

UNIT 35 – UPSC - Vernacular Press Act

India's History : Modern India : Vernacular Press Act : 1878

Lord Lytton



Vernacular Press Act, 1878 a highly controversial measure repressing the freedom of vernacular press. The regime of viceroy lord lytton is particularly noted for his most controversial press policy which led to the enactment of the Vernacular Press Act on 14 March 1878. Earlier dramatic performances act (1876) was enacted to repress the writing and staging of the allegedly seditious dramas. Vernacular Press Act (1878) was aimed at repressing seditious propaganda through vernacular newspapers.

Introducing the Bill the Law Member of the Council narrated how the vernacular newspapers and periodicals were spreading seditious propaganda against the government. The viceroy Lord Lytton strongly denounced newspapers published in the vernacular languages as "mischievous scribblers preaching open sedition". He remarked that the avowed purpose of most of the vernacular newspapers was an end to the British raj.

The papers that made the government worried were Somprakash, Sulabh Samachar, Halisahar Patrika, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Bharat Mihir, Dacca Prakash, Sadharani and Bharat Sanskarak. All these papers were said to have been leading the seditious movement against the government. The Act provided for submitting to police all the proof sheets of contents of papers before publication. What was seditious news was to be determined by the police, and not by the judiciary. Under this Act many of the papers were fined, their editors jailed. Obviously this repressive measure came under severe criticism. All the native associations irrespective of religion, caste and creed denounced the measure and kept their denunciations and protestations alive. All the prominent leaders of Bengal and of India condemned the Act as unwarranted and unjustified, and demanded for its immediate withdrawal. The newspapers themselves kept on criticizing the measure without an end. The succeeding administration of Lord Ripon reviewed the developments consequent upon the Act and finally withdrew it.