Abstract

Press have grown with the civilization. Many researchers have studied its role in development, or modernization of a society, which has been a topic of great interest particularly after the Second World War. This proposed study is an attempt to record and explore the historical evolution of the press in Meghalaya. The historical experiences and documents preserved with personalities and official establishment of press or otherwise is the root of the information of the study. The factors that lead to origin and development of press which influenced its role in the construction of contemporary society of Meghalaya.

In Meghalaya or for that matter North East India as a whole is relatively young member of the modern Indian map. The British rule has been the principle cause of present status of territorial geo-politics of this region. The origin and development of Meghalaya as may be evident from the historical evolution of press.

Press in Meghalaya

Journalism in Meghalaya through the print media specially has come a very long way since 1880 and catching up with the present time, both in terms of technology and news and views representation, leaving a trail of footprints and recorded memories of important events as time passes by.

Absence of state’s own script, led to the adoption of the script of the neighbours like the Assamese, Bengalis, Persians and Devanagiris into the literature and education system in Meghalaya. Following which, the Christian missionaries had brought in the first newspaper in the Garo language, ‘Achikni Ripeng’ (Friends of the Garos) in 1880. For a year the newspaper was in a handwritten form with the Bengali script. While in the Khasi Hills, the first Khasi newspaper was established in December 1889, ‘U
Nongkit Khubor’ (The Messenger) under the editorship of William William. This quarterly was printed in Roman script from the Star press of Calcutta which was also the official organ of Welsh Presbyterian Missionary. The newspapers during that time gave more emphasis to the cultural orientation which preserves their own background against the new transition. The cultural awakening first marked itself in journalism before it could reach to the other fields of literature. Another newspaper which had a landmark in the history of journalism in Meghalaya is the secular newspaper, ‘U Nongphira’ (Guardian). The paper was banned by the British administration after the First World War in 1914, as the newspaper published news story against the British Raj. But this did not prevent the paper to serve the people with their unbiased news information giving wide coverage of the struggle for Independence. The paper felt into the rage of British and finally was blacklisted. However the editor brought out another newspaper ‘U Nongpynim’ in 1928 to continue with his mission to disseminate truth.

After independence, the issue of Assamese language which was to implement to the Hill people of the region evoked strong opposing. Consequently, there were the rises of newspapers where many dies and few still survived till date. The newspaper includes news on the issue related to the movements rather than anything of social, educational and economic reconstruction or the welfare. 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 Nongsain Hima’ (The Nation Builder), U Pyrman’ (Watchdog), ‘U Pyrta ‘Riewlum’ (The call of the Hills) which also had given more emphasis on the hills’ movement and based their articles that describes about the developments of the movement and also included articles on the techniques of newspapers, local environmental issues, literature etc.

The growth of literacy and education had further helped in the development of print journalism. These developments are therefore important in the efforts being made by
these newspapers in throwing open to readers, the variations and vocabulary that can be incorporated and further used in the development and enriching of the indigenous language of the state which is the lingua France of the people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo.

There is a wide variety of publications in different languages which includes Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, English, Hindi, and Bengali which are serving the people of the region with news and information. In Meghalaya publications like 'The Shillong Times', 'Mawphor', 'Achik Songbad', 'Meghalaya Guardian', 'The Meghalaya Times' and 'U Jaintia' and magazines like 'Eastern Panorama', 'TNT', 'U Lur Phira' have a good circulation record in the region. In, Meghalaya newspapers from outside the state were also brought in daily for the circulation. With the availability of different newspapers, the people are exposed to the variant critical and independent point of views.

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. While looking into circulation rate of the language newspapers in the state, the daily circulation of English newspaper in Meghalaya has been rated at 55.87% which is the highest among the other regional language newspapers. Following which is the Khasi with 34.49% and the least number of newspapers that has been circulating in the state of Meghalaya is the Bengali newspaper with the rating of 0.51%. (Source: Audit Bureau of circulation)

Most of the daily newspapers today 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.
The technology development has changed the media scenario and even the mode of news coverage in Meghalaya. This development had taken in the printing, contents, and reporting of the event. Beside, a recent trend of online news portal had also taken place in the state, as the news of recent events is updated in the websites which can be accessed from every hook and corner of the world. The state’s first online news website, ‘*Oh! Meghalaya*’ provided the people of the region with latest and updated news in real time.

Nevertheless, lack of investment in the newspaper industry in Meghalaya had hampered its growth. Beside the Government advertisement, there are no big companies and industries that provide revenue to the publishing houses. There is a high requirement of the change in the advertising policy of the Government of Meghalaya. The execution of better advertisement policy would therefore change the press scenario.

**Aims of the study**

The aim of the study is to find out and record the hitherto unrecorded history of the growth and development of press in Meghalaya in terms of emergence, expression, and qualititative transformations. It starts with understanding the dynamics of colonialism and anti-colonialism in the history of media in Meghalaya. The study is also to understand how the press is playing its role in preserving the rich cultural and practices of the past.

**Objectives of the study**

The specific objectives of the proposed study are as follows:

1. To study the origin and development of Press in Meghalaya.
2. To access the contribution of professionals, journalists and others towards the development of the Press in Meghalaya.

3. To study the nature and extent of coverage of social issues and language movement if any by the local newspaper.

4. To find out the emerging trends in the Press in Meghalaya.

**Research questions**

1. How has the Press evolved in Meghalaya?

2. How is the Press related to the constitution of the modern Meghalaya?

3. What was the role of newspapers in preserving the cultural heritage of Meghalaya?

4. Was there any discernible change in the colonial and post colonial period of the history of the Press?

5. How are the social changes related to the evolution of the press in Meghalaya?

**Hypothesis**

The study is designed for historical and exploratory research to understand the origin and development of the Press in Meghalaya. Therefore no hypothesis is formulated for the study.

**Methodology**

The study employs methodologies of historical research, descriptive research and exploratory research. First to construct the history, information collected from the
office documents, written records, newspapers, veteran journalists, experts and historians. Next, to analyse the role of the press, content analysis tool are used.