Chapter 1
Press in India and Northeast India: Historical and Contemporary Scenario

Different epochs in history have been described by the dominant characteristic traits of that particular period; thus we have the ‘Stone Age’, the ‘Iron Age’, the ‘Bronze Age’, the ‘Age of Industry’ and so on. The most dominant hallmark of the contemporary age is that it is an age of information-communication. Hence, we often use expressions like ‘Information Society’, ‘Communication Era’, the ‘Information Age’, the age of ‘Information Communication Technology’ (ICT) and so on. Today the impact of media is so powerful and all-pervading that we describe the contemporary era as “Media Age”. As McLuhan (1964) has said: “This is the new world of the Global Village”. But any serious study of media cannot be isolated from other facets of human life. As McLuhan (1964) has observed, “any new medium, by its acceleration, disrupts the lives and investments of whole communities.” The print media, the oldest among the various modern means of communication, is the subject of the present study. Today the print media faces an unprecedented challenge from electronic media like radio, television and internet. In order to understand the ramifications of this challenge, it is necessary to examine the
traditional role of the press and the current challenges it faces in spite of remarkable
technological and sociological developments, which can augur well for the press.

In this introductory chapter we trace the history of the press in India as a whole and of Northeast India in particular. We examine the role and function of the press against the backdrop of the sociological and political processes that shaped the nation state that India is. In particular we examine the contribution of the Christian missionaries and the European pioneers who laid the foundations of the press in India. This early phase is followed by the nationalist press spearheaded by leaders like Raja Rammohun Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and others. It is in their writings and journalistic practices that we find the seminal concepts concerning the need for a socially responsible press. We shall examine the ideas and thoughts of the pioneers who led the movement to achieve the socialistic and nationalistic goals through their writings and publications. Raja Rammohun Roy and Mahatma Gandhi represent the two pillars of the twin movement to achieve social reform and independence respectively.

The notion of social responsibility has not ceased to have relevance today. Even in the vastly changed historical circumstances in which we live today, one cannot undermine the importance of the social responsibility of the press. Newspapers today are experiencing a global decline in circulation, but it has not diminished the pre-eminent role it has traditionally enjoyed as the ‘Fourth Estate’ and as the ‘watchdog’ of democracy, and a powerful agent of social change. The press, we must affirm, is quite different from other kinds of industry or business enterprise. Its functions include being the voice of the people to herald reform and change.
1.1 Definition

Before we set out to examine the social responsibility of the press in Northeast India, it is necessary to define and clarify terms that are central to our study.

i) The Press

The term ‘press’ in everyday parlance denotes many things: the printing press as well as the newspapers, and in some instances the book publishing industry. The reason for such wide-ranging connotations for the term ‘press’ is due to the fact that printing evolved over a long period of time and in varying historic circumstances. The technology as well as the method used for printing too varied from country to country. The term ‘press’ indicates the process used for rapid and standardised form of producing copies of texts. The term applied in the beginning to connote the technology of printing was later applied to the production of books and newspapers when they came into vogue. Persons engaged in the gathering of news and information and the production of newspapers came to be broadly referred to as ‘the press.’

In our study we refer to the press to mean journalistic activity centered on the newspaper industry. However, in the historical section where we speak about the pioneers and the first printing presses, we have sometimes used, for want of another suitable word, the term, ‘press’ to denote the printing establishment, including the machinery and the industry that it denotes. We have used the expression ‘the print media’ to denote the newspaper industry as well as the printing press. This is
necessary when we need to distinguish the print media from the electronic media. Our primary focus in the present study is on the press as a medium of communication and not on printing as an industry.

**ii) Social Responsibility**

We intend to examine the social responsibility of the press on the basis of conventional norms and precepts on which the press is founded. Siebert et al (1956) deal with the social responsibility theory of the press. Nordenstreng et al (1989) review developments concerning the status, rights and responsibilities of journalists around the world. The Constitutions of many countries either explicitly or implicitly define the role and functions of the press. Press Commissions and various newspaper publishers and editors have also defined the principles which govern the press. According to Eapen (1989), “If press responsibility, in its ultimate analysis, is to the readers, then press persons ought to maintain a high degree of integrity and uphold the rights and hopes of all social segments”. Social responsibility of the press demands widening the canvas of coverage, reducing the gap between the information rich and the information poor, including the use of language style which the neo-literate can fumble through. Rights and responsibilities cannot be end in themselves; they can only be means to an end. The press occupies a privileged position in modern society. But more than simply seeking out truth and reporting it to an otherwise ignorant populace, the press plays an active role in influencing and shaping public opinion. That is why it is disturbing when the media in general and the press in particular choose to lie or mislead their consumers in full knowledge of the ramifications of that decision. When the press fails to act truthfully and responsibly it
undermines a fundamental trust. This is not to imply that readers should forego critical thinking and blindly believe whatever opinion the press generates, or whatever information it communicates. There is a fundamental difference between opinions that appear in the editorial pages of every daily newspaper and news which is distinctly different from opinion. The well-guarded and traditionally accepted distinction between news and opinion seem to be fast blurring in many of our newspapers today. At worst one can also find opinion masquerading as news.

The trust of its readers is crucial to the smooth functioning of the press. The public needs to trust the press, but trust is not given unless responsibility is demonstrated. It is therefore crucial for newspapers to act properly and responsibly. Each country has its own rules and guidelines, rights and duties which govern the press. In addition, each newspaper has a set of internal regulations intended to ensure its editorial integrity, protect its sources and ensure that it maintains certain ethical standards. According to the ethical guidelines for editors, the editor-in-chief is personally and fully liable for the newspaper's content. This also applies to advertisements.

As universal rights, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the press may not be compromised or done away with by laws enacted by governments. Nevertheless they are not absolute in practice. The press is restrained by moral and legal responsibility as they may come in conflict with other rights similarly guaranteed. On the universal plane, journalists are aware of personal rights of individuals, like the right to privacy that others are entitled to enjoy. Respect for
these rights is the responsibility that guides journalists in the exercise of their freedom.

One of the principle goals of journalism is to be faithful and responsible to the truth. Whether individual journalists or publications meet that ideal is often debated, but they all, at a basic level, have a definitive responsibility - to their readers. At the first sign of anything like restraint or caution calling to act responsibly, the press tends to cry foul and call it censorship. It considers any such infringement as an affront on the idea of freedom which is held to be an absolute right. But in the absence of any countervailing force, the press and the other media conglomerates have used in recent times to create a cesspool of messages about licentiousness, murder, violence, immorality, 'objectification' of women, glorification of greed and force, and much more. The audience is often left with no choice but to live with what is proffered as news and information. This media-created environment of undesirable values, role models, and desensitising experiences has important effects on every one—particularly the most vulnerable segment of society like children and young people. It is in the light of such fast changing trends that affect the press and other media today that the issue of social responsibility is becoming increasingly important.

The social responsibility of the press implies the belief that the press has a basic responsibility to help strengthen and support democratic processes. The press is often referred to as the 'Fourth Estate' and its functions include being a 'watchdog'. Only a press that is socially committed and responsible can become a critical voice in the democratic system. A press that is a mouthpiece of the government in power or
other vested interest groups not only fails in its responsibility but also becomes in the
course of time one which lacks credibility in the eyes of the public.

There are media analysts who feel that today there is too much of creative
freedom, and not enough creative responsibility. Those who are content with what
they get from the press today do not feel the need for any kind of social or
governmental control or responsibility. McQuail (2004) notes the problem of growing
absence of media responsibility for wider matters of social and cultural concern.
Media, he says, seem to be more concerned with private accountability to the
shareholders than public accountability to the audiences, government or society at
large. Theories of democracy, according to him, seem unable to provide any coherent
account of the necessary role of press in the political process and theory of journalism
seems also incapable of providing what is missing.

There is a serious crisis of confidence and trust in the press. As Wahl-
Mass Observation (MO) study into public attitudes. According to him “journalism
cannot be trusted because news organisations are too commercially driven, biased,
and aligned with government and special interests.” This crisis is evident in the
decline of newspaper circulation and readership. It also points to the apparent
inability of mass media to serve their ideal role in a democratic society, that of
creating an informed public. But if consumers desire a socially more responsible
press, it is essential to address the issue of social responsibility which in turn implies
the need for reviewing existing laws, guidelines and policies, as well as enacting new
ones that favour a more responsible press.
iii) Northeast India

Northeast India, which is the primary focus of our study, consists of seven political states, namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, and is called the “Seven Sisters.” The state of Sikkim has been added to the Northeast for the purposes of planning and other administrative objectives to the seven states, making the final count eight. It may be observed that the term ‘Northeast’ applied as a collective nomenclature to the eight states of the region is itself being considered problematic. According to Hussain (2004) “there is a serious problem with the bracketing of this region with its diverse tribes, customs and cultures, into what is called the ‘Northeast.’ By doing so we often tend to ignore the distinct identity and sub-national aspirations of these ethnic groups.

With a land area of 2.55,00,000 square kilometers, the region constitutes 7.8 per cent of India’s total territory. Geographically, the region is part of a great tropical rain forest that sweeps across the Himalayan foothills to the Malay Peninsula. The region’s strategic location is evident from the fact that it has over 4000 kilometres of international border with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. In fact, Northeast has 98 per cent of its border with these countries and only 2 per cent of boarder with the rest of India through what is known as the ‘Chicken’s neck’ or the ‘narrow Siliguri corridor’. Seventy per cent of the land area in the region is hilly and the rest plains. With a wide forest cover, the region is one of the richest bio-diversity hotspots in the world. Though the state of Sikkim is often included as part of Northeast, we have in our study excluded it as this inclusion is comparatively recent and primarily motivated by administrative and economic considerations.
The region’s 38 million people belong to a variety of ethnic races and linguistic and cultural groups. Nearly half the population of the region belongs to the Scheduled Tribes. According to Singh, (1994) of the 653 tribal communities in India, 200 live in Northeast India. Of the 325 languages spoken in India, more than 200 of them are in the Northeast. Most of these languages fall within the category of Tibeto-Burman languages. In short, the region is a veritable microcosm of India’s ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity.

1.2 Christian Missionaries and the Press in India

One of the most outstanding Christian missionaries in the East, Saint Francis Xavier, exerted considerable pressure to get printing presses established in several places in the East. Portuguese Jesuits in 1556 introduced the first printing press. Goa, however, was not the intended destination of that press. The printing press dispatched from Portugal was meant for Abyssinia but did not reach its destination due to certain political conditions there. This press, which came to Goa en route to Abyssinia, stayed on in Goa, becoming the first printing press in India. By October of that year, printing commenced in Goa with Jesuit Brother Joao de Bustamante serving as the first printer. The first works printed in India were loose sheets called Conclusoes in 1546. Since such works are not considered as books, the first printed book was the Catechism composed by St. Francis Xavier called Doutrina Christao, printed in 1547 by Bustamante. It is this book that is considered as the first printed book in India. Records indicate that the early printers who came from Lisbon had able Indian assistants, though we do not have any record of their names (Kesavan, 1985). The
Portuguese from Goa made a gift of a printing press to the Emperor Akbar in the 1560s (Srambical, 1982-83).

Printing spread throughout India during the 250 years that followed its introduction in Goa. Besides the Portuguese, the British, Spanish and Danish helped disseminate the technology of printing. Twenty years after the first press was opened in Goa, a Spanish Jesuit lay brother, Goao Gonsalves, set up a press in Malabar and printed the first work in a local language- a Malayalam translation of Francis Xavier’s *Doutrina Christao*. In extreme south India, in the village of Pudikail near Tirunelvelly, Father John de Faria started a press in 1587, and cast types of Tamil letters (Lent, 1981-82).

The Danish, who started Protestant missionary work in India, had a press in Tranquebar (in Madras state) in 1712, its aim being to produce the Bible in Tamil. Its printer, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg must have been very industrious, for by April 1713, 32 books in the Malabar language and 22 in Portuguese were published. By 1713, the Danish missionaries were manufacturing paper, and shortly after, they persuaded the king of Tanjore to establish a press there. The Tranquebar press flourished until 1739 (Lent, 1981-82).

A press that had the greatest influence on India was the Baptist Mission Press started by William Carey in Mudnabatty in 1798 and moved to Serampore in 1800 (Lent, 1981-82). This printing press was instrumental in helping other nations open presses, sending trained printers and equipment to them. McMurtie (1935) wrote that this press was the first and most important of a long line of mission presses in India, which “exerted so great an influence on the spread of printing in that country.”
Responsible for the Serampore press was William Carey, a missionary who, when he arrived in Calcutta in 1795, had to carry on his evangelical work in secret because of East India Company restrictions. Carey requested a press from the London Missionary Society in 1798; the following year, other missionaries were sent to assist Carey with his missionary and printing duties. The first books of the Serampore press were a Bengali translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew, done by Carey in 1801, and Carey’s Dialogue intended to Facilitate the Acquiring of the Bengali Language in 1801. In 1816, Carey and his fellow missionaries founded the Calcutta Book Society, and in 1818, published at Serampore a Bengali monthly and a weekly, the first periodicals published in an Indian language. In 1812 two missionaries of the same church who were denied admission in Calcutta were sent to Bombay where they developed a press by 1815-17.

Missionary printers were not always welcomed or tolerated by the authorities in India. The British rulers feared that missionary activity might endanger the stability of British rule. Presses that were allowed to operate often were placed in areas where the authorities could easily control them (Lent, 1981-82).

Other printing presses were established in places like Vepery, Mangalore, Serampore, Gorakhpur (Kesavan, 1985). Kesavan (1985) says: “Regardless of the motives of the missionaries, one cannot but admire what was virtually a martyrdom of the highest caliber of a man of God like William Carey, who truly, is pre-eminent among the pioneers whose gift to India, is something we can never forget.”

Malayalam and Tamil are close contenders for the honour of being the first Indian languages to use movable type for printing. The East India Company, never
overeager to encourage the initiative of missionary activity towards the spread of printing for its own political reasons, finally woke up to a situation wherein it became necessary to fashion such Indian language typography as could help their administrative machinery in its work (Kesavan, 1985).

Within a hundred years of the printing of Gutenberg’s Bible in Germany, India initiated the fashioning of types for the many Indian languages. According to Kesavan, if the location of the earlier printing presses in India were plotted on the map, it will be found that they all hug the coast line of the Peninsula: Goa, Cochin, Pudikail (Northeast of Cape Comorin), Vypincotta (a mile south of Cranganore), and Ambalakkadu (a village 20 miles south of Trichur), are the places along the west coast. Tranquebar, Madras, Fort William- Calcutta, and Serampore along the East Coast represent the shaping of Indian printing. Bombay contributed its share towards the closing years of the second phase of the vigorous growth of early Indian printing (Kesavan, 1985).

1.3 Newspapers and Periodicals in India: The European Pioneers

The credit for starting the first newspaper in India goes to James Augustus Hicky who brought out the Bengal Gazette alias Calcutta General Advertiser. The first issue of the two-sheet weekly was published on January 29, 1780 in Calcutta. Hicky called it a ‘weekly political and commercial paper open to all parties but influenced by none.’ Its contents included items taken from newspapers in England,
Hicky's paper began to attract the wrath and displeasure of Warren Hastings, then Governor General of India and others who often featured in the gossip columns of Hicky's paper. Hicky was imprisoned and the types from his press were seized. His paper came to an end within two years of its commencement. Hicky's fortunes had already began to decline in the same year when a rival paper called *Indian Gazette* was launched by Messers B. Messink and Peter Reed which began publication in 1780. It was a much better newspaper with four pages, each 16 inches long with three columns and well printed. (Natarajan 2000; Partahsarathy, 1991). The publishers of *India Gazette* obtained the consent of the Governor General and sought postal concession, promising to abide by any regulations issued by him. Four years later, followed the *Calcutta Gazette* published under the direct patronage of the government. In the following year came two monthlies *Bengal Journal* and the *Oriental Magazine of Calcutta Amusement*. With the *Calcutta Chronicle* which began publication in 1786, there were four weekly newspapers and one monthly magazine published from Calcutta within six years of Hicky's maiden effort (Natarajan, 2000). According to Natarajan (2000) the new editors trod warily the trail, which Hicky had blazed for them. *The Bengal Gazette* was the forerunner of many more journals and newspapers in Calcutta and other parts of the country.

The first newspaper in Madras was *Madras Courier* which came into existence in 1785 as an officially recognized paper founded by Richard Johnson, the government printer. In 1791, Hugh Boyd, who was editor of the *Madras Courier
resigned and started the *Hurkaru*, but the paper ceased publication a year later when he died. *Madras Courier* continued without a competitor till 1795 when R. Williams started the *Madras Gazette*, followed a few months later by the *India Herald* which was published without authority by one Humphreys who was arrested for unauthorised publication. Censorship was introduced in Madras in 1795 (Natarajan, 2000).

Bombay’s first newspaper, the *Bombay Herald* came into existence in 1789. The *Courier* which was published a year later carried advertisements in Gujarati. The *Bombay Gazette* was published in 1791 and the *Bombay Herald* merged into it the following year. In Bombay and Madras, newspapers did not on the whole come into conflict with the government as was the case with the papers in Bengal. Most of the editors and publishers were anxious to earn official recognition and enjoy the favour of the government. Some of them submitted proof sheets to the authorities prior to publication. When they were pulled up for what was considered offensive to the authorities, the editors published apologies (Natarajan, 2000).

In Bengal the position was quite different. The editor of the *Bengal Journal*, William Duane, faced a lot of trouble from the government, his property was confiscated and he was eventually deported to England. Sir John Shore, the Governor General, wrote that newspapers in Calcutta had assumed ‘a licentiousness too dangerous to be permitted in this country.’ Between 1791 and 1798, newspapers in Bengal were pulled up for various offences many of which related to military subjects (Natarajan, 2000).
The turn of the century marked the end of a phase in journalism marked by absence of press laws, censorship of the papers, deportation of editors and other punishments. Those who refused to toe the government line were denied postal privileges. The press at this period largely catered to the interests of the Europeans in India (Natarajan, 2000). According to Natarajan (2000) the early newspapers were started by ex-servants of the Company who had incurred its displeasure and their columns were devoted to the exposure of the evils and malpractices of the time. Many of the writings were scurrilous and their authors indulged in the grossest libel. Nevertheless, they served a useful purpose.

1.4 The Nationalist Press

The nationalist press had two important objectives: social reform and freedom struggle. As one of the luminaries who inspired and guided the nationalist press through its nascent years, Raja Rammohun Roy is considered the father of Indian journalism. In 1816 Raja Rammohun Roy launched the first Indian-owned English daily, *Bengal Gazette*. Though his paper had the same name as that of Hicky’s, the content and purpose of Raja Rammohun Roy’s paper were quite different. He used the medium of newspapers and periodicals to promote social reform and make it effective because the law by itself did not, and could not, accomplish social reform. His *Sambaad Kaumudi*, launched in 1821 spelt out the case against the evils in Hindu society. He also launched a Persian weekly, *Miraqt-ul-Akhbar* to reach those who were unfamiliar with Bengali and English, and an English periodical, *Brahmanical Magazine* to counter the propaganda of the Serampore missionarues (Bhargava, 2005).
Raja Rammohun Roy opposed through his publications such superstitions and taboos as widow burning or sati, human sacrifice, the caste system, opposition to widow remarriage and practice of polygamy, untouchability, addiction to opium, degradation of the social position of women and ostracisation of those who crossed the seas (Bhargava, 2005). He also advocated practice of freethinking and the spirit of enquiry, laid the foundation of democratic spirit, inculcated democratic ideas and social outlook. He was a champion of the freedom of the press (Bhargava, 2005).

In 1885 Dadabhai Naoroji started the first English daily newspaper, *The Voice of India*, in Bombay. It was also known as the *Indian Spectator*. This broadsheet was more interested in British government’s doings and sayings. However the paper advocated social and administrative reforms. A Gujarati weekly called *Goktar* was started in the same year. Dadabhai, called the ‘Grand Old Man of India’, founded some thirty institutions, the most important among them being, the Indian National Congress. Most of his contemporaries were closely associated with one or the other newspaper or periodical of the era. They include Mahadev Govind Ranade, Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozeshah Merwanji Mehta, Kshinath Triambak Telang, Dinshaw Eduljee Wacha, Jhaverilal Umashankar Yajnik, Rahimotoolah Muhammad Sayani, Narain Ganesh Chandavarkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, W.C. Banerjee, Mannmohan Ghose, Surendranath Banarjee, Lal Mohan Bose, Anand Mohan Bose, Kalichurn Banurji, Dr. Satchidanand Sinha, Sir S. Subramania Iyer, G. Subramania Iyer, of *The Hindu*, Anandacharlu, Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliyar, C. Vijayaraghavachariar, Gazula Lakshmi Narasimhalu Chetty and Madan Mohan Lalaviya (Bhargava, 2005).
Lokamanya Tilak edited Kesari in Marathi and Maratha in English. Sri Aurobindo Ghose edited Bandemataram and Karmayogin in English and Dharma in Bengali. Sisir Kumar Ghosh founded and edited Amrita Bazar Patrika. Ranade and his colleagues started the Deccan Sabha in Pune and G.K. Gokhale was associated with this quarterly journal The Bengali. started by W.C. Banerjee. Bengal had other periodicals like Hindoo Patriot, Reis and Rayyat. Keshab Chandra Sen founded the Indian Mirror. Dr. Satchidanand Sinha started newspapers by the name of Bihar Times, Hindustan Review, Kayastha Samachar, The Indian People from places like Allahabad and Patna in the first decade of 20th century. Telang started the Indu Prakash, which was later run by Chandavarkar.

G.Subramniya Iyer of Madras was the founder-editor of The Hindu. Hriday Nath Kunzru founded the Indian Herald in Allahabad. Sardar Dayal Singh Maajithiya launched The Tribune from Lahore. Among the ‘Anglo-Indian’ publications of the early twentieth century were The Civil and Military Gazette, (Lahore), The Statesman (Calcutta), The Times of India (Bombay), and The Pioneer (Lucknow).

The early newspapers focused on the twin task of social reform and political emancipation of the country. Journalism served to spread the message of social reform and freedom movement as well as communicate with the authorities (Bhargava, 2005). These papers, many of them regional in language and outreach, rendered a yeomen service to create over the years a spirit of nationalism and social reform. The names of people associated with the founding and growth of these papers, show that they were driven by a passion for the social, ethical and political reawakening of India and not so much by commercial or material consideration. In
that sense the pioneers of the Indian press possessed a strong sense of social responsibility.

1.5 Press and Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi edited and published several periodicals and books. On June 4, 1903, Gandhi together with two of his close associates launched in Durban, South Africa, a foolscap-sized three-column weekly journal called Indian Opinion. It was non-commercial and meant to voice the feelings of the Indians in South Africa and to improve their lot (Bhattacharya, 1969). Though he was not the official editor of Indian Opinion, Gandhi was responsible for its policy, finances and editing. He regularly wrote columns in the paper, deliberated on issues like Satyagraha in its pages. Though the journal was primarily intended to advance the moral, political and social condition of Indians in South Africa, Gandhi through his writings expounded the struggle for human rights and equality before law for all people. Gandhi in evolving the idea of passive resistance or ‘Satyagraha’ was influenced by Christ, Socrates, Thoreau, Tolstoy and others who advocated peace and non-violence as a weapon against aggression. Gandhi explained that without Indian Opinion, the movement for civil rights, which he pursued for almost two decades in South Africa, would have been impossible. Gandhi’s writings won him several followers and collaborators from among the Englishmen like Albert West, Henry Polak, Herbert Kitchin etc. The cosmopolitan climate of the very first Gandhian ‘ashram’ is obvious: it was a true meeting place of East and West (Bhattacharya, 1969).
Within a few years after Gandhi returned to India, he took up the leadership of *Young India*, a weekly established as an organ of the Home Rule League of Bombay. In 1999 Gandhi took over its editorship. He stripped the journal of all advertisements and brought to its pages his message to the Congress party, setting before the country his programme of swadeshi aimed at making every village sufficiently productive to meet its own needs.

His papers and writings were primarily aimed at being an adversary of the British and to wrest freedom from the foreign rule. In his preface to Sunil Sharma’s book, *Journalist Gandhi*, (Sharma, 1994), one of India’s well known journalists, Kamath (1994) outlines some of the chief qualities of Gandhi’s journalistic writings. Gandhi wrote extensively on a wide variety of topics – politics, economics, sociology, religion. Kamath calls Gandhi’s writing provocative in an endearing way. He did not duck difficult questions but faced them head-on. He was also admired for his intellectual honesty and simple and intelligible style. He had no literary pretensions but what he wrote could be described as literature. This is because he wrote with his heart and not with his mind. He wanted the content to be studied, not the style. His style stunned because of its very simplicity. It carried conviction because of its innate honesty. *Harijan*, according to Kamath (1994) was the most talked about journal in India. *Harijan*, established in 1933, made more news than it reported. It was suspended, suppressed and restarted during the period preceding India’s independence. *Harijan* reflected the many social and individual concerns which were a part of Gandhi’s complex and continuing analysis of the human predicament.
Printed on hand-made paper it was the voice of Mahatma Gandhi and, by extension, the Voice of India. *Harijan* presented the Mahatma when he was alive in his many moods: friend, philosopher, guide, politician, statesman, saint. He was all that and much more; he was the complete editor. There never was no editor like him before and there never will be another like him in the future. The times, of course made the man. But the man contributed to his times in many wondrous ways (Kamath, 1994).

Kamath (1994) says “One can look at the Mahatma’s journalistic forays in either of two ways; as the moralist who took to journalism or as the journalist who undertook a moral crusade. That the Mahatma was crusader par excellence is unquestionable. He crusaded for morality in politics and in public life. He wrote with disciplined simplicity. The result was one most important quality of literary act, namely, clarity.

Gandhi’s influence and example in journalism, according to an observer, was like “an elixir to Indian journalism” (Bhargava, 2005). That the newspapers and the political movement moved hand in hand in the early twentieth century was noted. K. Rama Rao writes of Gandhi: “We of the press particularly lived in his reflected effulgence. To the newspapers he lent prestige and importance as the media of his message, as the vehicles of his inspiration and as the recorders of his operations in the field, as well as of his vital counsels in conferences, cabinet and committees (Bhargava, 2005).

Gandhi believed that the sole aim of journalism should be service. “The true function of journalism is to educate the public mind and read the mind of the country
and to give definite and fearless expression to that mind” (Kamath, 1960). Gandhi was an ardent advocate of press freedom. Freedom of the press, he said, is a precious privilege that no country can forego. The liberty of the press is a dear privilege, apart from the advisability or otherwise of civil disobedience.” The press, he believed, has power, but to misuse that power is crime. He adopted the human approach to journalism. He never considered the public as target for propaganda. His voice was the voice of humanity—not the voice of a pamphleteer. For Gandhi, readers were most important. A Journalist may be a patriot, a party member, or a faithful employee, but his loyalty, according to him, should primarily, to his readers. Public has the right to know the truth. It must be informed objectively as to what is happening. If the paper loses confidence of its readers, it has lost all that is worth in journalism (Sharma, 1994).

Gandhi did not carry advertisement as he expected the publication to survive on subscriptions. His intention was that ads would unduly influence the policy and conduct of the publication. It is difficult to think of the survival of newspapers today without advertisements. But commenting on Gandhi’s policy in this regard, Bhargava aptly states: “Gandhi in his farsightedness might have visualized the situation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries when newspapers would sell editorial space for advertising” (Bhargava, 2005).

The theme of social responsibility is not difficult to discern in the many writings and pronouncements of Gandhi. In simple, yet forceful and clear style, he exposed social evils and advocated inter-caste marriages, Hindu-Muslim unity and launched a multi-pronged attack on all forms of social disability. He called for social
change without sensation. In spite of the sensitive issues he took up, Gandhi achieved remarkable success with his papers and his writings as rival Gujarati papers declined in popularity, and the circulation of his paper *Navjivan* more than doubled within a year of his assuming its editorship. Gandhi was a leader and trendsetter in journalism. He inspired and influenced the thinking of many other freedom fighters as well as editors of his time.

Gandhi’s own observations about the objectives of a newspaper were spelled out in *Young India*. “I have taken up journalism not for its sake by merely as an aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life” (Bhargava, 2005). Gandhiji spelt out his perception of the objects of a newspaper as understanding ‘popular feelings and giving expression to it; another is to arouse among the people a certain desirable sentiments; the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects’ (Bhargava, 2005).

### 1.6 The Press in the Post Independent India

As we have seen the press in India had fought shoulder to shoulder with the nationalist forces in the freedom struggle. The press rejoiced with the 400 million people of independent India and in the first flush of freedom, it rode with the current and was sympathetic and cooperative with the new national government which faced a deluge of problems plunging the country into strife and bloodshed and instability. A section of the press, according to Parthasarathy (1991), had not got over the hangover of colonial rule and indulged in fanning communal passions and hatred and in scurrilous writing. Sensational journalism became a fashion with some and the country’s interests ceased to be paramount. The leaders in the new government, many
of whom had a close rapport with the press, felt that a section of the press played the role of an opposition instead of playing a constructive role. Nehru, who otherwise was champion of liberal democracy, came down on the press frequently. He recalled British premier Stanley Baldwin’s remark about newspapers that they enjoyed power without responsibility (Parthasarathy, 1991).

But the press justified its position citing its responsibility to the public. Frank Moraes, the editor of the *Times of India* said after some reflection and consultation he decided that “Since Nehru was faced virtually with no opposition in the parliament and since a democratic government could not effectively express itself in the absence of an opposition, the press should take it upon itself to function as an unofficial opposition outside Parliament, exercising that role with responsibility and circumspection (Parthasarathy, 1991). Another leading paper, *The Hindu* expressed similar views when it wrote: In the new circumstances the “Press may be expected to take a more detached as also a more responsible view of its obligations on the one hand to the government of the day, and on the other to the people as a whole, opposing official policy when it must, supporting it when it can and at all times bringing constructive opinion to bear from different angles on all important issues so that the people may decide with full knowledge” (Parthasarathy, 1991).

While the Draft Constitution was under consideration in the Constituent Assembly, the government appointed a Press Laws Enquiry Committee to “review the Press Laws of India with a view to examine if they are in accordance with the fundamental rights formulated by the Constituent Assembly of India.” The Committee submitted its report in May 1948. It favoured the repeal of the Press
(Emergency Powers) Act, 1931 and the incorporation of some of its provisions in the
general statutes laying down the law of crimes. The Act of 1931 was accordingly
repealed and replaced by the Press (Objectionable Matters) Act 1951 (Sarkar, 1984).
One of the distinguishing features of the Act from the previous laws was that the
judiciary and not the executive were to decide on the necessity for action and the
nature of the action taken. The Act was a temporary one and was allowed to lapse in
1956.

A Press Commission under the chairmanship of Justice Rajadhyaksha was
appointed in 1952. Its terms included the state of the press, working conditions, of
journalists’ freedom of the press and machinery for ensuring high standards of
included setting up of a Press Council with a view to safeguard freedom of the press,
encourage the growth of a sense of responsibility and of public service among those
engaged in the profession of journalism. The Commission also recommended the

The Press Council was established by an Act of Parliament in 1965. Its first
president was Justice N. Rajagopala Iyengar. Its members included members of
Parliament and representatives of newspapers. Though the Council closely resembled
the British Press Council, it was different in as much as it was vested with statutory
authority and had judicial powers.

The Press Council Act was repealed during the Emergency in 1975 and it was
re-established under the Press Council Act of 1978. A second Press Commission was
set up in the same year under the chairmanship of Justice P.C. Goswami. But Justice
Goswami and his colleagues resigned in 1980 with the formation of the new government. The Commission was reconstituted under the chairmanship of Justice K.K. Mathew. Among other things the Commission’s terms of reference included the role of the press and the responsibilities it should assume in developmental policies, readers’ right to objective news and free comments.

The Mathew Commission affirmed that the role of the press in a developing democratic society should neither be that of an adversary nor an ally of government. A free press, it said, should be a constructive critic. The Commission said that a newspaper was essentially a public utility and whatever be the precise form of ownership of newspapers, the exercise of ownership rights had to be subject to some measure of restraint and regulation. Public interest was the criterion that should regulate this activity. The Commission said: “The press has a social responsibility and accountability to the public. The theory that the freedom of the press knows no restraints is gone.” It said in the changed situation, the freedom of the issuer of news alone is not sufficient; the freedom of the consumer must also be protected (Parthasarathy, 1991). The Commission called for giving the press council powers to deny facilities of accreditation for a specified period to editors and journalists who had been held by the council thrice for violating the accepted principles of journalistic ethics. The Commission further pointed out that the Indian press is free but does not have a wide enough reach and it has an urban and middle class base which limits its contribution towards making the development process more widely participatory” (Parthasarathy, 1991).
The declaration of the Emergency in June 1975 by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came as a blow to the Indian press, which was its greatest victim. According to Kumar (1981) unlike her father, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had never been at ease with the press. 'How much freedom can the press have in a country like India fighting poverty, backwardness, ignorance, disease, superstition?' asked she in the first year of her regime. In the face of mounting confrontation with the press, Mrs. Gandhi clamped internal emergency on the nation. Censorship was imposed on the press and the Press Council was abolished. The two news agencies, Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) were merged into one. In 1977 with the coming to power of the Janata Party government, the freedom of the press was restored and the institutions like the Press Council were revived.

Under the Indian Constitution the freedom the press is guaranteed in article 19(1) which provides freedom of speech and expression. In 1951, the Constitution Act (First Amendment) provided for reasonable restrictions being imposed on the exercise of press freedom in the interest of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence. However, freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitutions on which “freedom of the press” rests, have often been interpreted differently to suit the views and interests of various categories of people.

The Mathew Commission said the press, as a medium of communication is a modern phenomenon. It has “immense power to advance or thwart the progress of civilisation. Its freedom can be used to create a brave new world or to bring about
universal catastrophe." It further observed that since the citizen was entirely dependent on the press for the quality, proportion and extent of the news supply, the exclusive and continuous advocacy of one point of view through the medium of a newspaper which held a monopolistic position was not conducive to the formation of healthy public opinion. "The assumption in a democratic set up is", the Commission said, "that the freedom of the press will produce a sufficiently diverse press not only to satisfy the public interest by throwing up a broad spectrum of views but also to fulfill the individual interest by enabling virtually everyone with a distinctive opinion to find some place to express it."

But the Commission noted with concern the dominance of commercial interests and the interpretation of article 19(1) which upholds the freedom of the owner to do as he chooses with his media as it is the private property of the owner who sells a manufactured product at his risk, and that a newspaper owes nothing to the public which grants it no franchise. The Commission felt that the constitutional imperative of free expression becomes the very instrument for repressing competitive ideas. Self-censorship by the press, the Commission observed, is practically as great a menace to the freedom of expression as government censorship. It said the point of a free press is that ideas deserving public hearing and the decision as to which ideas deserve that hearing shall not rest solely within the editors and owners. The widest possible dissemination of information from as many diverse and antagonistic sources, as could be ensured, alone will secure public welfare and the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression (Parthasarathy, 1991).
The rights of the public to know and the press to publish or refuse to publish have often been a bone of contention in the interpretation of article 19 of the Indian Constitution. Proposals to amend article 19 do not seem to suit a workable solution as it is likely to create more problems than solve. The public has the right to information and to know the different trends of opinion and views. But the press cannot be compelled to publish what it does not consider worth publishing. The freedom of the press would demand that the press use its discretion regarding what to publish and what not to publish. What is needed is not to argue in favour of one or the other parties, but to create many forums necessary to give expression to diverse, even opposing views with a sense of responsibility and common good. The debate over the issue has lessened today with the availability of many round-the-clock television news channels, internet and other avenues through which the public can have access to information.

1.7 Press in India in the Post Liberalisation Era

As we have seen, in the pre-independent era the newspaper industry faced many restrictions and problems from the British authorities. This was followed by the post-independence press which focused on democracy, politics and social issues. The growth in information, communication technology (ICT), the economic liberalisation in India, the ever-widening social base has all contributed to exponential growth of media. The New Economic Policy (NEP) which India adopted in the early 90s was characterised by devaluation, deregulation, privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation. The NEP ushered in rapid expansion of the communication sector.
which benefited the growth of media. The post liberalisation era witnessed the mushrooming of new television channels, widespread diffusion of internet and broadband, and birth of new newspapers and periodicals and overall expansion in the telecommunication sector (Singhal-Rogers, 2006).

The Indian newspaper in the post liberalisation era has shown marked improvements in layout and quality of printing, graphics and design. The physical environment in newspaper offices has undergone revolutionary changes. The work atmosphere in newsrooms has become more congenial for serious work; it has become more compact, much cleaner. Convergence in technology and interface between the various persons involved in the editing, layout and production have contributed to improve the press remarkably. Today most newsrooms are equipped with computers. The teleprinter has been replaced with Internet. Technology has automated the whole process of newspaper production. Today most newspapers get their inputs of news and photographs electronically. The print technology has moved from Desk Top Publishing (DTP) to Computer to Print (CTP). Technology has speeded up the process of news gathering, editing and publishing. Digital technology has helped improve the speed and quality of photographs and other data. Storage of content and photos has become more organized and efficient with the help of technology (Sharma, 2006).

The print media face serious challenge from television and Internet, two of the modern mass media that are seriously threatening the future of the print media globally. Though circulation figures of newspapers in India show that the threat is not so serious as of now, worldwide statistics indicate the need for the press to be ever
prepared to face the challenges ahead. At the dawn of the 21st century, it is perhaps too early to predict what is in store for the press in the next hundred years or more.

Commenting on the media of the post liberalisation era, one of India's leading journalists, B.G. Verghese notes: "The market era and rising advertising budgets saw media demand and supply expand exponentially. Indian language papers have exhibited the fastest growth with multiple editions and technological innovation. But he cautions against certain worrying factors like the market becoming more pervasive than government. Poverty and marginalisation have led to discontent and violence among large sections of population. In a scathing attack on the press, he analyses some of the major ills of the press in India: "competition for circulation/ratings and a larger share in the consumer rupee through advertising, there has been a dumping down of serious reportage and analysis, a trivialization of news and events, sensationalism and prurient coverage, invasion of privacy, trial by the press, resort to rumour, gossip and innuendo without verification, and disregard for fair and balanced reporting or prompt correction when in error and the right of reply. While there are admittedly fine journalists and some excellent writing, there is a lot of editorializing in the news, conjecture in place of fact and lazy journalism marked by shallow writing, inadequate research or patent ignorance of background and context (Verghese, 2006).

1.8 Press in India Today

Today in the face of serious challenges from television, internet and other media, the press is tending to become more and more commercial. In order to
understand the transitional phase of contemporary society, it is necessary that we examine the current scenario of the press in India today. Data indicates that there is a remarkable growth in the vernacular press while a major section of the English press seems to suffer a decline in readership. India is not entirely free from the threat of fast decline in readership faced by the press elsewhere in the world. Howsoever serious the threat may be the print industry in India needs to seriously consider the future of the press and prepare itself to meet the challenges confronting it. We shall examine the present scenario and the future prospects of the press in Northeast India. Our study, it is hoped, will contribute to the discourse on the challenges the press is expected to face in the years to come.

Table 1.1  Top Ten Newspapers According to Circulation (2004-2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>In Million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dainik Jagran</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>19.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dainik Bhaskar</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>14.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Daily Thanthi</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>10.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Amar Ujala</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>9.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hindustan</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>9.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Malayala Manorama</td>
<td>Malayalam</td>
<td>9.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lokmat</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
<td>8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eenadu</td>
<td>Telugu</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mathrubhumi</td>
<td>Malayalam</td>
<td>7.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Times of India</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>7.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Statistics show that the press is facing a serious decline in readership worldwide. However, the picture is quite different in countries like India. The print media in India is far from being dead if the official report on the state of the print publications is anything to go by. According to Press in India 2004-5, the annual report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), the print media claimed a
substantial share in the information space in the country registering 1,948 new newspapers and over a two crore increase in circulation in 2004-05.

**Figure 1.1 Top Ten Newspapers in India According to Circulation**

As of March 31, 2005, there were 60,413 registered newspapers on record as against 58,469 at the end of March 2004. With an annual increase of 2,36,31,621, the total circulation of newspapers in India in 2004-05 was 15,67,19,209 copies. Four newspapers also ceased publication during this period.
Dainik Jagran retained its No 1 position among newspapers with 19.07 million readers, Dainik Bhaskar followed second with 14.57 million, and Daily Thanthi is third with a readership of 10.23 million. Amar Ujala was at four with 9.89 million readers. Malayala Manorama (9.35 million) and Hindustan (9.72 million) interchanged positions at number five and six. Lokmat with 8.10 million, Eenadu with 7.94 million, Mathrubhumi with 7.65 million, and Times of India with 7.08 million readers were at the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth spots, respectively. Times of India was the only English daily to find a place in the top 10. Except for Amar Ujala and Hindustan, every other publication in the top ten list had experienced a marginal decline in readership.

Among magazines, Saras Salil (Hindi) with a readership of 7.36 million topped the list. A distant second was Kungumam (Tamil) with 3.76 million, followed by Vanitha (Malayalam) with 3.52 million readers. India Today (English) was fourth with a readership of 3.51 million. Grihashobha (Hindi) moved up a notch to number five, and was followed by Tamil weekly Kumudam, India Today (Hindi), Malayala Manorama (Malayalam), Tamil weekly Anand Vikatan, and Hindi monthly Meri Saheli. Kungumam, Anand Vikatan, and Meri Saheli were newcomers in the top ten list.
Table 1.2 The Top Ten Magazines in India According to Circulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Saras Salil</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kungumam</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vanitha</td>
<td>Malayalam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>India Today</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Grihashobha</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kumudam</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>India Today</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Malayala Manorama</td>
<td>Malayalam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Anand Vikatan</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Meri Saheli</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Most English dailies saw a fall in readership, though overall the English daily readership showed an increase. Both the top two, the *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* saw a decline while third-placed *The Hindu* increased its readership marginally. Among English magazines, number one India Today dropped by 10 per cent from 38.99 lakh to 35.09 lakh. *Filmfare* saw one of the steepest falls. Its readership fell 21 per cent to 16.71 lakh. *Outlook* with 11.44 lakh dropped by 11 per cent. *Stardust*, too, dropped and was at 10.95 lakh in comparison to the 13.11 lakh in the previous round.

The data shows that the reach of mass media has stagnated in the last three years. Press reach has been hovering around at 24 per cent, TV at 55 per cent, radio at 21 per cent, and Internet at 1.5 per cent at the all India level. In urban India, press and TV have declined. The press reach declined from 42.9 per cent in 2004 to 41.7 percent in 2006. TV declined from 80.2 per cent to 78.9 per cent in the last three years.
Table 1.3 Decline in Readerships of English Magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Magazine</th>
<th>Current Circulation in lakhs</th>
<th>Decline Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Filmfare</td>
<td>16.71</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stardust</td>
<td>13.11</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>11.44</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Today</td>
<td>35.09</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 1.2 Mass Media Outreach


In urban India the press reach declined from 42.9% in 2004 to 41.7% in 2006.

TV viewer ship declined from 80.2 % to 78.9 %.

Table 1.4 Ownership Profile of Newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>No. of Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>5680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joint Stock Companies</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Firms and Partnerships</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Trusts</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Societies and Associations</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Central and State Governments</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cooperative Societies</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL: 7226

Newspapers are registered in English and 22 main languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Newspapers are also registered in 100 other languages including dialects and a few foreign languages. The highest numbers of newspapers are published in Hindi (3,265). This is followed by English (873), Bangla (492), Gujarati (477), Urdu (403) and Marathi (329). Among language dailies, Hindi led with 799 newspapers followed by 181 in English. The languages that published more than 100 daily newspapers were Marathi (127), Urdu (162) and Telugu (110). Circulation-wise, the Hindi press maintained its dominance with 3,37,73,557 copies followed by English with 1,07,71,169. Uttar Pradesh had the largest number of daily newspapers (285), followed by Maharashtra (197).

Uttar Pradesh published the maximum number of periodicals in a single language i.e., 1,155 in Hindi. Other states with notable number of language periodicals were Rajasthan 545 in Hindi, Delhi 492 in Hindi, Gujarat 439 in Gujarati, West Bengal 430 in Bangla, Madhya Pradesh 422 in Hindi, and Maharashtra 309 in Marathi. It was also noticed that regional language periodicals were leading both in number and circulation in all major states. Bilingual and multilingual publications are excluded since these are not individual languages.
Regional language periodicals were leading both in number and circulation in all major states. Out of 7,225 newspapers, as many as 5,680 were owned by individuals, 973 by joint stock companies, 157 by trusts, 134 by societies and associations, and 169 by firms and partnerships. In all, 64 newspapers were brought out by the central and state Governments. Cooperative societies, educational institutions and the like owned the remaining 49. Newspapers owned by individuals had the largest share in circulation- 53.10 per cent, followed by those owned by joint stock companies 37.38 per cent.

Out of the total 5,351 periodicals, 4,645 deal with news and current affairs, while 63 were dealing with religion and philosophy. Apart from these there were other periodicals, dealing with various subjects, such as social welfare, medicine and health, education, finance and economics, literature and culture, children, women, law and public administration, cinema, commerce, agriculture and animal husbandry, science, sports, engineering and technology, industry etc. Apart from general
newspapers and specialised journals, there were 3,724 registered publications, without a definite periodicity.

1.9 The Press in Northeast India

The history of the printing press in Northeast India, like elsewhere in the country, may be traced to the period of the advent of Christian missionaries. From the beginnings of printing and journalism in Northeast India about 160 years ago, the print media in the region has made remarkable progress. Today in the face of challenges from the new media, as well as vastly changed socio-political and economic situation, it is apt that we examine the role and function of the press and whether the press in the region is socially responsible or not. In a region like Northeast India, with a vast international border, ethnic conflict and unrest and myriad of other problems, it is necessary to examine the social responsibility of the press in the light of issues like development, democracy and national integration. The present study, it is intended, may contribute in some measure to deepen our understanding of these issues, which in turn can lead to progress and development for all.

Recent trends indicate that the press in the region continues to grow rapidly, and that the newspapers have a decisive role in the social and political process that characterizes the region. The present study on the *Press and its Social Responsibility in North East India*, through content analysis of two of the leading, earliest and most prominent newspapers of the region, namely, *The Assam Tribune* and *The Shillong Times* is aimed at understanding in greater depth the social responsibility of the press.
Can we call the press in the region socially responsible? We intend to explore questions that deal with the extent to which the press live up to its social obligations. We also intend to propose ways in which the press can become more socially responsible. In this chapter we shall briefly examine the history of their establishment, development and importance in the region. We shall also examine the vision and mission of these two newspapers.

Print media in Northeast dates back to the Assamese language press and journalism, the pioneer in print media in the region. The Assamese press is greatly indebted to the American Baptist missionaries. It was they who promoted the Assamese language and launched the first Assamese monthly called *Arunodhoi* (Sunrise). *Arunodhoi* played a pivotal role in promoting cultural, religious and linguistic aspirations of the Assamese people, inculcated scientific temper and nationalism and helped provide to the Assamese language a distinct identity.

Today all the states in the region have newspapers and periodicals in English and in a few of the vernacular languages. The factors that have positively assisted the growth of the print media in the region include growing literacy rates which enable people to read, employment opportunities and the desire to be informed as well as connected with the rest of the country and the world in this era of globalisation. However, it may be noted that in many of the region’s languages and dialects there are no printed materials at all. For want of any printed books or literature, some of the dialects or languages are likely to become extinct in the years to come. Even for the existing periodicals and books, readership is by and large low. Circulation of newspapers and periodicals are limited largely to the urban areas of the region.
The electronic media with a wide network of radio and television stations in the Northeast enjoy a prominent place in the media scene. The region's geographical isolation with the rest of India and its proximity to several foreign countries have prompted the setting up of radio and television stations in the state capitals and other important towns of the region. Besides connecting the people of the region with the rest of India through national programmes, these media help foster national integration. They pay special attention to provide local language programmes, which in turn help strengthen ethnic identity and promote culture.

The tribal population of the region has a strong oral tradition and a rich culture, folklore, story telling, dances and songs. They have a variety of costumes that make them a colourful people. The tribals have a strong sense of the community and they have a strong tradition of self-governance and democracy. They have a time-tested tradition of equality, justice and egalitarian values. They are known for their hospitality, love for singing, dancing and story telling. The press in the region can become a powerful agent in providing a glimpse of the richness and uniqueness of the region and its people to others.

The multiplicity of languages is a big challenge for the press. The press also face difficulties in news-gathering and distribution due to lack of adequate transport communication facilities, lack of trained personnel, inadequate resources etc. The dearth of print media as well as low circulation of newspapers and books results in people becoming more and more dependent on electronic media as their source of information. Non-literate as well as neo-literate communities are often over-exposed to and over-dependent on electronic media, with little critical analysis of its impact.
Our research is expected to examine the social responsibility of the press in the way it serves as a source of information, and an instrument in shaping opinion, preserving and enhancing traditional values and culture.

The Christian missionaries are credited with introducing printing and publishing activities in Northeast India. William Carey and his missionary press was instrumental in publishing the first books in Assamese, Khasi and Manipuri. These books were translations of the Bible or books on Christian doctrine or textbooks for schools. 1836 American Baptist missionaries Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter started the first printing press in Sadiya in Upper Assam. They brought along with them a printing press, 100 reams of paper and other materials and established the press in Sadiya where they published a book in the Assamese language using Roman script. A year later Rev. Miles Bronson joined them. He brought another printing press along. The mission and its press moved to Jaipur (Assam) by 1838, where during 1842-43, Cutter had to dismantle the press and hide it during an insurrection. (Plathottam, 1996).

In 1846 Brown with the help of Cutter started from Sibsagar to publish a monthly paper in Assamese called Arunodhoi, the first Assamese journal as well as the first periodical of the entire Northeastern region. It survived for thirty-six years till 1882 under eight successive editors (Plathottam, 1996). The history of journalism in Northeast India dates back to Arunodhoi. D.K. Barua in his History of Assamese Literature observes: "It was in the pages of the Arunodhoi that we find the first florescence of modern Assamese literature. The magazine gave a literary status and dignity to the spoken languages of the people both in poetry and prose, and broadly
speaking, the language thus evolved continues to be the standard language of Assamese literature even today (Mazumdar, 1993).

From 1879, the first journal in the Garo language, *A'chikni Ripeng* (the Friend of the Garos) was published from Tura. The journal was aimed at creating greater spiritual awakening, to bring about uniformity in thought, promote cooperation and encourage one another, and to bring about the well-being of the whole tribe (Plathottam, 1996). The first journal in the Khasi language was a monthly called *Nongkit Khubor* (The Messenger) published from Shella by William Williams in 1889. Another journal called *U Nongialam Khristan* was edited and published by J.C. Evans. The leader of the Catholic missionaries in Northeast India Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller, was a journalist and editor of a Catholic periodical in his native Germany prior to his coming to the Northeast India in 1890. He gave great importance to the press. The Salavatorian missionary society to which Hopfenmueller belonged, started a Khasi monthly called *U Nongialam Katholik* (The Catholic Leader) which was later renamed *Ka ling Khristian* (The Christian Family) (Plathottam, 1996).

Though the primary objective of the Christian missionaries in Northeast India was to announce and teach the Christian message, they gave great importance to the development of the languages and literature of the region. Besides Bible translations the missionaries and their collaborators engaged themselves in writing and publishing dictionaries, primers, grammar books, and periodicals. These literary efforts helped the people of the region to break out of their isolationism. Development of the various
languages and publications in these languages helped foster increased awareness of people's cultural identity as well as social cohesion and development.

1.10 The Assam Tribune

The Assam Tribune was founded by Radha Govinda Baruah on August 4, 1939 as a weekly from Dibrugarh (The Assam Tribune 1939-1989 Golden Jubilee Publication, henceforth referred to as Golden Jubilee, 1989). When nationalist movement was raging strong across the subcontinent, and the northeastern state of Assam wanted to be part of the national aspiration for independence, Baruah set out with courage and determination to launch the paper. There were acute dearth of experienced editors and journalists but Baruah brought Laksminath Phookan who was on the editorial staff of The Hindustan Standard, a leading English daily of the Ananda Bazar group from Calcutta.

The objective and policy of The Assam Tribune was clear from the first editorial which spoke of the global situation of conflict and war. The editorial also warned against the dangers India as a subject of the British colonial power, was subjected to. In fact a month after the paper was started England declared war against Hitler.

Encouraged by the increasing goodwill and cooperation of the people in general and the readership of the weekly, Baruah decided to convert his weekly paper into a daily and to shift it to Gauhati, a more central location. Thus The Assam Tribune began publication from Gauhati as a daily from September 30, 1946. It became the first English daily newspaper from Assam and like many other nationalist
newspapers of the time, played a key role in the freedom struggle. The paper also strongly criticised the government policy of encouraging unrestricted immigration of people from undivided Bengal as it anticipated such influx would jeopardise the identity of the indigenous people. It also voiced its concern on other important issues like the illegal migration from East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh since 1971, uprising in the region, the division of Assam into smaller states, lack of development of the region and host of other issues. However, as a responsible newspaper, The Assam Tribune followed an independent policy without aligning with any political party. Throughout its history the paper has taken up the issues closer to the people and in the words of former Indian president R.Ventkataraman, The Assam Tribune “permeated Assam’s collective consciousness” (Golden Jubilee, 1989).

1.11 The Shillong Times

The Shillong Times was established in 1945. In 1961, Parsva Nath Chaudhuri bought The Shillong Times newspaper and press from the founder editor, proprietor, S.B. Chaudhuri and took over the editorial reins. With the untimely death of its second editor, P. N. Chaudhuri on 1 April 1978, his youngest son, Manas Chaudhuri, already actively working for The Shillong Times, took over the management of the paper.

A symbolic mesay - Independence Day, 15 August, 1991 – was chosen as the day to switch over the paper to the modern computer typesetting and offset printing technique to keep abreast with the latest in printing technology. For the first time The Shillong Times appeared as a broad sheet daily.
Realising that the Garo Hills comprises virtually half of Meghalaya and that there was no vehicle of information to disseminate information of events taking place in those parts, The Shillong Times launched its Garo Hills edition giving the readers of Tura a morning newspaper for the first time on 9th November 1992.

1.12 Growth of Newspapers in Northeast India During the Last 15 Years

The press in Northeast India has undergone rapid change since the period of liberalisation in the 1990s. The press in the region received a major fillip during the last decade and half due to factors such as the rising standard of the people, increasing mass awareness, growing literacy, greater political participation, increase in infrastructure facilities, travel and transportation, and more importantly due to the unprecedented advancement in the information-communication technology (ICT).

Print media in the region has made significant progress in terms of reporting, writing, presentation, designing, printing and circulation. Today in Northeast India there are more than 1074 titles registered with the Registrar of Newspaper for India (RNI) as compared to 700 at the beginning of 1992 indicating a growth rate of 53% during the period. Among the eight Northeastern states (Sikkim being formally included under ‘North Eastern Council’), Meghalaya saw the highest growth of 78% followed closely by Assam with 67%. Of the total 59 titles registered with RNI, 26 have come up during the period in Meghalaya.

The region characterised by ethnic pluralism and linguistic diversity, has seen the birth of several new publications in different languages ranging from the
scheduled languages to languages spoken by various tribes. Although Assamese, Manipuri, Bengali, Hindi, Nepali and Bodo are the only scheduled languages of the Northeast, many dailies and magazines in other major languages such as Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Lushai, Kuki, Karbi, Nyshi, Hmar etc. have been started during the period. During this period 118 titles were registered in Assamese followed by 57 in English and 52 in Bengali. In Assam, out of the total of 550 titles registered with RNI, 220 have been registered during the last 15 years. It may be noted that out of the 15 daily newspapers in Assamese language currently circulated from Guwahati, 12 have been started during the last fifteen years. This is in sharp contrast to the English dailies where only two out of a total of seven currently circulated from Guwahati were registered during the period. This indicates the immense importance and popularity enjoyed by the vernacular press as the preferred medium of communication.

*The Assam Tribune*, first published in 1939, still remains the most respected and widely circulated English daily in Assam. The media in Mizoram, which saw a steady growth of 38% during the period, has only two dailies *Highlander* and *Newslink* that are published in English while there are 26 dailies published in Mizo language from Aizawl only. The press in Manipur which registered one of the lowest growth rates in the region is severely hit by militancy. Tripura, which also suffers from insurgency, registered a slow growth of 20%. The print media in Arunachal Pradesh is in the early stages of development with only a total of 9 titles including dailies, magazines and periodicals. Nagaland which saw a high growth of 62% during the period saw 5 new English dailies hitting the news stand. In Sikkim the print media started significantly only during the early 90’s and has maintained a
steady growth ever since. All of the five Nepali dailies that are currently circulated in Sikkim were started during the last 15 years.

The English dailies published from the region are facing a new threat over the past few years with the national dailies, which till recently have been operating though regional correspondents, setting up offices in the region and launching regional supplements and editions. In a way this trend reflects the growing importance of the region. These, no doubt, have affected the circulations of the local dailies but are not yet able to compete with the local newspapers in coverage of local news. The local press with its finger on the pulse of the local population is more in sync with the local issues. In terms of advertisement potential at local/district level of limited services and products, local dailies enjoy preference. One of the major concerns for the media of the region is that it is often caught in the quagmire of insurgency with insurgent groups as well as the government agencies trying to use media as the force multiplier.

States like Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura which have been bearing the brunt of militancy most for the last few decades have seen killing and kidnapping of editors of several newspapers and magazines. The merciless killing of Parag Das, editor of Pratidin, H.A.Lalrohlu, editor of Hmar daily Shan, Brajamani Singh, editor of Manipur News and Khupkholian Simte, editor of Lenlai magazine bear testimony to this sad reality. Violence against media persons continues in different forms, which hamper objective and qualitative media work.

In addition to the press, the region has other sources of information. In terms of access to telephone, internet and other electronic media, the region has experienced
remarkable growth in the last one and half decades. However, access to these communication amenities have remained largely confined to the urban areas. Only 30% of the villages in northeastern states excluding Assam have access to Village Panchayat Telephone (VPT). Although accurate data on the current subscriber base of the internet is not available, as in the case of telephone there is a significant digital divide between urban and rural areas. According to a NASSCOM survey, sixty-eight cities and towns account for more than 92% of net access in India. (Bharali, 2007)

The media of the region is often being implicated for giving more importance to violence by insurgents, like killing, kidnapping and extortions while neglecting the news of development works being carried out at various levels. The overemphasising and coverage of the incidents of violence projects the region in a negative way to the outside world, consequently hampering the economic growth of the region. As Hussain (2004), journalist and Director of Center for Development & Peace Studies, Guwahati, points out, in order to make the ‘mindset’ of the people in the region to be changed and made forward looking, a sustained campaign needs to be carried out through the media, dedicated to the cause of development and progress. This campaign must reach the common people as well as policy makers or policy influencers who play a key role in matters concerning this region.

1.13 Press in Northeast India: Contemporary and Future Challenges

The kind of media attention the region gets in the press, be they the so-called national or regional press, is often negative and focused on the region as an
insurgency ridden troubled spot. According to Hussain (2004), "the area is known to the outside world as a land of rugged beauty and constant turmoil. This image is working at cross-purposes". While the region's image as an area of breathtaking natural beauty and a vibrant culture arouses interest and fascinates the rest of the country or the world, reports about insurgency, ethnic strife, and under-development in the region gets wide coverage in the media. While development agencies and financial institutions are striving to make the region's enormous potential known to the outside world, very little of such efforts is reflected in the mainstream as well as regional media. This is largely because the media coverage of the area is 'violence driven'. The focus on pioneering developmental efforts has been overlooked to a great extent by the media, and a mindset has been created and sustained to focus only on incidents of violence, and very little on the efforts to transform the region's economy. A study of the content in these newspapers would reveal the dearth of coverage given to news concerning developments at the state, districts or village levels. This gives an impression to those who are outside the region that nothing is happening in the region other than bandhs, and violent acts like killings, kidnappings and extortions by insurgents.

Given the fact that the media houses in the region have no journalists specifically and exclusively trained in 'development journalism,' it is difficult to imagine that the existing print media in the region would be able to play the role of an effective medium to spread the good word regarding the efforts to transform the economy of the area through outside investment. We still need to believe that the power of the media, if effectively harnessed and channelled, can go a long way in
dispelling myths and act as a force-multiplier in all ongoing efforts for peace and development. Most importantly, coverage of the immense potential of the available resources and the region’s proximity to the emerging Asian Tigers in the proper perspective could encourage prospective investors to open shop in the region. In addition, there is need for concerted efforts by government agencies, development organizations and media to help change the ‘mindset’ of the people in the region and made forward-looking. Media can help launch a sustained campaign to promote development, peace and progress. This campaign must reach the common people as well as policy makers or policy influencers who play a key role in matters concerning this region (Hussain, 2004).

With the advent of every new media of communication since the invention of printing, be it radio, television, computers and now the Internet, there are widespread fears that the printed word and thereby the press, would become extinct. The prophecy about the demise of the press has not come true so far. Nevertheless circulations of many newspapers have decreased, and several newspapers have diversified themselves while a few others have closed down. The biggest challenge to the traditional forms of newspapers and books has come from the Internet, which has revolutionized communication. The Internet has affected the content as well as the manner of communication including the process of information gathering and dissemination, interactivity, access, analysis, advertisements, marketing, feedback, and a host of other activities.

Newspaper readership did decline globally in the last decade. According to the report of Monique van Dusseldorp prepared for the European Journalism Centre
(EJC), Maastricht, there is an annual decline of about 600,000 newspaper readers a year. In the same report, Director General of the World Association of Newspapers, Timothy Balding observed that European newspapers lost 1.2 million readers in 1997, twice as many as the year before (Dusseldorp, 1998). This confirms the findings of the UNESCO World Communication Report: “In most countries, newspapers have gone through a serious recession characterised by a general downturn in sales, a loss of advertising market share, dwindling readership among the younger generations and a general decline in the influence of the press compared to radio, television and now the computers (UNESCO World Communication Report 1997). Of the institutions that contribute most of the development of a society, the press perhaps performs the most critical role. It serve as a vehicle through which voices of the people gets carried to large audience that are spread over vast geographical areas and hence different mindsets, needs and moral values. As Justice G.N. Roy, Chairman, Press Council of India once observed. “The role of media is not merely to inform, educate and certain as a detached observer but also to motivate, mould and mobilize public opinion towards the realization of sustainable peace, development, harmony and happiness in the civil society. The press today as a mass communicator has not only become the most important of the four estates, but has even acquired the power of setting the political, social, economic, educational and cultural agenda of the country (Bharali, 2007).

In this chapter we have examined the press in India from a historical perspective. We have defined the important terms of reference for our research, and have studied the historical developments as well as the major guiding principles that
contributed to the growth and development of the press in India. As our study is primarily focused on Northeast India, special mention has been made of the historical development of the press and the challenges the press faces today in the region. A brief overview of the contribution of the Christian missionaries to the founding of printing in India, the pioneering work of the founders of the first newspapers and periodicals, and the path breaking efforts and contribution of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and the other leaders of the nationalist movement are included in this section as it was considered important to understand the need for a socially committed and responsible press. We have also examined the current data on the status of the press in India, the challenges faced by the print media in the country and the region, and the future prospects of the press. Such a historical and contemporary overview of the press in India and the region was considered necessary to at the very outset of our study in order to set the background for a more detailed discussion on the social responsibility of the press.