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Author(s)	Jamil Athar.
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Rural Press In Pakistan

By

Jamil Athar

RURAL PRESS IN PAKISTAN

By Jamil Athar
Editor, Daily Tijarat
Gujranwala, Sargodha &
Lahore (Pakistan).

In the field of economic development, Pakistan's achievement has been generally well acknowledged. Starting with an agricultural economy the country now boasts a well laid out industrial infrastructure. Investment in large scale irrigation and power projects, steel, textile, fertilizers and other industries and communication facilities account for its emergence as a pioneer in the third world.

Pakistan, with a population of over hundred million (thirty million urban and seventy million rural) claims a per capita income of about 300 U.S. Dollars. The benefits of economic and industrial development are, however, not equally distributed between the urban and rural areas.

The pace of growth and development of the national Press has grown almost side by side with that of the industrial development of the country. Since independence in 1947, the standard of dailies and periodicals published from Federal and Provincial capitals and some other big towns in Urdu (National Language) and English has greatly improved. There are some daily newspapers and periodicals including daily Jang, daily Nawa-i-Waqt, daily Dawn, daily Pakistan Times, daily Nation, daily Muslim, and periodicals Herald, Newsline, Friday Times, Viewpoint, Akhbar-e-Jahan, Takbeer, Zindagi and Urdu Digest which can favourably compete with newspapers and periodicals in the developed countries. The coverage of national and international events by the dailies through news agencies like Reuter, APA, AFP, DPA. and the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), and the Pakistan Press International (PPI) and also their own correspondents is quite up to the mark.

Almost all Urdu dailies appearing from metropolitan cities not only publish their editions from some important regional centres but also Cont'd...P/2

- 2 -

bring out special pages for the readers in rural areas. In addition there are about one hundred dailies and some five hundred periodicals appearing from district headquarters. They are far behind the metropolitan press in number of pages, quality of printing, advertisement revenue and circulation, because they lack financial resources, modern printing techniques and experienced staff. Advertisements from big industrial concerns are also not available to them, they mainly survive on Government advertisements. Because of low literacy in rural areas, the income from circulation is meagre.

As regards circulation these newspapers can be divided into three categories: first dailies and periodicals which print five hundred to two thousand copies; second, dailies with a circulation of three thousand to ten thousand and third, dailies which have a circulation ranging from five thousand to twenty thousand. In the third category are those dailies which cater to the needs of small traders, artisans, cottage industries and commission agents in small towns and grain markets in rural areas. One such daily is Tijarat which is under the proprietorship and editorship of the present speaker. It is published simultaneously from, three towns, Gujranwala, Sargodha and the provincial capital Lahore. Daily Business Report from Faisalabad also falls in this category.

Some dailies published in regional languages like Sindhi and Pushto also have large circulations among the people speaking these languages. Of these, well-known are daily Ibrat (Sindhi), from ^{Mahimyar Khan),} Aftab (Multan), ^(Multan) Business Report (Punjab) Hyderabad and daily Wahdat (Pushto), from Peshawar. Sajjan (Punjabi) from Lahore is a new arrival among language dailies. Millat (Gujrati) and Dawn (Gujrati) of Karachi are popular/Gujrati language dailies. A reassuring aspect of the rural/regional press in Pakistan is that, despite many difficulties and meagre resources, many dailies and periodicals have been appearing from various places. Majority of regional dailies/periodicals are run by private individual proprietors or by joint stock companies in rare cases. However, there is

- 3 -

no Government aid of any kind.

In spite of all odds the regional press in Pakistan has developed considerably during last forty years. In the Punjab province it is particularly strong. For instance, the city of Faisalabad has 20 Urdu daily newspapers: Multan and Bahawalpur have ten Urdu dailies each. Also four dailies are published from Sargodha, four from Rahim Yar Khan, three from Gujranwala.

Since the promulgation of new press law in 1988 relaxing pre-conditions, for allowing new publications hundreds of newspapers, both dailies and weeklies are being published and planned: They may cause serious problems to existing established papers, however, they are striving hard to remain viable financially. Computer technology which entered Pakistan newspaper industry in the 60s by using process cameras for off-set printing is now being adopted by almost all regional newspapers: laser composing (300 DPI) technology which was initially introduced in 1986 in major papers is now being used by medium and small newspapers also, Ibrat, Baluchistan Times, Tijarat, Business Report, Qaumi Awaz, Sang-e-Meel, Aftab, Wifaq, Sarhad and Jurat are being produced on this system. It is low cost and fast in comparison with other system and it has replaced the traditional calligraphy system. In fact it has brightened the future of regional Urdu Press in Pakistan.

PROMINENT RURAL DAILIES

Prominent rural dailies in Pakistan are Wifaq (Sargodha-Rahimyar Khan), Aftab (Multan), Sang-e-Meel (Multan), Qaumi Awaz (Multan), Business Report (Faisalabad), Millat (Faisalabad), Awam, Saadat (Faisalabad), Kainat (Bahawalpur), Zamana (Quetta), Baluchistan Times, (Quetta), Jihad, Shahbaz, Sarhad and Frontier Post (Peshawar), Safeer (Hyderabad), Tijarat (Gujranwala Sargodha), Maghrabi Pakistan (Bahawalpur - Sukkur), Ibrat, Sind News and Mehran (Huderabad).

AGRICULTURE ORIENTED NEWSPAPERS

A noteworthy and important change in the press scene in the

- 4 -

last two decades is the reemergence of agriculture oriented journals in Pakistan, As 70 percent of Pakistan's population lives in the rural areas and is dependent on income from agriculture such journals, in one form or the other, cater to the largest segment of the country's population.

At the government level, the Federal Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development and some other organizations such as the Agriculture Development Bank of Pakistan and the provincial agriculture departments are publishing journals and magazines for those with interest in rural development. These experiments may in due course of time, take a firmer root and come to be supported by rural populace itself. Pace of individual efforts for publishing such papers is also encouraging.

A look at the contents of these publications shows that they highlight (i) advice for better farming (ii) profitable marketing (iii) cattle breeding and (iv) health care and hygienic living. They obviously lack news coverage of the rural scene which would require reporting as well as communication facilities in the villages. Since these facilities may take long to come about, the news coverage will have to wait longer.

In order to develop and improve the condition of regional press in Pakistan, the banks and financial institutions should be encouraged to give liberal interest-free credit facilities to small rural or regional papers. Also duty free import of new print technology and its accessories be allowed. Regional Press should be given fifty percent rebate in telephone, fax and telex charges. The newspapers and their printing plants should be given rebated rates for power consumption preferably at par with domestic consumer rates as is done in the case of hospitals and educational institutions. All small newspapers with circulation of upto 10,000 copies especially those using the new print technology

- 5 -

should be given tax holiday for five years. More Concession should be given to the newspapers in freight rates for carrying newspaper parcels to various places. Advertisers and advertising agencies^{are to} be convinced to allocate 25% share of advertisements to rural press. Federal and Provincial Governments may consider allocation of sufficient funds in development programmes to purchase copies of regional papers for local government institutions at village level. It is hoped that with the rise in literacy rate which is at present 26.2%, our regional press will prosper and the circulation of newspapers in the rural areas will greatly increase.

The Asian Mass Communication research and Information Centre (AMIC) should be complimented for its interest in the promotion of rural press in Asia. We expect that AMIC through national agencies such as the Press Institute of Pakistan will extend its consultancy service to the regional press in Pakistan. It would be appropriate if the Centre provides complimentary copies of model rural, county and community newspapers to regional press in Pakistan. Centre's guidance would help them to improve their professional standard including ~~ixy*emlx*mk*xxpx*px*re*lx*lx*lx~~ subbing, translation, reporting lay-out, make up, production and administration.

Happily democracy in Pakistan has a new life and the Press enjoys status and respect as in any other democratic nations. With the gradual stabilization of democracy, the press will also benefit because problems of the Press are undoubtedly the problems of democracy. The solution of the genuine problems of the fourth Estate will surely help sustain democratic order in Pakistan.