CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Print media in Manipur may not be thriving as compared to other big and economically advanced states. However, unlike in the past, some of the major newspapers, braving the obstacles along the way have been running successfully for more than 20 years. Higher literacy rate, awareness of the importance of the print media and rising standard of living of the general masses are the major contributing factors for the development of the print media in the state. However, print media in Manipur, like all the small and medium newspapers published in other parts of the country, faces various challenges. This chapter contains the major findings of the study and implications on government bodies, journalists, and future research institutes.

5.2 Summary

Primary data was collected from 1078 newspaper readers in the state (both from the valley and hill districts), 50 print journalists, 50 printing staff and 20 newspaper proprietors in the state. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study and chi-square test was applied to study the significance of difference between the independent and dependant variables. The statistical test was performed at 0.05 level of significance.

This research study shows that print media in Manipur has improved in terms of reporting, printing, designs, coverage of subjects and its contribution to the socio-economic progress of the state. However, lack of formally trained print media journalists and the present turmoil in the state are some of the major drawbacks of the Manipuri press.

5.3 Major Findings of the Research Study

The major findings of the research study can be divided into four categories, namely a) Readers’ perspective of print media in the state b) Journalists’ perspective of print
media in the state c) Printing staff’s perspective of print media in the state and d) Newspaper proprietors’ perspective of print media in the state.

5.3.1 Readers’ Perspective of Print Media in the State

With regard to reporting, 51.11% of the readers are satisfied with the quality of reporting by newspapers published in the state while the remaining 48.88% of the readers stated otherwise.

The study reveals that 64.10% of the readers are not satisfied with the quality of editing in newspapers published in the state while the remaining 35.89% of the readers are satisfied with the same.

Concerning the quality of printing, 59.27% of the readers are satisfied while the remaining 40.72% of the readers stated otherwise.

This research study has found that 55.75% of the readers are not satisfied with the quality of photographs used in the local newspapers published in the state while the remaining 44.24% are satisfied with the same. About the quality of design, 59.83% of the newspaper readers are satisfied while the remaining 40.16% of the readers have stated otherwise.

This research study also reveals the fact that 54.17% of the readers in the state are satisfied with the coverage of subjects by newspapers published in the state while the remaining 45.82% of the readers have stated otherwise. Further, 63.26% of the readers in the state are satisfied with the contribution of the local newspapers towards the socio-economic progress of the state while the remaining 36.73% of the readers are not satisfied with the same.

5.3.2 Journalists’ Perspective of Print Media in the State

This research study reveals that a majority of the journalists (54%) who are employed by the local newspaper houses belong to the low income group (below Rs.10,000 per month) and 52% of them have opined that they are not satisfied with their salary package.

Regarding formal training in journalism, a majority of the journalists (52%) did not receive any formal training in journalism before they joined their respective media houses.
A majority of the journalists (98%) have stated that the press in Manipur do not enjoy freedom of press.

This particular research study has also found that 50% of the journalists are not satisfied with their job, 58% of them get bonus/incentives from their employers and 98% of them cannot avail medical benefits from their employers.

5.3.3 Printing Staff’s Perspective of Print Media in the State

This particular study has found that a majority of the printing staff (54%) who are employed by the local newspaper houses belong to the low income group (below Rs.10,000 per month) and 86% of them have opined that they are not satisfied with their salary package.

This particular research study has also found that 54% of the printing staff members are not satisfied with their job, 62% of them get bonus/incentives from their employers and 96% of them cannot avail medical benefits from their employers.

5.3.4 Newspaper Proprietors’ Perspective of Print Media in the State

All the proprietors (respondents selected for data collection) have opined that freedom of press in Manipur state has been curtailed to some extent both by the militants operating in the state and the state government.

This research work has found out that 65% of the newspaper proprietors have taken loans for starting their media houses. 70% of them have stated that advertisement is their major source of revenue.

The study also reveals facts about circulation and distribution of the local newspapers in the state. 95% of the proprietors have stated that their newspaper is circulated in the interior parts of the state. 50% of them have stated that their newspaper is also circulated outside Manipur state. It is important to note that there are a few districts in neighbouring state Assam (that shares border with Manipur) where there is sizeable Manipuri population.

Manipur is an economically backward state where many villages and small towns are not well connected by proper roads. However, newspaper proprietors in the state have used several means of distributing their newspaper in far flung towns and villages of the state. 80% of them use buses for newspaper distribution, 60% of them use four wheelers for distributing the same, 20% of them even use two wheeler motor vehicles
and 10% of the newspaper proprietors use auto rickshaws for newspaper distribution in the remote areas.

5.4 Implications of the Findings of the Study

The implications of the findings of the study with reference to mainstream national media, Central and State Governments, Journalists, Proprietors and Research Institutes are given below.

5.4.1 Implications on the National Mainstream Media.

Manipur stands second to Jammu and Kashmir State, when it comes to militancy related casualties. However, Manipur in particular and the whole North Eastern fringes of the country in general, are far from the mainstream consciousness of the country. News related to militancy, that too, only very serious cases appear in the mainstream media. Lack of proper connectivity due to difficult terrain and less population may be a few of the major reasons for the mainstream media’s disinterest in the region. However, the mainstream national media should understand the fact that media is one of the few important factors that can bridge the gap between the north east regions and mainland India. Therefore, the same should sometimes keep TRPs (Television Rating Points) in the backstage and act from a larger perspective.

No doubt, major national dailies like ‘The Times of India” have its Guwahati edition. However, as the local news does not get the due prominence, people mainly read the local newspapers to get more local news even in states like Nagaland and Meghalaya where English is the official language.

5.4.2 Implications on the Central Government

The Central government needs to review the controversial Arms Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that has been imposed in the state since 1980. This act was imposed in order to contain militancy in the state. However, even after three decades of the imposition of the same act, the situation has not improved. In fact, the situation is worse compared to earlier days. The general public of the state feels that it is this act that has made the situation worse and not the other way around. The disturbed law and order situation has an adverse effect on both electronic and print media in the state.
5.4.3 Implications on the State Government

There have been many cases of newspaper journalists and proprietors against whom legal actions were initiated by the government for publishing certain news related to militant outfits in the state. The All Manipur Working Journalists Association have conducted several protest rallies in the past whenever any press person was put behind bars by the government for publishing the mentioned matters. However, the state government should understand that press people are caught between the state authorities and the militant outfits. This undue interference from both the government and the militants is a major issue of the press in the state.

According to Asian Human Rights Commission (2007), media restrictions are a step behind in resolving the armed conflict. The commission observed how the restrictions imposed by the Manipur state government regarding publication of objectionable materials can have a negative effect on coverage of certain news by journalists in the state. The state government should understand that freedom of expression is the cornerstone of democracy.

5.4.4 Implications on the Newspaper Proprietors

In its fifth annual press freedom report for South Asia, ‘The Fight Goes On: Press Freedom Crises in South Asia (2006-2007)’, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) identified five key needs to be addressed. First, journalists must be trained to monitor violations of press freedom and journalists’ rights. Systems should be set up to communicate and highlight such violations through alerts. Journalists in conflict areas must be provided safety training and professional skills development. Finally, they should receive training in union/association-building to help them present a stronger, united front and assert their rights to report objectively, free from pressure and harassment. Proprietors of newspapers in Manipur should ensure that their journalists receive the mentioned training and professional skills development.

The Press Council of India, in its report on the ‘Future of Print Media (2001)’, recommended that small newspapers, may be encouraged to run cost effective modern printing presses, Internet connections and organize workshops for journalists and printers for improving the overall quality of small newspapers. It also suggested that genuine small newspapers may be helped with subsidized newsprint. The council also believes that small newspapers are the best means for promoting unity and harmony.
among the people, which will ultimately reinforce the roots of democracy and the process of development. Newspaper proprietors in the state should demand for the implementation of these recommendations to the fullest so that they can reap the benefits.

5.4.5 Implications on Future Research

Referring to this research work, researchers can conduct further studies on the present scenario of freedom of the press in the disturbed areas of the country like the Jammu and Kashmir and North East India.

News of conflict between the militants and the government and the subsequent killings and human rights violation are the main news stories in both print and electronic media in the state. A content analysis on the coverage of such news can be done so as to find out the ratio between coverage of news related to militancy and other news.

Based on this research work, further studies can be conducted on how print media play an important role in safeguarding or preserving the language and culture of small ethnic groups in the country.
5.5 Epilogue

Small newspapers are more aware of the problems and challenges faced by people in the rural areas or those in the remote corners of the country as compared to the big national dailies. Small newspapers published from remote regions of the country carry more in-depth news and articles as these newspapers are published by people living in the same region. Therefore, people in these regions can easily identify with these newspapers. If utilized properly, these small newspapers can be a good conduit between the authorities and the people.

Newspapers published in Manipur come under small newspapers category. It is important to note that despite various challenges faced by the press in Manipur, certain positive changes can be seen in terms of reporting, printing, designs, covering of subjects, contribution to socio-economic progress of the state, circulation and distribution system.

Like many small newspapers published in other parts of the country, newspapers in Manipur also suffer from financial constraints, lack of skilled staff, miniscule readership and other related issues.

Unlike most other small newspapers published outside Manipur, newspapers in the state do not fully enjoy freedom of press due to the present turmoil in the state. Media persons are caught in between the state authorities and non-state actors. Undue interference from both the former and the latter is one of the major challenges of print media in the state. However, it worthwhile to mention that all the major newspapers in the state have thrived despite these challenges.