Chapter 8

Conclusion

In the northeast region print journalism was first introduced in Sibsagar, Upper Assam. An American Baptist missionary brought out ‘Orunodoi’ (Sunrise) which was the mouthpiece of the mission of propagation of Christianity in Assam. Similarly in Meghalaya, the Welsh Presbyterian missionaries contributed towards the publication of newspapers in the Khasi hills and American Baptist missionary in the Garo Hills. Their motive was also to promote the Christian faith among the native Indians of this hilly region dominated by three major tribes. Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya was the then capital of Assam and NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency). Their initiatives led to the translation of religious books to the local language, which laid the foundation of Khasi literature. Newspapers in the initial stage of their publication in Meghalaya were confined more to the cultural awakening and preserving the indigenous background against the new transition. After independence, with the growth of educational and political awareness, the regional newspapers had augmented the political aspirations of the people of Meghalaya. (Bareh, 1977)

The first Khasi newspaper was established in December 1889, ‘U Nongkit Khubor’ (The Messenger) under the editorship of William William. The newspapers during that time gave more emphasis to the cultural orientation which preserves their own background against the change. The cultural awakening first marked itself in journalism before it could reach to the other fields of literature. The first ever Khasi secular newspaper ‘U Khasi Mynta’ (The Khasi Today) was published in March
1896, edited by U Hormu Rai Deingdoh. This newspaper went in circulation for more than ten years giving due importance to Khasi religion, culture and literature. It was period of constructive journalism, maintaining a fairly high standard of ethical values, which enhanced purely the national building thought. The newspaper offered the chance for public to share their opinions and thoughts on various social issues, which includes the interest of the farmers etc.

The Garo Hills also saw the birth of several newspapers, mostly weeklies. In 1880, the first newspaper which was published in Garo was ‘A’chikni Ripeng’ edited by Rev. D. K. Sangma. Even the Jaintia Hills has its contribution into the publication of Meghalaya. They are ‘U Para Ri’, ‘U Jaintia’, ‘U Sangot’.

Newspapers like ‘U Nongphira’, ‘Ka Mei Rilung’, ‘U Khun Ka Ri’, ‘U Nongsain Hima’ and many others had also imprinted in the history of Hill State Movement in Meghalaya. After independence, the issue of Assamese language which was to implement to the Hill people of the region evoked strong opposing from the people of Meghalaya. This movement was also supported by the various newspapers of Meghalaya. When Meghalaya got its statehood in 1972, many political parties brought out their own newspapers which therefore change the trend of journalism. Few among them are ‘U Peitngor’ and ‘U Naphang’. The English newspapers like ‘The Sentinel’, ‘Meghalaya Guardian’, and ‘The Meghalaya Today’ are some of the newspapers which contributed in the journalism in Meghalaya.

The literacy rate is also one of the factors that have led to the growth of newspapers and magazines in Meghalaya. As per the Population Census of India 2011, the literacy rate of Meghalaya is 73.8% where 77.2% of this is of males and the female literacy rate is 73.8%. The neighbouring state Assam has a literacy rate of 73.2% with a difference of 2.3% in comparison to the Meghalaya literacy rate.

Table 10. Literacy Rate of North East India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Literacy Rate (2011 Census)</th>
<th>Male Literacy Rate (2011 Census)</th>
<th>Female Literacy Rate (2011 Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indiaonlinepages.com

The current scenario is that the Meghalaya has 80816 numbers of newspapers circulated on a daily basis (source: Audit bureau of circulation). Accordingly, there are about 67 publications (Source: RNI) running in the region which comprise dailies, weeklies, bi-weeklies, monthlies, fortnightlies etc.

In present situation, most of the newspapers are daily that have more or less detached themselves from being voices to political parties, rather they have opted to voice the opinion of the people. Besides, there is the trend of sensationalise news like crimes, accidents etc which the reader are interested to read about. A senior journalist of Shillong, Phillip Marwein state that the preference for the kind of news is usually observed when the newspapers are sold out in the market. Voicing views rose which are sometimes partisan to certain interested lobbies which had created a form of ‘paid news syndrome’ in the newspaper industry. The newspapers or the journalist are either to report the event or not to report the event.

The newspaper generates revenue mostly from the Government Department, as there are very little private advertising sectors in the state. The local newspapers are not
able to make much profit from the advertisement, as the Government of Meghalaya are giving lots of advertisement to the newspapers outside the state then the local publisher of Shillong. The Meghalaya Editor’s and Publishers’ Association (MEPA) had also urged the Government of Meghalaya to safeguard the local newspapers from the entry of the publications from outside the state. However, this issues and concern are yet to intercept by the Government on the advertising policy of Meghalaya. This causes to slow down the growth and development of newspaper organisation. So the newspaper owners cannot able to attract the kind of talent who are well trained and experience in the profession and which makes the newspaper a better one.

In such a situation, reporters are forced to learn the tricks of the trade in the field itself. As such, they are not trained journalists, and what moves them to join the profession is the lack of employment elsewhere. Some take two three years to learn to file a report while others take even more time to learn even the basics. However, this does not mean that the state is devoid of good journalists working in the prestigious newspapers of Meghalaya. Manas Chaudhari, proprietor and the editor of ‘The Shillong Times’, was one of the renowned journalists of the state. Under his tenure the paper had turned from a weekly to a daily and who had also ventured thrice into war-ravaged Bangladesh to find out first hand information of the situation. Ms. Patricia Mukhim, currently working as the editor of ‘The Shillong Times’ was conferred the Padmashree Award in the year 2000 for her extensive work in the field of journalism in Meghalaya. Besides this, she has also received many other prestigious awards. She also contributes articles to ‘The Telegraph’, ‘TNT’ and ‘The North East Daily’.

Sumar Singh Sawian, a man known by his work throughout the field of journalism and as well as in many cultural and philanthropic activities. He began his journey as
a reporter in ‘Frontier Times’ (Shillong Daily), columnist at the ‘U Nongsain Hima’
casual reader of Khasi and English bulletins of the AIR in 1970s. Besides, he had
also worked as the senior sub editor, PTI (New Delhi) and as the Chief of Bureau-
PTI (Shillong). He was also the editor of ‘Apphira News Daily’ (English).
Dr. Kamal Kumar Jhunjhunwala, the Editor-in-Chief of Eastern Panorama the first
monthly news magazine of North East India has also produced many documentary
films covering an interestingly diverse range of topics, issues and personalities.
Another publication ‘Woman’s Panorama’ which is the sister concern of the
publication was also brought out under his guidance.

Recommendations
The main backbone of all the publication’s revenue is the advertisement. However,
in Meghalaya, beside the Government advertisement, there are no big companies and
industries that provide revenue to the publishing houses. The Government of
Meghalaya are supporting the publication that comes from outside the state rather
than the local publisher. If there is less cash flow subsequently certain issues and
concern may disturb for proper functioning of the newspaper. As such most of the
reporters in Meghalaya are not well paid. The reporter’s salary is not enough to meet
the day end, beside there are neither travelling nor any daily allowance that are
provided. This increased a trend of sharing the stories among the reporters, which
created a clone of the different stories in the newspapers. Therefore, the Government
of Meghalaya should bring out certain advertisement policy which would benefit the
local publisher of the state. The execution of better advertisement policy would
change the press scenario. This would drag well experience and qualified journalist
which would also improve the news content in the publication.
R.M. Shabong, editor of 'U Rupang' stated that 'The boys who join the journalism not because they are specialised on this line. They come here only because they don't have job..... To become a reporter a person need to be specialised and qualified or need to have a good experience'. The qualification of most of these reporters is usually of class 10th standard. To report an event or a story, a reporter need to have a good command over the language and certain intelligence to comment on it. Therefore, qualification is one of the important stands on the path of being the 4th pillar of Democracy, as it shape one’s mind and thinking. Most of the reporters in the state are not well qualified; there should be strict criteria that all the publisher and owner of the local newspaper should implement for the appointment of the reporters.

Meghalaya has a wide variety of publications in different languages which include Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, English, Hindi, and Bengali. The newspaper can mould public opinion and are capable of teaching and informing to its readers about the issue that is concern most e.g., the traditional customs and rituals, political development etc. These different language newspapers are proficient to bind together the people of Meghalaya which can also influence the mind of the people towards the socio-economic development.

Presently, the state newspapers are witnessing very less coverage of news which has proper and detail information on a story which required the investigative and analytical reporting. The newspaper that can do analytical stories and as well good investigative reporting will definitely boost its sell in the market. Investigative reporting is expensive and time consuming, however this kind of reporting can attract the readers which also enhance its sell 5 to 6 times more then what it is.

The recent incident of a photojournalist's rape in Mumbai (2013) had thrown up many questions regarding safety and security of the journalists. In Meghalaya also the reporters also fall into the pit of the people in power or sometime people with
arms. Therefore, the press fraternity and the Government should work together to bring out a solution for the better working conditions which would give secured environment for the press to perform their duty.