

Indian Print Media History

Notes by

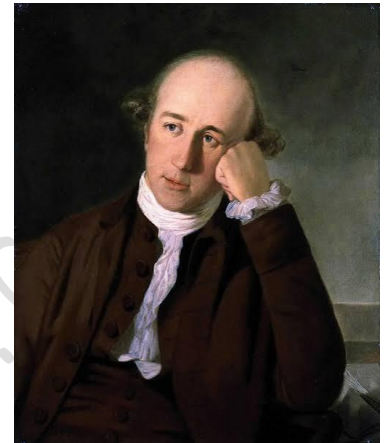
Dr. Drishita Chakraborty

Faculty, Dept. Of Mass Communication & Journalism

A.C. College, Jalpaiguri

• Introduction:

Journalism in India has a long and eventful history. It grew out of a constant struggle against strict British rule. In 1780, James Augustus Hicky started India's first newspaper, the Bengal Gazette (shown in the image below), but was deported. During the Quit India Movement, the British seized printing machines and took heavy deposits from brave newspapers. Great freedom fighters, social reformers, and thinkers helped build Indian journalism. Leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Raja Rammohan Roy edited or founded famous newspapers. Because of this, the growth of Indian journalism is deeply connected to the freedom movement. Ultimately, the press strengthened national awareness while the struggle for freedom helped journalism grow.



James Augustus Hicky

The first attempt to start a newspaper in Calcutta was made by William Bolts (1776). Bolts had resigned from the service of the East India Company after a court stricture for private trade under the company's authority. He thought of exploiting the untapped field of newspaper publishing to air his grievances against the company. His efforts to publish a newspaper were not approved by the company, and he was asked to go back to Europe. This way the first cherished effort to publish a newspaper came to nothing.



- **Overview of India's first newspaper: The Bengal Gazette**

1. *The First Newspaper of India*

James Augustus Hicky made history by launching the Bengal Gazette (or Calcutta General Advertiser) on January 29, 1780. It was the very first newspaper published in India and declared itself a weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties.

2. *Physical Layout and Content*

The paper was a 12" X 8" sheet with three columns on each side, featuring more advertisements than reading material. Its content included extracts from English newspapers, local letters, gossip, and a personal column where Hicky spoke directly to his readers.

3. *Dedicated Features and Columns*

Hicky's Bengal Gazette featured specialized regular columns such as the 'poet's corner', 'Bon-ton', and 'a women column' covering new fashions. It also covered political debates from the British Parliament, army news, and local community stories.

4. *Target Readership and Tone*

The journal was described as "witty and scurrilous," gaining swift popularity among traders, merchants, and the non-official European community. It focused heavily on the private lives and social gossip of the European population in Calcutta.

5. *Conflict with the Administration*

The paper's sharp personal attacks quickly earned Hicky the enmity of key officials, including Governor-General Warren Hastings and Chief Justice Elijah Impey. Hicky frequently targeted high-ranking individuals and exposed administrative malpractices.

6. *Arrival of Rival Paper (Indian Gazette)*

Later in 1780, Messink and Reed launched a rival newspaper, the Indian Gazette, which was better printed, featured four pages, and drew customers away from Hicky. Aggravating matters further, the administration granted postal facilities to the Indian Gazette while denying them to Hicky.

7. *Refusal to Seek Favors*

Believing Warren Hastings' wife influenced the postal decision, Hicky refused suggestions to seek her intervention. He rejected the idea, stating it would be improper and treacherous to use a woman's influence to secure a political favor.

8. *Arrest and Legal Struggles*

By June 1781, Hastings sent a force of 400 people to arrest Hicky and seize his printing types. Though he resisted, Hicky was arrested; unable to pay the steep bail of Rs. 80,000, he was fined Rs. 2,000 and sentenced to a year in prison.

9. *Editing from Prison*

Because there were no press laws at the time prohibiting it, Hicky continued to edit and publish his newspaper from behind bars. He persisted in launching attacks, running his journal, and exposing corruption while incarcerated.

10. *Final Seizure and Shutdown*

In March 1782, Warren Hastings instituted four fresh legal actions against Hicky, procuring an official order to permanently seize his printing press. Despite Hicky's various pleas, his press was confiscated, effectively bringing his venture to an end.

- **James Silk Buckingham: Pioneer of Free Press in India**



Early Life and Recognition: Born in England in 1786, James Silk Buckingham was widely respected in Calcutta as a man of principles, even by figures like the Governor-General and the Bishop. Jawaharlal Nehru later described him as an early champion of press freedom in India.

Arrival and Early Editing Career: Buckingham arrived in India in 1818 to edit the Calcutta Chronicle, a paper established by local merchants. He transformed it into a versatile chronicle covering political, commercial, and literary news while refreshing a media landscape burdened by European gossip.

Interests and Background: Beyond journalism, Buckingham was a widely travelled scholar with strong interests in anthropology, literature, and innovative transport like steam navigation and air-filled balloons. He also introduced literary figures like Byron and Walter Scott to his readers.

Launch of the Calcutta Journal: In October 1818, he founded the Calcutta Journal, an eight-page bi-weekly newspaper. Its stated mission included admonishing governors of their duties, pointing out public faults, and providing a platform for public grievances.

A New Standard in Calcutta Journalism: Buckingham set a high bar for local reporting and open correspondence columns, offering readers an instructive view of evolving Calcutta society that contrasted with earlier, more invective publications.

Focus on Public Policy and Reform: His coverage analyzed key administrative policies, including the postal service, police, and military. He boldly criticized the practice of sati and denounced government inaction regarding its eradication.

Support for Native Indian Media: Buckingham prioritized local living conditions over high-society fashions and actively supported Indian press efforts. He published summaries of Bengali and Persian papers and championed the right of the native press to voice public opinion.

Father of Indian Journalism: Widely regarded as a key figure in the growth of Indian media, Buckingham elevated press discussions to focus on public issues, bureaucratic conduct, and educating public opinion during his tenure.

Philosophy on the Role of the Press: He viewed a well-conducted press as an essential educational tool alongside traditional schools, arguing that spreading knowledge and dispelling ignorance through journalism was vital for national progress.

Legacy as a Freedom Champion: Buckingham held progressive and revolutionary views for his era, serving as a dedicated advocate for free expression and cultivating a spirit of critical inquiry among his readers.

Dr. Drishita Chakraborty, A.C. College