The mass media particularly the newspapers in the complex society of to-day are playing an important role in the Socialist as well as Capitalist countries. Irrespective of whether the Government is democratic or totalitarian, the need for mass media is there. The only difference and this is a vital difference - is that in the case of totalitarian countries, mass media function under a system of total control in which free expression of opinion is not allowed while in democratic countries the method used is one of persuasion.

However, the mass media specially the newspapers all over the world have been playing a vital role in the political, social and economic fields. They act as the catalysts in bringing about changes in the country. They also act as the spokesman of the people, play sometimes the role of the Opposition both inside and outside Parliament, educate the people and detect the breakdown in the social and political systems.

On the other hand the mass media can mislead the people and nation by suppressing the news, the publication of which may be vitally important in the interest of the country. They create a sensation by high-lighting the most important news in the front or prominent page of the newspapers. Sometimes, one-sided exaggerated statement is repeated in different forms with different captions. Thus make-up of the main page or
important space is devoted to the spate of adjectival
exuberance and news of much greater importance is
jettisoned to the less important page. The impact of this
kind of 'slant' and 'splash' make-up on the society is
dangerous and harmful. Significantly, the newspapers with
broader and neutral outlook will treat all the news only
for their proper news value.

It is in this context that the present study of
the newspapers of Assam from 1904 to 1978 begins. The purpose
of the study is to examine the growth, and economic viability
of the Press and also to evaluate the other roles of the
newspapers of Assam which have completed 133 years of
chequered history since the birth of the first newspaper
"Arunodoi" in 1846. During the period under study many
important events took place in Assam, as for example, the
language movement, creation of separate Naga and Hill State
(Nagaland and Meghalaya). Moreover, during this period
Assam also passed through political vicissitudes resulting
from the General Elections which led to the change of
Ministry of both in the State and Centre. Being a student
of journalism, my main focus of study will be the treatment
of these important events by the newspapers of Assam. To
arrive at the avowed objective, it would be necessary to
deal with the organisations of these newspapers and also
their ownership and control.

Although the Assamese journalism has completed a long
period of its existence yet there has been no study by any
researcher or any organisation like Assamiya Sahitya Sabha
to evaluate its importance in the development of socio-political and literary consciousness of the Assamese people or the people of Assam. Only a few historians and Assamese literatures made some casual references to the Assamese Press. Scattered facts, with little or no figure and certainly no inference drawn from these, do not make a history of the Press. Little attention has been focussed on the role of the newspapers of Assam in the political system and on the complex relationship between the Press and the Government, the Press and the Public. This study is a first attempt to fill up this gap.

I chose to study the subject from 1934-73 because during this period all the important events affecting the State of Assam and India as a whole had taken place. I have taken different types of events in different chapters for broader examination of the role of the Press from various angles. The method adopted is primarily historical and analytical but resort has also been had to the 'content analysis' and 'interview'.

Since the Assamese and English language newspapers have been dominant with their large circulation, I have chosen to study only the Assamese dailies and weeklies and English newspapers published in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Hence the newspapers published from the district of Cachar, which has been dominated by the Bengali-speaking people, have been excluded from this study.
The present study has been done on the basis of the old copies of the Assamese language- dailies and weeklies and English newspapers such as the Assam Tribune and Assam Express - of the relevant period that has been taken for consideration in this project. The old copies of the newspapers were available at the National Library, Calcutta, and at various offices of the newspaper enterprises at different districts of Assam. I have also gone through the several records of the Government of Assam in connection with this study. Whatever comments have been made in this study is purely on the basis of these records. It is hoped that more facts when unearthed would not bias this study.

The study has been divided into the following chapters:

Chapter I which is an introduction to the subject deals with the value and role of the mass communication.

Chapter II presents a brief history of the Press in India in general and Assam in particular up to 1954. It also deals in details with the role of the Christian missionaries who heralded the vernacular Press in India. An analysis of the aims of the Press in Assam before and after independence has also been made in this chapter.

Chapter III examines the pattern of the growth of the Press in Assam in relation to the socio-economic factors such as education, industrialisation, urbanisation and per capita income. An analysis of the style and content of the newspapers also helps determine the various roles of the Press, their
attitudes towards the society and the Government. It is equally important to know not only what that content was but what factors governed the choice of the content. It is very difficult to ascertain which feature or editorial of a newspaper is a consequence of which pressure. The style and the contents are a product of compromise of frequently competing forces. The style and the content have a relation with the political system of a country. It varies alternatively with the change of Ministry or Government. This chapter also deals with the economics, organisation and ownership of the Press since these are fundamental to the very existence of a newspaper. Who and what controls the contents of a newspaper - the editor, the proprietors, or the level of advertisement or a belief in the importance of scoops?

Chapter IV examines the language movement which vitally affects the society and people. The process of integration is hampered by the communal tension and violence as it results in hardening the suspicions and prejudices. The study of this explosive problem may contribute to an understanding and even solution of the most acute and baffling problem of Indian politics - the unending human conflicts which raged the country in the past and is continuing even to-day.

Chapter V deals with another important problem - the Hill People's demand that had already affected the rich soil of Assam. The political map of Assam underwent tremendous change during the past one decade. The study of this problem may help trace
out the forces working behind the rebels.

Chapter VI intends to examine the role of the Press on the important national events like J.P. movement in Bihar, 1974, the Allahabad Judgment of 1978, and pre-election scene after the lifting of the Press Censorship in 1977.

Chapter VII - the concluding chapter sums up the findings and draws appropriate conclusions from them.