Chapter II

JOURNALISM IN ASSAM
2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an attempt to discuss in-depth journalism of Assam in its historical, cultural, developmental and professional context. Keeping in view of the objectives of the study, the researcher took note of systematic and truly longitudinal observational studies offered by veteran journalists, historians and litterateurs that carefully tracked changes in Assam journalism over time.

2.2 THE ASSAM STATE

The word 'Assam' as interpreted by some scholars is derived from the Sanskrit word Asoma meaning peerless or unparalleled. But the widely accepted opinion of the academic circles today is that the term has come from the original name of the Ahoms, who ruled the land for about six hundred years prior to its annexation by the British.

The gateway to the Northeastern region, Assam, for all practical purposes, shall be the window to the region, especially in the current context of the research study. The state is close to India's international borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan and cultures, peoples and climate with South-East Asia, important elements in India's "Look East" Policy. Also located south of the eastern Himalayas, Assam comprises the Brahmaputra and the Barak river valleys and the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills.

In 2001, the census recorded literacy in Assam at 63.30 percent with male literacy at 71.30 and female at 54.60 percents. Urbanization rate was recorded at 12.90 percent. Growth of population in Assam has experienced a very high trajectory since the mid-decades of the 20th century. With an area
of 78,438 square kilometers, Assam currently is almost equivalent to the size of Ireland or Austria.

Assamese and Bodo are the major indigenous and official languages of the state while Bengali holds official status in particular districts in the Barak Valley. There is one more Dialect known as Goalpariya which is widely spoken by the inhabitants of Assam, North East and adjoining parts of Assam, Goalpariya language is also known in different names such as Goalpariya in Goalpara, Rajbongshi/Kamatapuri language. (India, 2010).

Surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the east and Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram on the south, Assam is the largest among all the eight Northeastern states with a population (according to 2001 Census) of 26.66 million (2,66,55,528) with 4.91 million households.

Though the study is focused to journalism in Assam, in order to understand the social, political, economic and historical perspectives of the region, we need to look at the Northeastern states as a whole, not Assam as a state in isolation.

The region covering a vast area of 2,63,000 square kilometers is a home to 40 million people spread over eight States- Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram, and Sikkim. Each of these states has its own history but together they also have some commonalities. Five of them were directly or indirectly part of Assam in the British age. Only the princely states of Manipur and Tripura were outside its zone of influence. Their next common feature is their isolation from the rest of India to which their only access by land is through a narrow corridor in West Bengal. Such isolations have several social, economic and political implications. The fact that not many in the country know about the northeastern states is the direct result of governmental insensitivity, administrative bungling or insensitivity of the mainstream India. It is often argued that due to insensitiveness of media in giving adequate coverage to the Northeast, the Government of India left the area unattended and neglected the region for decades. This total negligence of the Government of India towards the Northeastern region was responsible
in giving birth to several underground outfits and with their demands ranging from secession to autonomy and right to self determination. Some organizations like Mizo National Front, which fought for a separate independent nation became over ground and joined the national mainstream. And still as many as 25 armed insurgent organizations are still operating and fighting with the Indian State from the soil of Northeast (51).

Over the past five decades, virtually every state in India's northeast has witnessed the emergence of powerful militia to contest the Indian state's narrative of socio-economic progress and integrating the margins into the "national mainstream." Questions are raised as to why terrorist acts in northeastern India are not being addressed with the same level of depth and engagement, as, for instance, the November 26, 2008 Mumbai Terror Attack. The influx of Bangladeshi migrants into India and to be more specific into the northeastern States including Assam have long been a contentious and controversial issue hitting the headlines every now and then. The issue of ineffective border management and slow pace of detection and deportation of illegal migrants still continues to be an issue unresolved. There has also been a tendency to ignore emerging movements unless it turns volatile. Whether it is the six years long foreigners' movement in Assam or the eight year long fasting of Manipur's Iron Lady, Irom Sharmila for the repeal of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act, of 1958, which gives security forces the authority to use lethal force and legal immunity from independent investigation. These issues are still alive in the hearts and minds of people of the region. Poor governance and lack of accountability is another area which is of immense concern for the northeastern states. Lack of accountability in fast-tracking the completion of national projects like Lumding-Silchar gauge conversion, Gas Cracker Project, Bogibeel rail-cum-road bridge, etc clearly portrays lack of accountability- whither media or government?

The heart the fact lies that each state of the Northeast has a different set of location-specific concerns, grievances which often get blurred in the scheme
of things of media, policy framers and government leaders who are supposed to address these issues.

2.3 JOURNALISM IN INDIA

The growth and development of journalism in India has a chequered history. “The over 200 year history of the Indian press, from the time of Hicky to the Present day, is the history of a struggle for freedom which has not yet ended. There has been alternating periods of freedom and of restrictions on freedom amounting to repression. The pioneering works on the Indian press, like that of Margarita Barns, were stories of arbitrariness and despotism, of reforms and relaxation. The story of the Indian press is a story of steady expansion but also one of press laws” (Rau 1968).

James Augustus Hicky was the founder of India's first newspaper, the Calcutta General Advertiser also known as Hicky's Bengal Gazette, in 1780. Soon other newspapers came into existence in Calcutta and Madras: the Calcutta Gazette, the Bengal Journal, the Oriental Magazine, the Madras Courier and the Indian Gazette. While the India Gazette enjoyed governmental patronage including free postal circulation and advertisements, Hicky's Bengal Gazetteearned the rulers' wrath due to its criticism of the government. In November 1780 its circulation was halted by government decree. Hicky protested against this arbitrary harassment without avail, and was imprisoned. The Bengal Gazette and the India Gazette were followed by the Calcutta Gazette which subsequently became the government's "medium for making its general orders". The Bombay Herald, The Statesmen in Calcutta and the Madras Mail and The Hindu, along with many other rivals in Madras represented the metropolitan voice of India and its people. While Statesman voiced the English rulers' voice, The Hindu became the beacon of patriotism in the South. The Hindu was founded in Madras as a counter to the Madras Mail.

Journalism in India was nurtured by some of the greatest men that India has produced- freedom fighters, social reformers, intellectuals and men of letters who gave their best to its development and growth. The tallest stalwarts of the freedom movement-Mahatma Gandhi, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak,
the social reformers and liberal thinkers Raja Rammohan Roy, Surendranath Bannerji and Gopal Krishna Gokhle were themselves either editors or pioneers in establishing well known newspapers. The history of journalism has, therefore, been inextricably linked with the growth of national consciousness and the progress of freedom movement. In fact journalism nurtured the national consciousness and freedom movement and was in turn nurtured by it.

The growth and development of journalism depends a great deal on people's literacy and education, as well as socioeconomic activities in a given cultural and geographical environment. Towards the close of 19th century, several colleges imparting science and liberal arts education sprang up in major towns of India. A class of intelligentsia came up in the metropolitan cities and industrial towns. Many who belonged to this group felt that the British liberalism and democratic approach were confined to the British islands and that double standards were being followed in the administration of colonies. Between 1860 and 1899, hundreds of newspapers came up demanding freedom of expression and criticizing the repressive measures of the princess and British administrators. Some liberal Englishmen like James Augustus, Sir James Silk Buckingham settled in the British-Indian provinces and the princely states raised their voice against the British administration. (Vilanilam 2005)

The early years of nineteenth century saw Indian press struggling against the regulations meant to restrict its freedom. The first such threat emanated on 13 May 1799 when Wellesley issued guidelines for the papers published in Calcutta which required every printer to print his name at the bottom of the paper and pre-censorship of the papers. The penalty for infringement of the law was to be immediate deportation. In the wake of first war of Independence of 1857, the Governor-General Lord Canning, promulgated 1857 Act, which is also called “Gagging Act (Agarwal & Gupta 2001) ”.

Patriotic movements grew in proportion with the colonial ruthlessness, and a vehicle of information dissemination became a tool for freedom struggle. In
- *Navajagriti (1939)*

*Navajagriti* was the first Hindi weekly newspaper in Assam published in 1939 from Dibrugarh. Its editor was well known social worker, educationist and litterateur Pannalal Rajpurohit. With sincere efforts and hard work, Rajpurohit succeeded in making the newspaper very popular within a very short period.

Unfortunately, with the beginning of the World War, all his efforts stopped and he had to close down the paper before it could complete two years.

- *Tarun Asam (1939-42)*

The Weekly *Tarun Asam* was launched in 1939 by the famous tea planter and businessman of Dibrugarh, Nandeswar Chakravarty. Published from Sadasiva Press, Dibrugarh on 29th July 1939, the paper continued its publication till 1942. Benudhar Sharma, noted litterateur and historian was the editor till its closure.

The founder editor of this newspaper was Tarun Kumar Bhattacharyya, who was earlier the editor of *International Times*, published from Shillong. As *International Times* published many baseless news items of foreign countries, readers lost faith in the paper and was subsequently closed down. Tarun also used faked bylines and datelines of Reporters and location. After joining *Tarun Asam*, Tarun adopted the manipulative technique with imaginary news items. Soon he was dismissed and Benudhar Sharma was appointed as the Editor.

**Discussion:**

- *Tarun Asam* was somewhat different compared to other contemporary newspapers of those times. This newspaper did not take a directly opposite stand to the British Empire nor did support the cause of independence.

- What shot *Tarun Asam* to fame was its distinctive style in news coverage and informative items. In the 29th issue (25th February, 1940), there was a significant news item which is relevant and valuable in the context of Assam. The headline which read: “Only
twenty years are left for the extinction of the Assamese”. There was a graphic illustration containing data of immigrant Muslims; how the number of migrants was increasing in Assam every year was shown. (Mr. C.S. Mulan, 19th July, 1932)

- According to Senior Journalist Santanu Kaushik Barua, the newspaper disappeared owing many reasons, some like lack of attention by Industrialist Nandeswar Chakravarty on the administrative and financial aspects, Second World War broke which resulted in scarcity of newsprint, differences between owner and editor Benudhar Sharma, due to lack of administrative control, agents and distributors found opportunities not to clear payments, thereby weakening it financially, etc.

**Akela (1947 to till date)**

*Akela* is the only Hindi newspaper in Assam to celebrate golden jubilee. It was in the year 1943, when distinguished writer, journalist and social worker Biswanath Gupta began publishing a monthly magazine *Akela* from Kina bazaar Street in Calcutta. However the publication was stopped after a couple of years. During the period, Radhakrishna Khemka, well known social worker of Tinsukia and some of his friends who were in Calcutta was impressed by the with *Akela* and they proposed to publish the paper from Tinsukia. In the meantime Khemka set up a printing press in Tinsukia named Azad Hind Press. It was the backdrop in which publication of *Akela* started from Tinsukia in 1947. *Akela* which became popular within a short time suffered financially due to lack of advertisements. After the death of Biswanath Gupta, his son Prakash Gupta took up the editorial responsibility of the weekly. Even now the paper is in circulation from Tinsukia.

**Discussion**: *Akela* is a not only a symbol of sacrifice. The newspaper despite financial constraints is still holding the spirit of journalism and ethics set by its predecessors and is running within a limited area.
• **Dainik Assamiya (1946-48)**

*Dainik Assamiya* under the editorship of Dev Kanta Borooah first appeared on January 26, 1946 from the very establishment of *Assamiya*. Given that *Nagarar Katha* was not considered as daily in the truest sense, *Dainik Assamiya* happens to be second Assamese daily of Assam. *Dainik Assamiya* was the product of long cherished dream of famous poet and businessman Chandra Kumar Agarwalla of bringing out a daily of *Assamiya*. But his dream did not come true during his lifetime and passed away in 1938. Later, it appeared in 1946 with the headline running as “the daily edition of *Assamiya* established by Chandra Kumar Agarwalla”. After Dev Kanta Borooah, Hrendra Nath Barua assumed editorship of the newspaper. However, the life span of the paper was not a long one. Owing to economic hardship and the worker’s strike *Assamiya* ceased its publication towards the end of 1948. (Source: *Asampran*. Harendra Nath Barua, p.7)

**Discussion:**
- *Dainik Assamiya* is the second step in the modernization of daily journalism in Assamese.
- A band of professional journalist emerged through *Dainik Assamiya* and *The Assam Tribune*. Both these newspapers were the first to make make the use of the teleprinter. (Source: Presidential address, (1975) Seminar of Titabar session of Assam Sahitya Sabha on journalistic literature.

• **Janambhumi (1947 till date) and Dainik Janambhumi (1972 till date)**

The weekly newspaper *Janambhumi* was launched in March 1947 by the Sharma brothers- Debeswar Sharma and Kanak Chandra Sharma of Jorhat. Amongst all the newspapers in Assamese language currently in circulation, *Janambhumi* is the oldest. The newspaper played a significant role in creating a new generation of writers and among the first Assamese newspaper to celebrate its Golden Jubilee.

During the pre-independence days, due to poor means of communication, the people of Upper Assam were deprived of reading a newspaper. It was
with an aim to fulfill the longstanding aspiration of the people; Debeswar Sharma considered the establishment of *Janambhumi* at the dawn of India's Independence. However publishing a newspaper without a dependable press was a big headache. But when Sharma brother approached Darpan press they readily agreed. There was an agreement that Darpan Press would merely print the newspaper and all other liabilities would be borne by Sharma brothers. However, one day without any prior warning, the Sharma brother informed that the newspaper could no longer be published from it. Sharma brothers then shifted to another press named Annada Printing house to ensure continuity in circulation. This arrangement too did not last long. Finally it was in 1949 that Janambhumi Press was born, and since then there was no looking back.

After 25 year of its existence, the *Janambhumi* Group introduced their second newspaper, a daily, under the name of *Dainik Janambhumi*, in the 1st day of June, 1972. On the inaugural day amidst the presence of a host of guests including former Chief Minister of Assam Mahendra Mohan Choudhury, founder Debeswar Sharma announced that a “newspaper can never be anyone’s personal property and as such, the press has also to be public property. Therefore, he declared *Janambhumi* to be a public property.

From its inception, *Dainik Janambhumi* has scrupulously adhered to the ideals of nationalism, and nation building to ensure a strong, healthy and united Assam. It has never allowed itself to be diverted from relentless zeal of rooting out the evils of corruption and communalism from Assam.

**Discussion:** It was the grit of determination of Sharma brothers, who, despite ups and down never stopped publication of a single issue and gave birth to *Janambhumi* Press.

Debeswar Sharma, who was the father figure of the *Janambhumi* group and was a member of the Congress Party. According to review of literatures, Sharma never allowed any of his newspaper to become mouthpiece of the party. On the contrary, he never hesitated to criticize the Congress party when he deemed it proper in the interest of the society
2.4.2 THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PRESS IN ASSAM- AN ANALYSIS

In a few years following Independence, newspapers in Assam changed itself to an industry. The perspective of the papers radically changed. Corruption rapidly entered public life and values eroded from politics. The people at grass roots felt alienated from politics not related to their lives, culture and tradition. (Source: Saikia, Chandra Prasad. (2007) Preface to the Assamese Edition: 150 years of journalism in Assam. Guwahati: Media Trust). However, Press in Assam grew and focused on highlighting some burning issues and significant movements such as Oil Refinery movement, the Language Movement of 60s, the Chinese aggression of 1962, Indo-Pak war of 1965, the Bangladesh war of 1971 and the Foreigners Movement of the 80s. Newspapers played a vital role in keeping the people informed of all the aspects of the movements and war. The newspapers also created a congenial atmosphere for those who were keen to take up journalism as their profession. The post-independence period saw a boom of Bengali newspapers in the Barak Valley. Dainik Jugasankha is the leading Bengali daily published from Silchar, Guwahati and Dibrugarh. Dainik Sonar Cachar, another prominent publication of Barak valley since 70s is currently under moribund state, especially after the daylight murder of its proprietor Ranabir Roy. Among the pre-independence newspapers only the The Assam Tribune and Janambhumi has celebrated its golden jubilee and are still in existence. Some hand-picked few like Deka Asam(1935-67) and Assamiya (1918-58) appearing under various mast heads like Dainik Assamiya (1946-48), Natun Assamiya (1949-82) survived for a considerable period but died subsequently.

- Natun Asamiya (1949-82)

After Dainik Assamiya ceased publication in 1948, Natun Assamiya made its appearance from Guwahati on June 26th, 1949 under the editorship of Dev Kanta Borooah. For some time this newspaper ran as a weekly paper, Soon after Dev Kanta Borooah got elected as an MP, Kirtinath Hazarika took over the charge and Natun Asamiya started appearing as a daily. Kirtinath Hazarika however left the newspaper owing to some differences in opinion
with the Proprietor. The daily newspaper subsequently became a weekly and then it ceased publication in 1982. According to historical review (Source: *Dainik Asamar Jalangaidi Asamar Batorikakat*, p.34) Natun Asamiya ceased publication not because of dearth of subscribers but because of lapses in the part of the management.

**Discussion:** Natun Asamiya was among the first post Independence newspapers which witnessed the rift between the Management and the Editor. The newspaper never had a dearth of readers. By dint of its role in highlighting various burning problems of Assam, Natun Asamiya amply demonstrated how strong a role a newspaper can play in shaping public opinion.

- **Ramdhenu(1950)**

Assamese literary magazine *Ramdhenu* was at the centre of literary activities in Assam in the fifties of the last century. Features that can be called modern were manifest in poetry and the magazine offered the platform to the poets. *Ramdhenu* took interest in World literature in translation and also in the mosaic culture of the Northeast. Literature in *Ramdhenu* was literature in criticism.

**Discussion:** No single Assamese magazine so far has done as much for Assamese literature as *Ramdhenu* did. The magazine created quite a few short story writers and novelists who later took the vanguard of Assamese newspapers.

- **Dainik Jugasankha (1950 to till date)**

*Dainik Jugasankha*, established in 20th December 1950 at Silchar is one of the leading Bengali daily of Assam. The founder proprietor and editor of the paper was Baidyanath Nath, who began the publication as a weekly paper with a circulation of 700 copies. In 1979, *Jugasanka* was shifted to Guwahati and in 1985 it came back to Silchar. At present *Dainik Jugasankha* has three editions- Silchar, Guwahati, and Dibrugarh and is the largest circulated Bengali daily of Assam( RNI report). After Baidyanath nath, his son B.K. Nath took over the management of the paper.
Dainik Jugasanka is among the few newspapers in Assam which had celebrated golden jubilee. Coping up with changing technology in the unfolding media landscape, printing till 1995 at Jugasankha was done in flat bed machine. In 1995 offset machine was introduced and in 2004 colour printing was introduced. Diversification being one of the thrust of the newspaper giant, the Sankha Group of publications launched eastern chronicle, an English daily in 2009 under the editorship of Phatik Chandra Bora.

- **Shantidoot (1951-56):**
  Assamese weekly Shantidoot made its first appearance from Guwahati on December 7th, 1951. The weekly became a daily on October 2nd 1954 on Gandhiji’s birthday under the new name Dainik Shantidoot. The newspaper was the launching pad for a good number of journalists who later established themselves in the field of journalism.

**Discussion:** Again, with Shantidoot, the newspaper ceased publication because of poor management.

- **Asam Bani (1955- till date)**
  Asam Bani was the first important Assamese newspaper after Independence. This weekly was launched by The Assam Tribune establishment made its first appearance on July 1st 1955. The newspaper since its inception gained popularity due to its quality printing, get-up and various attractive features with pictures on every page. Besides the weekly horoscope, the weekly chronicle, and a page on films, plays and radio were there. The weekly also gained importance due to contributions of renowned Assamese litterateurs of that time including Maheswar Neog, Mahendra Bora, Birinchi Kumar Barua, Lakshahira Das and others. Another attraction of the weekly was cartoons.

**Discussion:** Asam Bani was the first modern weekly newspaper with quality printing, attractive look, features and special supplements. The successive editors also experimented with the taste and demand of the reader. While the founding editor Sais Chandra Kakati established it as a family newspaper, it was during the editorship of Tilak Hazarika and
Homen Borgohain the paper exposed the lapses of the government in
stronger terms.

- **Purbajyoti (1960)**

  Changanlal Jain’s *Purbajyoti*, a Hindi monthly news magazine first made its appearance on March 1, 1960. Initially in the absence of regular writers Jain himself had to write articles under different pseudonyms. After about a year and a half, Jain had to close down due to various problems. But as journalistic writing continue to haunt Jain, it was after eight years that he could fulfill his dream by publishing *Purbajyoti* as weekly which hit the stands on October 7, 1969. The paper played a leading role in spreading amity and removing the evils plaguing the society. With dauntless and progressive journalism, Changanlal Jain’s *Purbajyoti* became popular. Later after the death of Jain the paper ceased publication.

  **Discussion:** Not caring any personal gain, Changanlal Jain remained steadfast on his journalistic philosophy. Jain not only ran the paper for 16 years, but also tried immensely to convert it to a daily. The fact that there was not even a single Hindi daily in Assam always troubled Jain. Unfortunately his dream did not materialize as he had to embrace death before that could happen. The strange thing is that the first issue of *Purbajyoti* appeared on October 7 and Changanlal’s death too came on October 7. Hence, October 7 will always remain a memorable day for Hindi Journalism in Assam.

- **Ganatantra (1962-till date)**

  Noted freedom fighter Purnakanta Sarma started weekly *Ganatantra* in 1962 from the Ganatantra Press of Nagaon. The weekly which is more or less confined to the district of Nagaon, the newspaper is still in circulation.

- **Sadiniya Navayug (1963-66)**

  With a view to publish a modern Assamese weekly news magazine in the pattern and style of *Desh*—a popular Bengali news magazine, the Rani(Queen) of Beltola, Guwahati launched *Sadiniya Navayug* in 1963 from
Guwahati. But owing to lapses with the management, the news magazine could not enjoy a long lease of life and in 1966 it ceased publication.

- **Dainik Lokamanya (1963)**

  *Dainik Lokamanya* is the **first Hindi daily newspaper** of Assam launched in Guwahati by Pandit Ramshankar Tripathi. The four-page broadsheet daily was priced at 10 paisa. Within a very short time, it became popular because of its up-to-date and magnificent get-up. Unfortunately after few months of its publication the paper was closed down.

- **Mahajati (1964- till date)**

  *Mahajati*, published from Tezpur was launched in 1964 by Purnanarayan Sinha. The weekly is still in circulation in some pockets of Nagaon and Tezpur.

- **Uruli (1964)**

  The fortnightly *Uruli* was the **first Assamese newspaper published exclusively for women.** Launched on May 16th 1964, from the Ramdhenu Press of Guwahati, significantly the editor of this newspaper meant for women, was not a women, but a man none other than noted litterateur, Hem Chandra Sarma. However the paper did not survive for long.

- **Asam Batori (1963-70)**

  *Asam Batori*, a bi-weekly edited by Chandra Prasad Saikia, appeared in 1963, from Guwahati. The newspaper ushered in a new era of Assamese journalism. This newspaper served as the launching pad for many young journalists who later established themselves in the field of Assamese journalism. Many distinguished personalities of the time like Navakanta Baruah, Nirode Choudhury and many other contributed for the column.

  **Discussion:** This popular newspaper did not survive long for want of efficiency in the management and thus ceased its publication in 1970.

- **Dainik Asam (1965-till date)**

  *Dainik Asam*, was first published on August 4, 1965 at a time when *Natun Assamiya* was still in circulation. The newspaper which came out from the
house of *The Assam Tribune* group of Publications, on the first issue itself four thousand copies was printed. The demand for *Dainik Asam* during the anti-foreigners movement in Assam shot up to such high that the demand for one lakh copies could not be met due to shortage of newsprint. At least 70 to 80 thousand copies used to be printed daily.

In the first issue of *Dainik Asam*, eminent journalist and founder editor of *The Assam Tribune* Lakshmi Nath Phookan wrote an article on journalism wherein he mentioned: "To run a good newspaper one must have good machinery and equipment along with well-paid efficient people. But only efficient people will not do; it must be ensured that they are given all facilities and inspiration to prove their efficiency. How much work has been done is not the main thing; what counts is how the work has been done. It applies to everyone, from the editor and the editorial writer to the assistant editor and the outstation correspondent. A good newspaper is not only a newspaper, it is a work of art".

**Discussion:**

- *Dainik Asam* was one of the newspapers on which the state government of Assam imposed censorship in 1980. *Dainik Asam* and *The Assam Tribune* group played a leading role in challenging in court the Assam Special Power (Press) Act, 1960 providing press censorship.

- The foresightedness of Radha Govinda Baruah, the father figure of the *Tribune* was commendable. Apart from paying decent salaries, Baruah himself took keen interest in organizing customers through postal correspondence.

- The management came out in safeguarding the editors, the printers and employees at any time it earned the wrath of the government.

- The introduction of photo-journalism in Assam through annual photography contests is worth mentioning.

- *Saptahik Nilachal* (1968)
Saptahik Nilachal, a weekly was launched on October 2nd 1968 from Dutta Barua & Company printing press of Guwahati. With the appearance of Saptahik Nilachal, Homen Borgohain, the renowned novelist and storywriter formally stepped into the world of journalism. The publication of the weekly was suspended for six months in 1994 after the arrest of Ramendra Narayan Dutta Barua, Chief Editor and one of the proprietors of Saptahik Nilachal.

- **Assam Express (1969)**

It was on January 26, 1969 when Jibakanta Gogoi launched English weekly by the name of Weekly Express from Guwahati. Later on November 15th 1971, the weekly was changed to a daily under the masthead of Assam Express. Noted litterateur and illustrious political leader Hem Barua was the founder editor. Basically the paper was a pro-Congress (I).

- **Agradoot (1971) and Dainik Agradoot (1995-till date)**

Agradoot appeared as a fortnightly from Mangaldoi on February 1st, 1971. Kanaksen Deka was the proprietor and editor of the paper. The fortnightly Agradoot after being shifted to Guwahati in 1973 was converted to a weekly. It was in 1974, Agradoot was made a bi-weekly. When pre-censorship was imposed during internal emergency in 1976 on some newspaper in Assam including Agradoot, a series of editorials was published in Agradoot in a book format. This book was reprinted 13 times within a span of four years which itself is a record setting event in the history of journalism in Assam and India. (Agradoot Panchish bacharat, an article published on the Silver Jubilee issue of Agradoot)

Dainik Agradoot, as a daily appeared from the Agradoot Group of publications on October 6th 1995. According to Kanaksen deka, the editor and proprietor of Agradoot “Objectivity journalism is the hallmark of Dainik Agradoot”.

- **Sonar Cachar (1976-2009)**

Sonar Cachar, a Bengali weekly came into being in Silchar in the year 1976 at a time when the country was passing though a state of emergency
declared by the federal government under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. Founded by Ranabir Roy, initially it was a weekly established on May 8, 1976. During the period of its launch very few newspapers published from Silchar and most of them were weeklies. Only one daily newspaper namely *The Prantojyoti* was published in limited numbers to cater to the need of the news readers. Among the weeklies *Janashakti, Jugashakti, Jugasankha, Gati, Prantiya Samachar, Swadesh bani*, etc were among the front runners in Silchar. Besides, *Nabayug, Tirthabhumi, Danka, Kushicara, Dristipat*, etc. were published from Karimganj; while *Purbayan, Cachar, Dhaleswari*, etc. were the few Bengali newspapers from Hailakandi.

From the beginning Ranadhir Roy, the elder brother of Ranabir Roy was the editor of the weekly. On January 26, 1980 *Sonar Cachar* was converted to a daily coming under the masthead of *Dainik Sonar Cachar*. The paper soon strengthened its readership base throughout the Barak Valley. In 1996, *Dainik Sonar Cachar* became the first newspaper in Barak Valley to introduce the ultra modern wave offset technology for printing of newspaper. After the death of Ranabir Roy, Ms, Basabi Roy took over the charge as of the newspaper. Slowly the newspaper lost its readership base and finally in 2009, the newspaper ceased to publish.

Apart from *Dainik Sonar Cachar*, the group published the lone English daily from Barak Valley *The Frontier Sun*, and *Energy era*, the English weeklies.

- **Samayik Prasanga (1978 to till date)**

  *Samayik Prasanga* another Bengali fortnightly appeared from Silchar in Barak Valley on April 15, 1978. In the year 1981, the paper became a weekly and in the year 1991, the newspaper was converted to a bi-weekly. It was on 11th of May 2003, *Samayik Prasanga* hit the stands as a daily newspaper. Taimur Raja Choudhury has been holding the forte as the proprietor cum editor of *Samayik Prasanga* since its inception.

- **Tinidiniya Batori (1981-83) and Rashtriya Batori (1983)**
Tinidiniya Batori was launched on October 19th 1981 with noted Journalist-litterateur Radhika Mohan Bhagawati as its editor. The newspaper was short-lived and ceased publication from April 7, 1983.

Again towards the end of 1983, Rashtriya Batori started publication from the same set up at Athgaon in Guwahati. This newspaper too did not last long. Radhika Mohan Bhagawati resigned from the post of editor following differences of opinion with the management.

- **Prantik (1981)**

  Prantik, a news-magazine appeared on 1st of December, 1981. Printed, published and edited by Pradip Barua, the news-magazine occupied a distinguished position in the field of Assamese journalism and literary world. Bhabendra Nath Saikia, a doyen of Assamese literature and films was the Chief Editor.

- **News Star (1982)**

  News Star, first appeared on January 30, 1982 from Guwahati. An attempt to produce an unconventional tabloid-sized daily was initiated under the editorship of Ramendra Narayan Dutta Barua where a title was given to each of the eleven pages excluding the front page of the paper. However, the paper failed to get adequate response from the readers, which resulted in irregular publication. After a couple of years, the newspaper was published in the general format but its publication remained irregular.

- **The Sentinel (1983-till date)**

  The Sentinel was launched on April 13, 1983 under the editorship of Dhirendra Nath Bezborua. The successful entrepreneur of the Omega Printers and Publishers is Shankar Rajkhowa. At present, five newspapers with multiple editions of The Sentinel are published by the establishment. Ajir Asom, launched in 1987 is quite popular among the Assamese readership. Samay Prabaha, a Bengal daily appeared in 1990 under the editorship of Sukumar Bagchi reportedly ceased publication after a decade, but exists in paper only.
Discussion: This newspaper, which started without much funfair began to gain popularity with a good number of columns and special investigative reports. But gradually the newspaper faced an intensive down-sizing of manpower resulting in sharp decline in readership.

- **Apavad (1986)**
  
  In the year 1986, a unique strategy was adopted by a young journalist named Dinkar Kumar for the publication of a newspaper.
  
  Instead of the normal newsprint, Dinkar used the **inland letter card of the Postal department** to publish a monthly paper. Priced at 75 paisa and annual subscription of Rs 10/-, the paper established itself as a monthly literary paper. However after a few issues, this paper was closed down.

- **Ajir Asom (1987- till date)**
  
  The Sentinel Group launched the Assamese daily **Ajir Asom** on August 15, 1987, with a commitment to mirror the national life daily to all the inhabitants of Assam. Against the backdrop of publication of two Assamese dailies- **Dainik Asam** and **Dainik Janamkhumi**, **Ajir Asom** was successful in creating a considerable chunk of its readership in Assam.

- **Natun Dainik (1988)**
  
  **Natun Dainik** was launched on 1st January 1988 by a young businessman Surya Hazarika under the founding editorship of noted writer and novelist Chandra Prasad Saikia.
  
  A group of young promising journalists joined **Natun Dainik** and introduced novelty in the presentation of news items. Columns like **Deobariya** (Sunday), **Bigyan aru Prajaktividya** (Science and Technology), etc added new attractions to the newspaper.

- **Sadin (1989)**
  
  On January 6, 1989, the first regular issue **Sadin** was brought out. Tilak Hazarika who was then associated with **Asam Bani** joined **Sadin** as the Chief Editor. Ajit Kumar Bhuya took charge as editor of **Sadin**. The newspaper introduced a lot of new columns and displayed novelty in presentation.
- **Budhbar (1989)**

*Budhbar*, a weekly was launched on March 29, 1989 under the editorship of Parag Kumar Das. The weekly equipped with new columns set a novel trend by organizing seminars and publishing the details of the deliberations. Editor Parag Kumar Das owing his strong anti-establishment stance, was arrested on March 6\(^{th}\) 1992. Again on February 8\(^{th}\) 1993, Das as well as Publisher Krishna Kanta Barua, and Printer of the weekly Nripen Sarma was arrested under TADA. However, all the three were later acquitted by the court after the government failed to substantiate the charges. In the same year due to differences with the management of *Budhbar*, Parag Das was relieved of his office. Then Das launched *Agan*, a ten-day paper, on April 21, 1994. *Agan* was the first ten-day newspaper in Assamese language. But it did not last long.

- **Purbanchal Prahari (1989 to till date)**

A new era in Hindi Journalism in Assam emerged in 1989 with the launch of *Purbanchal Prahari*, a Hindi daily on May 16, 1989. G.L. Agarwalla. After having earned success in contract jobs, Agarwalla took up the newspaper business with Binodananda Thakur as its editorial advisor. His son Krishnamohan Agarwal took over the charge as its executive editor. With quality printing the paper soon became popular, but with the emergence of competitors, the circulation dwindled considerably. However, the paper is still in circulation.

- **Hindi Sentinel (1989-2007)**

Just a fortnight after *Purbanchal Prahari* was launched, Omega Printers and Publishers Ltd. Published the Hindi *Sentinel*. Veteran Journalist Radhika Mohan Bhagawati became the editor while Mukesh Kumar took over the charge as executive editor. Quality printing, standard news items and impartial reporting made *Sentinel* popular in a very short time. The special supplements taken out on Saturdays and Sundays earned a lot of appreciation from the readers. The newspaper in the first year of its publication brought laurels to journalism of Assam by winning the
Matishree award for excellent journalism. However due to lack of advertisers and emergence of a number of Hindi dailies, the paper presently ceased its publications.

**Discussion:** Hindi Sentinel continues to submit their annual Statements to RNI, although the newspaper is reportedly not well-circulated. According to the Annual statement submitted by Hindi Sentinel for the year 2008-09, the newspaper published from Guwahati bearing Registration. No 40913 has a daily circulation if 26,565 copies. One critical point to note here is that several newspapers in Assam and elsewhere in the country exist in paper only. By printing a few copies these papers reap the benefits of newsprint and government advertisements. It is apparent that RNI, whose basic task is to scrutinize and verify circulation claims of newspaper, is not functioning in an effective manner.

- *The North East Times* (1990-till date)

In the year 1990, G.L. Publications G.L. Agarwalla launched the English daily *The North East Times* amidst much publicity. The entire city of Guwahati city soon was abuzz with sign-boards of *The North East Times* placed in entrance of each lanes and bye lanes. As an executive editor, the name of G.L Agarwalla, is appearing since its publication.

The G.L. Publication group has altogether five newspapers, magazines in Assamese, Hindi and English. *Purbanchal Prahari*, the Hindi daily of the group was launched on May 16, 1989 and is still in limited circulation. However, *The North East Times* which also is currently in circulation has suffered severe setback in readership.

**Discussion:** The seed of Journalism as a business enterprise was first sown by G.L Publications. It may be mentioned that G.L. Agarwalla who, after having earned success in contract jobs, took up the newspaper business. Historically stalwarts of Journalism in Assam fought over literature and literary writings. Most of the newspapers suffered untimely death due to financial problems. Although there are
businessman and politicians like R.G Baruah and Debeswar Sharma who took up journalism as business but they never allowed the newspaper to become mouthpiece of any party or used the medium of newspaper for personal profits.

Mention must be made here several editors of G.L. Publications like Binodananda Thakur, Binode Ringania, Khiren Roy, Gauri Sankar Kalita, Homen Borgohain, etc had either left the newspaper following differences with Agarwalla or had a brief tenure for some other personal reasons.

- **Ajir Batori (1991) and The North East Observer (1992)**

  *Ajir Batori* edited by Dhirendra Nath Chakravarty appeared on December 16, 1961 from Rajashree publications of Guwahati. As many young journalists from *Natun Dainik* joined Ajir Batori, the style and tenets of the former influenced the latter in a big way. Later noted short story writer Manoj Goswami took charge as the executive editor of the newspaper.

  *The North East Observer* was published from the same Rajashree publications from October 2nd 1992 with Girish Chandra Sarma as its founding editor.

- **The Eastern Clarion (1991)**

  *The Eastern Clarion*, an English daily was first published in June 1991 from Jorhat by the Janambhumi group of newspapers.

- **News Front (1991)**

  *News Front*, an English daily appeared from Guwahati on 15th of August, 1991. Veteran journalist Amit Kumar Nag was the first editor and the Proprietor Gokul Bora himself was the managing editor of the paper. The same establishment at the Industrial Estate at Bamunimaidan at Guwahati also published *Ganapatrika*, a Bengali daily, and *Amarjyoti*, an Assamese daily. But all these newspapers did not last long.
- **Ajir Sangbad (1994-95)**
  
  *Ajir Sangbad*, an Assamese daily made its appearance in 1994 from Guwahati. But within a year of its publication, the newspaper faced serious crisis and for various reasons its publication became erratic and at last ceased to appear.

- **Asomiya Pratidin (1995- till date)**
  
  *Asomiya Pratidin*, presently the largest circulated Assamese daily of Assam was launched on February 20, 1995 by the Sadin Group. Ajit Kumar Bhuyan was the founder editor of the daily and Parag Kumar Das was the executive editor. Since its inception, the newspaper carried an anti-establishment stance and gained popularity by exposing the misdeeds and corruption of Hiteswar Saikia regime. By retaining the characteristic features of the weekly *Sadin, Pratidin* too laid emphasis on publishing humorous and satirical writings adding a new dimension to Assamese journalism.

  May 17, 1996 was a black day in the history of journalism in Assam when Parag Kumar Das, the executive editor of *Asomiya Pratidin* was assassinated in broad daylight. Prior to that no editor of a newspaper got killed in Assam.

- **Amar Asom (1997- till date)**
  
  *Amar Asom*, was launched on April 1997 from the house of G.L. Publications and was became the first multi-edition newspaper published from Guwahati and Jorhat simultaneously. For the first time, colour photographs appeared in any daily newspaper in the front pages.

### 2.4.3 THE POST 2000 MEDIA SCENARIO IN ASSAM AND NORTHEASTERN STATES

Until Year-2000 A.D, media scenario in the Northeast in general and Assam in particular primarily relied on print and broadcasting services. While Doordarshan and All India Radio were the sole public broadcasters, Guwahati -the capital of Northeastern India was home to majority of newspapers. Among the English dailies, *Assam Tribune* is the oldest,
published from Guwahati even today and hold and the forte of being the most revered newspaper in the Northeast India. The Shillong Times published from Shillong; The Sentinel and The Northeast Times, having their publications based out from Guwahati, Arunachal Times from Itanagar, The Nagaland Post from Dimapur, The Sanghai Express and The Imphal Free Press of Imphal, The Tripura Times and Tripura Observer from Agartala were among the few English dailies. Among the Assamese dailies Asomiya Pratidin, Dainik Agradoort, Khobor, Dainik Asom, Amar Asom, etc were widely circulated newspapers, while Dainik Jugasankha and Dainik Prantojyoti dominated the Bengali dailies. Purbachal Prahari, however, was the leading Hindi daily of Assam and Northeast.

In Assam, the post-2000 also saw the emergence of a quite number of regional publications, especially in Assamese, English, Hindi, and Bengali languages. At present several numbers of dailies are published in these languages- with cut throat competition among themselves. The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel and eastern Chronicle are the major English daily while; the Asomiya Pratidin, Dainik Agradoort, Asomiya Khobor, Dainik Asom, Amar Asom, Dainik Janasadharan, Aji, Dainik batori, Ajir Asom, Adinor Sangbad, etc are widely circulated Asamese dailies. Dainik Purvoday, Purbanchal Prahari, and Pratah Khobor are widely circulated Hindi dailies. Today as many as six Bengali dailies vie for advertising pie which includes Dainik Jugasankha, Samayik Prasanga, Dainik Prantojyoti, Dainik Jonokontho, etc. Dainik Jugasankha is the largest circulated Bengali daily in Assam.

Some of the widely circulated dailies published from the different State capitals of Northeast include- Vanglaini and Highlander published from Aizawl; Mawphor and Dongmusa- are popular Khasi newspapers; Sanghai Express and Poknapham from Imphal; Arunachal Front and Arunachal Sentinel from Itanagar; Dainik Sambad and Syandhan are popular Bengali dailies published from Agartala.

National newspapers like the The Telegraph, The Hindustan Times and The Times of India made their entry to Assam and the Northeast market with the
launch of its Guwahati editions. *The Hindustan Times*, which was the first among the national daily to launch Guwahati editions ceased publications owing operational losses. Other national newspapers published from the national capital have an average readership base in the Northeast; majority of them having their Correspondents posted at Guwahati.

Today Guwahati has more than twenty dailies; half of those are in the Assamese language. Most of the dailies are published from more than one centre, whereas three Assamese daily newspapers claim to enjoy around 1,00,000 circulation (Thakuria, 2009).

Among the regional audio-visual media, lately, five satellite television news channels—*NE TV* (launched in March 2004), *News Live* (launched in January 2008) and *DY 365* (launched in 2008), *News Time* (launched in December 2010), and *Frontier TV* (launched in January, 2011) have emerged from the city of Guwahati, and a couple of more are in the process of being launched.

The *NE TV* or *Northeast Television*, is the first private satellite channel of northeastern India which covers and connects all the eight states of the region. It came into existence on March 16th 2004. *NE TV* is also the first earth station and teleport of the northeast. Equipped with three state of the art studios with uplink facility from Guwahati, Northeast Television has already become the undisputed leader of top-notch entertainment and news in this region.

Northeast Television is far more popular than the state-owned media in the north it is present in 2 crores homes of the northeast already. Several private FM stations have also come up in Northeast, but the services are limited to entertainment only. The Northeast also saw the emergence of Internet based news services like www.northeasttribune.com having a sizeable readership.

**Discussions on satellite channels of Assam:**

- Since its inception *NE TV* maintained a strong anti-establishment stance. As a vocal critique of Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, the channel was banned entry to cover any official
programme of the Chief Minister since National Games, 2007. This is for the first time in the history of journalism in Assam that restriction has been imposed upon journalists of a specific media house.

- NETV is the first multi-lingual satellite news channel in Assam and the whole of eastern India. Initially the channel began with Assamese, English and Bengali news bulletins. Slowly it diversified to each and every language and also the dialects of various ethnic groups prevalent in Northeast. The languages are such as Assamese, Hindi, Bodo, English, Bengali, Manipuri, Nepali etc. The dialects includes Dimasa, Naga, Nagamese, Kuki, Mizo, Rongmai, Garo, Mishing, Karbi, Hmar/Lingmai etc.

- The success of presenting multi-lingual news by NE TV was subsequently adored by News Live, DY 365, News Time and Frontier TV. The infrastructure for launching a couple of channel one from The Sentinel group is in the offing.

Of the national satellite channels, almost all the major players have their bureaux in Assam having bureau offices at Guwahati. NDTV, Times Now, CNN-IBN, NewsX, are the four English national satellite channels which stationed their correspondents to look after reporting in the Northeast region. Regional media ETV is presently operating from Guwahati, although it had winded up its operations in Silchar, Agartala and Kokrajhar. Among the National Hindi satellite channels Sahara Samay and Zee News have their full-fledged bureau office at Guwahati, Star News is carrying out its Northeast operations with a lone camera person. Aaj Tak which once had a full-fledged bureau presence in Guwahati, the channel winded up its operations and has deployed stringers to sent the stories on requirement basis.

Discussion: It is pertinent to mention here that, all national satellite channels have their stringers/contributors in the Northeastern states who supply news on demand.
2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

From the in-depth analysis of journalism scenario in Assam, it is clear that the state is the home to majority of media organizations and thus forms the hub of its activities in the Northeastern region.

As far as media is concerned, capital Guwahati is a witness to the publication of more than 20 morning dailies, half of those are in the Assamese language. Most of the dailies are published from more than one centre, whereas three Assamese daily newspapers claim to enjoy around 1,00,000 circulation.

Until 1979, newspapers and magazines in Assam were largely focused on social themes, with the editor and the reporter treating journalism as an instrument of social change. The student agitation of the 1980s changed the face of journalism. Print journalism became more aggressive and focused on investigative reportage. Amidst all the turmoil and social chaos, the local media flourished. Today, almost all the prominent Assamese dailies – Asomiya Pratidin, Dainik Janambhumi, Amar Asom, Dainik Agradoot, Asomiya Khabar, Dainik Batori, Dainik Janasadharan, Dainik Asom, Edinor Sangbad, Aji - have multiple editions to reach more readers in remote areas of Assam.

Among the English dailies, The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, Eastern Chronicle and The Northeast Times, are among the few English dailies which have multiple editions. Dainik Jugasankha, Samayik Prasanga, Dainik Jonakantha, are some of the Bengali dailies having multiple editions. Purbachal Parahari, Dainik Puvoday, Pratah Khabar, are among the few Hindi dailies widely circulated in Assam.

The present study Social Background and Professional Role Performance of the Journalists in Assam thus has wider ramifications to the social, political, economic and historical perspectives of journalism in Assam.