



The Role of Gandhi's Journalism in Shaping Indian National Identity

Dr. Ashok Kumar¹

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Indian history, and his journalism played a significant role in shaping Indian national identity. As a journalist, Gandhi used his writings to promote Indian nationalism, challenge British colonialism, and empower the Indian people. This paper will explore the role of Gandhi's journalism in shaping Indian national identity, examining his use of language, symbols, and imagery to create a sense of shared identity among Indians.

Keyword: Newspaper, Navjivan, Young India, Gandhi, National Identity.

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who is known as the Father of the Nation, played a significant role in the fight for India's independence during British rule. MohanDas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869² in a middle-class family in the Porbandar district of present-day Gujarat state. His father's name was Karamchand Gandhi and his mother's name was Putlibai.

About the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in journalism a lesser known. aspect of Gandhi's multi-faceted legacy was his contribution to journalism, which deeply influenced the transformation of Indian national identity. Gandhi's journalism was a beautiful blend of political activism, social reform, and moral philosophy. Through his various publications, such as *Young India* and *Navajivan*, he expressed a perspective for a free and self-reliant India based on the principles of nonviolence,³ truth, and self-governance. His writings discussed a wide range of issues, from the struggles of the common people to the complexities of the freedom movement's political dynamics. Gandhi's journalism played a crucial role in awakening Indian national consciousness. His writings and editorial voice inspired the Indian public to engage in

¹ Dr. Ashok Kumar, 857/2, Mahadev Colony, Kaithal, Haryana. Email-rjashokair@gmail.com,

² Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. (2017). *Autobiography : the story of my experiments with truth* (p. 3). Dover Publ.

³ Louis, WM. R. (2012). *Gandhi and Nationalism the path to Indian Independence* (p. 40). Viva Books.



the fight for self-rule. By spreading his thoughts and principles through written words, Gandhi successfully crossed local and social boundaries. Gandhi's journalism also played an important role in advancing the Indian freedom movement.

Gandhi's journalism was a key component of his non-violent resistance movement against British colonial rule. Through his writings, he sought to mobilize public opinion, challenge British colonialism, and promote Indian nationalism. Gandhi's journalism was characterized by its emphasis on simplicity, clarity, and moral clarity and he used his platform to communicate complex ideas and moral principles to a wide audience.

Gandhi's journalism played a significant role in shaping Indian national identity through his writings and publications. His communication skills and ability to reach the masses through newspapers like *Young India* and *Harijan* were instrumental in spreading his ideologies of nonviolence, civil disobedience, and self-reliance.⁴

By using these platforms, Gandhi not only mobilized support for the independence movement but also promoted unity among diverse communities in India. His journalistic efforts helped in creating a sense of collective identity among Indians striving for freedom from British colonial rule.

Shaping Indian National Identity

Mahatma Gandhi started his journalism career in South Africa with *Indian Opinion*, a magazine for Indians in what was then a British colony and later became the Union of South Africa. His true journalistic journey began with *Indian Opinion*, a publication created to enlighten and instruct the Indian community in South Africa, and to support British Indians in the region, as mentioned by Gandhi in the initial edition on June 4, 1903. Throughout his lifetime, **he released a total of seven newspapers - *Indian Opinion*, *Young India*, *Navajivan*, *Harijan*, *Harijan Bandu*, *Harijan Sevank*, and the unauthorized**

⁴ Preeti, O., St, & Andrew's College. (2019). *GAP GYAN -VOLUME II-ISSUE III DALIT IDENTITY POLITICS AS A HISTORY OF NATION BUILDING: CONFLUENCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI AND DR. AMBEDKAR.* <https://www.gapgyan.org/res/>



Satyagraha. He did not assert himself as the publisher or editor of these newspapers without copyright, but he was the mastermind behind all of them.⁵

He wrote on all topics. He wrote simply and clearly, but in a powerful way, with passion and fervent anger. He said that the purpose of a newspaper is to understand popular sentiment and express it; second, to awaken desirable feelings in people, and third, to expose popular evils fearlessly.

In 'Young India' on July 2, 1925, he wrote: "I have adopted journalism not for its sake, but merely as a means of assistance to my life's mission. Gandhi considered journalism as a tool to serve the people. In his autobiography, he said: "The only goal of journalism should be service. A newspaper is a great power, but just as an uncontrolled stream of water submerges entire rural areas and destroys crops, so too does uncontrolled pen do the work of destruction."⁶

Gandhi's leadership⁷ promotes the real journalism in India. Gandhi never accepted journalism as a business. He was a missionary journalist and understood very well that journalism is an extremely powerful medium for the success of his mission. He considered journalism as an important and necessary tool for public education towards the victory of truth through nonviolent means. He also used journalism to give direction to the Satyagraha⁸ movement, to develop self-confidence, and to prioritize moral values in his conduct.⁹

Gandhi made journalism the medium of expressing thoughts.¹⁰

In 'Indian Opinion',¹¹ the echoes of voices embracing Indian culture, religion, and morality were accompanied by influences from Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Ruskin. On October 7th, 1919, Mahatma Gandhi was asked to donate all of his wealth to the national awakening yajna in Gujarat. He began by releasing a weekly newspaper in Gujarati named 'Navjivan' to express

⁵ Bulla, D. W. (2022). *Gandhi, Advocacy Journalism, and the Media* (p. 11). PETER LANG, New York .

⁶ Gupta. V.S. (2001). *Mahatma Gandhi And Mass Media | Journalist Gandhi*. www.mkgandhi.org.
https://www.mkgandhi.org/mass_media.php

⁷ Anand Kumarasamy. (2008). *Gandhi on personal leadership : lessons from the life and times of India's visionary leader*. Jaico.

⁸ Pyarelal, & Nayar, S. (1991). *In Gandhiji's Mirror* (p. 73). Oxford University, Press.

⁹ Verma. Surender (2017, April 1). *Gandhi and his Journalism, Garbhanal*. Retrieved from www.garbhanal.com.
<https://www.garbhanal.com/Gandhi-ji-and-journalism>

¹⁰ Singh, R. (2020, October 2). *Journey of Gandhi as Journalist, Lokniti Kendra*. Lokniti Kendra.
<https://www.loknitikendra.com/>

¹¹ Mishra, A. D., & Tatekar, S. R. (n.d.). *The complete biography of Mahatma Gandhi* (Vol. I, p. 307). Concept Publishing New Delhi.



his ideas using a straightforward, understandable, and humble language. Through this newspaper, he not just brought together the fragmented public power but also linked it to the national ideology. During Gandhi's time as editor, this weekly newspaper gained a readership of up to 1200.

Gandhi thought that if there were sufficient printing resources, the readership could potentially reach twenty thousand. This newspaper helped the public become conscious of their rights. Gandhi's fame was growing each day thanks to these newspapers. The articles in Navjivan also made an effort to bring the nation together through the concept of unity. In the initial edition of 'Young India', Gandhi introduced his core beliefs concerning journalism and acknowledged that he did not take pride or pleasure in editing an English language newspaper. Instead, he modified this newspaper to allow those who don't speak Gujarati or Hindi to relate to the national ideology through it. At first, over 1200 people read this newspaper, which cost only one anna.

He regularly addressed topics related to creativity like truth, nonviolence, swadeshi¹², conservation, cow protection, khadi, labor welfare, and Hindu-Muslim unity, from a social and religious viewpoint. He brought attention to subjects that were not breaking news but were definitely beneficial in terms of psychology. After his newspaper was banned by the British government, he turned to creative pursuits such as sanitation work. An English rendition of the weekly newspaper 'Harijan' was released on February 19, 1935, under the editorship of R.V. Shastri. Aryabhata Press in Pune was the publisher of the publication. The primary publication of the 'Harijan Seva Sangh' was this newspaper. Gandhiji released an English version to simplify his thoughts for the people of South India and Bengal. Gandhi pushed for the promotion of the Hindi-Hindustani language, leading to the creation of the National Language Propagation Committee in Wardha, which began publishing a monthly newspaper named 'Rashtrabhasha' on June 15, 1941. Gandhiji planted the seeds of national unity in the country through his work as a journalist. His important role in promoting national harmony can be seen in his work as a journalist.

¹² Hardiman, D. (2003). *Gandhi in his time and ours : the global legacy of his ideas* (pp. 15–21). Columbia University Press.



According to P.P. Shaju, a journalism professor at Mary Matha Arts and Science College in Mananthavady, India, Gandhi's journalism focused on three primary objectives: (1) understanding and expressing popular sentiments; (2) encouraging positive emotions among the people, and (3) boldly revealing common flaws. Shaju remarked that these goals establish elevated expectations for journalism in India and positioned Gandhi as a unique editor.¹³

Gandhi's Use of Language

Mahatma Gandhi used language to shape the Indian national identity. He used various explanatory tools. The simplicity of his writing and its reach was distinctive, which could reach a wide audience. Gandhi's use of Hindi and Gujarati languages helped in enhancing linguistic diversity and unity among Indians. One of Gandhi's major examples of language is his famous essay "**HIND SWARAJ**"¹⁴ (**Indian Home Rule**), **published in 1909**.¹⁵ In this essay, Gandhi claimed that Indians should reject Western culture and adopt traditional Indian values to achieve freedom. According to Gandhi Hind Swaraj means "Positive Freedom i.e. participating in the process of politics in every way possible, rather than conceiving the state as a negative institution restricts its activities to the bare minimum",¹⁶ He wrote, "The British government had no intention of granting independence to India.... If he had an intention of freeing India, he would already have done it... The British government has made India dependent on himself... We should not imitate the English... We should chart our own path." Gandhi considered language as an important means of dialogue.

Gandhi's use of language created a sense of urgency and moral clarity, emphasizing the need for Indians to take control of their own destiny.

Gandhi's Use of Symbols

Gandhi also used symbols and imagery to shape Indian national identity. One notable example is the image of the spinning wheel (charkha), which became a powerful symbol of

¹³ Bulla, D. W. (2022). *Gandhi, Advocacy Journalism, and the Media* (p. 11). PETER LANG, New York .

¹⁴ Pinto, V. (1998). *Gandhi's vision and value* (1st ed., p. 15). Sage Publishers.

¹⁵ Gandhi, M.K. (1909). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

¹⁶ Mukharji, S. (1994). *Facts of Mahatama Gandhi* (Vol. 2, p. xxii). Deep & Deep Publications.



Indian independence. Gandhi advocated for the use of the spinning wheel as a means of promoting self-sufficiency and economic independence among Indians.

In his writings, Gandhi often used the spinning wheel as a metaphor for Indian self-reliance and resistance to British colonialism. For example, in his essay "The Poorna Swaraj" (Complete Independence), Gandhi wrote: "The charkha is the symbol of India's strength... It is a symbol of our strength because it represents our capacity to resist the mightiest power on earth."¹⁷ The spinning wheel became a powerful symbol of Indian nationalism, inspiring millions of Indians to take up spinning as a form of resistance against British colonialism.

Gandhi's Use of Imagery

Gandhi also used imagery to create vivid pictures in the minds of his readers. His writings often featured vivid descriptions of Indian landscapes, people, and customs, creating a sense of shared cultural heritage among Indians. For example, in his essay "My Life is My Message", Gandhi wrote: "My life is my message... I am not a scholar or a statesman... I am a humble instrument in the hands of God... My life is my message because it is a living embodiment of truth."¹⁸ It creates a powerful image of Gandhi as a humble servant of God, emphasizing his commitment to non-violence and truth.

GANDHI'S LEGACY

As far as the nation-building in India was concerned, Gandhi's greatest contributions were: (1) He made Indians aware of the Western concept of the nation which was not based on any communal or religious solidarity and not based on any sectarian outlook. (2) He gave a vague social and economic content to it. He laid down the foundations of national economy. (3) Gandhi's concept of nationalism was clearly based on resistance to foreign intervention. (4) It was never oriented towards aggressive attitude to others. It had an international outlook. Free India's refusal to join any blocs and the restraint the Indian Government displayed in regard to foreign relations had an unmistakable Gandhian element in them.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gandhi, M.K. (1927). *The Poorna Swaraj or Complete Independence*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

¹⁸ Gandhi, M.K. (1927). *My Life is My Message*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

¹⁹ Mukharji, S. (1994). *Facts of Mahatama Gandhi* (Vol. 2, p. 67). Deep & Deep Publications.



Conclusion

In conclusion, Mahatma Gandhi's journalism played a significant role in shaping Indian national identity. Through his use of language, symbols, and imagery, Gandhi created a sense of shared identity among Indians, emphasizing their cultural heritage and moral values. His writings promoted Indian nationalism, challenged British colonialism, and inspired millions of Indians to take up non-violent resistance against colonial rule.

Gandhi published a total of seven newspapers - Indian Opinion, Young India, Navajivan, Harijan, Harijan Bandu, Harijan Sevank, and the unauthorized Satyagraha. He made Indians aware of the Western concept of the nation which was not based on any communal or religious solidarity and not based on any sectarian outlook. He gave a vague social and economic content to it. He laid down the foundations of national economy. Gandhi's concept of nationalism was clearly based on resistance to foreign intervention.

Gandhi's legacy continues to inspire Indians today, with many regarding him as the "Father of the Nation". His journalism remains an important part of Indian cultural heritage, providing insights into the struggles and triumphs of India's independence movement. His Journalism played a significance role in shaping Indian National Identity