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Abstract

This research study explores the history of local English-language newspapers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The English-language press has played a significant role since the British rule in the province. It has acted as a representative of the region on an international level because the English language is an international means of communication. The researcher collected data through secondary data such as books and archives and also interviewed senior journalists of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for data collection. The study discusses how English-language newspapers started in the province since the inception of the province, which used to be called North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Keywords: English Press, KP, NWFP, British Rule, Pakistan

Authors:

Muhammad Shahid: (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences (RIMS), Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

(Email: shahid152001@yahoo.com)

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Cite Us



Title

A History of Local English-Language Newspapers in KP Province, Pakistan

Authors:

Muhammad Shahid: (Corresponding Author)
Assistant Professor, Riphah
Institute of Media Sciences
(RIMS), Riphah International
University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
(Email: shahid152001@yahoo.com)

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Abstract

This research study explores the history of local English-language newspapers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The English-language press has played a significant role since the British rule in the province. It has acted as a representative of the region on an international level because the English language is an international means of communication. The researcher collected data through secondary data such as books and archives and also interviewed senior journalists of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for data collection. The study discusses how English-language newspapers started in the province since the inception of the province, which used to be called North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

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Introduction

English-language newspapers, like their other contemporaries, have played an important role in the development of society, particularly in the areas that remained under the influence of British imperialism.

English-language newspapers first appeared in KP during the colonial era. English was introduced to the province as a tool for governance and education, much like it was in other parts of British

India. Early English-language newspapers were frequently seen as a way for colonial rulers to enlighten local elites and the burgeoning middle class about British policies, local government, and global affairs. These publications set the stage for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's post-independence press environment.

But despite the significant role of print media, newspaper reading has declined globally. Guest (2016) considers that newspaper readership has



fallen and print dailies have lost paid subscribers by almost 20 percent since 2006. She adds that not only the readership of print newspapers has fallen, but advertisers are now also less willing to purchase newspaper ads.

Rahimullah Yusufzai Rahimullah Yusufzai, a senior journalist, has passed away, a senior journalist and resident editor of The News International in Peshawar, considered low literacy/education rate as one of the reasons behind the low readership of English-language newspapers, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He adds that the high cost of newspapers is also a reason behind low readership and circulation most people cannot afford to buy papers (personal communication,).

Another reason cited for the weaker state of newspapers is a scarce business in the province. Ismail Khan, the resident editor of Daily Dawn in Peshawar, says that the main reason behind the decline and weaker state of English-language newspapers in KP is the lack of corporate sector (personal communication). Also, some newspapers have launched their Peshawar editions while working from outside the Peshawar area. For example, due to the proximity of the federal capital Islamabad to Peshawar, daily Dawn management is not interested in starting printing their edition in Peshawar the paper prints its Peshawar edition in Islamabad and then delivers it to different parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while it covers Rawalpindi and Islamabad in separate editions. Similarly, the Express Tribune has also launched its Peshawar edition but the edition is edited in its head offices at Karachi.

Though there are several English-language newspapers in Pakistan such as Daily Dawn, The News International, Express Tribune, etc, this study is focused on the English-language newspapers that are published and printed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Like other forms of media, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had several English-language newspapers in the past. However several English-language newspapers appeared and closed down within a few years after their launching in the province. The newspapers that are published in the province nowadays are The Frontier Post, The Statesman, The Frontier Star, Daily Times, and Lead Pakistan. The Express Tribune, which is a

national-level newspaper, has launched its Peshawar edition but the staff works in the Karachi office.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Erstwhile NWFP

The location of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which was formerly called North-west Frontier Province (NWFP), is of much significance. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has an area of 28,773 square miles (74,521 square km), with Peshawar as the provincial capital. The province is linked to Afghanistan in the west and north, Azad Kashmir, and the Northern Areas to the east and northeast. It is bounded by Punjab province to the southeast while Balochistān is located to the southwest. The erstwhile FATA region, which has been merged into KP province, is located in the western corners of the province along the Afghan border. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa comprises 35 districts that are: Abbottabad, Bannu, Battagram, Buner, Charsadda, Upper Chitral, Lower Chitral, Dera Ismail Khan, Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Hangu, Haripur, Karak, Kohat, Upper Kohistan, Lower Kohistan, Kohlai-Palas, Lakki Marwat, Malakand, Mardan, Nowshera, Mansehra, Peshawar, Swabi, Swat, Shangla, Tank, Tor Ghar, South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Kurram, Khyber, Bajaur, Orakzai, Mohmand.

The research documents the English-language newspapers that were launched since the formation of the province, which was once called NWFP and is now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Following are details of the English-language newspapers launched in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in chronological order.

Research Methodology

The researcher applied a qualitative method for this study, wherein intensive interviews were held with senior journalists and owners of the English-language newspapers being published in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for data collection. Purposive sampling was adopted for this study and the owners and journalists of local press were selected on purpose for this study.

Historical Records of the Local English Newspapers

Following are details of the English-language newspapers that were started in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa, previously called NWFP, since the province's inception in the year 1901

Daily News

After the formation of the then North-West Frontier Province, Daily News is considered to be the first English-language newspaper in the area. DC Anand and Sons, the proprietor of the Commercial Press of Peshawar, was given a declaration by the chief commissioner for the newspaper in August 1914 (Khan, [1992](#)). The two-page paper, resembling a leaflet, had both English and Urdu editions that were published separately and it covered mostly the First Great War. It was the only private newspaper that was published in the province during World War I (1914-1918).

With a circulation of about 1000, the newspaper was circulated in the local military and other government departments. The paper did not have any article or editorial but it only accommodated the information supplied by the government. The press was located in the cantonment area and it stopped publication when the First World War came to an end.

In 1924, there were four English-language journals being published in the province (Aamer, [1986](#)). Their details are as follows:

The Islamia College Magazine

The Islamia College launched its magazine "Khyber Akhbar" in 1917 and it was later renamed "Khyber". It was an English-language publication but later its Pashto and Urdu portions were also included in it, with an annual subscription of Rs2. Beginning as a quarterly, it later turned into a yearly.

Edwardes College Magazine

This magazine, a contemporary of "Khyber", covered material for the ethical, educational, and literary enlightenment of students. It was known as Chronicle in the beginning but its name changed to "Post" after some years and later "Edwardian". In 1925, its title was a Pashto word "Brekhnā".

The Frontier Clerk

An official registered organization, the Frontier Clerks Association, launched the Frontier Clerk magazine in 1924. It was a voice of the clerks'

community and aimed to protect their rights and improve their living standards.

Riflemen

Starting in August 1924, the Riflemen magazine had a limited circulation. It was mostly distributed to military departments and officials.

Sindhu

Sindhu was a tri-language newspaper, published in Pashto, Urdu, and English and launched in 1929 in the Dera Ismail Khan district of the province. Its editor/publisher was Kundan Lal. It had a limited circulation and ceased publication after a short time (Amer, 1986).

Daily Khyber Mail

The Daily Khyber Mail, considered the pioneer of English journalism in the province, was launched by Sheikh Sanaullah and it started publication from Peshawar in 1932 before the inception of Pakistan. On Sheikh Sanaullah's death, the paper was looked after by his sons Sheikh Zakaullah, Sheikh Saleemullah, and Sheikh Inayatullah. However, it ceased publishing in 1988 and later the paper was converted into the Khyber Mail Printers and Publishers, located in the main Saddar bazaar in Peshawar.

Rizwan Inayat, in charge of the Khyber Mail Printers and Publishers, says that the Khyber Mail was closed due to a financial crisis. He said the government was not giving it proper advertisements as given to some other papers in those days (personal communication). He said the firm also provides design, offset printing, digital printing, panaflex dye, and packaging services.

Though there were some other papers as well, including The Sunday Post, The Advertiser, and The Frontier Mail, the Khyber Mail was the popular one in the province as the others were closed after some time (Ajmal, 1982). After the inception of Pakistan, the paper was converted from a weekly to a daily, which was appreciated by the founder of the country Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Fatima Jinnah, and other leaders of those times. Jinnah had said in those days that without a daily newspaper in the provincial capital Peshawar, the voice of Pathans could not reach the outside world.

However, later the decline of the paper started due to certain reasons. According to Khan (1992), there were several reasons that led to the closure of the paper: the arrival of another rival newspaper, ie The Frontier Post, in the market, the differences between the sons of Sanaullah after his demise, the disinterest of family of Zakaullah after his death, absence of definite policy, and release of fewer advertisements and slow payment from the government to the organization. However, after years of closure, Rizwan Inayat has recently relaunched The Khyber Mail, both in print copies as well as an online version where its e-paper is also available.

The Khyber Mail International

Another newspaper titled Khyber Mail International was started in 1997 in Peshawar and its offices were located in the Saddar area. However, it was also closed in 2006 when its owner moved to the United States. According to a former employee of the newspaper Aftab Ahmed, the main reason behind its closure was the financial constraints as the paper was finding it difficult to pay salaries to its employees (personal communication).

The Frontier Star

It is another newspaper that has been published in Peshawar. Its owner and chief editor was Hafiz Sanaullah (late), a senior journalist as well as an academician. Mr Sanaullah is also considered the pioneer of the Journalism and Mass Communication Department at the University of Peshawar. The paper still continues but with limited circulation.

Daily Times

Daily Times is another local newspaper that is printed in Peshawar. Fazl-e-Haq, the chief editor of the paper, says that he purchased it from one Naeem Afzal. The paper was launched in 1989 but it ceased to publish later due to financial issues and it was later re-launched and continues publishing now (Fazl-e-Haq, personal communication).

It may be mentioned here that one newspaper, with the same title as the Daily Times, is also being published from Lahore. However, Haq said his paper is older than the one being printed in Lahore.

The paper's office is located in the Sikandarpura locality of Peshawar.

The Frontier Post

The Frontier Post was launched in 1985 in Peshawar. It was considered an influential and popular newspaper and had become an international newspaper. However, due to some issues that resulted in the arrest of its owner Rehmat Shah Afridi, the newspaper was adversely affected. Rehmat Shah Afridi also launched an Urdu newspaper daily Maidan on 25 December 1988 and a Pashto newspaper daily Hewad in 1984. However, The Frontier Post stopped publishing in 1998.

Rehmat Shah also views anti-Pakhtun conspiracy behind the downfall of his paper The Frontier Post. Rehmat Shah, affiliated with the Pakistan People's Party, was arrested and sentenced to capital punishment twice in the government of Nawaz Sharif in 1999. However, he cites political reasons for his arrest and punishment (Personal communication).

According to him, "the lobby from Punjab and other areas did not like to see a newspaper from Pakhtun region prosper and hence they made attempts to destroy the paper." Rehmat Shah Afridi said the newspaper ceased to publish for six months when the offices of The Frontier Post and daily Maidan were torched by a mob following the publication of a blasphemous letter in the paper in May 2001. He said the Frontier Post was the second largest newspaper in Pakistan after Daily Dawn in those days.

He also mentioned that the government should not target a paper that publishes bold and critical editorials and stories. When a newspaper publishes something against the government, the authorities stop releasing advertisements in that paper. He said the provincial government should also support the local newspapers of the province so that they serve as a mirror of the province. He said the leading newspapers, which are printed outside the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, do not give proper coverage of the incidents in the province. Most of the time the national newspapers publish important issues of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in inner pages while at times the unimportant news stories of big cities like Lahore and Karachi are published

in outer pages. Rehmat Shah said that the best remedy for proper coverage of local news in the province is that the local newspapers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are supported and encouraged so that they become popular and turn into national newspapers with the passage of time (personal communication).

The Statesman

The Statesman is another English newspaper launched by Ayaz Badshah, who already had an Urdu newspaper Mashriq. Soon after the Frontier Post was closed, most of its staff joined The Statesman. However, compared to the Frontier Post, The Statesman could not achieve that much progress. The paper had quality content in the beginning when it was launched in 2001 but its quality level declined when most of the qualified staffers left the paper. The paper is running even today but has a very low circulation.

Lead Pakistan

Daily Lead Pakistan is another newspaper launched in Peshawar on 25 December 2010. It is owned by Sara Haider who serves as its editor-in-chief/publisher while its managing editor is Yahya Khan Saddozai. The paper has a total of eight pages and it is printed by Gul Zaman Printers in Peshawar. According to Yahya Khan, the paper's circulation is about 10,000 (personal communication).

He also said that the circulation of the local English newspapers can be increased, provided the management of the papers publish the material in accordance with the demands of the readers and said that they should also produce quality content. Saddozai said that scarcity of business is a problem in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said the Information Department of the provincial government should support the local English newspapers by giving them advertisements to strengthen it because English is a means of communication at the international level.

Conclusion

The socio-political development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, is intricately linked to the history of the English-language press in the area. English-language media has been essential in

influencing public opinion, keeping up with political events, and capturing the sociocultural shifts occurring throughout the province. The English-language press has continued to be significant in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa despite the Urdu language media's predominant influence. It serves the educated elite, decision-makers, and a portion of the middle class.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), continued to experience the development of its media landscape following the 1947 division of British India, albeit it lagged behind Sindh and Punjab in terms of the number of newspapers published there. The center for indigenous English-language newspapers in the province was its capital, Peshawar. Well-known publications like The Khyber Mail, which was founded in the middle of the 20th century, were crucial in the coverage of local issues as well as the spread of news on a national and worldwide scale. The readership of these newspapers was mainly educated and urban, consisting of professionals, academics, and civil servants.

The region's exposure to English-language newspapers increased during the 1970s and 1980s. Newspapers were essential in constructing the narrative surrounding the geopolitical upheavals that followed, particularly the effects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the arrival of Afghan refugees. Discussions on topics like Pashtun identity, regional autonomy, and ties to the federal government found a forum in the press. A more critical and investigative style of journalism also emerged during this time, with publications like The Frontier Post starting to explore touchy subjects like social justice, human rights, and political corruption.

As Pakistan went through political unrest and economic hardship in the 1990s and early 2000s, the English-language press in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa played an increasingly more significant role. News consumption changed due to globalization and the emergence of digital media. Compared to other media, English-language newspapers continued to have a smaller circulation, but they nevertheless had a big influence, especially on opinion leaders and policymakers. Traditional newspapers found it difficult to sustain their readership as digital

platforms emerged, but many responded by creating online editions, carrying on their history.

Like other forms of media, the English-language press in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has played a key role in informing, educating, and entertaining audiences. The English press was a successful enterprise in the times of British rule in the province since it was launched and supported by the then rulers to make it a strong source of mass communication in those days. Because the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has been a hotbed for news due to militancy, military operations and Talibanization, the role of English-language newspapers has become more important in the region. Also, local journalists believe that local press is needed in the province so that the issues of the province can be highlighted in a proper way. They also believe that other mainstream English

newspapers in the country are playing an important role in society; however, they do not give proper coverage to the issues of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and hence local issues can be better highlighted on an international level by the local English-language newspapers.

The English-language press of KP is still developing today, reflecting the opportunities and difficulties the province's media sector faces. In the political and intellectual environment of the province, the English press continues to hold significant influence, even in the face of a move towards digital journalism and a growing inclination for regional language media. Its historical significance in forming public opinion and acting as a link between regional and worldwide perspectives cannot be ignored.

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