



STUDY MATERIAL

VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE THAKURPUKUR

NAAC ACCREDITED GRADE – 'A'

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**Journalism
&
Mass Communication**
(HONOURS)

FATHER OF INDIAN JOURNALISM : HICKY

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FATHER OF INDIAN JOURNALISM : HICKY

James Augustus Hicky made history by starting the "BENGAL GAZETTE" or "THE CALCUTT GENERAL ADVERTISER" the first news paper published from India on January 29th 1780. IN the 1st issue ,he introduced him self as the first &late printer to the honorable company though he did not seem to have enjoyed a high reputation .About his venture he said "I have no particular passion for printing of news papers ;I have no propensity; I was not bred to a slavish life of hard work, yet I take a pleasure in enslaving my body in order to purchase freedom for my mind & soul". The journal described it self as "A Weekly Political & Commercial paper, Open to All Parties but Influenced by None".

It was the sheet paper with a size of 12"x 8" having three columns on each side. It published extracts from English news papers at home .Letters from local & mofussil readers & items of gossip & scandal of interest to the European community. The items were divided by rules or stars. The issue had more advertisement than reading matter. The news are mostly related to private lives of individuals. Hicky had a column to himself through which he used to talk to his readers directly. It was described as a "Witty & scurrilous" paper & very soon earned the enmity & chief justice Elijah Impey & generally the administration .Hicky's Gazette gained popularity within weeks. The individuals he attacked were not happy, but others were. In fact they looked forward to reading the issue. Its reader was among the traders & merchants & non officials' European class community. In Hicky's Gazette there were regular column -'POET'S CORNER','BON TON','A WOMEN COLUMN'- where new fashion s & modes were discussed. News varied from political, individuals & local stories to weather or the arrival of some pretty women from England. Besides carrying a belated account of the debates in the British Parliament, Hicky's gazette had editorials on the army and on the reported plans of individual rules, letters to the editor also found a space.

Compared to current newspapers, Hicky's Gazette was smaller in size. Its circulation was limited; not exceeding 200 copies. The readership was confined to the employees of East India Company and other Europeans, chiefly traders. The editor spoke, rather wrote, directly to the readers. In a large number of letters published, praises were showered on the efforts of Hicky. There was a space for poets, the Poets' Corner. Advertisements mainly about auctions were printed and the articles, which were entitled 'London Fashions', 'Folly of a Fashionable Life' and 'Evils that Arise from French Refinements' reminded us of the papers like The Tatler of Richard Steele and The Spectator of Joseph Addison and was moral in tone. Some stories of scandals, love affairs, local gossip were also accommodated to hold a mirror to the

life of the European community in Calcutta. Full reporting was occasionally done of the balls and dances. Public engagements were also announced and many scandalous stories were served in a palatable way. Nicknames were given to the notables of the European community of Calcutta. Thus the Gazette was a kind of moral monitor of Hicky's in which his aim was 'Castigare ridendo mores' – a tool to ridicule the manners of the persons he disliked. He was sterner than Sheridan in his *The School for Scandal*. Characters like Eruma Wrentham, 'the Chinsura Belle', a gossipmonger reminding us of Sheridan Mrs. Candour or Buxom Clumsy like Sheridan's Crabtree or Benjamin Backbite abound in the Gazette. The Gazette was also a social document as it exposed the unlawful method of accumulation of vast wealth by the Company traders. Some assertions regarding the sale of a slave boy, a 'South African kefir', were also found. As with all newspapers, the Gazette also played the ante-establishment role and very soon incurred the wrath of Warren Hastings, the Governor General and others in the administration including Sir Elijah Impey, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Another rival paper was the India Gazette, which made Hicky furious and unhappy especially when he came to know that postal concession was given to the paper. Hicky criticized the publishers for influencing Lady Hastings in getting this advantage. Henceforth, the articles of Hicky against the government were more malicious and sarcastic and even vulgar. Hicky irked Warren Hastings so much that a case of defamation was filed against him. Hicky was even imprisoned. Then four fresh cases were filed and equipments were seized without caring for the fact that this was a blow to the freedom of the Press.

Hicky knew his reading public. Spicy news about individual lives interested his European readers most. He had his "informal sources" and his own kind of investigative reporting. Hicky's fortunes began to decline when a rival paper 'Indian Gazette' appeared in the same year. It was a much better news paper with four pages, each 16 inches long with three columns and well printed. It was published by MESSINK & REED, who followed Hicky and benefited from his experiences. When Hicky found that his customers were deserting him he launched attacks against its proprietors, Peter Reed, salt agent and B. Messink, a theatrical producer, John Z. Kiernander'

Whom he suspected of supplying types to his rival & Droze, who did publicity for this journal. What aggravated his feelings was the grant of postal facilities to the India Gazette & their denial to him. He bitterly complained his readers that undue pressure had been brought to bear of Hastings through his wife to withhold postal facilities to him. It was suggested that he should seek Mrs. Hastings intervention in the matter but he rejected it, saying 'there is some thing so sneaking & treacherous in going clandestinely to fawn & take advantage of a good natured woman to draw her in to promise to getting that done which I knew would be highly improper to ask her husband, though his unbounded love for his life would induce him to comply with.'

It is not surprising in the circumstances that no English news paper had come in to being in India, although the company had installed a printing press in Bombay in 1674& provided a generous supply of types &

Paper .Another press was installed in Madras in 1772 & an official printing was established in Calcutta in 1779.The first attempt to start a news paper in Calcutta was made in 1776 by Mr.William Bolts, who had resigned from company's service earlier that year .After censure by the court of Directors for private trade under the company's authority .He was directed to quit Bengal& proceed to Madras & from there to take his passage to Europe. No attempt was to emulate Mr. Bolts examples for 12 years until 1780, when James Augustus Hicky started the BENGAL GAZETTE or THE CALCUTTA GENERAL ADVERTISER, in the first issue of which he introduced himself.

There was no love lost between Hicky & Warren Hastings. Nor was the popular with officials & many merchant & business men. The publicity which he gave to the social life of the European community touched by malice & ridicule. While announcing marriages & engagements he also published, news of engagements anticipated & he utilized this to hit people he disliked. In June 1781 Hastings patience was at an end. The chief justice of India sent an army of 400 people to arrest Hicky at his house& to seize his printing types. He put up resistance & did not allow them to take any his types. He was arrested& was granted bail in the sum of rs.80000. Since he could not pay the amount, he was tried & sentenced to a year's imprisonment & a fine of rs.2000.Even from prison he continued his paper, which was allowed because there was no prelaws at that time to bar him. So that attacks continued. Although some of the writings were scandalous yet the journal exposed many malpractices. In March 1782, Warren Hastings instituted four fresh actions & an order was produced to seize Hicky's printing press. A number of pleas made by Hicky were of no use. He was due to get some money from the govt for printing jobs earlier. Even this payment was delayed & when it came, it was much smaller than what he expected. In the grip of poverty he set his plight in one of his letters to the governor general.

The Bengal Gazette passed into oblivion. But the heritage it left still continued. Journalism in India had come to stay and till today people realize that 'pen is mightier than sword'. Hicky's boldness has proved one great truth about Indian journalist 'Better break than break'. Journalists may be harassed, attacked or imprisoned, but journalism does not die. He was only the first in a long line of Anglo-Indian news papers. To whome goes the credit of being called the father of Indian Journalism .Hicky died a Pauper but he left a very rich cultural heritage for Indian journalism

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