CHAPTER III: Changing Face of Journalism in Manipur

3.1 Origin of newspapers in India with special reference to North-East:

The first newspaper of the world, *the Oxford Gazette* was started in London in November 1665 by Lord Arlington. The bi-weekly was edited by Henry Muddiman. It has appeared ever since without break, every Tuesday and Friday as the official organ of the government.\(^{82}\) *The Daily Courant*, which is considered to be the first daily newspaper of the world, appeared in England in 1702.

In India, attempts to publish newspapers were started by those who had grievances against the East India Company and had resigned from it. The first attempt to start a newspaper in Kolkata was made in 1766 by William Bolts, the well known author of the Consideration of Indian Affairs. However, he was forced to go back to Europe before he could succeed and there was no one to follow the footsteps of Bolts for about fourteen years.\(^{83}\)

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The first newspaper of India, *the Bengal Gazette* or *the Culcutta General Advertiser* was brought out on January 29, 1780 in Kolkata by James Augustus Hicky, a former employee of the Company. In his weekly, he wrote sarcastically against the British and their affairs, especially against the administration of the East India Company. It took a leading part in maligning the reputation of Warren Hastings, the Governor General of Bengal.\(^{84}\) When a malicious personal attack was made against his wife, the Governor General had to take recourse to law and proclaimed an official order depriving Hicky the privilege of circulating his newspaper through the General Post Office. An attempt to punish Hicky was thought necessary by Hastings and suit after suit were filed to gag him and strangle his paper.

Within six years of Hicky's brave attempt, four weeklies and a monthly were published from Kolkata. *The Indian Gazette*, the second Indian newspaper, was started in November 1780. In February 1784, *the Culcutta Gazette and Oriental Advertiser* was published. In the following year, *the Bengal Journal* made its appearance. In 1785, *the Oriental Magazine or Culcutta Amusement* was published as the first monthly

\(^{84}\text{Ibid.}\)
publication in India. Then *the Culcutta Chronicle* began publication in 1786.\(^{85}\)

Among the north eastern states of India, Assam is the first one to publish a newspaper. Newspaper publication in Assam began in 1846 when American missionaries first came to Sibsagar District of Assam to start a journal called *Arunodoi* (meaning Sunrise) under the editorship of Oliver T. Cutter.\(^{86}\) The journal could survive for over 36 years. It was after 25 years that another local newspaper was started in Majuli. Started by Auniati Satra in 1871, the newspaper was called *Assam Bilashani*.

In Mizoram, John Shakespeare started a Christianity periodical called *Chanchin Laishuïh* in Mizo dialect in 1898. He also published a Mizo monthly *Leh Vai Chainchin* in 1902 which was in circulation till 1941. The oldest existing periodical in Mizo *the Kristian Tlangau* was published first in 1911 by R. Dala and his colleagues. This journal serves as an organ of the Presbyterian Church till today.\(^{87}\)

\(^{85}\) Op. cit, p-14  
\(^{87}\) Diplab L. Chaudhary, NE press fails to raise to occasion, Communicator, April-June, 1998, IIMC, New Delhi, p-27.
3.2 History of newspapers in Manipur:

The history of vernacular journalism can be traced back with certainty for many Indian language newspapers. However, for Manipuri Journalism, it is somewhat difficult. A small printing press was brought to Manipur by Shanglakpam Bhubanchandra Sharma at Kwakeithel, Imphal in 1910-1911. But it was not used for printing newspapers or other journals. It printed forms, bills and other government documents. The State Printing Press which has now become the Directorate of Printing and Stationery was established in 1918-1919 and it had printed government reports and private publications.

The origin of Manipuri journalism can be traced back to late 1910s and that too, outside the state of Manipur although it was a newspaper prototype. A pioneer hand written journal in Manipuri language *Meitei Leima* was started from Cachhar in Assam. And it is believed that the same had been practiced in 1917-18. The journal could lasted only a short period of time.  

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88 M. Saratchandra, *Growth and Development of Newspapers in Manipur till the Late 1940s*, M. Phil. Thesis, Department of History, Manipur University, p-31.
A multi-faceted leader of the state, Jananeta Hijam Irabat, who had pioneered social and political movements of the state, brought out another hand written journal - *Meitei Chanu*. The first issue of the cyclostyled monthly appeared in June, 1922. He was, for Manipur a Raja Ram Mohan Roy of the Indian press. But there are conflicting reports on the starting year of the journal. Some writers say that the journal was published in between 1925-26. In one of his articles, Seram Mangi, the former Assistant News Editor of the All India Radio, Imphal wrote that that without going to the scale of newspaper publication, the first publication of a newspaper in Manipur was Hijam Irabat’s hand written journal, *Meitei Chanu* in around 1925-26.

However, if one looks at the veracity of defining a newspaper, the early ventures like *Meitei Leima* and *Meitei Chanu* can only be early prototypes of newspaper. If the publications are to brand as newspapers, the two should have been published either in printed or in cyclostyled format.

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
and maintained periodicity at least for a considerable number of publications and reach to a significant number of readers.

_Masik Jagaran_, a monthly published as a bilingual journal in Bengali and Manipuri is considered to be the first printed journal in the annals of Manipuri journalism. It was edited by Arjun Singh and printed at the Islamia Press in Sylhet (now in Bangladesh). Nityaichand Singh was publisher of the journal. It started in 1924 and aimed at giving education to Manipuris outside the state properly and improving their standard of living. Kangujam Madhumangol Singh, former editor of _Prajetantra_ and former news editor of the local private television network, ISTV averred that whether the editor was a Manipuri or a non-Manipur could not be yet ascertained. Arjun Singh might even be a Punjabi.\(^{92}\)

No newspaper was printed at a printing press in Manipur before the month of October, 1930. It is unfortunate that newspapers which were published before the end of the Second World War have become unavailable antics.

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\(^{92}\) Speech of K. Madhumangol at the 34\textsuperscript{th} Birth Anniversary of AMWJU on September 13, 2004 at the Manipur Press Club, Imphal.
The first printed Manipuri monthly journal published in Imphal was *Yakairol*. The journal was edited and published by Dr. Ningthoujam Leiren Singh. The first issue of the publication appeared in October, 1930 and a copy of it was priced five pice. The main contents of the journal were literary items, health columns, spiritual comments, historical and social issues. Among the regular contributors of the journal, Hawaibam Nabadwipchandra, Dijamani Sharma, Lalita Sharma, Dr. Lamabam Kamal, Khwairakpam Chaoba etc. are worth mentioning. The publication had some of its contents in Bengali and English too.  

The first daily newspaper of the state is *Dainik Manipur Patrika*. The daily was registered in 1932 under the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867. The daily came out sometime in 1933 and it could circulate 3000(three thousand) copies a day within a short period of time. The newspaper even published two issues a day. The newspaper was read not only in Manipur but also in Manipuri inhabited areas of Assam, Bengal, Tripura and Brindavan.

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93 M. Saratchandra, *Growth and Development of Newspapers in Manipur till Late 1940s*, M. Phil. Thesis, Department of History, Manipur University, p-31.
in Uttar Pradesh. The daily was a vocal critic of the British rule in Manipur and it invoked a sense of patriotism that would lead to freedom struggle against the alien rule in the state. The newspaper had invited wrath of Her Majesty because of its criticism of the policies and programs of the foreign rule and thereafter the daily had to face the music accordingly.

The newspaper went on to provoke the colonial authority in Manipur to such an extent that ultimately the government of Manipur proscribed its publication. This was the first instance in the history of Manipuri journalism in which a newspaper was banned by the state administration. Thus, the newspaper which had grown as a powerful mobiliser of public opinion went out of publication after about five years. Three brilliant editors - Thongbam Gokulchandra Singh, Hawaibam Lalhari Singh and Lalita Madhab Sharma had served the daily. Their hard hitting editorial columns served as an eye opener for the people to the injustices of the British rule and helped in moulding public opinion against it.

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94 Op cit, p-40

95 ibid.

96 Op cit, p-32
A monthly journal named *Lalit Manjaree Patrika* was started by Atombapu Sharma in 1933. It dealt with the issues like education, history, religion, literature, society, political matters etc.\(^9\) In matters of political relevance, the monthly was considered to be a mouthpiece of the Indian National Congress and bolstered the views of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. Arambam Dorendrajit, Khwairakpam Chaoba, Maisnam Thambhou, Hijam Anganghal and Lalita Madhab were the prominent figures among the contributors of the monthly. Another quarterly named *Shrigouranga* was edited by Lalita Madhab in 1934. It served as an ideologue newspaper of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. *Tarun Manipur*, a weekly journal, was started in August, 1938. It was edited by Rajkumar Shitaljit Singh and published by Arambam Dorendrajit. Shitaljit had also served as a correspondent of the Associated Press of India (API) from 1937-1941. The API was pioneer news agency of the country during the British regime in the country and later it became the premier news agency of the country - Press Trust of India (PTI). A health journal, *Meitei Maiba* also came up in the same year under the editorship of Shagolsem Indramani Singh and it was published by Ningombam Mangi Singh.

\(^9\) Op cit, p-35
It must be remembered that the 1930s and 1940s had seen the emergence of a new educated class of intellectuals which was critical about the British rule in Manipur and also of the socio-economic discriminations that were perpetuated in the society under the native kings. Atrocities of the princely rule and suppression of the colonial administration had led to people’s apathy towards the ruling circle. Opinion leaders of the state started to explore ways to combat chilling effects of undemocratic governance. These developments were the main reasons behind the profusion of newspaper publications in the late nineteen thirties and forties.

Airing his observations upon the role of the press in Manipur during the dependent Bhodhachandra regime, Naorem Birendrakumar Singh, former editor of the daily newspaper Paajel said that many of these newspapers of the time reflected resentment towards the monarchy and the inhuman religious and customary practices. Newspapers associated with persons who are known for their political leanings had significantly contributed to this. Yet, there were others who were loyal to the king. The
conflict came to such a head that few intellectuals who were loyal to the then Maharajah of Manipur had to start newspapers to counter the bid.”

It may also be noted here that there were also other intellectuals or journalists who were not against the king but no one ever defended the discriminating character of the British administration in Manipur. Recalling his past experiences as a journalist, Rajkumar Shitaljit Singh said that not all might have been against the monarchy in the state, but no one ever defended the malpractices in governance as he witnessed during the period. He further recalled that once the President of the Manipur State Durbar, McDonald said that Manipuri people were unfit for shouldering administrative responsibilities. The same was recorded in the state Durbar. When he published the story in his *Tarun Manipur* he was summoned for infringement upon the confidentiality of the proceedings of the Durbar. Later, he was not given any punishment as there was no law to book him under any provision of the rules enacted by the State Durbar.

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98 An interview with Naorem Birendrakumar, June 17, 2000 at his residence at Nagamapal, Imphal.
99 An interview with Raj Kumar Shitaljit, June 19, 2000 at his residence at Keishamthong Top Leirak.
100 Ibid.
He further reminisced that once a famine hit at Mayang Imphal and king Churachand provided them food grains (paddy) as loan. Later, Shitaljit came to know that the king had allowed borrowing the food grains on the condition of returning the same with byaj (interest). In his editorial comment he criticized the act and wrote that the king was supposed to lend a helping hand to his subjects whenever they are in a great trouble. Providing something to his subjects that would be returned with interest denigrates the esteemed authority of the king. The king asked the President of the State Durbar to punish him for the comments he made. The wise Britisher ignored it and replied that the writings could be interpreted as a praise of His Highness if it is taken in good faith and also that what he has done did not constitute a punishable offence.\textsuperscript{101} Interestingly enough, such incidents did not affect their personal relationship. He was loyal to the king and later appointed as tutor of prince Jaisingh and had moved for Jaipur as tutor of the prince.

The state could see a spurt of newspapers in 1939. Manipur Matam (weekly), Manipur Paojel (bi-weekly) and Manipur Mahila/Meitei Chanu

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
(monthly) were started in the same year.\textsuperscript{102} Manipur Matam had served as a mouthpiece of the Nikhil Manipur Mahashabha. It could circulate 300(three hundred) copies a day and one copy of the weekly was priced four pice. In a significant move, students were offered to read the newspaper at half the price. Assamese language had its reserved columns in the weekly and it was also read in Assam. Earlier it was published for every third day, but later it changed to a weekly. Rajkumar Shitaljit edited the weekly also. Manipur Paojel was published twice a week under the editorship of Keisham Kunjabihari. Manipur Mahila or Meitei Chanu was edited by Pukhrambam Prijat Singh and it was the first ever journal of its kind on the cause of women in the state.

The later part of the nineteen thirties was a crucial juncture in the freedom movement of the country from the yoke of British Empire. Newspapers became a very important vehicle of mass mobilization in the struggle and nationalist newspapers had served against all odds for this noble cause. Many journalists of the country had to enjoy Her Majesty’s

\textsuperscript{102} Growth and Development of Newspapers in Manipur till Late 1940s, M. Saratchandra, M. Phil. Thesis, Department of History, Manipur University, p-37.
hospitality in jail. In Manipur also Kunjabihari was also arrested by an order of the Manipur State Durbar and thrown behind the bar. The newspaper was striped of its registration and proclaimed banned.

The menace of the Second World War stopped publication of most of the newspapers and journals from 1939-45. Some journals like *Meitei Leima, Meitei, Naharol etc.* however appeared in 1941 for a short period. Two or three issues of *Meitei Leima*, a monthly were brought out in 1941 under the editorship of Akham Thambalngou Singh. Even king Bodhachandra regularly contributed stories for the journal. The same year witnessed the emergence of another monthly, *Meitei* edited by Phurailatpam Gourachandra Sharma. Laishram Jugeshwar, Chingakham Pishak, Thokchom Modhu and Hawnibam Nabadwipchandra were among the contributors of the monthly. Economic condition of the state, Russia's compulsion to join the Second World War and purna swaraj (full independence from foreign rule) were discussed in the monthly through the enlightening columns of different contributors. Gourachandra Sharma was son of princess Ombisana, daughter of king Surachandra. He was a government employee, but left his job when a misunderstanding erupted.
between king Churachand and himself. Later, he started to publish journals and books.\textsuperscript{103}

Another periodical which excelled in this year was \textit{Naharol}. It was published twice in a year under the editorship of Laishram Gopal Singh. Two issues of the journal—yaoshang issue and pujah issue were brought out. The former was printed at the Shivaji Press, Dr. Suresh Sarkar Road, Calcutta and the latter was printed at the Churachand Printing Press, Imphal. Both were, however, published from 6 Murlidhar Sen Lane, Calcutta. The journal had the distinction of publishing letters to the editor from eminent personalities like Anil Kumar Chandana, Rabindranath Tagore’s secretary; Maharajkumar Priyobarta of Manipur, Thakur Kamini Kumar Singh, Revenue and Development Minister of Tripura; Gopinath Bordoloi, premier of Assam etc.\textsuperscript{104}

After the Second World War ended and normalcy restored, a daily newspaper \textit{Bhagyabati Patrika} was started on April 15, 1946 and it had a number of talented personalities in the list of its editors. Maisnam Biramani, Khamnam Madhu, P.M. Singh, Dr. N. Leiren, Arambam Lalmani etc. edited

\textsuperscript{103} Op. cit, p-38.  
the daily and the newspaper continued its regular publication till 1950. In the same year, *Ngasi*, a fortnightly was also started under the editorship of Keisham Kunjabihari. He also edited a daily, a monthly (for children) and a bi-weekly. The first two carried the same title (*Ngasi*) and the bi-weekly was named as *Manipur Paojel*. A monthly called *Chhatra Jagat* (students’ world) was also started in December the same year to serve as a mouthpiece of the Manipur Chhatra Sanmelani (students union of Manipuri students at that time). It was edited by Ningthoujam Tombi Singh and published by Thokchom Bira Singh. N. Tombi later edited *the Manipur Times* and *the Manipur Mail*. Two other periodicals – *Bhagyabati Masik* and *Bhagyabati Kala* (both monthly) were started in the same year under the editorship of Atombapu Sharma. The former monthly was a literary and cultural publication and the latter dealt with music and dance.

Main contents of Manipuri newspapers and other journals during the second half of the nineteen forties reflected socio-economic and political issues of those times. They also included cultural and literary items, and also concerns of specific sections of the society like that of the students. Newspaper circulation was significantly low as transport and communication facilities were underdeveloped. Newspaper and other
publications were running a short life. There were no proper distribution network and newspaper stalls and newspapers could not expect any support from the government. Most of the publications except daily newspapers were also published cyclostyled as there were very few printing presses.

It may be noted here that printing presses of Christian missionaries were very much present in many corners of British India including its northeastern region but Manipur was an exception. The state printing press was engaged in printing government documents and publications. Atombapu Sharma’s Churachand Printing Press was the premier printing centre at the time. Many newspapers, journals and books were printed here.

In 1946, the Calcutta Manipuri Students Union started an annual magazine named Khonjel. It could survive only a short life and resurfaced in 1975. Even if it could sustain its publication only for a few issues, it published many articles which aimed at promoting mutual understanding and emotional integrity between the valley and hill populace of Manipur.

A significant newspaper of the time, Prajatantra, was started as a daily newspaper in 1946.\textsuperscript{105} It continued its publication till a few years back

\textsuperscript{105} Op cit, p-45
with short breaks sometimes. It started as a mouthpiece of Manipur State Congress under the editorship of Keisham Kunjabihari Singh. Earlier, it was printed at Chitrangada Press, Imphal. However in 1948 it shifted its printing centre at Tarun Press, Imphal. R.K. Maipaksana became its editor in the same year. He put the famous political maxim "the voice of the people is the voice of the god" just below the title of the newspaper. Laishram Jaichandra Singh assisted Maipaksana in 1950 and the former succeeded the latter in 1951 as the editor of the daily. A copy of the daily was priced four pice in its inception. The year 1947 is a significant one in the history of the evolution of Manipuri journalism. The year witnessed the emergence of ten publications including daily newspapers viz.- Praja, Eikhoige Manipur and Sandhyagee Bhagyabati Patrika (dailies); Anouba Yug, Bhagyabati and Praja (weeklies); Khonjel (fortnightly) Palem and Imarol (monthlies); Meengnaidabee (quarterly).  

Anouba Yug was started in April, 1947 as a cyclostyled weekly by Hijam Irabat. He was a revolutionary social reformer. He stood for the cause of peasants, weaker sections and oppressed people of Manipur. He started the weekly with a vision to bring about a socialist society. Through the

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106 Op cit, p-56
columns of his weekly, he encouraged the peasants and oppressed section of
the society to fight for their cause, spread democratic values and shoulder a
great role in removing the misunderstandings which developed between the
plain and hill people of the region. His newspaper voiced against
untouchability, religious dogma and many social and administrative
malpractices. His weekly could not last long because of his socio-political
engagements.

*Bhagyabati* (weekly) was published every Sunday under the
editorship of Arambam Lalmani Singh and it was purely a literary journal.
*Praja* (weekly) was started in the last week of June, 1947 under the
editorship of Hawaibam Ranbir Singh. The weekly had to cease its
publication within two months but, within the short span of two months, it
published enlightening editorial comments on significant issues like the
possibilities of center-state relations of independent India and its states and
British India’s views on the formation of a united India after independence.

*Praja* (weekly) reincarnated as a daily newspaper in the last week of
July, 1947, but with a change of guards. Laishram Achou Singh became
editor of the daily. The daily advocated against the formation of an Interim
Council in Manipur by the royal authority. The Council had seven members or ministers. The royal authority appointed his brother prince Priyobarta to serve as Chief Minister and head of the Interim Council. Through his editorial columns in Praja the editor made a harsh comment against the king’s decision to appoint an unelected person to lead a government. He criticised that the autocratic decision was against public interest. His newspaper demanded that the Interim Council should be an elected body and there should be proper representation from the hill areas of Manipur in it.

Khonjel (voice) was the first Manipuri journal published from Tripura. The fortnightly was started on 3 August, 1947 from Agartala. It was edited by Ningthem Shri Madhabjit Singh and published by Moulabi Nalu Miya and printed at Sophia Press, Agartala. The editor of the fortnightly had a mission to uplift the status of Manipuris outside the state, but succumbed to death untimely of a dog bite.¹⁰⁷ The Young Writers’ Association, Manipur started a literary quarterly “Meengnaiabbee” on August 1, 1947 under the editorship of Khwairakpam Chaoba Singh. He also edited a monthly journal “Jyoti” which was started in 1948. Another monthly ‘Palem’ was also started on October 29, 1947. It was a cyclostyled publication. It was edited

¹⁰⁷ Op cit, p-67
by Thambalngou Singh and it was known for its promotion of Meitei revivalism. The journal was published by an organization called Meitei Mayek Thougali Marup, Wangkhei which was working for rejuvenating Meitei script. Another literary monthly “Imarol” had appeared in the month of November, the same year. It was edited by Wahengbam Narayan Singh.

In 1947, social worker Sagolsem Indramani Singh edited “Eikhoigee Manipur”. It was a daily newspaper. He also had edited a health journal “Meitei Maiba”. The daily could survive for five years. Indramani was put behind the bar when he tried to organize meetings against the non-inclusion of Meiteis in the administrative set-up of the state that emerged after Manipur’s merger into the Dominion of India in October, 1949 and her subsequent becoming of a Part-C state. Laishram Jugeshwor Singh had edited Sandhyagee Bhagyabati Patrika, a daily newspaper. Later, he also edited the English weekly named the Eastern Express.

On the short lived nature of the newspapers published in Manipur before it had merged into the Dominion of India, Seram Mangi observes: A weekly journal Ngasi was published in 1946. It was edited by Keisham Kunjabihari. After a short period of time, it became a daily newspaper.
However, the state authority had banned its publication. A publication called Congress Bulletin was also published for some time. A journal called Praja which was later changed its name to Prakashanti was also in print under the editorship of Loitam Yaima Singh. It was also proclaimed banned in 1948 on the charges of malicious writing against the king of Manipur. There were some monthly and other periodical journals in between 1930-1948. All these newspapers were circulated only for a short period and stopped publication because of sanctions by the state government or some other reasons. The newspapers at that time could not serve as a potent mass media.  

After independence from the colonial rule, many printing presses came up in the state. As per a report of the All Manipur Press Association, 1965-66, as many as 62 printing presses were there in Imphal and its nearby areas at that time. There were some unregistered printing presses also. With the advent of more developed printing technology, journalism also got boosted in Manipur. The Manipuri weekly “Ngari” was converted into a daily newspaper in January, 1948 under the editorship of Keisham Kunjabihari Singh. Jyoti, a monthly edited by Ashangbam Minaketan Singh

also saw light of the day in December the same year. The Calcutta Manipur Students Congress also started its annual publication “Khonjet” in the same year and it was edited by Gourahari Singh.

1949 was another landmark year in the history of Manipuri journalism. In the month of October that year, Manipur merged into the Dominion of India. In fact, the period from 1949 to 1980 may be considered as the second phase of the development of the press in Manipur.\(^{109}\) Many newspapers, journals and magazines were brought out in 1949 and the earlier newspapers also continued their circulation. Loumee, edited by Yaima Singh and Praja Shakti edited by R.K. Maipaksana made their appearance in 1949. Loumee started as a weekly and it became a daily newspaper in 1949. Praja Shakti was published twice in a week initially and later it was published thrice in a week.

Many mouthpiece newspapers of political parties surfaced during the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies. Ideologue newspapers of this genre included Simanta Patrika of the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, Khollao of the Communist Party of India, Manipur State Council, \_sanaikeibak\_ and later \_lhou\_ of the Manipur People’s Party (MPP).

\(^{109}\) Op cit, p-89
The former editor of *Ihou* AK. Sanaton said that Kanglei League, a regional political party of the state, started a vernacular daily newspaper by the name of *Ihou* in 1973. The first editor of the newspaper was Kshetrimayum Shyamkanhai Singh. When MPP was on the way to merge with the Janata Dal, a section of the party countered the move fervently. In the meantime, Kanglei League had merged into MPP in 1976 and from 1977 onwards to 1999, *Ihou* was publishing as a mouthpiece of the party.\footnote{10} The political mouthpiece had stopped publication in 1999 because of the onslaught of new printing technologies and professional competition. Sanaton also had edited a weekly journal called *Anouba Khongthang* in 1980.

*Ihou* was started in 1973 as the mouthpiece of the Kanglei League in 1973. *Sanaleibak*, on the other hand, was started by the Manipur People’s Party (MPP) in 1974 as its mouthpiece. With the merger of the Kanglei League into the MPP in 1977, *Ihou* became the mouthpiece of the MPP and *Sanaleibak* continued as an independent newspaper with Chandam Manihar as its editor.

\footnote{10: A Talk with Sanaton at his home at Singjamei, Imphal on 30 Aug., 2007}
Simanta Patrika was started on 1 July, 1957 under the editorship of Naorem Birendrakumar Singh and it is still publishing though not doing well. The first issue of Khollao appeared on 8 January, 1962 and it was edited by Thiyam Meghachandra Singh. Recalling the ups and downs of the vernacular daily, L. Iboyaima, a former editor of the newspaper narrated that the newspaper became the most popular daily in the nineteen sixties. Its popularity could not be attributed to being a political party’s newspaper or its ownership only. The news coverage of the daily on the issues of public importance had really attracted readers’ immediate attention. Moreover, the newspaper’s going to near oblivion and extinction later on was never by people’s outright rejection of it. It was because of management problems. After a gap of few years, the ideologue newspaper reappeared in 1999 but it could not survive even till the end of that year. The latest entry into the bandwagon of political mouthpieces was Panthungpham of the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), which had ruled the state from 1998-2001. The newspaper was born with the emergence of the regional political outfit and had gone with the wind with the dethroning of MSCP in 2001. The daily was edited by Senjam Tombinou Singh.

111 A Talk with L. Iboyaima on Jan. 23, 2009 at the CPI, Manipur State Council Office in Imphal.
The year 1996 will remain a memorable year in the history of Manipuri journalism. *Hueiyen Lanpao* went on offset printing on July 28, 1996. *The Imphal Free Press*, a daily which have both English and Manipuri editions, also started on offset print on 3 May, the same year. *Poknapham* also went on offset print from October 25, 1996. *Matamgee Yakairol* also followed suit in the same year. Besides, a pension scheme was started in April, 1996 for the working journalists of the state under the Manipur Working Journalists Pension Rules, 1996.

Describing the quantum leap the print media of the state experienced at the dawn of offset printing, Salam Bharat Bhushan, the founder editor of *Hueiyen Lanpao* asserted that when his daily went on offset, it could maintain a circulation of 18,000 copies per day for the first time in the annals of print media in Manipur. A high tone on commenting socio-political issues and an outlook of Meitei revivalism were always associated with the daily.\(^{112}\) As a result of his revolutionary spirit he had to taste prison life for three months without trial in 1984 under the National Security Act (NSA) and letter blocks of the printing set up were impounded. He averred that the political papers during those days had a soft tone. Independent

\(^{112}\) A Talk with Bharat Bhushan at his home at Sagolband Meino Leirak, Imphal on May 23, 2007
newspapers were also moderate. Even if some newspaper came in the line of
the trendsetting *Hueiyen Lanpao*, they were overlooked by the state
administration but his paper really had a primary reader in the state
machinery.\(^{113}\)

The largest circulated daily of the state at present, *the Sangai Express*
(which has both Manipuri and English edition) was started in 1999 and both
its editions at the beginning were edited by Khelen Thokchom. Another
Manipuri daily, *Treiben* had started in 2004. The short lived Imphal Today
(Manipuri daily) came up in the same year. *The Sangai Express* went to
Yakairol, Naharolgee Thoudang, the Imphal Free Press, Sanaleibak* and
*Hueiyen Lanpao* also had gone to multi-colour print.

**Dialect newspapers:** The practice of Journalism in the hills of
Manipur became tangible in the early 1940s. It is believed that a Hmar
Magazine, *Hmasawwnna* which had surfaced in 1941 was the first news
magazine in tribal dialect in Manipur. It was edited by Zathuo, a Hmar
literary giant. The magazine was said to be published from Mission
Compouna, once the bastion of Welsh missionaries in Old Churachandpur.

\(^{113}\) ibid
But in the absence of evidence to substantiate the claim, the assertion could not be ascertained.

A magazine called *Lhangsam* appeared in the northern hill district of Manipur about the same time. It was edited SL Lunneh, a pioneer of Christian faith and a trailblazer of Thadou-Kuki literature. It was published from Motbung in Sadar hills. The magazine was known for its multi-perspective contents. It became a mouthpiece of the then Kuki Christian Organization (KCO). At the same time, it tried to prop up the Thadou-Kuki literature and dwelt on the socio-political issues of the Kukis side by side.

In 1952, a monthly magazine *Zinsol* was published in Gangte dialect. It was edited by Lamzasoi Chelmang, the first graduate among the Gangtes. The monthly served as a channel of information throughout the length and breadth of the Gangte inhabited areas of the state. The magazine with its package of information and editorial comments was well received by the readers. A regular feature of the magazine titled “Bilsahte Lunggel” was much closed to the heart of its readers. It is said that, *Zinsol* earned name and fame, thanks to this unique and thought provoking feature. The journal articulated the aspirations, demands, difficulties and problems of the local
masses and had been able to establish strong emotional affinity with its readers. Like other short lived dialect newspapers, Zingsol too found it hard to escape from the trap of death. After two years, it ceased to publish as a result of financial dearth.

The following years witnessed the coming of Sim-Le-Mal, a magazine in Thadou-Kuki dialect. It was also edited by S.L. Lunneh. It was published from Motbung in Senapati District. It also found hard to survive due to financial shortage. It had attempted to address the socio – political and more importantly, identity issues of the erstwhile Kuki nation, apart from promoting the Thadou – Kuki literature. Nevertheless, it was also deemed to meet the fate of other dialect magazines circulated at that time. Magazines like Pennagam, Moultinchan, Zouzam etc. had appeared in the following years with their own flavour. However, they could not stand against the test of time due to the common raison d’être of financial crunch.

In those days, journalism was regarded as a hobby rather than a profession. And, no one dared to take up the task of publishing journals as a profession. They were never started with an attempt to attack, criticize or launch a tirade against those who are in power or authority. Rather it was the
increasing awareness and the need felt by the torch bearers of the profession to address social issues which had borne out such publications. One important factor which had contributed to the growth of journalism in the hills of Manipur was the ever increasing consciousness to protect and preserve the ethnic identity of the various communities there. The trend and approach still prevails. Thongkhanlian Vaiphei, a leader (editorial) writer of dialect daily, Thuhiltu said that the daily was started with a view to cater the reading needs of the Vaipheis as well as to preserve and promote the Vaiphei literature.\textsuperscript{114} All the newspaper owners in Churachandpur also tell the same. So, apart from providing information to the people, they are accepting the additional burden of enriching their literature and preserving their identity.\textsuperscript{115}

The tribal dialect newspapers in Manipur are mostly community-based mouthpieces and have a niche reader who speaks a particular dialect. Such genre of newspapers, in a good number, started to proliferate in the state from 1980 onwards. The circulation of such type of newspapers and its

\textsuperscript{114} Mangminthang Gangte, \textit{Journalism in the Hills of Manipur}, Project Report, 2007, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Manipur University, p-4.

\textsuperscript{115} ibid
continued existence depend to a large extent on the population of the ethnic tribe that is being targeted by the newspaper. For instance, the circulation of a Kuki newspaper will depend on the number of readership, i.e. the population who speak a Kuki dialect. This being the key reason, there is hardly any newspaper available in the dialect of smaller ethnic tribes. Dialect newspapers in the state, as one finds today, are that of the bigger tribes. They enjoy the advantage of larger population which means larger circulation and more readerships which would make the publication sustainable.

Readership is the imperative factor for the survival of any publication, particularly in a state like Manipur. Here, advertisement revenue accounts for only a little part of the economic health of a newspaper. The situation is more serious in dialect newspapers. Newspapers in minor dialects are unable to survive because of lack of readership. Gin Gangte in an article contributed to the North East Sun observed: “Readership (not advertisement) is most important because it is the reader who themselves are the buyers on which the survival of the paper depends”. ¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Op cit, p-5.
As mentioned earlier, from the 1980s onwards the number of news magazines and other periodicals inside the state increased manifold with most of the ethnic tribes having publications in their own dialect. Unfortunately, many such newspapers failed to sustain for a long period. One of the popular publications among the dialect journals was Lenlai, a monthly magazine in Simte dialect. The magazine edited by T. Khupkhonlian Simte was known for its hard hitting comments on the socio-political issues of Manipur. The comment coupled with its cartoon strip was well received by its readers. The monthly could secure a place for itself in the hearts of its readers.

The radition of daily newspaper publication among the ethnic tribes of Manipur started with the launch of Thuthang in Zou dialect in 1973. It is the oldest RNI registered dialect daily of the state and was edited by T. Gougin. Recorded as the oldest existing dialect daily newspaper in Manipur, Sikni-Eng started to hit the news stand on 2 September, 1975. Published by Lalpianga from the Fanai Printers, Lamka, it was first edited by C S Sitkil.

117 ibid
Lalhmingliana Torell, the present editor and publisher of the daily took charge from 1978 onwards. Although it is the oldest existing dialect daily of the state it is still printing in a letter press. It had enjoyed readership throughout the Mizo-dominated areas of India and once penetrated even to some Indian embassies abroad.

*Sumkon*, the Imphal based Kuki daily was started in 1980 under the editorship of Mangjiangam Touthang. Though the daily claims to be largest circulated daily in the tribal zone of the state, it is also still being printed in a letter press. *Thinglhang Post* was launched as a Kuki weekly in 1982 by the present Information Minister of the state, T. N. Haokip and became a daily in the nineties. The popular Paite dialect daily, *Manipur Express* was started as a weekly in 1981 and became a daily in 1983. The daily owned, edited and published by L. Chinkhalian undertook a facelift when it got published in offset print in 2003.

The first Hmar dialect daily, *Thuthar* was started in 1983 at Churachandpur under the editorship of W. R. Pudaite. The daily, however, failed to survive long. The vacuum created by the closure of the daily was filled up in 1987 with the emergence of another Hmar dialect daily,
*Hmaswnna Thar* edited by Lalmalsawn Sellate in the same district. The daily even went on offset print by the beginning of 2007. The Mizo dialect newspaper, *Chhantu* was started in 1976 by F. Hrangzuala. After having ceased to circulate in 1990, the newspaper resurfaced in 2002 with a new look of computerized print. The Tangkhul dialect daily, *Aja* was started in 1992. Ms Valley Rose Hungyo is editing the daily from its commencement. The Rongmei Naga daily, *Dihcham* was launched in 1999 by Ramkung Pamei from Tamenglong District headquarters to cater the reading needs of Zeliangrong tribes in Tamenglong and elsewhere in Manipur.

*The Lamka Post* which started in 2002 as a Paite daily under the editorship of Thangzalian Thomte, had set a milestone in the annals of dialect journalism in Manipur when it came out as the first dialect daily of the state in offset print. The daily could cross a circulation figure of 2000 per day at the very inception itself. The newspaper also e-mailed its news items to the Paite diaspora around the globe. The year 2004 saw the birth of a Vaiphei dialect daily, *Nisin Thuhiltu* and it was edited by Kh. Benlian. Although it is a late comer among the dialect dailies of the state, it could attain a readership of about 4000.
Magazines like Hetnaapha, Vaphual, Ahi-Twi, Chennagam Lenkolni, Akshi, Sawmleng, Suangmantam Digest, Zingsol, Zo-Khuak etc. appeared for a short while and disappeared. Also weeklies like, Mediator in Kuki from Moreh, Tulai Zogam in Kuki from Imphal, Kanthouna in Maring, Frontier Week-End in Paite from Churachandpur, Kaphung Khon in Tangkhul etc. appeared in the scene for a short period.

3.3 Arrival of radio, television and new media in Manipur:

Radio broadcast in Manipur: On May 21, 1957 All India Radio, Guwahati started broadcasting Manipuri programmes. The All India Radio, Imphal started transmitting its programmes from August 15, 1963 through a low power transmitter. The studio of the AIR station was equipped with a limited facility of essential equipments and there were only one playback studio and two multipurpose studios. Out of these two multipurpose studios, one was installed at the office complex near the Battalion Headquarters of the First Manipur Rifles and the other at the studio near Raj Bhavan. On 2 November, 1971, a high power transmitter was installed at Mayang Imphal. The coverage area has been increased with the commissioning of 50KW short wave transmitter on 20 February, 1996. With this new development,
AIR, Imphal covers not only the entire state but also neighboring states as well as some foreign countries.\textsuperscript{118}

A 10Kw FM transmitter started its test transmission from November, 2002 and the transmission was on regular service from the next year. A new project for Captive Earth Station has been completed and commissioned on March 31, 2003 and henceforth the programmes of AIR, Imphal can be uplinked through this earth station.\textsuperscript{119}

**Regional News Unit (RNU), Imphal:** The Regional News Unit of the AIR, Imphal was commissioned on 15 August 1963. The first team of the Unit included R. Constantine, Assistant News Editor of the time and Nabakumar Singh, translator cum newsreader. A 15 minute Manipuri news bulletin was broadcast at 7:30 p.m. from AIR, Imphal on 1 January, 1964. Later a 5-minute Manipuri news bulletin was introduced on 4 January, 1964 at 7:30 a.m. This 5-minute news bulletin has now been extended to 10 minutes from the later part of 2002 onwards with the introduction of a news analysis of main stories published in local dailies of the state with editors of local dailies, media experts and economic writers inter-alia. In due course of


\textsuperscript{119} Op cit, p-36.
time, Kabui, Thadou, Mao, Tangkhul, Hmar and Paite news bulletins were also introduced from the station.

On every Sunday, a 15-minute News Reel was introduced from January, 1964 at 7.15 p.m. by the name of Paogee Shaktam and on Tuesdays and Thursdays a 5-minute news commentary in Manipuri was also introduced by the name of Matamgee Wapham. Whenever the Manipur State Assembly is in session, there is an assembly review daily for 15 minutes at 7:45 pm and the programme has been branded as Manipur Vidhan Sabhagee Paodam. Only senior journalists or editors of local dailies are privileged to present the review.

From 2002 onwards, live phone-in programme “Hello Manipur”; science magazine; responding phone-in-questions by concerned experts in particular issues like natural disaster, health, agriculture and animal husbandry in Khonjel Nachom; rural programme, Phone-in-listeners choice in the dialect programs etc. have attracted the listeners. Actually, radio broadcast has been redefined in Manipur also as it has done in many corners of the globe. All India Radio, Imphal started radiating 2 hours local programmes in FM Channel on radio wave 103.5KHz on trial basis and it
was from 1 June, 2003 that the trial transmission extended to 5 hours from 11:00 hrs to 16:00 hrs daily and became a regular feature. The full capacity of the FM transmitter is 10 KW and direction quality of the FM signal is found to be very loud and clear up to Ukhrul, Moirang and Tengnoupal.

**Dialect programmes:** AIR, Imphal broadcasts programmes in 6 major dialects and 18 minor dialects out of the 31 recognized dialects of the state. Kabui, Thadou, and Tangkhul programmes were started from the very inception of this Station. Mao programme was commenced a month later in the same year (1963). Hmar and Paite programmes started later, on 26 November, 1981. The duration for Tangkhul and Thadou programmes are 30 minutes each and for Hmar, Paite, Mao and Kabui programmes, the duration is 20 minutes each. Minor dialect programmes were started in the later part of 1964 under the leadership of P. Ramyang, the then Transmission Executive. The programme called “Chinglongee Sheiroi” (melodies from the hills) is being very well received at present.

**Television transmission in Manipur:** The state was brought under the coverage of Doordarshan during the Asian Games, 1982 with the installation of a low power transmitter (100W) within the campus of the All
India Radio, Imphal. Later, the low power transmitter was upgraded to high power transmitter (1Kw) in September, 1987 and shifted to the present complex of the Doordarshan Kendra (DDK), Imphal at Porompat. The first regional transmission of the DDK was started on 30 April, 1993 for 30 minutes. Duration of the transmission was increased to 45 minutes by next year and from the month of February, 2005 it is transmitting Manipuri programs and local dialect programmes 5:30PM to 8:00PM every day with 15 minutes North East News telecast in between from the Programme Producton Centre, Guwahati.

The transmission of DD2/DD-Metro channel from the Doordarshan Kendra, Imphal on 23 December, 1995 has helped in creating more avenues for recreation. But the entertainment channel of the Doordarshan has now been replaced by 24X7 DD News channel. DDK, Imphal on 1 August, 2005 ventured a 15 minutes news bulletin in Manipuri at 7 pm. From the later part of 2007, News in Manipuri is being telecasted both at 5:30 pm and 7 pm. The same was started to give a checkmate to the local private television channel ISTV Network’s news program at 3 pm, 5 pm and 9 pm daily.
The Doordarshan Kendra telecasts programs on agriculture, children, women, youth, environmental programs etc. Tribal songs and dance programs are also being transmitted regularly for 30 minutes. Whenever the state assembly is in session, the Question Hour is transmitted for 30 minutes and Governor’s address to the House is also highlighted as and when His Excellency delivers the same. Messages given by the state Chief Minister and other ministers during important festivals and social events are also covered by the DDK transmission.

**Information Service Television (ISTV) Network:** The ISTV Network is a private cable TV operating organization established on 27 January, 2003. Before its establishment, there were two cable networks, viz. ICTV & SEENTV. Later they were clubbed together and formed a single entity under the banner ISTV (Information Service Television) Network. Since its establishment, ISTV is serving the people of Manipur by providing information, entertainment & education.

The network covers almost all the valley areas and also some parts of the hills of the state. From its main centre at Imphal city, it reaches upto Ithai in South, Sekmai in the North, Mayang Langjing - Phayeng in the West and
in the east upto Baruni hill. The network is the only Cable Network operating in Manipur covering the widest area and providing more than 40 satellite channels of international, national, regional and local pursuit to its viewers. It has become very popular among the people of the state in general and among the youths in particular. It is being preferred more than any other public media enterprises like Doordarshan and AIR inside the state. The news programme of the cable network is very popular with the people of state.

New Media in Manipur: www.e-pao.net and www.kanglaonline.com are the two leading Manipuri based portals. They cater services like infotainment, edutainment and news. www.e-pao.net was launched on December 31, 1999. www.e-pao.net has approximately 25 lakh sessions or visitors with 1.35 crores of pages. It is viewed running up to 6.63 crores hits and 674 gigabytes of transfers (not counting media files) during January-2006 to December, 2006).

These two portals serve as a good media for the Manipuris staying in Manipur and outside the state or abroad. Especially the Manipuri diaspora outside the state and abroad finds these websites as a major means to
connect with their fellow Manipuris at the earliest and at the cheapest. A glimpse of a photo from Manipur, a Manipuri lingo or whatever kinds of Manipuri taste invoke the real Manipuri in them. Among the main features contained in these websites, mention may be made of the photo gallery (where there are a lot of photographs), reviews (book/theatre/art/movie review), yellow page (a list of dealers/stockists/shop owners of Manipur), e-frenz (a friend making channel), leisure (snippets on life experiences, jokes, funny instances etc.), chat, travel (a complete tourist guide book of Manipur), opinion (opinion poll on various social issues of Manipur), message board (an in-depth discussion on various issues and interest), e-pao-radio (various Manipuri songs on net), Manipur (a number of articles, blogs, editorials on Manipur), weather (weather forecast of Manipur), horoscope (check what's in store for the day) and many more.

In addition to the above ventures, some daily newspapers published at Imphal have gone online recently. The Sangai Express and the Imphal Free Press have gone online from 2003 and 2007 respectively. Poknapham also has gone online from 2008.
3.4 Media Reach in Manipur:

As per an official report of the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of Manipur the net paid circulation figure of the newspapers of the state for the year 2006-07 is 2,08,834. The figure is inclusive of the circulations of Manipuri, English, Hindi and dialect newspapers published in Manipur. The report is based on the documents submitted by the newspaper or periodical establishments of the state under Rule 7 of the Manipur State Advertisement Policy, 1994. Newspaper density of the state is 8 newspapers per 1,000 individual. In addition to the above figure, north east editions of the *Times of India* and the *Telegraph*, news magazines like *India Today*, *Outlook*, *the Week* and *Frontline* are also circulating well in the state. Kolkata edition of *the Statesman* and New Delhi edition of *the Hindu* are also read here. The newspaper density of the state is even higher than that of the national figure which is 7.9 newspapers per 1,000 individuals according to the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) report, 2005.

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120 Annual Circulation Record of the newspapers in Manipur, 2006, Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of Manipur
Due to the shortage of transmission capacity and lack of radio sets in the earlier times, the radio listenership was very low and confined mostly into Imphal and its adjoining areas. But gradually the number of listeners rose to a considerable extent with the gradual increase in the transmission capacity and gradual increase in popularity of the redefined medium. Radio broadcast coverage in India is 91.42% of the total geographical area, serving 99.13% of the total population. In Manipur, according to a report published in 2004-2005 by the Audience Research Unit of AIR, Imphal, the listenership is below 75% of the population and 84.15% in terms of area.

Doordarshan Kendra, Imphal has reached 60 percent of the total population of the state. It covers an area of 60 kilometres being radius from the television transmission tower at Porompat. In four valley districts of the state-Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal and Bishnupur, the transmission of the Doordarshan Kendra covers 90 per cent of the total population. According to the National Readership Survey, 2006 the television reach in India is 230 million homes while that of satellite television is 68 million homes on an average.

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121 Naharolgi Thoudang, Manipuri News in DD, Augsut 2, 2005, Imphal, p-1
Concluding Remarks: The scope and reach of media have taken giant strides in Manipur in the past decade. Journalism in the state has changed a lot if one compares the same with the days of Irabat’s hand written cyclostyled monthly- Meitei Chanu which appeared in June, 1922.\textsuperscript{122} Now, most of the newspapers of the state are printed in offset press. Many of them have even gone for multi-colour prints. Some of the dailies have started multi-edition dailies and have gone online. The number of newspaper readers has also encreased manifold. There have been significant developments in the AIR, Imphal and DDK, Imphal too. The presence of a local private television network- the ISTV has also brought a new vista of enjoying local contents in electronic media by the people of the state. All these have contributed the emergence of media in Manipur as a very potent medium through which the public opinion can not only be expressed but also molded. Naturally, it has drawn the attention of state as well as non-state actors involved in a situation of conflict inside the state with a view to serve their own respective interests. This, in turn, has created a number of problems on the part of the journalists working in Manipur.

\textsuperscript{122} ibid.