**Prof Tausif on journalism: Part - II**

[Dr Naazir Mahmood](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/dr-naazir-mahmood)

November 2, 2020

Prof Tausif Ahmed’s writings on journalism take us through the vicissitudes of this country and how journalists have endured hardships while fighting for the freedom of expression. One such article is ‘Media aur Riyasat’ (The media and the state) published in the 51st issue of ‘Tareekh’, a journal edited by Dr Mubarak Ali.

This is a historical overview of how over the centuries the state has tried to control the mediums of communication. Tausif Ahmed tells us that right from the formation of early states, the ruling classes had their own methods of communication with the people. While the common people relied on rumours and whispers, state officials had the monopoly over announcements emanating from royal sources. Official orders were copied and sent across the territories ruled by a certain king or potentate. But from the mid-15th century the state started losing control over mass communication.

The development of the printing press was a major milestone in the journey to freedom of expression. But still all states tried in their own way to control publications of material they considered undesirable. According to Tausif Ahmed, most rulers and state officials never liked philosophers, poets, and writers who challenged or exposed the atrocities committed by state functionaries. In fact, they encouraged writers to write eulogies and praise for their imaginary or real deeds and ideologies. Poets and writers who excelled at composing laudatory texts and verses got ample rewards and commanded direct access to the ruler.

But Prof Tausif Ahmed also points out that most states did not have a well-defined procedure for the transfer of power from one ruler to another, making all rulers vulnerable. That is one reason they considered even a minor deviation from the officially prescribed line as ‘rebellion’. Even today, in states where transfer of power does not take place constitutionally and smoothly, rulers try to curb the freedom of expression to prolong their rule and propagate only a certain official version of development, events, and ideologies. Alternative versions are curbed and discouraged.

Just like the church in the medieval period used to have a monopoly over religious matters and severely punished any dissenters, some modern states try to behave like the church of yore by crushing dissenting voices. According to Prof Tausif Ahmed, the development of democracy and the evolution of free media go hand in hand. No democracy can flourish if its state institutions keep crushing dissent and keep violating the constitutional guarantees for free expression. The more authoritarian a political dispensation is, the more it creates an atmosphere of fear for journalists and media professionals.

In this article, Tausif Ahmed discusses the role of the media under various forms of government – from the Roman Empire to the dark ages and through to American, British, and Soviets states of the 20th centuries. He says that in most developed democracies the media is totally allowed to criticize the government and the state itself, but the media cannot malign people at their will. The defamation laws are stringent and any baseless allegations can result in huge fines on the accusers such as editors and publishers of newspapers that hurl such charges.

Another good essay by Tausif Ahmed is ‘Bolshevik Inqilab aur Akhbaraat’ (The Bolshevik Revolution and newspapers) published in the 58th issue of ‘Tareekh’ dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Russian revolution in 2017. This a long essay spanning over 40 pages dealing the impact of the revolution on newspapers not only in Russia itself but also in India and Pakistan. He describes how in 1924 one of the most prominent communist leaders of India M N Roy launched the ‘Vanguard of Indian Independence’, paying tributes to the Soviet leader V I Lenin.

The Communist Party in India launched in 1925 a weekly under the editorship of Qazi Nazrul Islam but the British authorities banned that weekly after just 15 weeks. Almost at the same time S A Dange launched his English newspaper ‘Socialist’ in Bombay. In 1926, a leader of the Ghadar Party Bahi Shokh Singh started a Punjabi paper called ‘Kirni’ (Labourer). Tausif Ahmed gives details of nearly all journals, magazines, and newspapers in India and Pakistan influenced by the Bolshevik revolution and leading a left-wing agenda in the Subcontinent. This essay covers nearly a century of leftist journalism in this region.

But perhaps the best books by Tausif Ahmed are ‘Azadi-e-Sahafat ki Jadojihad mein Akhbari Tanzeemon ka Kirdar’ (The role of newspaper organizations in the struggle for press freedom) and ‘Pakistan mein Sahafat ki Mutabadil Tareekh’ (An alternative history of journalism in Pakistan). ‘Azadi-e-sahafat was first published in 2014 and has gone into multiple editions and reprints. Praised by senior journalists such as I A Rahman, M A Siddiqi, and Abid Ali Syed, the book is a treasure trove of information about the role of newspaper organizations in the struggle for freedom of expression in Pakistan.

Though the book has eight chapters discussing in detail the role of the APNS, CPNE, PFUJ, APNEC, and others, the sixth chapter is perhaps the best. It is about the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and how it has struggled over the decades to fight for freedom of expression in the country. Formed in 1950, the PFUJ by 1971 had combined 11 unions of journalists from both East and West Pakistan. After the separation of East Pakistan as Bangladesh, the PFUJ has nine unions. The PFUJ has waged a relentless struggle in the country against authoritarian rules and regulations under both civilian and military governments.

Though some successful and unsuccessful attempts have been made to divide the PFUJ, to date the largest and most organized PFUJ has been working under the leadership of capable and senior journalists such as Nasir Zaidi and Shahzada Zulfiqar. Nasir Zaidi is one of those four journalists who were sentenced to lashes under the military dictatorship of General Ziaul Haq. Tausif Ahmed in his books gives detailed accounts of multiple struggles waged by newspaper organizations in the country over the past 70 years.

Prof Tausif Ahmed’s book ‘Pakistan mein Sahafat ki Mutabadil Tareekh’ (An alternative history of journalism in Pakistan) is a relatively briefer account of research conducted under the Society for Alternative Media and Research (SAMAR) led by senior journalist Mazhar Arif. Prof Tausif Ahmed has painstakingly gone through the old files of magazines and newspapers such as the weeklies ‘Al-Fatah’, ‘Lail-o-Nihar’, ‘Mayar’, ‘Outlook’, ‘Viewpoint’, dailies ‘Amn’, ‘Awami Awaz’, ‘Azad’, ‘Dawn’, ‘Imroze’, ‘Musawat’, ‘Muslim’, ‘Pakistan Times’, and many others.

The book has also compiled the editorials by some of the most respected editors and journalists in the history of Pakistani journalism. Especially the editorials by Chiragh Hasan Hasrat, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Haneef Ramay, Syed Sibte Hasan, and many others are a narrative of historical and political developments that Pakistan has gone through especially in its first three to four decades. The book is full of eyewitness accounts by respected journalists who stood fast in the face of adversity. From Abdullah Malik, Safdar Mir, Nazeer Naji, and Shafqat Tanveer Mirza to Abbas Athar, Munno Bhai, and many others, Tausif Ahmed has done a marvelous job by compiling this alternative history of journalism in Pakistan.

Prof Tausif Ahmed has also written research articles on other issues such as ‘Anjuman-e-Asatiza, Jamia Karachi: Aik Tanqidi Jaiza’ (A critical review of teachers’ association at the University of Karachi) published in 56th issue of ‘Tareek’h, and his numerous book reviews are all worth reading. We may conclude by saying that anybody interested in knowing about not just a mundane history of journalism but in the struggle for freedom of expression in Pakistan must read Tausif Ahmed’s article, essays, and books.

Concluded

The writer holds a PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK and works in Islamabad.

Email: mnazir1964@yahoo.co.uk