, having Anglophilic proclivities, often reflected pro-British prejudice in its reprotings on India Led by Christian Science Report and the New York Heral Tribune, this section had placed heavy reliance on the "facts" supplied by the British Information Service in the United States. It is noteworthy that this agency published a brocgyre or brochure entitled, "Fifty facts About India". The document was distributed on a large scale and "American newspapers found very useful whenever they needed to write editorials on the Indian problem.(1)

The same section of media gave and outrageous impression of Gandhi and his first mass movement (non-cooperation campaigns) aspersion on the high sincerity of the man'(2) The Christian Science Monitor made the following 'assessment' about the personality of Gandhi.

Mr. Gandhi , inspite of all his well known qualities of statesmanship which have earned for him high regard in Great Britain as well as in India, has stood reveled more and more during the past few months as the embodiment of reaction, in the simplest meaning of Western Civilization, in the railways, the telegraph and the modern industrial system, nothing but the ruin of India".(3)

About the non-cooperation movement, the paper had the following uncharitable opinion: “The

Non-Cooperation movement inaugurated by Gandhi the well known Indian leader, last summer, a campaign which sought to bring the Anglo-Indian Government of India to a standstill by the simple refusal of all Indian,(4) Mohammedan or Hindu, to take part in it, has proved a failure”.

The biased commentary of the paper can also be gauged from its bleak appraisal of Gandhi’s future moves. It wrote:

“The situation in the country, generally speaking, although difficult, is not unduly serious. Mr. Gandhi has failed, so far in practically everything he has attempted, and there is no reason to suppose that he will succeed any better in the future”.(5)

After the Chauri Chaura incident and the withdrawal! Of the non – cooperation movement there was comparative lull in the Indian national scene. The arrival of all white Simon Commission revived the US media interest in India. The Commission was greeted with black flag demonstrations. Where ever it went in India hostile crowd everywhere displayed placards and banners that read “Go back, Simon”, but the Philadelphia Inquirer had altogether different analysis to convey. It reported:

“The attempt to boycott the Commission has apparently failed and this is a sign of good omen. There are many Indians who believe that they have better chance of justice at the hands of a British Commission than at the hands of their own countrymen. If Sir John Simon and his colleagues fulfill expectations, they should be able to do a great service for India”.(6)

The failure of the Simon Commission to mollify the national sentiment resulted in the famous Lahore resolution of Poorna Swaraja (1929) and subsequent launching of the Civil Disobedience movement by Gandhiji.

In England preparations went ahead for hosting the first Round Table Conference despite the decision of the Congress to boycott it. While the majority of Dailies and Periodicals expressed doubts about the efficacy of the conference in the wake of Congress boycott the Christian Science Monitor viewed it as a positive advantage. It wrote:

“So many influential Indians will, after all the coming “round table “ conference in London also to raise reasonable hopes that any agreed decisions which this gathering may reach will command sufficient support in India to enable them to be put into operation. It would no doubt have been willing to participate. There are compensating advantages, however, in the very abstention of representation than would otherwise have been the case”.(7)

The same paper was critical of Gandhi and his mass campaign. In one of its observations, it accused Gandhi of letting loose lawlessness by inaugurating the Civil Disobedience campaign. It wrote:

“It is obviously not easy for any Government to arrest a “saint” for collecting salt on a bleak and deserted seashore, especially when the “saint” himself was courting arrest. On the other hand, there are objections to waiting until many innocent people have perished before arrested him before would have led to even greater bloodshed. But the arrest is clearly justifiable as it is, and greatly as the Mahatma himself probably welcome it as a possible further impulse to the cause to which he had devoted himself”.(8)

Pro-British learnings of these section of papers and periodicals was amply reflected in their response to the 1942 Quit India Struggle. Reacting over the Congress Resolution for British withdrawal from India the Baltimore Sun observed that the vast majority of the American people would support the British if they took any action against the Congress “The Washington star and Philedelphia Inquirer counseled the British to take the sternest measures against the Congress while The New York Herald Tribune grimly indicated that there was no longer any room for argument with Gandhi”.(9)

Thus, it is clear that a section of the American press sought to project an attitude of hostility while commenting on Indian nationalist activities.

They almost spoke the British imperial versions on the events taking place in India. However, there were some newspaper and journals, too, which strove to maintain caution and objectivity in their coverage of India related issues.

In the meantime events of gigantic dimensions were taking place in India but little credible news was coming forth. Hence, New York Times observed.

“Little news goes out of India. The censorship is doing its work thoroughly. But occasional correspondence appears in English newspaper to yield hints of what is going on under the stricter Government policy since the arrest and imprisonment of Gandhi.”¹⁰

It is noteworthy in the context of the Gandhian

movement that a section of the press help Gandhi responsible for

the spate of violence that followed in retaliation for the British

repression of mass movement. The New York Time did not share this sort of appraisal.

It stated:

“Mr. Gandhi makes no appeal to violence; in face, he distinctly preaches against it; but it is clear that his ideas have an explosive power and will have to be handled carefully.”⁽¹¹⁾

The New York Times did same plain speaking when it editorially commented that India's demand for self-government could no longer be answered by a racial of the good works of the British Raj. It observed

“Yet despit such reservation, the historic argument for liberty stands. If India is determind to be free, one cannot go on indefinitely pleading the benefits of British rule. Neither can one yse in the form the argument that India is not yet ready for independence.”¹²

Thus, there did exist a section of Amercian Press which, though usally responsive to the Indian aspirations of freedom viewed their stuggle with some reservation but without any pronounced bias.

British censorship succeeded in preventing and report on the Jalliawala Bhag massacre of April 1919, the nation-wide upsurge against repression and the rise fo Gandhiji to national leadership from reaching the United States. The Non-Co-operation movement, launched by Gandhiji in August 1920, was also not reported for serval months. But soon, article on Gandhiji and the movement began to appear in many newspapers and periodicals. Frazier Hunt, a correspondent of the Chicago Tribune, visited India and interviewed Gandhiji in October 1920.¹³ The World, a New York daily, sent a correspondent to India and published a series of articles by him.

His circle of friends steadily increased, as interest in India grew with the advance of the national movement. There were exensive report in the Amercian press of Gandhiji's march to the sea in 1930 to defy the salt laws, the nation-wide Civil Disobedience which followed and the brutality of the police against peaceful satyagrahis. Time magazine chose Gandhiji as launched by Gandhiji from prision in 1932 also attracted the interest of many Americans.

Gandhiji said at a press conference in 1931 that there were many manifestations of great inerest from America in his work in India:” I receive hundreds of letters; they may, of course, be merely pretexts to get my autograph, but the interest is certainly there.”¹⁴ He noted in a letter to American friends, sent through the India League of America, on August 3, 1942: “ I have even excepting Great Briain.”¹⁵

He recognized that world opinion was important for the success of the not-violent struggle in India. Through his statements, interviews and letters, he contributed greatky to promoting understanding if the struggle.

However, the stand of the liberal press was entirely different. It took absorbing interest on the notable happenings in India. Represented by the Nation, the New Republic and the Christian century and many others, this group remained a consistant support of India's cause, from the very beginning. Particularly, after the advent of Gandhi on the national scene, this liberal section of the press threw its full weight behing the national movement in India.

The liberal press hailed the emergence of Gandhi and his unique method of moralistic anti-British campaign. This humble appreance and moralistic approach in politics greatly impressed the liberal media personnel. His resort to fast as a means of penance for the acts of violence that marred the visit of the prince of Wales was picked up by the New Year Times for comment. The paper stated:

“As a rermedy for the situation for which he is responsible a responsibility he has the decency to admit Gandhi has imposed upon himself a complete fast for one day each week”.¹⁶

“ Glowing tributes to Gandhi and to his influence on the Indian masses were paid by various writers. Brain P.O Shasnain did not consider the Mahatma a visionary; he said:

“He has actual political power, the power given him by over a hundred million followers.”¹⁷

Shasnain maintained that the British feared Gandhi more than any other man on earth- far moere that they feared do Valera or Lenin, for they recognized that he was fighting with the weapons which he knew how to use with consummate skill but which they did not know how to counter all. He continued:

.....Bullets, bayonets, artillery, aeroplane bombs, are useless against the man who is teaching, al India to despise death, even to die loving the slayer. For Gandhi insists that his followers shall not harm the British, no matter what evil they do. He treats the British as if they were children playing with a force they know not of. 18

Same penetrating analysis by leading Columnists are especially noteworthy. Clair Price, in “Gandhi and British India” which appeared in the New York Times, wrote:

The Government of India in its own country is the most powerful Government in the world- has met and overcome many and obstacle in one way or another, but today it is up against and obstacle of a sort which is brand new in its experience. It is up against M.K Gandhi, a dark little wisp of a man who looks as if he could be picked up in one’s arm and carried of like a child. In point of personal following, he is far and away the greatest man living in the world today..... He is a philosophic anarchist, a new Tolstoy without Tolstoy’s past. He specializes in reducing his wants. He has fastened so long and so often that he physically is mere shadow of a man. He is an idea, living for a moment in a frail and brittle body.19

W.H. Robert observed:

“He preached a gospel even more amazing than his personality. It was a message of renewed self-respect and regenerated manhood, of freedom so would not be worth the cost. Real freedom could come only from moral regeneration.”20

W.W. Pearson said:

It is not because he stands for a definite policy in regard to the British Raj, but because he is a saint, a man of austere and ascetic life who follows Truth at whatever cost to himself. Not even his worst enemy has ever doubted Gandhi’s sincerity.’21

Berned Sexton described Gandhi as a morning star to India, a new leader of the insurrectuon in spirit, a man whose title was not General but Mahatma a man who had invented for war a new explosive which he named Soul Force. He added:

“..... Then man through whose leadership these things have come to pass is evidentially one of the great characters of history, one of those “pale thinkers” whom Emerson described as being let loose on the planet now and then for its purification.’22

Many articles were written on the Non- Cooperation movement as it progressed. Those who had neither anti or pro leanings towards Britain or India mostly refrained from exepressing any opinion and gave only bare outlines of the happenings in India, but in doing so, sometimes exaggerated their accounts as it often happens This might be attributed to the lach of securing first hand information, or the exaggerated accounts of the achievements of the movement appearing in the Indian press which they sometimes quoted. Also, it might have been due to the fact that their high and venerated opinion of Gandhi’s followers were in a very simple and literal sense doing what he advised. People had made bonfires of their foreign- made clothes, layers had abandoned lucrative practices; thousands of cases had been taken out of Law Courts; over 25,000 titles had been renounced23 In the same strain, Roman Rolland wrote in the Century Magazine that in inaugurating his Non- Cooperation movement, Gandhi returned the medal of Kaisar-i-Hind which had been given to him by the British Government for humanitarian work.

Gandhi's example was immediately followed Hundreds of Magistrates sent in their resignation; thousands of students left the colleges; the Courts were abandoned; the schools were emptied.²⁴

Practically all the leaders, including Gandhi, had been arrested by the Middle of March.1992, and thus, the movement was leaderless. Besides, the emergence of the Swaraj party, led by C.R Das and Motilal Nehru, the chief followers of Gandhi, to wreck the 1919 constitution from within the councils, gave the appearance of a rift in the Congress party. The participation of the Liberals-a party leaders without followers- created the impression in the Amercian press that the Indians were willings to cooperate with the Government, to the gave detriment of Gandhi's leadership. These factors only confirmed the opinion of the critical press, that Gandhi was a "visionary", and "impractical idealist", and that his importance in the opinion of the section of the section of the press which did not view his movement in a favorable light. That perhaps explains the paucity of comment on his arrest.

Liberals opinion, however, was bouned to take note of Gandhi's imprisonment. The New Republic and The Nation came out with sharp criticisms, condemning the British Government. The nation asserted;

"when an alien Government arrests a national hero who, its own apologists admit, is the most saintly figure in the modern world, no further proof is required that it rests its case on naked force.

Condemning British domination of India, the paper volleyed out a barrage of arguments.

..... Even so, the protagonists of imperialism, England and America, assure us that there was no other couse open to the Government. However clouded England's title, she and she alone, it is asserted, protects India from external invasion and internal chaos and strife. She has brought justice and modern civilization to a country where they could not exist but for her strong arm. The argument is not convincing; it clearly overstates both the evil conditions prior to the British rule. It attributes material progress solely to alien rule rather than to the general march of science which has coincided with the period of British dominance. At best the imperialist case smacks too much of the occupations of another man's house by saying, "I keep order in the household and I keep the other burglars out."

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