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'DNYANPRAKASH'

ITS ROLE IN POLITICAL AWAKENING (1849 – 1910)



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

Krishnaji Trymbak Ranade began publishing Dnyanprakash newspaper in Marathi at Pune on February 12, 1849. Initially, it was a weekly newspaper. It became a bi-weekly from 1853. For the duration of the Indian National Congress session at Pune in 1895, the newspaper was published daily with the aim of providing fresh news of the deliberations at the session. From August 1904, it became a regular daily newspaper.

KEYWORDS

Political Awakening, 'Dnyanprakash', Indian National Congress session.

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INTRODUCTION

The aims and objectives of Dnyanprakash were stated in its very first issue. Chief among these were to give news of international happenings just as English and other European language newspapers did and to translate in Marathi any useful matter published in English and other European languages. Thus, the newspaper would help in removing the ignorance of the people and making them aware of the true events taking place on the world stage. The newspaper was fully aware of its responsibilities. Pointing out the rights and duties of a newspaper, it opined that newspapers have every right to write whatever was possible about the acts of commission or omission of government servants because, after all, they are servants of the people and publishers are the people's eyes. A printing press opens the doors to reforms. Thus, the newspaper strongly believed that newspapers had the right to criticize the government and its officers wherever it was appropriate.

Dnyanprakash was basically a progressive newspaper. However, it somewhat softened its voice when it passed into the hands of moderate leaders. Studied analyses and balanced editorials were the salient features of this newspaper. It adopted a proactive policy towards social reforms. The need for appropriate education system for women and girls, tips on the kinds of businesses which the newly-educated class should start, the state of neglect of traditional arts were some of the subjects which generated vehement comment from the newspaper. Apart from socially-oriented articles, the newspaper also carried innovative and useful information through reports such as 'Sanadi Naukaranchi Pariksha', 'East India Company', 'Hindustan Deshachya Vyaparachi Stithi', 'Bharat Khandat RashtraEkki Anek', 'Dhande, Rozgarva Uddeem YavarilKar', 'Indapurchi Nyaysabha', 'Sinnar Yethil Shetiva Vyapar Yanna Uttejan Denari Mandali', 'Punyatil Padarth Sangrahalay', 'Punyatil Udyogi Lokanche Vartan', 'Dushkala Sambandhi Vyavastha', 'Mumbaichya Governorchi Anastha', 'Padvanacha Sukal', and 'Vede Peek'. From these titles, the newspaper's policy and approach are clearly seen.

Dnyanprakash stood firmly for protecting the rights and interests of natives. In an article related to the appointment of natives to the Council, it observed that only those natives who were favourable to the British government were appointed on the Council. Hence, they were inclined towards promoting the interests of the government rather than the people. Therefore, it was of the firm opinion that the native members should be directly elected by the people.

British administration did improve the condition of Indians to some extent but, on the whole, there was a rise in poverty. Tracing the causes for this, the newspaper wrote in an article titled 'Hindustan DeshAnkhiKitiPilunKadhna?' that we are Indians but so long as administrators belong to England and they manage our finances till then the kind of financial management which comes in a self government will not be possible. Since they took over the administration of the country, the British resorted to unbridled expenditure. It was necessary to cut down this expenditure. India was a big pasturing ground where fat British bulls could freely graze to their stomachs' full. This attitude of the British was dangerous and treacherous to Indians, the newspaper opined.

The newspaper exposed the irrational British economic policy by pointing out the huge difference in the defence expenditures of India and those of European countries. The defence outlay of India was much more than that of France, as if India was so rich that it could afford such a large expenditure. It rued the misadministration of the British and their bad management of the country's resources. Discussing the British policy towards India, the problems emerging from that policy and the harm wrought about by the policy, the newspaper said that if the British wanted to continue ruling this

country and exploiting it for their own benefits, they should at least have the compassion to keep Indians alive. The British should not kill the hen that lays golden eggs. Thus, the newspaper brought to the fore the reality of British economic policy.

The Queen of England set up a committee to review the then existing political system of India. At that time, the newspaper demanded that instead of hardcore administrators, the Queen should appoint free and independent-minded English people who are not part of British administration in India. These people should be conversant with administrative practices and their lacunae. If people who are part of administration are appointed on the committee, it would be like making an accused a judge. They would not be in a position to highlight their own weaknesses and defects.

The newspaper is seen advocating unity among Indians. Whatever may be the internal differences of Indians but their national interest was one. The newspaper tried to show the importance of this unity in an editorial titled ‘EkacheDogheShatruParasparancheMitra’. The editorial commented that the days of hatred and resentment by Hindus and Muslims towards each other’s religion were over. Either by their cleverness or craftiness, the British have assumed control over the entire nation and put it to slavery. National unity is the only way by which the shackles of slavery can be broken. The fighting between us benefits some third party. The British are trying very hard to keep us apart. It would be foolish of us not to see their craftiness when there is still time.

Explaining the way in which local fund was used on the amenities and comforts of British officers instead of carrying out public works, the newspaper said that the local fund was used for building a road leading to the Sahib’s bungalow and garden. If this fund is misutilised and if, in the coming days, the right to local self-government is granted, then the people-elected members will have to take care that public money is utilized on providing amenities to the people.

Keeping their own interests in mind, the British financially exploited India and did not allow trade and commerce to grow. Instead, it promoted British trade and sought to create new markets for the textile mill owners of Manchester and Dundee. The newspaper regretted that the British did not show the same commitment towards protecting the interests of the huge population of this country as they did towards protecting the interests of a handful of British industrialists. Both India and Canada were British colonies. However, there was a sea of difference in the British policies towards each of them, the newspaper said. The British quelled a rebellion in Canada and themselves bore the expenditure of this military exercise. The people of Canada were not burdened with additional revenue demand. But when the British set out to suppress a rebellion in Burma, they made Indians not only to help them in this exercise but also to bear its expenditure. Despite being guiltless and loyal, Indians had to suffer this kind of injustice. It was, therefore, natural for people to wonder whether it was better to revolt rather than remain a loyal subject. In an ominous indication of the times to come, the newspaper said that the British themselves would be responsible if some people no longer swear allegiance to them.

The newspaper educated the Marathi masses on such issues as what is Swaraj? Why should it be attained? What needs to be done for attaining it? How did Italy and Greece free themselves from foreign rule? The literacy level at that time was 15 or 16 per cent. Those who could read also used to read the newspapers to those who couldn’t. This was how the views and opinions of newspapers percolated into the society and led to the growth of bitterness among Indians for the British.

In an editorial headlined ‘British SamrajyachyaAatkiBaher’, the newspaper was at pains to note that good governance was eluding Indians due to the empty, unproductive talks of miscreants on the

one hand and the policy-related issues of arrogant British officers on the other. In the same article, the newspaper pointed out the difference between Ireland and India. Ireland has been England's neighbour for centuries and a sufferer of its atrocities for a few centuries. It has a similar religious and cultural heritage as that of England. Despite this, the people of Ireland do not want to merge their identities with the English. On the other hand, India doesn't share such a long relationship with England. Its philosophy, its religion and its social make-up are completely different than that of England. The original political philosophy of India is quite unlike the political philosophy they have been made aware of due to their recent contact with England. In this situation, it is not unjust that India should not aspire and crave for total political independence. The newspaper gave a clear picture of the existing realities in the said article. When Indians demanded Swaraj, the British told them that they didn't have the ability to rule themselves. Delivering a sharp retort to them, the newspaper said that one cannot learn to swim without getting in the water. Hence, it demanded that Indians be given responsibilities in instalments.

Another article in the same issue spoke of the preparations necessary to move towards Swaraj. An attempt to adopt the three-fold policy of national integration, mutual trust and decisive action is itself good preparation for attainment of Swaraj, it said. The disgust that some people feel towards Indians would not abate unless their conduct is influenced by the noble qualities of pride, self-reliance, simplicity and truthfulness. It held slavery in great contempt and said that the thought of orientals or occidentals enforcing themselves on the other was jarring to the mind and self-esteem.

The newspaper pointed out that anti-British feelings, unrest, conspiracy, revolt, murders and other illegal activities were on the rise. The main reason for this was the high-handed actions of government officers which resulted in a change of mindset of educated people and emboldened the courageous among them to indulge in such activities.

BalGangadharTilak criticized the Morley-Minto Commission. The newspaper, however, favoured one of its recommendations as it at least introduced the idea of setting up Parliament in the country.

In the period from 1849 to 1910, the newspaper's public awareness campaign was extraordinary in its scale. Using simple and gentle, yet effective language, it presented its views to the people and succeeded in creating resentment and hostility among Indians for the British. It provoked nationalist feelings by asking and explaining such questions as what is Swaraj, why is its attainment necessary, what are the ways in which it can be achieved, how did foreign-ruled European countries gain independence, what actions they took, etc. The newspaper had the courage to assert that newspapers had the right to criticize government and its officers. The newspaper was especially respected for its editorials which presented a studied and balanced picture. It kept lighted the flame of progressive thought among political and social leaders.

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