CHAPTER 5

ROLE AND IMPACT OF COMMUNITY JOURNALISM ON SOCIETY: A STUDY

5.1 ROLE OF JOURNALISM

The role of journalism in the earlier time was to inform to the public or mass people. Starting from the first newspaper till the nineteenth century the press has gone with various changes and developments. The developments including technological and style of writing and presenting the news and information also happened. But ideological development in the process of journalism was not very much discussed up to the first part of twentieth century. It may be because till then journalism was not developed as an profession for bread and butter, rather it was the service to the society and also the practice of one’s own interest. Till the democracy developed in the Europe and other countries, role of journalism was limited to the information giving instruments of the ruling class. It was not going to the common people for their aspirations or ideas they have. Nor the journalism served the purpose of the common people. Rather journalism was mainly aimed at the benefits of the ruling class by giving selected information to the public. It can be mentioned here that first newspapers were not published to serve the purposes of the common people, but to do the propaganda of the ruling class for their benefit.

After the democratic movements in the world, the role journalism became significant. The press realized that they are the mediator to motivate the common
mass. The press earlier motivating people for the benefit of the ruling class gradually gone through the introspect about their role and duties to the people. Ultimately it is the people who are the real audience of the press.

The American Press Institute in their website given a comprehensive write up about the purpose of journalism has quoted Bill Kovach and Tom Rosensteil from The book Elements of Journalism “the purpose of journalism ….. is defined by something more basic than technology or journalism techniques used by the journalist; it is the function of news plays in the lives of people.” This is what the theoretical basis for the modern concept of journalism. The Institute finalizes the comment on the purpose of journalism as “Purpose of journalism is thus to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their government”. (www.americanpress institute.org, 2015).

The role of journalism is not only limited to gathering and publishing the information to the people. Journalism must tell the mass people about the happenings around the world, in their society and around them. At the same time it is the role of journalism to educate people about the meaning of the information they are giving and how it can or may affect the lives of the common people. Journalism should inform the people about what is important for their better lives and the tools for the better lives the people may have. Also journalism should inform about the environment and human at large for the better future of the present and coming generations. Through the information and education role of journalism can help in democracy.
To play a good role in the society and the journalistic field, one has to understand the basic elements of journalism. There are many guidelines and advices today to achieve the goal of journalism. The most essential elements covers some basic motivations to the journalists to achieve this goal are – work with truth in the collection, verification and analyzing the data or information they collect and produce. Journalism should be transparent in their source and methods of collection and presentation. The correct or right information can be the basis for interpretation, comment, criticism by the public or audience, through which the ultimate truth can be emerged in the society. For the truthfulness, the verification is very important. Careful verification can lead to truthfulness of the journalism. Journalism should have the motivation to be loyal to its readers or audience; and in the larger context

journalism should be loyal to the people. Journalism has a role to play as an public forum. They should form a common forum where any member of the community or any public can discuss their issues freely. That way it helps the democratic role of journalism.

One of the major roles of the journalism is to educate the people. Here when you need to educate people then you have to give some analysis and interpretation of the information already gathered for the news. So, besides news or pure information journalism need to analyze the information in line to get the various impacts on the society and environment and also need to study this in the future perspective. To educate the people journalism should have a definite goal, why and what to give to the mass people to make them educate.
5.2 Agenda Setting Role of Journalism:

Another role of journalism, especially in the community journalism is Agenda Setting for the specific community. Every day, much information flows to the media house or to the journalist; it is the journalist who will first have to think about the importance of the information to the readers or in greater importance of the human society. Editor and editorial board have to set an rules for governing the information flow to the readers. Here an agenda need to set by the journalism activities. What is important for a particular reader group or society or a community is the parameter for the agenda setting. Also the journalism must know the requirements and shortcomings of a society. Then only the journalism can set an agenda for the development of that society by providing a set of information. There is a question sometime, that how a media can decide what are important for a society. Also some critics comments as “The things that we think are important any day are in fact the very things on which the media concentrates. The obvious question is whether they are important and therefore the media concentrates on them or whether the media concentrates on them and therefore they became important. What does seem clear is that the media surely lead us to focus attention on what they focus their attention. Most of the time the media, the press primarily gets away with telling its readers what to think about that day with their headlines and editorials.” (Andal N, 2008). As this is clear that in most of cases the newspaper set the agenda and that are why united nations also given more importance on the media to eradicate poverty and to raise various social issues through the media. Thus community media should use this role in a positive way to develop the community. It has that power in them to motivate the members of the community through its writing or broadcasting the selected information according
to the agenda of the journalism or press. This is somehow similar to the media’s role of gate keeping the information. This is essential for successful role of agenda setting. Through this process, journalism select the required information from the information gathered in the press and take decision whether or not the information should go to the public, and in what form and how much. So what we get in a newspaper or press is not the only information in the day, rather we get some selected information as per the agenda of the press for a particular reader group.

In the context of this present study, the Agenda Setting role of journalism is required in case of the community journalism. This is because the media has to educate the people first to understand the issues, and for that the media needs to push the information in a systematic way to the readers. The readers cannot sometimes demand the information or rather they are ignorant about the new thing happening, which may otherwise be very pertinent to them for their development. Also the media should set the agenda for the educating the people to make them understand the situation. Media can trained and educate people to analyze the information. For that also they need the systematic approach.

Regarding the development journalism, media have to have a clear idea of the situation and context. Agenda is not always the political, but agenda may be used for the development purposes also. Agenda may be set to make the people aware about the various opportunities in relation to the overall development. In other word, media needs to fill up the gap of the knowledge which is lacking in the part of the readers to make them self sustained.
In Assam, the media is not fully adopting any theory or model. As the researcher is a permanent resident of the state and a regular reader of daily newspapers, it is experienced that some of the media have the agenda set by their editorial policy group, but unfortunately these are mostly related to the politics and business. Even the electronic media in Assam are showing the agenda through their presentation and content in several cases. There are many examples experienced by this researcher during the study period. But then also a few media houses are setting the agenda on some other topics including the developmental issues, social problems, cultural and literary development etc. Considering all these agenda of the community media of Assam, the researcher tried to get an idea about what is the nature of agenda of media in Assam, and the answer is not clear. There are issues of the politics, social, cultural etc. But the notion of development or development support is less important when the agenda for the media is set. Only if something in the nature of crime within the developmental works, then only the media is giving space for it. The researcher have travelled the state on various occasion and interacted with the people, they are also confused on the role of media in the society.

5.3 Other Roles of Journalism:

Journalism should have the role in investigate the information received in the community or society for the good of the people. Investigate the source of information and the purpose of information along with the linkage in it and motive of the information. This is very important for the journalism to be impartial, but in practical no human being can be neutral. Regarding the role of community journalism, as the journalists are also a part of the community, so it is sometimes
very easy to investigate but that ‘nearness’ may leads to the biasness in the journalism.

Journalism, especially community journalism should also be interpretative. As the community journalism is basically done for a community residing in a semi urban, rural or under developed areas, where the members of the community needs some explanation for some of the information. Also the various aspects of that information need to be interpreting to the readers. Though interpretation is not the part of the journalism in case of hard news, but in community journalism it may need to practiced for better understanding and analyzing the information. For these two- interpretation or investigation the journalist should have a motive to do research. Research is also important to create the news.

Another role of journalism as the researcher has already mentioned is filling up the knowledge gap. The media in the modern age has great potential for sourcing and disseminating information to the people through various forums. Media should have a component for research on the information flow and should play a role of gate keeping for disseminating this information. Because information overflow is happened to be another problem in the present days. Selecting appropriate information and convert it to knowledge and utilizing it in the practical life is not very easy.

Role of journalism is not only to inform the people, but also to be a watch dog on the various systems related to public. This role is one of the major role which directly benefit the people. Since in most of the countries, the media is enjoying freedom, they are playing this role. Apart from the big media houses or the
commercial media houses, the community media is much needed this role. As community media’s field is the semi urban or rural area, and the community members are need help to understand the situation or consequences, so it may the media which can become the guidance force for the community people.

5.4 Constraints of Community Journalism in Assam

The researcher has already mentioned about the barriers of community journalism in Assam. In that chapter, the researcher has given the barriers related to the early part mostly, how the community newspapers and magazines were developed and constraints faced by these newspapers and magazines. Here, in this chapter the researcher is trying to concentrate on the present media organizations. So, though both chapters are with almost the same heading but as the researcher feels that present constraints will be more relevant in this chapter.

There are good numbers of newspapers published from Assam presently. These newspapers are surviving as they are getting the advertisements from both government and industries. After that also many newspapers including the dailies, weeklies published from the capital city Guwahati and other district headquarters are closing their publications. The are some major barriers or hurdles for this:

i) There is no sufficient number of trained personals or journalists in the industry or media houses. Many of the journalists required the training for professional development as well as for the role specific journalism. They also need the orientation on the new concepts coming up in the days with new vistas to cater the needs of the present society or community. It is experienced that what media
houses are paying to the journalists is not according to their position and needs, it is very less than the recommendations made by various Journalist Pay Commissions. As a result media houses are not getting proper qualified persons. A small numbers of them are professionally educated or trained to handle the job of a journalist.

As the researcher has visited many of the media houses and met many journalists working both in the city and the rural or semi urban area, it is experienced that most of the newspapers do not have the sufficient numbers of journalists for covering every Block. Even in many cases one journalist is working for the more than one newspaper. In such a situation, development of media or journalism is a distant word. Again, there is no specific course for the community journalism in the country or the state where the potential journalists can be trained. So, both way, that is lack of academic orientation or training on the community journalism and the ignorance about the systematic community journalism by the media are some of the key factor for not growing the community journalism in Assamese language press.

ii) The revenue collected from the advertisements or the circulation is not sufficient for running a newspaper with changing technology and techniques. To cop up with the new techniques, the journalists have to train as mentioned above and after that the media house has to pay the minimum respectable amount for their livelihood. In many cases, the researcher have experienced that most of the rural journalists are not well paid for their day to day expenditures. Even the new entries in the city areas are also not paid well to meet up their day to day requirements. As a result, the journalists are lacking the motivation in their work.
iii) There is lack of specific orientation or motive of the press. The press, though they are practicing community journalism, but that is in most of the cases they are doing it unconsciously. This is not happened in a systematic manner. There is no specific evidence found during the study regarding a clear cut editorial policy on the developmental or social issues. What is needed for the community journalism is required a agenda which can drive the society. The newspapers should have a think tank for setting the agenda as well as the motivational and guiding policy for the community journalism.

iv) The recent years, as and when the researcher met the journalists and discussed about the research skills of them, the ignorance is a common amongst them. The primary skill for development journalism and community journalism is the research of the data and also in the field. But, it is experienced that many of the journalists are lacking the research skills. Another important factor for lack of research is the time factor. In many cases they even don’t given sufficient time to file a report or news, which in other ways discourage the research practices among the community journalists. This is mostly may be because of the shortage of the journalism staff in the media houses.

5.5 Impact of Community Journalism in Assam:

The impact of the newspapers in Assamese language on the people of Assam is immense. This can be verified through the various cases. The Assam Press both Assamese language press as well as other press are playing a major role in the past events. There is history of positive role playing by the Assamese press since the first newspaper published from Assam. From the age of Orunodoi it is newspapers
and magazines which are more vibrant on the various issues in Assam, be it the
issue of identity of the Assamese language as an independent language in the
British Raj or the Language (Medium) Movement in Assam in 1972. In both the
issues, the newspapers involved a large number of writers and leading personalities
to create the concept among

the common people. *Orunodoi* has started the written language in the modern
form with developing the vocabulary and grammar. They have given space to the
prominent leaders of the society to write in the newspaper. In the event of Medium
Movement, prominent writer and literary activists started debate and discussion in
the newspapers like *Dainik Asom, Dainik Janambhumi, Asom Bani*, and *Natun
Asomiya*. Also the literary movement was started by the newspapers and
magazines like *Bahi, Awahan* and *Ramdhenu* etc.

Like the literary and language, the social movements on different issues were also
have the strong role of the Assamese newspapers. Latest example may take from
the Assam Movement against the illegal foreigners from 1989 to 1995. During that
period, a good numbers of Assamese newspapers took part in debate and
discussions. Many eminent personalities from the Assam took part in it about the
ethical and other issues of this movement. It is said by many people, the researcher
interviewed that the movement was distributed every knock and corner very
quickly because of the role played by Assamese newspapers. One can understand
the impact of Assamese newspapers on the society from this case.

Assamese newspaper’s impact in the development sector is not significant. Though
some new published on the rural areas, but these can be categories in three
category—first, the crime and corruption news related to developmental activities, second, success stories which are starting by the Assamese newspapers in recent times and third, the soft news content related to the meetings and other events. Most of the cases there is no reflection in the news presented or publication on the agenda set on the community or the developmental issues.


References:

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