CHAPTER-IV

JOURNALISM IN MANIPUR:
DIFFERENT PHASES
4.0 Importance of Local Newspaper

The development of the press in the recent years was marked by the growth of small and medium sized newspapers. With increase in literacy and the capacity of purchasing power of the people living in rural and urban areas, there is a significant increase in the circulation of regional language newspapers. And expansion of the language press has brought about a marked change the way public issues are discussed and conducted. Over the past decade or so the language press has gained enviable power over local politics so much so that regional power centres are often seen wooing it in an effort to gain its support at the local level. “The future of the Indian press means essentially the future of the Indian languages press. India will have gradually mammoth circulation in all the Indian languages”. It can also be stated that the growth of regional press/local press may be due to the various types of regional and local problems occurred in the country and also with the multiplicity of languages and cultures.¹
Like national or international newspapers, the functions of the local dailies are also to (i) convey government policies to the public; (ii) keep government informed of public needs; (iii) keep government informed of public reactions to government policies; and (iv) keep the government and public informed of events taken place in and around. Long before, during middle of 19th century, Reverend James Long, a champion of the Indian Language Press, said; “the native (local) newspapers are humble in appearance but like the ballads of a nations they often act where the law fails and as straws on a current they show its direction. The importance of the native (local) newspaper press is very great. The number of newspaper in circulation is small compared with that of other publication but their influence is great. If government wish correct news to circulate in the villages/localities, they must use the vernacular press as organ”.

The influence of local newspapers was so powerful in British India that, in 1876, the “Vernacular Press Act” was introduced to control them. The similar situation we may observe recently when Sri Lanka Government lifted censorship on foreign media but maintained the restrictions on the local media (The Statesman 6.6.2000) Late H. Saikia, the Chief Minister of Assam has once reportedly said that he could not ignore the local press because “it is the local press that reach his subjects and more importantly his electorate”. Realizing the importance of local media, the Government of Manipur has recently taken a decision “to have a cabinet minister liaison” for disseminating Government information to the local press. This action has been taken by the local media as the “acknowledgment of the Government” towards the power of the press” which is nothing but the “acknowledgment of the power of the people”. The policy of ‘local dailies’ has normally been guided by some factors like (i) domination of local issues; (ii) known readership and its information needs; (iii) sentiments of the
local people; (iv) local pressure groups; (v) local selling network etc. The ‘local dailies’ is a medium which is supposed to (i) reflect local aspiration; (ii) highlight local grievances; (iii) expose local corruption and evils; (iv) record social-political-economical-scientific-cultural activities and development of the region; (v) predict trend of local growth and development; (vi) examine and monitor the current occurrences as local guardian. Besides, it should be an ‘organ’ for consolidating and guiding public opinion at local level, a ‘forum’ for exchange of views of local people and a ‘mirror’ of the society. In brief, the ‘local-dailies’ is a ‘local chronicle’ in the backdrop of the regional, national land international flavour.

According to Haokip⁶, “The local newspaper is a low cost medium of advertising, publicity, information and propaganda. The visual sophistication of the electronic media cannot fade out the down-to-earthly appeal of good old newspaper. Its affordability certainly is an asset. Moreover, national and international newspapers are not as vocal about and local to localities’ sensibilities as their local counterparts are. The vernacular press that vociferously champions parochial feelings are looked upon by patronizing readers as the conscience-keeping Messiah of hope. Their crusade against atrocities and excesses on innocents, fearless exposure of injustice in public life and timely echoing of popular sentiments earn for themselves endearing soft spots in the hearts of the readers”.

The distinction between a national, regional and local paper is however sometimes confused as felt by one editor of a local newspaper. According to him,⁷ “there is nothing ambiguous about a local newspaper or a regional newspaper.” But, he raised some questions on the ‘term’ of national newspapers: “How exactly do we define a national newspaper? Are the nationalistic credentials of these
newspapers superior? Are these newspapers supposed to have a broader vision than their local and regional counterparts? Are they more politically correct?” He is finally of the opinion that the term ‘national’ quantities more than qualities and the “so-called national dailies have much wider reach than the local and regional daily”. It is really the local and vernacular papers that are integral to the society and play an active role in moulding public opinion. In short, the local dailies serve the immediate purpose of the people better than the national or international papers. In this backdrop, the growth and development of local newspaper in Manipur, a small state (basic facts in Annexure I/1) of North-East Region, are to be viewed.

4.1 Journalism in Manipur: Different Phases

The growth and development of journalism in Manipur includes, as identified by (Late) N. Tombi, renowned Parliamentarian, media-personality and founder Editor of an English daily in Manipur (*Manipur Mail*, Estd. 1980), five phases as noted below:

First phase: End of 19th century -1899; Second phase; 1900-1929; Third phase: 1930-1945; Fourth phase: 1946-1970; Fifth phase: 1971 onwards. Honouring his scholarship and experiences in the subject, an attempt has been made here to consolidate the events taken place and highlighted during these five different phases separately.

4.1.1 The First Phase (End of the 19th Century *i.e.* upto 1899)

At the end of the 19th century, as Tombi explained, ‘British Contact’ and ‘the interaction between the Manipur and the rest of India through Cachar and Bengal during the later half of Maharaj Chandrakirti’s rule’ were intensified. Improved communication obviously called for exchange of ideas through
publications. Lack of printing facilities did not stop the endeavours of the then enlightened sections of the kingdom. Handwritten and cyclostyle copies served the purposes partially. However, the printing of Government Annual Reports had been carried on outside Manipur (Calcutta and Shillong) under the supervision of the East India Company since Manipur had connection with the political agent of Britain. The printed publication of Manipuri script or Meitei Mayek in the pages of the Royal Asiatic Society by Mr. G.H. Damant and G.A. Grierson’s writings in the *Linguistic Survey of India* in 1891 are worth mentioning. But, in the same year as M. Kriti, a noted scholar, said that the Manipuri script was abandoned and the Bengali script had been adopted. Some books in Bengali script were brought out by Pandit Makar in 1895.9

4.1.2 The Second Phase (1900-1929)

“Since the growth of journalism in any country is invariably linked to the growth of it’s literacy rate, Manipur remained at a low rung for many years. However, the first two decades of the 20th century showed promises of some growth of educational promotion”.10 *Meitei Leima*, a hand written magazine published from Cachar during 1917-18 is said to be one of the pioneer magazines in Manipuri Journalism. Later, Hijam Irobat, the pioneer in the field of journalism in Manipur, brought out another hand written magazine, *Meitei Chanu* during 1925 and 1926.11 The other development during this period was the introduction of ‘printing machine’ in the state. According to M. Kriti, the first printing press was established during 1918-19. Government reports and private publications were seen in print for first time in the state.12

Thus, the first two phases had made the ground for the publication through (i) some enlightened sections of the people; and (ii) some printing
facilities. However, the state had to wait further to witness the first printed-
newspaper.

4.1.3 The Third Phase (1930-1945)

From 1925 onwards, as N. Tombi pointed out,¹³ 'a link between the old
and the new literary trends was clearly established' and 'the educated young
addressed themselves to the promotion of Manipuri literature including
journalism'. This period had also witnessed 'political awareness' among the
people which 'was inseparably linked with the growth of journalism'.

Meanwhile, a new printing-machine was brought from England during
1929-30 for the use of the State Printing Press. By 1932-33, the State Press
became a full-fledged department. And, the Churchand Printing Press (named
after Churchand Maharaj) was established in 1930.¹⁴

Culturally, this phase has made Manipur rich when the Manipur
Sahitya Parishad was born in 1935. Meanwhile, the state had witnessed the
publication of the first daily newspaper Deinik Manipur (in 1933), the first bi-
lingual journal Masik Jagaran (Bengali and Manipuri) from Sylhet (in 1930) and
the first Manipuri monthly journal Yakairol (in 1930). The Sahitya Parishad also
started publishing its half-yearly organ Manipur Sahitya Parishad Patrika mainly
to propagate the activities, speeches, decisions and the resolutions of the
Parishad.¹⁵ On the other hand, the Deinik Manipur became a powerful organ in
moulding the public opinion against British rule and in exchanging 'cultural and
religious views of the people of Manipur'. It was also circulated in the Manipur
inhabited areas of Tripura, Assam, Bengal (including present Bangladesh) and
Brindaban. Regular sale was more than 3000 copies and two issues were
published in a day. However, because of its anti-government policy, the
Government of Manipur banned its publication, after its five-year continuous service.\textsuperscript{16}

The period (1930-45) had seen publication of another daily \textit{i.e. Manipur Matam}, during 1937-39, though a number of other publications were also found in literate-community. Some of such publications available in record are noted in Annexure I/2. The \textit{Manipur Matam} was a mouthpiece of \textit{Nikhil Manipur Hindu Mahasabha}.\textsuperscript{17}

This phase had not only witnessed first time a ban on newspaper (\textit{Deinik Manipur}) but also first jail punishment for a media personality, Keisham Kunjabihari (Editor of a journal \textit{Manipur Paojel}) during Second World War for his writing against Government. These two incidents had glorified the journalism of Manipur at its initial stage.

It would not be irrelevant here to remember some of the pioneers who contributed lot for shaping the journalism in the beginning with limited resources only. The list includes Atombapu Sharma (\textit{Lalit Manjuri Patrika}), Thongbam Gokulchandra Singh (the first newspaper editor of \textit{Deinik Manipur}), Arjun Singh, Parijat Singh, Ram Krishna Singh (\textit{Masik Jagran}), R.K. Shitaljit (\textit{Manipur Matam} and \textit{Tarun Manipur}), Hijam Anganghal, Hijam Irabot, Dr.N.Leiren (Minister in 1947), Dr. Kamal, Kh.Chaoba, S. Lalit, M. Jhulon, N. Tombi, A. Dorendrajit, A. Thambal Angou (\textit{Meitei Leima}), Thokchom Modhu, Ph. Gourachandra Sharma (\textit{Meitei}), L. Gopal (\textit{Naharol}) and many others (see Annexures I/2 & IV/1). They contributed not only to the growth of journalism but to the growth of Manipuri literature, social reform and political awareness also.

The continuity of the publications was disrupted during the Second World War (1939-45). However, some periodicals were brought out during this
time also. Even Maharaj Bodhachandra contributed poems regularly to such journals.\textsuperscript{18}

4.1.4 The Fourth Phase (1946-1970)

"The end of the Second World War brought a new phase of socio-economic, political and academic upheaval, totally reflecting the British leniency in Indian matters when Britain decided to concede freedom. The post war year, 1946 was agog with new political activities, which naturally embraced the journalistic movement". It was during this period, Tombi continued a number of newspapers and journals came into existence and the journalists take an active role in bringing the public more politically conscious.\textsuperscript{19}

While the first two phases made the ground and the third phase saw the beginning of the journalism in Manipur, the fourth phase had extended the movement further. Besides the scholars mentioned above, a host of young educated persons came forward and joined to the writing profession. Some of the notable media-persons during this period are R.K. Sanahal and H. Ranbir (Praja), Kh. Nilamani, L. Achou and Kh. Chaoba (Meeng Naidabee), A. Lalmani (Bhagyabatee), Madhabjit Singh (Khonjel), S. Indramani (Eikhoigee Manipur), L. Jogeshwor (Sandhyagee Bhagyabatee), M. Biramani, Kh. Madhu and Dr. Leiren (Bhagyabatee Patrika), N. Tombi (Chhatra Jagat), Atombapu Sharma (Bhagyabatee Masik and Bhagyabatee Kala), Madhabjit Singh of Tripura (Khonjel), W. Narayan (Imarol), L. Jaichandra (Prajatantra), N. Birendra Kumar (Simanta Patrika), Th. Meghachandra (Khollao), Th. Bira Singh (Wareng), R.K. Jhaljit, Yaima Singh, R.K. Meipaksana and many others who are listed in Annexures I/2 & IV/1. This period had also witnessed the active participation of the women section in the writing-world. Some of them like Ramani Devi, S. Sarju Devi, S. Shyama Devi and others.\textsuperscript{20,21}
The role of printing presses can never be ignored in the growth and development of the writing-world. By 1965-66, Manipur had 62 registered press, as reported (22). The State Printing Press (Estd.1918-19) and Churachand Printing Press (Estd.1930) obviously had been taken pioneering responsibilities. Some of the other important presses are Tarun Press, Chitrangada Press, Friends Union Press and Bijoy Press Ltd.

The period had also seen the publications of some new newspapers like Bhagyabatee Patrika (1946), Ngasi (1946/1948), Praja (1947), Eikhoigee Manipur (1947), Sandhyagee Bhagyabatee Patrika, Prajantragra (1950), Simanta Patrika and Khollao. Besides daily newspapers, a number of monthlies, bi-weeklies, weeklies like Panthung, Anouba Manipur, Wareng, Eastern Express (English), Manipur Times (English), Resistance (English), Frontier Chronicle (English), had been found in print regularly. The other important areas in the history of journalism of the period to be noted were:

(i) The Editors of a number of dailies had also published a number of bi-weeklies and monthlies (see Annexure IV/1).

(ii) The political parties too came forward to publish their organs for making people politically aware. Some of such organs are Prajantragra and Simanta Patrika of Congress Party, Khollao of Communist Party of India, Resistance of Pan Manipur Youth League, Praja of Socialist Party. With Anouba Jug (weekly), Hijam Irabot, a revolutionary social reformer, inspired the peasants, farmers and downtrodden people to fight for the emancipation.

(iii) A number of weeklies were published in English language also. Eastern Express, Manipur Times, Resistance, Frontier Chronicle, Cyclone, Hill Monitor were some of the popular English weeklies at that period.

(iv) The hill districts too joined to the publication world during that period. About 52 daily newspapers and periodicals of different
dialects were published from different hill districts during 1935-1992 (Annexure I/3). However, the highest number of periodicals was published from Churachandpur. The contents of most of the hill publications were related to Christian religion and the political affairs of the hill people. The Roman Script was used in most of the publications.

(v) However, most of those publications during that period were short-lived (a very few are available now).

4.1.5 The Contemporary Period (1971 onwards)

"The fourth phase began in 1946 and continued up to the seventies" while "the fifth phase comprises the contemporary period" – N. Tombi wrote. The seventies’ had witnessed a remarkable growth in the publications works in Manipur, including dailies, as shown in Annexures I/2&3; Annexure IV/1 and Table 4.3(particularly, after Manipur became a full fledged State in 1972). It is not unusual that newly acquired ‘Statehood’ might bring a fresh air to different fields of the State. This political development has undoubtedly strengthened the movement of journalism in Manipur. Therefore, it can be presumed that the ‘contemporary period’ i.e. the fifth or current phase of the journalism of the State has started from 1971 and onwards.

The growth of Journalism in Manipur as reported above has come across various changes during the past fifty years or so. The noted journalist N. Brojendra has remarked: "It is with the indomitable spirit, irrepressible independence and vigour that the first line of journalists in the state practiced Journalism despite heavy odds. The result is that the present generation has been left with a legacy of reading habit. The time was when the journalist has only himself to perform different roles, such as editor, publisher, printer, reporter, proof-reader and what’s more compositor and machine man. Besides, readership in the days of yore was very limited. The people did not depend much on
newspapers for news, they were rather inclined towards news or rumour disseminated from the market". But, today, it has become the biggest industry in the state. The size and turn out of the newspaper industry in Manipur is next to that of Guwahati. About eighty percent of the houses in the state subscribe to the local newspapers. Today a reader can get a local newspaper by early morning at any place/districts of the state. In fact, the contemporary period is marked by its close approach to professionalism in spite of the limited reading circles in the state. The press in Manipur particularly the vernacular achieved certain credibility and of course, profits.

The coverage of news on national and international levels by the local newspapers with the help of Internet service, teleprinter facilities etc has made the local readers more informative and up-to-date. As the newspaper reading habit is spreading far and wide, this industry has been growing up. Some of the issues that have been dominating the journalism of Manipur in contemporary period (as focussed in print media) are accumulated in brief, as presented below:

4.1.5.1 Local Press, Government and Underground

The concept ‘freedom of press’ has been challenged during this period in a number of occasions by different mighty sections of the society in the name of ‘misreporting’ or ‘biased-reporting’. “Journalism in Manipur is in peril. Journalists are at the receiving end everywhere, from the government as well as from the underground set up”, Bijoy Kakchingtabam, a renowned columnist has opined. He continues.... “The press is indeed caught between the devil and deep sea. In the war between the government forces and the underground organisations, it is getting hit from both sides”. He did not hesitate to disclose that “very often, journalists especially editors have been deprived to exercise their right to edit by
underground elements who want their press statements to appear verbatim in the newspapers the next day. They have also to face harsh words and threats to their well-beings often. There are also other power centres, putting the pressures on the journalists. Students' bodies, local clubs and sundry organisations that assumed the mantle of the saviour of our society, want to dictate their terms with the newspapers. This is an infringement on not only the rights of these newspapers, but also on individual discretion. The columnist is not happy "to observe that as the world walks into the new millennium, Manipur has retrogressed into the medieval age of intolerance, rigidity and authoritarianistic visions".30

The editors of the dailies, too, are unhappy. In the editorial-column (IFP, 1.12.00), one editor has recorded his experiences: "The new item today of the government's intent to penalize newspapers for publishing an underground organisations statement should highlight one of these pretty distinctly. Pressmen are caught between the demands of different believers in free speech. On the one side are those who think editors exercising their discretion in grading the newsworthiness of statements they make, is an infringement on the basic human right of freedom of expression and on the other are those who think editors using their briefs about the same freedom of expression".

The observations remain same to the same person even after nearly one year (IFP Editorial, 9.10.01): "The press in Manipur were under pressure from different angles. After all, what is the press worth if it cannot thinks and writes freely? A good newspaper, as well known American playwright, Arthur Miller, once commented, is a nation talking to itself. Probing its collective cultural legacy, its history, its glories, its sins . . . . And as with all such retrospection, it is more than likely that some uncomfortable and embarrassing questions may arise, but rather than repress these thoughts, the forward looking attitude, we are of the
firm belief, is to face them squarely, overcome them, and than only leave them behind with our heads up. But shaken as it is today, we wonder what courage the media in the state will have left to strive to live up to this lofty ideal so eloquently articulated by Miller. The spirit of free debate has been muffled. The freedom of expression in thought, in dress, in music are being put in Jeopardy by an excessive tendency for moral policing”.

The Government and the press are made for each other. One can pretend a healthy existence without the other. The press has been providing the major link between the government and the public for augmenting the development of the society. Recently, the Govt. of Manipur has taken a decision to have a cabinet minister liaison for disseminating Govt. Information to the local press. This action has been taken by the local media as the ‘acknowledgement of the Govt.,’ towards ‘the power of the press’ which is nothing but the ‘acknowledgment of the power of the people’.

Meanwhile the role of the media, more particularly the non-government print media, has been more than adequately accentuated. The press in Manipur has very often been charged with being anti-establishment. That it has been alleged for highlighting the opinions of various underground organisations. One of such cases may be noted here as reference: On 30th Nov. 2000, the Manipur police has lodged FIRs against some of the local dailies (i.e. Poknapham, Huiyen Lanpao, Imphal Free Press (IFP), Sangai Express, Yakairol, Naharolgi Thoudang and Toknga) in Manipur for publishing the statement released by the UNLF, an underground outfit, on the occasion of its 36th foundation day.

Local journalists have been subjects to a censorship regime since June 1998, but the new regulations gave the Govt. the power to arrest journalists, seize
their property on broadly-defined grounds of "national-security". In Oct 1998, the chief secretary issued a list of Dos and Don'ts in response to a Union Home Ministry directive (of 10-7-98) asking it to take action against seditious publication. It prohibited, among others, publication of press releases by underground organization like obituary references about their cadres and "boycott" calls for Independence Day or Republic Day.\textsuperscript{33}

In view of the attitude of the press and its relations with the Government, the entire valley area comprising Imphal East and West, Bishnupur and Thoubal district were declared as \textbf{proclaimed area} under the prevention of seditious Meeting Act, 1991 on April 26\textsuperscript{th} 2000 by the government of Manipur. While, the Manipur Govt. has issued another order on June 5 of the same year extending the Act to hill districts (\textit{i.e.} Churachandpur, Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong).\textsuperscript{34}

Another incident may be noted that the scribes were not allowed to enter the Secretariat premises to collect reports on April 17 and 19, 2002. As a protest against the entry of journalists inside the secretariat, the journalists fraternity of the state boycott the Secular Progressive Front (SPF) Ministers and MLAs, asserting that the Govt. has failed to take up visible actions against the officers concerned, who restricted the entry of journalists into the state Secretariat. The print media, particularly the local dailies and electronic media in the state censured the news reports relating to the SPF Minister and MLAs during the period.\textsuperscript{35}

After viewing the ban of journalists exercising their professional duties from different angles, the "International Press Institute (IPI) has asked Governments to ensure independence of public media. In its resolution adopted at
the world's 50th General Assembly, it asked Govt. to allow scribes to exercise their profession without hindrance by ensuring that visas or work permits are provided rapidly and without bureaucratic interference. It appealed to governments to revoke any legal restriction aimed at controlling journalism and obstructing the principle of the right to "seek, receive and impart informations and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". IPI also condemned the use of "lengthy suspended jail sentences in order to silence criticism and prevent journalists from carrying out their professional duties" and urged Governments, parliaments and Courts to call a halt to such sentencing practices. Another resolution called for the establishment monitoring mechanisms on freedom of the media to act as permanent watchdogs of press freedom violation.36

4.1.5.1.1 POTO (Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance)

No nation at any stage can go without a free press. A free press is the backbone of a progressive society and a progressive nation. That's why, in view of the worsening situation of media-persons in certain parts of the country, Justice J.S. Verma (Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission) once remarked: "A special law is necessary to fight terrorist activities. However, the act must contain necessary safeguards and it must be a legislation with a human face".37

The Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) was promulgated by the President of India in the year 2001 in the background of the multifarious challenge faced by India in the management of its internal security. The existing criminal justice system could not deal with the types of heinous crimes that have appeared in the country in the last 50 years. There is an upsurge of terrorist activities, intensification of cross border terrorism, and insurgent groups in different parts of
the country. Terrorism has now acquired global dimensions and has become a challenge for the entire world.

The ordinance defines terrorist acts "as acts done by using weapons and explosive substances or other methods in a manner as to cause or likely to cause death or injuries to any person or persons or loss or damage to property or disruption of essential supplies and services etc with intent to threaten the unity or integrity of India or to strike terror in any section of the people". The ordinance also fulfill India's obligations in complying with the United Nations Security Council Resolution No.1373 dated 28.9.2001 requiring member states to undertake comprehensive measures to deal with the problem of terrorism. The ordinance also defines terrorist organisation indulging in terrorist acts and provides for their ban under a prescribed procedure. Under POTO, "Section 14 provides a new provision which makes it obligatory to furnish information in respect of a terrorist offence. Failure to furnish the information called for or deliberately furnishing false information to investigating officer shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years or fine or both. The investigating officer can call for such information only with prior approval in writing of an officer not below the rank of Superintendent of Police".38

Meanwhile, the journalist community in Manipur strongly condemned against POTO 2001, which poses significant danger to press freedom. The press in Manipur is going to be much worse after the POTO comes into force for very obvious reasons. The media both print and electronic will be made more vulnerable, all for doing it's perfectly legitimate job of newsgathering.39 As protest against POTO, the entire journalists took a mass silent rally to the streets on 5th Nov. 2001 and a memorandum also given to the President of India. In it the
All Manipur working Journalist Union (AMWJU) expressed strong apprehension at those sections of the ordinance, which will directly affect journalist working in conflict areas like Manipur, where, it noted, the police has misused even laws like the Public Disturbance Act. All the local dailies published in the state kept the editorial column blank on November 7, 2001 as a mark of protest against the terrorism ordinance. Editors of different local dailies expressed the apprehension that freedom will be curtailed under POTO, 2001.

The editor of *Imphal Free Press* in its editorial on November 15, 2001 stated that “POTO seems to totally negate the govt. of India’s earlier stance that insurgency, is a political problem, needing to be ultimately tackled and put to rest politically. POTO mandates journalist to share information on insurgents with the authorities. In case of the journalist, who acts as the communication bridge between different sections of the society, there is a difference. It will amount to burning this bridge, for once it becomes known confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, Journalism will be reduced, without its consent, to bumbling booby traps with flanks exposed, that even a mouse would ignore”.

Condemning POTO the editorial column of *Sangai Express* on November 5, 2001 also explained: “Manipur is reeling under Armed Forces Special Powers Act for the past many years. Under the Act called by many as “draconian law”, there are allegations of violation of human rights by security forces while dealing with the entire people of Manipur have been voicing demand for scrapping of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from Manipur. *Irom Sharmila Chanu*, a young woman has been on indefinite hunger strike more than one year demanding lifting of the Act. The Govt. might have valid reasons for miserably failed to provide safeguards against violation of the Act. Given the track records of misuse of laws and power in Manipur by Govt. forces, there is no
guarantee that POTO will not be misused by the security forces, despite Centre’s attempt to allay the fear in the minds of the people.”

4.1.5.1.2 Treatment to Media-Persons

In his column ‘Between the Lines’ Bijoy Kakchingtabam, the renowned journalist once wrote: “We operate in a war zone and casualties are expected, but the offences against the journalists are not straight forwarded. There is nothing deliberate and outrightly vehement about the way they have been targeted. If this was not so, it would have been all a part of the dangerous game being played out in the state, and journalists too would have taken self-casualties sportingly. The reality is far from this. Newsmen are deliberately harassed and newspersons are sorted out and harangued in all conceivable ways, direct and indirect. What is even more atrocious is that the govt. has simply refused to respond to the demand by journalists’ community to look into the matter and have the guilty punished after establishing the facts of the matter”.

Another passage from the editorial column of IFP (27.12.2000) may be quoted here to understand the situation: “Nobody is saying that no pressmen can get hurt. Pressmen in other parts of the world have suffered worse fates. In covering war or semi war zones, as the case certainly is in Manipur, probability of pressmen suffering injuries of worse is high. However, it also needs to be emphasised that no pressmen would have protested had the injuries been caused without any intent. They would merely have been treated as tragedies, unfortunate but with little room for anybody’s remorse. An occupational hazard that all those who work into the profession are willingly exposed to the attacks were deliberate, and in fact the attackers became even more contemptuous when the reporters produced their identity cards. This is what insulted and infuriated the press community. What made the entire episode even more atrocious was the fact that
the attacks had come from supposedly disciplined, uniformed forces, which ought
to understand the significance of press identity cards, issued by government
recognised media houses, or in the case of many, by the government’s own
department of publicity and public relations, DIPR, and which incidentally also
bear the national insignia of the Ashok Pillar”.

Condemning the assaults of media persons in the state, the editorial
column of Sangai Express (24.1.01) becomes critical: “The Journalist
Community in the state have always boycott the Government information against
inaction taken by the Government over frequent cases of assault of media persons
by members of the state force. During the agitation the media persons were
accused of bias and playing politics in favour of the Opposition parties. The
prevailing fluid political situation may be one of the factors for the accusation, but
we have no other option to shake the Government out of its stupor. Despite
repeated assurances no concrete step was taken. No one is above the law,
including police personnel and journalists. If the journalists, who were assaulted
had done something against the law then let them face the music. At the same
time, if the personnel involved in the assault cases are guilty then let the law take
its own course”.

The statements of three renowned media-personalities mentioned above,
are some of the evidences, which have brought the issues in light. Some definite
cases (not all), occurred during nineties and after, are on record here (Table-4.1).

The condemnations from different organisation and association over the
arrest of an editor as noted below, (on some particular cases) are however some
bright examples for the solidarity of the media-lovers.42
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>By whom</th>
<th>For what</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<td>(1)</td>
<td>Konung Sanatomba, Editor Kangla Lampung (monthly), Imphal</td>
<td>Gunned down</td>
<td>Unidentified Persons</td>
<td>For publishing some items</td>
<td>Matamgi Yakairel, Ed. Aug 25, 2000</td>
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<td>(1993)</td>
<td>M. Sujeshor, Reporter Toknga (D)</td>
<td>Assaulted</td>
<td>Police Personnel</td>
<td>For collecting Information</td>
<td>Record file AMWJU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. Kheda, Photo journalist Poknapham (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>17 Assam Rifles</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1998)</td>
<td>Puyam Thouba, Reporter Panthungaunam (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>17 Rastriya Rifle</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1998)</td>
<td>S. Nanda, Reporter IFP (D) &amp; L. Kheda, Photo Journalist, Poknapham (D) Ringo, Reporter Naharolgi Thoudang (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>7 Assam Rifle</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1999)</td>
<td>W. Shyjmai, Editor, Kangleipakki Meira (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Unidentified personnel</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1999)</td>
<td>Laishram Ibomcha, Reporter Kangleipakki Meira (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Volunteers, AMSU</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1999)</td>
<td>W. Sachindra, Reporter Nongaliska (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Security Personnel</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1999)</td>
<td>Laitrohlu Ulmar, Editor Shau (D)</td>
<td>Gunned Down</td>
<td>Unidentified Persons</td>
<td>For publishing some items</td>
<td>Matamgi Yakairel, Ed Aug 25 2k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2000)</td>
<td>N. Biren, Editor Naharolgi Thoudang (D) &amp; Th. Ibeysima (44 Yr old social worker)</td>
<td>Arrested and case registered</td>
<td>State Police</td>
<td>For delivery of Public speech &amp; Publication of the same</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2000)</td>
<td>K. Sarat, Reporter IFP (D) &amp; M. Romeo, Reporter Poknapham (D) (Jiribam Correspondent)</td>
<td>Assauld</td>
<td>Manipur Rifle (IRI) 12</td>
<td>For collecting information</td>
<td>Record file AMWJU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2000)</td>
<td>G. Dimit Sharma, Photo Journalist Naharolgi Thoudang (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Police personnel</td>
<td>do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2000)</td>
<td>S. Sunita, Woman Reporter Matamgi Yakairel (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>IRB personnel</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2001)</td>
<td>Editor, Times of India</td>
<td>Threatened for 'ban'</td>
<td>RPF</td>
<td>For publishing Some items</td>
<td>IFF, May 3 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2002)</td>
<td>K. Madhumangol, Editor Prajatantra (D) Koijam Imoba, Reporter Prajatantra (D)</td>
<td>Assauld</td>
<td>Workers of the candidate during election</td>
<td>For collecting information</td>
<td>Record file AMWJU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2002)</td>
<td>Robert J Bait, Reporter Matamgi Yakairel (D)</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Assam Rifle</td>
<td>For collecting Information</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. The Reporter’s Forum Manipur (REFORM) and many organisations in the state strongly condemned and deplored the arrest.

II. 18 hour general strike was called from midnight of April 17 to 6 p.m. of 18th April by committee for Democratic Rights. Many organisations support the bandh.

III. State journalists have threatened to surrender their press I card if the State Govt. does not withdraw the case lodged against the editor.

IV. Journalist Front Manipur (JFM) submitted a memorandum to the Governor against the arrest. It said, “There is no precedence of arresting a Journalist or an editor for covering a public event. It is an unhealthy precedent and pose a serious threat to the freedom of the press enshrined in the constitution.”

V. JFM stated that according to the guidelines of the Press Council of India if the Govt. feels that any writing or reporting is seditious, it should first serve a show cause notice to the editor concerned instead of picking up and dumping in jail.

VI. The Indian Federation of Small and Medium Newspaper of Manipur state committee has taken strong exceptions to the arrest.

VII. The Committee to Protect Journalist (CPJ), New York, in a faxed message to Chief Minister W. Nipamacha on April 20 questioned the constitutionality of the Statute under which the editor have been arrested on charge on sedition.
VIII. The JFM in a meeting decided to suspend publication of all the daily papers on May 1 and to boycott all Govt. activities and ruling members.

4.1.5.2 Association of Journalists

Professional Association is a necessity not only for the growth and development of the profession but also for the protection of the professionals from many attacks, which are not lawful. The media persons of the existing period of the history of journalism in Manipur have felt the need of such forum. As a result, the All Manipur Working Journalist Union (AMWJU) has been born in 1974 and affiliated to the Indian Federation of Working Journalists Union, New Delhi. However, there are other forums also in Manipur, which are concerned with the journalists and journalism of Manipur. Some of such organisations are Committee on Protection of Journalists Manipur (CPJ); All Manipur Columnists Union (AMCU); Manipur Press Club; Reporters Forum, Manipur (REFORM); Journalist Front, Manipur (JFM); Editors’ Forum, Manipur; All Manipur Newspaper Sales and Distributor Association etc. The objectives of AMWJU, as amended on 1st May 1998 by the Special General Body Meeting are:

➤ To encourage and promote study and research in the field of Journalism.

➤ To encourage the setting up of journalist institutions to provide training and research in various field of Journalism.

➤ To establish and maintain a library catering to the needs of various organizations and students of Journalism.

➤ To award Scholarship and prizes to deserving students of Journalism.

➤ To inculcate sense of nationalism in the people through various means of publications like journals, newspapers, magazines, books etc.
➢ To uphold the Dignity and Freedom of the press in all aspects of functioning.

➢ To promote and maintain the highest standards of professional conduct and integrity and to raise the status of members of the profession and Journalism.

➢ To strive for the betterment of working conditions of Journalist; especially Salary, Tenure of office and Conditions of service and for prevention of socially unrelated automation.

➢ To institute an employment and emergency help fund and Journalists? Benefit fund for the members of the union.

➢ To safeguard and promote the interests of Journalists in all circumstances including securing employment and prevention and protection from harassment including threat in the course of journalistic duty.

All the Journalists’ Union in the state have always stood against the assault of any media person by any body may it be Govt., security personnel, or army or any other group. The area of protests are normally observed in:

- stopping publication of government press releases or advertisements and functions/ programmes involving ministers, bureaucrats and the ruling political parties;

- boycotting press conference;

- condemning the assaults through publication;

- writing and publishing articles / papers on assaults;

- keeping blank the editorial column; and

- Condemning on editorial column.

The relevance of ‘association’ to the journalists in Manipur has excellently been highlighted by one editor (IFP Editorial 17.1.01) in his column: “Journalists by
and large tend to be individual and hence Journalists Union remains more of clubs than unions in the sense of a hard bargaining trade union that we have all come to associate the idea of a union with Journalists union hence have been devices for people in the profession regularly come together and exchange notes or else unwind the tensions of their work, which are not mean by any standard. Competing amongst each other for exclusives, choosing very strict deadlines, exposed to all the hazards of having to be at trouble spots, and at the end of the day, realizing that the monetary worth of the Jobs they do is never good enough and is outweighed heavily by the hardship they have to go through. In spite of all this, the profession still continues to attract bright young men and women. By necessity, journalists in Manipur are today being driven to the path of tough unionism. The past year has seen some of the most atrocious attacks on those in the profession by both the govt. and its fast multiplying parallel counterparts. The attacks by underground elements were regrettable, but it is by the govt. and its various instruments, that have hurt the most. After all the journalists community always have considered itself as one of the vital props of the establishment that the govt. represents. However, despite strong protests lodged, the govt. has chosen to keep absolutely mum and nothing, forcing the journalistic community to take to the streets and take up other measures.”

4.1.5.3 Code of Conduct

Another important event in the movement of journalism in Manipur is happened when the AMWJU at a general body meeting on Oct 8, 2001 framed a code of conduct for media-persons and media organizations in order to perform their professional duty smoothly. Some of the clauses of the code are: 43

a) No claims made by unidentified sources/person(s) over telephone will be entertained. In case of identification, editors of all newspapers/periodicals/monthly will decide.
b) No press conference called by any individual or organisation (s) without official invitation will be accepted.

c) All press releases of any organisation(s) have to be duly signed with seal and on organisational letterhead.

d) All press releases should be delivered to the press before 8 p.m. for morning dailies, 3 p.m. for eveningers and 4 p.m. for cable news channels.

e) In case of conflict/controversies between two or more parties, views of parties concerned will be given equal coverage. If the arguments and counter arguments raised become harmful to the state and could claim human lives, the AMWJU reserved the right to censor.

f) If any organisation(s)/individual would like to retract a press releases of handout issued by them for any reason, the said organisation(s)/individual should officially approach the editor in person with duly signed letter by the same person who signed the press releases.

g) If any individual/organisation(s) have any grievances (except petty or minor matters which can be solved by the editor) against any newspaper, the concerned should first approach the AMWJU to address the problem.

h) All newspapers/media persons will follow “The norms of Journalistic Conduct” as laid down in Press Council in India (PCI) rules along with AMWJU’S code of conduct.

i) Editors are directed from sensationalizing the news report indulge in sensationalism.

j) Editors will bear responsibility for mistake of omission and commission appearing in their newspapers.

k) All Editors have the right to censor/ delete any news report or press releases or interviews or press conference, which could creates communal tension or group clashes.

l) In case of violation of ‘code of conduct’ as laid down by AMWJU by reporter(s) newspaper(s) the AMWJU will take punitive action against the reporter/ newspaper. (IFP 9th Oct 2001)
4.1.5.4 Training Programme

The intensive use of latest technology, the extension of the coverage and the contribution in the field has made a big impact on the profession of journalism. The other pressure comes from the user end – their expectations have constantly been raising for more sophisticated high quality journalistic services. This pressures call for more highly qualified and trained professionals. The initial education and experience are therefore not enough. It needs to be supplemented throughout a professional career with continuing education and training that enable professionals to develop and refine their skills and insights.

Such opportunities, which were unavailable, are now partially available in Manipur also. For the promotion and development of Journalism in Manipur, Directorate of Information and Public Relation (Govt. of Manipur) imparted certain training courses from 1992 till date in various field of Journalism. A list of the training programs along with the duration may be highlighted below (Table 4.2):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of the course</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Orientation course in Journalism</td>
<td>Two week (19-31 October)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Basic course in News Reporting</td>
<td>Two week (5-18 April)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Certificate course in Journalism</td>
<td>6 month (20th May onwards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Basic course in News Reporting</td>
<td>14 Day (7-26 Aug)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Basic course in News Reporting</td>
<td>14 Day (1-17 Sept)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Basic course in Sports Journalism and Public Relations</td>
<td>16 Day (18 Feb-17 March)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Basic course in News Reporting</td>
<td>14 Day (29th Jan-11 Feb)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DIPR record file (Govt. of Manipur).

Adding to the above mentioned programmes, ‘Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication, Pune’ was requested by the Governor of Manipur (Ved Marwa)
himself at one seminar held on 7th Feb 2000 at G. M. Hall, Imphal to start a branch of 
the Institute in Imphal to train the interested media persons.

Reaaising the necessity, the IFP has proposed "the Govt. of Manipur to 
introduce an institute for mass communication to raise the communicative skills of 
not just media professional, but also of the rest of the intelligentsia. And can also 
introduce mass communication as a subject in schools and colleges in the state. There 
would be a steady outflow from these institutes of young professionals whose skills 
can give the much needed fillip to the status of journalism in Manipur" (Editorial 
28.4.2001).

4.1.5.5 The Manisana Wage Board

How is the economic-status of the media-persons associated with local 
newspapers? Certain question relevant to the media-persons are required to be 
answered: "Are the journalists, the reporters, the sub-editors and the editors attached 
with the local newspapers poorly paid? Are their pay package and their salaries 
commensurate with the ungodly working hours and hostile conditions they work in? 
Or more specifically are the proprietors of the newspapers getting rich at the expense 
of the journalists they employ?" The media itself has given the answer: "The 
pressmen in the state cannot afford a lots of problems. Their salaries are meagre and 
Wage Boards recommendations, which have so very often been described as 
letdowns and betrayals by pressmen in the metropolitan cities, are far away dreams 
for them. Pressmen in the state cannot even afford to be ill, and in many offices, they 
work seven-days a week. Absence by one or two can have whole organisation 
tottering. The columnist of Imphal Free Press, Naarda Ningthouja pointed out, even 
bandh callers discriminate against them by exempting them and making them work 
even on bandh days. It is in such a situation that complaint that even the holiday-a-
month average of the Manipur press is too much". The truth is that the economic
status of local media-persons in the state is very low comparing with other in Metropolitan City. In this backdrop (in August 2002) the Labour Ministry of State, Z Mangaibou takes a decision to study the possibility of implementing the Manisana Wage Board and makes some of the major newspaper houses adopt the recommendations of the wage board. However, the question before the newspaper organisation in the state is, should the circulation figure be the core criteria for deciding that the newspaper should come under the purview of the wage board? Moreover is there any mechanism to check whether the circulation figure submitted by the newspaper has been declared or not? Has the Labour Department studied the advertisement rates or more specifically when was the last time the advertisement rates were reviewed by the state Government? Advertisement is the oxygen of any publishing venture and without advertisement it would be virtually impossible to sustain newspaper or a magazine. With this view, the Manipur Mail (editorial column, dated 11 August 2002) has suggested, “the revenue of the local daily papers in Manipur need to be enhanced to enable it to stand its own. The DIPR, Govt. of Manipur, which has not revised the advertisement rate for the last one and half decade, should think of revising the rate of advertisement to be given to the local daily papers”.

Regarding the implementation of Manisana Wage Board in Manipur, The Sangai Express (editorial column, dated 10th August 2002) has expressed that “the best course for the state Govt is to set up a committee the ground realities of the newspaper houses and the working conditions of the journalists, and then categorize the newspapers, and draw up the pay recommendations”.

4.1.5.6 Local Journalism: The Advancement?

How matured is the journalism of Manipur today? Do the local-dailies provide qualitative reporting/ analysis to the readers? Have the professionals been
doing justice to their profession? Are they able to transform the dailies into the weapon for development of the people and the state? To find answers to all these queries are not easy. Since the scope of the present work is limited, no attempt will be made here to find the answers. However, comments from some media persons may be relevant to understand the trend. R.K. Lakhikant, one of the renowned ‘Leader Writers’ in the editorial column of *IFP,* thinks: “The situation of the development of Journalism in Manipur today remains more or less the same from the past. There were no writers in the state who can convey the spirit of Manipur, its trials and tribulations, to the rest of the nation and the world. Journalism is known to grow along with the experiences and writings of the Journalists over a period of time so that the successful ones amongst them are trendsetters in their profession and command a large readership. But nothing of this sort has happened in Manipur. Few writers have made a mark in the area of drama writing and poetry, but journalism, as a genre is still primitive in the state. This is quite surprising because in other fields of performing arts, Manipur has made tremendous contributions at the national and international arena. If the Journalists themselves can be excused to a certain extent for the dearth of in-depth analysis of the social problems because their job grind leaves them with little time or energy, there is also a surprising dearth of other sections of the intelligentsia that is keen to make their thoughts and ideas known. This is evident also in the paucity of good topical and analytical articles that appear in the press. Professional jargon and articles full of verbiage makes reading dull and at times impossible. As much as the people of Manipur are inhibited about writing, they are also equally averse to reading. Hence, it will not be all too assumptive that our society in general is not as well informed as desired. In the information age that this century has been dubbed to be, this can have tragic consequences. Our lack of information has made us back benchers.”

One may have some
reservation over such statement. And, since, there is no scope here to examine the matter, let us find some positive sides or other side of the coin as pointed out by other media persons of the different background.

Late N. Tombi Singh*, one of the pioneers of journalism in Manipur and editor of an English daily said, ‘the local dailies, both English and Manipuri are playing great role and the circulation, news content, standard of the newspapers have also been improved due to competition and with the introduction of offset printing and the increase of literacy percentage among the people’. Yambem Laba, a freelance journalist of Manipur who often writes in national dailies, feels that ‘the newspapers in Manipur have now become daily necessity and readers, more in number, are looking forward to objective reporting, logical analysis and fearless criticism’. Another young journalist, Pradip Phanjoubam* the editor of English daily IFP, too, opines that ‘the media in Manipur has made great strides. Today most of the major newspaper in the state are printed on web offset and some have even gone colour. In terms of professionalism too, a number of talented young journalists, committed to their profession, have emerged’.

4.1.5.7 Women in Journalism

During 1950s, the Manipuri women started entering in to the field of literature by contributing poems, novels, short stories etc. The list of early women-writers includes the names of Ramani Devi, S. Sarju Devi, M.K. Binodini, S.Shyama Devi, T. Thoibi Devi, Kh. Pramodini and others. M.K. Binodini and T. Thoibi won Sahitya Academy award in 1979 and 1989 respectively. It may be worthy to note that these early women writers had created a new culture for

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*Interviews with N. Tombi on 01.11.2000
*Interview with Yambem Laba on 18.08.2000
Manipuri women in the field of literature. In course of time, a host of new young women writers are found in the field of literature. But, no record is available so far regarding the participation of Manipuri women in journalism even during 1980s.

The Sahitya Academy Award winner, M.K. Binodini* has explained the issue in the following words “In the earlier days women were lagged behind in the field of education and the literacy rate of female population was very low. As a result, this led to the limitation and lack of opportunities for development of women in journalism. But the Manipuri women took active role in any conflicting situation. The Ima Market in Khwairamband Bazar, the only vendor in the world run by women, is the unique place where women of Manipur gathered and business transaction are carried on. It, not only forms a place for business, but also for gathering and disseminating information”.

Chitra Ahanthem,* the renowned columnist, has examined critically the women participation in journalism: “Ideally, there should not be any distinction or even categorization of men journalists and women journalists. But in Manipur, where journalism is not based on a professional background, the so-called women journalists are more myth than reality. Till date, the few women reporters writing for newspapers in Manipur are given ‘soft’ topics and events: functions, press conferences, culture, education, health etc. The more serious issues: politics, crime, and legal beats, security/defence etc are all assigned to men. Overall, most journalists in Manipur do not have any formal training in journalism and the few women in the field have the added disadvantage of the lack of social acceptance of the profession as a career option. The poor resource setting in this profession translating into low earning levels also discourage women to take up journalism. Women in this profession have become visible only recently because of the above factors. It will

* Spoken at an Interview with the present researcher (during March-April 2003).
take quite some time for this profession to find favour from people when women take it up as a choice of career. This depends solely on breaking journalism is a male domain.”

However, some of the names found often in the print medias in recent times as journalist/columnist/writers are I. Ashalata (Poknapham), S. Sonia (Poknapham), Aruna (IFP), Juli Sobha (IFP), L. Geeta (IFP), Chitra Ahanthem (IFP), Gangarani (IFP), Darshini (Sangai Express), Nomita Khongbantabam (Sangai Express), Ratneshwori Goshami, Chanu Kiran, Suchitra Potsangbam, S. Sunita (Yakairol), Dr. Jamini and others.

4.1.5.8 Ownership of Newspapers

There are different types of ownership of newspapers. These may be classified as newspapers owned by individuals, societies and associations, firms or partnerships, joint stock companies, Government (Central/State), cooperative societies, educational institutions, international organisations, political parties, companies- public or private etc. Common Ownership Units (COU) is among the more prominent types of ownership. The office of the RNI defines COU as a newspaper establishment owning two or more news-interest newspapers of which at least one is a daily. Leading example of COU’s are Bennet Conman and Co. Ltd., Indian Express Pvt. Ltd. Ananda Bazar Patrika Pvt. Ltd., Hindustan Times and Allied Publication (Public Ltd.), Kasturi and Sons Pvt. Ltd.48

In Manipur, most of the newspaper-establishments are owned by individuals. However, there are some papers (party organs) owned by different political organisations also. Some of the dailies like Prajatantra, Simanta Patrika, Ngashi, Manipur Times are organs of the Congress Party. The daily Khollao is the official organ of the CPI, and the daily Anouba Samaj belongs to the Socialist Party of India.
4.1.5.9 Press and Registration Act

The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 which is the oldest existing Press Laws in India has been amended to meet certain specific situation of the Press. Later, in 1988, a Bill amending the Act was introduced in Parliament. The Bill gave powers to the district authorities to enter the premises of a newspaper establishment. The Preamble of the Act says that the Act is “for the regulation of printing presses and newspapers for the preservation of copies of books and newspapers printed in India and for the registration of such books and newspapers”. Therefore, in order to get the figures about the press in India, there should be a Registrar of Newspapers to submit to the Govt. a report every year on the press in India. And also a Deputy Registrars under the Press Registrars in every State. 49

For running a local newspaper, the District Magistrate has to refer the proposed title to the RNI for clearance and registration. Once registered, the local daily has to maintain account books as per directive of RNI. However, most of the local newspapers do not maintain these accounts, as they are aware of the facilities. 50

The number of Newspapers/Periodicals published in Manipur recorded in the Statistical Abstract of India during the year 1978-99 is shown in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dailies</th>
<th>Tri/DiWeekly</th>
<th>Weeklies</th>
<th>Fort-Nightlies</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Quartermly</th>
<th>Annually</th>
<th>Other Periodicals</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Abstract, India
4.1.5.10 Media Environment of Neighbouring States (North-East Region)

Journalism in the north-east can be far developed when we remember the saying of British Army Lt. General Michael Rose, when he visited Kohima to pay homage to their Second World War heroes that “You know when British soldiers were around this region, we didn’t hear much about media activity. Had there been media persons from this region during those days, things would have been quite different by now”.51 Although there were limited media persons and few language papers, it did not live up to the expectation of the people. And even though they are working under a typical situation in the north-east India, it can not be denied that the face of the region has change drastically over the years in a variety of ways because of the rapid growth of media activity.

The medias in Nagaland are also partly responsible in bridging the gap between the Government of India and the Naga underground organisations and today not only the people of this country but also the whole world witnessed how the political process is going on. But it is regrettable that sometimes media persons who were all long discharging their modest duties for the service of the people also faced the wrath of multi-corners-underground organisations, government agencies including security forces.52 Recently, in Assam, the editors of the dailies *Dainik Agradoot* and *Dainik Ajir Batari* and ‘Journalist Action Committee’ has submitted a report53 to the Press Council of India stating that “there is no freedom of the press in the state of Assam and that the journalists are being subjected to illegal, inhuman and uncivilized harassment by the police and Government authorities”. However, the unsavoury and undemocratic situation prevailing in the sphere of Journalism in Assam leading to complaints, and unethical surfacing of socio-political tension, is not an even-specific issue of the present. It dates back to the Assam movement when the AASU and the language agitation rocked the state in the seventies. The press spontaneously supported the
cause of the agitation. Those who were opposed to the movement came under pressure but atrocities were perpetrated on the press.

Emphasising the solidarity of the media-professionals in the north east region, Okenjeeet Sandham, a noted media-person in Manipur pointed out.54 “Today a number of media persons from the north-east India working with various national papers and magazines. However, these national papers and magazines have started giving adequate spaces for the north-eastern region and the face of the centre towards north east India has in fact changed a lot. Although there is lack of proper attention for the well being of the media fraternity in the region by the national media organizations, the media fraternity appears to be coming closer and in real sense of term they have to fight collectively for their common goal irrespective of their casts, creed and religion, because the vestige of this region lies in their collective approach whether one likes it or not.”

4.2 Observations

The above mentioned narration brings out different phases of journalism in Manipur during the last century (i.e. from the end of 19th century till recent time). Some observations as noted below may be made from this episode.

- The history of journalism in Manipur is viewed at different five periods.
- The first daily-newspaper, Dainik Manipur was appeared in 1933.
- Thongbam Gourachandra Singh was the first editor of local-daily.
- Printing became popular when machines were available (the first printing press in the state was Churachand Printing Press).
- A sizable number of scholars, social reformers and political-leaders joined the profession and used medias as instruments for social-reform, literary-advancement and political-activities.
The publications of local-dailies flourished during the seventies onwards (particularly after when Manipur achieved statehood).

A number of dailies/weeklies in English and in tribal dialects (particularly from hill-districts) were also published.

The journalists had never mind to work for ‘freedom of press’ all through the time.

The local-dailies were always found to extend its support to the growth and development of local language and literature, local culture and political-activities.

Dissemination of information for the welfare of the people had been the guiding-spirit of all the local-dailies.

The solidarity of the media-persons through a number of associations strengthened the movement of journalism.

As observed, the present episode has not examined the contents of the dailies in detail. The next section will explore the same with a critical-analysis and try to find out the relevance of the dailies as information-disseminator.

References:


4. Ibid.


34. Quoted from *Sangai Express*. April 29, 2000.


42. Quoted from *Sangai Express*. April 16-29, 2000 and May 4-6, 2000.


46. *Op cit*, p. 44.


54. Okenjeet, S. *Op cit.*