

C. Y. Chintamani: A Liberal Voice in Indian Politics

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Abstract:*This article examines the political thought and public intervention of C.Y. Chintamani (1880–1941) in the evolving context of Indian politics in the late colonial period. As a journalist, editor of The Leader, and member of the Central Legislative Assembly, Chintamani occupied a distinctive position within the growing currents of constitutional nationalism and mass-based politics. This paper situates his liberalism within the larger tradition of Indian constitutional thought, emphasizing his commitment to parliamentary institutions, civil liberties, and political reform under colonial rule. The article analyzes Chintamani's engagement with important political debates and the role of the educated middle class in shaping public opinion. Through an in-depth reading of his editorials, speeches, and legislative interventions, the paper highlights how Chintamani articulated a vision of political modernity based on dialogue, moderation, and institutional continuity rather than a revolutionary movement. Contextualising his ideas within the changing dynamics of the Indian National Congress, the rise of mass movements and wartime constitutional developments, the paper argues that Chintamani's liberalism represented both a critique of authoritarian colonial rule and a cautious response to the politics of popular movements.*

Keywords: Colonial India, Journalist, Nationalism, Liberalism, Politics etc.

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Introduction

Sir Chirravoori Yajneswara Chintamani was a well-known figure in Indian politics and journalism. He was born in Vizianagaram on April 10, 1880, into an orthodox Brahmin family. His lifelong dedication to social reform and political activity was initiated when he joined the Indian National Congress as an active member and assumed the post of editor of the *Vizag Spectator*. His first work, *Indian Social Reform*, was published in 1901.¹ This event marked the beginning of his literary career and demonstrated his commitment to tackling the urgent social challenges of the day. After relocating to Allahabad in 1902, Chintamani advanced his editorial career by serving as an Associate Editor and then as Editor of the

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Indian People. His influence grew as he became associate editor of *The Leader* in 1909 and, the following year, took full editorial control. He joined the U.P. Legislative Council in 1916 to advance his political ambitions, but in 1918, he broke with the Congress party to co-found the Indian National Liberal Federation (INLF) alongside prominent politicians such as Dinshaw Wacha² and S.N. Banerjee.³

Chintamani was a key figure in the Indian independence movement throughout the 1920s and 1930s, participating in significant events, including the First Round Table Conference in London.⁴ His dedication to transforming education and industry in India was demonstrated by his leadership within the INLF and tenure as U.P.'s first Minister of Education and Industries in 1921. Despite electoral setbacks, notably a 1937 defeat in Jhansi. In 1939, the British government knighted him for his political and journalistic accomplishments. This study examines Chintamani's transition from editor to political activist. In his early years, he was a prominent representative within Congress, but he parted ways with the party just as Gandhi rose to prominence. He also expressed his views on Congress and the British government as a newspaper editor.

Doyen of Indian Journalism

Chintamani began his career as an editor at the age of eighteen, later emerging as a social reformer at thirty and a politician at thirty-six. Throughout his journey, he made significant contributions to the press and local journals in the region, including *Telugu Harp*. Before taking on the role of editor, he submitted several articles to *Telugu Harp*, but some of his controversial pieces were rejected with the admonition, 'Do not rush to the press so soon.'⁵ Undeterred, Chintamani embraced the challenge of self-education, immersing himself in historical facts and events and diligently studying various resources to enhance his knowledge. *Harp* and the *Vizag Spectator* soon accepted his articles, and later, he received a salary of thirty rupees per month after being hired as editor and manager of the *Vizag Spectator*. In this way, at the age of eighteen, he became the editor of the *Vizag Spectator*. Chintamani later purchased the *Vizag Spectator* for a substantial sum of Rs. 300, relaunching it as the *Indian Herald*, a weekly newspaper.⁶ However, due to financial problems, this paper was closed within two years. During this period, he faced several hardships, including the

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death of his wife and financial struggles. In search of work, he travelled to Madras and secured a job with G. Subramaniam Iyer, the former editor of *The Hindu*.

Why was Chintamani called the ‘Pope of Indian Journalism’? It all began with *Vizag Spectator* and culminated with *The Leader* by the end of his life. When Chintamani arrived in Benares (now Varanasi), he met Dr. Sochidananda Sinha, a renowned barrister at the Allahabad High Court. With Chintamani's assistance, Sinha launched a weekly newspaper, *Indian People*. Later, *Indian People* was succeeded by *The Leader*, a daily newspaper. From *Vizag Spectator* to *The Leader*, Chintamani saw numerous triumphs and disappointments, but his unwavering dedication to journalism earned him the honorific title of ‘Pope of Indian Journalism.’

The vernacular newspapers were ill-equipped to compete with the Anglo-Indian press. In response to this challenge, a group of public-spirited individuals, including Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Dr. Sinha, and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, came together to launch an English daily newspaper from Allahabad. They decided to incorporate *Indian People* and rename it *The Leader*.⁷ Chintamani and Nagendranath Gupta⁸ were appointed joint editors of *The Leader*, but Gupta left within eight months. Chintamani's efforts to establish the newspaper as a significant platform for nationalist opinion garnered him many admirers. Soon, he began to assert his independence as an editor, arguing that the editor should have the final say. He believed that true editorial independence depended on the willingness to resign if necessary. Chintamani clarified that he would not tolerate any day-to-day interference, questions, or distractions in his work.

His commitment to editorial freedom eventually led to a direct conflict with Motilal Nehru, the chairman of the Board of Directors. The first clash between Chintamani and Motilal Nehru occurred just a year after *The Leader* was launched. At that time, it was customary to hold a cultural program during the Congress session, but Chintamani criticised it in the editorial columns of his own paper, prompting Motilal's anger for bringing the issue into the spotlight among Congress leaders.⁹ When Motilal cancelled the programme, Chintamani stood his ground, insisting that, as editor, he had the right to comment on any matter. This conflict was not the last. In 1915-16, the issue of a separate electorate for Muslims in the U.P. municipal council, included in the Jehangirabad Amendment¹⁰ to the U.P. Municipalities Bill, sparked controversy. While Motilal and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru supported

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the proposal, Chintamani campaigned vigorously against it, and *The Leader* strongly criticised the reservation. The final straw came when Chintamani refused to publish Motilal's letter, leading to Motilal's resignation from *The Leader*.¹¹

The leader addressed every important issue facing the country. Chintamani was dissatisfied with the final draft of what would become the Government of India Act 1919, believing that Indian political parties should actively participate in its implementation. Meanwhile, Malaviya opposed the 1919 reforms.¹² This created a situation where the chairman and the editor had differing views, prompting Chintamani to consider resigning as editor. He submitted his resignation letter, but Malaviya refused to accept it, insisting that Chintamani's role as editor was vital. Ultimately, in light of the disagreement, Malaviya chose to resign from the board of *The Leader*.¹³

Although *The Leader* was seen as a liberal party newspaper, it never became the party's mouthpiece. While the British government faced daily criticism for its political and economic policies toward India, Congress leaders and their liberal colleagues were not spared either. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Pandit Motilal Nehru, and Sir Chamanlal Setalvad all faced criticisms, including Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who received significant criticism for supporting the Press Act of 1910. When Gokhale expressed surprise at the harshness of the critiques, Chintamani replied, 'Sir, I have worshipped you all my life. Must you grudge my freedom even for one day?'¹⁴

The Political and Social Legacy of C.Y. Chintamani

Chintamani joined the Congress in 1898. One year later, during the Lucknow session of 1899, he delivered his first speech, earning accolades from senior leaders. At this session, he met Gokhale, whose political views and ideas had a lasting impact on him. He honed his skills as a publicist by attending lengthy speeches, reviewing notes, and engaging with fellow Congress members. After two decades, he left the Indian National Congress in 1918 and co-founded the Indian National Liberal Federation with Surendranath Banerjee, Dinshaw Wacha, Chimanlal Setalvad, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and others. During the First Round Table Conference, the Congress decided to boycott the conference, while Chintamani represented the liberal delegation. Chintamani's participation in the First Round Table Conference in

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1930–31 was significant. After his return, he expressed disappointment at the British government's lack of commitment.

Chintamani emerged as a prominent liberal figure of his time, using his speeches and writings as potent instruments to challenge the British government and the Congress. Ramananda Chattopadhyay, the founder of *The Modern Review*,¹⁵ a highly influential journal in early 20th-century India, made it a platform for many prominent thinkers of the time, including C.Y. Chintamani. Chintamani began contributing to *The Modern Review* in 1907, writing on topics including Extremist Politics and the Provincial Conference in Allahabad. In 1908, he wrote about Public Health in the United Provinces. In the *Modern Review* and *Hindustan Review*, he discusses government regulation of public sanitation and sanitary problems in village areas.¹⁶ Chintamani was the secretary of the first Industrial Conference held in Varanasi (also known as Benares) in 1905. This conference discussed agricultural and industrial issues.¹⁷

Chintamani was an extreme liberal who was committed to the idea of constitutional reform but used language that was not moderate. It was not until Gandhi's arrival that individual leaders began to adopt a more collective approach, engaging in unified action. From 1920 onwards, the Indian National Congress became more organised, adopting a hierarchical structure that nurtured leaders at various levels. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, a diverse array of leaders emerged across different ranks, with eminent personalities such as Motilal Nehru and Madan Mohan Malaviya leading the charge. At the same time, the second tier included leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, C.Y. Chintamani, and others.¹⁸

When the Second Round Table Conference was announced, the British government showed little interest in appointing him as a delegate. Chintamani, however, had already established himself as a prominent figure in Indian politics, having been a member of the Legislative Council since 1916. He rose to prominence as a leading opposition leader from 1927 to 1936, drawing large crowds to the legislative gallery whenever he spoke. During this time, the liberals focused on implementing the Government of India Act of 1919.¹⁹

In January 1921, Governor Sir Harcourt Butler appointed Chintamani and Pandit Jagat Narayan as ministers in Uttar Pradesh. As a Minister of Education and Industries, Chintamani initiated major reforms in the education system. With Butler's support, He brought about important reforms, including the Intermediate Education Act and the Allahabad

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University Bill. The latter was particularly transformative, freeing secondary education from university control and granting secondary schools the autonomy to manage their own curriculum and educational affairs. Chintamani served as minister for 28 months, facing numerous challenges before resigning on April 23, 1923.

C.Y. Chintamani's contributions to Indian politics mark him as a significant and influential liberal voice in the early twentieth century. His commitment to democratic ideals, progressive reforms, and social justice set him apart as a visionary who sought to bridge the divide between traditionalism and modernity in a rapidly changing India. As a proponent of civil liberties, education, and economic reforms, Chintamani's political philosophy resonated with the aspirations of many Indians struggling to build an accessible and inclusive nation. His deep understanding of India's socio-political landscape allowed him to challenge authoritarianism and champion the rights of marginalised communities. Despite the complex and turbulent times, his legacy as a liberal thinker continues to inspire advocacy for equality, freedom, and rational discourse in Indian politics today.

Chintamani never wavered in his commitment to editing a newspaper. His dedication to his craft remained unwavering until his death. His sense of responsibility was evident from his work at *The Leader*. A stark contrast is evident between him and Nehru on the Board of Directors. Later, when he had differences with Malaviya, Chintamani took the step of submitting his resignation. However, Malaviya chose to resign from *The Leader's* Board. He wrote to Chintamani: 'Both you and I love the *The Leader* and want it to prosper. Its future lies more with you as editor than with me as chairman of the board of directors. In order to avoid embarrassment, one of us should drop out; let it be me: You must necessarily continue'.²⁰ When he departed from Congress alongside other leaders to form the Liberals, *The Leader* was labelled the mouthpiece of the group. However, he has repeatedly shown that this characterisation is untrue. He has also continued to criticise his political mentor without pause.

Chintamani served as a member of the Congress for twenty years, after which he co-founded the Indian National Liberal Federation with prominent leaders. He advocated for self-rule for India through cooperation with the British government. After assuming office as Minister for Education and Industries, Chintamani introduced significant reforms in the education system.

Conclusion

Chintamani believed that education should not only be academic but should equip students with vocational skills. He was particularly enthusiastic about the advancement of technical education and advocated the establishment of a technical university in Kanpur. After serving for 28 months, he resigned under various circumstances. As the Leader of the Opposition, he often criticised the government's actions. He disagreed with the British government's proposals at the First Round Table Conference in 1930–31. In 1939, he was knighted by the British government. Sir Chintamani died on 1 July 1941 in Allahabad, leaving behind a legacy of commitment to social change and liberalism in India.

Notes and References

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- ¹ Chintamani, Chirravoori Y. *Indian Social Reform in Four Parts; Being a Collection of Essays, Addresses, Speeches, &C., with an Appendix*. Thomson and Co, Popham's Broadway, 1901.
- ² Dinshaw Wacha (1848–1938) was a prominent Parsi leader, social reformer, and a key member of the Indian National Congress. Known for his advocacy for the rights of the Parsi community and education, he played an important role in the Indian freedom movement.
- ³ He was a prominent Indian nationalist leader during British rule and one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress. He played a significant role in the Indian independence movement and later founded the Indian National Liberal Federation in 1919.
- ⁴ Indian Round Table conference, 12th November 1930—19th January 1931 Presented by the Secretary of State for India to Parliament by Comma7id of His Majesty. January 1931, LONDON: PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE
- ⁵ Sunil Raman, *C.Y. Chintamani: The Liberal Editor Politician*, Rupa. Co, New Delhi, 2002, P.9.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- ⁷ Mamta Tyagi, & Chandni Sengupta, 'Analyzing the Role of the Print Media in India's Freedom Struggle: A Historical Narrative', *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol.09, 2019, pp. 487-492.
- ⁸ Nagendranath Gupta (1861-1940) was a prominent Indian journalist, writer, and follower of Keshab Chandra Sen. He was born in Motihari, Bihar, and later moved to Calcutta, where he became a well-known figure in the literary and journalistic circles.
- ⁹ Sunil Raman, *op.cit.*, p.20
- ¹⁰ The Jahangirabad Amendment was a significant piece of legislation passed in 1916 during the British colonial rule in India. It aimed to address various administrative and political issues in the princely states. The amendment was part of the broader efforts to reform and modernise the governance structures in these states.
- ¹¹ Sunil Raman, *op.cit.*, p.21.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p.25.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p.26.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.30.
- ¹⁵ The Modern Review was a monthly magazine published in Calcutta, founded and edited by Ramananda Chatterjee. It was in circulation from 1907 to 1995. The magazine became an important platform for the Indian nationalist intellectual community. It featured a wide range of content, including poems, stories, travelogues and sketches, as well as essays on politics, economics and sociology.
- ¹⁶ C.Y Chintamani, *Public Health in the United Provinces*, ed., Ramananda Chatterjee, The Modern Review, vol. IV, 1908, pp. 240-244
- ¹⁷ *Report Of The First Indian Industrial Conference (1905)*, Indian press, Allahabad,1906.

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¹⁸ Pramila Agrawal, U. P. POLITICS (1958-1965) (BI-POLARISED GROUPISM), *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1965, pp. 66-67

¹⁹ Ray T. Smith, The Role of India's 'Liberals' in the Nationalist Movement, 1915-1947, *Asian Survey*, vol. 8, no. 7, 1968, pp. 607-624

²⁰ Sunil Raman, *op.cit.*, p.26