

## PRESS IN INDIA AND RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY

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### Abstract

A democracy ideally stands on three main pillars, viz. Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. Apart from these three mentioned above however exists another pillar namely the Press. It is therefore aptly referred to as the fourth estate of democracy. This is so primarily because it plays as important a role as the other three branches of the democracy in making it work effectively. We consider press as free from bias and prejudice. But as press uses the verbal medium language, it cannot be free from this. Press reflects the realities of this world as wished by social and political world. The press tries to motivate, mesmerize or change the opinion of the people in such a way that people of a particular taste will be addicted to a particular newspaper. Thus, for instance, they cannot spend their morning hours just with a cup of tea without having a newspaper. This is how a newspaper turns or moulds the language of the news as well in such a manner that it can fulfill its desired goal and yet the reader remains unaware of the fact.

### Introduction

Newspaper gives a true picture of the world the main aim being to provide information about the happenings of this world to its readers. Black tiny letters (white paper paints the picture of the world in varied colours). It can represent murder and bloodshed along with love, mercy and kindness. Newspapers project reality and fact of this world. They are however not free from the editorials' bias, prejudice and ideology.

### Contributions of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

The study of the history of freedom of press reveals that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was an ardent supporter and patronizer of freedom of press. He was a pioneer of Indian Journalism. He brought out journals in some major languages including Bengali, Persian and Hindi in order to create socio-cultural and political awareness among the people of India. It was felt necessary as they were mostly under intellectual darkness. Also, he wanted to

strengthen public opinion in the country. Ram Mohan Roy tried to spread literary, political and scientific knowledge among the Indians. He had the intention of presenting popular demands and grievances before the Government by creating public opinion on current issues and topics.

The purpose Raja Ram Mohan Roy had in mind could not be served properly if there was no freedom of press. He championed the cause of press freedom. In 1823, Press Ordinance was promulgated. It prohibited the publication of newspaper or periodicals without previous license from the Governor-General-in-Council. Raja Ram Mohan Roy protested against it and submitted a memorandum to the Supreme Court arguing in favour of freedom of press in India. The British East India Company was against Freedom of press in India. But Raja Ram Mohan Roy strongly argued against this view. The company had the fear of public criticism under a free press. Ram Mohan Roy was successful in convincing the authority with his strong logic arguing that in India Freedom of press would not be harmful for the government as people had been loyal to it.

Roy pointed out that a free press acted as a safety valve and did not give any scope for sudden out burst. Freedom of press was helpful to both the government and the people. A free press acts like a channel of communication between the two and solves many problems. People come to know about the plans, programmes, policies and intentions of the government through it. People also express their reactions and grievances through it thus making the governance more effective.

A free press helps disseminate knowledge and boosts intellectual improvement. It allows creativity: gives literary, cultural and artistic knowledge and pleasure. The government comes to know about the defects of its policies and administration and gets a scope to remedy those before any crisis arises. Raja Ram Mohan Roy argued that a free press fails revolution and does not nourish it.

He felt that there has not been a reduction of violence under a free press. On the contrary, a number of revolutions have taken place in those parts of the world where press freedom was denied. Due to lack of opportunity of expression grievances and discontentment of the people pile up and ultimately burst out in the form of a revolution. It

is important to observe what Raja Ram Mohan Roy said while justifying his stand on the issue of freedom of press:

*Every good ruler who is convinced of the imperfectness of human nature and revenue to the eternal Governor of the world must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire and therefore, he will be anxious to afford every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained liberty to publication is the only effectual means that can be employed.*

Ram Mohan Roy however, was not in favour of absolute freedom of press. In stead he wanted reasonable restrictions on it. He believed that those who try to incite hatred in the minds of the Indians against the British nation should be punished. Similarly, an attempt to provoke hostilities with neighbours and friendly states must be duly penalized.

### **Conclusion**

The notion of freedom of press as held by Roy was to ultimately establish in India the rule of law and not the rule of persons and their whims. In the USA and some other countries press freedom is guaranteed under their constitutions. But in our constitution, on the other hand, this is implicit in 'the freedom of speech and expression', granted to every citizen as one of his fundamental rights. Similarly, in communist countries or in countries where there is dictatorship, freedom of press is rather suppressed. The Press Commission was established in India for the first time in 1956. After a lapse of ten years came the Press Council in 1966 for the freedom of press. Then came a significant period in the history of the Indian press when the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi curtailed the freedom of press in 1975 with the imposition of the Emergency. She did not allow the newspapers to expose the defence and internal affairs of our country. She was right in her way because it was against the country's safety and integrity. The year 2000 saw a milestone in the media with the passage of the 'Freedom of Information Act'. By this act the journalists of India are given the right to give true information to public. If they violate this act, they will be prosecuted.

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