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The Evolution of Muslim Press in Punjab (From the Early Beginning to the 1947)

Abstract

Communication is the basis of daily life. In fact, it is the basic and most vital human instinct. "The process of sharing ideas, information and messages with others in a particular time and date is called communication." It includes writing and talking, as well as non-verbal communication, (such as facial expressions, body language or gestures), visual communication (the use of images, or pictures such as paintings, photography, video or film) and electronic communication (telephone calls, e-mails, cable TV or satellite broadcasts). Communication is the most vital element of our daily life and is also significant in other walks of life such as business, education and any other situation where people encounter each other for any purpose. Communication between two people is an outgrowth of methods developed over centuries of experience. Gestures, the development of languages and the necessity to engage in joint action in daily life, all played a part.

Introduction

Humans are not the only creatures that communicate; many other animals exchange signals and signs that help them find food, migrate or reproduce. The world-renowned 19th century biologist, Charles Darwin showed that the ability of a species to exchange information or signals about its environment is an important factor in its biological survival. While other animals use a limited range of sounds or signals to communicate, human beings have developed complete system of languages that are used to ensure survival, to express ideas and emotions, to tell stories and remember the past and to negotiate with one another. Language, some theorists believe, is an outgrowth of group activities such as working together. Most languages have a written form. Written communication began earlier in the form of drawings or marks made to indicate meaningful information about the natural world.

It was in this backdrop that Aristotle observed that the man is a social animal, i.e. he cannot live alone. So, language was perhaps first invention of human beings which they developed to survive and reproduce.

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The Rise of Journalism

The print journalism has a long history. Newspaper is publication, usually issued daily, weekly or at other regular time that provides news, views, features and other information of public interest and that often carries advertising. Forerunner of modern newspapers includes the “Acta Diurna” (Daily Acts) of ancient Rome—posted announcements of political or social events and manuscripts. ‘Newsletters were circulated in the late-middle ages by various international traders. ‘Acta Diurna’ – hand written newsheets were posted by the representatives of the government in the public market places from the year 59BC to at least 222 AD. It announced news of military campaigns, politics, trials, scandals and executions. In China, early government produced newsheets, called “Tipao”, were circulated among the court officials during the “Han Dynasty” (202BC–220BC). At some point during the ‘Tang Dynasty’ (618-907), the Chinese used carved wooden blocks to print “Tipao” making them the first printed newspaper in human history. A printing press that employed movable types was developed in Europe in 1450 and European officials soon began using it to publish news. Newspapers published under the same name on a regular schedule first appeared in Venice, Italy, in the 16th century. Handwritten newspapers called “Avisi” or ‘Gazette’, appeared weekly as early as 1566. They reported news brought to Venice by visiting traders. Venetian gazette established a style of journalism that most easy printed newspapers followed—short sets of news items written under the name of the City they came from and the date on which they were sent. Newspapers spread rapidly throughout the Europe. English newspapers started publishing in 1621 in UK, were among the first in the world to use headlines to attract readers and wood acts to illustrate stories. They also set source of revenue and paid newsboys or more commonly, newsgirls to sell papers in the streets.

Although the first attempt to set up newspapers in India did not occur until 1766, almost a century earlier Aurangzab, the last of the great Moguls, recognized the need to home news reports from various districts /provinces and for the purpose, a network of news writers or “Waka-i-nawis”, to gather information of important events, was organized. Although Aurangzeb found the news reports useful to successfully extend the boundaries of the vast Mogul empire, but his failure in Duccan, can partly be attributed to the false reports sent by his news writers. However, S.C. Sanial who is considered an authority on journalism of Mogul era does not agree with this statement. He observed that Aurangzeb had full confidence in the good faith as well as accuracy of the press repots. The king of Oudh, according to Sir William Sleeman, employed 660 news writers to collect political and social information relating to his state. They were paid Rs. 4 to Rs.5 per month. The East India Company also utilized news writers to collect sensitive information. During the period of political decline and fall of Moguls, with military and economic rise of East India Company in India, it was the political

corruption and coercion, which precipitated the first attempt to establish a newspaper in India. Williams Bolts, an employee of East India Company, resigned from the Company in 1766 and immediately declared his intention to publish a newspaper by posting a notice on the door of commercial house in Calcutta as well as in other public places. It was no surprise that company did not permit Bolts to publish newspaper in India. On April 18, 1767, Bolts was ordered to leave Bengal and to proceed to Madras to board a ship leaving for Europe. For the next 12 years, there was no attempt made to start a newspaper in India.

James Augustus Hickey, a printer by trade, has the distinction of launching the first newspaper in India. His “Bengal Gazette” alias “Calcutta General Advertiser”, more commonly known as ‘Hickey’s Gazette’ came out in January 29, 1780 in Calcutta as a 2-sheet weekly, 12x8 in size. It declared itself as a “weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties but influenced by none.” It was described as a “Witty and Scurrilous” paper and soon earned the enmity of Warren Hastings, the Governor General and Chief Justice Elijah Imphy. This paper barely lived 2 years. However, Prof. Muhammad Siddique, in his book “A History of Urdu Literature”, has stated with reference to one Sa’aid Abdul Khaliq of defunct Masur State that first regular newspaper published in India was actually “Fauji Akhbar”, printed at the government press in Masur State. It was a weekly paper and its circulation was confined to army personnel only. Its policy was anti-British and pro-French. After the fall of Masur State, the Printing press was confiscated and the stock of old papers was destroyed by the invading British army. Journalism in those days was hardly considered a profession for decent men. Pulteney’s description of the journalist “A head of witches whom neither information can enlighten nor affluence elevate” was one point of view on which the officials of the company acted. During this time, press was confined to, and observed the interests of the ruling race and its subject people had very little to do with it. The East India Company was not favorably disposed to the press industry and its officials were, from the beginning, suspicious of journalists and newspapers.

It was in this backdrop that first Urdu newspaper “Jam-e-Jahanuma” appeared in 1822 from Delhi by Maulana M. Bakir. News item besides, poems were usually published in the newspaper. The editor, Munshi Sardar Sukh published this paper under the patronage of East India Company. As there were no regular sources of newsgathering, the owners of newspapers usually depend on the “Waqa-I- Nagars” posted across the empire by different state rulers or the East India Company.

Journalism in Punjab

So far as the present day Pakistani Punjab is concerned, no traces of paper are to be found there till immediately after the British conquest of Punjab in 1849 when

the first newspaper started appearing from Lahore, namely “Koh-I-Noor”. Feroze (1957) in his book “Press in Pakistan” disclosed that actually “Lahore Chronicle” was the first newspaper which starting appearing from Lahore in the year 1844. This paper later incorporated into “Civil And Military Gazette” of Lahore as this venture did not prove to be a financial success.

After the Gujrat battle of Sikhs with the British army in 1849, the Punjab was finally annexed to the British Kingdom of India. The Urdu newspapers sprung up just after the occupation and a few stray references to such newspapers are found in the early issues of ‘Koh-i-Noor’, which first appeared on January 14, 1850 from Lahore and was the first regular and successful Urdu newspaper in Punjab, which was started by Munshi Harsukh Rai who came to Lahore in 1849. This venture was launched under the patronage of Punjab Board of Administration. Its maximum circulation was only 249. The size of paper was 8 x 12 with 16 pages.

There was another newspaper called “Darya-e-Noor” which being an independent paper, was a great rival of ‘Koh-i-Noor’. It appeared in the same year and from the same building in Lahore. It was run by Fakir Saraj-ud-Din of Fakir family of Lahore. The paper came to an inglorious end very soon after the death of its editor/proprietor. It was a weekly, usually published on Sundays and its circulation did not cross 100 papers per week. Being ex-vice editor of ‘Darya-e-Noor’, Munshi Mehdi Hussain Khan started his own weekly ‘Riaz-e-Noor’ from Multan in 1853. Fakir Ghulam Nasir-ud-Din launched ‘Shua-ul-Shamsh’, a paper having nationalistic tendencies.

Another well-known newspaper of the early days of journalism in Punjab was the “Punjabee”, a tri-weekly English paper, started in 1856 by Mohammad Azeem, father of a famous Punjab historian, S.M.Latif. Its language was later on changed into Urdu. The paper collapsed after a few years but its vernacular edition, which was introduced later, continued to appear till 1890. The paper was like ‘Lahore Chronicle’ in style and printing standards. It was printed at the “Punjabee Press” by M. Gregory (Manager). During the chaotic period of 1857, proprietor of ‘Punjab Punch’ M. Fateh-ud-Din launched another weekly newspaper in Roman language as the British government was patronizing the promotion of Roman manuscript. The proprietor of the paper used to criticize the official policies of the British administration vis-à-vis Indian people. Munshi Mehram Ali Chishti who started his professional career as an editor of ‘Koh-i-Noor’ started a weekly paper ‘Rafiq-e-Hind’, an independent paper of that age. This paper collapsed in 1904. In 1856, S. Raza Ali Rizvi Delhvi announced to launch “Ankai Roozgar” from the winter resort of Simla.

After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, many new literary and educational journals also surfaced. In July 1, 1854, a monthly magazine “Bainai Bebha” from

Lahore was launched under the editorship of M. Ahsan. It was an educational magazine published for the promotion of education. Total pages of the magazine were 32.

Sialkot

Sialkot was the second largest centre of regional journalism after Lahore in Punjab. The one reason of rapid expansion in journalism was increase in literacy rate. Dr. Abdul Salam Khurshid maintained that 'Riaz-ul-Akhbar' was the first regional newspaper launched in Sialkot under the editorship of Munshi Dewan Chand, the pioneer journalist in Sialkot.

Multan

The regional journalism started in Multan in the year 1852 by the launching of 'Riaz-ul-Noor' by Munshi M. Mehdi Hussain Khan. Later, Fakir Ghulam Naseer-ud-Din also published 'Shoa-ul-Shamsh'. Both the newspapers were stated to be arch rivals of each other.

Gujranwala / Gujrat /Rawalpindi

Regional Journalism started in Gujranwala in 1850 with the publication of 'Gulzar-e-Punjab'. The first regional newspaper of Gujrat was 'Mutla-ul-Anwar' which was launched in 1854. After a lapse of two years, another paper 'Sohail Punjab' was launched from Rawalpindi.

Faisalabad

Faisalabad is one of the most important centers of regional journalism. First newspaper in this city was launched in about 1933, namely 'Lyallpur Akhbar'. Commercial journalism is specially flourishing in this city as it can be termed as one of the commercial capitals of Pakistan. Later in 1938, a newspaper namely 'Saadat' was published which is now a daily newspaper and continues to be published since 1937.

Literary Journalism

During the early era of press in India after the War of Independence, the format and style of newspapers was not very much attractive. Newspapers usually gave the look of hotchpotch. But with the passage of time, the printing standard started to improve. Delhi, Lahore and Agra were three major centres of literary journalism. Literary journalism was initiated by literary personalities of that time but this medium of journalism also had a support of the British. "Mohsan-e-Hind" was launched in July 1, 1854 by M. Ahsan Kalanori. It was 32-paged educational journal. Three other literary journals were also launched in 1856 namely,

“Khurshheed-e-Punjab”, “Noor-Ala-Noor” and “Mualam-ul-Ulema”. One of the earliest literary magazines of Urdu language in Punjab was “Mukhzan” edited by Sh. Abdul Qadir, which enjoyed a considerable vogue and provided a necessary opening for literary aspirants of the day. The “Humayun” founded by Mian Bashir Ahmad in 1902 in the name of his father Mian Shah Din was cautious without being conservative in its outlook and failed to keep pace with the changing time. The “Ma’arif”, the organ of the Shibli Academy of Azam Garh was often informative, though pedestrian in style and was more of a theological than a literary journal. The “Urdu”, a quarterly started by Maulvi Abdul Haq, was a literary organ of the “Anjuman Taraqi-e-Urdu”. “Its forte was research and criticism, and had done solid work in the former”. “Alnaful Azam” was the only Arabic journal of India, published by S.M.Azam of “Lahore Chronicle” from Lahore. It first appeared in 1871.

“Guldasta”(Bouquet) Journals

This term is used for those journals, which were launched for the purpose of promotion of poetry. “Gul-e-Ranaa” in 1845, was the first such journal published from Delhi. It was the pioneer Urdu Magazine. According to Khurshid (1964), medical and legal journals were also launched for the sake of promoting scientific knowledge.

At the outset of war of independence in 1857, the total circulation of vernacular press was not more than 500 in Punjab. During the turbulent period of 1857, the British authorities-imposed pre-censorship on 2 Urdu newspapers from Lahore while “Chasm-e-Faiz” of Sialkot was forced to restart its publication from Lahore where it was kept under constant surveillance. “Riaz-ul-Akhbar” from Multan was bound to pre-censor all news items and after some time, its press was confiscated.

The vernacular press played its role in arousing public sentiments against the foreign rulers, but defeat in War of Independence left very negative impact on the Muslim press. In 1858, only one out of 12 Urdu newspapers were edited by a Muslim editor. The Punjab Mutiny Report throws ample light on actions taken against newspapers in the territories now forming Pakistan. It is interesting to note that all these newspapers were placed under censorship before the promulgation of “Gagging Act” of 1857. The concerted campaign launched against the Muslims by the Anglo Indian Press terrorized the Muslim press to such an extent that it almost ceased to exist. It was under the impact of Sir Syed’s revivalist movement that the Muslim press began to show signs of life in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Bahawalpur State

The only Muslim newspaper worth mention appeared in 1867 at Bahawalpur under the official patronage of the Abbasid rulers of that Muslim state. It was called “Sadiq-ul-Akhbar” and was printed at the Government owned press of the same name. The paper enjoyed full support and patronage of the state government and was edited by Maulvi Muhammad Ashraf. The “Sadiq-ul-Akhbar” press is still functioning as the 2nd official printing press of the Punjab Government after Lahore. The paper has since long ceased to appear. At the time of Independence in 1947, there were in all 60 newspapers and an English fortnightly “Bahawalpur Review” being published from Bahawalpur.

In his lecture delivered on December 1, 1866, famous French orientalist Garcin de Tassy maintained that Urdu newspapers generally wrote in allegorical style and used metaphor and simile in day-to-day writings. With the beginning of seventies, the journalism, which had been lying dormant, began to recover from the shocks of 1857 disturbances. Feroze (1957) in his book “Press in Pakistan” has maintained that comparatively little interest was shown in the matter of news by the Urdu newspapers of that age. Mostly, the space in journals was covered by articles, which, very often, were not topical. They were either literary in the wider sense, or historical.

“Akhbar Anjuman-e-Punjab” started in January 1870, was consisted of 16 pages and was a weekly journal. The paper was edited by Pirzada M. Hussain and its annual subscription was Rs.13. In 1874, Mirza Fateh M. Baiq launched his “Anjuman Mufeed-a-Aam” journal from Kasur. In 1884, Mirza Abdullah started a monthly journal from Ludhiana called “Anjum Rafah-a-Aam”. This journal was mouth organ of carpet industry. Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam of Lahore launched a monthly magazine “Himayat-e-Islam” in 1885 from Lahore. The “Punjab Observer” was started in about 1893-94 and was owned by a wealthy Muslim of Ludhiana, Khawaja Ahmed Shah. It was an Anglo-vernacular, bi-weekly having circulation of 1200 copies per issue. It continued to appear till 1918.

The Rise of daily Journalism

The year of 1875 saw the dawn of daily journalism in Punjab. Kh. M. Hassan started “Rznameha Punjab” from haveli Kabul Khan in Lahore on January 1, 1875. It was a weekly newspaper. Munshi Mehr Buksh started a weekly “Shafiq Hind” from Lahore in 1885. He also launched an evening “Sham-e-Wisal” and a morning “Naseem-e-Subh” from Lahore. Maulvi Saif-ul-Haq Adeeb started a daily newspaper “Rahbaer-e-Hind” from Lahore.

In 1873, total strength of newspapers in Punjab was 41. During the period, 1875-76, Maulvi Fateh Din started a newspaper “Akhbaron Ka Qiblagah” from Lahore.

“Rehbar-e-Hind” was brought out by Munshi Nadir Ali Saifi on April 1, 1875. In 1876, 13 English, 46 vernacular and 3 Anglo vernacular newspapers were being published in Punjab.

Paisa Akhbar

It was not until 1887, that the foundation stone of an important weekly Urdu newspaper was laid at Gujranwala. It later shifted its offices to Lahore. This paper was owned and edited by Munshi Mehboob Alam. The “Paisa Akhbar” carved a new path of progress and set new journalistic trends. Like the early newspapers, articles published in the paper were not devoted to “Praise of Winter and Summer and the poetic disputes between pen and Sword”. Articles usually discussed the subject of public interest and were of literary and intellectual type. The “Paisa Akhbar” was published from its very beginning on a size 18x12/ 2 which later became as standard for all the Urdu journals. Its price was very low. Although other Urdu newspapers were working at a loss but the “Paisa Akhbar” was the first newspaper which was a great business success. It was not very late that it acquired top position among the Urdu newspapers. It improved both technically and intellectually.

In 1900, the editor Munshi Mahboob Alam went to UK for taking advanced training in journalism. This was the first time that an Urdu editor went to Europe for that purpose.

The progress of Urdu journalism was, from time to time, hampered by a number of legislations; and when the 19th century was about to close down, it was passing through a trying period. “Paisa Akhbar” was finally closed down in 1924 due to financial crunch. Munshi Mehboob Alam also launched “Bachoon Ka Akhbar”, “Sharif Bibi”, “Baghban”, “Kaleed -e-Intekhab” and “Intekhab Lajawab”. “Siraj-ul-Akhbar” published from Jhelum by Maulvi Fakir Muhammad of Lahore was an Urdu weekly. It was brought out in 1885. It discussed topics of the day and published general news items. The paper appeared on every Monday. It continued publication till 1917. “Chaudhvi Sadi”, was a widely circulated weekly, brought out by Munshi Siraj Din of Bhera. It comprised 1200 copies per issue in 1897. The editor also started “Muhammadan National Magazine” from Sialkot, but this paper did not last long. It was a champion of Muslim cause and was against the Congress Moves. “Jaffar Zatl” was the first humorous newspaper published in Urdu from Punjab. It appeared only occasionally and had a very low circulation. “Lahore Punch” was a comic journal published weekly from Lahore. It also printed political and general news. Its circulation did not exceed 200 copies per week. It appeared in 1897.

There were in total, 95 vernacular and 18 English newspapers being published in 1897 from Punjab.

During the last decade of 19th century, a quality weekly paper “Wakeel” was brought out from Amratsur by Sheikh Ghulam Muhammad. The basic policy of this sectarian paper was awakening of the Muslims. Some of the big names like Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad remained attached with this paper. Weekly “Watan” was launched in 1902 from Lahore by Maulvi Sana Ullah Khan. It was once a leading Urdu weekly having 4000 copies a week. It later turned out to be a political paper. The paper died down in 1935.

Zamindar

It is considered to be one of the most vocal and important Muslim newspaper of pre-partition Punjab, which tremendously influenced the public opinion of Muslims. It was started by Maulvi Siraj Din, a retired Inspector of Jammu & Kashmir Postal Department. The primary aim of the paper was to champion the cause of agriculturists. It first appeared in 1903 from Karamabad, a village near Wazirabad. In 1909, Zafar Ali Khan, son of Maulvi Siraj Din took up its editorship and brought it to Lahore in 1910. The “Zamindar” first took up the role of a critic of prominent Hindu papers and voiced feelings of the Muslims. The paper soon became well known due to fiery style of journalism which was a new concept for the readers. In fact, it established a new school of journalism which was followed by every important newspaper of that age. It was first paper which introduced modern touch in the display of news, but this touch seems to have been created by inspirations and desire to follow the style of extremist foreign papers. International topics were discussed in the editorial columns. It was also ‘Zamindar’ which in 1922, introduced a regular humorous column for the first time, which was unknown to the daily Urdu press of that age. This paper played a significant role in political awakening and was fined many a times due to policies adopted against the interests of the British government. The novelties of style and its extremist policies earned both money and reputation for the paper. There were also, of course, a departure from the old trodden path of journalism in Urdu. However, according to veteran journalist Feroze (1957), ‘Zamindar’ was the first paper blamed to popularize the trend of yellow journalism in Pakistan after 1947. This paper finally died down in late fifties due to financial crunch.

Siyasat

It was started as a daily in 1919 in Lahore and ceased to exist in 1937. ‘Siyasat’ was a paper of average standard. Maulana Syed Habib launched it. This paper had little regard for journalistic view point.

Inquilab

Maulana Ghulam Rasool Mehr and Abdul Majeed Salik established this paper in April 4, 1927, as an Urdu daily from Lahore. The paper was printed on 20x30 size which it maintained to the last day of its long existence of about 20 years. The paper, in the beginning, had 4 columns to a page. Most of the space was devoted to comments and advertisements. In the beginning, the paper was inclined towards pan-Islamism. But with the coming in power of Unionist Party in Punjab, it got into good books of the Punjab government. It was finally closed down in October 1947 due to financial munch.

Zam Zam

It was a pro-Congress and nationalist in approach, published weekly from Lahore. Later, another pro Congress paper ‘Pasban’ was also launched from Lahore during the same period. Maulana Chiragh Hassan Hasrat started “Shiraza” in 1935 from Lahore. It was a humoristic paper. It could not survive long and lasted for only 4 or 5 years.

Ahsan

It was brought out in 1934 from Lahore. This publication had patronage of a many of experienced journalists of that age. This paper introduced many new techniques in Urdu journalism. Interestingly, the policy of daily paper was pro Muslim League while the weekly edition supported the Congress’ point of view. It was the first Urdu paper which installed tele-printer in the office for gathering news.

Saadat

It was published in 1937 from Faisalabad by Imam Bakhsh Nasikh Saifi. Initially it was a weekly newspaper. It played an important role in the independence movement of Pakistan and supported the stance of the All India Muslim League. Qaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah also wrote some letters to the editor of daily Saadat for publication of specific news and articles and suggested various guidelines to form public opinion for getting an independent country for the Muslims of Subcontinent. It is the only newspaper in Pakistan which has survived till now i.e 2019.

Nawa-e-Waqt

Launched in March 23, 1940 by Hameed Nizami, “Nawa-e-Waqt” rose to be one of the most prominent newspapers of Pakistan. It was a weekly paper published on the size of 18x22/4 and consisted of 6 pages. Initially, it was fortnightly, but on November 15, 1942, it was made weekly. Its size was changed to 22x29/2 and

number of pages were increased to 8 to 12. At last, “Nawa-e-Waqt” became daily on July 22, 1944 in connection with the ‘Create Muslim press’ campaign of the All India Muslim League for popularizing their cause. This paper gained popularity due to many reasons, “Shahbaz” was totally pro unionists, “Inquilab” was also pro Congress and the policies of “Zamindar” and ‘Ahsan” were also in support of Congress party. So there was a dire need to launch a pro Muslim League paper from Lahore. “Nawa-e-Waqt” was anti unionist in its approach as well as anti Congress. During the elections of 1946, “Shahbaz” was pro unionist, “Inquilab” remained neutral, but ‘Zamindar” “Ahsan” and “Nawa-e-Waqt” fully supported the Muslim League. Technically, it was a good paper which worked very hard to popularize the view point of All India Muslim League.

Pakistan Times

An English daily published by Progressive Papers Limited, first appeared on February 4, 1947 from Lahore, primarily, to promote the Muslim cause in the Punjab where there was no English daily to project Muslim’s point of view. It contained 8 to 10 pages of 36x46 size, each having 8 columns. It also published a special edition on every Sunday.

At the time of independence, Lahore, Lyallpur (Faisalabad), Sialkot, Rawalpindi and Bahawalpur were major centres of regional journalism in Punjab. According to Feroze (1957), on the eve of independence, 19 English, 217 Urdu and 16 papers of other languages, besides, 132 dailies, 95 weekly and 95 monthly magazines were being published in Punjab. It is also pertinent to mention that the Muslim press, through the British rule in India, remained economically backward and weak due to the dearth of financial resources and insufficient support of advertisements. Improper entrepreneurial skills of Muslim journalists who usually worked as proprietors/editor and lack of educated readership coupled with prejudiced attitude of Hindus also played the role in dwindling the Muslim press. On the contrary, Hindu press was very active, advanced and vocal against the Muslims. Hindu community was unified in harming the interests of the Muslims. Muslim press could not be organized on modern and efficient lines as the All India Muslim League realized the importance of press very late. It was only under the visionary leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah that concerted efforts were made to set up Muslim press for properly projecting the Muslims’ point of view. However, Muslim press, with divergent outlooks and lack of proper direction coupled with poor standard of journalism, failed in realizing the importance of their point of view to the British public and the authorities.

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